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Representations of the Holocaust in Soviet cinema

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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST IN SOVIET CINEMA

Alissa Timoshkina
PhD in Film Studies

ABSTRACT

The aim of my doctoral project is to study how the Holocaust has been represented in Soviet cinema from the 1930s to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The USSR was one of the central participants in WWII and lost over a million of its Jewish population in the Holocaust. While the suffering of the Soviet nation was vividly depicted in arts and history texts, forming a significant part of popular culture, the violence against Jews often appeared to be a (deliberately) forgotten chapter. In the multi-ethnic and multi-national state – whose pre-Revolutionary anti-Semitic history produced the very concept of pogrom – official Soviet ideology, propagating a sense of unity, emphasised the *Soviet* identity of the victims and refused to differentiate between the dead. Moreover, the devastating statistics of all the casualties of the Soviet-German war (1941-1945) occupied a central place in popular memory, overpowering the proportionally smaller number of Holocaust victims. Throughout the period studied in this thesis, history and memory of the Holocaust underwent a series of repressions and re-evaluations, constantly shifting between the margins and the forefront, between official and unofficial knowledge. This thesis is a chronological study of the role played by Soviet cinema in relation to the shifting discourses of memory, knowledge and history of the Holocaust. Comprised of four chapters, my work traces the trajectory of cinematic portrayals through four main historical periods, under the respective leaderships of Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev. Accounting for the interrelation between Soviet ideology, censorship, the Soviet film industry, cinematic genres and individual film texts, I tease out the complexity and versatility of Soviet cinema's relationship with the subject of the Holocaust.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This thesis uses the Library of Congress system for names and titles. An exception is made in cases of commonly accepted usage: for example, ‘Sergei Eisenstein’ rather than ‘Sergei Eizenshtein’, and ‘Larisa Shepitko’ rather than ‘Larisa Shepit’ko’. In those cases where there are several acceptable spellings of names, I have opted for Library of Congress system: for example, ‘Andrei Tarkovskii’ rather than ‘Andrei Tarkovsky’ and ‘Vasilii Grossman’ rather than ‘Vasily Grossman’. Original titles of films are provided in the filmography at the end of the thesis.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a chronological study of the representations of the Holocaust in Soviet cinema from the 1930s to the 1990s. As such, it is rooted in the discipline of film history and contributes to two fields of study: Holocaust cinema and Soviet film. These two fields have existed and developed independently from each other and, to this day, studies of representations of the Holocaust in Soviet film – in other words, of Soviet Holocaust cinema – remain extremely rare. However, this fact is not determined by the dearth of Soviet films on this subject. On the contrary, there exists a vast filmic corpus: from features of the late 1930s depicting anti-Semitic persecutions in Nazi Germany, to portrayals of wartime crimes against Soviet and European Jews made between the 1940s and the early 1990s. Producing a diverse history of Jewish victimhood, survival and heroism, Soviet cinema offered explicit and implicit, detailed and brief depictions of the industrial mass murder in the Eastern European death camps and documented their liberation. It also portrayed the Nazi occupation and its aftermath in the Soviet Union.

This study of Soviet Holocaust films, then, does not simply expand the existing corpus of ‘Holocaust cinema’, which is generally comprised of European and North American films depicting the plight of the European Jews, but it also introduces a previously understudied aspect of the Holocaust – the annihilation of *Soviet* Jews. This particular wartime atrocity remained overshadowed in the West by the invention of the gas chambers, while in the Soviet Union it was marginalised by the ideological discourse of universal wartime suffering. If the field of historical studies of the Holocaust has seen a series of interventions since the 1980s from scholars like Nora

Levin, Zvi Gitelman and Timothy Snyder,¹ who underlined the experience of the Soviet Jews, Holocaust film scholarship remains generally unaware of the Soviet aspect of the Jewish genocide as well as of Soviet Holocaust films more broadly.

While not claiming to present a complete account of *all* Soviet films on this subject, my thesis nevertheless provides a most comprehensive corpus of Soviet documentaries, features, TV films and series (as well as of several newsreels and fiction shorts).² It offers an original analysis of the Soviet ‘classics’ and introduces works that have escaped academic and popular attention. However, although the introduction of a new body of work is an important contribution in its own right, it is not the only aim of this thesis.

By examining these films, I intend not only to establish a history of representations of the Holocaust in Soviet cinema and to trace its development over time, but also to reconsider some of the prevalent approaches in the two fields that my research addresses. In the scholarship of Holocaust film, and of the Holocaust in general, the tendency is to envisage the gas chamber as the symbol of the Jewish genocide, while in the studies of Soviet cinema it is to underscore the power of the state control over the film industry. I explore these concerns in the following sections that correspond to the main areas of research underlining this thesis – namely, Holocaust cinema and the question of ‘(un)representability’, Soviet cinema, and Soviet Holocaust cinema. This section also presents my aims and key research questions. Before moving on to these, however, I will indicate briefly in what ways my thesis fits more generally within the field of film history. In the final section of the introduction I turn to discuss my methodology, corpus and the structure of the thesis.

¹ These are just a few names. Throughout the thesis I invoke more authors.
² Proportionally, fiction films make up the majority of the corpus.

Film and History

Since this thesis is concerned with the representation of a particular historical event in a national cinema, it mobilises some of the tools developed by scholars of film history. Overviewing the development of this field, Guy Westwell³ notes that the turn of historians towards film occurred in the mid-1970s, partly thanks to the rise of post-structuralism and its understanding that there no longer exists a clear (qualitative) division between written and filmed history; ‘each were conventionalised reconstructions of the past, with their own formal and fictive logic’.⁴

A series of interdisciplinary initiatives (conferences, seminars) undertaken at the time by Anglo-American historians prompted the publication of the first texts on the historical value of film, such as *The Historian and Film* by Paul Smith⁵ and *Feature Films as History* edited by Kenneth R.M. Short.⁶ These contributions were paralleled by the work of French scholars Marc Ferro⁷ and Pierre Sorlin,⁸ and the field has developed further in the United States since the late 1980s thanks to the works of Hayden White⁹ and Robert Rosenstone.¹⁰ Although works by these academics are most often associated with the pioneering developments in the study of film from a historical perspective, Westwell points out that the question of historical representation has always been central to the field of film studies since its inception in the 1960s.

³ Guy Westwell, ‘Critical Approaches to the History Film – a Field in Search of a Methodology,’ *Rethinking History* 11/4 (2007): 583.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Paul Smith, ed. *The Historian and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁶ Kenneth R. M. Short, ed. *Feature Films as History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981).

⁷ Marc Ferro, *Cinéma et Histoire* (Paris: Denoël, 1976); Mark Ferro, *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Green (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1988).

⁸ Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

⁹ Hayden White, ‘Historiography and Historiophoty,’ *The American Historical Review*, 93/5 (December 1988): 1193-1199.

¹⁰ Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

In her 2012 publication on historical films, Sabine Hake¹¹ extracts two key ideas that arise from the field of film history. Firstly, ‘the filmic representation of specific historical periods, figures, and events changes with their changing political functions [...] and, for that reason, must be treated as historical in and of itself.’¹² Secondly, ‘the historical film [...] plays a pivotal role in shedding light on contemporary problems’¹³ or in Sorlin’s own words: ‘a view of the present [is] embedded in the picture of the past.’¹⁴ In addition to these fundamental understandings, it is necessary to highlight another idea also essential to my research: Ferro’s suggestion that a film contains several layers of historical meaning. He demarcates these as official ‘History’ and unofficial ‘history’, and in doing so underlines the ways in which a film can challenge and/or conform to the mainstream interpretations of the (national) past.

Following these scholars, my work too is concerned with the relationship between film and history – in this case, both with the relationship between films depicting the Holocaust and their contemporary context at any given time, and with how and why these cinematic portrayals change over a period of time. While Short¹⁵ contrasted two key strands within this field – on the one hand, films can be used as evidence in the study of social, cultural and political history, while on the other, the film industry itself can be the subject of historical interest – my thesis aims to marry these lines of inquiry in order to investigate how wider socio-political and cultural attitudes towards the Holocaust as well as various changes within the Soviet film industry informed the cinematic representations of the Jewish genocide. My research

¹¹ Sabine Hake, *Screen Nazis: Cinema, History and Democracy* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

¹² Ibid., 6-7.

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Sorlin, *The Film in History*, 19.

¹⁵ Short, *Feature Films as History*, 16.

asks how the relevant Soviet films were implicated in the dominant discourse on Jewish victimhood; how they shaped the popular understanding of the Holocaust; and to what extent they deviated from and/or contributed to the cinematic representational conventions of their time. I am interested in how a close examination of a film text can shed light on the wider formation of the Holocaust knowledge and memory.

Holocaust Film and the Concept of (Un)representability

As a work embedded in the field of Holocaust cinema, but with a particular national focus, this thesis is equally concerned with exploring new avenues for the study of the cinematic depictions of the Holocaust. In particular, I am interested in the concept of Holocaust ‘unrepresentability’, which has emerged as key to the scholarly inquests into the Jewish genocide. Arguing for the need to include the murder of the Soviet Jews in the conceptualisation of the cinematic representations of the Holocaust, my work asks whether the historical specificity of annihilation in the Soviet Union, predating the gas chambers, can illuminate the existing debates. I also underline the significance of looking not only at the type of history (in other words the type of the Holocaust) depicted *in* these films but also at the history *of* these films. This allows me to question the influences of the relevant historical context (I consider factors like the general limits of historical knowledge about the Holocaust and the history of film production, i.e. the involvement of the state and filmmakers’ individual artistic choices) on the portrayal of the Jewish genocide in a film. Overall, this thesis aims to evaluate whether the analysis of Holocaust cinema from the perspective of Soviet film history can offer new understandings of the relationship between the event of the Holocaust and its cinematic representation.

Debates surrounding the profound effect of the Holocaust on Western civilisation are often considered to date back to Theodor Adorno's famous 1949 expression about the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz.¹⁶ Rooted in the theological concept of *Bilderverbot*, a religious prohibition of divine images, this poetic understanding, as Karyn Ball observes, was transformed into a rhetoric of 'unrepresentability' in the popular and academic discourses since the 1960s.¹⁷ The key proponents of the 'unrepresentability' debate in the popular sphere, who endowed the Holocaust with a sacred status and accentuated the moral taboos surrounding its representation, are generally considered to be the literary figures Primo Levi,¹⁸ Elie Wiesel¹⁹ and George Steiner.²⁰ Libby Saxton²¹ comments: '...discourses of this kind emphasise the event's uniqueness, insist that it cannot be known or conceptualised in conventional ways and define it negatively in terms of its radical non-relation to representation and thought ('Auschwitz' is revered as 'unnameable', 'unsayable', 'unimaginable', 'unthinkable', 'unfathomable'...); while Gillian Rose²² explains that this view was also maintained by Holocaust theologians and by philosophers like Jean-François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas.

¹⁶ Adorno's phrase is quoted and its implications discussed in detail in numerous texts, for example Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 25-58.

¹⁷ Karyn Ball, 'For and Against the *Bilderverbot*: The Rhetoric of "Unrepresentability" and Remediated "Authenticity" in the German Reception of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*,' in David Bathrick, Brad Prager and Michael David Richardson, eds. *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory* (New York: Camden House, 2008), 164.

¹⁸ Expressing this view in *If This is a Man* (1956), Levi later questioned it in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), see Libby Saxton, *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁹ Elie Wiesel, 'Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-fact and Semi-fiction,' *New York Times* 16 April, 1978. He later expressed similar views in his Foreword to *Indelible Shadows: Cinema and the Holocaust* by Annette Insdorf, 3rd ed. xi-xii. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²⁰ George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985).

²¹ Saxton, *Haunted Images*, 7.

²² Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43.

A polemical and a controversial view, the idea of Holocaust ‘unrepresentability’ was also put forward by literary critic Shoshana Felman and psychologist Dori Laub in their influential and much debated text *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992).²³ Contributing to the tendency in Western thought to envisage Auschwitz and its gas chambers as the ultimate symbol of the Holocaust, they proposed to regard the annihilation of Jews as ‘an event without a witness.’²⁴ They justified this much-debated claim by the specificity of the annihilation inside a gas chamber, as this particular method of murder left no survivors. Coupled with the Nazi policy of concealment (the destruction of the evidence of, and witnesses to, the destruction), the annihilation inside a gas chamber led to ‘*a crisis of witnessing*’.²⁵ Moreover, Felman and Laub employed a psychoanalytical model to maintain that the traumatic nature of the experience would rupture the memories of any existing witness and so preclude the very possibility of a coherent testimony and adequate representation.

While Felman and Laub were approaching the Holocaust from a psychoanalytic stance, in the same decade scholars like Saul Friedlander, Dominick LaCapra, Hayden White and Berel Lang, to name just a few, analysed the impact of this event on the field of contemporary historiography. They asked how could this event, which Lyotard famously compared to an earthquake so strong as to destroy all instruments for measurement,²⁶ be represented in historical discourse, itself comprised of concepts of relativism and interpretation. These concerns were articulated and analysed in the influential edited volume *Probing the Limits of Representation*

²³ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (Oxon: Routledge, 1992).

²⁴ Ibid., 51.

²⁵ Ibid., xvii.

²⁶ Quoted in Saul Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 5.

(1992).²⁷ While the historiographic approach equally acknowledged the ‘limits’ imposed by the Holocaust on contemporary Western culture and thought, unlike the proponents of the ‘unrepresentability’ discourse, the scholars mentioned above suggested that these limits could be transgressed. It is then the process of transgression that merits a closer inquiry.²⁸

Studies of the Holocaust in the 21st century saw a turn towards the role of the photographic image and, with it, towards an ethical analysis of its ability to document and represent the atrocious event. This turn was partly prompted by the famous debate in the late 1990s between filmmakers Claude Lanzmann, another well-known proponent of ‘unrepresentability’, and Jean-Luc Godard over *la pellicule maudite*, and more specifically the former’s rejection and the latter’s appreciation of a hypothetical reel of footage capturing a working gas chamber.²⁹ This was followed by a new wave of debate in a similarly polarised vein prompted by a 2001 photographic exhibition in Paris, ‘Memory of the Camps: Photographs of the Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camps (1933-1999)’. It was French art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman who radically challenged the idea of the Holocaust ‘unrepresentability’, first in his essay in the exhibition catalogue and then in the 2003 text of the same provoking title – *Images in Spite of All*.³⁰ Analysing the only four existing photographs of the victims before and after the Auschwitz-Birkenau gas chamber that were exhibited in Paris, he asserts the necessity of confronting the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁹ For the discussion of the debate between Godard and Lanzmann see Libby Saxton, ‘Anamnesis and Bearing Witness: Godard/Lanzmann,’ in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S Williams and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), 364-379; Saxton, *Haunted Images*, 52-59. Lanzmann’s polemical view in regards to ‘unrepresentability’ is also discussed in Barry Langford, “‘You cannot look at this’: Thresholds of Unrepresentability in Holocaust Film,” *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 8/3 (1999): 23-40.

³⁰ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Originally published as *Images malgré tout* (Paris: Minuit, 2003).

‘unimaginable’.³¹ While Didi-Huberman criticised the iconophobic discourse of ‘unrepresentability’, his own approach was, in turn condemned as fetishistic and voyeuristic by Gérard Wajcman and Elisabeth Pagnoux, who insisted on the impossibility of Holocaust images in *Les Temps modernes*, the journal edited by Lanzmann.³²

Refusing to hide behind the ‘protective shield’ that the discourse of ‘unrepresentability’ is often understood to have created between the event and its aftermath, Didi-Huberman advocates facing the image of the atrocity in order to tease out and analyse the ethical, epistemological and emotional complexities of the relationship between the representation (its content and author) and the viewer. Since the early 2000s this approach has become particularly prominent in the discipline of film studies, where the ethical position of filmmakers, the adequacy of their aesthetic choices and the notion of spectatorship are brought under examination. Before moving on to detail how my work intervenes in these debates, I must briefly mention another area, that of trauma theory.

The study of Holocaust cinema through the prism of trauma theory has also gained wide prominence in the last decade, where scholars apply the psychoanalytical model to analyse films’ ability to render the traumatic experience and its memory on screen. Following a tendency to apply Freudian psychoanalysis to literature, such as in the works of Shoshana Felman,³³ mentioned earlier, and Cathy Caruth,³⁴ scholars

³¹ Ibid., 3.

³² Wajcman’s and Pagnoux’s responses are discussed in Sven Erik Rose, ‘Auschwitz as Hermeneutic Rupture, Differend, and *Image malgré tout*: Jameson, Lyotard, Didi-Huberman,’ in David Bathrick, Brad Prager and Michael David Richardson, eds. *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory* (New York: Camden House, 2008), 126-129.

³³ Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Felman, ed. *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

³⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Caruth, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

of cinema have analysed film within the same framework, in particular underlining the unique formal qualities of the audio-visual medium to represent traumatic events, from personal (such as sexual) abuse to wider historical traumas such as WWII and the Holocaust. For example, Thomas Elsaesser has highlighted the cinema's unique formal ability to engage with the question of temporality, which is fundamental to the concept of trauma, particularly in relation to the Freudian idea of *Nachträglichkeit* or belatedness.³⁵ Similarly, E. Ann Kaplan accentuated the link between cinema and trauma explaining that 'forms such as cinema may be especially appropriate to figuring the visual, aural and non-linear fragmented phenomenon of trauma.'³⁶ This turn within the field of film studies can be said to have begun with the publication in 2001 of a special debate in *Screen* on trauma and cinema. While some contributors to and editors of this issue, like Elsaesser³⁷ and Maureen Turim,³⁸ had already signalled some awareness of the possibility of analysing film through the psychoanalytical concept of trauma, others like Kaplan,³⁹ Joshua Hirsch⁴⁰ and Janet Walker⁴¹ went on to publish some of the first full-length studies on trauma and film.

Undoubtedly theories of trauma and ethics offer relevant analytical tools for the study of the cinema's capacity to render events that challenge common sense and conventional representation, and to stress the complex moral and psychological relationship between the (mediated) site of trauma and the spectator. However, my thesis intends to depart from these analytical frameworks, since what interests me is

³⁵ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as Mourning Work,' *Screen* 42 (2001): 196-197.

³⁶ E. Ann Kaplan, 'Melodrama, Cinema and Trauma,' *Screen* 42 (2001): 204-205.

³⁷ Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan and New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

³⁸ Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989).

³⁹ E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, eds. *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (Aberdeen and Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰ Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

the relationship between films and their historical contexts; a type of investigation that can be accommodated through the tools offered by film history, rather than through the approaches discussed above.

The key factor that strikes me in the field of Holocaust (film) scholarship, and the one I aim to reconsider in this thesis, is the dominant focus on the gas chamber as the symbol of the Jewish genocide. My point of departure, then, is the shift to emphasize instead the mass shootings of Jews that took place in the Soviet territories. The historical difference between the two stages of the Holocaust is crucial for offering a new avenue into the debates on ‘unrepresentability’. Indeed, and crucially, by contrast with the debates around the gas chambers, the genocide of the Soviet Jews left numerous survivors and plenty of visual evidence.

However, the goal of this thesis is not *only* to show that the Soviet Holocaust is in fact historically representable. What I aim to underline is the complexity of analysing this concept within the context of Soviet film history. While the history of the Soviet Holocaust itself made its photographic depiction possible, the political climate surrounding the production of the relevant films often posed different kinds of limitations. An understanding of the intricacy of the Soviet-Jewish history underpinning these films is crucial to my study. The ambiguous position that the history and memory of the Holocaust occupied in the official Soviet interpretations of the war then points, in turn, to certain ideological difficulties in the representation of the Holocaust as a specifically Jewish experience in Soviet films. Therefore, when analysing the history of Soviet Holocaust cinema, it is not the question of theological or moral but rather that of *ideological* unrepresentability that needs to be considered. My aim therefore is to examine the complexity, and to trace the development in time, of the idea of ‘(un)representability’; I use such a spelling deliberately so as to stress

the duality of the concept and its complicated relationship to the notion of ‘unrepresentability’ discussed above.

Soviet Cinema

The subject of my research challenges one of the widespread academic and popular perceptions about Soviet cinema – that there were no or very few films on the topic of the Holocaust. In order to illuminate this misconception about Soviet Holocaust cinema, it is also necessary to look at the ways in which Soviet cinema at large has been traditionally understood and studied.

Since historically Soviet cinema has been closely linked to the state, this factor dominates scholarly analysis. While this connection is indeed important to my own research, rather than conventionally emphasising the absolute, negative effect of state control, I aim to probe its limits. Considering the reluctance of the Soviet government to acknowledge officially the uniqueness of the Holocaust, we can presume that it would have attempted to prevent all cinematic representations that deviated from the mainstream line. However, as the filmic corpus paints a different picture, it prompts me to question the concept and modalities of state control as well as cinema’s artistic and political conformism or its opposite, unorthodoxy.

Generally, Soviet cinema is divided and studied according to specific political periods. In his overview of the scholarly approaches to the cinema of the Stalinist period, Julian Graffy⁴² demarcates four stages: the early Soviet cinema, which covers both the immediate post-revolutionary and early Stalinist era, and is usually examined in relation to the ‘great Soviet filmmakers’, the Stalinist entertainment cinema in the

⁴² Julian Graffy, ‘Writing about the Cinema of the Stalinist Years: the State of the Art,’ *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10/4 (2009): 809.

1930s, wartime cinema, and the late Stalinist period, infamous for the dearth of films caused by severe censorship.

Following Graffy's approach we can delineate the study of the subsequent decades in a similar vein. If the figure of the dictator dominates the study of the Soviet cinema from the mid-1920s through to the early 1950s, the years between 1956 and 1967, known as 'the Thaw', are usually examined in terms of artistic innovation and the ideological liberation of the industry.⁴³ By contrast the subsequent period, dubbed the 'Stagnation' (1968-1982), is generally regarded as cinematically 'unremarkable', with the exception of the auteur cinema of Andrei Tarkovskii, Marlen Khutsiev, Larisa Shepitko and others, who began their careers during the 'Thaw'.⁴⁴ The final stage in Soviet film history, from the mid-1980s to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, is generally examined in relation to the pivotal reforms of the film industry that occurred during perestroika, and the new group of socially critical films, known as *chernukha*,⁴⁵ prompted by these reforms.

What generally permeates the analysis of the Soviet cinema, particularly of the Stalinist and the 'Stagnation' periods, is a tendency to focus on the opposition between the 'great film artists' and the state, and to highlight the ideological control at the heart of Soviet filmmaking.⁴⁶ Dating back to Jay Leyda's 1960 text *Kino: A*

⁴³ For example, Neia Zorkaia, *The Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1989); Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda, zheltaia zvezda* (Vinnitsa: Globus Press, 2001); Liudmila Dzhulai, *Dokumental'nyi illiuzion* (Moscow: Materik, 2005); Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ To the works mentioned above we can add Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Andrei Shemiakin and Iulia Mikheeva, eds. *Posle Ottepeli: kinematograf 1970-kh* (Moscow: Materik, 2009); Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009); as well as auteur studies of specific filmmakers, for example, Mark LeFanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* (London: BFI, 1987).

⁴⁵ Seth Graham translates the term as 'dark naturalism' in 'Chernukha and Russian Film,' *Studies in Slavic Cultures* 1 (2000): 9-27. Iana Hashamova defines *chernukha* as 'a typical late Soviet film exposing the social maladies of the failing regime' in Iana Hashamova, *Pride and Panic: Russian Imagination of the West in Post-Soviet Cinema* (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007), 16.

⁴⁶ This tendency is identified by Natacha Laurent in Laurent, *Le cinéma 'stalinien'. Questions d'histoire* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2003), 71-72.

History of the Russian and Soviet Film,⁴⁷ this approach recurs periodically well into the 21st century.⁴⁸ Already in 1988, Ian Christie and Richard Taylor underlined its limitations:

So long as Western historians continue to overestimate the effectiveness of centralised state control and propaganda intent, and to underestimate the degrees of improvisation and relative autonomy that have governed [cinema's] development, they will continue to reproduce a frozen legacy.⁴⁹

Twelve years later, George Faraday⁵⁰ continues to criticise this tendency and proposes to rethink the notion of the stifling effect of state control, the idea of 'the suffering artists' and the binary of the 'good' auteur and the 'bad' mainstream cinema.⁵¹ He explains that scholars of Socialist culture tend to inhabit a qualitative approach, endowing works that stand up against political oppression with qualities like honesty, integrity and courage, while the rest is generally dismissed as grey and conformist.⁵² While Faraday is not the first to depart from what he calls 'the heroic artist paradigm',⁵³ his work nevertheless correctly identifies important, if still marginal, scholarly shifts towards the study of Soviet popular culture⁵⁴ and cinema.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ This idea is put forward by Laurent in *ibid.*; Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1960).

⁴⁸ For example, in Herbert Marshall, *Masters of Soviet Cinema: Crippled Creative Biographies* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1983); in the vast field of auteurist approaches to the cinema of Tarkovskii, such as Mark LeFanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*; Peter Green, *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); amongst others, as well as in studies of Soviet censorship like Arlen Blum, *Evreiskii vopros pod Sovetskoi tsenzuroi 1917-1991* (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskii evreiskii universitet, 1996); Valerii Fomin, *Kino i vlast': sovetskoe kino 1965-1985* (Moscow: Materik, 1996); Katherine Bliss Eaton, ed. *Enemies of People: the Destruction of Soviet Literary, Theatre and Film Arts in the 1930s* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

⁴⁹ Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* (Oxon: Routledge, 1988), 17.

⁵⁰ George Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers: The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁴ Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Northamptonshire: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Stites, 'Soviet Russian Wartime Culture: Freedom and Control, Spontaneity and Consciousness,' in *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch, eds. (Urbana and Chicago:

This thesis then inscribes itself at a juncture between the still prevailing focus on ‘the great artists’ and the smaller field of popular Soviet cinema scholarship. Examining a varied filmic corpus, it challenges the existing binary of the ‘noteworthy auteur’ and ‘conformist mainstream’ cinema. Simultaneously, I question the existing periodization of Soviet cinema in an attempt to reconsider qualitative umbrella terms like the ‘Thaw’ and the ‘Stagnation’.

Soviet Holocaust Cinema

Embarking on this project in 2009, I was struck by the general lack of awareness of the existence of Soviet Holocaust cinema as well as by several discouraging responses from Russian and UK scholars as to the subject of my study. The vast body of Western film scholarship on the Holocaust included only three references to Soviet films in *Indelible Shadows*⁵⁶ and *The Holocaust Film Sourcebook*,⁵⁷ while scholars of Russian cinema paid equally little attention to the subject.⁵⁸ However, as I was completing my research, a French-language edited volume on the representation of

University of Illinois Press, 2000), 171-184; Thomas Cushman, *Notes from the Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

⁵⁵ Andrew Horton and Mikhail Brashinsky, *Zero Hour: Glasnost and the Soviet Cinema in Transition* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992); Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Andrew Horton, ed. *Inside Soviet Film Satire: Laughter with a Lash* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Peter Kenez, *Soviet Cinema and Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001). To this we can add David MacFayden, *The Sad Comedy of El'dar Riazanov: An Introduction to Russia's Most Popular Filmmaker* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); Rimgaila Salys, *The Musical Comedy Films of Grigorii Aleksandrov: Laughing Matters* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2009); and several film companions such as Julian Graffy, *Bed and Sofa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001) and Graffy, *Chapaev* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

⁵⁶ *Professor Mamlock* (Adolf Minkin, Gerbert Rappoport, 1938) and *The Commissar* (Aleksandr Askoldov, 1967) in Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 155-6 and 56-7.

⁵⁷ *Ordinary Fascism* (Mikhail Romm, 1965) in Caroline Joan Picart, *The Holocaust Film Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 122.

⁵⁸ The sparse field was comprised of an article by Jeremy Hicks ‘Confronting the Holocaust: Mark Donskoi’s ‘The Unvanquished’,’ *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 3/1 (2009): 33-51; sections from Miron Chernenko’s *Krasnaia zvezda, zheltaia zvezda* and a few passing references in Neia Zorkaia, *The Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991) and Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films*.

Jews in Russian and Soviet cinema⁵⁹ came out in spring 2012. Featuring three essays on the subject of the Holocaust by Jeremy Hicks,⁶⁰ Vanessa Voisin⁶¹ and Olga Gershenson,⁶² it implied the possible formation of a new field. Indeed, in autumn 2012 Hicks published the first book-length study in English of Soviet Holocaust cinema.⁶³

Covering the period from 1938 to 1946, Hicks' work presents a pioneering account of newsreels, documentaries and feature films. The author offers meticulously researched production and release histories, as well as narrative and some textual analysis, with the aim of placing the emphasis on the forgotten contribution of Soviet filmmakers to the cinema of the Holocaust. However, focusing on a particular time span, the text gives no indication as to the subsequent history of Holocaust representations. Since we were working in parallel and I cover the identical period in Chapter 1 of my thesis, I acknowledge the possibility of some overlaps. However, in Chapter 1, I also endeavour to demonstrate the ways in which my approach differs from Hicks'. I offer an alternative understanding of the wartime cinema's role in relation to the wider propagandistic project of the state as well as my own readings of the same films. Moreover, the chapter analyses a feature film, *Feat of a Spy* (Boris Barnet, 1946), not included in Hicks' book.

⁵⁹ Valérie Pozner and Natacha Laurent, eds. *Kinojudaica: Les représentations des Juifs dans le cinéma de Russie et d'Union soviétique des années 1910 aux années 1980* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2012).

⁶⁰ Jeremy Hicks, 'Les Morts ne mentent pas: le cinéma soviétique, la Shoah et le procès de Nuremberg,' in *Kinojudaica*, 313-340.

⁶¹ Vanessa Voisin, 'Au nom des vivants de Léon Mazroukho: rencontre entre dénonciation officielle et hommage personnel,' in *Kinojudaica*, 365-584.

⁶² Olga Gershenson, 'Les *Insoumis* (1945) ou comment un roman soviétique est devenu un film juif,' in *Kinojudaica*, 341-364.

⁶³ Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938-1946* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

At the point I had completed the research for this thesis, another book on the subject, written by Olga Gershenson, was published in summer 2013.⁶⁴ The book therefore came out too late for me to engage with it throughout the entire thesis; I was nevertheless able to read it and found that, despite some overlaps in the filmic corpus, inevitable as the book covers the same time span, our approaches are significantly dissimilar. Apart from some factual errors,⁶⁵ there are four key points of difference in terms of the overall intent.

First of all, the author adheres to the scholarly convention of highlighting the crippling effect of Soviet censorship. Encapsulated in the book's title – *Phantom Holocaust* – Gershenson's intention is to consider what Soviet Holocaust cinema would have been like without the severe censorship. As such, the book presents numerous cases of speculation, lamenting the loss of 'important' Holocaust films. Moreover, Gershenson maintains the 'suffering artist' paradigm, identified earlier, as she presents 'tragic' biographies of the filmmakers. Secondly, the attention to the identity of the directors leads to an essentialist approach as to their ethnicity. There is a clear emphasis on the importance of the filmmakers' Jewish origin throughout, or in the cases of non-Jewish directors like Aleksandr Askol'dov, the book attempts to highlight their familiarity with the Jewish context.⁶⁶ My work, conversely, aims to depart from such an approach. Thirdly, Gershenson's book observes another scholarly convention, which my thesis reconsiders – the qualitative understanding of the period

⁶⁴ Olga Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

⁶⁵ It claims to have studied *all* Soviet feature films dealing with the Holocaust, whereas in fact it bypasses a number of works. It contains errors in some textual readings, for example in the analyses of *Professor Mamlock* (Gerbert Rappoport, 1938) and *Fate of a Man* (Sergei Bondarchuk, 1959). It misidentifies the famous footage of the deportation from the Dutch transit camp, Westerbork, which appears in *Good-bye, Boys* (Mikhail Kalik, 1966) as a depiction of a deportation from a ghetto.

⁶⁶ The chapter on *The Commissar* (Aleksandr Askol'dov, 1967) opens with a recollection of a well-known fact that, as a child, Askol'dov was sheltered by a Jewish family after the arrest of his parents. Gershenson connects this episode in his biography to the making of the film: 'his memory of the Jewish family consciously or unconsciously became an impetus for the future film *Commissar*', in Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust*, 158.

of the so-called ‘Stagnation’. Not only does the book use the term unquestioningly but it wrongly asserts that ‘[i]n the entire decade of the 1970s, there was only one film that touched upon the events of the Holocaust’⁶⁷ – *The Ascent* (Larisa Shepitko, 1977). Finally, the text makes a deliberate choice not to consider the ‘theoretical debates about the limits and possibilities of Holocaust representation’,⁶⁸ concluding that Soviet filmmakers in their struggle with state censorship could not afford the ‘luxury’⁶⁹ of concerning themselves with this question. Therefore, despite surface similarities in corpus and topic, Gershenson’s study and mine are fundamentally different projects.

Another difference between my work and the two existing texts on Soviet Holocaust cinema is the fact that my thesis comes from the field of film studies⁷⁰ and therefore pays particular attention to textual analysis. I discuss the specificity of my method in the following section.

Methodology, Corpus and Structure

The overarching theoretical preoccupation with the relationship between a film text and its historical context determines my methodology as well as the selection of the corpus. My work follows a chronological approach throughout the four chapters wherein it marries the analysis of the cinematic depictions of the Holocaust to the broader processes of representation, knowledge and memory of WWII. The consideration of Soviet-Jewish history also forms part of the contextual analysis. Thus

⁶⁷ Ibid., 169.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Although in recent years Hicks has turned to the study of Soviet cinema, his area of expertise is Russian literature, whereas Gershenson comes from the field of Jewish studies and *Phantom Holocaust* is her first book dedicated to the study of film.

while my main aim is to study the trajectory of cinematic portrayals of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, this thesis additionally accounts for the evolution of WWII memory, cult and cinematic genre, as well as for the Soviet-Jewish cultural, social and political relationship and its effect on the cinematic portrayal of the Jewish wartime experience.

The decision to acknowledge the relevance of these two areas enabled me to compile a preliminary filmic corpus. I did this initially relying on two texts: *Russian War Films*,⁷¹ which provides a comprehensive account of this particular film genre, and *Krasnaia zvezda, zheltaia zvezda*,⁷² a broad study of Jewish ethnicity on the Soviet screen. I refined and enlarged the corpus further by surveying (online) directories and encyclopaedias of Soviet cinema,⁷³ and by studying all Soviet-period issues of the leading film journal *Iskusstvo Kino*, available in the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies (SSEES) library in London.

Consequently, I drew up a list of over 640 documentaries, shorts, newsreels, TV series and feature films which in some way relate to the event of WWII and/or to the experiences of the Soviet Jews. I was able to view around 400 of these audio-visual texts. Out of these, my thesis refers to some 110 Soviet films that I considered relevant to my argument, including a core filmic corpus of 64 works that I examine particularly closely in relation to their cinematic portrayals of the Holocaust.⁷⁴ I obtained the material online (YouTube and YandexVideo), from the film collection at

⁷¹ Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films*.

⁷² Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*.

⁷³ www.ruskino.ru; *Letopis' Rossiiskogo Kino 1930-1945* (Moscow: Materik, 2007); *Letopis' Rossiiskogo Kino 1946-1965* (Moscow: Kanon+ROOI 'Reabilitatsia', 2010); Liubov' Arkus et al. eds. *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino: Kino i kontekst*, vol. 4 and vol. 5 (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2002 and 2004); *Sovetskie Khudozhestvennye Fil'my. Annotirovannyi katalog (1918-1957, 1966-1969, 1974-1975)* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961, 1968, 1979).

⁷⁴ I intended to include the study of *Steps in the Night* (Raimondas Vabalas, 1962) in Chapter 2 since Chernenko's text states that this film briefly mentions executions of Jews. However, as the only copy that I found was in the original Lithuanian language, I was not able to verify Chernenko's claim. The film does not feature any apparent visual references to the Holocaust either. For these reasons I was not able to discuss the film in the chapter.

the SSEES library, and by purchasing DVDs during my research trips to Russia. In addition, I have sourced some rare materials directly from the filmmakers, for example Iurii Khashchevatskii and Aleksandr Rodnianskii, and visited the film archives at the Imperial War Museum in London and Gosfilmofond in Belye Stolby (Russia).

This thesis attempts to study a wide range of films to establish an as-complete-as-possible sense of Holocaust depictions on the Soviet screen. Therefore my corpus comprises different types of works: well-known and obscure, mainstream, art and so-called auteur films. My main criterion for the selection and analysis was the question of whether and how these films acknowledge the Holocaust as a specifically Jewish experience. Consequently, I refrained from passing any judgement on their artistic and/or ethical value in depicting the Holocaust.⁷⁵

The use of close textual analysis was an insightful and a rewarding method for several reasons. It enabled me to account for the ways in which the Holocaust is depicted in films, i.e. how prominent it is in the overall narrative, whose viewpoint on this event is favoured,⁷⁶ and whether and how openly these films suggest the difference (in fate) between Jews and gentiles. It also allowed for deeper insight into the meaning and structure of the films, often leading to original readings. Moreover, I was able to establish the presence and the development of what I term ‘a Holocaust representational system’, employed by these films to develop the iconography of atrocity and to communicate the often-marginalised narrative of Jewish suffering.

⁷⁵ Langford discusses the critical tendency to analyse the artistic and ethical factors as criterion of value of Holocaust films utilizing the contrasting examples of mainstream genre films, like *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), and auteur or art films, like *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985), in Langford, “‘You cannot look at this’,” 23-40.

⁷⁶ This method is similar to the one applied by Miriam Bartu Hansen in her analysis of Jewish subjectivity in ‘*Schindler's List* in not *Shoah*: the Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory,’ in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. Marcia Landy (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 201-218.

While focusing on the films' visual aspect through the examination of mise-en-scène, camera work and editing, I also paid equal attention to the representational capacities of film sound. Although the study of sound is not ignored in any of the scholarly fields discussed above that inform my own research, appreciations of the soundtrack in its entirety (music, dialogue and sound effects) as an integral formal element remain rare in film scholarship. I draw my understanding of this imbalance as well as of the general importance of film sound from texts by Michel Chion⁷⁷ and William Whittington⁷⁸ as well as from some of the presentations at the 2011 conference 'Sonic Futures: Soundscapes and Languages of Screen Media.'⁷⁹ In particular my interest stems from Barry Langford's discussion of sound in Holocaust films, such as *The Grey Zone* (Tim Blake Nelson, 2001).⁸⁰ In his paper Langford noted that, while numerous literary accounts of Holocaust survivors, for example Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, include vivid depictions of the sonic realm of the camps (the barking dogs, the functioning furnaces, the screams of the victims and the shouting of the perpetrators), the religious prohibition of *images* continues to impact the scholarly understanding of Holocaust representations, resulting in the focus on the visual rather than on the sonic aspects.⁸¹ Indeed, the interview that I then conducted with Tim Blake Nelson⁸² made clear the director's intention to use film sound expressively in order to render the incessant nature of the death industry as well as to challenge the theoretical notion of unrepresentability.⁸³ My own turn to the study of

⁷⁷ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

⁷⁸ William Whittington, *Sound Design and Science Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

⁷⁹ Organised by the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) in London.

⁸⁰ Barry Langford, 'Speaking the Unseeable: Soundscapes of Holocaust Film' (paper presentation, NECS conference, King's College London, 25 June 2011).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Tim Blake Nelson, e-mail interview, 3 November 2011.

⁸³ The entire film deliberately subverts the concept of 'unrepresentability' by depicting a young girl who miraculously survives the gas chamber, and then briefly figuring her memory of the annihilation process. For an analysis of the film see Saxton, *Haunted Images*, 82-84.

sound is, then, governed by an interest in exploring and demonstrating the equally affective representational capacities of films' sonic elements as well as to uncover an entirely new *aural* representation of the Holocaust.

In addition to textual analysis, my contextual analysis took two main forms: archival research and interviews. The archival research included the study of film scripts and script reports, as well as of films' contemporary reviews and scholarly accounts. I consider details of films' production in an attempt to understand what determined the type of representation they offered, and look at their critical reception – not in order to comment on their artistic value, but to establish how, if at all, their depiction of the Holocaust was received by contemporary commentators.

I was also fortunate enough to conduct interviews with film directors Georgii Natanson, Iurii Khachshevatskii, Lily van den Bergh and Pavel Lungin, scriptwriters Aleksandr Shlepianov and Maiia Turovskaia,⁸⁴ art director Viktor Petrov, assistant directors Vladimir Kozlov and Evgenii Tsymbal, and film historians from Russia – Evgenii Margolit, Andrei Plakhov and Aleksandr Shpagin – and France – Sylvie Lindeperg. While the study of Soviet film criticism and scholarship offered some factual information, it mostly interested me in relation to its symptomatic value in terms of the dominant discourses on the Holocaust, the memory of WWII and cinema's ideological role. The interviews with the industry members, however, gave me a unique personal insight into the history of the films' creation; they illuminated the artistic intentions of the filmmakers and allowed me to compare their individual views with the official ones.

While the discovery of little-known or forgotten Soviet films was a rewarding aspect of my research, it did, however, pose some challenges. Working with a corpus

⁸⁴ While Turovskaia is a distinguished film historian and critic, I interviewed her specifically in relation to her work as scriptwriter of *Ordinary Fascism* (Mikhail Romm, 1965).

produced in a state that ceased to exist more than 20 years ago means that a lot of the information, particularly on the ‘forgotten’ films, was not available. Moreover, inevitably, in a study that surveys a large number of films it is not possible to focus on all in equal measure. As indicated above, some films were studied in close textual and contextual detail; these form the main case studies in all four chapters. Others are perforce given less space. Their analyses are woven into the main narrative of the chapters and the amount of detail provided for each depends on the nature of representations offered in these films as well as on the availability of relevant archival material.

This thesis is structured chronologically so as to accommodate its intention to study the trajectory of the Holocaust portrayals over a period of Soviet history. Each chapter is divided and examined according to the existing historical periodisations, discussed earlier.⁸⁵ While consistent in their coverage of chronological historical events, each chapter, however, follows a different structure and examines different types of corpus. Thus Chapter 1 is comprised of three sections looking respectively at the immediate pre-WWII period, the Great Patriotic War, and the late Stalinist era. It examines documentaries, newsreels and feature films. Although works studied in Section One of the chapter are not Holocaust films but rather those depicting the pre-condition of the Holocaust, I consider them as essential to the overall narrative of the thesis and they are included in the overall time frame that it covers (the 1930s to the 1990s). Chapter 2, studying the period of the ‘Thaw’, is structured around the concept of temporality and comprises three parts that consider mainly the feature films depicting the Holocaust in ‘the present’, ‘the past’ and ‘the future’ of their narrative. Chapter 3, dedicated to the ‘Stagnation’, is also structured thematically; looking at the

⁸⁵ Chapter 2 excludes the three years connecting the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and the beginning of the ‘Thaw’ in 1956. No films on the subject of the Holocaust were found in this period.

different types of Holocaust depictions, it comprises TV and feature films only.

Chapter 4, similarly to Chapter 1, observes the internal chronological order; divided into two sections (from Brezhnev's death to perestroika and from perestroika to the collapse of the Soviet Union), it focuses on feature films and documentaries.

Throughout the four chapters, I combine three forms of analysis: contextual (relationship between Soviet cinema and the cultural-political climate), extra-cinematic (the Soviet film industry: film production and reception) and textual (close textual analysis of individual films, film groups and genres). Approaching cinema as a film scholar from a historical perspective, I establish a sense of interconnectedness between the historical context, the film industry and the cinematic representation of the Holocaust, and tease out the complexity of these links. This work aims to strengthen the connection between the studies of Holocaust cinema and Soviet cinema; bringing to light a new kind of national cinema, it hopes to enlarge the scope of Holocaust film studies and to offer new avenues for examining the history of Soviet film.

CHAPTER 1: HOLOCAUST CINEMA DURING STALINISM

The Jewish community experienced a dramatic social transformation throughout the early 20th century, from overt discrimination in pre-Revolutionary Russia, to the promise of equality in the new Soviet state. No single period saw a series of events as crucial to the history of (Soviet) Jews as that studied in this chapter, however. The rise and fall of the Nazi regime, WWII, the Holocaust and the post-war Stalinist terror prompted a dramatically negative re-evaluation of the Jews' position, not just in the USSR but in the contemporary Western world. Simultaneously, these events posed questions concerning cinema's role in recording, representing and testifying to the state-sponsored anti-Semitic persecutions and atrocities. A contemporary of the Holocaust and a witness of its preconditions and aftermath, Soviet cinema faced the task of capturing the unprecedented. In rendering the Holocaust, it adopted new generic, narrative and stylistic tropes, which would become fundamental to subsequent post-Stalinist representations. This chapter identifies, examines and charts the formation and development of Holocaust cinema during the period in question. Acknowledging the role of the state (ideology, propaganda and censorship) in the creation of a WWII mythology in social, historical and cinematic discourses, it analyses how film, through its formal and narrative capacities, positioned itself in relation to the official Soviet understanding of Jewish wartime victimhood and heroism. In doing so, this chapter elucidates how the Holocaust was perceived during the Stalinist period and what role cinema played in the formation of the historical understanding of this event. Through identification of the fundamental ideological and

cinematic tropes of Holocaust representation created under Stalin, the analytical framework for the remainder of my thesis is established.

The period under consideration can be clearly divided into three historical stages and this chapter is structured accordingly: the years from Adolf Hitler's accession to power and leading up to the Soviet-German war (1933-1940), wartime (1941-1945) and the late Stalinist period (1946-1953). Section One analyses three films that form part of the wider corpus of the so-called anti-fascist films; *Professor Mamlock* (Gerbert Rappoport and Adol'f Minkin, 1938), *Swamp Soldiers* (Aleksandr Macheret, 1938) and *The Oppenheim Family* (Grigorii Roshal', 1938) openly depict the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. I place these works in relation to the context of the Soviet-Jewish cultural environment and official Soviet responses to Nazi anti-Semitism. Looking at representations of Jews and their political struggle, this section studies how these films anticipate some of the representations of Jewish victimhood in subsequent Soviet Holocaust films. With the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union, a change was apparent in the official rhetoric concerning Nazi anti-Semitic crimes. Section Two examines how wartime cinema attempted to confront the unprecedented reality of the mass annihilation of Jews both in occupied Europe and the Soviet Union. Looking at newsreel footage and documentaries, as well as short and feature films, this section investigates the relationship between the fluctuating ideological control over the film industry, the official interpretation of Nazi anti-Semitic atrocities and the means of portraying the Holocaust on film. A case study of *The Unvanquished* (Mark Donskoi, 1945), the first feature film to reconstruct the annihilation of Soviet Jews on the original location of the Babii Iar massacre, concludes this section.

Finally, Section Three, concentrating on the post-war late Stalinist years, offers a perspective on the disappearance of Holocaust portrayals from Soviet cinema against the background of emerging Cold War ideology and anti-Jewish domestic campaigns. The overall aim of this chapter is to acknowledge and analyse the first stage in the trajectory of Soviet Holocaust cinema, identifying key formal, thematic and ideological tropes that constitute its pioneering attempt to confront the genocide of the Jews.

Section One: the USSR Responds to the Nazi Persecution of European Jews during the 1930s

When the Nazi Party came to power and began implementing its radical anti-Semitic policies in 1933, Soviet Jews were recognized as an independent ethnic community within the USSR. The Soviet government had been supporting the establishment of Yiddish schools, Party cells, clubs and theatres throughout the country since the 1920s.¹ In 1934 Soviet Jews were given their own autonomous region of Birobidzhan and The Moscow State Yiddish Theatre (GOSET), established in 1919, continued to play a crucial role in promoting and celebrating Jewish culture, while its leading actors and artistic directors, Solomon Mikhoels and Veniamin Zuskin, acted as spokesmen for the Jewish community. However, as many scholars, like Jeffrey Vridlinger, observe, such freedom existed only within the ideological project of the state. By allowing the Jewish community to celebrate their cultural heritage, the Soviet government intended ‘to communicate socialist ideology [...] through national

¹ Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), xv.

discourses.² J. Hoberman³ observes a similar process taking place in the cinematic sphere, tracing the Sovietisation of *shtetl* Jews in Soviet-Yiddish cinema from *Jewish Luck* (Aleksandr Granovskii, 1925) to *Seekers of Happiness* (Vladimir Korsh-Sablin, Iosif Shapiro, 1936). Although it fit the ideological agenda of the state, many authors agree that there was nevertheless a flourishing of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s.

Endorsing multi-ethnic harmony, the Soviet government expressed its solidarity with the persecuted German Jews, openly condemning the chauvinistic ideology of the Nazi regime through public speeches, press and cinema. For example, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Viacheslav Molotov, criticised the anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws in a speech given on 25 November 1936, while the Soviet press reported numerous incidents of Nazis' harassment of Jews, including coverage of Kristallnacht (9-10 November 1938).⁴ The event itself was followed by a series of anti-fascist demonstrations and public meetings throughout the Soviet Union. Cinema contributed to the anti-German discourse with films like the historical drama *Alexander Nevsky* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1938), contemporary anti-fascist films such as *Conveyor of Death* (Ivan Pyr'ev, 1933), *Ruddi's Career* (Vladimir Nemoliaev, 1934)⁵ and *The Struggle Continues* (Vasilii Zhuravlev, 1938), and most importantly certain works openly exposing Nazi anti-Semitism such as *Professor Mamlock*, *Swamp Soldiers* and *The Oppenheim Family*. Although depicting events that took place in

² Jeffrey Vridlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 8.

³ J. Hoberman, 'A Face to the Shtetl: Soviet Yiddish Cinema, 1924-1936,' in *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, eds. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (New York, London: Routledge, 1991), 124-150.

⁴ For details on press coverage see Il'ia Al'tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti* (Moscow: Kovcheg, 2002).

⁵ The film features a Jewish character; however, the subject of anti-Semitic persecution is not developed.

1933, these three films appeared highly topical upon their release in 1938⁶ when the events of Kristallnacht were widely condemned in the Soviet Union, as in the majority of Western countries. They thus provided a timely criticism of anti-Semitism in Europe; however, in doing so they also fulfilled a certain ideological function. Like the works of Soviet-Yiddish cinema and theatre, these films employed Jewish narratives to propel a Socialist rhetoric. Therefore they appear particularly relevant to the narrative of this thesis for two reasons: firstly, they feature stylistic and narrative tropes that my work seeks to highlight and examine, and secondly they also signal and prefigure the ways in which the Jewish narratives are instrumentalised in films for specific ideological ends.

As a precursor of Holocaust cinema,⁷ *Professor Mamlock* together with *Swamp Soldiers* and *The Oppenheim Family* can be considered the starting point of subsequent cinematic approaches to the genocide of the Jews. The key feature, relevant to the future trajectory of Holocaust films, is the tendency of all three works to merge ethnic and political themes. By highlighting the Communist beliefs of the Jewish characters, which clash with the ideology of the ruling regime, these films downplay the primacy of the ethnic question in state-sponsored discrimination. In doing so they also promote an anti-Western discourse by depicting Germany (and the Western world) as the enemy of Communism. Making a similar observation, Jeremy Hicks explains that such depictions were rooted in the Marxist understanding of anti-Semitism as a vestige of capitalism.⁸ Indeed, as Paul Babitsky and John Rimberg

⁶ Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938-1946* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 18.

⁷ Annette Insdorf values *Professor Mamlock* as the first Holocaust film, in Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 155-156; Joshua Rubenstein more accurately acknowledges it as the first Soviet cinematic portrayal of Nazi anti-Semitism, in Rubenstein, 'The War and the Final Solution on the Russian Front,' in *The Unknown Black Book*, eds. Joshua Rubenstein and Il'ia Al'tman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 19.

⁸ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 22.

demonstrate, representations of racism as a means of critiquing the West were widespread in other Soviet films of the 1930s such as *Black Skin* (Pavel Kolomoitsev, 1931), *The Great Consoler* (Lev Kuleshov, 1933) and *Circus* (Grigorii Aleksandrov, 1936), all of which depict the United States as a racially prejudiced country.⁹ Therefore we can see how the three anti-fascist films under examination here draw on existing anti-Western rhetoric to portray the suffering of the German Jews.

Professor Mamlock, adapted from the eponymous 1933 German play by Fredrick Wolf, depicts the humiliation and the struggle for survival of a renowned Jewish surgeon in Nazi Germany. However, while placing the figure of a Jew suffering from discrimination at the centre of the narrative, the film favours the theme of political resistance over that of ethnic violence. Initially the apolitical Mamlock is contrasted with his son, an active member of the Communist resistance. The film departs from the original ending of the play, where Mamlock commits suicide, and the insertion of a different ending constructs a Socialist Realist narrative of political awakening: a failed suicide attempt turns Mamlock from a discriminated Jew into a politically conscious Communist. Towards the end of the film the professor's ethnicity plays no role in his fate. The initial discrimination against Mamlock is captured in the scene where he is fired from the hospital, beaten up and led through the streets with the word *Jude* written on his gown. However, this explicit representation of anti-Semitic violence is then countered in the closing scene depicting Mamlock's death from a Nazi bullet as he delivers a passionate anti-regime speech. Thus, contrary to Annette Insdorf's reading,¹⁰ the film highlights the professor's Communist beliefs and not his Jewish origin as the reason for his murder, shifting the emphasis from the ethnic to the political.

⁹ Paul Babitsky and John Rimberg, *Soviet Film Industry* (New York: Praeger, 1955), 168.

¹⁰ She suggests that Mamlock dies because 'he never allowed politics to touch his life', in Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 155.

The Oppenheim Family, based on Lion Feuchtwanger's novel *The Oppermans*, blends these two factors, depicting both ethnic origins and ideological convictions as reasons for the misfortunes of a well-known German-Jewish dynasty. The new regime forces Martin Oppenheim to merge his established furniture business with a less successful German-sounding company, while his son, a promising student, is dismissed from his course for delivering an ideologically controversial paper. Similarly, his brother, a renowned ophthalmologist, is imprisoned for his anti-Nazi beliefs and is depicted sharing a cell with similar-minded anti-Nazi ethnic Germans. The theme of the political imprisonment of the Jews also figures in *Swap Soldiers* through the sub-plot of a Jewish pharmacist (played by *Professor Mamlock*'s Semien Mezhinskii) who suffers in a labour camp alongside non-Jewish inmates. Although the presence of anti-Semitic policies is conveyed through the film's mise-en-scène, it is the suspected connection to the Communists that determines the character's confinement to a camp.

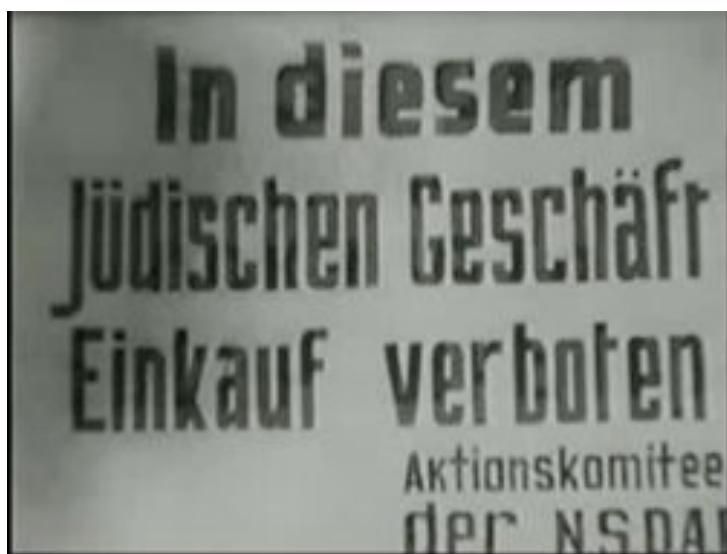


Fig. 1: A sign in the pharmacy reads 'It is forbidden to buy from this Jewish store' in *Swap Soldiers*

Moreover, like *Mamlock*, the pharmacist meets his death in an act of political defiance – escaping from the camp – rather than because of his Jewish origins. As well as exemplifying the tendency to merge the ethnic and the political, *Swamp Soldiers* demonstrates Soviet cinema's first attempt at rendering the Nazi concentration camp system. Although this depiction is less detailed than some of the subsequent reconstructions, it nevertheless introduces one of the key representational tropes – barbed wire fences.

The predominance of political over ethnic themes in these films is also evident from the responses of the Soviet press, which tended to downplay or bypass the significance of the protagonists' Jewish origins.¹¹ This too will become a fundamental feature of the future approaches to Soviet Holocaust films in the media. Another way in which these three anti-fascist films underline the ideological link between cinema and the state is their removal from screens shortly after the signing of the Non-Aggression pact with Nazi Germany in August 1939 and their subsequent return with the beginning of the Soviet-German war on 22 June 1941.

Interestingly, though, while these works together with a new wave of anti-fascist propaganda (re)appeared in the cinemas, new explicit portrayals of Jewish suffering never returned to Stalinist-era screens. Commenting on this paradox, Hicks explains that as the beginning of the Soviet-German war placed the emphasis on the common war effort,¹² it thus manifested a shift in perspective on the specificity of Jewish suffering. This fact is evident from the ban of several wartime works similar in content to the 1938 anti-fascist films. The approved film project to adapt

¹¹ Hicks analyses the reception of *Professor Mamlock*, in Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 28-31.

¹² Ibid., 43.

Feuchtwanger's *Exile* (1939) was never realised,¹³ while Eisenstein's work on *Prestige of an Empire*, a film based on the infamously anti-Semitic Beilis trial in 1913, and starring Zuskin, was cancelled in 1941. Zuskin was also due to appear in GOSET's adaptation of *The Oppermans*, which was no longer envisaged as relevant by the theatre's artistic director, Mikhhoels.¹⁴ Moreover, two completed films, *The Murderers are Coming* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, Iurii Tarich, 1942) and *Young Fritz* (Grigorii Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg, 1943), which also deal with Jewish themes within anti-fascist narratives, were banned from release.¹⁵

Adapted from Bertolt Brecht's play *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, *The Murderers are Coming* is clearly anti-fascist in its depiction of Nazi Germany. However, the film boils down the anti-Semitic theme of the original play to two episodes where non-Jewish characters verbally imply the suffering of the Jews: first, an SS officer mentions the deportation of the Jews, while later a member of The Hitler Youth reads out an anti-Semitic article from a newspaper. While Jewish characters are also absent from *Young Fritz*, the film offers a more detailed depiction of Nazi anti-Semitism. Prefiguring the ironic discussion of skulls in *Ordinary Fascism* (Mikhail Romm, 1965),¹⁶ the film's narrator, who claims to be a famous German racial scientist, discusses the difference between the Aryan and the Semitic race by comparing the human skulls positioned in front of him. Compared with its representation in the 1938 films, the subject of Jewish discrimination is only given marginal and brief verbal references in these two wartime films. *The Murderers are Coming* and *Young Fritz* thus highlight the dramatic shift in the understanding of Nazi-inflicted victimhood from the late 1930s to the early 1940s. Although the

¹³ Together with *The Oppermans* and *Success* (1940), this work forms a trilogy, see Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 42.

¹⁴ Vridlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theatre*, 234.

¹⁵ The former was released in the post-Soviet period, while the latter was never shown on screen.

¹⁶ To be studied in Chapter 2.

common theme of the particularity of Jewish suffering is likely to have played a part in the ban of the film, it is also important to consider other contributing factors: the lack of topicality of the works set in pre-war Nazi Germany in the new wartime context; the sympathetic portrayal of non-Nazi Germans, which jarred with the Soviet discourse of German bestiality; the portrayal of a form of state oppression which closely and dangerously resembled the Soviet system.¹⁷

While the Soviet films of 1938 empathised with the plight of German Jews, employing the theme of anti-Semitism to expose the ills of the Nazi (Western) state, the ban of the two wartime anti-fascist films signals a shift in the interpretation of this type of story. The following section explores the new understandings of Jewish victimhood in the context of the Soviet-German war.

Section Two: the Soviet-German War and the Holocaust

By 22 June 1941 – when Nazi Germany, breaching the non-aggression pact, attacked the Soviet Union – Soviet cinema had already expressed concerns about the possibility of a military conflict; producing anti-fascist films during the 1930s, it also created historical films that glorified great Russian (military) figures, such as *Peter the First* (Vladimir Petrov, 1937), *Pugachev* (Pavel Petrov-Bytov, 1938), *Alexander Nevksy* and *General Suvorov* (Mikhail Doller, Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1941), as well as ‘defence films’¹⁸ highlighting Soviet military strength, such as *If There Should be War Tomorrow* (Efim Dzigan and Lazar Antsi-Polovskii, 1938), *Tank Crew* (Zinovii Drapkin, Robert Maiman, 1939) and *Squadron Number Five* (Abram Room, 1939).

¹⁷ Vridlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theatre*, 234; Peter Kenez, *Soviet Cinema and Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001), 178; Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 101.

¹⁸ Iurii Khaniutin mentions the genre in his article on wartime cinema in ‘Kogda pushki streliaiut,’ *Iskusstvo Kino* 5 (1965): 9.

Indicative of the prime (ideological) importance of cinema during the war is the fact that on 22 June 1941 the government requested Ivan Bol'shakov, the head of the State Committee for Cinematographic Affairs, to replace the repertoire of all Moscow cinemas with these works.¹⁹ The first wartime (short) films, *Girlfriends, to the Front* (Viktor Eisymont, 1941) and *Chapaev is with Us* (Vladimir Petrov, 1941) and the editions of the *Fighting Film Collections* (a group of short films on war themes), appeared in just two weeks.

The continued production of film against the background of the prompt evacuation of all major film studios to Central Asia in September 1941 was another testimony to Lenin's well-known dictum that, for the Soviet regime, cinema was the most important of all arts.²⁰ Meanwhile, the evacuation of all military and industrial assets from central to Asian territories determined a significant demographic change, which contributed to the formation of historical and cinematic (mis)conceptions and (mis)representations of Jewish victimhood and heroism. The evacuation of some 27% of the Jewish population made them the second largest group of evacuees after the Russians²¹ and simultaneously prompted an anti-Semitic myth of Jewish absence from the occupied territories. The myth of the Tashkent front or Tashkent partisans, as it became known, is partly responsible for the distorted popular understanding of Jewish victimhood as well as Jewish contribution to the war effort.²² The reality of the situation was dramatically different to this popular myth. Not only did a large

¹⁹ Julian Graffy, *Chapaev* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010): 90.

²⁰ Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* (Oxon: Routledge, 1988), 53.

²¹ Al'tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti*, 387.

²² Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, gathered the largest number of Jewish evacuees, see David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 185, 191; Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 128. For a detailed account of the Soviet Jewish contribution to the war, see Yitzkhak Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner: Soviet Jews in the War Against Nazi Germany* (Jerusalem, New York: Gefen Publishing, 2010).

proportion of Jews join the Red Army and the partisans, but also those Jewish civilians who remained in the occupied zones fell victim to the first large-scale annihilation practices of the German and Romanian occupiers and their collaborators. The systematic mass murders of Soviet Jews began immediately after the invasion, with one of the gravest anti-Semitic atrocities, the Babii Iar massacre, taking place on 29-30 September 1941, only ten days after the occupation of Kiev. The murder of Jews in Babii Iar, as in other occupied Soviet locations, was accomplished with astonishing efficiency. The Kremlin was aware of the anti-Semitic atrocities as early as August 1941 through numerous Red Army and partisan reports from the occupied zones. Moreover, on a few rare occasions Stalin and Molotov acknowledged these facts in public: Stalin's speech of 7 November 1941 referred to the 'medieval Jewish pogroms' that were taking place across the occupied zones, and Molotov's wartime Note number four, delivered on 6 January 1942, featured an entire passage on the Babii Iar massacre.²³ The Soviet press published these speeches and provided additional information, such as in the articles by renowned writers who worked as war reporters Vasilii Grossman, Il'ia Ehrenburg, Konstantin Simonov and Boris Gorbатов.

The reaction of the cultural sphere was prompt. Once again members of GOSET acted as spokesmen for the Jewish community, this time raising awareness of the anti-Semitic atrocities against Soviet and European Jews. A Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) was formed in February 1942; consisting of the members of the Soviet-Jewish intelligentsia and headed by Solomon Mikhoels. From then on until its dissolution in 1948, the JAC was to play a central role in documenting and voicing the facts of Jewish suffering, namely through such literary undertakings as *Eynekeit*, a Soviet-Yiddish newspaper, and *The Black Book*, a project for a publication of witness

²³ Al'tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti*, 391; Kiril Feferman, *Soviet-Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941-1964* (Saarbrücken: VDM Publishing, 2009), 9-10.

and survivor accounts. However, since the newspaper was published only in Yiddish and the book was never published during Stalinist times, the reach of this information remained rather limited. A more successful endeavour was a radio rally on 24 August 1941, where Mikhoels, together with leading Soviet-Jewish figures (Ehrenburg, Eisenstein and scientist Lina Shtern amongst others) addressed the problem of wartime anti-Semitic crimes. Receiving a full spread in the newspaper *Pravda* the next day, this meeting was also recorded on film and screened as part of the newsreel edition, *Soiuzkinozhurnal* n.84. For the first time identifying Soviet Jews with an international Jewish community and implying active resistance on the part of Jews, Mikhoel's speech expressed some ideologically challenging ideas and its filmic record was as a result edited so as to omit them.²⁴ As such, the newsreel provides not only the first example of the Soviet cinematic record on the subject of the Holocaust, as Hicks and Miron Chernenko observe,²⁵ but also of the ideological control surrounding the cinematic representation of Jewish victimhood and resistance in Soviet wartime cinema.

Soviet Documentaries and the Formation of Holocaust Discourses

Since Hicks' 2012 book offers an in-depth analysis of wartime atrocities in Soviet newsreels and documentaries, I will limit my discussion of this subject to the factors most relevant to the central arguments of my thesis: the textual relation between film sound and image and the contextual role of these films in the formation of official and unofficial Holocaust discourses.

²⁴ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 45.

²⁵ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 45; Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda, zheltaia zvezda* (Vinnitsa: Globus Press, 2001), 144.

It is generally understood that, since documentary cinema and newsreels were at the epicentre of the Soviet struggle against the invaders, they fell under the strict control of the Party²⁶ and the filmmakers tended to shape the content of these films by carefully selecting, or sometimes staging, certain scenes for a stronger propagandistic impact.²⁷ Notwithstanding this fact, the chaotic circumstances in which they found themselves upon entering first the newly liberated Soviet territories, and then the death camps in Poland (to which I turn at the end of this section), also led to some ideologically problematic evidence, such as images of targeted Jewish persecution being captured on film. These ‘mistakes’ were rectified through editing and the use of the voice-over commentary. Therefore, when we analyse the outtakes as well as the discrepancies between the sound and the image track of the newsreels and documentaries depicting the liberated Soviet territories, we can find evidence not only of the undesirability of the information about the targeted persecution and annihilation of Jews, but also of the initially inconsistent ideological control.

Soiuzkinozhurnal n.27 (1942) provides a revealing example of both.

Documenting the liberation of Barvenkovo,²⁸ the newsreel captures a frozen body on the ground in a medium close-up. Covered in ice, the face of the dead person is completely invisible, making this image a powerful symbol of universal victimhood. However, an outtake from the same footage tells a different story; originally filmed in a medium shot, the dead person is in fact wearing a Star of David armband.

²⁶ Peter Kenez, ‘Black and White: the War on Film,’ in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 160.

²⁷ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 47.

²⁸ A small town outside Kharkiv, Ukraine.



Fig. 2: A clear marker of Jewish victimhood.

In this case, the anonymity of the face is contradicted by the unambiguous meaning of the armband, turning this victim from a symbol of universal suffering into concrete evidence of anti-Semitic crimes. The manipulation of the meaning of images, common in wartime newsreels and documentaries, was also realised through voice-over commentary. Thus another image of a dead person in the same newsreel is accompanied by a voice-over identifying the victim as Iakov Reingold. Despite a clearly Jewish-sounding name, the voice-over stresses his Soviet origin and refers to the deceased as ‘a peaceful citizen.’ Amir Wiener explains²⁹ that, starting in 1942, when a mythology of universal Soviet suffering began to emerge, this phrase gradually replaced all references to Jewish victimhood. Using the example of the Soviet press, David Shneer³⁰ provides further insights, explaining that Soviet readers (and viewers) perceived the euphemistic connotations of this phrase by relying on various clues in the newspapers, such as the Jewish-sounding names or the visual

²⁹ Amir Wiener, *Making Sense of the War: the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 209-215.

³⁰ David Shneer, *Through Soviet-Jewish Eyes*, 101-107.

markers of anti-Semitism captured by the photographs and thus were likely to understand that ‘peaceful citizens’ often connoted the Jewish population.

Whereas *Soiuzkinozhurnal* n.27 testifies to the discrepancies *within* the voice-over commentary, *Soiuzkinozhurnal* n.10 (1942) and the documentary film *Battle for Our Soviet Ukraine* (Aleksandr Dovzhenko, 1943) demonstrate contradictions *between* the image and the voice-over, which we can also read as symptoms of the ideological unease regarding the Holocaust. Each captures the discovery of a Jewish mass grave, in Kerch and Drobitskii Iar (Kharkiv) respectively; however, the ethnicity of the dead remains unacknowledged. While the newsreel emphasises the Soviet identity of the dead, the documentary stresses their Ukrainian nationality. In a chapter-length study of *Battle for Our Soviet Ukraine*, Hicks demonstrates that this was an ideologically controversial gesture at the time, as Dovzhenko shifted the dominant paradigm of Soviet victimhood.³¹ However, regardless of the film’s unorthodox Ukrainian standpoint, as well as its artistic and technological merit (which Hicks praises at length) it is important to also stress that the film’s approach to the depiction of the Holocaust is bound by, and contributes to, the emergent representational conventions. A particularly striking example of how the film masks the Jewish identity of the victims is provided by a close-up of a skull of a Holocaust victim, whose empty sockets gaze hauntingly at the viewer, while the voice-over addresses the audience from the perspective of the *Ukrainian* dead.

Although the image track capturing the remains of the Jewish victims in no way indicated their ethnicity, the viewer, following a similar principle to that discussed in relation to the newsreels, could have gleaned this knowledge from other accounts (newspaper, photography) of the same or similar events. Il’ia Al’tman

³¹ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 107-133.

explains that the recurring differences between various types of coverage of the Holocaust served a significant purpose: they allowed the Soviet citizens to compare the different sources and construct a more complete narrative of the Jewish genocide, simultaneously conveying the very fact of the ideological unease around this subject.³²

Thus we begin to see how newsreels and documentary films, capturing the aftermath of the occupation, participated in the formation of an ambiguous discourse, comprised of official and unofficial – explicit and implicit – knowledge. The lack of a coherent overarching ideological standpoint on the coverage of the Holocaust throughout the war leads to the formation of telling discrepancies and contradictions. As such, these first records of the Holocaust testify to the presence of the Soviet-Jewish casualties of war and also establish the textual and ideological principles for omitting and under-representing of this fact.

I now turn to the study of Soviet newsreels of liberated camps, *Majdanek* (1944) and *Auschwitz* (1945). While these works exhibit a similar tendency to eschew direct depictions of the Jewish dead, what interests me in the analysis here is their centrality to the creation of a Holocaust iconography as well as to the formation of Holocaust memory in Soviet cinema. Although another film was compiled of the same material as *Majdanek* by the Polish filmmakers, entitled *Majdanek - the Cemetery of Europe* (Aleksandr Ford, 1944), it is the analysis of the Soviet film that is relevant to my thesis. While Hicks' text provides a comprehensive study of the way these two Soviet newsreels omit and/or imply the Jewish origin of the dead,³³ my aim is to focus more exclusively on their textual properties.

³² Al'tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti*, 409.

³³ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 157-185.

As in the first cinematic records of the liberated Soviet areas, the cameramen documenting the liberated camps in Poland were faced with the excruciating task of filming atrocities of unparalleled scale and horror. Adapting their filming techniques to the unprecedented subject matter, the cameramen forged a new film language, comprised of visual motifs and camera movements that would recur, from then on, in films about the Holocaust. First of all, let us consider the visual motifs introduced in these newsreels, which have contributed to the development of a Holocaust iconography in Soviet cinema. Both works introduce figures of camp survivors and with them the visual motif of striped uniforms and they capture the ovens (intact in Majdanek and destroyed in Auschwitz). Having to represent the vast scale of the absent dead bodies that had been destroyed in the crematoria, Soviet cameramen employed the effective, and later much imitated, device of filming their possessions *en masse* – hair, shoes, clothes, spectacles, suitcases, toys, dentures – to signify the irrevocably absent victims as well as their magnitude. The close-up of a single plait amongst a large heap of hair in *Auschwitz* proves a particularly powerful image, which at once suggests the individuality and enormity of the dead.



Fig. 3: The individuality and the enormity of the dead captured in one shot.

Moreover, *Majdanek* introduces the later much replicated emblem of Nazi genocidal industry, the chimney of the crematorium, while *Auschwitz* figures other essential icons such as the gas chamber peep hole, cans of Zyklon B gas and the gateway bearing the *Arbeit macht frei* sign. Without attributing its origin to the Soviet newsreel, Ilan Avisar considers the latter image in particular as one of the key icons of the Holocaust.³⁴

Secondly, I must stress that numerous images from these newsreels reappear as found footage in films of subsequent decades, acquiring different meanings and serving different purposes within the narratives.³⁵ The images that were to become particularly prominent throughout post-war Soviet cinema included close-ups of shoes, toys and glasses, as well as shots of the ovens from *Majdanek*, a sequence depicting liberated children baring their tattooed arms from *Auschwitz* and shots of the inmates behind barbed wire fences from both newsreels.

Thirdly, not only the objects and people but also the filming techniques were to shape subsequent cinematic iconography. The wartime cameramen filming the camps employed the particular device of tilting and panning to highlight the incomprehensibly large scale of the dead, and consequently the efficiency of the Nazi annihilation practices. Thus both films use a tilt from a close-up into an establishing shot of piles of human possessions to emphasize its enormity, while *Majdanek* in particular relies on panning to realise a similar purpose, such as in a shot of the crematoria's ovens. Another iconic technique, tracking past barbed wire fences, which in Holocaust film scholarship is attributed to *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, France,

³⁴ Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 5.

³⁵ Footage from these films will become equally widespread in Western cinema; however, for the scope of my work, I will limit the discussion to the Soviet context.

1956) and associated with Holocaust cinema ever since, was in fact introduced in *Majdanek* and then reappeared in *Auschwitz*.



Fig. 4: Tracking past barbed wire fences.

In an analysis of these films' reception, Hicks comments on the absence of the Jewish victims from the written accounts of both the newsreels and the liberation itself, and explains why these films have been largely forgotten or ignored in the West despite their pioneering contribution to Holocaust cinema.³⁶ He suggests that, because of the manipulation of certain images – for example the staged footage of Auschwitz inmates happily greeting the Soviet liberators – these films were later dismissed as propagandistic fabrications.³⁷ What interests me about the post-war fate of these newsreels is the way they reappear, either as found footage or as visual references, in Soviet documentary and feature films of subsequent decades in order to construct different kinds of memory and knowledge of Nazi atrocities. The examination of their

³⁶ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 171-174 and 183-185.
³⁷ Ibid., 176-183.

utility as litmus test to the fluctuating ideological and epistemological discourses of their time will be the task of the following chapters.

Between Convention and Unorthodoxy: Soviet Cinema in Exile Represents the Holocaust

The importance the Soviet government placed on the feature film industry during the war is evident in the evacuation of the film studios as well as in the prompt production of new wartime films. In this section, I want to analyse the role of the cinema in the construction of an official war mythology and of ideologically controversial narratives of the Holocaust. The specificity of my approach lies in its departure from two existing, opposed scholarly views on the relationship between cinema and state ideology during the war.

On the one hand, there exists an understanding of the highly propagandistic role of Stalinist wartime cinema, which is regarded as the state's tool in the war effort. My own analysis of the three anti-fascist films to an extent has signalled such an approach. While authors like Peter Kenez³⁸ and Richard Taylor³⁹ respectively highlight the propagandistic nature of early Soviet and Stalinist cinema in general, Karel C. Berkhoff⁴⁰ focuses on wartime (film) propaganda in particular. He points out that, at the outset of the war, Soviet victory was highly unlikely and the unpopularity of the regime with the peasants – a consequence of collectivisation and of the Ukrainian famine – as well as with the newly annexed Baltic regions threatened the

³⁸ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³⁹ Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1979).

⁴⁰ Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During WWII* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

survival of the Soviet Union itself. Therefore, the government invested significantly in the ideological mobilisation of the vast Soviet nation, employing such means as the mass media, (poster) art and cinema in the effort.⁴¹

On the other hand, film scholars such as John Haynes, Denise Youngblood and Jeremy Hicks amongst others, maintain that, because the feature film industry was removed from the ideological centre of the country as a result of the evacuation, the wartime period produced films that exhibit a degree of ideological and artistic freedom. For example, Haynes⁴² suggests that the relaxation of the ideological pressure from the capital allowed for the creation of a peripheral space where new non-conformist narratives could be constructed. Moreover, this understanding is shared by historians of Soviet culture, like Bernd Bonwetsch⁴³ and Richard Stites,⁴⁴ who suggest that the war created a ‘breathing space’ not just for the cinema but also for Soviet intellectuals and culture at large.

However, the fact that some films depicting anti-Semitic persecution were released while others dealing with the same subject were banned underlines the complexity of the relationship between film production in evacuation and the propagandistic project of the state; ultimately demonstrating that this relationship did not fall neatly into either of the two opposing scholarly categories.

It is generally understood that one of the key images constructed by wartime cinema was that of a unified invincible Soviet nation. The unifying discourse of Soviet brotherhood also extended to the official expression of solidarity with the

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² John Haynes, ‘Brothers in Arms: the Changing Faces of the Soviet Soldiers in Stalinist Cinema,’ *The Modern Language Review* 95/1 (2000): 167.

⁴³ Bernd Bonwetsch, ‘War as a “Breathing Space”: Soviet Intellectuals and the “Great Patriotic War”,’ in *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, eds. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 137-153; Richard Stites, ‘Soviet Russian Wartime Culture: Freedom and Control, Spontaneity and Consciousness,’ in *The People’s War*, eds., Thurston and Bonwetsch, 171-184.

⁴⁴ Stites, ‘Soviet Russian Wartime Culture,’ in *The People’s War*, eds., Thurston and Bonwetsch, 171-184.

oppressed Slavic countries, like Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁴⁵ Such emphasis led to the formation of what Weiner⁴⁶ calls a hierarchy of ethnic heroism (with the Slavic nations figuring at the top) and the levelling of victimhood. This, together with the earlier-mentioned myth of the Tashkent front, led to the under-representation of Soviet Jews as either Holocaust victims or war heroes. Moreover, there is evidence of the direct involvement of the censors in precluding the making of films on such subjects. In addition to the banned and shelved anti-fascist projects discussed earlier, we can name *I Want to Live*, a script depicting a distinctly Jewish plight that was banned in 1942,⁴⁷ and the removal of references to Jewish victimhood in *The Regional Party Secretary* and *Partisans in Ukrainian Steppes*.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the two latter films preserve the depiction of Jews as partisans, while three other wartime fiction films – *A Priceless Head* (Boris Barnet, 1942), *She Defends the Motherland* (Friedrich Ermler, 1943) and *The Unvanquished* – present, albeit marginalized, narratives of the Jewish predicament. In doing so these works point to the tensions between the conventional and unorthodox discourses that constituted wartime cinema in evacuation.

Soviet film critic Iurii Khaniutin names *She Defends the Motherland* as an example of the new sophistication and verisimilitude attained by Soviet wartime cinema due to the influence of documentary films.⁴⁹ Neia Zorkaia observes that it was *Moscow Strikes Back* (Leonid Varlamov, Il'ia Kopalin, 1942) in particular that inspired scriptwriter Aleksei Kapler and director Fridrikh Ermler to embark on this

⁴⁵ The trope of family and brotherhood in Stalinist films is discussed in Elena Baraban, 'Semeinyi krug: traktovka rodstva, evreev i voennoplennykh,' *Ab Imperio* 3 (2009): 1-25.

⁴⁶ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of the War*, 208.

⁴⁷ A film dedicated to a distinctly Jewish plight during the occupation, see Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 91.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 92-95.

⁴⁹ Iurii Khaniutin, 'Kogda pushki streliaut,' 10.

feature film project.⁵⁰ Moreover, Kapler's personal experiences as a war correspondent endow the film with a further degree of authenticity.⁵¹ This is evident not only in the film's portrayal of Nazi violence, but also in its (brief) acknowledgement of the ideologically ambiguous subjects like the Holocaust, Soviet collaboration and anti-Semitism. While *She Defends the Motherland* is generally considered a wartime classic,⁵² until Hicks' 2012 publication no one appreciated its importance as the first wartime feature to invoke the Holocaust. However, it needs to be said that in depicting the Holocaust through a brief verbal reference, irrelevant to the main narrative, the film not only signals the subject's marginal position within the larger picture of wartime sufferings, but in doing so also inaugurates a representational trope that will recur throughout the subsequent decades.

The brief verbal reference appears in a scene towards the beginning of the film where a group of villagers, escaping the Nazi invasion, hides in the woods. Sitting around the fire, one of the characters provokes the group with a pro-Nazi monologue. His speech is ideologically deviant not only because it implies the Holocaust and collaboration, as Hicks observes, but also because it draws parallels between the Nazi and Soviet regimes. The man says: 'It won't be easy living under the Germans, but we are used to that.' He then continues to articulate the truth about the Holocaust:

Have you been in the hands of the Germans? You have! Have you seen them hang everyone at random? They also know what they are doing, even though they are fascists. They kill Communists, of course, because those had the

⁵⁰ Neia Zorkaia, *Illustrated History of Soviet Cinema* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1989), 182.

⁵¹ Aleksei Kapler, *Dolgi nashi* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1973) 257-295; Kapler, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia. I. Stsenarii. Kinopovesti* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1984), 9, 247-295; Kapler, *Stranstviia v iskusstve. Stranstviia zhurnalista* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1984), 541-556.

⁵² Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2007), 63; Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 117; Zorkaia, *Illustrated History of Soviet Cinema*, 182.

power. Well, and the Jews ... But why would they touch us? Fascists also need a simple working man.⁵³

By depicting the Nazis' selective approach to murder, this monologue challenges one of the key wartime conventions: the irrational bestiality of the invaders. While presenting both Jews and Communists as key target groups, it nonetheless implies that Jews, as opposed to Communists, were killed for their ethnicity. Moreover, in acknowledging the specificity of the Jewish fate, the phrase also implies Soviet anti-Semitism, as the manner of the actor's delivery of this line conveys his belief that such an action is natural or justified.⁵⁴ However, this highly controversial speech is clearly coded as 'wrong' and the scene ensures audiences' antipathy towards the character: his monologue is intercut with reaction shots of other characters' disconcerted faces and the deserter is shot before he manages to walk away.

Despite a pioneering acknowledgement of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, *She Defends the Motherland*, nevertheless, refers to the Jewish suffering only very briefly and from the perspective of a cowardly Slavic character. The following analysis attempts to evaluate whether the other two films, featuring Jewish characters, offer a different point of view.

Supporting the suggestion of a wartime ideological relaxation, Hicks observes that the *Fighting Film Collection*, to which *A Priceless Head* belongs, 'constituted a sphere where the homogenizing power of the Stalinist cultural system was, for a short time, shaken in such a way as to permit the expression of unorthodox messages.'⁵⁵ However, the inextricability of the two divergent discourses – of ideological liberation and of the cinema's propagandistic role – is evident in *A Priceless Head*, which

⁵³ My translation.

⁵⁴ Hicks depicts this as 'a gesture that suggests "of course"', but does not appreciate it is an implication of Soviet anti-Semitism, in Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 97.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 81.

combines an unconventionally overt portrayal of a Jew with some ideologically-laden tropes.

Contributing to the Soviet wartime tendency to express solidarity with oppressed Slavic nations, this short film centres on the plight of a Polish resistance fighter, Grochowski, wanted by the Nazis in exchange for a reward. Escaping a manhunt, he hides in the flat of a woman who is struggling in vain to obtain money to feed her sick child. In a noble gesture Grochowski suggests that the woman denounce him and use the reward to help her pay to cure the little girl. While initially the woman decides to give him away, she in fact misleads the Nazi soldiers. This gesture of defiance leads to an attempted execution of the woman and her child; however, they are rescued by Grochowski. As the narrative focuses on the moral dilemma of the woman and the heroic deed of Grochowski, it places the Jewish character – a nameless man living in the same building as the Polish mother – into a secondary position.⁵⁶

Despite such a depiction of the Jewish character, *A Priceless Head* is noteworthy as the first overt wartime portrayal – and the only instance in the *Fighting Film Collections* – of a (persecuted) Jew. Making the audience aware of his ethnic identity before the character appears on screen, the credit sequence states that the ‘Jew’ is played by Moisei Gol’dblat (a well-known GOSET actor and Mikhoels’ co-star in the popular Soviet-Yiddish film *Jewish Luck*). Once the character appears in the film, the fact of discrimination against him on ethnic grounds is clearly communicated through costume, dialogue and movement within the frame. His black coat and hat, as well as the side-locks (*payot*) indicate his Jewish orthodox origin while the Star of David armband signals his discriminated position. Moreover, he is

⁵⁶ In this respect I disagree with Hicks, who argues that the film develops two parallel plots, in *ibid.*, 87.

introduced standing off the pavement attempting to read a 'Wanted' poster and, when a sympathising woman invites him to come closer, the man replies that he is not allowed to do so because he is Jewish and points to his armband.

While this manner of overt depiction demonstrates an unorthodox approach to the idea of universal suffering, the remainder of the film offers a more conventional depiction. The film re-introduces the Jewish character five scenes later, assisting Grochowski's escape from the Nazis. Having established that he is discriminated against, the film then depicts the Jew living in the same apartment block as the Polish characters, and in doing so omits the fact that in the occupied territories Jews were subjected to more severe living conditions. Exhibiting the narrative tension between the non-conformist and the orthodox treatments of Jewish victimhood in the first half of the film, *A Priceless Head* concludes with a conventional depiction of the Jew being punished together with the Polish protagonists. Moreover, it is significant that the Jewish character in fact voluntarily joins the group of the condemned Poles: after the Polish doctor, holding the sick child, is murdered, the Jew comes over to take the child from the dying man, and thus assumes his place in the group. The theme of the Jew's unique, more severe treatment at the hands of the Nazis so clearly established in the opening sequence thus becomes dissolved into a more ideologically driven narrative of patriotism and solidarity, making his plight a matter of ideology rather than of ethnicity. The film closes with a 'Wanted' poster of the woman next to that of Grochowski, and both characters appear in the epilogue sequence transmitting an anti-Nazi message via underground radio. While Hicks reads the absence of the Jew from the finale as a problematic omission of Jewish heroism,⁵⁷ in my view this absence in

⁵⁷ Ibid., 90.

fact re-affirms his secondary position in the main narrative line of the mother and the resistance fighter.

A Case Study: The Unvanquished

References to Jewish victims became increasingly rare by 1943, both in Soviet films and in the wider socio-political and cultural spheres. However, in 1945, at a time when Soviet newsreels of the liberated death camps omitted the Jewish specificity of the Nazi mass-annihilation practices, *The Unvanquished* was released. Restaging the murder of Soviet Jews in Babii Iar, the film was not only the first audio-visual portrayal of Jewish annihilation on Soviet screens but also the first record of the largest Soviet Holocaust site. Omitted from the key Western texts on Holocaust cinema, in recent years *The Unvanquished* has gained recognition amongst (Russian) film scholars. For example, Milena Musina⁵⁸ and Evgenii Margolit⁵⁹ analyse the representation of the Holocaust within the specific framework of an auteurist reading of Donskoi's *oeuvre*. While authors like Chernenko⁶⁰ and Zorkaia⁶¹ briefly acknowledge the importance of the film in the context of Soviet Holocaust cinema, readings by Hicks, Olga Gershenson and Elena Baraban present a more in-depth analysis of the subject.⁶² However, since this film innovatively reconstructs a mass murder in an authentic location, it is generally over-praised for its pioneering attempt to portray openly Jewish victimhood, and the centrality of the Jewish theme in the

⁵⁸ Milena Musina 'Ischislenie roda,' *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski* 51 (2001): 89-202.

⁵⁹ Evgenii Margolit, 'Nevedomomu bogu,' *Iskusstvo Kino* 9 (2010): 89-97.

⁶⁰ Cherneko, *Krasiana zvezda*, 169.

⁶¹ Zorkaia, *Istoriia sovetskogo kino* (Moscow: Aletea, 2005), 266.

⁶² Jeremy Hicks 'Confronting the Holocaust: Mark Donskoi's *The Unvanquished*,' *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3/1 (2009): 33-51; Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 134-157; Olga Gershenson, 'Les Insoumis (1945) ou comment un roman Soviétique est devenu un film juif,' in *Kinojudaica: Les représentations des Juifs dans le cinéma de Russie et d'Union soviétique des années 1910 aux années 1980* eds. Valérie Pozner and Natacha Laurent (Nouveau Monde Editions, 2012), 341-364; Baraban, 'Semeinyi krug,' 1-25.

film is over-emphasised. This tendency is evident in the very title of Gershenson's essay, which suggests that *The Unvanquished* is a 'Jewish film'.⁶³

In contrast, I would like to offer a more nuanced reading of relevant scenes in the film, in order to assess the ways in which *The Unvanquished* both conforms to, and deviates from, existing discourses of victimhood. In doing so, I hope to suggest a new understanding of the film's representation of the Holocaust in general and in the sequence of the massacre in particular.

Based on the 1943 Stalin-prize winning short story by the well-known writer and war correspondent Boris Gorbатов, the film was directed by the internationally acclaimed filmmaker, Mark Donskoi. Telling the story of a Ukrainian metal worker, Taras Iatsenko, and his family in occupied Ukraine, the film, as Zorkaia⁶⁴ observes, would have differed little from the original literary narrative of Soviet stoicism and resistance were it not for the sub-narrative line dedicated to Iatsenko's family doctor, Aaron Fishman, and his granddaughter, who fall victims of the Holocaust. While the short story features only three references to Jewish suffering – an encounter between Taras and the doctor at the black market, the phrase 'Jews were executed somewhere outside the town'⁶⁵ and the character of a Jewish girl in hiding captured by the Nazis – the filmic adaptation turns them into a secondary narrative line, and one so coherent that some authors, like Margolit⁶⁶ and Gershenson,⁶⁷ misperceive it as central in the film. Such elaboration can be attributed to the film authors' personal experience of the Holocaust: Donskoi visited liberated Kiev in June 1944, while Gorbатов covered the liberation of Majdanek as a war correspondent for *Pravda* that same year. As well as the expansion of the Holocaust theme, the film's casting of Veniamin Zuskin in the

⁶³ Gershenson, 'Les Insoumis,' 341.

⁶⁴ Zorkaia, *Istoriia sovetskogo kino*, 266.

⁶⁵ Boris Gorbатов, *Nepokorennye* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1978), 41.

⁶⁶ Margolit, 'Nevedomomu bogu,' 93.

⁶⁷ Gershenson, 'Les Insoumis,' 341.

part of doctor Fishman is generally considered as another means of emphasising the importance of the Jewish narrative line. Moreover, this casting choice, while essential in communicating the character's ethnic origin to the viewer, will also be determinant in the post-war fate of the film.

The doctor is introduced in the opening sequence and his Jewish origins are suggested by Zuskin's presence as well as by the character's Jewish-sounding name and medical profession (traditionally associated with this ethnicity in the Soviet context).⁶⁸ Omitting any explicit identification of Fishman's ethnicity, the opening scene also creates a certain degree of ambiguity as to why the doctor is in a more endangered position under the occupation than the ethnically Ukrainian characters. This is achieved through the delivery of the lines and actors' performances, which are marked by numerous pauses, silences and meaningful looks. For example, when Taras announces that the Germans are approaching and offers shelter to the doctor, Fishman, looking absent-minded, says with long pauses 'But... I have patients... sick children...'. When the doctor leaves, Taras follows and makes a last attempt at convincing him to stay. For a while the men face each other in silence before the doctor finally departs; lasting approximately five seconds this pause appears rather long in a 17 seconds-long shot. Thus we begin to see one way in which the film follows a general cinematic tendency to imply rather than articulate both the Jewish origins of the character and his more endangered position.

However, a subsequent scene, featuring the doctor and his granddaughter at the black market, offers a different approach. It employs costume – the Star of David armband on the doctor's coat – so as to communicate overtly the character's Jewish origins as a reason for his discrimination. Moreover, capturing Taras' act of gazing at

⁶⁸ Hicks, 'Confronting the Holocaust,' 36.

the armband, the scene present a medium close up of his face next to this anti-Semitic marker. In doing so it not only emphasises the importance of Fishman's Jewish origin, as Hicks suggests,⁶⁹ but also underlines a specifically Ukrainian perspective on the Holocaust, as it is the act of Taras' gazing that prompts the medium close-up.



Fig. 5: A Ukrainian perspective on the Holocaust.

Continuing to emphasise the Ukrainian point of view, *The Unvanquished* depicts the death march of the Jews to the ravine within a larger episode dedicated to the funeral of Taras' workmate murdered by the Nazis. The last encounter between Fishman and Taras occurs at a crossroads when the Ukrainian spots the familiar face of his family doctor amongst an anonymous crowd of people led by the Nazis and the Ukrainian police. Again aligning the spectator with Taras' visual perspective, the camera singles out the doctor from a distance and makes him the focal point of the sequence. Moreover, the scene presents what I'd like to call an 'aural close-up' by introducing into the soundtrack a musical motif that has been associated with the doctor in previous scenes. Since the rest of the victims appear as an anonymous,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 137.

ethnically unspecified group – contrary to Musina’s erroneous observation that they are marked with the yellow stars⁷⁰ – Fishman therefore figures as a signifier of the group’s Jewish origin as well as an embodiment of collective Jewish suffering. Scholars generally consider the brief dialogue between the two men as central to the Jewish-Ukrainian dynamics of the film. However, they overlook the fact that, by presenting Taras bowing to Fishman (thus expressing empathy with his suffering), the scene eschews the problem of Soviet collaboration and anti-Semitism so innovatively confronted in *She Defends the Motherland*. Although Ukrainian police can be seen in the background of the crowd shots, the dialogue section of the sequence paints an unproblematic picture of ethnic harmony. While Hicks is the only scholar to reflect on the subject of collaboration, he envisages Taras as the sole character to express solidarity with the Jews. However, a closer look at the editing demonstrates that the two shots of Taras’ workmates strengthen the idea of a wider solidarity. As Taras expresses respect to the doctor, the two insert shots of the men’s solemn faces looking into Fishman’s direction thus symbolise the compassion of the Ukrainians with the suffering of the Jewish people.

Continuing to testify to the ambiguities of the wartime films’ depiction of the Holocaust, this scene on the one hand confirms the myth of interethnic harmony, while on the other it undermines the trope of undifferentiated Soviet victimhood. It does so both thematically and formally. First of all, the film distinguishes between the two types of victims – the Ukrainian worker, shot for disobeying the Nazis, and a group of Jews to be shot for no reason other than their ethnicity. Secondly, such thematic contrast is further emphasised via editing, shot composition and movement within the frame. The film cleverly uses the location of the crossroads to stage a

⁷⁰ Musina, ‘Ischislenie roda,’ 197.

spatial contrast: at first the two groups of people never occupy the same screen space, as the shot-reverse shot technique employed throughout the majority of the scene clearly separates the Jews from the Ukrainians. Moreover, once the processions assume their course, a high-angle establishing shot reveals a graphic contrast between the death march, moving down the road and off-screen left, and the Ukrainian funeral procession walking up the road to the right.



Fig. 5.1: A visual contrast suggests the uniqueness of the Jewish plight.

The difference in the fates of the Jewish and the Ukrainian characters, at first implied through dialogue in the opening scene, and then elaborated visually in the subsequent episodes, reaches a climax in the scene of the massacre. This section of the film stands out from the rest due to a shift in viewing agency: if previously the story of the doctor was related within the context of Taras' narrative, the massacre of the Jews occurs in the absence of the Ukrainian protagonist. Viewed from an impersonal perspective, it appears as an independent element in the narrative. While scholars highlight the Jewish perspective in the scene, considering it to be the film's

‘centre of gravity’,⁷¹ a close textual analysis in fact demonstrates a lack of Jewish agency. As such, the massacre, despite being a pioneering reconstruction, contributes to the tendency of wartime cinema to deny a Jewish perspective on the Holocaust. The scene depicts a group of people standing at the bottom of a ravine, while German soldiers stand at the top pointing their machine guns at the victims. After a series of close-ups of the condemned, the sequence restages the murder, intercutting the long shots of the Nazis shooting people with images of dark clouds and medium close-up of Nazi generals observing the massacre. The scene terminates with the symbolic image of a black scarf entangled in a tree.

In his 2009 article, Hicks, relying on the insight of the Russian scholar Margolit, suggests that the male voice appearing in the sequence just before the shooting starts, sings a Kaddish, a Hebrew mourning prayer.⁷² Indeed, Margolit confirmed this fact to me in one of the interviews I conducted with him.⁷³ Attributing great significance to the aural component, Hicks proposes that the film thus challenges the cinematic convention of undifferentiated Soviet martyrdom.⁷⁴ Elaborating on this idea in his 2012 book, the author refrains from clearly identifying this off-screen sound as a Jewish prayer, yet analyses the scene in a similar vein, highlighting its Judaic motifs.⁷⁵ He interprets the close-ups of Fishman’s face, the shots of the clouds and the brief pause in non-diegetic music (which accompanies the majority of the scene) as a depiction of a prayer, referring to the historical fact that

⁷¹ Gershenson, ‘*Les Insoumis*,’ 346.

⁷² Hicks, ‘Confronting the Holocaust,’ 38-39.

⁷³ Evgenii Margolit, e-mail interview, 20 September 2011.

⁷⁴ Hicks, ‘Confronting the Holocaust,’ 38-39.

⁷⁵ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 146-147.

Jews often recited Kaddish before an execution.⁷⁶ A similar reading is then offered in Gershenson's essay.⁷⁷

While the fact that the scene was reconstructed on the original location and based on the witness accounts of the Babii Iar massacre⁷⁸ indeed makes it unique in Stalinist (Holocaust) cinema, it is important to acknowledge that formally the film conveys a different idea to the one expressed by the scholars above. First of all, in analysing the editing, we can observe that the first part of the scene is comprised predominantly of high-angle shots, looking down *at* the victims from the top of the ravine, and that there are no reverse low-angle shots, thus denying the perspective of the Jews. Secondly, the images of the clouds that Hicks interprets as 'an attempt to recreate the point of view of victims'⁷⁹ are presented from an impersonal perspective: the shots of the sky appear in the sequence four times, and while one editing combination links the close-up of Fishman's face to the shot of the clouds, the three other combinations, which differ each time, do not allow attributing this image to a specific point of view. Therefore it is possible to argue that these symbolic shots convey the general turmoil and enhance the overall emotional tension of the scene rather than recreate the visual perspective of the victims.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 146.

⁷⁷ Gershenson, 'Les Insoumis,' 347.

⁷⁸ Boris Monastyrskii, 'Takoe ne proshchaiut,' in *Ekran 1968-1969*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970), 41.

⁷⁹ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 146.



Fig. 5.2: Four different editing combinations imply an impersonal perspective.

A closer analysis of the soundtrack similarly offers a new understanding of (the lack of) Jewish agency. The brief sequence of diegetic speech in the scene, identified by Margolit and Hicks as a Jewish prayer, is in fact a series of commands

shouted by the Nazis. A more attentive listening enables us to hear that the diegetic sound consists of two clear phrases – *Erster Zug nach rechts* (first line to the right) and *Zweiter Zug links rüber* (second line to the left) – spoken by one voice, and then repeated by another at a distance.⁸⁰ Therefore the diegetic sound in the scene does not affirm the religious identity of the Jewish victims, but in fact depicts the firing squad aligning before an execution. While Gershenson identifies the sound correctly, she does not emphasise the importance of this fact or problematise the existing scholarly understanding of the scene.⁸¹

As I have sought to demonstrate, a close analysis of sound and editing complicates the readings of the scene not only as a representation of Jewish religious identity but also of Jewish agency. A more nuanced textual reading teases out the ambiguity of portrayal of the Holocaust in *The Unvanquished*, demonstrating that the film simultaneously challenges and falls within the dominant representational strategies of Soviet wartime cinema.

The Jewish narrative line disappears from the film shortly after the death of Fishman, the key Jewish character, in the massacre. The Russian chauvinistic rhetoric, whose growing prevalence in the extra-cinematic sphere is echoed in such scenes where the *Ukrainian* Taras teaches his grandchildren about the stoicism of their *Russian* spirit,⁸² colours the film's conclusion concerning Fishman's granddaughter. Having avoided death in the massacre by hiding in Taras' house, the little girl falls into the hands of the perpetrators during the raid on the house. Following the emotionally powerful scene of the girl's capture, the film offers a rather conventional happy ending: the girl is rescued by the Ukrainian collaborator Vasilek, who turns out

⁸⁰ I am grateful to Steve Browell and Barbara Plotz for helping me identify the sound in the scene.

⁸¹ Gershenson, '*Les Insoumis*,' 347.

⁸² Baraban, '*Semeinyi krug*,' 12-13.

to be a partisan, working under cover. In thus departing from the original literary source, where it is implied the girl perishes at the hands of the Nazis, the film employs the Jewish storyline to highlight the courageous nature of the Slavic characters and to further eschew the subject of collaboration.

Scholars offer different understandings of this narrative line. While Gershenson,⁸³ echoing Margolit's⁸⁴ original observation, comments on the hopeful symbolism of the girl's doll and, applying Christian iconography to the Holocaust narrative, calls the child 'a little Madonna', Hicks⁸⁵ sees her as a precursor of the character of Anne Frank, and Baraban⁸⁶ reads the happy ending as an anti-Semitic utilitarian appropriation of the Jewish narrative. However, the girl's function in the film can be illuminated when read in relation to the trope of child victimhood in (Soviet) cinema. Karen Lury⁸⁷ argues that the figure of a child in danger or pain is generally perceived as a 'perfect victim' for its capacity to trigger the strongest emotional response from both the viewer and other characters; as such it acts to justify the goodness of the positive characters and the evil of the negative ones. Moreover, speaking about cinematic representations of Jewish children, Omer Bartov⁸⁸ observes that these characters often possess a redeeming power within the narrative. Thus, we can see how the assault on, and the salvation of, the Jewish girl in *The Unvanquished* realises such a function: it simultaneously highlights the bestiality of the Nazi regime and redeems the Ukrainian characters – Taras, who failed to save the doctor; Vasilek, who regains respect from the other characters, and the viewers, for saving the child.

Although brief, the story of the child is significant as it establishes two important

⁸³ Gershenson, 'Les Insoumis,' 348.

⁸⁴ Margolit, 'Nevedomomu bogu,' 94.

⁸⁵ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 140.

⁸⁶ Baraban, 'Semeinyi krug,' 19.

⁸⁷ Karen Lury, *The Child in Film* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010), 107.

⁸⁸ Omer Bartov, *The 'Jew' in Cinema: From The Golem to Don't Touch my Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 112.

representational tropes – the suffering Jewish child, and gentiles hiding the Jews – which subsequently recur and will be examined in the following chapters. Moreover, the character of Fishman’s granddaughter becomes the first figure of a Holocaust survivor to appear in Soviet cinema.

Since both Hicks and Gershenson present a detailed study of film’s national and international reception,⁸⁹ where they clearly establish that the Jewish theme was tellingly ignored by the film’s reviewers, I will limit myself to observing that, despite a successful box-office release (on 15 October 1945) and a positive critical reception, *The Unvanquished* was withdrawn from circulation just 14 days later, on the 29th of the same month. Such a short-lived fate, as well as the film’s troubled internal reception by industry officials and peers,⁹⁰ once again illustrates the unease towards the Jewish subject in both the cinematic and the wider social contexts. Despite the initial release, the film was soon pushed into oblivion. The rapidly changing national and international post-war climate – which saw the beginning of the Cold War as well as the execution of the actor Veniamin Zuskun by the Soviet state in 1952 during the wave of late Stalinist terror – led to the forgetting of *The Unvanquished* in the Soviet Union and consequently elsewhere in the world. As the last wartime film figuring the annihilation of the Jews, its disappearance becomes symbolic of the wider vanishing of post-war Stalinist Holocaust cinema in general.

Section Three: the Erasure of the Holocaust in the Post-War Stalinist Period

It is generally understood that, with the end of WWII and the beginning of the Cold War, the myths of the Great Russian defeat of Nazi Germany constituted the official

⁸⁹ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 151-156; Gershenson, ‘*Les Insoumis*,’ 360-364.

⁹⁰ Hicks, *ibid.*; Gershenson, *ibid.*

memory of the recent event. Stalin's rapidly growing cult of personality and the Russian chauvinistic rhetoric, the founding aspects of the war myth, were propagated in all social and cultural spheres, shaping the history of the war so as to eliminate any narratives challenging the official paradigm. Since the Great Patriotic War was the first event in Soviet history to be connected solely to the Stalinist regime (as opposed to the 1917 Revolution under Lenin's leadership), it became the prism through which the government re-wrote the past and shaped the current Soviet history. Analysing the role of Stalinist historical films of the 1930s, Evgenii Dobrenko explains that the concept of history in general was employed as a socio-cultural anaesthetic to numb the pain in the present; referring to the insight of Russian art historian Mikhail Allenov, he adds that historical events were interpreted 'to one's credit and justification', making the 'falsification of history [...] a function of its apologetics'.⁹¹ This understanding is indeed relevant to the way in which recent history became an impetus for purging the Soviet past as well as its present in the immediate post-war period. Resonant with Henry Rousso's observation, within the French post-war context, that a purge is an inevitable consequence of a war,⁹² the late Stalinist period witnessed a wave of terror that removed undesirable aspects of the recent past on both a concrete level, through arrests and executions, and on a socio-cultural level, through omission from history texts, literature and cinema.

The official rhetoric of Russian heroism, most famously initiated by Stalin's victory toast on 24 May 1945, where the leader singled out the Russian people as the most loyal and stoic,⁹³ left no room in the Soviet annals for any other (ideologically ambiguous) narratives of heroism and victimhood, such as the plight of POWs and

⁹¹ Evgenii Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 19.

⁹² Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 20.

⁹³ Weiner, *Making Sense of the War*, 208.

indeed of Soviet Jews.⁹⁴ Moreover, historians generally observe that the creation of Israel (14 May 1948) was crucial to the deterioration of the Jews' civil position in the Soviet Union as well as to the silencing of their wartime fates. The marginalisation of the Holocaust from collective memory was not unique to the post-war Soviet Union; after all, as Michael Marrus⁹⁵ observes, the specificity of the Jewish fates during the war was largely ignored worldwide until the pivotal trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Nevertheless, the wave of post-war Stalinist terror led to an unprecedented attempt to suppress Jewish society, history and culture in a period that became known as 'the dark years of Soviet Jewry' (1947-1953).⁹⁶ However, before the government implemented tighter censorship over Jewish topics, as well as over Soviet cinema at large,⁹⁷ two films, a documentary, *The Judgement of Peoples* (Roman Karmen, 1946), and a feature, *Feat of a Spy* (Boris Barnet, 1947), became the last testaments to the wartime Jewish predicament in Stalinist cinema.

In his account of the Soviet audio-visual evidence presented at the Nuremberg Trials (1945-1946), Hicks explains that since these materials were compiled from the wartime documentary footage, their representations of the Nazi atrocities continued to propel the idea of universal Soviet victimhood,⁹⁸ consequently sustaining the (mis)representation of Jewish suffering into the immediate post-war period. The tendency to downplay the specificity of Jewish fates is evident not only in the general stance of the prosecution and in the audio-visual evidence employed *at* the trial, but also in *The Judgement of Peoples*, a documentary film *about* the trial. It is in this film that the images from the *Majdanek* and *Auschwitz* newsreels appear as found footage

⁹⁴ Arlen Blum, *Evreiskii vopros*, 94-95.

⁹⁵ Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 4.

⁹⁶ Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, 144-173. Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 319.

⁹⁷ Blum, *Evreiskii vopros*, 97-115.

⁹⁸ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 189.

for the first time. As such *The Judgement of Peoples* inaugurates a particular textual and thematic trope through which Soviet cinema will attempt to make sense of the war's legacy as well as to render the temporal relation between the past and the present on screen.

The non-linear narrative structure allows *The Judgement of Peoples* to travel between the diegetic present of the courtroom and the archival past of Nazi Germany and wartime atrocities. Establishing a temporal and causal relationship between the events, thematically the film highlights the idea of an inevitable punishment while it formally creates the first instance of what Joshua Hirsch calls 'a documentary flashback.'⁹⁹ Wrongly attributing its original use to *Night and Fog*, Hirsch's case thus testifies to the tendency to forget Soviet cinema in Western Holocaust discourses, an imbalance that Hicks pinpoints and attempts to rectify in his book.

In Section Two of this chapter I have already examined how the use of the voice-over in documentary films exposes telling textual and contextual discrepancies in the films' coverage of the Holocaust. The voiceover in *The Judgement of the Peoples*, written by Boris Gorbатов, follows a similar trajectory. Operating within the same ideological system as the trial, the film eschews explicit depictions of the Holocaust, instead presenting brief references in the image track and the voice-over, which, however, remain dissociated. So, although the image track features archival images of Majdanek's chimney and ovens of the crematorium from the 1944 newsreel, and of the enormous piles of dead bodies and human possessions from *Auschwitz* newsreel, these shots are separated from the voice-over narration which refers to Julius Streicher as 'an incendiary of anti-Semitism and the spiritual father of the executioners at Majdanek'. Such a textual dissociation undermines the emotional and

⁹⁹ Hirsch, *Afterimage*, 49-50.

epistemological impact of the material, presenting instead the images of the camps as examples of universal European suffering while giving no concrete evidence as to the consequences of Nazi anti-Semitic ideology. Moreover, while acknowledging Nazi hatred of Jews, the film emphasises its effect on the Western European population, and so continues the tendency of the late wartime period to alienate the Holocaust from the Soviet context.¹⁰⁰

As the last Stalinist documentary to depict the Holocaust, *The Judgement of the Peoples* can be appreciated for bridging the gap between the latter part of the war and subsequent post-Stalinist years. Propagating the existing official discourses of victimhood and bypassing the fact of the Holocaust on the Soviet territories, it simultaneously employs the newsreel footage of the liberated camps in a new form of a flashback. This formal innovation anticipates the emergence of the theme of memory, as well as of the tendency to re-contextualise the images from *Majdanek* and *Auschwitz*, in the following decades.

In her analysis of *Feat of a Spy*, Denise Youngblood appreciates the film as the first Soviet *film noir* and highlights the way in which it subverts the generic canon of wartime cinema by implying the moral ambiguity of the protagonist.¹⁰¹ However, evaluating this film for the first time in relation to Soviet Holocaust cinema, we can see the importance of *Feat of a Spy* as the only late Stalinist film to mention the persecution of the Soviet Jews and to acknowledge Soviet collaboration. Set in the occupied town of Vinnitsa, Ukraine, it tells the story of a Soviet spy, Aleksei Fedotov, who arrives disguised as a Nazi in order to expose a group of local collaborators. It is from this narrative premise that the film briefly addresses the Holocaust, portraying the joint effort of the Nazis and the local Ukrainians in the persecution of Jews.

¹⁰⁰ This tendency is depicted in Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 153.
¹⁰¹ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 90.

Despite an unconventional acknowledgement of this subject, the film associates the act of Soviet collaboration with the single character of a clerk, Medvedev, who works in Fedotov's cover company and, as in the case of *She Defends the Motherland*, is clearly constructed in negative terms.

The three encounters between Fedotov and Medvedev occur inside the spy's office. The film employs the confined space and the *noir* effect of chiaroscuro lighting to convey the morally dubious nature of the activity, and suggests the collaborator's unpleasant nature through his physical appearance. His face and receding hair are always greasy; he wears a Hitler-like moustache and his buttoned-up shirt, with a bowtie sitting tightly around his neck, code the clerk as a negative and an up-tight character.



Fig. 6: Medvedev's unpleasant appearance highlights his negative deed.

In the first instance, the clerk declares his willingness to collaborate with the new boss and advises the Germans to be as vigilant with other highly dangerous social elements

as they have been with Jews and the Communists. Medvedev then appears in the office twice more, to present Fedotov with a full list of Jews and Communists living in the area and then to denounce a Jewish couple in hiding. We learn towards the end of the film that the collaborator does not escape punishment.

As the last film of the Stalinist period, *Feat of a Spy* encompasses several representational techniques observed in this chapter. Similarly to *She Defends the Motherland*, its acknowledgement of the Jewish persecution simultaneously highlights Soviet collaboration and anti-Semitism. However, while the wartime film, in referring to both the Communists and the Jews, differentiated between the reasons for their persecution, *Feat of a Spy* merges the two victim groups. This trope can therefore be related to the way pre-war anti-fascist films merged the ethnic and the political factors in the narratives of Nazi persecution of Jews. If Barnet's wartime short *A Priceless Head* exhibited a degree of ideological unorthodoxy by picturing the clearly identifiable character of a discriminated Jew, the absence of such a portrayal from his post-war film can be appreciated in relation to the processes of erasure that took place at the wider socio-cultural level.

The Disappearing Memory of the Holocaust

By the time *Feat of a Spy* was released in 1947, to a generally positive critical response, the Soviet government had been undertaking a series of initiatives to suppress the Jewish community and, with it, the memory of the Holocaust. While the publication of Ehrenburg's 1948 novel *The Storm*, depicting the Jewish massacre in Babii Iar, appears to be a unique exception, generally all references to Jewish wartime experiences disappeared from the public sphere by this point. Blum's study

demonstrates how a series of directives from the government not only prevented the publication but also heavily censored and withdrew the existing Jewish-themed works from circulation.¹⁰² Scholars generally agree that the ban of *The Black Book* in 1947 marked the beginning of the dark years for Soviet Jewry, which ended with Stalin's death in 1953.¹⁰³ The following six years saw the dissolution of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee,¹⁰⁴ the murder of Mikhoels and the execution of other prominent members, such as Veniamin Zuskin.¹⁰⁵ Consequently GOSET was closed down and the dissolution of other Jewish theatres, schools and publishing houses took place around the country. The creation of the Israeli state turned Soviet Jews into a diasporic community and, coupled with increasing Cold War hostility, it resulted in Jews being perceived as the fifth column of Western powers within the Soviet Union. The subsequent so-called 'anti-cosmopolitan campaign' aimed at eliminating such 'rootless' elements led to discrimination against Jews in all social spheres, and the following and final governmental project, the Doctors' Plot, which disseminated a myth of Jewish doctors' involvement in the murder of several Party leaders, unleashed a widespread anti-Semitic paranoia. This ended only with the official condemnation of the government's anti-Jewish campaign following Stalin's death in 1953.¹⁰⁶

As one of the key cultural institutions, the film industry was equally affected by, and contributed to the purges. Numerous sources demonstrate that anti-Semitic sentiment was already present there during the war. Film director Mikhail Romm,

¹⁰² Blum, *Evreiskii vopros*, 110-113.

¹⁰³ Al'tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed account of the history of the JAC see Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism: a Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Mikhoels was killed in a staged road accident on 13 January 1948 in Minsk, while Zuskin together with other JAC members was executed in Moscow on 12 August 1952.

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed account see Genadii Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Stalin's Russia* (Moscow: Prometheus Books, 1995), 179-247.

famously addressed this problem in a letter to the head of the Soviet propaganda department, where he spoke out against the growing anti-Semitic attitudes within the industry.¹⁰⁷ While anti-Semitic opinions could not have been publicly expressed during the Soviet war against Nazism, the drastic post-war change in the government's stance enabled open criticism of leading Jewish filmmakers, such as Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Sergei Iutkevich and Leonid Trauberg, as 'miserable tramps of humanity'.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, as Genadii Kostyrchenko's thorough research demonstrates, various Jewish industry personnel were made redundant.¹⁰⁹ While, contrary to Kenez's observation, Jews did not entirely disappear from the late Stalinist cinema,¹¹⁰ no films depicted their wartime experience. As well as the widespread anti-Jewish campaigns, the drastic increase in censorship control contributed to the erasure of the Holocaust from the Soviet screens. The intensification of ideological demands and censorship regulations in the post-war period led to a sharp decline in film production, as very few scripts survived into the production stage.¹¹¹ This extraordinary period in the history of Soviet cinema became known as 'cine-anemia'¹¹² or the 'film famine'.¹¹³ Consequently the few war films produced during these 'dark years', such as *A Return with Victory* (Aleksandr Ivanov, 1947), *Private Aleksandr Matrosov* (Leonid Lukov, 1947), *The Third Blow* (Igor' Savchenko, 1948), *The Young Guard* (Sergei Gerasimov, 1948), *Konstantin Zaslونov* (Aleksandr Faintsimmer, 1949) and *Far Away from Moscow* (Aleksander Stopler, 1950), all

¹⁰⁷ Mikhail Romm, *Kak v kino: ustnye rasskazy* (Moscow: Dekom, 2003), 126-134.

¹⁰⁸ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 89.

¹⁰⁹ Genadii Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2001), 262-264.

¹¹⁰ Kenez, *Soviet Cinema and Society*, 199.

¹¹¹ Babitsky and Rimberg, *Soviet Film Industry*, 107.

¹¹² Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Films* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50.

¹¹³ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 87.

eschewed the subject of the Holocaust, even though some featured ethnically Jewish actors.¹¹⁴

Thus, while there exists a general tendency to focus on the crippling effect of Stalinist censorship on the Soviet cinema, it is clear that only the late Stalinist period experienced truly severe ideological control, causing a drastic decline in film production. The period from 1947 to 1953 presents the first and only instance when all references to Jewish wartime experience disappeared from Soviet films. This period thus stymied a proper understanding of the Holocaust, rendering it an alien concept in both Soviet cinema and the national history of the war.

Conclusion

The period examined in this chapter figures as a starting point for the complex and rich history of Soviet cinematic representations of the Holocaust. As such it is of great significance to the study of both Holocaust cinema and Soviet cinema. Divided into three sections, corresponding to three distinct periods of Stalin's rule, this chapter charts a clear trajectory of depictions of the Holocaust: the representations of Nazi anti-Semitic crimes change from overt in the pre-war period, to oblique during the war, to absent in the last years of Stalin's regime. This series of marked changes in the attitude towards Jewish genocide clearly brings our attention to the link between the ideological climate of a country and how its national cinema interprets a given historical event. Changes in the official standpoint are paralleled by cinematic depictions, which as a whole are incomplete, contradictory and distorted. This is precisely what makes them important to my study, as inconsistency and ambiguity

¹¹⁴ For example, popular Jewish comedy actress Faina Ranevskaja appeared in *Private Aleksandr Matrosov*.

form an essential part of the ideological, thematic and stylistic aspects of the Holocaust representational system that my thesis investigates. Forming under Stalin, the system described in this chapter was to determine Soviet Holocaust cinema in the subsequent decades.

It consists of several important tropes. The anti-fascist films of 1938 depicting the plight of Jews in pre-WWII Germany develop the tendency to merge the political with the ethnic in representations of Nazi bestiality, thus using the story of Jewish suffering for Soviet ideological ends. During the Soviet-German war the lack of official directives on the depiction of mass murder of Jews leads to the formation of a contradictory discourse, comprised of some information acknowledging and some denying the uniqueness of their fates. Cinema is implicated in this discourse through a number of discrepancies, such as the contrast between voice-over and image track in the newsreels and documentaries, and the tension between the ideologically-laden and unorthodox messages of the fiction films. This corpus then accentuates that no single work fits neatly into either a ‘conformist’ or ‘unorthodox’ category. This accentuation underlies the analysis of the films in the following chapters.

In terms of narrative tropes these films present us with the death marches of Soviet Jews, Jews in hiding and the Jewish child victim and offer an array of new visual motifs: the Star of David armband, the chimneys and ovens of the crematoria, striped uniforms, barrack blocks, gas chambers and the figures of the survivors. Almost all of these visual motifs (except the armband) are introduced in the newsreels of the liberated Majdanek and Auschwitz, which also inaugurate filming techniques such as tracking past the barbed wire fences as well as panning and tilting shots of human possessions. The documentary film, *The Judgement of Peoples*, studied in Section Three, already demonstrates how segments of these newsreels

reappear as found footage in the post-war period to inaugurate the formation of the cinematic iconography, which constructs the memory of the Holocaust. It will be the task of the following chapters to trace the usage of these newsreels, analysing the ways in which they become reconfigured ideologically and aesthetically with changing historical contexts.

The rapid harshening of the ideological climate in the late-Stalinist period has led to this corpus being forgotten at home and in the West, and, as Section Three suggests, enabled a misconception that the subject of the Holocaust is alien to Stalinist cinema. Countering this view, the current chapter demonstrates how knowledge and memory of the Holocaust originated under Stalin.

CHAPTER 2: HOLOCAUST CINEMA DURING THE ‘THAW’

The death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 was a turning point in Soviet history, resonating widely in all spheres from the political to the cinematic. Although Stalin’s successor, Nikita Khrushchev, was in power from 1953 to 1964, it was his seminal speech at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956 that initiated a new period of political, social and cultural reforms. Receiving its name from Il’ia Ehrenburg’s 1954 novel, the ‘Thaw’ is generally understood to have been a period of ideological relaxation, not coterminous with Khrushchev’s reign, but ending in 1968 with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Leonid Brezhnev’s government. However, a closer look at scholarly inquest into the ‘Thaw’ demonstrates that this blanket term cannot be applied evenly across the entire 11-year period. While Sergei Kapterev,¹ drawing on Katerina Clark’s² insight, distinguishes three ‘thaws’ occurring under Khrushchev’s leadership, authors like Birgit Beumers,³ Josephine Woll⁴ and Stephen V. Bittner⁵ highlight the uneven nature of the period and suggest that it contained a series of ‘thaws’ and ‘freezes’. Tat’iana Gorjaeva⁶ goes further, proposing that the idea of an ideological relaxation associated with the ‘Thaw’ is in fact a myth. Her study of Soviet censorship demonstrates that there were no concrete directives to ease

¹ The first one occurred with the inauguration of Khrushchev in 1953, the second took place in 1956 and the third in 1961 during the 22nd Party Congress which furthered the process of de-Stalinization such as by the removal of the dictator’s body from the Mausoleum, in Sergei Kapterev, *Post-Stalinist Cinema and the Russian Intelligentsia, 1953-1960: Strategies of Self-Representation, De-Stalinization, and the National Cultural Tradition* (Saarbrücken: VDM Publishing, 2005), 9-10.

² Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

³ Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Library of Congress, 2009), 112.

⁴ Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 64.

⁵ Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory of Moscow’s Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 2.

⁶ Tat’iana Gorjaeva, *Politicheskaja tsenzura v SSSR: 1917-1991* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002), 315.

ideological control; rather it was the project of re-structuring and re-evaluating of state power over Soviet society that created a temporary moment of uncertainty and debate, facilitating new freedom of expression. These processes resonated in the sphere of cinema. While the system of state control underwent re-evaluation, the Soviet leadership also sought new means to increase film production in order to ease the late Stalinist 'film famine'.⁷ Thus, rather than resulting from a straightforward alleviation of censorship, new cinematic narratives and themes began to emerge in the mid-1950s due to wider historical revision, general re-assessment of state control, and developments in the film industry. Accordingly, this chapter examines how factors such as Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation project (including the criticism of the terror campaigns and of the old myth of the Great Patriotic War⁸), the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers, and technical improvements within the Soviet film industry⁹ relate to new trends in the depiction of the Holocaust in the films of 1956-1967.

Considering these contextual factors, the chapter also engages with the theme of memory that emerges in the cinema of the 'Thaw' and is predominantly figured through the recurring device of the flashback (and flash-forward in some cases). In analysing the multi-temporal structure of the films in this chapter, I will draw and elaborate on Maureen Turim's theory of flashbacks, which emphasises their ability to

⁷ Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 115; Louis Harris Cohen, *The Cultural-Political Traditions and Developments of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1972* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 236; Neia Zorkaia, *The Illustrated History of Soviet Cinema* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1989), 195.

⁸ Denise Youngblood notes that as Khrushchev dismantled the cult of Stalin, he simultaneously began to implement a new cult of the Great Patriotic War, in Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Kansas: Kansas University Press, 2007), 108. The cult will reach its apogee in the 1970s and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

⁹ Valerii Golovskoi, *Is There Censorship in the Soviet Union? Methodological Problems of Studying Soviet Censorship* (Washington, DC: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, 1985), 18.

represent subjective memories¹⁰ and in doing so to ‘subjectivise’ history.¹¹ Since the etymology of the word ‘flashback’ emphasises the primacy of the visual experience, Turim’s analysis remains focused predominantly on the film image, albeit giving some attention to the use of voice-over in what she calls ‘auditory flashback’.¹² However, my analysis equally considers the representative role of the soundtrack in its entirety (music, voice and sound effects), comprising a device I will refer to as an *aural* flashback in the films of this period.

The works presented in this chapter also embrace the concept of memory through the recycling of archival images of the war, the use of which Woll appreciates as a recurring feature of the cinema of the ‘Thaw’,¹³ while Turim also envisages found footage as another form of flashback.¹⁴ More specifically, these films construct new layers of filmic memory and further develop the system of Holocaust representation by widely circulating segments from *Majdanek* and *Auschwitz* newsreels, as well as by recreating their mise-en-scène and filming techniques. Referring to Barbie Zelizer’s study of atrocity images and memory, and more specifically to her observation that the recycling of Holocaust photographs grants them an iconic status by removing their original meaning,¹⁵ this chapter explores what kind of memory and knowledge is constructed and communicated through the formation of the iconography and its usage.

Since the theme of memory and the related device of the flashback appear particularly prominent in the cinema of this period, I will use the temporal division of

¹⁰ Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹² Ibid., 123-124.

¹³ Woll, *Real Images*, 197.

¹⁴ Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 246.

¹⁵ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

the present, the past and the future as a structuring element for the chapter. In the corpus studied here, flashbacks, and hence representations of the Holocaust in the diegetic past, are most frequent; they are examined in Section Two. However the chapter also analyses Holocaust representations in the diegetic ‘present’ (in Section One) and in the diegetic ‘future’ (in Section Three). Although films in which the representation of the Holocaust is situated in the diegetic ‘present’, that is to say historic films in which the whole story is set in the past of WWII offer less overt textual explorations of memory, I nevertheless address in these texts the question of point of view and subjectivity (inherent to the concept of memory) by looking at narrative structure and characters’ prominence in the plot. Consequently, all three sections study whose memory and point of view on the history of the Holocaust is privileged in these films. This chapter surveys mainly feature films, but it also offers a reading of a TV mini-series *We Draw Fire on Ourselves* (Sergei Kolosov, 1963-1964) as well as the documentary *Ordinary Fascism* (Mikhail Romm, 1965). The latter together with *The Commissar* (Aleksandr Askol’dov, 1967) form the two case studies of the chapter.

Remembering the Holocaust During the ‘Thaw’: an Overview of the Context

The inconsistent nature of the ‘Thaw’, recognized by some scholars as mentioned above, is evident in the trajectory of acknowledgements, remembrance and representations of the Holocaust in society at large. Resonating in all spheres, from political to literary and cinematic, the question of Jewish wartime suffering receives a contradictory treatment, demonstrating a variety of conflicting viewpoints both within the government and society and in the relation between the two. However, what is

essential is that regardless of these tensions the subject of the Holocaust comes to occupy an unprecedented visible position. The debunking of the myth of Russian victory under Stalin's wise leadership and the rehabilitation of the victims of the post-war (anti-Semitic) terror, following Khrushchev's speech, facilitated a new understanding of recent history and with it the emergence of topics like Jewish suffering and Jewish heroism as well as Soviet anti-Semitism and collaboration. An overview of a series of events allows us to trace the formation of the new Holocaust discourse and highlights its complex and contradictory nature.

First, the trial of Adolph Eichmann, which began in Jerusalem in April 1961, became a pivotal event of international significance exposing the specificity of the Nazi annihilation of the Jews. Secondly, the publication of Evgenii Evtushenko's poem *Babii Iar* (19 September 1961) brought to light the particularity of the Jewish tragedy together with the question of Soviet anti-Semitism within the domestic context.¹⁶ Receiving wide coverage in the national press, both events were met with a mix of public opinion; a fact that testifies to the plurality of viewpoints on the subject of the Holocaust, but most importantly to the possibility of such public expression. Strongly criticised by Khrushchev, who denied Soviet anti-Semitism, Evtushenko's poem inspired Dmitrii Shostakovich's 13th Symphony (1962) and Anatolii Kuznetsov's documentary novel, *Babii Iar* (1966), both of which also came out to both acclaim and condemnation in relation to their handling of the controversial subject.¹⁷ Thirdly, further treatments of the Holocaust in the literary sphere also exemplify the 'thaw' and 'freeze' dynamics of the period. The Soviet system allowed

¹⁶ The poem opens with a phrase 'No monument stands over Babii Iar'; throughout the text the author empathises with the eternal plight of the Jewish people and brings up the problem of the national anti-Semitism, in Evgenii Evtushenko, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Moscow: Profizdat, 2003), 176.

¹⁷ Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948-1967: a Documented Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 74-77; the reception of the poem is discussed in Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, 111-125; and in Woll, *Real Images*, 106-107.

the publication of numerous books on the subject of the Holocaust,¹⁸ but banned Vasili Grossman's now seminal novel *Life and Fate* (written in 1961, published in USSR in 1988), which explicitly depicts Soviet anti-Semitism and the genocide of the Soviet Jews. While the domestic anti-religious (anti-Judaic) campaign of 1960-1964¹⁹ precluded official commemoration of the Holocaust, the Soviet Jewish community began to hold private memorial ceremonies at the massacre sites throughout the country. The clearly anti-Israeli standpoint of the government, expressed at the international level by its support of Arab countries during the Six Day War (1967), did nothing to erase the subject of the Holocaust from the public and the cinematic sphere. The memory of the Holocaust, despite being contested, emerged from the complete silence imposed on it in the late Stalinist era. From then on it was to permeate public and private, official and non-official war discourse until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The New Cinematic Narratives of the War

'The cinema of the Thaw was born out of the Second World War', observes Liudmila Dzhulai.²⁰ She explains that not only its creators came from a young war generation but that the event itself became the key thematic premise of their films.²¹ Testifying to the resonance of Khrushchev's de-mythologising project in the cinematic sphere, the films of this period generally depart from the late Stalinist official interpretations of

¹⁸ In addition to *Babii Iar* (the poem and the novel), the 1960s saw the publication of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1961) and *I Must Tell* (1965), a similar story by a Lithuanian-Jewish girl, Masha Rolnikaite, amongst other works, see Lukasz Hirszowicz, 'The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror,' in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941-1945*, eds. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1993), 48-49.

¹⁹ Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 176.

²⁰ Liudmila Dzhulai, *Dokumental'nyi illiuzion* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 103.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 103-105.

the war by replacing official ‘History’ with personal ‘histories’, to borrow Marc Ferro’s distinction.²² Consequently the narratives shift in emphasis from the military leadership to the efforts of ordinary individuals. Moreover, contributing to the debunking of the Stalinist idea of a Russian victory, the films of this period, as Woll observes,²³ depict Soviet people of all nations and ethnicities in a joint struggle against Nazism. Consequently, we witness the first appearance of a Jewish soldier since *Wait for Me* (Aleksandr Stopler, 1943), in *Soldiers* (Aleksandr Ivanov, 1956), a film that simultaneously exhibits other tendencies of the cinema of the ‘Thaw’, such as the depiction of a personal account of the war and the questioning of the Red Army’s military tactics. Other Jewish soldiers follow in *Fate of a Man* (Sergei Bondarchuk, 1959), *In Difficult Times* (Igor’ Gurin, 1961), *Remember, Kaspar* (Grigorii Nikulin, 1964), *Wild Honey* (Vladimir Chebotarev, 1966) and *Chronicles of a Dive Bomber* (Naum Birman, 1967).

The appearance of these characters and the general shift towards new, personal narratives of the war, as well as being underpinned by the wider process of re-evaluation of the Stalinist past (including WWII), can be attributed to what scholars identify as the determination of a new group of graduates from VGIK²⁴ to depict the war truthfully, according to their personal memories and experiences.²⁵ For example, Louis Harris Cohen considers the works of young filmmakers like Stanislav Rostotskii, Sergei Bondarchuk, Marlen Khutsiev, Latif Faiziev, as well as Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov (who worked jointly), together with the role of the leading VGIK pedagogue, film director Mikhail Romm, in the creation of films that

²² Mark Ferro, *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Green (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 26-28.

²³ Woll, *Real Images*, 63.

²⁴ All-Union State Institute of Cinema, a key film educational establishment in the Soviet Union.

²⁵ Woll, *Real Images*, 63; Cohen, *The Cultural-Political Traditions*, 251.

defined the new cinema of this period.²⁶ Significantly, all of these filmmakers will re-appear in this thesis as directors of some Holocaust films of the ‘Thaw’ and ‘Stagnation’ periods.

If the personal experiences and convictions of the filmmakers endowed the films’ narratives with verisimilitude, the technical improvements of the film industry, sanctioned by the government’s sixth Five-Year Plan,²⁷ resulted in a new formal sophistication, which enhanced the films’ aesthetic quality. In particular, the use of long takes and deep focus enabled more naturalistic depictions in a Bazinian sense,²⁸ while the use of mobile cameras and the improvement of film sound allowed for visually and aurally nuanced renderings of the personal qualities of the narratives, most evident in the use of point-of-view shots.

Thus the period saw the formation of stylistically and thematically new types of Soviet films within the context of the official revision of the Stalinist past and the development of the film industry. The main part of this chapter will position and analyse the emergence of Holocaust films in relation to these defining factors of the cinema of the ‘Thaw’.

Section One: the Holocaust in the ‘Present’

By the early 1940s, the subgenre of resistance films had emerged as one of the key means to portray, and hence to inspire, the struggle with the invaders. While these works bore a specific propagandistic purpose, films like *The Unvanquished* and *She Defends the Motherland* managed to inscribe the ideologically deviant narratives of the Holocaust (as in the former) as well as of Soviet anti-Semitism and collaboration

²⁶ Cohen, *The Cultural-Political Traditions*, 257.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 23-40.

(as in the latter). As observed earlier saw, the late Stalinist period saw a complete erasure of these subjects from resistance films as well as from the Soviet cinema at large. Yet things changed once more with the advent of the ‘Thaw’, during which some resistance films were made again, enabling references to the Holocaust to appear, as it were, in the ‘present’ of the diegesis.

The little-known film *The Partisan Spark* (Aleksei Masliukov, 1957) and the popular TV mini-series *We Draw Fire on Ourselves* (four episodes, broadcast on 18 February 1965) while sharing some narrative conventions with the films of the late Stalinist period – for example, *The Young Guard* (Sergei Gerasimov, 1948) and *Konstantin Zaslavov* (Aleksandr Faintsimmer, 1949) – testify to shifts in the official memory of the war, as they both depict the persecution of Soviet Jews. In addition, *We Draw Fire on Ourselves* features a character who is an anti-Semitic collaborator. Thus the otherwise conventional narrative of *The Partisan Spark* briefly acknowledges the Holocaust through the trope – inaugurated in *The Unvanquished* – of Slav characters hiding Jewish children. The brief scene, which has no impact on the rest of the story, features two members of the Ukrainian resistance who bring a couple of young orphans to their mother’s home. At first refusing to shelter them, the woman changes her mind when told that these children managed to escape death in a ravine. While the children are never explicitly identified as Jewish, the way the protagonists refer to their persecution and attempted murder (‘*they* are being killed and buried en masse’) implies their Jewish origin and differs drastically from the experience of the Slav characters in the film. This signals the film’s covert attempt to confront the Jewish genocide in the Soviet territories.

The trope of Jews in hiding receives a more pronounced treatment in *We Draw Fire on Ourselves*. In her brief and highly negative account of the TV mini-series,

Denise Youngblood overlooks the way in which the sub-narrative line of a local collaborator's attempt to expose a Jewish woman in hiding marks this work's radical departure from the conventions of late Stalinist resistance films.²⁹ Based on an eponymous story by Ovidii Gorchakov, *We Draw Fire on Ourselves* depicts the Nazi occupation of Ukraine through the story of a local resistance fighter, Anna Morozova (played by the popular actress Liudmila Kasatkina, the director's wife).

The Holocaust narrative enters the first episode, with the appearance of a Jewish woman called Zhenia in Anna's house, where she is introduced as an escapee from the Smolensk ghetto. Thus without any overt pronouncement, the film clearly establishes her ethnic identity while also underpinning the particularity of Jewish fates in the occupied territories. Later in the same episode, a local collaborator, Terekh, pays a visit to Anna's home and, upon seeing a new tenant, enquires about her ethnic origin. His questioning of the dark-haired, dark-eyed woman affirms Terekh's racist viewpoint and indicates a stereotypical perception of Jews both during the war and arguably into the 1960s, the time of the making of the series. The episode then draws a parallel between Terekh's anti-Semitic beliefs and his actions when he casually, yet also eagerly, mentions his direct involvement in the murder of the local Jews.

Confronting the ideologically complex subjects of collaboration and Jewish genocide in the first episode, *We Draw Fire on Ourselves* then loses this narrative thread, as Terekh's anti-Semitic crimes are never mentioned again and Zhenia disappears from the series rather abruptly. Later (in episode two), we learn from a conversation between Anna and another character that Zhenia, because of her particularly endangered position, was taken into hiding by a local partisan division. Rather than being a blind spot in this work, the uneven treatment of the Holocaust can

²⁹ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 139.

be read as symptomatic of the wider contextual tension between official and unorthodox discourses, while the TV series itself can be appreciated as the first overt engagement in a popular audio-visual text with the ideologically ambiguous subjects of the Jewish genocide and of Soviet collaboration.

The impossibility of placing a Jewish story at the heart of the narrative and therefore of offering a Jewish viewpoint on the Holocaust, which characterises the approach to this subject in both *The Partisan Spark* and *We Draw Fire on Ourselves*, is also evident in *Eastern Corridor* (Valentin Vinogradov, 1966), a resistance drama set in wartime Minsk. However, while the story of Jewish persecution and annihilation is treated as secondary and irrelevant to the main narrative of a Belorussian resistance group, the film features a highly stylised, aurally and visually complex reconstruction of the annihilation of the Minsk ghetto. The stylistic and narrative complexity (if not unintelligibility) of the entire film led to it being a complete fiasco with critics and viewers at the time, and *Eastern Corridor* remained largely forgotten until recently. To obtain some information on the history of the film, unavailable in scholarly and popular film literature at the time of researching the current chapter, I conducted an interview with film historian and curator Aleksandr Shpagin,³⁰ who reintroduced *Eastern Corridor* into the festival circuit in the late 1990s. He offered some insight into the film's production and reception, explaining that the unconventional approach to the portrayal of the Minsk resistance immediately struck a problematic cord with the industry officials at the early stages of production. However, the film was completed partly thanks to the efforts of its scriptwriter, Ales' Kuchar, who was favoured by the authorities, as well as of renowned filmmaker, Mikhail Romm, a former teacher of Valentin Vinogradov at VGIK.

³⁰ Aleksandr Shpagin, e-mail interview, 25 January 2011.

Despite these efforts, the film's destiny upon its completion was rather short-lived. It was screened at the 7th film festival of Baltic, Belorussian and Moldavian films in 1967, and was immediately taken out of competition for being 'anti-artistic' and 'incomprehensible'. The complexity of the film is also reaffirmed in a letter from a film-goer, published in *Iskusstvo Kino*, where he asks the film journal to explain the meaning of the film and also recounts how most of the viewers left the auditorium during the screening.³¹ Though *Eastern Corridor* was never officially banned, it was largely forgotten until the late 1990s. Rediscovered by Shpagin,³² it was screened at several Russian film festivals, such as Kinotavr in 1996 and 1999, and later at festivals in Hungary (2000) and Italy (2004). More recently, it featured in an episode of film critic's Sergei Kuznetsov's online video journal, *Mertsaiushchii Evrei*,³³ and was the subject of two articles by Aleksandr Fedorov and Olga Gershenson in 2011.³⁴ While Fedorov examines the way the film departs from genre conventions, and Gershenson focuses on Vinogradov's career and the history of the film, I am interested principally in the scene rendering the annihilation of the ghetto and the way the Jewish narrative line is made secondary in the film.

Eastern Corridor is indeed a challenging viewing experience. It translates the sense of confusion, fear and distrust that permeated the years of the occupation through its aesthetic and narrative qualities: the chiaroscuro lighting often obscures the setting as well as the faces of the characters, there are many disorientating camera

³¹ *Iskusstvo Kino* 6 (1968): 27.

³² Shpagin saw the film while compiling a volume on the cinema of the 1960s, Shpagin, e-mail interview, 25 January 2011.

³³ Sergei Kuznetsov, *Mertsaiushchii Evrei*, 26 November 2010, accessed 30 October 2013 <http://booknik.ru/video/channels/winkjew/mertsaiushchii-evrei-8-vostochnyyi-koridor-mistika-holokosta/>.

³⁴ Aleksandr Fedorov, 'Strukturnii analiz mediateksta: stereotip sovetskogo kinematograficheskogo obraza voyny i film V. Vinogradova "Vostochnyi Koridor",' *Voprosy kul'turologii* 6, 2011. Accessed 23 November 2013 <http://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/art/kino/2107/>; Olga Gershenson, 'Neizvestnyi Vinogradov,' *Iskusstvo Kino* 7 (2011): 137-144.

movements and angles, and the lack of establishing shots complicates the identification of locations. Moreover, the search for the traitor amongst the resistance fighters, supposedly the key event in the film's plot, remains unresolved. The fact of unique Jewish suffering is acknowledged through a narrative sub-line in which resistance fighters attempt to rescue a German-Jewish scientist and his daughter from the Minsk ghetto. However, the scene of the mass murder in the ghetto itself appears as completely unrelated to either the main or the secondary narratives lines in the film.

Benefiting from new technical capacities at the Soviet film studios (Belarus' film in this case), the film offers a highly stylized and technically complex staging of the annihilation of the Minsk ghetto, which departs from a historically accurate depiction, instead staging an abstract and symbolic scene of mass drowning. Set at night, the scene opens with a bird's-eye view shot of turbulent waters, accompanied by the sound of water and human screams. As the camera pans right to reveal a mass of people being pushed into the water, a male voice is heard on the soundtrack, singing a prayer in Hebrew. The use of an off-screen voice, reciting a prayer, in Hebrew, clearly establishes the religious and therefore the ethnic origin of the victims. The camera then cranes upwards into a wide establishing shot to reveal a multi-layered composition. The chiaroscuro lighting picks out a group of people in white shawls standing in the middle of the water, and, in a less clear manner, another group in the background, surrounded by a line of guards holding up torches. When this group reappears a few shots later in medium-close up, they can be clearly identified as orthodox male Jews wearing the traditional prayer shawls (*tallit*). This religious garment acts as another unequivocal marker of the victims' identity. Several shots later, the camera captures a naked woman who emerges out of this group, passionately throws her hands up and addresses God in Yiddish. The use of sound,

this time Yiddish language, once again firmly establishes the Jewish origin of the victims. The scene ends somewhat abruptly, when the film first cuts to a shot of the Jewish scientist and his daughter being driven (presumably) to the place of execution and then suddenly introduces them in a new scene in a different location.

Analysing such an aesthetically unorthodox manner of representation of the Jewish genocide, Kuznetsov sees these creative choices as the director's comment on the mystical and unfathomable nature of the Holocaust.³⁵ Vinogradov's own viewpoint, discussed in Gershenson's text,³⁶ equally highlights the moral limitations of his creative decision to refrain from a historically accurate, graphically brutal reconstruction. While both of these views resonate with the extant strand of scholarship on the unrepresentability of the Holocaust, I believe that when analysing the scene of annihilation in *Eastern Corridor* it is essential not to separate it from the rest of the film. Once contextualised within the overall style of the film, it transpires that it is not only this scene, but also the principal story of Minsk resistance that is depicted through symbolic and surrealist forms. Consequently, it becomes impossible to argue that the departure from verisimilitude can be read as a specific comment on the nature of Holocaust representation only, for this scene is but a small part of a larger stylistically unorthodox and challenging approach to the entire narrative of the war.

The Third Half (Evgenii Karelov, 1962), another film depicting the Holocaust in the diegetic present of a narrative set in the past, produces, by contrast to the audacious staging in *Eastern Corridor*, only brief references to the persecution and annihilation of Jews – which, nevertheless, suggest the particularity of their fates. Based on the true story of a football match between the occupiers and Soviet POWs –

³⁵ Kuznetsov, *Mertsaiushchii Evrei*.

³⁶ Gershenson, 'Neizvestnyi Vinogradov,' 139.

former members of the leading Ukrainian football team Dynamo – this little-known film depicts a public attack on an anonymous young woman who is suspected of being Jewish, and, in another scene, a local collaborator living in an apartment that used to belong to a Jewish family. Considering the film is set in Kiev in 1942, it is possible to read the Jewish absence from the flat as a consequence of anti-Semitic, genocidal practices, such as the Babii Iar massacre, while the portrayal of the collaborator together with the anti-Semitic crowd presents another example of mainstream cinema confronting these ideologically complex topics.

While *Peace to Him Who Enters* (Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov, 1961) equally embodies the tendency of the films in this group to marginalise Jewish characters from the main narratives of the Slavic war effort, it stands out as the first Soviet fiction film to depict a Jewish death camp survivor. Death camp survivors first appeared in *Majdanek* and *Auschwitz* newsreels, but the very fact of their presence, not only in films but also, as David Shneer³⁷ explains, in the Soviet press, posed a challenge to the official narratives of Nazi bestiality. Consequently the stories of their survival, together with those of POWs and invalids, were marginalised in the public discourse of the late Stalinist regime. In this light, the appearance of a Holocaust survivor in *Peace to Him Who Enters* serves as another indicator of a shift in the officially approved remembrance of the war and of cinema's involvement in this process. However, that such a representation remained extremely rare and covert (my research identified only two such examples in the cinema of the 'Thaw') points to a continued unease about the need to differentiate between groups of Nazi victims.

The first representation of such a character in *Peace to Him Who Enters* is so brief and subtle that it is likely to be overlooked by most viewers. Indeed, scholars of

³⁷ David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 179.

this well-known work, such as Woll³⁸ and Youngblood,³⁹ have not commented on this pioneering aspect of the film. Moreover, conducting a narrative rather than a textual analysis, they overlooked the formal significance of the film's prologue, which hints at the subsequent appearance of the Jewish survivor in the main part of the film. As such it corresponds to the process, depicted by Janet Walker, where an opening sequence inaugurates the textual work as well as the themes of an entire film.⁴⁰ Featuring some of the new key stylistic tropes of the period, the prologue creates a non-linear melange of black and white archival and fictional footage accompanied by a voice-over. The sequence figures a series of rapidly cut documentary images depicting various types of military action. These are suddenly interrupted by two fictional shots of people in striped uniforms staring at the camera from behind a barbed wire fence. These fictional reconstructions clearly draw on the iconography of the original footage of the liberated Auschwitz, underlining its seminal role in the formation of cinematic memory of the Holocaust, but they also anticipate the appearance of the survivor in the course of the narrative.



Fig. 7: Recreating the visual motifs of *Auschwitz* (right) in *Peace to Him Who Enters* (left).

³⁸ Woll, *Real Images*, 121-124.

³⁹ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 130-131.

⁴⁰ Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 39.

Indeed, a group of camp survivors appears in the film when the protagonists, three Soviet soldiers transporting a pregnant German woman, attempt to take shelter in some ruins to provide a (relatively) peaceful place for childbirth. At first greeted with eagerness, the soldiers are then asked to leave when the group discovers the German identity of the pregnant woman. As the soldiers depart, a previously unseen character enters the frame and addresses the others in Polish: ‘Shame on you!’ Although his presence in the frame lasts only a few seconds, close viewing permits identification of a Star of David badge on his sleeve. This small yet significant detail on his costume clearly establishes this man as a Jewish survivor of the Final Solution, while his phrase to the camp mates suggests his sympathetic attitude towards German civilians.



Fig.7.1: The first Jewish camp survivor in the cinema of the ‘Thaw’.

The insertion of a forgiving Jewish camp survivor indicates the film’s attempt to understand the relationship between perpetrators and victims and thereby signals its

adoption of a contemporary reflexive stance. While demonstrating the appearance of new ways of thinking about the war, which echo the wider re-evaluative discourse of the 'Thaw', the near-invisibility of the character reminds us of the shadowed existence of this group of victims. The covert manner of portraying a Holocaust survivor recurs in a Soviet-Czech co-production, *May Stars* (Stanislav Rostotskii, 1959), which takes us into the next section of this chapter, devoted to films in which the Holocaust is represented in the past of the diegesis, through flashbacks.

Section Two: the Memory of the Holocaust through Flashbacks

Of the new ways in which the cinema of the 'Thaw' engaged with the theme of memory, most representative are the films studied in this section – *May Stars*, *Fate of a Man*, *Two Years Above an Abyss* (Timofei Levchuk, 1966), *It's Been a Long Time* (Nikolai Figurovskii, 1965), *You Are Not an Orphan* (Shurkhat Abbasov, 1962) and *Ordinary Fascism* (Mikhail Romm, 1965) – which formally recreate the actual process of remembering onscreen via the device of flashback. This technique allows the films to stress the lingering memory of WWII, drawing parallels between the past and the present and offering subjective visions of history, to borrow Turim's insight.⁴¹

May Stars explicitly features the theme of memory and war commemoration. It opens in the 'present' (1959) and then travels back in time, to the immediate post-war period. While the flashback in this film does not represent the memories of a specific character, the temporal leap points to the self-reflexive narrative structure, as it appears to be prompted by the themes of collective memory and commemoration central to the film's prologue. Like *Peace to Him Who Enters*, *May Stars*

⁴¹ Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*.

opens with a collage of archival and feature film footage accompanied by a lyrical voice-over. The prologue inaugurates the theme of official war commemoration through passages depicting war memorials and cemeteries, while the subject of the Holocaust is implied and anticipated through a voice-over reference to the Terezin death camp. At first presented in an isolated landscape as though outside diegetic space and time, the sites of commemoration are then inscribed into the present-day narrative. Pulling out of a low-angle shot of a military monument, the camera reveals a busy park alley, where contemporary life assumes its course. In a symbolic manner the camera then focuses on two children – emblems of the new peaceful life – who ask themselves what is war and when it took place. As though prompted by the children's need to know and hence a collective necessity to remember, the film travels back in time.

The flashback sequence is structured around four novellas depicting encounters between Soviet soldiers and Czech civilians in and around Prague during May 1945. The story of a Holocaust survivor corresponds to one of the novellas. It begins with a group of Soviet soldiers encountering a man in a striped uniform on a rural road. As he explains that he is a survivor from Auschwitz, the soldiers, in a gesture of solidarity, stop a passing truck and ask the driver to get this man to his home in Prague. When the truck departs the camera switches to a new position inside the vehicle; assuming the point of view of the survivor, it inaugurates a new novella.

Once in Prague, the character encounters a woman, who identifies him as Pan Novak. She seems pleasantly surprised by the fact that Novak is alive and inquires about the fate of his wife. The reverse close-up reveals his saddened face as the man says that his wife was sent to the Terezin death camp. When Novak arrives at his house the neighbours also greet him with a mixture of surprise and relief, exclaiming

that they did not expect to see him alive. While this film, unlike *Peace to Him Who Enters*, does not identify the survivor as Jewish through a Star of David on his clothes, it nevertheless presents several covert clues as to his ethnicity. Firstly, it associates Novak with two notorious Holocaust death camps – Terezin and Auschwitz, and secondly, it clearly highlights his difference from the rest of the civilians in Prague through their surprise at his return.

Identifying Novak as Jewish, on the one hand, makes it possible to argue for a Jewish perspective in the film. His point of view and story line are key to the novella. However, on the other hand, the story of survival is presented covertly and as such is overshadowed by the pro-Soviet and Slavic pathos of the film overall. The idea of Soviet heroism and Slavic solidarity is what binds the four novellas. Consequently, as the theme of commemoration and memory is central to the film so the work itself acts as a cinematic monument to the heroic action of the Soviet army rather than to the tragic fate of European Jews.

The cinema of the ‘Thaw’ also addresses another controversial subject – the survival of POWs – in *Fate of a Man*, the story of a Russian soldier, Andrei Sokolov. This work presents a compelling example of cinema’s complex and ambiguous relationship to the official discourse of its time. It at once challenges and conforms to the existing norms of depicting the war and Jewish suffering; it also underlines a wider shift in the popular memory of the Soviet struggle with Nazism and, perhaps paradoxically, exemplifies the ability of a popular, state-approved film to openly engage with the subject of the Holocaust.

Fate of a Man features the annihilation of both Soviet and European Jews, the latter being represented via a pioneering reconstruction of the murderous industry in a death camp. The film was a huge success at the time with audiences, critics and

Soviet officials alike. It was repeatedly praised by the Soviet Minister of Culture, Ekaterina Furtseva, who set it as an example for other Soviet filmmakers,⁴² as well as by Khrushchev himself during various speeches at home and abroad.⁴³ Since then *Fate of a Man* has been generally appreciated by scholars in Russia and the West as a landmark in the cinema of the ‘Thaw’. While Woll examines the film in relation to its original literary source,⁴⁴ both Youngblood and John Haynes analyse its representation of the Soviet male hero,⁴⁵ and Elena Baraban conducts a reading through trauma theory.⁴⁶ Evaluations of the film in the context of Holocaust cinema, such as those by Neia Zorkaia⁴⁷ and Miron Chernenko,⁴⁸ remain however extremely sparse and brief. Therefore, I would like to offer a detailed textual and narrative analysis, specifically recognizing *Fate of a Man* as a Holocaust film.

Fate of a Man is adapted from an eponymous 1946 story by Mikhail Sholokhov, which was not allowed into publication until 1956 precisely because of its depiction of the POWs. Representing a series of reminiscences by its protagonist, Sokolov, the film, like the novel, is comprised of several long flashbacks illustrating his trajectory from pre-war peace to his wartime ordeals. The narrative opens in the post-war period when Sokolov and his companion, an orphaned boy, encounter a man by a desolate riverbank. While waiting together for a ferry, Sokolov recounts his life experience. By employing a conventional flashback, initiated by the character’s act of narration, the film then travels back in time through a dissolve accompanied by a

⁴² Cohen, *The Cultural-Political Traditions*, 275.

⁴³ Ibid., 283.

⁴⁴ Woll, *Real Images*, 88-91.

⁴⁵ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 121-123; John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 157-8.

⁴⁶ Elena Baraban, ‘Voina v kino: odinochestvo travmy na fone kollektiva,’ in *Travma: punkty*, Sergei Ushakin and Elena Trubina, eds. (Moscow: NLO, 2009), 635-657.

⁴⁷ Neia Zorkaia, *Istoriia sovetskogo kino* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2005), 330.

⁴⁸ Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda, zheltaia zvezda* (Vinnitsa: Globus Press, 2001), 206.

voice-over.⁴⁹ It is within the principal long flashback dedicated to Sokolov's wartime activities, that the film introduces four depictions of the Holocaust.

The first depiction dedicated to the persecution of Soviet Jews offers a conventional treatment of Jewish victimhood, portraying how the perpetrators select and execute not only Jews, but also Communists and commissars. While Chernenko accounts for one Jewish victim in this scene,⁵⁰ more attentive viewing establishes that the Nazis in fact select two men on the suspicion that they are Jewish. While one of the selected 'Jewish' men contradicts the Nazis, saying: 'I am Russian', the other one, saying instead 'I am a doctor', thereby confirms the Nazis' suspicions to the viewer.

Indeed, his Jewish ethnicity can be identified by relying on two established representational conventions: his medical profession (as in *The Unvanquished*) and the round glasses; this particular prop figures as a signifier of a character's Jewish origin in several films of the period, such as *Soldiers* and *Remember, Kaspar*, and as such can be considered a recognisable marker of the victim's ethnicity.⁵¹

If the first scene denies individuality in death to the Soviet Jew(s) who perish together with the non-Jewish victims, the second one, set in a Nazi camp, clearly sets apart the POWs from the European Jews. Absent from the original literary source, the scene can be appreciated as a pioneering contribution of the filmmakers to the history of Holocaust representations, as *Fate of a Man* becomes the first Soviet film to reconstruct in detail the industrial process of murder. The scene opens with a trainload of people arriving at the camp to the cheerful accompaniment of *Oh, Donna Clara*, a popular 1930s tango, performed by a diegetic orchestra. The majority of the people to

⁴⁹ Turim depicts these as key conventional devices to signal a temporal shift in Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 15-16.

⁵⁰ Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 206.

⁵¹ The conventional association between Jewish characters and round glasses was also mentioned to me by Russian film scholar, Evgenii Margolit, during my interview with him in Moscow, 15 April 2010.

disembark from the train are not POWs but smartly dressed, French-speaking civilians of all ages. The following section of the scene then reveals the specificity of their treatment as well as their Jewish origin through shot composition, editing, movement within the frame and the soundtrack. The chaos of the selection process is portrayed through shots of the Jewish families being torn apart, which are intercut with medium close-ups of Sokolov looking at the action, from which he is physically separated by a barbed wire fence.



Fig. 8: A Russian POW observes the suffering of European Jews.

As well as stressing the differences in their fates, such editing and frame composition accentuates Sokolov's perspective on the action. Up to this point the Jewish identity of the European victims was only implied, but now the loudspeaker announcement in the following shot clearly distinguishes between the Soviet prisoners and 'the people of Jewish ethnicity' by giving them different instructions. The scene continues to stress the theme of difference through a sharp visual contrast between the two groups of inmates: a line of Soviet soldiers moving into the off-screen left in the foreground

of the frame, and Jewish civilians in the middle of the frame, separated from the rest by a barbed wire fence, who move in the opposite direction. They walk upwards into the deeper background of the shot, which features a tall smoking chimney. As well as being a pioneering reconstruction, this scene in particular underlines the development of Holocaust iconography in Soviet cinema, modelled on the *mise-en-scène*, camera movement and visual motifs of the *Majdanek* and *Auschwitz* newsreels. Showing a sign reading *Bad-Desinfektion*, which was introduced in *Majdanek*, this scene also echoes the *mise-en-scène* and camera angles of a sequence depicting the liberated children in *Auschwitz*.



Fig. 8.1: A documentary-like reconstruction suggests the difference between European Jews and Soviet POWs.

The documentary nature of the reconstruction is also evident in the way the film refrains from reproducing and imagining the annihilation process beyond the evocative images of a line of people disappearing in a building with a tall smoking chimney. The film thus treats the smoking chimney at once as a historically accurate detail and as a symbol of the incessant mass-scale annihilation process.

The evocative power of the smoking chimney is employed in the third scene rendering the Holocaust. The least overt of all four representations, it depicts Sokolov's march to his possible execution while the chimney appears in the background. In a more conventional manner this scene aligns the fate of the Jews and the POWs: it suggests the on-going annihilation of the Jews via a thematic and textual association with the earlier scene, while acting as a foreboder of Sokolov's own, possibly tragic fate. The chimney becomes central to the scene through mise-en-scène, with an establishing shot featuring the large chimney in the background and Sokolov's small silhouette in the foreground and via editing: his walk is intercut with long tracking shots focusing on the chimney in medium shot.



Fig. 8.2: The chimney depicts the incessant work of the crematoria and acts as a foreboder of Sokolov's fate.

While all four depictions of the Holocaust occur within the longer flashback, the final occurrence is itself a recollection of an earlier scene of selection in the camp, and as such figures as a flashback-within-a-flashback or an 'embedded flashback'⁵² in the film. Being presented as 'involuntary' and abrupt, this feature can be understood as what Turim identifies as a modernist flashback, used according to her to render

⁵² Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 16.

memories of a traumatic nature such as those of the Holocaust.⁵³ Considering that, as we will see, the memory of the past is evoked in this scene through purely aural means, we can term the device a modernist *aural* flashback. The use of sound in this scene was indeed praised by the film's contemporaries,⁵⁴ and yet it has not been previously read as a sonic representation of the memory of the Holocaust.

When Sokolov returns home to discover that his entire family perished during an air raid, he decides to drown his sorrow in alcohol with his neighbour. In an attempt to cheer him up, the old man puts on a record brought back from the front by his nephew. As Sokolov sits at the table resting his head in his arms, the same melody of *Oh, Donna Clara* enters the soundtrack to trigger the appearance of an aural flashback. In her analysis of *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, France, 1959), Lynn Higgins, drawing on Turim's insight, observes that the traumatic memory of the French woman in a café scene seems to be prompted by her act of drinking, as though the act itself initiated the flashback in the film.⁵⁵ The same applies to the role of the record in *Fate of a Man* and most importantly to the music it transmits, as it is the act of involuntary listening that initiates the return of Sokolov's traumatic memory.

The man slowly looks up and as if struggling to recognise the tune begins to rise. Suddenly a subtle non-diegetic sound of cries and crowd commotion, previously heard during the selection scene, begins to inhabit the aural realm of the shot. As though trying to block (the internal and external) sounds Sokolov puts his hands to his ears and stares in the direction of the music. Signalling the subjective nature of the image, the hand-held camera then moves in closer to the record player, as Sokolov approaches the object. The music stops as he takes the record off the turntable;

⁵³ Ibid., 231.

⁵⁴ Lev Trakhtenberg, 'Dramaturgiiia zvuka,' *Iskusstvo Kino* 8 (1968): 101.

⁵⁵ Lynn Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Representation of History in Postwar France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 36.

however, the cacophony of sounds continues to dominate the soundtrack, as though it was the object itself that caused the distressing noise. The aural flashback ends as the tormented protagonist smashes the record on the floor, simultaneously ending the film's exploration of his memory of the Holocaust.

If in *Fate of a Man* the Holocaust is represented from the perspective of a Russian POW, *Two Years Above an Abyss*, the next film under examination here, presents the Babii Iar massacre as a memory belonging to Taras, a Ukrainian collaborator turned resistance fighter. Based on the real story of a Kiev resistance group, which was first published as a documentary short story in the Soviet press in 1963,⁵⁶ the film, commissioned to mark the 50th anniversary of the state security services, received wide national distribution and a positive critical response.⁵⁷ Since then, however, this work has generally been forgotten in both academic and popular culture. Praised for its documentary-like quality at the time, the film was also valued as a commemoration of the Babii Iar tragedy. However, it is essential to note that what were perceived as historical 'facts' about the massacre at the time were heavily influenced by the official commemoration of the event, in which the Jews were only one of many victim groups. Thus a loudspeaker announcement misleadingly summons the Jews, together with the Communists and the commissars of Kiev and its vicinity, to Mel'nik Street on 29 September 1941 (the actual address and date of the beginning of the massacre). The film then renders the event itself twice in the form of two audio-visual collages, comprised of segments from the *Auschwitz* newsreel and *The Unvanquished* as well as of fictional reconstructions of the massacre.

⁵⁶ The eponymous story was written by the journalist Aleksei Evseev based on his interviews with the member of the state security services (Vladimir Drozdov) and published in the newspaper *Nedel'ia*.

⁵⁷ Gosfilmofond archive, Belye Stolby, Russia.

The first flashback sequence opens with a medium shot of Taras at his work desk grasping his head in agony. It is laid over several archival segments from *Auschwitz*, figuring the inmates behind a barbed wire fence as well as the liberated children baring their tattooed arms. The next section of the flashback shows Taras standing at the massacre site, superimposed with a series of fictional shots depicting Nazis shooting women and children. Although the first flashback sequence problematically inscribes the image of the collaborator and represents the atrocity from his perspective, it also highlights his feeling of guilt, figured in the opening shot of the tormented man.



Fig. 9: Fragments from *Auschwitz* represent the memory of the Babii Iar massacre tormenting the Ukrainian character.

Moreover, the ideas of guilt and repentance are further explored in the second flashback, which occurs during Taras' visit to a church, while the traumatic memory of the massacre itself determines his decision to join the resistance. The audio-visual agency of the Ukrainian character can be read through editing and composition, as the close-ups of the character's face, framing the flashback sequence, clearly suggest his point of view. The nightmarish quality of his experience is rendered via the process of visual and aural superimposition as images of the church's icons are layered with the

previously featured scenes of human suffering while the religious chanting is mixed with sounds of gunshots and human cries. Replaying the same images, the sequence also introduces two new shots; they are extracts from *The Unvanquished* that depict the gunning down of the Jews inside the Babii Iar ravine.



Fig. 9.1: Extracts from *The Unvanquished* reused in *Two Years Above an Abyss*.

The two flashback sequences, as well as representing subjective memories of the Ukrainian character within the narrative, also demonstrate the extra-diegetic formation of the cinematic iconography of the Holocaust by drawing on Soviet newsreels and feature films. The use of found footage simultaneously exemplifies a process of displacement and misinterpretation, which the formation of iconography entails. Moreover, by highlighting the audio-visual agency of the Ukrainian character, these sequences testify to the continued impossibility of depicting the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective in the cinema of the ‘Thaw’.

Emphasising the innovative use of sound in the cinema of this period, I identified a particular type of representation – the aural flashback. As experienced by Andrei Sokolov in *Fate of a Man*, the sonic aspect of the traumatic memory also

appears in *Two Years Above an Abyss*. While these two films clearly associate the memory of the Holocaust with the Slav characters, another film in this section – *You Are not an Orphan* – innovatively presents an aural flashback from the perspective of a Jewish boy called Abram.

Themes of child suffering as well as of Soviet multi-ethnic unity, prominent in Soviet cinema, are also central to this film about an Uzbek couple, who adopt children of various nationalities during the war. From the beginning the name Abram typically implies the Jewish ethnicity of the character (played by a Jewish actor, Fima Kaminer) yet the narrative openly articulates his Jewish origin only towards the end, when one of the children speculates that if the Nazis were to reach Uzbekistan the family would have been shot for hiding Abram. The boy justifies his claim about Abram's particularly endangered position by referring to the Nazi hatred of Jews. While the father's response, sustaining the convention of multi-ethnic unity, assures the children that the Germans hate *all* nationalities, we later learn from a conversation between the children that Abram's parents had fallen victim to Nazi anti-Semitic crimes and that Abram had, in fact, witnessed their murder.

These two brief scenes not only clearly establish Abram's particularly tragic fate as a Jew, but also retrospectively give new meaning to a scene at the beginning of the film, where Abram faints while playing at war. The chaotic and intense nature of the game is translated via fast-paced editing, swift camera movement, oblique frames and an upbeat musical score. Once a boy, playing 'a partisan', is cornered in a dark cul-de-sac, the leader of the 'Nazi' group wearing a hand-made uniform and a painted Hitler-like moustache begins the interrogation. Paradoxically, the Nazi is 'played' by Abram, who acts out this part in a very enthusiastic manner screaming out insults and orders to give away the partisans' hiding place. Gradually, the faint voice of a German

man speaking the same phrases as Abram appears on the soundtrack. The soundtrack is then enhanced by sounds of human cries and gunshots. As though hypnotised by the German voice, the Jewish boy begins to faint. Visualising Abram's dizziness, a point-of-view shot of a 'partisan' boy becomes distorted by rapid centrifugal camera motion. Then Abram suddenly falls backwards; as the camera captures his body lying on the ground, the soundtrack resumes a naturalistic diegetic depiction, suggesting the end of Abram's aural flashback. While at this point in the narrative the significance of the scene is not yet clear, the evocative use of sound, editing, framing and camera movement nevertheless imply that Abram underwent some highly distressing experience at the hands of the Nazis. Viewed retrospectively, having learnt about Abram's pre-diegetic experience, this scene can be understood as an aural flashback rendering the murder of the boy's parents.

The film's innovative depiction of a Jewish perspective on the Holocaust and its clear acknowledgement of the Jews' particularly endangered position are interestingly assigned to the children's realm. Without undermining the plausibility of the children's understanding of the Holocaust, the film however counters their viewpoint to that of the adults. As such, the contrast between the children's and the adults' interpretation of Jewish suffering can be appreciated as indicative of the existing tension between official and unofficial versions of the Holocaust.

Themes of childhood and memory also appear in *It's Been a Long Time*. Comprised of a series of flashbacks, this film tells the story of a village schoolteacher from the perspective of a former pupil. Chernenko's brief account of the film claims that the murder of Jews is mentioned in passing,⁵⁸ whereas in fact, the film features a secondary narrative line concerning a couple of Jewish teachers who, together with

⁵⁸ Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 221.

their children, perish in the Holocaust. While at first the couple is not identified as Jewish, this fact is signalled through several recurring representational tropes: their Jewish-sounding surname, Kushel', and the type-casting of Jewish actors, Aleksandr Palees and Etel' Kovenskaia, who both have dark curly hair and dark eyes. Moreover the association with the intellectual sphere of teaching and Kushel's round glasses further strengthen the closeness between these characters and Soviet conventions of Jewish ethnicity. The murder of the Kushel' family is depicted in a separate episode, which thus emphasizes their individuality, and the Nazis announce their Jewish origin before the family appears on screen: one of the soldiers says to another 'We captured some Jews'. The murder itself, however, is not visualised but rather implied by the off-screen sound of gunshots in the following scene.

The plurality of discourses on the Jewish genocide during the 'Thaw' is, as we have seen, evident both in the variety of cinematic renderings and within the films themselves. The film to which I now turn, *Ordinary Fascism*, is a particularly fruitful example of these features, and one that merits a closer look for a number of reasons. Thematically the film explores the history of Nazism and of WWII; weaving together several temporal planes, it offers the director's personal commentary on the grand historical narratives. Formally the film functions via a series of flashbacks; it employs a voice-over narration and incorporates a wide range of archival material – all of which thus typify the key trends of the cinema of the 'Thaw'. As such, it invites analysis in relation to point of view as well as to Holocaust iconography and memory. Moreover, the Jewish origin of the director, Mikhail Romm, and his privileged status in the film industry illustrate a specific type of relation between mainstream ideology, the film industry, a (Jewish) filmmaker and the subject of the Holocaust.

A Case Study: Ordinary Fascism

The compilation documentary film *Ordinary Fascism* explores the psychology of a totalitarian society based on the example of the 3rd Reich. Operating on several temporal planes: the present (the 1960s), WWII, and the interwar period, it consists of 16 segments, referred to in the film as chapters. The segments analyse Hitler's rise to, and fall from, power via a complex formal structure characterised by non-linear narration, dissonant image/sound relationship and contrapuntal editing techniques. All 16 chapters are connected via the director's voice-over, thereby enhancing the authorial perspective and the essay-like quality of the film.

Conceived by the film historians Maiia Turovskaia and Iurii Khaniutin and the director Mikhail Romm, the project required two years of research in the Soviet, Polish and Eastern German film archives as well as some additional filming in Moscow and the former death camps. The selection of 1700 shots (which constituted the final version)⁵⁹ and the development of the narrative were complicated not only by the vastness of these resources but also by the absence of certain types of material, such as footage of the pre-war labour camps or the depictions of the ordinary activities of people in pre-war Nazi Germany. Therefore the filmmakers had to rethink the film's chronological structure and develop instead a non-linear narrative, drawing on Sergei Eisenstein's montage theories.⁶⁰ The project was completed in late 1965, premiering at the Leipzig documentary festival on 13 November, and winning the main award, the Golden Dove. Following a successful reception at the festival,⁶¹ *Ordinary Fascism* received theatrical distribution in the Soviet Union and Eastern

⁵⁹ Mark Zak, *Mikhail Romm i ego fil'my* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), 246.

⁶⁰ Mikhail Romm, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), 320-321.

⁶¹ Maya Turovskaya, 'Some Documents from the Life of a Documentary Film,' *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 2/2 (2008): 155-165.

Germany in 1966. While it was withdrawn from exhibition by 1967, a fact that, according to Turovskaja, pointed to changing ideological currents,⁶² its initial reception was extremely positive.

According to the statistics presented in the 1966 January issue of *Iskusstvo Kino*, 40 million Soviet spectators, an astonishingly high figure for a documentary film, viewed the film and it was named best film of the year by the critics' poll in *Ekran* (1966). Surveying its contemporary as well as subsequent critical and scholarly approaches both in the Soviet Union and elsewhere,⁶³ we can observe that *Ordinary Fascism* is generally appreciated as a distinctly personal account of a vast and complex historical period. Soviet authors such as Viktor Listov and Mark Zak, focusing on the use of archival material, have praised the film's ability to re-contextualise Nazi propaganda footage and to establish a highly personal relationship between the author, the film images and the audiences.⁶⁴ Woll similarly highlights the personal nature of the work, valuing its groundbreaking contribution to the Soviet documentary tradition.⁶⁵ She considers this film within the context of the 'Thaw', while other scholars appreciate it more broadly as a pioneering cinematic portrait of a totalitarian state, which implicitly draws parallels between the Nazi and the Soviet regimes.⁶⁶ Commentators are unanimous in their appreciation of Romm's voice-over,

⁶² Ibid., 161.

⁶³ Domestic commentators: Semen Frelich, 'Dokumental'nyi epos,' in *Sovremennyyi dokumental'nyi fil'm: Kriticheskie zametki. Problemy teorii. Iz sobstvennogo opyta*, Lev Roshal' ed. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970), 122; D. Mikosha, 'Khronikeru stoit doveriat', in *Sovremennyyi dokumental'nyi fil'm*, 64; Iurii Trifonov, 'Obyknovennyi fashizm,' *Novoe Vremia*, January 21, 1966 reprinted in Liubov' Arkus, ed. *Obyknovennyi fashizm* (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2006), 233.

Foreign press: *Monthly Film Bulletin* 33/391 (August 1966): 129; *Films and Filming* 12/10 (July 1966): 54; *Daily Cinema*, 25 January 1967, 6; *Cine Weekly*, 11 February 1967, 15.

⁶⁴ Viktor Listov, *Istoriia smotrit v ob''ektiv* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), 221; Zak, *Mikhail Romm i ego fil'my*, 246.

⁶⁵ Woll, *Real Images*, 192-194.

⁶⁶ Jeremy Hicks, 'Sokurov's Documentaries,' in *The Cinema of Alexander Sokurov*, Birgit Beumers and Nancy Condee, eds. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 13-28; Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 197-201; Wolfgang Beilenhoff and Sabine Hänsen, 'Speaking about Images: the Voice of the Author in *Ordinary Fascism*,' *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 2/2 (2008): 141- 153.

as the key means of establishing a personal perspective on historical events as well as of re-interpreting archival images taken by the perpetrators.

The highly personal nature of the film, enhanced by its essay-like structure, thus begs the question of the director's and to some extent the scriptwriters' identity. The fact that all three, Romm, Turovskaja and Khaniutin are Jewish, leads commentators like Wolfgang Beilenhoff and Sabine Hänsen as well as Chernenko to stress the importance of the Holocaust narrative as well as of the Jewish perspective on the history of Nazism in the film. However, despite acknowledging a hitherto ignored aspect of *Ordinary Fascism*, these two accounts lack a nuanced, critical approach. In the introduction to their article, Beilenhoff and Hänsen elevate the film to the status of 'a most powerful reflection on [...] the holocaust',⁶⁷ a claim that remains unexplained in the body of the text, while Chernenko praises Romm for being the first one to openly speak about the Holocaust without 'omissions', 'euphemisms' and 'abstract phrases'.⁶⁸ At the same time, the majority of Holocaust film scholarship appears to be unaware of *Ordinary Fascism*, as it features in only one publication in the field, Caroline Joan Picart's *The Holocaust Film Sourcebook*.⁶⁹ For these reasons I feel it is necessary to strike a balance between a near absence of readings of the representation of the Holocaust in the film on the one hand, and a tendency to overstate the novelty of the approach to this subject on the other.

Close textual readings are required to analyse how the film treats the Holocaust not only thematically but also formally. In particular, my focus is on the editing and the relationship between sound (voice-over, music) and image in the three chapters of the film featuring the subject of the Holocaust. It is also necessary to

⁶⁷ Beilenhoff and Hänsen, 'Speaking about Images,' 141.

⁶⁸ Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 199 (my translation).

⁶⁹ Caroline Joan Picart, *The Holocaust Film Sourcebook*, vol. 2 (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 122.

combine textual and contextual analysis to account for the ideological and epistemological underpinnings of the film, as well as for Romm's relationship with the film industry authorities. For this, I was fortunate to be able to interview Maia Turovskaja, a source to whom I refer throughout the case study. Overall, my analysis draws on the approach of the French film historian Sylvie Lindeperg – who, in her study of *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, France, 1955), looks into what she calls 'the black box of the film's creation'⁷⁰ (historical factors surrounding the production of the film) – and who I also interviewed.

Walker's understanding of the communicative powers of a film's opening sequence⁷¹ enables me to examine here how the opening chapter of *Ordinary Fascism* inaugurates the formal and thematic means of representing the Holocaust in the entire film. The theme of memory and the relationship between the harrowing past and the peaceful present, common in films that I examine throughout this section, is introduced in the opening sequence of *Ordinary Fascism* via an abrupt insertion of images of wartime atrocities into the present-day footage of Moscow streets. The camera focuses on a mother with a child in her arms standing at a street crossing; suddenly the frame freezes and the image cuts to an archival photograph depicting a German soldier pointing a rifle at a Jewish woman and her child in Ivangorod, Ukraine, 1942.⁷² A loud gunshot is heard on the soundtrack as the camera zooms in on the image, compositionally and thematically matching it to the shot of the woman and her child in present-day Moscow.

⁷⁰ Sylvie Lindeperg 'Night and Fog: Inventing a Perspective,' in *Cinema and the Shoah: an Art Confronts the Tragedy of the Twentieth Century*, Jean-Michel Frodon, ed. Anna Harrison and Tom Mes trans. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 74.

⁷¹ Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 39.

⁷² This particular photograph features in the Holocaust exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Moscow.



Fig.10: An abrupt graphic match draws parallels between the past and the present

Such a disruption of the previous sequence provides a startling effect physically, as well as highlighting the idea that the peaceful present is underpinned by the atrocious past. The abrupt insertion of the Holocaust imagery can again be identified as a ‘modernist flashback’⁷³ or more specifically a ‘traumatic documentary flashback’,⁷⁴ a device that connotes the disturbing nature of the relationship between the past and the present. Inaugurated in the opening sequence, this principle defines the approach to the use of the atrocity footage throughout *Ordinary Fascism*.

After exposing the viewer to the photographs of Nazi wartime atrocities, including those of the Holocaust, the film presents their modern-day remnants through footage of the former death camps, shot by Romm’s camera crew. This section of the film, by combining contemporary black and white shots of Auschwitz with excerpts from wartime newsreel of Majdanek, blurs the distinction between different times and locations and thus creates what Max Silverman and Griselda Pollock refer to as a ‘concentrationary space.’⁷⁵ Drawing on David Rousset’s idea of *l’univers*

⁷³ Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 231.

⁷⁴ Joshua Hirsh, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 49.

⁷⁵ Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, eds. *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais’s Night and Fog* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 8.

concentrationnaire,⁷⁶ they designate by this term a symbolic representational system, which comprises the Nazi concentration and annihilation industry. Continuing the connection with the wartime newsreels, *Ordinary Fascism* recreates some of their filming techniques, such as a tilt up from a close-up of human hair into an establishing shot of a pile, and a pan from a medium to a wide shot of the ovens. In doing so it establishes a textual unity between different periods in Soviet film history and furthers the iconic quality of these visual motifs. Moreover, as well as echoing the formal style of the wartime works, the film approaches the question of the targeted annihilation of Jews from a similar ideological stance; in other words, *Ordinary Fascism* similarly avoids any parallels between the genocide of the Jews and the Nazi camp system. Such an approach then highlights some continuity between the wartime and the ‘Thaw’ discourses on this particular subject, simultaneously registering a contemporary tendency to universalise the ethnic crimes committed in the camps. The Auschwitz museum itself omitted the predominance of the Jewish victims in the camp during the 1960s, as Lindeperg confirmed in my interview with her.⁷⁷

The opening chapter of the film features the Holocaust only implicitly, communicating its latent history to an informed viewer and/or retrospectively. The rest of the film, focusing on Hitler’s personality cult (drawing implicit parallels to the Soviet context) and the absurdity of Nazi propaganda and life style, eschews representations of the Jewish fate in all but two chapters – chapter six entitled ‘The great national theory in practice’ and chapter 14 called ‘Ordinary fascism’. Thus the film demonstrates its uneven and contradictory manner of representing the Holocaust. This raises the question of ideological and epistemological limitations, as well as of the filmmakers’ creative intent, all of which will be analysed in due course.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁷ Sylvie Lindeperg, e-mail interview, 11 December 2011.

Directly addressing Nazi racial policies, chapter six unveils the history of Nazi anti-Semitism through an ironic examination of the pseudo-scientific racial theory, based on the shape of human skulls. At first mocking the absurdity of these ideas, the chapter changes in tone once the subject of ethnic persecution enters the narrative. While not emphasizing that Jews were the prime target of racial policies, the film nevertheless refers to this group of victims first through the soundtrack, when Romm's voice-over, accompanying the footage of Julius Streicher, describes the Nazi ideologist as a propagator of anti-Semitism; and then through the image, as a sequence depicting German refugees opens with a close-up of an Orthodox Jew. The anti-Semitic ideology of the regime is then depicted more clearly in the footage of an SA man marking a Jewish shop.

Accounting for the consequences of these policies, the film travels forward in time to consider the annihilation of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, acknowledging the uniqueness of Jewish victimhood for the first time. The voice-over accompanying the images from SS Major-General Jürgen Stroop's report of the ghetto liquidation identifies it as proof of 'the annihilation of the entire Jewish population of Warsaw'. The image track then reveals photographs contained in the report, including the now-famous photograph of a boy with raised arms, which, as Janina Struk⁷⁸ observes, would become one of the most widely recognised icons of the Holocaust.

⁷⁸ Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 83.



Fig.10.1: The widely recognised icon of the Holocaust appears in Soviet cinema of the 1960s.

Stressing the theme of child victimhood, the camera focuses on the boy in a close-up and thus makes him the emotional centre of the photograph as well as of the entire sequence. Chernenko, once again overstating the importance of the film in this respect, wrongly suggests that *Ordinary Fascism* introduced this image into the universal, rather than the national, context of Holocaust iconography.⁷⁹ Noteworthy for the first appearance of this iconic Holocaust image in Soviet cinema, this film chapter also appears to be the only instance of an overt identification of the Holocaust in the film.

The principle of visual and aural contrast, inaugurated in the opening sequence, characterises the compilation of material in chapter 14 of the film. It is comprised of photographs depicting the atrocious as well as the mundane (or rather atrocious as mundane) activities of the perpetrators during WWII.⁸⁰ As the visual track reveals disturbing photographs, such as a soldier posing next to a hanged woman, the voice-

⁷⁹ Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 199. The picture was discovered by the makers of *Night and Fog* in the collection of the Institute for Jewish History (Poland); see Lindeperg, 'Night and Fog: Inventing a Perspective,' 67.

⁸⁰ While it might have been possible to highlight the influence of Hannah Arendt's famous expression about the banality of evil on this film, Turovskaia confirmed in an interview with me that the makers were not familiar with Arendt's work during the 1960s, Turovskaia, e-mail interview, 25 September 2012.

over contemplates the paradox of the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘horrifying’ within Nazi ideology. Focusing on this theme throughout the chapter, the voice-over does not differentiate between the various types of atrocities depicted on the image track. Consequently the images of the Holocaust in the ravines – the most common means of annihilating the Soviet Jews, featured in this sequence, remain unidentified in terms of the ethnicity of the victims and the geographic location of the atrocity. After showing us two photographs of half-naked Latvian Jews lined up at the top of a ravine,⁸¹ the camera zooms in on a photograph of a naked young woman squatting in a pile of clothes and Romm’s voice-over, in an attempt to return the individuality to the victims in their dying moment, identifies the woman and another man in the picture as siblings.

Commenting on *Night and Fog*’s use of the only surviving photographs of the victims before and after the Auschwitz-Birkenau gas chamber taken in secret by the members of the *Sonderkommandos* in August 1944, Libby Saxton observes that, by not identifying them as evidence of the Holocaust, the film ‘obscures the distinction between the concentrationary system and the Final Solution’.⁸² Indeed, this insight can be related to the way *Ordinary Fascism* blurs the boundaries between anti-Semitic crimes and the general atrocities committed on Soviet territory. While Lindeperg explains that the French filmmakers could not have been aware of the significance of the images at the time of making *Night and Fog* in the 1950s,⁸³ such logic cannot be applied to the Soviet film, because not only had such history already been represented in Soviet cinema, albeit in the singular case of *The Unvanquished*, but the filmmakers themselves, as Turovskaja explained to me, would have been aware of the meaning of

⁸¹ These images feature in the Holocaust exhibition at the Moscow Jewish Museum and are identified as capturing the execution of Latvian Jews in 1941.

⁸² Libby Saxton, *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 89.

⁸³ Silvie Lindeperg, ‘*Night and Fog*: A History of Gazes,’ 62-63.

these photographs at the time, yet chose not to acknowledge it.⁸⁴ Thus by *not* calling the victims by their proper names, contrary to Chernenko's statement, the film in this case reveals its ideological rather than epistemological limitations. It thereby communicates the conflicting levels of the official and the unofficial knowledge of the Holocaust that underpins its representation.

This tendency continues in the next segment depicting a pogrom in the Soviet city of Lviv. It opens with a photograph of a half-naked woman sitting on the pavement, followed by a series of rapidly cut images of physically and possibly sexually abused women. The word 'pogrom' on the soundtrack clearly establishes the anti-Semitic nature of the event, while also reminding the viewer of its Russian origin; the rest of the commentary interprets these images solely as emblems of human dignity in the face of the atrocious. Thus Romm identifies the woman on the pavement as 'the Saint of our Century' and thereby transforms photographic evidence of the Holocaust into an icon of universal (Christian) martyrdom. The voice-over continues to universalise the sights of a distinctly Jewish tragedy in the following section, depicting the Holocaust in the occupied territories outside the USSR.

A series of photographs capturing the deportation to and the selection process at the camp of people marked by Star of David badges is accompanied by Romm's recollection of the story of Dr. Janusz Korczak. However, while the stars indicate the ethnic origin of the people on screen, the Jewish identity of Dr. Korczak, whose tragic fate was to attain an iconic status in popular Western culture, remains unacknowledged. The fact that in 1966 Goskino rejected a film script about Korczak by the director Mikhail Kalik, confirms the ideological undesirability of such a story

⁸⁴ Maia Turovskaia, e-mail interview, 26 January 2012.

about Jewish dignity and martyrdom⁸⁵ and helps to understand that the avoidance of Korczak's identity in *Ordinary Fascism* was defined by ideological rather than epistemological factors.⁸⁶ This section of *Ordinary Fascism* features other examples of unidentified Holocaust imagery, for example, photographs capturing the selection process in a death camp. Moreover, taken directly from *Night and Fog*, a montage of photographs of naked people before an execution commits an identical epistemological error by mistaking images of Jewish women and children in Ukrainian woods (October 1942) for a line of ethnically undifferentiated people at the entrance to a gas chamber.⁸⁷



Fig.10.2: Epistemological error in the usage of archival imagery.

Up to this point, this chapter of the film attempts to obviate the Jewish dimension of Nazi crimes in the Soviet Union and to obscure the reasons for the

⁸⁵ Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 192.

⁸⁶ Turovskaia explained to me that they made a deliberate choice not to accentuate Korczak's Jewish origin, in Turovskaia, e-mail interview, 26 January 2012.

⁸⁷ Lindeperg, 'Night and Fog: Inventing a Perspective,' 80-81.

creation of the death camps in Poland. Its closing sequence, filmed by Romm's crew in Majdanek, goes even further by inscribing this Holocaust site into a specifically Soviet context. Echoing the imagery and the filming techniques of the opening sequence, and hence of the wartime footage, the camera reveals endless piles of human possessions, stored in the museum section of the camp, while the voice-over observes that these sites of annihilation were only the rehearsal grounds for Heinrich Himmler's unrealised plans for the extermination of some 60 million Russians. This statement immediately strips the Holocaust of both its ethnic specificity and its historical uniqueness.

I have focused on *Ordinary Fascism*'s thematically and textually rich portrayal of the Holocaust in order to demonstrate the importance of a nuanced reading. More specifically, my aim has been to show that it is possible to value it as a Holocaust film while questioning its manner of representation. Departing from the superlative statements of Beilenhoff and Hänsen, and also of Chernenko, my analysis suggests that both the thematic and the formal approaches to the subject of the Holocaust must be problematized, and that doing so exposes the contradictions and unevenness that characterise the film's approach.

Drawing on Lindeperg's method, we have seen the connections between the film's formal and narrative discrepancies and the contemporaneous official knowledge and memory of the Holocaust. In doing so, it has been possible to identify three distinct yet interrelated factors that underpin *Ordinary Fascism*'s manner of representation: epistemological, ideological and creative. Producing the film in the Soviet Union in the 1960s, the filmmakers were bound to a particular framework of knowledge, as some historical information at that point remained unavailable. Thus, following Resnais' example, they misused the photographs of Soviet Jews in

Ukrainian woods as evidence of ethnically undifferentiated annihilation in the death camps and, through this and other scenes, conformed to the official emphasis of the Auschwitz museum on the universality of its victims. The latter fact equally points to the ideological issues at play. The film's addressing of the Holocaust is clearly circumscribed by the official interpretation of Nazi crimes, which, despite a significant shift in the official memory of the war during the 'Thaw', contested the singularity of Jewish experience. The interconnectedness of the official stance and the filmmakers' creative decisions is equally evident in the film.

While Romm, as a renowned film director and pedagogue at VGIK, enjoyed state support throughout his career,⁸⁸ his openly pro-Jewish stance, observed in Chapter 1, struck a particularly dissonant chord with the authorities in the 1960s, as Turovksaia explained to me.⁸⁹ Thus the director was allowed to make the film on condition that the word 'Jew' would be omitted. That this word is nevertheless mentioned in the film, however, also points to gaps in the system of control.

While it is tempting to emphasise the role of state censorship in limiting the film's portrayal of the Holocaust, it is nevertheless essential to consider that the depiction of the Jewish genocide was not the main creative aim of the makers, as my interview with Turovksaia confirmed.⁹⁰ Consequently, the case of *Ordinary Fascism* also demonstrates that the Jewish origin of a Soviet filmmaker/scriptwriter does not in itself guarantee an interest in exploring in depth the subject of the Holocaust. A textually and thematically rich film, *Ordinary Fascism* invites an engaged reading, which results in the understanding that, although the film offers an original look at the

⁸⁸ Chernenko notes that Romm was 'a prize-holder of all possible Soviet state awards' in Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 198 (my translation).

⁸⁹ Turovksaia, e-mail interview, 26 January 2012.

⁹⁰ Turovksaia said: 'When Iurii [Khaniutin] and I began writing the script, we were not driven by the interest to explore 'the Jewish question' but rather how an ordinary German becomes a Nazi' (my translation), *ibid.*

recent past and hints at parallels between the Nazi and the Soviet regimes, its unstable and conflicting treatment of the Holocaust, together with a strong anti-Western stance, indicates that at the same time it remains bound by the mainstream Soviet rhetoric of the era.

Section Three: the Holocaust through Flash-Forwards

Section Two of this chapter looked at films whose multi-temporal structure represented the process of *remembering* the war and through it, the Holocaust. While Turim's theory of flashbacks stresses films' formal and narrative capacities for rendering memory on screen, and thus for engaging with the question of temporality, history and subjectivity, her analysis is bound to films that look back into the diegetic past. However, via the films included in this section, I would like to demonstrate that a similar understanding applies to *Good-bye, Boys* (Mikhail Kalik, 1964) and *The Commissar* (Aleksandr Askol'dov, 1967), films employing a flash-forward to render the Holocaust, a formal feature which equally reveals the types of memories and points of view constructed in their depictions.

Since *Good-bye, Boys* contains a complex temporal relationship between flashbacks and flash-forwards, it acts as a bridge between Sections Two and Three of this chapter. Featuring the intertitle 'I remember' at the beginning, the film thus stresses not only the theme of memory but also the contemporary perspective from which the narrative of the past is recreated.⁹¹ However, the fact that the diegetic story itself, set in the pre-war Soviet Union, is punctuated with archival images of wartime atrocities, allows us to identify them as flash-forwards in relation to the main narrative.

⁹¹ Turim stresses the capacity of intertitles to delineate temporal relations in Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 16.

Based on Boris Balter's coming-of-age story of three friends, Volodia, Sasha and Viktor, during the last pre-war summer, the film creates a nostalgic and intimate portrait of adolescence. This work needs to be positioned within the history of (Soviet) Holocaust cinema, as it features a series of archival images depicting the genocide of European Jews. Overlooking the use of the found footage, Chernenko⁹² nevertheless highlights the presence of a Jewish theme in the film, which in his view is openly embraced through the characters of Sasha and his parents. Yet, while the film does not eschew their ethnic origin, it deprives the Jewish characters of a more central place in the narrative, which is occupied by the Russian protagonist, Volodia. Not only is Volodia given the majority of screen space and time, the intertitles, which comment on the action from the 'present day', communicate his point of view on the entire narrative. Consequently it is in his subjective realm that the images of the Holocaust appear.

Exhibiting a recurring trope of the cinema of the 'Thaw', the incorporation of archival footage into a fiction film, the diegetic (pre-war) present is punctuated by a series of archival segments depicting the 'present' of Nazi Germany and the 'future' of WWII. The film deploys the now-familiar footage from *Auschwitz*, and also introduces archival imagery new to the Soviet context – the deportation from the Dutch transit camp of Westerbork to Auschwitz on 19 May 1944,⁹³ originally used in *Night and Fog*. The principle of contrasting the peaceful and the atrocious via abrupt editing constitutes *Good-bye, Boys'* representation of the impending tragedy.⁹⁴ In the first instance, a technique which, following Turim's logic, can be identified as a 'modernist flash-forward' abruptly inserts the archival footage of the 'future' deportation into a blissful nocturnal setting of the 'present'. As Volodia and his

⁹² Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 192.

⁹³ Lindeperg, 'Night and Fog: Inventing a Perspective,' 74.

⁹⁴ This device is also prevalent in *Ordinary Fascism*.

girlfriend sit by the seaside, their romantic encounter is accompanied by a popular pre-war song, which acts as a sound bridge to the documentary segment. The song continues over the archival flash-forward, which opens with an image of Nazi soldiers standing on a train platform. The next shot depicts people crammed inside the wagons, while others, marked with white armbands, walk past carrying their possessions. The following two frames reveal a wagon being shut, and the face of a young girl staring into the camera through a gap in the door, an image that, as Lindeperg observes, went on to become an ‘icon of the Shoah.’⁹⁵



Fig. 11: An icon of the Shoah in *Good-bye, Boys*.

The Holocaust footage re-appears towards the end of the film, when a segment, this time depicting the end of the war, once again erupts into the diegetic ‘present’. Testifying to the continued recycling of the wartime newsreel from *Auschwitz*, this section features two shots of the inmates behind a barbed wire fence as well as footage of the liberated children. However, this Holocaust imagery remains

⁹⁵

Ibid.



Fig.11.1: Featuring newsreel footage of Auschwitz in form of a flash-forward.

unidentified in *Good-bye, Boys*, thereby pointing to some of the limitations at play. Knowing of Kalik's on-going preoccupation with Jewish history and identity, which is evident not only in all of his films but was also confirmed to me by his sister, Marina Kalik, during my interview with her,⁹⁶ it is possible to presume that the director was aware of the meaning of the footage. However, considering Goskino's refusal of Kalik's script about Korzcak, as well as his continuous conflicts with film industry officials,⁹⁷ it is unlikely that the director could have referred to the ethnic dimension of the Holocaust overtly in *Good-bye, Boys*. Interestingly, when viewed in light of recent research into Holocaust iconography, the film's portrayal of the Jewish genocide appears to be circumscribed not only by ideological but also by epistemological factors. Thus it transpires that the image of a young girl in the train car, which figures – albeit covertly – as an icon of the Holocaust in the film, in fact depicts a Sinti victim of Nazi persecution.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Marina Kalik, phone interview, 19 April 2010.

⁹⁷ Related to me by Marina Kalik during my phone interview, *ibid.*, they are also depicted in Kalik's autobiographical film *And the Wind Returns* (Soviet Union/USA, 1991).

⁹⁸ Lindeperg, 'Night and Fog: Inventing a Perspective,' 74.

While *Good-bye, Boys* relies on archival footage in its covert depiction of the Jewish genocide, the final film of this chapter, *The Commissar*, employs expressive camera work, sound and mise-en-scène to construct a haunting symbolic scene of the Holocaust. This film suffered a great deal at the hands of industry officials, eventually becoming one of the best-known examples of the brutality of Soviet censorship and (consequently) of Soviet Holocaust cinema.⁹⁹ While the film is often studied in relation to its troubled extra-cinematic history, in the first part of this case study, I would also like to introduce a close textual analysis of the Holocaust flash-forward, addressing, as before, the questions of cinematic subjectivity and point of view.

A Case Study: The Commissar

The Soviet-Jewish writer and wartime reporter, Vasilii Grossman, evoked at the beginning, returns in the narrative of this chapter, as it is his 1934 short story *In the Town of Berdichev* that Aleksandr Askol'dov decided to adapt for his diploma film, *The Commissar*. The decision itself was a mistake on the director's behalf, as he unknowingly chose a work of a writer who by this time had become a *persona non grata*. The film, like the short story, is set during the Russian Civil War (1917-1922) and tells the story of Klavdiia Vavilova, a Red Army commissar who, no longer able

⁹⁹ Omer Bartov, *The 'Jew' in Cinema: From The Golem to Don't Touch my Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 34; Valerii Fomin, *Polka* (Moscow: Materik, 1992), 46-76; Andrew Horton and Mikhail Brashinsky, *Zero Hour: Glasnost and the Soviet Cinema in Transition* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992), 36; Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 116; Graham H. Roberts, 'The Sound of Silence: from Grossman's Berdichev to Askoldov's *Commissar*,' in *Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature, 1900-2001: Screening the Word*, Stephen Hutchins and Anat Vernitski, eds. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 59-68; Elena Stishova, 'Passions over *Commissar*,' *Wide Angle* 12/4 (October 1990): 62-75; Louis Menashe, 'Chapayev and Company: Films of the Russian Civil War,' *Cineaste* 4 (Autumn 2005): 18-22; Daniela Berghahn, 'Do the Right Thing? Female Allegories of Nation in Alexandr Askoldov's *Commissar* (USSR, 1967/87) and Konrad Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* (GDR, 1964),' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 26/4 (October 2008): 561-577; Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 228-232; Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Cinema and the Holocaust*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56; Hirszowicz, 'The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror,' 57; Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 156; Woll, *Real Images*, 235.

to fight because of her pregnancy, temporarily lodges in the house of a poor Jewish tinker, Efim Magazannik. While focusing predominantly on Vavilova's struggle between her motherly instinct and her civic duty, *The Commissar* also depicts the hardships of the Magazannik family living in the Pale of Settlement during these troublesome years of Soviet history.

Officially commissioned to honour the 50th anniversary of the Revolution, the film, following the tendencies of the cinema of the 'Thaw', presents the grand historical narrative of the Civil War through the prism of the protagonist's intimate experiences, employing stark black and white photography, expressive camera movements and sound to translate its subjective emotional and sensual qualities. The film breaks from the official conventions of the portrayal of the Civil War¹⁰⁰ even further by inserting Klavdiia's imagining of the Holocaust. While such a scene is naturally absent from the original 1934 story, it is likely that Grossman's subsequent work as a wartime correspondent, such as his article 'The Hell of Treblinka' (1944), inspired the restaging of the Jewish genocide in the film. As such the film enters into a dialogue with the author, rather than simply adapting his work. Indeed, *The Commissar* self-reflexively signals the contemporary context of its creation by figuring the scene in the form of a flash-forward.

Although the flash-forward sequence played a significant part in the banning of *The Commissar*, the history of the film's production and reception reveals other determining factors. These existed both at the level of context – including the banning of Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*, the event of the Six Day War, and Askol'dov's defiant personality – as well as at the level of the text, in particular the general subversion of the Civil War canon: the unorthodox portrayal of a female commissar

¹⁰⁰ Discussed in Louis Menashe, *Moscow Believes in Tears* (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2010), 71-81.

and of the Revolution; the humanistic stance of the story and a positive depiction of Jews.¹⁰¹ While the decline of the ‘Thaw’ is evident in the shelving of the film – which is often considered as the marker of the end of the liberal period¹⁰² – the very fact of its creation, regardless of the attempts to close down the production, also points to the unevenness of censorship and ideological control. Committing an ‘error’ by allowing the film to go into production, the authorities nevertheless recaptured control over it once the film was completed. After a series of film industry viewings and discussions, following Askol’dov’s firm refusal to make the required changes, *The Commissar* was pronounced ‘utterly unacceptable for [the] screens’.¹⁰³ The director was fired from his position for being ‘unsuitable’ for the job and was expelled from the Communist Party.¹⁰⁴ *The Commissar* was shelved indefinitely and was only released 20 years later in the late perestroika period.¹⁰⁵

The Holocaust flash-forward, as unexpected as it may seem on first viewing, is nevertheless anticipated throughout the film. *The Commissar* openly contemplates the nature of (pre-Revolutionary) anti-Semitism through numerous dialogues, and two scenes: the first symbolising and the second graphically depicting anti-Semitic violence. In both cases the film employs the Magazannik children; initially they are shown observing a heavy machine gun cart being pulled past their house. Since the children were in the middle of having a bath in the preceding scene, they are captured standing naked in the street. The film chooses a peculiar yet highly evocative type of framing – a shot captures the children’s genitalia in the background with parts of the machine gun cart in extreme close-up in the foreground. Such a composition clearly underlines a visual and consequently a symbolic contrast between life (children and

¹⁰¹ See Stishova, Menashe, Berghahn, Fomin.

¹⁰² Hutchings and Vernitski, *Russian and Soviet Adaptations*, 18.

¹⁰³ Stishova, ‘Passions over *Commissar*,’ 63.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ The release and reception of the film is discussed in Chapter 4.

their delicate, exposed body parts) and death (the machine-gun cart and its rough metallic bulk). The fact that the children are Jewish furthers the idea of their endangerment and vulnerability to anti-Semitic violence.

Elaborating on the symbolism of this scene, the film presents another one, which surprisingly features the Jewish children playing at pogrom.¹⁰⁶ While the boys pretend to be the perpetrators, their elder sister, Sonia, falls (real) victim to their violence. Her helplessness and angst are captured with disturbing authenticity, as though anticipating the feelings of the Holocaust victims, who appear in the flash-forward shortly after. The Holocaust is also anticipated through visual motifs such as the striped material of the mattress against which the helpless girl is pinned, and the white feathers that float about, as the children make havoc in their back yard, creating an allusion to the ashes and the smoke of the crematoria. Thus with some important thematic and visual motifs in place, the film then offers Klavdiia Vavilova's vision of the Magazanniks' death in the Holocaust.

When the characters learn of the approaching White Army troops, fearing another wave of pogroms, they hide in a cellar. Hearing the disturbing sounds of battle, Efim decides to ease the fear of his children, and possibly his own, by engaging his family in a dance. Vavilova and her newborn son are removed from this family ritual. The camera zooms out into a high-angle shot to reveal the entire Magazannik family forming a circle around a candle on a stool and beginning to dance around it. As Efim starts humming a Klezmer-style tune,¹⁰⁷ a piano is heard entering the soundtrack developing this melody into a full non-diegetic score, regularly punctuated by off-screen sounds of explosions. Lit with a singular spotlight to reproduce the candlelight, the sequence is imbued with mystical tones as though prefiguring the

¹⁰⁶ In this way it is similar to the depiction of a Jewish boy playing a Nazi in *You Are not an Orphan* discussed earlier in this chapter.

¹⁰⁷ Klezmer is the musical tradition of the Eastern European Jews.

tragic events that are about to unfold in the following scene. Once the viewing position becomes identified with Vavilova through a close-up of her distressed face looking at the dancing family, the scene then begins to acquire an all-the-more subjective and dream-like quality; starting from the reverse shot of the Magazannik boy dancing and then looking directly at Vavilova and into the camera.



Fig.12: The beginning of Vavilova's vision.

As the characters appear and disappear in and out of the static shot, Alfred Schnittke's score develops an increasingly sinister tone; the off-key and off-beat notes together with a general increase in the tempo add to the transformation of the diegetic action into a symbolic macabre dance, which now appears to be happening in some non-diegetic, unidentifiable space.

Disrupting the spatial-temporal logic of the film, an abrupt cut removes the characters from the black and white interior setting of the 1920s and places them, via a modernist flash-forward, into the sepia exterior of an extermination camp during WWII.¹⁰⁸ Efim, together with his family, now appears to be marching along an unidentifiable street amongst a group of people, marked with Star of David badges and armbands. The Magazannik family gradually disappears out of the frame, never to

¹⁰⁸ Graham H. Roberts perceives the locations as a concentration camp but bypasses reading the scene as a depiction of the Holocaust, in Roberts, 'The Sound of Silence,' 91.

be seen again in this sequence. The nightmarish tone of the scene, evoked through cacophonous music, film colour and the presence of smoke, is heightened further by the appearance of a coffin with a fiddler walking behind it.



Fig. 12.1: A symbolic depiction of the Holocaust.

This symbolic, rather than historically accurate or realistic element of the mise-en-scène thus draws a parallel between the death march of the Jews and a funeral procession. Staying in close proximity to the action the camera increases its tracking speed, and moves together with the people into a small tunnel leading to the entrance of the camp. As soon as the camera enters into the tunnel a new musical phrase appears on the soundtrack: the loud choral singing and the faint sounds of (church) bells on the background create a sinister allusion to a death knoll.

The camera captures various anonymous faces from an eye-level position and then suddenly tilts upwards in a low-angle shot that reveals the feet of men who are wearing striped uniforms and sitting on a stone wall. Panning across the wall, the camera then zooms out into a wide shot of the entrance to the camp, with another group of inmates standing on a small balcony above the main gate. Black smoke erupting from a chimney appears in the background of the shot. As in *Fate of a Man*, this element of the setting functions as a silent signifier of the Final Solution.



Fig. 12.2: Smoke as a silent signifier of the Final Solution.

The complex choreography of the camera, which alternates between different types of shots and angles through a number of zooms and pans, together with the intricate musical accompaniment, produce a highly disorientating effect by which the scene renders the atmosphere of the event depicted on screen.

While the procession continues to move through the archway towards the gate, the camera, as though attempting to escape, suddenly tracks in the opposite direction. It then halts to reveal Vavilova standing by the entrance to the tunnel with her baby in her arms. A rapid zoom reframes the shot into a close-up of her face, thereby establishing a new point of identification in the sequence. At first Vavilova acts on her initial impulse to follow the crowd; however, she then stops at the threshold of the tunnel. In deep focus the camera captures her from behind, featuring her in the foreground of the frame, then revealing the rest of the crowd standing in the background in front of the closed gate waving their hands in the air – a symbolic gesture of surrender that echoes the movements of Efim's family in the previous scene.

The music gradually fades into a monotone electronic sound, which further highlights the disturbing atmosphere of the scene, as Vavilova suddenly turns towards the camera; accompanied by a zoom which emphasises the significance of the moment, she returns the audience's gaze.



Fig.12.3: A Russian commissar addresses the viewer from the site of a Jewish trauma.

A sudden cut to a black and white close up of her face signals a return to the diegetic 'present' in the interior of the Magazanniks' cellar. A non-diegetic, whispered prayer in Hebrew comes into the soundtrack, gradually enhanced with reverberation. The use of the electronically manipulated prayer increases the mystical tone of the sequence while the language clearly re-affirms the religious and ethnic identity of the victims in the previous scene.

As though having realised something, Vavilova's face acquires an increasingly anxious expression and she starts to leave. The camera pans from her face to a medium close-up of the Magazanniks, who are sleeping pressed tightly against one another. Figuring after the flash-forward scene, this shot can be read as an allusion to

images of dead bodies. The sequence ends with a medium shot of Vavilova leaving the cellar, disappearing into the black background of the image.

Analysing the depiction of the Holocaust in the *The Commissar*, we can note that the film creates a symbolic, rather than a historically accurate evocation of the Jewish genocide. A death march of Soviet Jews from Berdichev is made to end, not in a ravine or a forest but in a (Eastern) European death camp.¹⁰⁹ Following the principle of symbolisation and displacement, a representational technique common to several films in this chapter, *The Commissar* mixes elements which belong to the Soviet context, such as the death march,¹¹⁰ with the iconography of the death camps – striped uniforms and a smoking chimney – to produce an image of universal Jewish suffering.

However, despite such an overt and detailed depiction, the film signals some tension between the mainstream and unorthodox approaches to the subject of the Holocaust. On the one hand, it clearly challenges the existing Soviet convention of aligning the suffering of the Jews and the commissars at the hands of the Nazis by stressing the uniquely anti-Semitic quality of the atrocity. Yet, on the other hand, the film maintains the relation between the two victim groups by positioning the Holocaust scene within the subjective realm of a Russian protagonist – the Red Army commissar. Applying the method of studying cinematic flashbacks to this case, we can observe that, by abruptly opening and closing the Holocaust sequence with two close-ups of Klavdiia's face, the film thus figures this modernist flash-forward as a product of her traumatic vision. Although it presents the Jewish family as protagonists

¹⁰⁹ From Grossman's own journalistic accounts we learn that Jews of Berdichev, including his own mother, perished in the massacres performed by *Einsatzgruppen* and their collaborators, in Antony Beevor and Liuba Vinogradova, *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman and the Red Army* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2011), 209.

¹¹⁰ It is important to distinguish between a march of the Soviet Jews to their execution in a ravine or a wood, and the death march from one (death) camp to another, more common in non-Soviet territories.

of the film, giving them significant narrative space and time, *The Commissar* privileges the perspective of the Russian title character on the genocide of the Jews.

The direct gaze of a Russian commissar at the viewer from the site of a Jewish trauma appears to be the last image of the Holocaust to feature in the cinema of the ‘Thaw’. As such it testifies to the apparent absence of Jewish agency over the memory and history of the Holocaust, as in the film itself, so in the cinema of this period at large.

Conclusion

The task of this chapter has been twofold: to question the liberal nature of the ‘Thaw’, thereby contributing to a newly emergent scholarly tendency; while offering a new way of appreciating the innovative quality of this period through the study of Soviet Holocaust cinema, which has not previously been the subject of scholarly investigation. Although the corpus analysed here testifies to a significant break from the films of the Stalinist period, it also demonstrates that there remains a link between the two through the continuation and sometimes modification of certain tropes and tendencies. The complex ‘thaw’ and ‘freeze’ dialectic of this period is clearly exemplified in the sustained intricacy of the ‘conventional’ and the ‘unorthodox’ features that constitute the cinematic renditions of the Holocaust.

One of the key innovations of this period is the emergence of the cinematic memory of the war. Not only is WWII a central narrative preoccupation of these films, but films dealing with this subject are also engaged formally with reproducing the process of remembering the war on screen. Using temporality as an organising principle in this chapter, I demonstrate that films in all three sections possess a degree

of self-reflexivity about the past (and with it about the Holocaust), hitherto absent in Soviet cinema. While the process of remembering is only narrativised in films studied in Section Two and Three, works analysed in Section One, nevertheless, also demonstrate their temporal distance from the war and hence from the Stalinist period. Looking in a chronological order at three films from a sub-genre of partisan films, Section One argues that the key deviation common to all the films is the increasingly pronounced reference to the Holocaust. However, at the same time, I underline some affinity with the conventions established in wartime cinema, such as the marginalisation of the Jewish narrative in the main story of the Slav resistance.

Relying on the theoretical insight of Maureen Turim, this chapter maintains that the question of point of view is inherent to the subject of memory through the flashbacks and flash-forwards that are studied in Sections Two and Three, respectively. The analysis of cinematic point of view allows me to conclude that despite being more explicit than during Stalinism, the memory of the Holocaust continues to belong to Slav protagonists, while the Jewish point of view is predominantly absent. Therefore the lack of Jewish subjectivity is a recurring feature not only in this period but also in the entire corpus of Soviet Holocaust films studied so far.

While thematically these films negotiate between innovation and convention in their treatments of the Holocaust, technically and stylistically they demonstrate a new sophistication. One of the key findings of this chapter is the rare device of an aural flashback in *You Are not an Orphan* and *Fate of a Man*. This device not only underscores the innovative aspects of Soviet film sound, but also stresses the integral representational capacities of sound in relation to the depiction of the Holocaust. The aural flashback thus offers an alternative way for considering the concept of

(un)representability and challenges the existing scholarly tendency to consider this concept in terms of visual record only.

Thinking of the reasons for the types of depictions of the Holocaust offered in films of this period, this chapter accounts for the interrelation between state ideology, epistemological limitations and personal choices of the filmmakers. The key concept that arises here is inconsistency. While the period studied in Chapter One saw a relatively clear dynamic in the depictions throughout the three stages, albeit with some considerable inconsistencies during wartime, the current chapter observes fluctuations from harshness to benevolence of state control, and from unorthodox to conformist cinematic representations at various points in time. Thus the hugely successful *Fate of a Man* was praised by the leadership despite its overt representations of the Holocaust; little-known films equally overt in their depiction – such as *You Are not an Orphan* and *Third Half* – escaped much critical and official attention, while films like *Good-bye, Boys*, *Ordinary Fascism* and *The Commissar* were subjected to restrictions.

As well as being framed by ideological constraints, the impossibility of a more overt portrayal in some films is also determined by the question of creative intent. Although we can say, with some degree of speculation, that Kalik (*Good-bye, Boys*) would have made a more openly Jewish film were it not for conflicts with the film industry authorities, it also appears to be true that Romm, the director of *Ordinary Fascism*, never strove to make a film about the Holocaust. Since both were Jewish, these examples also demonstrate that the ethnic origin of the director is not *per se* an essential factor in the portrayal of the Holocaust. Indeed, further proof of this point can be found in the fact that, of the 13 films studied in this chapter, only three – *Peace*

to Him Who Enters, Good-bye, Boys and *Ordinary Fascism* – were directed by Jewish filmmakers.¹¹¹

Surveying the continuation of the cinematic trajectory of the Holocaust into the mid-1950s, this chapter demonstrates that despite an indisputable increase of films capturing the Jewish genocide during the years following Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation speech, it is nevertheless important to be aware of the contradictory dynamics of this trajectory. It thus offers a new reason for re-thinking the prevailing understanding of the rise and the demise of the 'Thaw', as well as for questioning the value-laden use of the term itself.

¹¹¹ Askol'dov is not Jewish, contrary to Roberts' statement, which signals his essentialist approach, in Roberts, 'Sound of Silence,' 95.

CHAPTER 3: HOLOCAUST CINEMA DURING THE ‘STAGNATION’

The opening chapter of *Reconsidering Brezhnev* explains that the term ‘stagnation’ was formed retrospectively during Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms of 1986.¹ Signalling the conservative neo-Stalinist features of Leonid Brezhnev’s government from 1968 to 1982, this term was designed to emphasize, by contrast, the subsequent radical reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika.² For nearly two decades the expression remained unchallenged and it is only recently that scholars have begun to reconsider this ‘grey’ period of Brezhnev’s era. For example, Edwin Bacon’s and M.A. Sandle’s edited collection stresses the positive social and cultural aspects of the period,³ while Alexei Yurchak more engagingly explores the ambiguities and the multi-faceted nature of the relationship between Soviet official and personal discourses during the so-called ‘Stagnation’.⁴ While some attempts were made to re-evaluate the cinema of this period, as in the workshop *Reconsidering Stagnation* organised by the University of Amsterdam in March 2012, the perestroika discourse continues to dominate the study of Soviet films made between 1968 and 1982. A new inclination to refrain from the value-laden terminology in the study of this period is signalled in two recent Russian-language publications *Posle Ottepeli: kinematograf 1970-kh*⁵ and *Mezhdu ottepel’iu i glasnost’iu*.⁶ Nevertheless, these works follow the typical scholarly tendency in the study of the ‘Stagnation’ to focus on the exceptional works of

¹ Edwin Bacon, ‘Reconsidering Brezhnev,’ in *Reconsidering Brezhnev*, eds. Edwin Bacon and M.A. Sandle (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2.

² Ibid., and Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It was No More: the Last Soviet Generation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

³ Bacon, ‘Reconsidering Brezhnev,’ 4.

⁴ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 7.

⁵ Andrei Shemiakin and Iulia Mikheeva, *Posle Ottepeli: kinematograf 1970-kh* (Moscow: NII kinoiskusstva, 2009).

⁶ Valerii Golovskoi, *Mezhdu ottepel’iu i glasnost’iu* (Moscow: Direkt-media, 2011).

commonly accepted auteur filmmakers,⁷ to set them against the rest of the 'conformist' cinema and to highlight their struggle with the censors. Lawton's understanding that in the 1970s only 'a few talented directors were able to rise above the level of grayish mediocrity'⁸ of the mainstream cinema encapsulates this viewpoint. As the consensus underlines the stifling effect of Soviet censorship, it generally maintains that hardly any innovative representations of WWII were produced;⁹ consequently the subject of the Holocaust is believed to be non-existent.

In this chapter I want to challenge this dominant (mis)understanding. By looking at a wide filmic corpus, I hope to demonstrate that, despite the solidification of the ideological control over film production during the 1970s, the subject of the Holocaust not only existed in films of the 'Stagnation' but also was treated in a variety of thematic, formal and generic ways. Uncovering this new dimension of this supposedly 'grey' period in Soviet cinematic history simultaneously highlights the need to rethink the existing binary division between (insignificant) mainstream film and (worthwhile) auteur cinema.

The introduction to this chapter, relying on the historical insight of Zvi Gitelman and Nina Tumarkin, accounts for the state of contemporary affairs in Soviet-Jewish society as well as for the developments in the commemoration of WWII and of the Holocaust during the 'Stagnation' period. The following main part of the chapter puts the emphasis on the diversity of the ways in which the Holocaust was depicted, through the study of a wide filmic corpus divided in three groups. First,

⁷ Andrei Tarkovskii, Sergei Paradzhanov, Larisa Shepitko, Kira Muratova, Elem Klimov are some of the most frequently cited filmmakers.

⁸ Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

⁹ For example, Denise Youngblood suggests that 'During the eighteen years of Brezhnev's "stagnation"(zastoi), filmmakers faced great difficulties making provocative films, especially about the [...] World War Two' in 'A War Remembered: Soviet Films of the Great Patriotic War,' *The American Historical Review* 106/3 (2001), 849.

it looks at works which attempted to erase the Jewish history from WWII narratives. Secondly, it examines works presenting verbal and visual references to the Holocaust. Finally, it studies the representation of Jewish victims on screen. Each section features a case study: *Remember Your Name* (Sergei Kolosov, 1974), *The Dawns Are Quiet Here* (Stanislav Rostotskii, 1972) and *The Ascent* (Larisa Shepitko, 1977), respectively. Looking at thematic, narrative and textual properties of the films, I continue to examine the strategies for representing the Holocaust and consider their role in the development of the knowledge and memory of the Jewish genocide. Identifying both an insistence on universal Soviet suffering at the level of the official discourse, and the formation of a cultural counter-discourse, this chapter inscribes the cinematic works into this historical context and evaluates their interrelation.

The Memory of the Holocaust and Jewish Society during the 'Stagnation'

It is generally understood that the Six Day War (5-10 June 1967) increased the official anti-Israeli stance of the Soviet government as well as popular anti-Semitic feelings; as such it is perceived as one of the first symptoms of the 'Stagnation'. While the official anti-Israeli rhetoric points to the neo-Stalinist tendencies of the period, the simultaneous awakening of the Jewish community and the formation of a counter-discourse underscore its unique complexity. This section discusses the ambiguous and contradictory dynamics between the government and the Soviet-Jewish community.

As the Six Day War ended with Israel's victory, it inspired a sense of pride among Soviet Jews, allowing them to identify for the first time with the victors.

However, despite this ‘spiritual blast’¹⁰, their domestic position as an ethnic group prevented from practising its culture, language and religion, pointed to Israel as the desirable place to live. Although there was no official ban on emigration,¹¹ the state repeatedly denied exit visas to a large number of Jews, an action which unwittingly prompted the appearance of a widespread human rights movement known as the *refusenik* movement.¹² Waves of demonstrations and other social activities through which Jews fought for their right to move were suppressed by the government; the most famous case was the imprisonment of prominent *refusenik* activist Anatolii Shcharanskii in 1977.¹³ The Shcharanskii case evoked acute resonance in the West and produced the opposite effect to that expected: instead of muting the expression of Jewish consciousness, it strengthened it. Paradoxically, as Hedrick Smith observes, in contrast with the rest of the Soviet citizens, who were rarely allowed to travel abroad, Jews were commonly considered as a privileged group in terms of gaining emigration permits.¹⁴

As privileged as the émigré Jews might have been, those who remained in the country, either by choice or because they were denied an exit visa, suffered discrimination in the form of unemployment, redundancy and limited entry to higher education. Analysing the concept of national identity under Brezhnev, Ben Fowkes makes the unwittingly anti-Semitic remark that the emigration of 249,000 Jews between 1971 and 1980 strengthened the country politically by removing many

¹⁰ Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 174.

¹¹ In 1966 the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Aleksei Kosygin stated that Soviet Jews were free to emigrate, in *ibid.* 174.

¹² The term *refusenik* stems from a Russian word *otkaznik*, meaning a person who was refused an exit visa. For more see Mark Azbel, *Refusenik: Trapped in the Soviet Union* (New York: Paragon House, 1987).

¹³ For more see Natan Sharanskii, *Fear No Evil* (New York: Public Affairs, 1998), Felix Roziner, ed. *Anatolii Shcharanskii* (Jerusalem: Shamir, 1985).

¹⁴ Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 473.

potential dissidents, and eliminated rivals to the Russians on the Soviet job market.¹⁵ Seeing the decrease in Jewish postgraduates in the USSR by 40 per cent between 1970 and 1975 as a positive fact,¹⁶ the author overlooks state discrimination as one of the contributing factors to these statistics. This evident social discrimination was, however, countered by an unofficial Jewish culture. An ‘illegal’ press (*samizdat*),¹⁷ as well as schools and cultural centres that began to form during the 1960s flourished during the ‘Stagnation’. It is thanks to these initiatives that Jews were able to learn not only Hebrew and Yiddish but also their culture and history, since, as Gitelman points out, Soviet history books excluded Jewish connections to the history of Russia, Eastern Europe, and WWII.¹⁸

Indeed, the recent history of WWII was re-interpreted once again to fit the ideological agendas of the state. Nina Tumarkin explains that Brezhnev’s government created ‘nothing short of a full-blown cult of the Great Patriotic War’, propelling the following rhetoric: ‘our country, under the leadership of the Communist party headed by Comrade Stalin, arose as one united front and expelled the enemy from our own territory and that of Eastern Europe, thus saving Europe, and the world, from fascist enslavement.’¹⁹ The official memory of the war was shaped and controlled by the state, including the Ministry of Defence, and was employed so as to boost the patriotic spirit of the nation as well as to sustain the Cold War antagonism towards the West.

Naturally, such a myth could accommodate neither the narrative of a distinctly Jewish suffering nor the inclusion of Jews into the ‘Soviet fighting family’.²⁰ By this

¹⁵ Ben Fowkes, ‘The National Question in the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev: Policy and Response,’ in Bacon and Sadle, *Reconsidering Brezhnev*, 83.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ For example, journals like *Iton*, *Jews in the USSR* and *Tarbut*.

¹⁸ Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, 186.

¹⁹ Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: the Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 134.

²⁰ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of the War: the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 39.

point in Soviet history the cult of WWII had replaced that of the Revolution as representing the ultimate formative event in the Soviet national past. Exemplifying the scholarly trend of associating Stalin's and Brezhnev's periods is the understanding that, similarly to the 1930s purge of Jewish figures from the history of the Revolution, the official memory of WWII during the 'Stagnation' ignored the presence of the Jews as both victims and victors. As the Jewish community continued to hold unofficial ceremonies on sites of the atrocities, in 1976 the Soviet government erected a monument to the Babii Iar massacre a mile away from the original location, and whose inscription emphasised the Soviet origin of the victims.²¹ Indicative of the official standpoint in relation to Jewish victimhood, the case of the Babii Iar monument thus ended with the ultimate suppression of Holocaust history.

While the official stance was clear, and generally speaking 'a wall of silence regarding the Holocaust [stood] in the Soviet Union',²² a number of literary interventions helped shed light on the silenced subject. As previously, this fact underlines how the cultural (literary) discourse countered the official one and that the state control over the portrayal of the war was not absolute. In his overview of the Holocaust in Soviet literature, Lukasz Hirszowicz points out the significance of Anatolii Rybakov's *Heavy Sand* (1978), as the first novel depicting a distinctly Jewish experience of the occupation to appear after the Six Day War, and refers to two Belorussian-language works, *Sparks in the Ashes* (Lidziia Arabiei, 1969) and *The Bloody Banks of Niamikha* (Vladimir Karpau, 1972), which were published but

²¹ Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, 124; Gitelman, 'The Soviet Politics and the Holocaust' in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*, ed. James E. Young (New York: Prestel, 1994), 139-149.

²² Mordechai Altshuler, quoted in Zvi Gitelman, 'Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945-1991' in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941-1945*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 1993), 6.

remained lesser-known for reasons of linguistic limitations.²³ Moreover, his brief account leads me to observe that, with the exception of *Heavy Sand*, other popular texts, such as *Sotnikov* (Vasil' Bykov, 1970) and *The Market Woman and the Poet* (Ivan Shamiakin, 1976), depicted the Holocaust as secondary in the main narrative of the Slavic wartime experience. Thus while acknowledging a subject that was otherwise ignored by the government, these and other works discussed by Hirszowicz demonstrated a continued lack of the Jewish perspective on the Holocaust. Their adaptation for the screen, as *The Ascent* and *The Market Woman and the Poet* (Samson Samsonov, 1979), suggests the interrelation between the literary and the cinematic spheres and invites consideration of how the cinema responded to the socio-political and cultural discourses on the Holocaust and the Great Patriotic War. This question is explored in the main part of the chapter.

Cinema and the 'Stagnation': the Control of the Industry and the Memory of the War

Attempting to demarcate 'Stagnation' cinema from the previous period of the 'Thaw', scholarly consensus generally comments on the increase of ideological control over film production and highlights the cinema's contribution to the government's propagation of the official memory of the war. Although, as I have demonstrated, during the 'Thaw' the readjustment of the government's control over the industry created a new moment of (uneven) ideological relaxation, by the end of the 1960s a new system of control was in place. Scholars like Fomin²⁴ pinpoint the significance of two documents in particular, a report 'On the state of contemporary Soviet cinema' (1967) and a decree 'On measures for the subsequent development of Soviet cinema'

²³ Lukasz Hirszowicz 'The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror' in Dobroszycki and Gurock, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 49-50.

²⁴ Valerii Fomin, *Kino i vlast'.* *Sovetskoe kino: 1965-1985* (Moscow: Materik, 1996), 14.

(1972), which prompted the administrative restructuring of the industry and the establishment of new priorities in cinematic production. The new stage of centralisation of Goskino and the appointment of Filipp Ermash as its head in 1972 marked the beginning of what scholars identify as the tightening of governmental control over the film industry. Ermash's fondness for the Hollywood model led to the promotion of filmmaking that combined conventionality with entertainment, as George Faraday explains.²⁵ Faraday goes on to say that this new approach was realised not by returning to the Stalinist tradition of meticulous script editing, but by privileging certain 'trusted' mainstream directors, like Sergei Bondarchuk and Stanislav Rostotskii,²⁶ who by this point in time have established successful state-approved careers. Consequently, such policies unwittingly solidified the critical and scholarly discourse of auteur versus popular cinema, with the former connoting moral and artistic integrity and non-conformism.

The increase of the Party's control over the industry is also evident from the survey of the Soviet film press and academic publications, which feature references to the Party directives and quotes from Brezhnev's speeches,²⁷ as well as from the personal testimonies of Soviet filmmakers. For example, in my interview with Aleksandr Shlepianov the scriptwriter described his numerous struggles with Party officials, such as during the writing/censoring of the script for *Dead Season*, a popular

²⁵ George Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers: The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 87.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ A text by film historian Aleksandr Karaganov demonstrates the value film scholarship of the 1970s invested in Party guidance when he mentions the importance of various Party directives in *Sovetskoe kino: problemy i poiski* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1977), 68. Moreover, the 1972 decree and its effect on the Soviet film industry are discussed in Vladimir Baskakov ed. *Sovetskoe Kino: 70-e gody* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1984), 22-23. References to Brezhnev and the Party are numerous in various issues of *Iskusstvo Kino*, of *Soviet Cinema* and of *Kinopanorama*. Quotes from and reference to Brezhnev's speeches frequently feature in Mark Zak, *Kino: lichnost' i lichnoe* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), Vladimir Baskakov, *Ekran i vremia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974) and I. Sepman, ed. *Leningradskii Ekran* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979).

spy-thriller directed by Savva Kulish in 1968.²⁸ Denise Youngblood and Tony Shaw invoke this work in *Cinematic Cold War* as the most interesting film to appear at the time when the Cold War spy genre was on the rise and the Communist ‘Party once again became intensely interested and involved in the minutiae of filmmaking’.²⁹ As this case demonstrates, the involvement of the censors did not always affect the quality of the film. Moreover, what is particularly relevant to my study is that Shlepianov was asked to cut out the character of a rabbi from the script and replace him with a Catholic priest,³⁰ a fact that points to the continued unease over the presence of Jewish characters in Soviet cinema; this is also discussed by the film critic Semen Chertok, who presents other examples of censorship concerning Jewish themes and characters, such as in *Day of Admittance on Personal Matters* (Solomon Shuster, 1974).³¹

Another factor pivotal to the portrayal of the Holocaust is the cinematic memory and commemoration of the war. Since the ‘Stagnation’ witnessed the 25th and the 30th anniversary of the victory, the subject of the war as well as of its effect on contemporary society became particularly prominent in the films of this period. We continue to observe the prominence of flashbacks; however, their function differs from those discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, if the films of the ‘Thaw’ used flashbacks to represent personal histories and memories of individuals, the cinema of the ‘Stagnation’ employs this device to stress the collective need to remember; highlighting the connection between the past and the present those films using flashbacks thereby attempted to make the war relevant to the younger post-war

²⁸ Aleksandr Shlepianov, interview, London, 21 June 2012.

²⁹ Denise Youngblood and Tony Shaw, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2010), 52.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Semen Chertok, *Stop-kadry. Ocherki o sovetskom kino* (London: Overseas Publication Interchange, 1988), 17-20.

generation.³² As such, this technique echoes a wider concern of the state to emphasise the contemporary significance of the war.³³ The evident influx of genres and subgenres during this period – from spy thrillers and detectives stories to family dramas and children adventure films – can be considered as another means for the cinema to integrate the memory of the war into popular culture while simultaneously appealing to younger audiences.

Goskino's focus on entertainment cinema and the appearance of generic variations of the WWII theme lead to the question of the relationship between mainstream cinema and the ideologically controversial subject of the Holocaust. Setting out to renegotiate the existing approaches to the cinema of the 'Stagnation' as well as to its (presumed lack of) treatment of the Holocaust, the following sections bring to light a wide range of mainstream and auteur works.

Section One: The Apparent Erasure of the Holocaust

As previously, my aim is to underline the complexity of the relation between the film texts, the film industry and their context. Therefore, this section discusses one of the possible ways in which the cinema of the 'Stagnation' treated the Holocaust: the erasure of the subject is made apparent in the alteration of the previous generic tropes employed to depict the Holocaust. As such, these works underline a tendency of some films to conform to the mainstream discourse.

Most notably, we can observe the alteration of a familiar trope in Soviet cinema, the aligning of the suffering of Jews with that of commissars and Communists. By contrast, a number of films from the 1970s clearly emphasise the

³² Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 133; Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2007), 170.

³³ Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 133.

distinct plight of commissars and Communists while completely erasing the existence of Jewish victims. For example, in the contemporary family drama *For Your Fate* (Timur Zoloev, 1972), a character states that the Germans' first action was to eliminate the families of the high-ranking commanders and Communists. A contemporary spy thriller, *Tracer Element* (Igor' Gostev, 1972), emphasises the unique fates of commissars and Communists in the Nazi death camps, while a number of WWII children's adventure films like *Bullet Fears the Brave* (Oleg Nikolaevskii, 1970), *Oginski Polonaise* (Lev Golub, 1971) and *The Return of the Violin* (Shamil' Makhmudbekov, 1972) similarly stress the Nazis' specific persecution of the Communists. Equally telling is another fact that the film adaptation of *The Market Woman and the Poet* erases the Holocaust sub-narrative line of its literary source.

While it is in the dialogue of these works that the absence of the Holocaust narrative is most notable, in the popular family drama *Remember Your Name*,³⁴ the erasure is evident in the way it draws upon the established iconography of the camps. The use of flashbacks in this film not only highlights the necessity to remember (signalled in the film's title) but also inscribes the memory of Auschwitz into the realm of the film's Russian protagonists, a mother and a son separated in the camp during the war. *Remember Your Name* includes a variety of representations of Auschwitz, such as fictional reconstruction, original newsreel footage of the liberation, and fictional scenes shot in the museum of the camp, but it ignores the reality of the Jewish genocide by stressing the Slavic origin of the victims and representing their point of view. Thus the film's use of Holocaust iconography demonstrates how the imagery, which contributed to the shaping of the popular memory of the camps, was circumscribed by the particular ideological agendas of its time. The erasure of the

³⁴ 35.7 millions viewers in Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 171.

Jewish presence from Auschwitz in *Remember Your Name*,³⁵ is so notable that Denise Youngblood, who generally bypasses the subject of the Holocaust in her study of the Russian war films, makes an exception in this case, stating that:

[The film] is notable not only for showing life in Auschwitz but also for its silence regarding Auschwitz's main purpose. There are no Jews to be seen [...]. Based on the film alone, one would believe Auschwitz was built as a laboratory for Josef Mengele's medical experiments on cute, blond, Russian children.³⁶

Moreover, the contrast in treatment of the Holocaust between Kolosov's *We Draw Fire on Ourselves* (1964) and *Remember Your Name* invites a consideration of the interrelation between the filmmaker's creative choices and the official history of the war during the 'Stagnation'. This is discussed in the conclusion to this case study, where I also refer to Kolosov's 1982 film *Mother Maria*.

A Case Study: Remember Your Name

Remember Your Name depicts the life of a Russian woman, Zina (again played by Liudmila Kasatkina) who is emotionally and physically scarred by the war. The film introduces the character as a typical positive Soviet worker: she is loved by her colleagues and neighbours, she rises early and is never late for work; however, it also points to her profound sadness by featuring series of long shots of her solitary figure walking down the streets of then-Leningrad to a moving musical score. The setting of her apartment further connotes her lonely existence and a black and white framed photograph of a soldier in her living room suggests that she has lost her husband during the war. Early on in the film, Zina receives a notification of an arranged phone

³⁵ Marek Haltof briefly cites this film in relation to the general silencing of the Holocaust during the period of harsh censorship in Poland in Marek Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 119.

³⁶ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 171.

call from Gdansk, and immediately calls a friend to share the news. From their conversation it becomes clear that the woman's past is related to Poland and that this phone call is of great importance to her. As she finishes the conversation the film presents the first, conventional, flashback from her point of view, which begins to expose the events related to the phone call: when the character puts down the phone, the camera zooms in on her face, thus suggesting her visual agency in the sequence, until the image becomes blurred. A sound-bridge takes us into the next sequence where we are introduced to the younger heroine (played by the same actress) in a maternity ward. Through the conversation between the characters we learn that she has given birth to a son from her pilot-husband. However, the blissful morning is suddenly interrupted by the news of the war and the following scene depicts how the Nazis march the women with their newborn babies off to an unknown destination.

The next flashback occurs during the conversation between Zina and her friend; however, this time the film does not rely on the conventional device of a zoom in and out, but, through the use of sound and editing, presents what has been previously identified as a modernist flashback. As the women begin to converse an off-screen female voice, shouting a command in German, abruptly enters the soundtrack and prompts the sudden appearance of a new shot. A close-up of an old malnourished woman in a striped uniform licking a tin bowl suggests the transition into the camp. When Nazi officers arrive in the barracks, all the women line up for an inspection. As they stand in the foreground of the shot the camera clearly reveals red triangles on their uniforms, thus allowing us to identify these women as political prisoners and simultaneously pointing to the film's exclusion of the Jewish inmates. The following section of the scene depicts the painful separation of mothers from their children. As her little son gets torn away from the petrified protagonist, the

sequence switches to a freeze-frame, which is followed by a close-up of a burning fire. Such expressive use of film form at once symbolises Zina's angst and suggests the possibility of her son perishing in the crematorium. Continuing the symbolic association the sequence proceeds with a long shot of a smoking chimney, filling the entire frame with dark smoke. Having first appeared as a symbol of the Nazi annihilation industry in the newsreel of the liberated Majdanek, the chimney then featured in several films – *Fate of a Man*, *Ordinary Fascism*, *The Commissar* – gradually becoming, as I have argued elsewhere in the thesis, one of the key symbols of the Holocaust. However, this particular sequence in *Remember Your Name* establishes an association between the chimney and the story of the Russian heroine, and in doing so contributes to the process of remodelling the Holocaust as a specifically Slavic story that takes place in the film.

The third, conventional, flashback from Zina's perspective occurs before the much-anticipated phone call from Gdansk and reveals how she found traces of her lost son. Years after the war, Zina, who now works at a TV factory, comes across a TV programme dedicated to the children of Auschwitz where she spots her own son among the liberated victims. Thus, in a self-reflexive manner, the film creates an encounter between the woman and a screen-image of her little boy in Auschwitz. The theme of children's victimhood, which is a prominent motif in Soviet cinema and one that is underlined in my thesis, is also essential in *Remember Your Name*. The film represents the character of Zina's son, Gennadii, as the ultimate symbol of wartime suffering. In this sequence, it employs the footage of Auschwitz children baring their tattooed arms and inserts a fictional image of the child actor into this now-iconic symbol of the Holocaust. Making the boy a focal point, the film prompts audience identification with the Russian character (and his mother) thereby turning the original

image of Jewish children into a symbol of Russian suffering. The little boy's martyrdom is potently emphasised in a long shot, where a wall of newly manufactured TV sets projects his face from the ultimate site of the trauma to the distressed viewer – his mother.



Fig. 13: Manipulation of archival footage to highlight Russian victimhood.

Thus the insertion of the fictional image of the child actor into the *Auschwitz* newsreel demonstrates another means of ideological, and in this case formal, manipulation of the footage to cater for the Slavic agenda of the film. The encounter with the documentary film inspires Zina's desire to find the origin of the footage and thus, years later, leads her to the discovery of her lost son in Poland.

Remember Your Name can be divided into two parts, each representing the memory of the mother and the son, respectively. After the phone conversation with the now-adult Polish son, while Zina herself cannot cross the border to reach him, the camera travels to the other side of the phone line. From this point on the film presents Gennadii's memory of the events after the separation from his mother in the camp.

The first flashback from his perspective takes the viewer into a Polish orphanage in the immediate post-war period. There the little boy gradually develops an affectionate relationship with the nanny (his future foster-mother) who, at one point, inquires about his origin. This dialogue presents the only instance where the film mentions Jewish victims, yet it conventionally denies the specificity of their genocide.

Responding to the nanny's question, the child can only identify himself with Auschwitz, saying: 'I am from the camp'. After a pause the boy adds: 'But I am not a Jew'. When the woman suggests that he might be Polish or Russian, the boy responds: 'Poles and Russians were also sent to the gas chambers. I must be French in that case.' This curious phrase serves a dual purpose in relation to (the absence of) the Jewish theme in the film: it at once inscribes the previously obliterated fact of Jewish annihilation in Auschwitz yet simultaneously denies its specificity by suggesting that Poles and Russians, as opposed to the French, equally perished in the gas chambers.

The camp itself appears in the film for the last time when the narrative travels forward in time. Remaining in the realm of Gennadii's memory, the section of the film depicts the museum of Auschwitz that the now grown-up character visits. The film's recurring manner of modelling the liberation footage for a Slavic narrative is also evident in the sequence where Gennadii watches the original *Auschwitz* newsreels in the screening room of the museum. This scene employs editing in such a way as to create an intimate emotional connection between Gennadii and the archival document. Using a shot-reverse shot editing combination, the film reveals the newsreel from Gennadii's perspective and in doing so affirms his agency over the image of the camp. Thus the footage revealing the gas chamber peephole, Zyklon B cans, destroyed ovens and piles of hair is intercut with reaction shots of the distressed man in the auditorium.



Fig. 13.1: The editing in the scene accentuates a Slavic perspective on the Holocaust.

It is here in Auschwitz that he learns about Zina's search for him, and so the camp that once separated mother and son now enables their reunion. The film concludes by propagating the convention of Soviet-Polish camaraderie, as it depicts Gennadii's affection and gratitude to both his (Polish and Soviet) 'mothers' and hence both his motherlands.

The change of approach to the subject of the Holocaust in Kolosov's works evident in the transition from *We Draw Fire on Ourselves* to *Remember Your Name* is further highlighted in *Mother Maria* (1982); a film based on the true story of a Russian émigré nun, who saved French Jews during the occupation of Paris and perished in a gas chamber at Ravensbrück.³⁷ Also starring Kasatkina, this film completely elides the history of Jewish suffering. While *Remember Your Name*'s origin in a true story of a Russian camp survivor can be perceived as one of the reasons for the absence of Jewish victims, *Mother Maria* clearly distorts facts from the life of the nun by replacing the French Jews, saved by Maria, with fictional Russian émigré resistance fighters. The striking elision of the Jewish narratives from

³⁷ Mother Maria, or Elizaveta Kuzmina-Karavaeva, a Russian poetess and social activist, emigrated to France after the Russian Civil War. She was named The Righteous Among Nations by Yad Vashem in 1985.

both *Remember Your Name* and *Mother Maria* went tellingly unnoticed in the Soviet film press and literature. Receiving wide distribution in the Soviet Union and abroad, both films were covered in numerous Soviet and international sources. Writing about *Remember Your Name* domestic commentators tended either to focus on the moving mother-son relationship,³⁸ or to praise the theme of Soviet-Polish solidarity.³⁹ By contrast, the Western reviewer of *Mother Maria*, which was shown in Venice and Montreal (1983), saw the absence of Jewish characters as one of the key signs of the film's affinity with 'party polemics'.⁴⁰

Kolosov's case then interestingly highlights several ideas. It points to the difference in reception of cinematic depictions of the Holocaust in the USSR and in the West. Moreover, it highlights how certain films of the period clearly distorted historical facts so as to shape the story of WWII according to the official discourse on wartime victimhood and heroism. As such these works also underline the fluctuating nature of the filmmaker's artistic approach to the same subject during different historical periods.

The latter idea can be illustrated with an example of another film and the creative interests of its director – *They Were Actors* (Georgii Natanson, 1981). Moreover, like *Remember Your Name*, this work misuses the archival imagery of the Holocaust to represent the suffering of the Slavic people. *They Were Actors* is a WWII drama, based on real events concerning an underground resistance movement started by a Simferopol theatre. Following the existing tendency to juxtapose past and present through the use of flashbacks, it depicts the wartime events in parallel with the

³⁸ Elena Blinova, 'Pomni imia svoe,' *Prizyv*, 21 March 1975; 'Pomni imia svoe,' *Vechernii Leningrad*, 13 March 1975; Ol'ga Kuchkina, 'Chtoby zhila pravda,' *Iskusstvo kino* 5 (1975): 127-130; Mark Tatarinov, 'Two Heroic Mothers,' *Soviet Film* 6 (1975): 7-8; Wojciech Wierzewski, 'Remember your name,' 19-20.

³⁹ Tsimailo, 'Shoulder to Shoulder,' 28; Iurii Vorontsov and Igor Rachuk, *The Phenomenon of the Soviet Cinema* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980) 304.

⁴⁰ *Variety*, 14 September 1983, 20.

post-war trial of local collaborators. The film employs the archival imagery of wartime atrocities extra-diegetically; inserted into the scenes in the courtroom, this archival footage acts as evidence of the crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators in Simferopol. As the film uses the archival material figuratively rather than for its historical value, it distorts the original meaning of the photographs that appear in this sequence, including the two depicting the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto.



Fig.14: Territorial and ethnic displacement of the archival material.

As such, *They Were Actors*, similarly to *Remember Your Name*, exemplifies the contribution of Soviet cinema to the formation of an alternative memory of the Jewish suffering, where the images of the Holocaust are represented as atrocities against Soviet citizens.

Moreover, such a displacement of the original meaning once again brings up the question of the epistemological factors as well as of the director's creative choices. My interview with Georgii Natanson, the 92-year-old filmmaker, brought up the fact that he was never interested in depicting the Holocaust.⁴¹ Despite acknowledging the importance of my research and recalling that some of his family fell victims to the

⁴¹ Georgii Natanson, e-mail interview, 4 October 2012.

Jewish genocide, he stressed that *They Were Actors* was based on real events of the Russian resistance and explained his artistic conviction to stay as much as possible true to the facts as well as to commemorate the great heroism and stoicism of the Russian people. Natanson also explained that he was not aware of the original meaning of the archival photographs depicting the Warsaw ghetto at the time of making *They Were Actors*. While this ethnically Jewish filmmaker bypassed the history of the Holocaust in his 1981 film, today he is developing a script, *I Ran Off to the Front*. Dedicated to the Jewish wartime heroism, it is based on the life of Lena Varshavskaia, a 16-year old Jewish member of the Tallinn resistance.⁴²

Section Two: Verbal and Visual References to the Holocaust

Section One of this chapter presented examples which highlighted the influence of mainstream rhetoric on the films' erasure of Jewish characters and references to the Holocaust. However, cinema's compliance with and propagation of the official memory of the war is only one of the types of relationship between films and their context that existed during the 'Stagnation'. This section discusses another mode of this relationship. While excluding Jewish characters, films studied here nonetheless breach 'the wall of silence' by presenting both overt and subtle verbal and visual references to the Holocaust. The selected corpus is comprised of spy thrillers: *Shield and Sword* (Vladimir Basov, 1967-8, four parts, broadcast between 19 August 1968 and 3 September 1968), *Omega Option* (Antonis Voiazos, 1975, five parts, broadcast between 15 September 1975 and 6 November 1975) and *Earth, on Demand* (Veniamin Dorman, 1972) – of partisan film: *No Way Back* (Grigorii Lipshits, 1970)

⁴² Ibid.

– and of war dramas: *Dawns Are Quiet Here* (Stanislav Rostotskii, 1972) and *It Was in May* (Marlen Khutsiev, 1970). It thus demonstrates the range of genres and sub-genres through which the cinema of the ‘Stagnation’ embraced the subject of the Holocaust.

Spy Thrillers

While spy thrillers re-emerged in the late Stalinist period with the beginning of the Cold War,⁴³ their appearance as a sub-genre within WWII films became most noticeable from the late 1960s onwards. This development was discussed by contemporary critics who commented on the emergence of a new, psychologically complex Soviet spy hero.⁴⁴ They related the appearance of a new wave of spy films to the 50th jubilee of the Soviet state security services in 1967.⁴⁵ Moreover, considering that in the 1970s state security services were closely involved in film censorship, it is likely that this genre in particular was subjected to close scrutiny.⁴⁶ More recent film scholarship equally acknowledges the popularity of spy TV films and series, perceiving it as particularly common in the period of the ‘Stagnation’.⁴⁷ However, what is absent from both Soviet and recent Western commentary is the appreciation of spy films in relation to the portrayals of the Jewish genocide.

⁴³ Maiia Turkovskaia ‘Soviet films of the Cold War,’ in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, ed. Richard Taylor and Derek Spring (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 131-142.

⁴⁴ Aleksandr Karaganov, ‘Geroika podviga, kharakter voiny,’ *Iskusstvo kino* 6 (1969): 53; Karaganov ‘Povest’ o chekiste,’ *Iskusstvo kino* 3 (1969): 70-7.

⁴⁵ Vsevolod Revich, ‘Soratniki Zorge,’ in *Ekran 1968-1969*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970), 139.

⁴⁶ The involvement of the state security services in the ideological control of the film industry is evident from numerous documents discussed in Valerii Golovskoi, *Is There Censorship in the Soviet Union? Methodological Problems of Studying Soviet Censorship* (Washington, DC: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, 1985), 20-21.

⁴⁷ Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Library of Congress, 2009), 149-150.

The highly popular four-part TV mini-series *Shield and Sword*,⁴⁸ telling the story of the Soviet spy Aleksandr Belov (alias Johan Weiss) in Nazi Germany, offers the first example of a popular TV series of the ‘Stagnation’ addressing the history of the Holocaust. This is realised through dialogue and mise-en-scène. The first verbal reference appears in Episode One, where the protagonist shares a drink with his recently demoted SS ‘colleague’. As the Nazi gets drunk he expresses his resentment towards Jews, saying that he can take out his career-related frustration on these ‘easy targets’. While this statement might appear somewhat vague, it nonetheless points to the anti-Semitic outlook of the SS, and the following episode in the series demonstrates how such ideology was naturalised in the popular sphere. Set in a cabaret, the scene depicts a group of spectators throwing eggs at a Charlie Chaplin impersonator and shouting: *Jude!* And the décor visually signals the role of popular entertainment in disseminating anti-Semitic ideology through a poster of *Jud Süß* (Veit Harlan, 1940).⁴⁹



Fig. 15: Anti-Semitic ideology in popular culture of the Third Reich.

⁴⁸ The film attracted the highest number of viewers and was voted best film of 1968 by critics and audiences in Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia comp., *Ekran 1968-1969* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970), 73; *Sovetskii ekran* 10 (1969): 2-3; *Iskusstvo kino* 6 (1968): 10.

⁴⁹ Susan Tegel discusses how this film incorporates entertainment with anti-Semitic propaganda in ‘Veit Harlan’s *Jud Süß*,’ in *Holocaust and the Moving Image*, ed. Toby Haggith and Joanna Mary Newman (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 76-84.

The film then makes a transition from depicting a ‘light’ form of anti-Semitic propaganda to portraying its consequences in a scene set in a death camp: the annihilation of a train-loads of people in a gas chamber is mentioned in the dialogue while black smoke forms part of the mise-en-scène. The symbolic function of the black smoke has been discussed in relation to several Soviet films in this thesis. Moreover, together with depictions of the Nazi anti-Semitic ideology in the earlier episodes of the TV series, this particular element of the setting comes forward as an emblem of the Jewish genocide.

If *Shield and Sword* offers a relatively covert portrayal of the Holocaust, *Omega Option* includes an overt, albeit brief, verbal reference: as a Nazi intelligence officer takes over an apartment to set up new headquarters, his assistant informs him that the previous owner was a Jew who was deported to a death camp. *Earth, on Demand* similarly offers a brief yet specific evocation of Nazi anti-Semitic policies, depicting how the protagonist is reminded not to sit on a bench designated for Jews. However, while acknowledging the particularity of Jewish victimhood, the film also conforms to mainstream rhetoric by eliding the fact of Jewish heroism. Based on Evgenii Vorob’ev’s documentary novel about a Soviet-Jewish spy, Lev Manevich, the film however completely obscures the protagonist’s ethnicity. It never uses his real Jewish-sounding name, and only features his French-sounding alias, Etienne. Moreover, Oleg Strizhenov, a popular, ethnically Russian, actor plays the character.

Thus while some mainstream films managed to address the fact of Jewish victimhood, representations of Jewish heroism in the cinema of the ‘Stagnation’ remained rare. An important exception is *Dawns Are Quiet Here*, a hugely popular

WWII drama. Directed by a state-favoured and popular filmmaker, Stanislav Rostotskii, this film subverts the generic as well as the ideological canons governing the depiction of the war by figuring Jewish heroism, victimhood and subjectivity. For these reasons I offer a close study of this film below.

A Case Study: Dawns Are Quiet Here

Denise Youngblood observes that, in the early 1970s, the conventional male-led narratives of the war began to wear out, and it is therefore not surprising that *Dawns Are Quiet Here*, one of the most popular films of this period, is dedicated to the female war effort.⁵⁰ Youngblood's insightful analysis, however, overlooks the importance of the fact that one of the five female protagonists, Sonia Gurvich, is clearly identified as Jewish. Chernenko's text acknowledges Sonia's ethnicity,⁵¹ but it does not relate it to the dominant (cinematic) rhetoric of war heroism in the 1970s and it overlooks the film's reference to the Holocaust. The lack of attention to the film's treatment of the Holocaust also characterises the approach of Soviet critics, who tended to focus on the thematic juxtaposition of femininity (vitality) and war (death) and to value the film's attempt to make the history of the war relevant for the post-war generation.⁵² The latter observation is of particular significance here as, in complying

⁵⁰ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 164. However, Youngblood does not see the film as part of a new group of female-led films as does Liudmila Belova in 'No Matter How Many Years Pass,' *Soviet Film* 3 (1975): 3-5. Other films include *Girl from Cell Number 25* (David Rundeli, 1972), *About Those Whom I Remember and Love* (Natal'ia Troshchenko, Anatolii Vekhot'ko, 1973) and *Night Witches in the Sky* (Evgenii Zhigulenko, 1981).

⁵¹ Cherneko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 272.

⁵² Karaganov, *Sovetskoe kino*, 154; Baskakov, *Sovetskoe Kino*, 65; Lev Anninskii, 'Ikh krov'iu,' *Iskusstvo kino* 1 (1973) 23-31; Evgenii Gromov, 'The Dawns Are Quiet Here,' *Soviet Film* 1 (1973): 11-15. A review in a Polish newspaper *Trybuna ludu* also accentuates the powerful contrast between femininity and the brutality of war, reprinted in *Soviet Film* 11 (1974): 33. Reviews from *Neues Deutschland*, *Neue Zeit* and *Variety* similarly highlight the theme of femininity, reprinted in *Soviet Film* 12 (1973), 33.

with the official project of the state, the film in fact managed to convey the controversial history of Jewish heroism and suffering.

Dawns Are Quiet Here is an adaptation of a key work of war literature – Boris Vasil’ev’s eponymous story, which itself experienced a successful reception when it was first published in the journal *Iunost’* in 1969, and was then adapted for the stage by Iurii Liubimov at the Taganka theatre in 1971.⁵³ Stanislav Rostotskii wrote the script together with Vasil’ev, and the film was released in 1972 to huge success both nationally (it was viewed by 130 million people) and internationally.⁵⁴ Out of 250 feature films released in 1972-1973, *Dawns Are Quiet Here* was voted best film according to an audience poll undertaken by the leading film journal *Sovetskii ekran*.⁵⁵

The film’s fulfilling of the mainstream agenda to sustain the topicality of WWII is evident in its narrative and formal structure, as the main (black-and-white) wartime story is framed by (colour) episodes set in the present, featuring characters from a post-war generation. After a present-day sequence depicting a young woman hiking through the Karelian landscape, the film travels back to 1942 to depict the lives of Sergeant Fedot Vaskov and his female division, stationed in the same area as that pictured in the prologue. In addition to Vaskov, the film focuses predominantly on five characters: a simple village girl, Liza, the beautiful and rebellious daughter of a Red Army general, Zhenia, a Moscow university student, Sonia, a timid orphan, Galia, and a young mother and widow, Rita. While secretly visiting her child in a nearby

⁵³ Vladimir Sokolov, ‘Ved’ eto ne prosto ...,’ in *Ekran 1972-1973*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), 42-45. The film was awarded a special prize at XXXIII Venice Film Festival, and Italian newspapers *Tempo*, *L’Unita* and *Il Mattino* praised the depiction of the female heroism and appreciated the film as a hymn to humanity, reprinted in *Soviet Film* 5 (1973): 11. The film was nominated for a ‘Best Foreign Film’ Oscar in 1972.

⁵⁴ Filipp Ermash, ‘Kino – neot’emlemaia chast’ khudozhestvennoi kul’tury,’ in *Ekran 1977-1978*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), 22.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

village, Rita spots two German soldiers in the woods, and the five women together with Fedot set out on a scouting mission. There they unexpectedly learn that there are not two soldiers but an entire German division operating in the area. Heading back to get help, Galia drowns in a swamp and the group are left cut off in the woods. As they enter into a struggle with the enemy, the women die one by one, and the film grants individuality to each character by depicting their deaths in separate scenes. Fedot survives the struggle to capture the remaining Nazi soldiers. The film closes in the diegetic present depicting an aged Fedot, Rita's grown-up son and a young woman from the prologue by the memorial plaque on the site of the women's deaths.

Similarly to Rostotskii's *May Stars* (studied in Chapter 2), *Dawns Are Quiet Here* exhibits an expressive approach to film form and structure by employing three temporal planes to depict the story of the five women at war. Apart from the present-day segments and the main wartime narrative, the film introduces a third, subjective, dimension of the women's memories within the larger wartime segment. The two are distinguished formally, as the war period is filmed in black and white naturalistic style, while the memory sequences are characterised by bright colours, artificial-looking sets and non-diegetic music and sound effects. The expressive use of film form in the 'memory' sections enables the film not only to relate the pre-diegetic stories of each character, highlighting the contrast between the peaceful lives and the harsh wartime, but also to convey the emotional quality of each of the women's memories.

Considering the lack of Jewish subjectivity in Soviet films studied so far, *Dawns Are Quiet Here* challenges this convention by figuring Sonia's memory of her pre-war romance in the form of a flashback. Filmed in both the artificial-looking sets and outdoor locations, the sequence ends with the beginning of the war, depicting the lovers' farewell. The fact that the memory sequence is framed by two close-ups of

Sonia's eyes thus affirms her viewing agency in this episode. Not only does the film exhibit an atypical approach to the notion of Jewish subjectivity and heroism, its representation of the Holocaust also subverts the official canon by emphasising the specificity of Jewish destinies in the occupied territories. Taking place in the first part of the film, the scene depicts a conversation between Sonia and Fedot as they embark on their journey through the woods. The woman tells him that the war caught her in Moscow where she was conducting her studies while her parents remained in Minsk and have not communicated with her since the invasion. Worried, Fedot stops and enquires: 'Are your parents of Jewish nationality?' to which Sonia replies: 'Naturally!' As they resume their march, the man comments, as if to himself: 'Naturally... I would not have asked if they were in Moscow.' Suddenly Sonia turns back to face Fedot (and the audience) and asks with distress: 'Perhaps, they had time to escape?' The man pauses, then sighs deeply and curses under his breath; not answering Sonia's question he starts to walk away. Although brief, this dialogue highlights some important facts about the Holocaust suggesting that Jews in the occupied territories (such as Minsk) suffered a dramatically different fate from those in unoccupied zones (such as Moscow), and that non-Jewish Soviet citizens experienced an altogether different treatment by the Nazis.

Sonia's own death at the hands of the German soldiers, however, does not differ from those suffered by her non-Jewish comrades; enduring the war in a context different from her parents', the young woman dies as a Soviet soldier defending her motherland, rather than as a victim of the Jewish genocide. The presence and portrayal of the Jewish character demonstrates that this popular film, whose director

was a notoriously privileged state favourite,⁵⁶ is remarkable for its challenge of the three fundamental conventions in the representation of Jews and the Holocaust – the lack of a Jewish subjectivity, the omission of the specificity of Jewish suffering, and the undermining of the Jewish role in the Soviet war effort.

An interesting comparison may be drawn between *Dawns Are Quiet Here* and another film, *No Way Back* (Grigorii Lipshits, 1970). While it similarly features the character of a Jewish soldier (whose ethnicity is implied through his name, Solomon Birkovich, and the casting of a popular Soviet-Jewish actor, Lev Lemke), it nevertheless offers a more conventional interpretation of Jewish heroism and victimhood. The film presents Birkovich as one of several secondary characters and its depiction of the Jewish genocide follows the convention of uniting the victims: sent on a scouring mission to his native village, Birkovich discovers that the entire population has been wiped out, including his (presumably Jewish) father-in-law. Lamenting the death of his local community, the character reminisces about the multi-cultural unity of Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Germans and Jews that this village once enjoyed. The specificity of the Jewish suffering downplayed in this scene is undermined even further in another part of the film where the character of a cowardly partisan, who considers surrendering, comforts himself with the fact that the Germans only kill commanders and Communists.

The case study of *Dawns Are Quiet Here* demonstrated that a popular film by a state-favoured director could offer unconventional treatment of ideologically problematic subjects. I now turn to *It Was in May* to examine how this commonly accepted auteur film addresses the Holocaust. In terms of film genre *It Was in May* clearly challenges mainstream conventions by adopting a meditative rather than an

⁵⁶ His privileged position within the industry is depicted by Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 59, 62.

action-based approach to the depiction of the Soviet soldiers' sojourn at a German household in the immediate aftermath of the war. The blissful atmosphere of a newly obtained peace, established at the beginning of the film, changes dramatically when the soldiers accidentally wander at night into the site of a former death camp. This nocturnal experience, as well as their subsequent encounter with two death camp survivors, shakes the soldiers' belief system. It is through their journey from the blissful joy brought on by the end of the war to the realisation of its legacies that the film self-reflexively narrativises the process of encountering, remembering and commemorating the atrocities. It thus engages with the process of witnessing, testimony and visual record, which are generally perceived as core elements of the Holocaust discourse.

Thematically the film can be divided into three parts: the blissful beginning of peacetime; the encounter with the death camp and its effect on the soldiers; and the documentary epilogue comprised of archival photographs of Nazi atrocities and documentary footage of their commemoration in the diegetic present. The film's elision of the ethnic specificity of the annihilation industry, is, however, dictated not by ideological or epistemological limitations but rather by the logic of the narrative; representing the soldiers' point of view, the film thus relates their (rather than its own) lack of awareness of the very existence of the camps.⁵⁷ Thus the theme of the Holocaust emerges gradually throughout the film: from the remnants of the annihilation industry (the abandoned death camp), to witness testimonies, to archival images of Jewish suffering and documentary footage of the camp's museum.

Aesthetically, the film can be appreciated as belonging, in part, to the *cinéma vérité* tradition. The grainy black and white film stock, hand-held camera, natural

⁵⁷ Lev Rybak, however, considers such a narrative premise unrealistic in 'Novyi fil'm Marlina Khutsieva,' *Iskusstvo Kino* 9 (1970), 32-44.

lighting, location shooting and often improvised dialogues imbue the film with documentary-like qualities, while the lyrical approach to the documentary material in the epilogue endows *It Was in May* with poetic sensibility, for which this work was praised at the time.⁵⁸ Moreover, such formal and aesthetic qualities allow comparison to *Ordinary Fascism*, as well as underlining the latter's influential status in the Soviet cinematic context.⁵⁹ An overview of the Soviet press testifies to the prevailing tendency of critics to praise the film's condemnation of Nazism while in no way acknowledging the film's treatment of the Holocaust. The influence on the film industry of the 25th anniversary of the war's end is evident in the way *Iskusstvo Kino* related the then-upcoming film to the tradition of victory commemoration, while upon its release the film was praised as one of the best works of the WWII genre.⁶⁰ While the lack of focus on the film's portrayal of the Holocaust at the time can be related to the prevalence of the official war discourse in the Soviet press, surprisingly, more recent scholarship demonstrates an equal lack of awareness of this aspect of the film and analysis of the film itself is quite rare. Youngblood is the only contemporary scholar of Russian cinema to acknowledge the film's covert treatment of the subject, explaining that Khutsiev, unable to openly portray the Holocaust, depicts it silently through the documentary epilogue.⁶¹ However, since she excludes the death camp scene and the survivors' testimonies from her brief account, I offer a more comprehensive reading of the film.

The Soviet film critic Lev Rybak rightly observes that *It Was in May* immerses the viewer into an atmosphere of uneventfulness from the beginning,

⁵⁸ Karaganov, *Sovetskoe kino*, 150.

⁵⁹ Valerii Fomin, 'Posleslovie k pobede,' in *Ekran 1970-1971*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1972), 30.

⁶⁰ 'Ekrannye vesti', *Iskusstvo Kino* 2 (1970): 136; Fomin, *Ekran 1970-1971*, 27.

⁶¹ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 173.

strengthening the shocking effect of the scene in the death camp.⁶² After a long feast to celebrate victory, a group of soldiers embarks on a nocturnal journey through the countryside. An upbeat military waltz, accompanying the long take of the car driving along the road, ends abruptly once the headlights of the car catch a section of a barbed wire fence. As the car reverses, the headlights travel across a series of barbed wire fences, gradually revealing this setting to be a camp. Stunned, the soldiers get out of the car and begin exploring the newly found location. The sense of suspense and disorientation is powerfully conveyed through the use of lighting: the sequence inside a barrack block is lit by a single spotlight, leaving the rest of the frame obscure. The absence of any music or dialogue focuses the viewers' attention on the image, as the handheld camera captures in close-ups the wooden bunk beds, straw mattresses and remnants of striped uniforms. Unwittingly, the soldiers perform the journey of the camp victims from the barrack block, through the gas chamber to the ovens, and the camera reveals the elements of the annihilation industry that have become iconic: the barbed wire fence and a watchtower, the gas chamber, cans of Zyklon B, and the empty ovens.



Fig. 16: The soldiers discover empty ovens in a death camp.

⁶²

Rybak, 'Novyi fil'm Marlena Khutsieva,' 36.

The film highlights the unprecedented quality of the site through the contrast between the image and the dialogue as the soldiers mistake the gas chamber for a bomb shelter and the crematorium for a boiler room. While Rybak perceives this approach as naïve,⁶³ it can be read instead as a self-reflexive point of departure for the development of the film's theme of knowledge, memory and commemoration.

The theme receives further treatment when the soldiers encounter two camp survivors whose testimonies endow their inexplicable nocturnal experience with meaning. While the first survivor bypasses the fact of ethnic persecution in his emotionally-charged account of the annihilation procedures, the second, more sober intellectual reflection on the nature of the Nazi regime, connects the fact of anti-Semitism to the very existence of the camp, stating that the camps began when Jews were no longer allowed to take the same trains as the Germans.

The understanding of causal relations between historical events, signalled in the survivor's speech, is furthered in the epilogue where the film, similarly to *Ordinary Fascism*, employs the principle of associative montage to juxtapose archival images of the atrocities with the present-day footage. Moreover, it furthers the formal link with the original wartime footage of the liberated camps by elaborating on the existing visual motifs and filming techniques.

The epilogue opens with the contemporary footage of a city street, as crowds rush past the camera. As the lyrical musical score builds up the emotional quality of the scene, suddenly a montage of archival photographs appears on the image track. Testifying to the formation of collective memory and cinematic intertextuality, the sequence re-introduces images of the atrocities previously figured in *Ordinary*

⁶³ Ibid., 41.

Fascism: the execution of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto and the Jewish boy with raised arms from Jürgen Stroop's report (1943) as well as a group of Jewish women before an execution in Mizosc in Ukraine, October 1942. The iconography of the camp returns into the film prologue, which features shots of the ovens and the chimney. The film ends with a close-up of a boy on a contemporary street; this counterpart to the iconic child from the Warsaw ghetto thus highlights the interrelation between past and present.

Section Three: Jewish Victims on Screen

This final section of the chapter looks at eight films featuring Jewish characters: *The Girl from Cell Number 25*, *Gold* (Damir Viatic-Berezhnykh, 1969), *I Will Wait for You* (Iakov Segel', 1982), *Sons of the Fatherland* (Latif Faiziev, 1968), *Deer Hunting* (Iurii Boretskii, 1981), *Curfew* (Natal'ia Troshchenko, 1981), *Five Brave Ones* (Leonid Martyniuk, 1970), and *The Ascent*. It sets out to analyse the manner of their portrayal on screen and whether these characters enable more overt, ethnically-specific renderings of the Holocaust.

Generally speaking, these films tend to imply rather than to articulate the Jewish ethnicity of their characters. Relying on existing representational conventions of the Soviet cinema, they typecast Jewish (or Jewish-looking) actors, rely on Jewish-sounding names and occasionally employ overt verbal identification as well as visual markers such as the Star of David. It is through these signifiers of the characters' origins that the films convey the narrative of the Holocaust. Thus *The Girl from Cell Number 25*, which tells the story of a Georgian partisan, Zoia Rukhadze, opens with a scene where the heroine, together with her comrade, witnesses a group of people

being hurried into a truck and driven off by the Nazis. Representing the viewing position of the protagonist, the sequence features a close-up of a young woman on the truck, as Zoia pronounces off-screen: 'Look, this is my school mate, Rima Fischer!' Rima's fate remains unknown in the film; however, her clearly Jewish-sounding name denotes this scene as a depiction of Nazi anti-Semitic persecution.

While the next film *Gold* features an equally brief scene, it goes further by clearly identifying the Jewish identity of the victim as a reason for his capture. The character of a Jewish doctor briefly appears in a scene related from the perspective of a Russian protagonist, a young secretary at a local bank. Seeing a group of Nazis forcing a man in a white surgical coat out of a building, the woman runs up to the officer and tries to explain that the captive is an established Russian doctor. However, the Nazi dismisses her plea by saying 'Das ist ein Jude' ('This is a Jew') and takes the doctor away.

The next film in this group, *I Will Wait for You*, not only features a more developed Jewish character, but in doing so also offers the first representation of a Holocaust survivor in the cinema of the 'Stagnation'. On the one hand, the character of Arkadii Lazarevich, played by the popular Soviet-Jewish actor Zinovii Gerdt, is granted agency in the film through dialogue as well as the equal screen space and time that he shares with the Russian protagonists; on the other hand, however, he is denied authorship of the memory of the Holocaust, as it is his Russian granddaughter who narrates his story of survival. Contrary to Chernenko's understanding,⁶⁴ the film does not produce an overt representation but rather implies the history of the Holocaust through the Jewish origin of the character (his Jewish-sounding name and the casting of a popular Jewish actor) and the granddaughter's recollection of his fate. As the girl

⁶⁴ Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 269-270.

dances with a young soldier – a visitor to their house, which used to belong to his family before the war – she tells him that Arkadii Lazarevich is not her real grandfather, but a homeless man her mother found at a Moscow train station. She relates his story: ‘When Nazis came they shot *them* all and buried *them*. But Arkadii Lazarevich managed to escape.’ Although during this scene the camera zooms in on Arkadii Lazarevich’s pensive face, it is the Russian character that authors his experience of the Holocaust.⁶⁵

This tendency to narrate the Holocaust story from the perspective of the non-Jewish characters is also evident in *Sons of the Fatherland*. While presenting a detailed reconstruction of the annihilation of Jews in a death camp, however, the film focuses on and stresses the tragic fate of the Soviet Uzbeks at the hands of the Nazis. The somewhat confusing film structure and storyline concerns the search of a Russian woman, Elena, in the diegetic present for her Uzbek husband, Iskander Salimov, who has perished in a Nazi death camp during the war. Comprised of multiple flashbacks from the perspective of several characters, the film travels back to the war years to offer alternative visions of the past; in doing so it gradually uncovers the ‘truth’ about Iskander. The film also features the character of a Jewish inmate, Mark Geltz, who is mistaken for Iskander for the majority of the story. While this narrative premise could have allowed the identification of a Jewish perspective in the film, it is later undermined by a new narrative twist revealing that Geltz was actually an ethnic German, mistaken for a Jew. Thus the scene of the mass annihilation of an anonymous group of Jews, observed by Iskander and Geltz, is narrated from the perspective of the non-Jewish characters.

⁶⁵ Chernenko wrongly states that Arkadii Lazarevich recollects this, in *ibid*.

Opening with the arrival of the trainload to the camp, *Sons of the Fatherland* clearly denotes the Jewish origin of the victims through a low-angle shot of people cramped inside a train car with Star of David badges on their clothes. The torment of the selection process is conveyed through fast-paced editing and alternating camera angles: as the soldiers push the people out of the wagon, the screaming, petrified crowd is photographed from both high and low angles. These images are intercut with close-ups of barking German shepherd dogs and reaction shots of Iskander and Geltz who observe the procedure from behind the barbed wire fence. Like *Fate of a Man* the film uses shot composition and movement within the frame to visualise the different fates of the two groups of people. As the Jews are marched along a path, they are separated from the rest of the (concentration) camp by a series of barbed wire fences. Craning up into a wide establishing shot, the camera reveals a smoking chimney in the background, which once again acts as a silent symbol of the Final Solution and implies the exterminatory nature of the procedure depicted on screen.



Fig. 17: Recurring iconography of a death camp.

The film refrains from depicting the moment of death inside the gas chamber, and instead implies annihilation through editing with a combination of three shots: a group of women undressing, an establishing shot of the chimney, and a long shot of the

exterior of the gas chamber with the smoking chimney in the background and Geltz picking up the clothes of the now dead Jews.



Fig. 17.1: Editing suggests death in a gas chamber.

The overt acknowledgement of the Jews' particularly tragic fates in the camps can be explained by the film's literary inspiration – the work of a famous Soviet-Uzbek poet Gafur Guliam, who condemned Nazi racial policies in his wartime poem 'I am a Jew' (1941).⁶⁶ However, at the same time the focus on the exceptionally tragic position of the Jews in the scene of extermination is overshadowed by the internationalist ethos of Guliam's poem (the author proclaims that the blood of all races flows in his veins), which is figured in the film's focus on the camaraderie between ethnically diverse characters as well as through the love story of Elena and Iskander. The film erases the Jewish perspective from the narrative by revealing Geltz's German origin, and represents the scene of extermination as a self-contained episode irrelevant to the rest of the narrative. Moreover, by placing the enigmatic character of Iskander at the heart

⁶⁶ Michael Shterenhis, *Tamerlane and the Jews* (London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 113.

of the film, *Sons of the Fatherland* inscribes a new, Uzbek, ethnicity into the memoryscape of the Nazi camps.

I would like to return to Tumarkin's observation about the government's attempt to engage the younger generation into the war discourse, in order to discuss how the following three films – *Deer Hunting*, *Curfew* and *Five Brave Ones* – relate the history of the Holocaust through the character of a persecuted Jewish child. In their texts on children and cinema, Karen Lury, Vicky Lebeau and Emma Wilson all stress the emotional affect in the relationship between the audiences, the film and the character of a (suffering) child.⁶⁷ Lury points out that '[a]nimals and children are "perfect victims", since they are blameless, they make the wrongs of war seem all the more wrong, and the viewer's righteous and explosive response all the more satisfactory'.⁶⁸ Lebeau also observes that an image of a dead or suffering child exposes the ambiguity of our spectatorial participation by teasing out the contradictory feelings of pleasure and disgust, empathy and hatred, while Wilson sees the suffering of a child as 'a limit [...] in ethical thinking'.⁶⁹ Both Lebeau and Lury maintain that a child is the perfect character for exploring the legacies of the war and of the genocide, commenting on its metonymic function in the narrative: '[t]he presence of child as a small emotive figure can be used to "stand in" for many deaths'.⁷⁰ Throughout their chapters dedicated to suffering children and children at war, Lebeau and Lury, respectively, invoke numerous examples from Holocaust cinema, including the girl in the red coat from *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1993), Anne Frank from the eponymous 1959 film by George Stevens, and the

⁶⁷ Vicky Lebeau, *Childhood and Cinema* (Edinburgh: Reaktion Books, 2008); Karen Lury, *The Child in Film* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010); Emma Wilson, *Cinema's Missing Children* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ Lury, *The Child in Film*, 105.

⁶⁹ Wilson, *Cinema's Missing Children*, 157, 176.

⁷⁰ Lury, *The Child in Film*, 107.

Jewish boys in *Au revoir les enfants* (Louis Malle, France, 1987). Such a choice, albeit unacknowledged by the authors, suggests that the character of a Jewish child is perceived as the most potent symbol of suffering, or as Omer Bartov states '[it] has come to represent the victim *par excellence*'.⁷¹ Indeed, since WWII the image of the boy from the Warsaw ghetto, as well as the story of Anne Frank, has come to epitomise innocent suffering; often elevated from their ethnically and historically defined context, they become universal symbols of victimhood, as L.J. Nicoletti discusses in relation to Frank's image in contemporary US culture.⁷² Analysing the role of children within the Soviet cinematic context, Evgenii Margolit associates it with various periods of ideological 'liberalisation.'⁷³ Moreover, he observes that the trope of a suffering or a dying child, most powerfully employed in *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), is often employed to propel the ideologically laden notion of a noble sacrifice. While the character of a victimised child is indeed a common one in Soviet films about the war, the presence of Jewish children, the victims '*par excellence*' is extremely rare. In this light, the cinema of the 'Stagnation' presents a rare group of films featuring a persecuted Jewish child. These films then present a new point of identification and empathy for the audience and, in the case of *Five Brave Ones*, a children's adventure film, make the history of the Holocaust accessible to the younger post-war generation.

⁷¹ Omer Bartov, *The 'Jew' in Cinema: From The Golem to Don't Touch my Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 112.

⁷² L.J. Nicoletti, 'Reading the Anne Frank Project' in *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory* ed. David Bathrick, Brad Prager and Michael David Richardson (NY: Camden House, 2008), 86-113.

⁷³ For example the cinema of the 'Thaw' features numerous child protagonists, such as in *The Steamroller and the Violin* (Andrei Tarkovskii, 1961) and *Man Follows the Sun* (Mikhail Kalik, 1963), in Evgenii Margolit, 'Prizrak svobody: strana detei,' *Iskusstvo kino* 8 (2002), accessed 24 October 2013. <http://kinoart.ru/2002/n8-article14.html>.

The briefest and least explicit appearance of a Jewish child occurs in *Deer Hunting*, a film depicting the life of an orphanage (the ultimate symbol of broken childhood) in the occupied territory. This work acknowledges Nazi anti-Semitic policies in its opening scene, where a Nazi soldier, governed by anti-Semitic typecasting, picks out a dark haired boy from the group of orphans to inquire about his Jewish origin. However, the headmaster assures the Nazi that the boy is Spanish and, after confirming this through a brief conversation with the orphan, the Nazi lets him go. The danger surrounding Jewish children in the occupied territory depicted in this sequence is confirmed in a later episode: suspecting the headmaster's connection to the partisans, the local collaborators raid the orphanage. Failing to find any proof, they depart, leaving the group of distressed children standing in the hallway. Suddenly, a boy emerges from a room and asks: 'Can I come out now? I am scared there on my own'. The boy's Jewish origin is not explicitly acknowledged but they are implied in terms of traditional physical stereotyping: dark curly hair and hooked nose – as well as the need for him to hide.

A similarly covert depiction features in *Curfew*, a film telling the story of an old Belorussian woman, Vera, who offers shelter to orphans during the war. Her 'family' consists of children of various ethnic and national backgrounds, including a Jewish boy, Boris. His origin is never openly acknowledged, but again implied through his particularly endangered position on two occasions. While the original script of the film pronounces that Vera will suffer severe punishment if Boris is discovered in her house,⁷⁴ the film implies this fact in a dialogue between the old woman and a local teacher (in fact a Nazi spy), who suggests dyeing the boy's dark hair blond to minimise the risk. Towards the end of the film, when the Nazis stop

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Gosfilmofond archive, Belye Stolby, Russia.

Vera and her children for a check up, she singles out Boris telling him to run into hiding, while remaining relatively calm about the fates of the other (non-Jewish) children. Tragically, no one manages to escape death.

While only an attentive, insightful viewer can appreciate *Deer Hunting* and *Curfew* as Holocaust films, *Five Brave Ones* offers a more overt depiction by explicitly identifying one of its protagonists as Jewish and portraying his fate as different from the rest of the non-Jewish main characters. This film can be considered most illustrative of cinema's project to communicate the history of the war to the younger generations, as it recreates the events of the occupation through the prism of children's imagination. Starting off in the diegetic present with a children's excursion to a war museum in Belorussia, *Five Brave Ones* then travels back to wartime through what can be called a *fantasy* flashback, as the five protagonists imagine themselves during the occupation. In this respect the film exemplifies the sub-genre of the 'fairytale war film', which allows for alternative 'magical' narratives of history.⁷⁵ As we shall see, this fantasy aspect of the film relates to its rendering of the Holocaust.

The film opens with a black and white sequence in the war museum where a guide narrates the official history of WWII in Belorussia; emphasising the universality of the Soviet people's suffering, this scene demonstrates the way the younger generation was made to engage with the official discourse of the war. However, while the depicted educational process conforms to mainstream rhetoric, the official narrative of the war is later challenged in the course of the film. The opening sequence introduces the five protagonists (four boys – Kesha, Maxim, Danil, Lev, and a girl – Gustia) and establishes their visual agency by intercutting between close-ups of the museum exhibits and of their curious faces. A photograph of children

⁷⁵ Lury, *The Child in Film*, 110.

during an air raid inspires the curiosity of the protagonists to imagine themselves during the war and prompts the appearance of a fantasy flashback. The narrative transforms the protagonists into local children, who start their own resistance movement in an occupied village.

The Jewish origin of the protagonist, Lev, is revealed several scenes later: the group of children arrives at Gustia's house, but is refused entry since the Nazis now occupy the yard. After some explanations four of the children are allowed entry, but Lev is picked out by the Nazi who shouts in a mixture of German and broken Russian: 'Jude? Jude not allowed!' After some commotion the boy manages to escape; he reappears several episodes later when Maxim and Danil spot him as part of a procession of people hurried down a rural road by the Nazis and their collaborators.



Fig. 18: A recurring trope of a Jewish death march.

While the original script of the film explains that these people are Jews who are being marched to their deaths under pretence of resettlement into a ghetto,⁷⁶ their identity is not visualised through costume or verbalised in the film. Nevertheless, Lev's previously identified Jewish origin as well as his different fate from that of the rest of

⁷⁶ Gosfilmofond archive, Belye Stolby, Russia.

the children, allows us to interpret this episode as a group of Jews being marched to their execution. Moreover, the meaning of the scene is clear as we can also relate this recurring trope to previous examples, in *The Unvanquished* (1945) and *The Commissar* (1967). In a rather unconvincing manner, though one that can be justified by the fantasy aspect of the film, the children manage to save Lev from the procession and run away. His Jewish origin is mentioned once more in a scene where the children dye his hair blond – a feature that re-appears in *Curfew* and can be appreciated as another representational trope.

This relatively unknown film offers an important example of children's cinema engaging with the theme of the Holocaust. While the opening sequence conforms to the official rhetoric of eliding the specificity of the Jewish case from the official commemoration and education discourse, the fantasy flashback, through the character of a Jewish child, depicts the distinctly different fate of the Jews in the occupied territory. Moreover, by positioning the flashback within the realm of children's imagination, the film grants Lev subjectivity on the same terms as those of his Slavic friends, making him a co-author of the Holocaust narrative in the film. The fact that this relatively overt depiction occurs in the 'imagined' sequence of the film, on the one hand, undermines the plausibility of the events, yet on the other, can be seen as the reason for such an explicit representation appearing in a mainstream children's film. Similarly to *You Are not an Orphan* (Shurkhat Abbasov, 1962), studied in Chapter 2, this film uses the children to underline the contrast between official and unofficial knowledge about the Holocaust.

The film received wide distribution upon its release in 1970 and was then screened as part of a children's film festival commemorating the 30th anniversary of

victory day in 1975 as well as on a Belorussian TV channel in that same year.⁷⁷

Semen Chertok's observation that Soviet censors paid less attention to children's cinema⁷⁸ explains the wide circulation of a film with a distinct Holocaust sub-narrative line and makes it a noteworthy example of a popular film challenging mainstream conventions.

A Case Study: The Ascent

While the last film in this section, *The Ascent*, is not a children's film, its portrayal of a Jewish child offers an illuminating analysis in relation to the commemoration rhetoric as well as to the prevailing scholarly delimitation of conformist mainstream and creatively liberal cinema of the 'Stagnation'. Based on the story by Vasil' Bykov, this well-known WWII partisan drama, directed by Larisa Shepitko, has been widely analysed and praised in numerous scholarly texts and critical articles.⁷⁹ The theme of morality, which as Zorkaia points out 'emerged in the cinema of the early 1970s',⁸⁰ is central to *The Ascent* and is the aspect of the film most often analysed by scholars. Indeed, the film places the question of choice at the centre of the relationship between two partisans, Sotnikov and Rybak, who undergo mental and physical torture after

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Chertok, *Stop-kadry*, 19.

⁷⁹ Some include, in English: Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 179-184; Youngblood, 'When Will the Real Day Come? War Films and Soviet Postwar Culture,' in *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* ed. Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 134; Barbara Quart, *Women Directors: the Emergence of a New Cinema* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1988) 191-241; Quart 'Between Materialism and Mysticism: the Films of Larisa Shepitko,' *Cineaste* 3 (1988): 4-11. In Russian: A. Romanenko, 'Kinematograf chitaet Vasil'ia Bykova,' in *Ekran 1976-1977*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1978), 70-75; Mark Zak 'Rezhisser vybiraet pozitsiiu,' in *Ekran 1976-1977*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1978), 63-96; Boris Pavlenok 'Iubileinyi god,' in *Ekran 1976-1977*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1978), 14-19; Zoia Kutorga and Ovidii Gorchakov 'Vozvrashchennoe proshloe,' *Iskusstvo kino* 5 (1977): 55-59; Elena Stishova, 'Khronika i legenda,' *Iskusstvo kino* 9 (1977): 30-40; Victor Ponarin, 'Saga of Two Men in the Woods,' *Soviet Film* 8 (1977): 35-37; Valerii Golovskoi, *Mezhu ottepel'iu i glasnost'iu: kinematograf 70-kh* (Moscow: Materik, 2004), 258-265; Neia Zorkaia, *Istoria Sovetskogo Kino*, 411-413; Zorkaia, *Soviet Cinema Today* (New Delhi: Panchsheel Publishers, 1988), 18-19, 50-53; Elem Klimov, ed. *Larisa* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1987).

⁸⁰ Neia Zorkaia, *Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema*, 279.

they are captured by the Nazis, leading to Rybak's conversion into a collaborator and Sotnikov's death on the gallows.⁸¹ Though focusing on this particular aspect of the film in her analysis, Zorkaia does not, however, acknowledge that in exploring the theme of morality *The Ascent* simultaneously challenges traditions of the partisan genre.

The film presents us with an ambiguous partisan, Rybak; it also depicts the hostility of the villagers to the partisans through the character of Demchikha. Moreover, while by this point Soviet films have presented numerous portrayals of collaborators, *The Ascent* goes further by attempting to understand the psychology of the traitors. It does so through the central narrative of Rybak's betrayal, as well as by casting a popular actor, Anatolii Solonitsyn,⁸² as the head of the local police – Solonitsyn makes this secondary character complex by portraying him as educated and well spoken. Moreover, contrary to the conventional partisan narrative, *The Ascent* colours the relationship between Rybak and Sotnikov with strong religious and mystical motifs;⁸³ through the expressive use of lighting and framing, the film creates a Christ-like image of Sotnikov's noble and suffering face, while thematically Rybak is aligned to the biblical character of Judas.⁸⁴ Despite its challenging approach to the genre, the film's emphasis on Sotnikov's unshakable belief in the Soviet system and his courage and willingness to die in the name of the motherland earned *The Ascent* a positive response from its contemporary critics and prompted its wide release and

⁸¹ Detailed synopsis of the film in Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 179-184.

⁸² Anatolii Solonitsyn (1934-1982) is best known for his title role in *Andrei Rublev* (Andrei Tarkovskii, 1966). The complexity of this character is discussed in Romanenko, 'Kinematograf chitaet Vasilisa Bykova,' 70-75.

⁸³ Shepitko herself defined the film as a 'neo-fable' in Golovskoi, *Mezhdru ottepel'iu i glasnost'iu*, 262.

⁸⁴ Louis Menashe compares the images of Sotnikov to the medieval painterly tradition in Menashe, *Moscow Believes in Tears: Russians and Their Movies* (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2010) 153. Zorkaia and Stishova comment on the Christ-Judas motif in Zorkaia, *Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema*, 280, and Stishova, 'Khronika i legenda,' 35.

circulation in the (international) festival circuit.⁸⁵ Coming out to mark the 60th anniversary of the Revolution, the film was praised for its portrayal of Sotnikov as an ideal Soviet man and the majority of the film's contemporary reviews tended to focus on this particular feature of *The Ascent*.⁸⁶ From a present-day perspective, the film has also been appreciated as an example of auteur filmmaking and as the best work in the *oeuvre* of this female director, who prematurely died in a car crash at the age of 41. However, despite an overwhelming number of critical and scholarly texts there exists an apparent lack in the study of the film's Holocaust theme, which is figured through the character of a Jewish girl, Basia.

Departing from the existing scholarly and critical framework, I present here a close textual analysis of the portrayal of Basia. I place emphasis on this overlooked aspect of the film to demonstrate that, while challenging numerous generic conventions and featuring the rare character of a Jewish child victim, the film's depiction of the Holocaust in fact adheres to the official rhetoric of its time.

Appearing through a pre-diegetic story line concerning Basia's fate, the subject of the Holocaust is presented as marginal in the principal narrative. The girl receives the smallest amount of screen time in the film, as she is the last character to be thrown into the cell where Sotnikov and Rybak await execution together with the village elder, Sych, and Demchikha. She is a skinny teenager, with black hair and big dark eyes played by a non-professional Jewish actress, Viktoriia Gol'dentul'. Bykov's literary text, on which the film is based, clearly establishes Basia's ethnicity as well as

⁸⁵ Elena Vladimirova's article 'Ekran iubileinogo goda' praises this film as a profound and talented work and states that it was screened with great success at the X All Union Festival in Riga in Vladimirova in *Ekran 1976-77*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1978), 38-43; Ousmane Sembene discusses this film as head of Jury of the XXVII Berlin Film Festival, where *The Ascent* won the Golden Bear, the FIPRESCI and the International Film Organisation awards in Sembene "Voshozhdenie" prodolzhaet luchshie traditsii sovetskoi kinoshkoly,' *Iskusstvo kino* 1 (1978): 177-178. The film's success in Berlin is also covered in Boris Galanov, 'Zhivye i prizraki,' in *Ekran 1977-78*, comp. Iurii Tiurin and Galina Dolmatovskaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), 173-179.

⁸⁶ For example, Baskakov, *Sovetskoe Kino*, 74-76; Vladimirova, 'Ekran iubileinogo goda,' 38; Ponarin, 'Saga of Two Men in the Woods,' 37.

the particularity of the Jewish predicament in a passage depicting her escape from a Jewish massacre. Moreover, it also relates Rybak's surprise at seeing a Jewish girl alive long after the entire local Jewish population has been annihilated.⁸⁷ However, the screen adaption conventionally implies, rather than articulates, the girl's identity through her physical appearance as well as her Jewish-sounding name; furthermore, Basia's recollection of her survival figures in a brief monologue, which articulates neither her nor the massacre victims' Jewish origin. From this scene we also learn that the reason for Basia's imprisonment and subsequent execution is her refusal to denounce the family that sheltered her, rather than her ethnicity. Here we can see a link to the pre-war anti-fascist films, where the act of defiance replaced the ethnic origin of the victim as the reason for their punishment.

I would like to return to the discussion of the (Jewish) child as 'the perfect victim', in order to compare how the textual properties of the scene set in the cellar foster audiences' emotional identification with Basia and Sotnikov. While Basia indeed fits Bartov's depiction of a 'victim *par excellence*', it is, nevertheless, Sotnikov whose physical fragility and moral nobility are central to the scene – a fact that points to the possible similarities between the characters. Lebeau's suggestion that the figure of the suffering child can often evoke an ambiguous erotic and empathetic response, and Bartov's observation that the character of the Jewish child victim is often imbued with redemptive, Christ-like qualities, can be similarly related to the portrayal of the suffering partisan.

Analysing the cultural representation of the male body in pain, Kent Brintnall highlights the inseparability of the erotic and the religious at the core of this

⁸⁷ Vasil' Bykov, *Ego Batal'on* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 2000), 263.

concept.⁸⁸ Drawing on the writing of Georges Bataille, he considers Hollywood action films, Robert Mapplethorpe's photography and Francis Bacon's art, concluding that the eroticised Christ-like male body both excites and repels, and bears redemptive qualities. In *The Ascent*, Sotnikov's emaciated and tortured body becomes another key element to emphasise the film's religious motif. Therefore notions of eroticism, empathy and redemption can be said to define the function of both the Jewish child and the tortured partisan. However, despite the theoretical similarity in their function, the film's unequal formal treatment of the two characters engenders a different audience response to them.

Throughout the scene in the cellar, the camera photographs Basia in medium shots with other characters, while Sotnikov is privileged through close-ups where the camera lingers and zooms in on his face.



Fig.19: Sotnikov's Christ-like suffering face.

⁸⁸ Kent Brintnall, *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-In-Pain as Redemptive Figure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

His thematic and visual centrality to the scene is emphasised further through Sych's confession to the frail partisan, which constitutes the film's religious motif and positions Sotnikov as the redemptive, moral backbone of the group. Moreover, the scene features a number of point-of-view shots of other characters from Sotnikov's perspective, including a singular close-up of Basia, and employs sound effects so as to externalise his hallucinations. It thereby establishes his audio-visual agency in the scene and thus furthers audience identification.

The hierarchy of textual primacy is sustained into the scene of their execution, which can be related to Amir Weiner's argument of the hierarchy of heroism and the universalisation of victimhood in Soviet war discourse.⁸⁹ The film posits the Slavic character, Sotnikov, as the ultimate hero (and saint), while Basia's victimhood is equated to the rest of the secondary characters', who die together for disobeying the Nazis. The denial of the specificity of Basia's fate in the narrative is again underlined formally, particularly during the last section of the execution scene.

After Sotnikov refuses the last chance to collaborate and Rybak, in a moment of despair, confirms his willingness to work for the occupiers, the entire group is taken to the village square for execution. While Rybak is now forced to perform the part of the hangman, Sotnikov together with Sych, Demchikha and Basia ascends the scaffold. Here the film highlights the equality in death among the secondary characters and privileges Sotnikov's position through the use of framing (close-up and long shot) and editing (shot-reverse shot). As a rope is thrown around the victims' necks, the camera dignifies their death by granting them individuality through separate close-ups. First it reveals Sych's unwavering face and, after cutting to Demchikha's tearful expression, captures Basia's. In her last close-up in the film, the

⁸⁹ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of the War: the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 208.

girl looks terrified. Her big eyes gaze at the crowd around her, as one of film's contemporary critics pointed out, as though asking: 'Why? What for?'⁹⁰ All of the three consecutive close-ups last approximately eight seconds, thus establishing a sense of equality between Sych, Demchikha and Basia; moreover, the absence of a reverse shot from their point of view denies viewing agency to all three characters.



Fig. 19.1: Formal and thematic equality in death.

Thus the use of framing and editing further obscures the difference between Basia and the Belorussian characters, conforming to the Soviet rhetoric of not dividing the dead. However, such a formal pattern is broken when Sotnikov's close-up appears in the sequence. Not only does this image receive the longest screen time but also, as in the previous scene, the film grants Sotnikov subjectivity in the dying moment through point-of-view shots of the crowd and the scenery.

Thus a detailed textual analysis demonstrates that, contrary to the film's unorthodox (generally acknowledged auteurist) treatment of the partisan genre, its depiction of the Jewish character, and with her of the entire Holocaust sub-narrative,

⁹⁰ Interview with Shepitko in Romanenko, 'Kinematograf chitaet Vasilisa Bykova,' 74.

in fact conforms to the official discourse. To sum up, first of all, the narrative does not openly acknowledge Basia's Jewish origin, but implies it through her name, physical appearance and pre-diegetic history. Secondly, despite being the only child victim, who, according to Lury, Bartov and Lebeau, elicits audience empathy and identification, the film's formal and thematic composition nevertheless engenders allegiance with the Christ-like character of Sotnikov. Thirdly, while allowing Basia to narrate her story of survival in the massacre, the film later conforms to the Soviet discourse of universal suffering when it equates her punishment to that of the Belorussian characters. *The Ascent* therefore presents an example of a widely praised auteur film offering a conventional depiction of the Holocaust.

Conclusion

Identifying a recent shift in the socio-political and cultural study of the 'Stagnation', this chapter, through the examination of Holocaust cinema, renegotiates the stigma of 'unremarkable' traditionally attached to the films of this period. In rethinking the idea of stifling state control, it considers a wide range of films, depicting the controversial subject of the Holocaust in a number of ways and demonstrating the plurality of possible relations between state control and film texts. Although the period of the 'Stagnation' is generally compared to the Stalinist regime, this chapter shows that contrary to this logic, factors like the increase of anti-Israeli rhetoric, the discrimination against Soviet Jews, the omission of the Holocaust from the official commemoration discourse and the tightened control over the film industry are, in fact, paralleled by the production of films dealing with the Holocaust.

Section One of this chapter indeed focuses on films that completely erase this subject from their narratives. However, it underlines an important aspect of their (absent) representations. As these films draw on the already formed Holocaust representational system, consisting of narrative tropes (i.e. the aligning of Jewish fates with those of the communists) and visual motifs (i.e. the archival footage of the liberated camps or the re-creation of its iconography), their evident omission of Jewish victimhood from these tropes in fact proves equally communicative.

Other films, studied in Section Two and Three, exhibit an interesting degree of hybridity where they openly support the directives of the government (imposed on the industry as a result of tightened censorship) yet paradoxically include the highly undesirable subject of the Jewish genocide into their narratives. This is made particularly clear in cases of popular genre films, like spy thrillers and children's adventure films. Thus by sanctioning the production of these films in an attempt to maintain the relevance of WWII (so as to consolidate a certain type of mythology), the Soviet government unwittingly allowed for the history of the Holocaust to form part of the collective memory of the war. This observation about the innovative status of popular cinema under Brezhnev then prompts me in this chapter to re-evaluate the existing scholarly opposition between 'conformist' popular cinema and 'liberal' auteur films.

By approaching this question through the prism of Holocaust representations, this chapter demonstrates that mainstream cinema was sometimes more successful than auteur cinema in challenging dominant conventions regarding the Jewish wartime experience. Thus *Dawns Are Quiet Here*, a hugely popular film directed by a state-favoured filmmaker, and *Five Brave Ones*, a little known mainstream children's film, were more innovative than some critically-acclaimed auteur works, *The Ascent*

and *It Was in May*. As this chapter argues, their innovation lay in the ability to clearly depict the fate of the Jews as distinct from those of the Slavic characters. Considering the relationship between these two strands of Soviet filmmaking it is important to bear in mind that Goskino tended to exercise greater control over the work of the liberal filmmakers, making overt references to the Holocaust all the more complicated, while state-trusted directors as well as standard mainstream films were subjected to less control. However, as Chapter Two has already argued, the control of the state should not be seen as the sole reason for the understated narrative of the Holocaust, as often the filmmakers themselves were not interested in focusing on this subject in their films.

Overall, this chapter introduces a new corpus of films into a period that remains understudied by scholars of Soviet cinema. Questioning the conservative quality of films under Brezhnev it brings to light a new fact that the subject of the Holocaust not only existed in cinema of this period but was also treated in a diverse manner. Furthering an investigative premise undertaken in Chapter Two, the present chapter highlights the need to re-think the value-laden periodisations and terminology that have so far characterised studies of this period.

CHAPTER 4: HOLOCAUST CINEMA AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

This chapter examines the final stage in the trajectory of Holocaust representations in Soviet cinema against the background of the collapsing regime.

The 1980s saw a series of pivotal events, which transformed the cultural and political landscape of the Soviet Union and the Western world. While Brezhnev's death in 1982 did not bring any immediate changes, as Section One of this chapter demonstrates, Mikhail Gorbachev's speech at the 27th Party congress in March 1986 marked a new phase in Soviet and world history, contributing to the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Communist block in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The seminal policies of perestroika (reconstruction) and glasnost (openness) dismantled the old Soviet systems both structurally and at the level of discourse. The change of cadres and the policy of decentralisation permitted younger liberal personnel to work independently from the 'top'. A new wave of historical re-evaluation, paralleled by the opening of the archives, enabled different understandings of the USSR's relation to the West, putting an end to the Cold War antagonism and with it the Soviet myths of the Great Patriotic War. As a result, this period witnessed the re-emergence of the history of the Holocaust into the official public sphere. While the whirlpool of change appeared so strong as to bring the demise of the Soviet Union, it created a remarkable period, which forms an important closing chapter in both Soviet history and the present thesis.

Considering the dramatic difference between the years pre- and post-Gorbachev's speech, I will conduct my study dividing the chapter in two sections. In Section One (1982-1985) I account for the last stage in the Soviet WWII cult as a

determining factor in the lack of Holocaust representations. This section also figures a case study of *Come and See* (Elem Klimov, 1985). Section Two (1986-1991) analyses how the pivotal changes at the level of the context surrounding the films enable dramatically new cinematic narratives of the Holocaust. In looking at the tendencies of historical re-evaluation as well as at the drastic reforms of the Soviet film industry, I pick out and discuss those aspects which I see as essential to the formation of the new filmic discourse of the Holocaust. I also identify a new corpus, examining how a number of documentaries and feature films enabled new Jewish characters to account for the memory and history of the Holocaust. Overall, this chapter attempts to understand the position of these distinctly Jewish narratives within the context of a collapsing Soviet Union.

Section One: the Transition from ‘Stagnation’ to Perestroika

A major event in this period of transition was the 40th anniversary of the war’s end in 1985. Although they took place under the new leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, the celebrations replicated the flamboyant galas of the Brezhnev period. In her study, historian Nina Tumarkin, who visited Moscow in the spring of 1985, observes that these May celebrations were the last ones of such monumental proportions in Soviet history, as the USSR itself would be soon ‘blown apart by the winds of *glasnost*, *perestroika*, and *demokratizatsiia*.’¹ The continuity with the Brezhnev era was evident not only in the pompous style of the Victory day parades but also in the commemoration politics propagated in the official speeches. The Cold War context continued to define the chauvinistic anti-Western stance of the government, which

¹ Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: the Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Book, 1994), 28.

emphasised the uniquely tragic and heroic position of the Soviet nation in the victory over Nazism.² As the Soviet-Jewish historian Mikhail Gefter told Tumarkin in 1985, the enduring official insistence on the universal and heroic Soviet struggle with Nazism continued to exclude the possibility of acknowledging the Holocaust and other ideologically problematic episodes, such as the Katyn massacre and the Soviet-Nazi pact of 1938.³ The Soviet cinema of this period, as we shall see, did little to challenge this tendency.

As previously, the industry contributed to the official commemoration process by producing films on the subject of the war,⁴ numerous articles in the Soviet film press on the importance of the WWII genre⁵ as well as by organising a series of Soviet war film festivals.⁶ The official rhetoric of the jubilee year can be seen to affect film production not only in 1985 but also around this date, namely in the general lack of references to the Holocaust from 1982 to 1986. Out of the 50 films that I studied, I was able to identify only four that invoke the Holocaust, either through verbal references to Jewish massacres or via marginal Jewish characters.

A brief dialogue between the protagonists of *Sign of Misfortune* (Mikhail Ptashuk, 1986), mentions a mass-murder of the local Jews, while *Kindergarten* (Evgenii Evtushenko, 1984), *Come and See* (Elem Klimov, 1985) and *I Did All I Could* (Dmitrii Salynskii, 1986) each figure Jews on screen, and each mask or convey the particularity of their suffering in various degrees.

² Details of Gorbachev's speech in *ibid.*, 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 36, 49-51.

⁴ Most notably the epic battle films like *Battle for Moscow* (Iurii Ozerov, 1985), *Victory* (Evgenii Matveev, 1985) and *Counter-Strike* (Vladimir Shevchenko, 1985). However, as Denise Youngblood notes, other films, like romantic war drama *Legal Marriage* (Al'bert Mkrtchian, 1985), were thematically closer to the intimate style of the cinema of the 'Thaw'. This therefore testifies to some degree of diversity in the portrayals of war in Youngblood, *Russian War Film: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), p. 193.

⁵ Most 1985 issues of *Soviet Film*, *Iskusstvo kino* and *Ekran* feature such articles.

⁶ *Soviet Film* 12 (1985): 19.

The famous poet Evtushenko, who poignantly addressed the subject of the Holocaust and raised the question of Soviet anti-Semitism in his seminal poem *Babii Iar* (1961), started as a director with the autobiographical *Kindergarten* depicting his wartime experience. However, the Jewish theme, central to his poetry, appears only marginally in the film through the anonymous silent character of an Orthodox Jew who travels together with the little protagonist into evacuation, figuring in the background of several scenes. The autobiographical nature of the story places the child protagonist at the centre of the events, while the persecution and evacuation of Jews dissolves into the larger picture of wartime calamities.

Representing Jews as a (silent) minority amongst a group of non-Jewish casualties is a familiar representational trope that has been observed throughout this thesis and one that also features in *Come and See*, the last film of well-known filmmaker Elem Klimov. Since the film is generally recognised as a masterpiece of late-Soviet cinema and has garnered international critical acclaim (it was awarded the Golden Prize and the FIPRESCI prize at the 1985 Moscow International Film Festival), I consider it important to address this widely studied work from a new perspective. The film appears to be a fruitful case study for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a rare example of Jewish victimhood in post-Brezhnev/pre-perestroika cinema. However, this fact remains largely ignored, with the exception of Louis Menashe's and John Wrathall's articles, where the authors acknowledge the presence of the Jewish character in passing.⁷ Moreover, while some critics stress the influential role of *Come and See* on *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1993)⁸ and

⁷ Louis Menashe, 'Patriotic Gauze, Patriotic Gore. Russians at War,' *Cineaste* 3 (2004): 29; John Wrathall, 'Excursion to Hell,' *Sight and Sound* 2 (2004): 29.

⁸ Wrathall, 'Excursion to Hell,' 29.

compare it to *Lacombe Lucien* (Louis Malle, France, 1974),⁹ there exist no readings of the film within the context of Holocaust cinema. Secondly, *Come and See* provides a fruitful case to illustrate two of the key themes of my thesis: the relationship between a film's text and its context as well as the scholarly division between auteur and popular cinema. The latter concept will be illustrated further in the subsequent analysis of a mainstream film, *I Did All I Could*.

A Case Study: Come and See

As an auteur film which, however, offers a conventional understanding of the Holocaust, *Come and See* invites an analysis similar to that of *The Ascent* (Larisa Shepitko, 1977). Directed by Klimov's wife, the film's interpretation of Vasil' Bykov's Belorussian partisan story and its critical and audience success inspired Klimov's own subsequent turn to the subject of WWII.¹⁰ Like *The Ascent*, *Come and See* exposes uncomfortable facts from WWII history such as collaboration and the at times unheroic conduct of the partisans; moreover, in restaging scenes of graphic violence with precision and authenticity, *Come and See* creates powerful images of devastation, thereby challenging the representational canon of Soviet cinema. Indeed, the challenge was so great that Klimov himself worried about the film being unbearable to watch.¹¹ However, despite its unorthodox approach to the representation of the occupation, the film's understanding of Jewish suffering – as a minor episode within the larger picture of the Soviet victimhood – remains within the conventions of

⁹ Lloyd Michaels, 'Come and See (1985): Klimov's Intimate Epic,' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 25 (2008): 214. Using the word 'holocaust', the author clearly refers to genocide rather than to the targeted persecution and annihilation of Jews.

¹⁰ The idea of the film itself originally belonged to Shepitko in Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Library of Congress, 2009), 193.

¹¹ Wrathall, 'Excursion to Hell,' 28.

official Soviet history. My analysis here focuses on the scene depicting the mass-murder of Belorussian villagers, including one Jew, and looks at the use of archival footage in the film's closing scene to illustrate this point.

Russian and Western scholars and critics value *Come and See* as an example of a film by an auteur who offers a new understanding of Soviet history,¹² as well as considering it 'the last greatest film of the genre'.¹³ Indeed, having studied over four decades of Soviet films in the previous chapters, we can observe how *Come and See* on the one hand fits within the cinematic tradition initiated during the 'Thaw', of re-evaluating the legacy of WWII,¹⁴ yet on the other hand, how it challenges the representational canons by creating a visually and aurally complex, brutal portrait. Denise Youngblood¹⁵ shares this view, observing that the film at once draws on and subverts the established tropes of the Soviet war film. The formal unorthodoxy of *Come and See* is largely rooted in the subjective quality of the narrative: again, following the existing tradition dating back to the 'Thaw', the film recreates the story of the occupation from the intimate perspective of its protagonist, in this case, the Belorussian teenager Flor.¹⁶ The film's innovative use of sound and camera pushes the boundary of spectatorial identification by placing the viewer uncomfortably close to the perspective of the emotionally distressed and aurally impaired boy. For part of the film, the soundtrack recreates the perspective of the shell-shocked, deafened protagonist and the camera privileges point-of-view shots and close-ups of the boy's

¹² Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 193; Wrathall, 'Excursion to Hell,' 29.

¹³ Denise Youngblood, 'A War Remembered: Soviet Films of the Great Patriotic War,' *The American Historical Review* 106/3 (2001), 852.

¹⁴ Nina Ignat'eva places *Come and See* within the existing tradition of the cinema of the 'Thaw' to reflect upon the nature of the war in 'Idi i smotri,' *Iskusstvo kino* 12 (1985), 82; Adamovich confirms his and Klimov's interest in reflecting upon the past from a contemporary perspective in Leonid Pavliuchik, 'Uiti ot bezdny...', *Iskusstvo kino* 2 (1988), 5.

¹⁵ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 194.

¹⁶ Youngblood implies a parallel between *Come and See* and the 'Thaw', accounting for the trope of a child at war, in 'Post-Stalinist cinema and the myth of World War II: Tarkovskii's 'Ivan's Childhood' (1962) and Klimov's 'Come and See' (1985),' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 14/4 (1994), 413-419.

ageing face, distorted by horror. Consequently, such narrative and formal strategy excludes the possibility of depicting a Jewish point of view in the film. Moreover, not only the Jewish perspective but also the very fact of the specificity of the Jewish suffering is absent from the film, as the analysis of the relevant scenes will demonstrate.

Before moving on to a textual analysis of selected scenes, I would like to give an overview of the film's production history, relying on the interviews that I conducted with some members of the crew. To begin with, it is particularly relevant to note the discrepancies between the treatment of the Holocaust in the film and in its original literary source. The coming of age story of a child-partisan, Flor, who matures and ages before our eyes as he experiences the horrors of Nazi occupation in rural Belorussia, is based on *The Khatyn Story* (1972) and *Out of the Fire* (1977), two works by Ales' Adamovich, a prominent Belorussian writer and the co-author of the film's script. While *Out of the Fire*, a documentary account of the occupation compiled from interviews of the survivors, inspired the authentic tone of the film, the fictional *Khatyn Story* provided *Come and See* with Flor's coming-of-age narrative. Klimov insists on the influence of the original literary sources, explaining his personal desire to stay truthful to the material.¹⁷ However, the absence of a Jewish narrative line in the film, whereas *The Khatyn Story* includes several episodes depicting gentiles hiding Jews as well as of references to the Nazi anti-Semitic policies, contradicts such an intention. Here the question of the relationship between the official discourse and self-censorship, as well as that of the ideological limitations surrounding the production of a film, that my thesis seeks to address, become particularly pertinent.

¹⁷ Marina Murzina, comp. *Elem Klimov. Nesniatoe kino* (Moscow: Khroniker, 2008), 195.

Vladimir Kozlov,¹⁸ one of the film's assistant directors, pointed out in my interview with him that the anti-Israeli mood caused by the wave of Jewish emigration to Israel in the 1970s continued to permeate the Soviet film industry in the 1980s, making overt references to the Holocaust impossible. Although my study of films of the 'Stagnation' era in Chapter 3 proved that resistance to official ideology was possible for some filmmakers, it is nevertheless probable that the official anti-Jewish stance contributed to Klimov's and Adamovich's creative decision to exclude overt references to the unique position of Jews when adapting the latter's literary works for the screen. Indeed, in my interview with the film's production designer, Viktor Petrov,¹⁹ he explained that it was unthinkable for Klimov to openly depict anti-Semitism and the Holocaust since the Goskino officials were already dubious about the film's other controversial issues, such as the depiction of graphic violence as well as of collaboration. However, he also stressed that Klimov was never interested in depicting the Jewish tragedy in any case and that the subject of the Holocaust never existed in the original script.

Before relating how the character of a Jew came to be in the film and analysing how its portrayal relates to the wider trajectory of depictions of the Holocaust, it is necessary to look at the scene in which he features in detail. Often described as the most powerful episode of the film,²⁰ the scene of the mass burning takes place towards the end. It begins when Nazis, with the help of local collaborators, gather a large group of villagers outside a barn. A local collaborator opens the doors and pronounces cheerfully: 'Welcome, Belorussians!' – a phrase that immediately establishes the victims' ethnic origin. Staying in close proximity to the group, the

¹⁸ Vladimir Kozlov, e-mail interview, 29 October 2010.

¹⁹ Viktor Petrov, e-mail interview, 17 November 2010.

²⁰ Louis Menashe, 'Patriotic Gauze, Patriotic Gore. Russians at War,' 29; Rostislav Pospelov, review of *Come and See*, *Soviet Film* 12 (1985): 14; Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 195; Wrathall, 'Excursion to Hell,' 29.

hand-held camera moves inside the barn, as the screaming crowd, including Flor, is forced inside. After depicting the chaotic atmosphere in the interior, the scene cuts to an exterior shot where a group of collaborators carry a man to the future place of execution shouting: 'We've got a Jew'. As they push him inside the barn, the camera remains focused on the petrified man. His 'otherness' as the only Jew in the scene is emphasized through his positioning in relation to the rest of the crowd, and his movement within the frame. As the panic-stricken crowd pushes towards the door in an attempt to break free, the Jew, holding his arms close to his torso, moves in the opposite direction.



Fig. 20: The 'otherness' of the Jewish victim.

Meeting his death together with the Belorussian characters as the barn is set on fire, this anonymous Jewish character continues the prevailing cinematic tendency to depict the annihilation of the Jews as a minor part of the larger tragedy of the Soviet nation. In doing so it sustains the notion of not dividing the dead, which dates back to WWII. Indeed, looking into the history of the scene's creation, it becomes clear that

the filmmakers used the Jewish character to highlight the universality of Soviet suffering rather than to depict the Holocaust. In my interview Petrov related that the decision to introduce a Jewish character, who was played by the stills photographer, Igor' Gnevyshev, came spontaneously during the shoot as the director felt the need to 'expand the group of victims who suffered at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators'.²¹ Tellingly Gnevyshev's article in *Soviet Film* commenting on his film debut bypasses references to the Jewish origin of this character.²²

Thus the portrayal of Jewish suffering in an otherwise artistically and thematically innovative film corresponds to the mainstream conventions of the Soviet war discourse. From the history of the film's production it is clear that the subject of the Holocaust did not interest the filmmakers during the writing of the script and appeared in the film spontaneously to highlight the universality of suffering of the Soviet people. The relation between the wider discourse, the filmmakers' creative intent and the filmic text itself is particularly poignant in this scene, as the Jew's otherness conveyed through mise-en-scène in fact corresponds to his arbitrary position in the film project at large.

A similar understanding applies to the use of documentary footage in the film's epilogue. A conceptually and emotionally powerful scene depicts Flor, in a frenzied state, shooting at the portrait of Adolf Hitler; this action is accompanied by a series of archival sequences, portraying Hitler's life and the atrocities of his regime, played in a reverse motion. The unconventional use of archival material thus creates a striking visual metaphor for Flor's (as well as the filmmakers' and spectators') wish to undo the history of Nazism. Played at a high speed in reverse motion to a cacophonous soundtrack, the documentary footage startles and disorients the viewer,

²¹ Viktor Petrov, e-mail interview, 17 November 2010 (my translation).

²² Igor' Gnevyshev, 'Go and See,' *Soviet Film* 5 (1985): 4-5.

increasing the overall impact of the scene rather than of the individual segments of the archival reels. Thus, the two brief sections depicting the Holocaust, the liberated children of Auschwitz and Kristallnacht, rapidly slide past the viewer and dissolve in the overarching theme of the sequence: what if Hitler never existed?

While *Come and See* is generally praised as an auteur film that portrays the war with shocking authenticity, my analysis has demonstrated that its representation of the Holocaust does not challenge the official discourse of undifferentiated victimhood. In this light, *I Did All I Could* – a mainstream film overlooked by Soviet film scholarship – is of special interest to my study.

Based on Sergei Smirnov's documentary short story, *A Hospital in Eremeevka* (1962), the film depicts the case of Leonid Silin, a Russian soldier who convinced the Nazis to allow him to open a hospital for wounded POWs in the occupied Ukraine in 1941. Describing the recruitment of the medical staff for the future hospital, the short story mentions that the Nazis forbade hiring Communists, red army officers, ethnic Russians and Jews; however, due to his diplomatic talent and impeccable knowledge of German, Silin managed to hire two Jewish doctors. While the literary text conventionally aligns the Jews with several other victim groups, the filmic version of this episode emphasises the particularity of the Jewish fate: as Silin gathers a group of doctors and nurses in the POW camp, a Nazi officer supervising the process refuses exit to one man, identifying him as a Jew (the film portrays one, rather than two characters). As the group's plea that Dr. Miron Kandel' is their best surgeon proves futile, the doctor himself encourages the group to leave him behind and retreats into the anonymous mass of POWs. To the great relief of the hospital staff, Dr. Kandel' reappears several episodes later as Silin succeeds in negotiating his release. Towards the end of the film we learn that, due to Kandel's particularly endangered position, he

was taken into hiding in the nearby village. While Kandel' is an episodic character, the film stresses his Jewish origin (through verbal identification, his medical profession and a Jewish-sounding name) as a reason for him being particularly threatened during the occupation.

Thus, whereas *Come and See* bypasses the original Jewish narrative of Adamovich's literary text, *I Did All I Could* not only preserves the episode concerning the Jewish doctor(s) but it additionally highlights the particularity of his experience. In addition to their treatment of the Holocaust, the two films provide further examples to the overarching intention of this thesis to re-consider the relationship between auteur and popular cinema. We have observed so far that the general formal and narrative innovations of the auteur films do not necessarily presuppose a nonconformist approach to the subject of the Holocaust. Contrastingly, some mainstream films, ignored by scholars for their lack of artistic value, in fact appear more innovative in their treatment of the Jewish plight.

Section Two: from Perestroika to the Collapse

Section Two of this chapter investigates the effect of Gorbachev's policy of perestroika and the reforms within the Soviet film industry on the trajectory of the cinematic portrayals of the Holocaust. Particularly important to my study here are the abolishment of censorship, co-productions with the West, the role of the Fifth Congress of the Filmmakers' Union (May 1986) and the subsequent work of the emergency conflict commission to release banned films; all of which I study in due course. Examining a wide range of films, this section presents two case studies – *The Commissar* (Aleksandr Askol'dov, 1967/1988), a film already analysed in Chapter 2,

but here discussed in terms of its release, and *Meeting with Father* (Aleksandr Rodnianskii, 1990) – a representative of the new wave of Holocaust (documentary) cinema.

The dominant scholarly tendency to draw parallels between different periods of Soviet history (such as between Stalin's and Brezhnev's rules, outlined in Chapter 3) is evident in the comparison of the perestroika and the 'Thaw' eras: for instance, Youngblood states: 'like the 20th party congress in February 1956, when Khrushchev first denounced Stalin, the 27th party congress in March 1986 was a revolutionary moment.'²³ For Anna Lawton, the new political mood inspired 'open criticism of censorship in the arts and literature, revision of the Stalinist past [and] calls for rehabilitation of the cultural and political figures in the official press.'²⁴ The new wave of rehabilitation, as previously, also concerned the Soviet-Jewish relationship. The release of the *refusnik* movement leader, Anatolii Shcharanskii (1986), the increased number of emigrants to Israel, the publication of banned literary works on Jewish themes (notably, Vasilii Grossman's *Life and Fate* and *Forever Flowing* [1988]) and the opening of the Mikhoels²⁵ Jewish cultural centre in Moscow (1989) were some of the socio-political and cultural signs of the new era. Zvi Gitelman²⁶ observes that while Gorbachev's administration brought little reform to the domestic policy on inter-ethnic relationships, it was the re-evaluation of foreign relations that determined the improvement of the Soviet-Jewish national and international rapports. Indeed, a blossoming of the Soviet-Israeli relationship, discussed by Robert O.

²³ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 198.

²⁴ Anna Lawton 'Soviet Cinema Four Years Later,' *Wide Angle* 12/4 (1990): 9.

²⁵ Solomon Mikhoels was the artistic director of Moscow Yiddish State theatre and the leader of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. His murder in 1948 signalled the beginning of Stalinist (anti-Semitic) purges (discussed in Chapter 1).

²⁶ Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 193.

Freedman,²⁷ facilitated new dialogues, including about the history of the Holocaust. The opening of Soviet archives, as part of the process of historical re-evaluation, enabled the first (Western) scholarly inquests into the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. The process of historical re-evaluation together with the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan (1989) resulted in the fall of the WWII cult; and as one of the essential founding cults of the Soviet identity, its demise contributed to the very break up of the Soviet Union. Youngblood suggests, once again comparing the 1980s to the ‘Thaw’, that ‘Khrushchev’s Thaw had dismantled the Stalin cult; glasnost dismantled [the Soviet Union’s] remaining foundational myths, the cult of [...]the Great Patriotic War.’²⁸

While initially there was a positive dynamics towards remembering and acknowledging the unique plight of the Jews during the war, the late 1980s saw a new turn in the public discourse, which I discuss in this chapter in the continued case study of *The Commissar*. However, before proceeding to the analysis of films, it is essential to consider another contributing factor to the development of Soviet Holocaust cinema: the structural reforms of the Soviet film industry.

The Fifth Congress of the Filmmakers’ Union: a Revolutionary Moment

Film scholars writing on the late Soviet period generally acknowledge the importance of the Fifth Congress of the Filmmakers’ Union (13 May 1986)²⁹ in initiating drastic reforms within the Soviet industry at the levels of production infrastructure and cinematic content. Some even call these reforms a revolution, which brought the

²⁷ Robert O. Freedman, *Soviet Policy towards Israel under Gorbachev* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1991).

²⁸ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 203.

²⁹ The Filmmaker’s Union was created in 1957 and for the majority of its existence was headed by filmmaker Lev Kulidzhinov, from 1965 to 1986.

Soviet film industry to its demise. Scholars like George Faraday³⁰ and Nancy Condee³¹ observe that the innovative strategies of self-financing and freedom from direct governmental control, at first perceived as positive developments, in fact proved incompatible with an industry which has been run by a single administrative body since the early 1920s.³² Gorbachev himself recognized the need for a drastic restructuring of the highly bureaucratic film industry, and he appointed his close associate, the Secretary of Ideology Aleksandr Iakovlev, to initiate and supervise the reforms. Iakovlev's choice of Elem Klimov as head of the Filmmakers' Union pinpointed the internally conflicting policies of the cultural administration,³³ since the director, as we have seen, had previously suffered at the hands of that very system. However, we can also see how such a choice could signal the beginning of a major shift towards a more liberal film industry and seem a highly promising initiative at the time. Indeed, state officials and filmmakers concurred in their support of Klimov's candidature. Coming from a generation of directors from the era of the 'Thaw', Klimov as well his deputy Andrei Smirnov and the majority of their secretariat, strove for creative liberalisation and highlighted as key aims of the new Soviet industry the education and elevation of the tastes of filmgoers. This new approach promoted a shift from the entertainment to the artistic valuing of film. It thus marked a departure from Filipp Ermash's priorities in the management of the industry, while the head of Goskino himself was replaced by the liberal figure of Aleksandr Kamshalov in 1987. Moreover, as Faraday³⁴ observes, the fundamental changes within Goskino led to the

³⁰ George Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers: The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 2-3.

³¹ Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Films* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52-53.

³² Faraday comments that while the name of the organisation would change, its principle remained generally intact throughout the Soviet history in Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 61.

³³ Condee, *The Imperial Trace*, 52-53.

³⁴ Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 159.

collapse of the scholarly and critical dichotomy between nonconformist auteur, and conventional popular cinema, as within this new context the ‘artists’ no longer had to overcome ideological constraints to produce their films.

Since the reforms of the film industry are discussed in numerous scholarly texts, I would like to flag up only those aspects that I see as key to the development of Soviet Holocaust cinema. Echoing the reforms that were made on the wider socio-political scale, the film industry underwent a similar process of de-centralisation, where film studios were no longer controlled by Goskino but rather were granted financial and creative/ideological freedom. Consequently, film studios and their creative units were able to co-produce films with the West – a factor that I will study in the last part of the chapter – and depict any subject on the screen without concerns for censorship. For now, however, I would like to consider another key factor contributing to the new freedoms of the Soviet film industry: the work of ‘the Conflict Commission for creative questions’, an organisation conceived by the Filmmakers’ Union on 17 May 1986 to review and release previously banned and censored films.

A Case Study: the Conflict Commission and the release of The Commissar

Comprised of the member of the Filmmakers’ Union, the Conflict Commission was headed by the leading Soviet film critic, Andrei Plakhov. In the interview that I conducted with Plakhov,³⁵ he identified the following key aims of the Commission: to ‘rehabilitate’ the films which had been shelved indefinitely, to revive the original director’s cuts of the censored films, and to grant wide release to films with

³⁵ Andrei Plakhov, interview, London, 26 October 2010.

previously limited distribution.³⁶ The work involved re-watching films, deciding upon their artistic and ideological qualities and recommending them to Goskino for exhibition and distribution. While, as Plakhov acknowledges, the process was often complicated by struggles with the authorities in the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Commission ‘rehabilitated’ 250 films, including the now classic *The Colour of Pomegranates* (Sergei Paradzhanov, 1968), *The Theme* (Gleb Panfilov, 1979), *Repentance* (Tengiz Abuladze, 1984) and, most importantly to my study, *The Commissar* (Aleksandr Askol’dov, 1967).

The unique fate of this film, whose production and release were separated by 20 years, enables us to trace the trajectory of the Holocaust (cinematic) discourse from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. Discussing the work of the Conflict Commission, most scholars tend to ignore the important fact that *The Commissar* was the only film to face additional hardship upon its release. Recollecting the complicated process, Plakhov explained to me that, after numerous unanswered requests from the Commission, Goskino issued a refusal on 28 November 1986, barring the release of the film unless certain changes were made.³⁷ However, as previously, Askoldov’s uncompromising personality led to another conflict with the officials and the film remained on the shelf until July 1987. It was then, during the Moscow International Film Festival, that Askoldov made a public plea in front of the international jury, comprised of Robert De Niro, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Vanessa Redgrave, for the release of his film.³⁸ Following his impromptu speech, a special screening of *The Commissar* was organised two days later and permission to take the film off the shelf was received immediately after the event. However, the film

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., and Elena Stishova also describes this process in ‘Passions over *Commissar*’, *Wide Angle* 12/4 (1990): 73-74.

³⁸ A video record of the speech appears in the documentary film *The Fate of the Commissar* (Valerii Balaian, 2006).

was not allowed into wider national and international distribution until November 1988. Commenting on this fact, Miron Chernenko suggests that it was the unease about the Holocaust scene that delayed the final release of the film.³⁹ Indeed, this comment invites a closer look at the historical context that framed the fate of *The Commissar* in the late 1980s.

Political scientists and historians, such as Yitzhak Brudny⁴⁰ and Vladimir Shlapentokh,⁴¹ observe that the policy of free speech, beneficial in many aspects, however, led to open criticism of Gorbachev's government and also prompted a new wave of public and political anti-Semitic expressions particularly in the late 1980s. The government and liberal intellectuals did little to counter these views.⁴² Opposition to Gorbachev was split into two groups: the supporters of Stalinism and advocates of imperial rule. Whilst differing ideologically, these were united by a shared anti-Semitic outlook. They blamed the Soviet Jews for the Revolution, the Civil War and the mass terror of the 1930s, as well as for the devaluation of Russian culture in the post-Stalinist period.⁴³ Despite the difference in their views on the future of the country, they shared a belief that Jews should not be part of it. The Soviet media played a crucial part in propagating these attitudes: for example, 'Memory', an extreme right-wing organisation that rose to prominence in 1987, made frequent anti-Semitic statements during TV appearances, while an open letter from a schoolteacher, Nina Andreeva, expressing strong pro-Stalinist and anti-Semitic views was published in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* in 1988, inspiring a wave of similar texts that were widely

³⁹ Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda, zheltaia zvezda* (Vinnitsa: Globus Press, 2001), 294.

⁴⁰ Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁴¹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalinist Era* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990).

⁴² Ibid., 260.

⁴³ Ibid., 206-208.

printed in the Soviet press. Moreover, as Richard Stites observes, Soviet Neo-Nazi movements became increasingly visible and widespread during this period.⁴⁴

Naturally, the film industry was implicated in these debates and the new leadership in both Goskino and the Filmmakers' Union were aware of the further conflicts that the controversial film, *The Commissar*, could potentially stimulate. According to his own, albeit subjective and perhaps embittered, account, the director recalls Klimov's objection to the release of the film unless the Holocaust scene was edited out.⁴⁵ Indeed, as we have seen in the first part of this chapter, Klimov was a liberal filmmaker in numerous ways, yet not in relation to the Jewish subject. Commenting on this situation, Pavel Lungin, a Soviet-Jewish director who did not receive the support of the Filmmaker's Union in the production of his first feature film *Taxi Blues* (France/USSR, 1990), suggested to me that Klimov's request to cut out the scene was guided by his interest in avoiding scandal and potential conflict related to the depiction of Jewish martyrdom, rather than by his personal dislike of the subject.⁴⁶ However, since Askoldov refused to back down, and given the initial order from the top, the film eventually had to be released uncut.

While the artistic merit of *The Commissar* is undeniable, its national and international success is more likely to be dictated by its controversial production and release. An overview of the critical response points to the centrality of the film's history to its success. While also praising *The Commissar*'s unorthodox approach to genre and gender,⁴⁷ most authors stress the role of the Jewish narrative line in the film's history. For example, Verina Glaessner comments on the film's contemporary

⁴⁴ Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Soviet Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 200.

⁴⁵ *The Fate of the Commissar* (Valerii Balaian, 2006).

⁴⁶ Pavel Lungin, interview, Moscow, 12 August 2010.

⁴⁷ Louis Menashe, 'Chapayev and Company: Films of the Russian Civil War,' *Cineaste* 4 (2005): 18-22; Horton and Brashinsky, *Zero Hour: Glasnost and the Soviet Cinema in Transition* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992), 36-38.

significance ‘as a vehicle for making “the Jewish question” [...] a visible plank of the government’s current policies’⁴⁸ and points out the role of the Holocaust sequence in the ban of the film. Anne Williamson similarly connects the film’s Jewish theme to its production and historical context:

In 1967, just as Israel had triumphed in the Six Day War, Askoldov was finishing the edit on *The Commissar*, which sympathetically portrays a Jewish family. Soviet censors realized that scenes like the commissar's vision of the future Holocaust and of the Magazanik family being led to the gas chambers hinted darkly at a connection between Nazism and Russian anti-Semitism and could possibly remind audiences of Stalin’s appeasement of Hitler.⁴⁹

The Soviet press of the late 1980s while not focusing on the connection between the Holocaust scene and the film’s ban, nevertheless acknowledged the centrality of the Jewish theme and generally condemned the banning of this work.⁵⁰

Since its release *The Commissar* has become one of the best-known Soviet films. It was shown at the 32nd London Film Festival, the 31st San Francisco Film Festival and the 38th Berlin Film Festival, winning the Silver Bear and a FIPRESCI prize at the latter. It was nominated for the national film award NIKA (1988) and, surprisingly, selected by the Soviet government as the country’s official entry to the Oscars in 1988.⁵¹ Most importantly to my study, *The Commissar* has been recognised by both Russian scholars (Chernenko,⁵² Stishova⁵³) and Western authors (Annette Insdorf,⁵⁴ Josephine Woll,⁵⁵ Youngblood⁵⁶) for its contribution to Holocaust cinema at large.

⁴⁸ Verina Glaessner, ‘The Commissar,’ *Monthly Film Bulletin* 664 (1989): 140.

⁴⁹ Anne Williamson, ‘Askoldov!,’ *Film Comment* May-June (1988): 69.

⁵⁰ Konstantin Shcherbakov, ‘Shag navstrechu,’ *Iskusstvo Kino* 11 (1987): 57-62.

⁵¹ Bulletin announcement, *Screen International*, 12 November 1988, 4. The film was not selected in the final list of nominees.

⁵² Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 228-232.

⁵³ Stishova, ‘Passions over *Commissar*,’ 62-75.

⁵⁴ Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Cinema and the Holocaust*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.

⁵⁵ Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 235.

⁵⁶ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 156.

The Commissar is indeed a rewarding film to study. Firstly, as a work with a formally intricate and rich portrayal of the Holocaust, it lends itself to textual analysis, particularly in relation to cinematic point of view. Secondly, as a work with an astonishingly complicated production and release history, it enables us to trace the trajectory of the Holocaust discourse in the Soviet Union from the late 1960s to the end of the 1980s and to observe continued controversy over Jewish wartime history. Finally, the release of *The Commissar* contributes to the appearance of a new late Soviet genre of Holocaust cinema, marking a new important stage in the history of Soviet cinema.

Jews Reclaim their History: New Holocaust Cinema in the Soviet Union

The Commissar undoubtedly played an important part in enabling the production of a new wave of more liberal and more explicit films about the Holocaust – although Chernenko⁵⁷ over-stresses the film's contribution to this new trend. In this section, consequently, I wish to consider other, equally important, factors in this process of renewal of representations of the Holocaust in the Soviet cinema of this period. First of all, it needs to be said that following the wider process of dismantling the cult of WWII, Soviet cinema once again strove to write new histories of this event, unveiling new stories of the Holocaust in the process.⁵⁸ Secondly, by the end of the 1980s the Soviet Union was signalling a certain readiness to acknowledge the presence of the international Holocaust cinema at large, through initiatives like the retrospective of anti-fascist cinema at the Moscow International Film Festival in 1987⁵⁹ and most importantly the season of French auteur cinema in Moscow in February 1988, which

⁵⁷ Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 294-297.

⁵⁸ *Iskusstvo kino* 5 (1990): 3.

⁵⁹ Featuring *Cabaret* (Bob Foss, USA, 1972) and *Sophie's Choice* (Alan J. Pakula, USA, 1982).

showcased *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, France, 1985) and *Au revoir les enfants* (Louis Malle, France, 1987). Thirdly, the creation of a new self-financing film production model within the context of a failing Soviet economy led to an unprecedented boom of co-productions. In the following section I consider this particular factor as crucial to the new genre of Soviet Holocaust cinema.

While co-productions were not completely alien to the old Soviet film model⁶⁰ – indeed, *May Stars* and *Remember Your Name*, studied in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively, are examples of such a practice – by the late 1980s a third of all Soviet films were co-produced with the West.⁶¹ It is impossible to overlook that fact that this period saw an unprecedented increase in films not just portraying the Holocaust but also presenting it as a uniquely Jewish trauma from the perspective of Jewish protagonists. Speaking of European co-productions, film scholars generally comment on a crisis in European national cinemas and register a peak in a new wave of co-productions by the end of the 1980s. However, as Luisa Rivi observes, European co-productions appear not only from financial necessity but also to articulate the needs of new symbolic expression.⁶² Indeed, Soviet partnership with the West (mainly Europe) fits this depiction. On the one hand, co-productions satisfied the Soviet need to rely on more stable (Western) financial and administrative structures at a time when the domestic industry was thrown into a ‘whirlpool of change’⁶³ (indeed, Western companies also benefited from the cheap production costs of the Soviet film studios). On the other hand, the boom in co-productions responded to the need of the Soviet cinema to articulate previously suppressed or distorted subjects, including that of the

⁶⁰ Faraday explains that certain privileged directors were able to shoot co-productions abroad, in Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 88.

⁶¹ Ibid., 136-137.

⁶² Luisa Rivi, *European Cinema after 1989: Cultural Identity and Transnational Productions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 9.

⁶³ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 184.

Holocaust. The tendency to re-evaluate the past, while certainly stimulated by the Gorbachev reforms, can also be attributed to the growing importance of the Western market, which, as Faraday observes, strongly influenced cinematic content.⁶⁴ He explains that Soviet filmmakers were expected to expose the ‘Soviet Union’s traumatic past and troubled present’,⁶⁵ since such films proved particularly successful at European festivals and on TV. Indeed, the trauma of the Holocaust and the problem of contemporary anti-Semitism became (some of) the recurring topical issues in the co-produced films.

Thus the boom in co-productions, paralleled by several crucial factors such as the fall of censorship, the formation of a new Holocaust cinematic discourse and the rehabilitation of Soviet-Jewish cultural figures (Vasilii Grossman and Solomon Mikhovels among others), led to a general increase in Jewish-themed films, and the Holocaust genre itself emerged as part of a larger wave of what can be called the new Soviet-Jewish cinema. These films can be divided into several thematic/generic groups:⁶⁶

1. Jewish heritage films, depicting Jewish history in pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union, often inspired by and based on the literary works of Russian-Jewish authors like Sholem-Aleichem and Isaac Babel, and closely resembling the Yiddish cinema of the early 20th century.⁶⁷ *The Art of Living in Odessa* (Georgii Iungval’d-Khil’kevich, 1989), *The Carter and the King* (Vladimir Aleinikov, 1989), *The Dusk* (Aleksandr Zel’dovich, 1990),

⁶⁴ Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 137.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ I am going to identify the country of production only of the co-produced films. Those without such information are produced by the Soviet Union only.

⁶⁷ Sholem-Aleichem (b.1885 Russia; d.1916 USA), real name Sholem Rabinovich, was a renowned Russian-Jewish writer and playwright working in Yiddish. Isaac Babel (b.1884 Russia; d.1940 Soviet Union), a distinguished Soviet-Jewish writer, executed by Stalinist state. Russian/Soviet-Yiddish cinema is discussed in Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 11-78; and Valérie Pozner and Natacha Laurent, ed. *Kinojudaica. Les représentations des Juifs dans le cinéma de Russie et d’Union soviétique des années 1910 aux années 1980* (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2012).

Gambrinus (Dmitrii Meskhiev, 1990), *Get Thee Hence!* (Dmitrii Astrakhan, 1991) and *Wandering Stars* (Vsevolod Shilovskii, 1991) are feature films set in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Their narratives nostalgically depict Jewish culture, touching upon Russian anti-Semitism and featuring scenes of pogroms. Documentaries such as *Peace to You, Sholem* (Vladimir Dvinskii, USSR/Germany, 1990) and *Everything is Fine* (Iurii Khashchevatskii, 1991) also explore Jewish history from the pre-Revolutionary to the present times, accounting for the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, including the Holocaust. Soviet anti-Semitism is the subject of a feature film, *And the Wind Returns* (Mikhail Kalik, USSR/USA, 1991), and a documentary, *People's Gala Concert* (Semen Aranovich, USSR/USA, 1991), both of which look at the dark years of Soviet Jewry under Stalin, as well as at the history of Jewish emigration to Israel.

2. Contemporary Jewish films, touching upon issues of anti-Semitism and emigration in the late Soviet period, such as the documentary *The Jewish Cemetery* (Rafail Nakhmanovich and Iurii Mar'iamov, 1990),⁶⁸ and features *Taxi Blues* (Pavel Lungin, USSR/France, 1990), *Jewish Happiness* (Vitalii Manskii, 1991) and *Love* (Valerii Todorovskii, 1991).
3. Holocaust films. Feature films set during the war, depicting the persecution and the murder of Jews in the Soviet Union and Europe: *Our Father* (Boris Ermolaev, 1989), *A Ladies' Tailor* (Leonid Gorovets, USSR/Germany, 1990), *Outcast* (Vladimir Savel'ev, USSR/Germany, 1991) and *The Parrot Speaking Yiddish* (Efraim Sevela, USSR/Germany, 1991); and documentary films exploring the history of the Holocaust from a contemporary perspective:

⁶⁸ Also features the subject of the Holocaust and will be included into the corpus for detailed discussion.

Revolt in Sobibor (Pavel Kogan and Lily van den Bergh, USSR/Netherlands, 1990), *Which One of us is Shai?*, *Mission of Raoul Wallenberg* and *Meeting with Father* (Aleksandr Rodnianskii, USSR/Germany, 1990).

In the remainder of this chapter I focus on the works dedicated to the subject of the Holocaust and study them in relation to several key concerns of my thesis – cinematic memory and the commemoration of the Holocaust, a Jewish point of view on the Holocaust and Holocaust (un)representability.

Memory, commemoration and testimony: Holocaust documentary films

In 2012 Claude Lanzmann took part in an on-stage interview in London to discuss *Shoah*.⁶⁹ When asked as to why the film does not touch upon the fate of the Soviet Jews, the director explained that while the script originally presupposed such a narrative line, the Soviet authorities in the 1970s banned the French crew from filming in the Soviet Union. This little-known episode in the history of the widely-discussed Holocaust documentary then begs the question: how different would the popular and scholarly understanding of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union have been were Lanzmann to have embarked on this project in the late 1980s? Indeed, this example highlights how crucial the historical changes in the Soviet Union of the late 1980s were in enabling communication with the West and hence the emergence of a new wave of documentary films about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.⁷⁰

I begin this section by looking at three documentaries, *The Jewish Cemetery*, *Peace to You*, *Sholem* and *Everything is Fine*, which engage with both contemporary

⁶⁹ Claude Lanzmann, on-stage interview, Institut Français, London, 20 February 2012.

⁷⁰ Chernenko also highlights the importance of co-production to the appearance of the new wave of Soviet documentary films of the Holocaust in Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 290, 341.

and historic problems of Russian and Soviet anti-Semitism, Jewish emigration and ethnic violence.

The Jewish Cemetery portrays the life of a Soviet-Jewish artist, Mikhail, in the late Soviet Union, reflecting upon some pivotal events from the Brezhnev era – the *refusnik* movement, anti-Semitic discrimination through unemployment and arrests, and underground religious practices – and documenting the transition to the late Soviet period and the new freedom to commemorate and celebrate Soviet-Jewish history and identity. The film captures a range of commemorative practices performed by Soviet Jews, such as the memorial ceremonies for the murdered members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the renovations of a Jewish cemetery, and excavations of mass-graves of Holocaust victims. At first seemingly unrelated to the story of Mikhail, scenes of the excavation then culminate in the Jewish burial ceremony of the victims' remains, led by the protagonist. The film openly manifests the Jewish identity of its subjects in the scenes depicting the exhumation and the burial ceremony: Mikhail's commemorative speech stresses the anti-Semitic nature of the atrocities, the kippah skullcaps worn by the Jewish men working in the mass graves and the yellow Star of David symbols on the victims' coffins and the clothes of the participants of the burial ceremony.



Fig. 21: The Jewish identity of the victims is restored.

The directness of these images in specifying the ethnicity of the victims becomes particularly striking when contrasted with the wartime footage of similar events, such as the exhumation of the mass graves in *Battle for our Soviet Ukraine* and the commemorative ceremony depicted in *Majdanek*, where, as Chapter 1 demonstrated, this fact remained unacknowledged. Thus some 45 years later *The Jewish Cemetery* reinstates precisely what was elided in the wartime films – the Jewish origin of the victims and the anti-Semitic nature of the crimes. The image of a man wearing a kippah retrieving the remains from the mass grave powerfully underlines that the Soviet Jews are finally able to re-connect with their history, literally restoring the Jewish identity of the wartime victims, while Mikhail's speech and the yellow stars at the burial ceremony emphasize the Judaic nature of the event and symbolise the identification of the commemorators with the victims.



Fig. 21.1: Soviet Jews uncover their history.

Establishing continuity between the victims of the Holocaust and contemporary Soviet Jews, these yellow stars thus also symbolise the perpetual sufferings of Jews in the Soviet Union.

The next documentary in this section, *Peace to You, Sholem* similarly articulates its Jewish identity and places the Jewish experience at the heart of its narrative. It does so from the very beginning both thematically and formally: the title invokes the name of the renowned Russian-Yiddish author, Sholem Aleichem, while the opening credit sequence is written in Hebrew-stylised Cyrillic text. The film itself is then comprised of 14 imagined letters to Sholem Aleichem, their authors forming a collective protagonist representing the Jewish people. These function as thematic chapters in the film, covering topics from pre-Revolutionary pogroms and the Holocaust to contemporary anti-Semitism and Jewish emigration. A textually rich piece comprised of archival footage, excerpts from silent Yiddish films, present-day interviews and theatrical performances, *Peace to You, Sholem* features Zinovii

Gerdt,⁷¹ a popular Soviet-Jewish actor, who narrates, interviews and meditates throughout the film.

Exploring Sholem Aleichem's biography, the film travels from pre-revolutionary Russia to contemporary New York, where Gerdt meets the author's descendants. Their discussion of Aleichem's ability to combine humour and tragedy prompts the film to depict pre-Revolutionary pogroms and then the Holocaust. Introducing a new chapter, Gerdt puts on a striped jacket with a yellow star on its breast pocket and steps up on a theatre stage filled with people in similar costumes.



Fig. 22: Jewish actor contemplates the history of the Holocaust.

As the actor hypothesises about Aleichem's view on the Holocaust, images of atrocities begin to flicker on a film screen in the centre of the stage. *Peace to You*, *Sholem* signals its inter-textual quality by featuring now iconic images of Kristallnacht, the Warsaw ghetto (including the photograph of the boy), deportations and selections at the death camps, and the newsreel footage from the liberation of

⁷¹ Gerdt's Jewish identity was central to identifying the Holocaust narrative in *I Will Wait for You*, studied in Chapter 3.

Majdanek and Auschwitz death camps. At first appearing as projections on the screen, they then fill the image track in the form of a long archival segment.

The process of reclaiming Jewish history suggested earlier takes place in this film through the way it re-interprets the footage of atrocities. While these images featured previously in Soviet cinema to represent universal suffering, *Peace to You, Sholem* produced towards the collapse of the Soviet Union underlines the importance of the new historical context to its ability to rewrite the meaning of these images. No longer requiring its viewer to read between the lines, the film extracts the story of the Jewish Holocaust from the margins and puts it at the heart of the narrative.

Returning the original meaning to these images of atrocities, the film also redresses the official history of the Babii Iar massacre. The cinematic commemoration of this tragedy that runs through this thesis is at the heart of the fifth chapter of *Peace to You, Sholem*. So far we have observed how Soviet historical discourse, while acknowledging the massacre, refrained from identifying Babii Iar as the largest mass grave of Soviet Jews. After the pioneering reconstruction in *The Unvanquished*, where the Jewishness of the victims was represented through the character of Dr. Fishman, Soviet cinema had adhered to the official discourse and eschewed the ethnic specificity of this site. For example, in Chapter 2 we saw how *Two Years Above an Abyss* conventionally depicted the massacre as equally affecting Jews, Communists and commissars. Thus what *Peace to You, Sholem* does is to re-insert the hitherto missing emphasis on the anti-Semitic nature of this crime.

The relevant chapter of the film opens with a reprint of the original announcement by the occupiers, which clearly demonstrates that only Jews were summoned to the meeting point on the corner of Mel'nik Street on 29 September 1941, the date that went down in history as the first day of the massacre. The testimonies of

the survivors in the scenes that follow play an equally important role in underlining the specifically Jewish nature of this atrocity. The presence of the Holocaust survivors, itself rare in the Soviet cinema at large, provides another example of how late Soviet documentary cinema enabled Jews to reclaim their personal histories of the Holocaust. By presenting the first testimonies of Holocaust survivors in the Soviet Union, the film thus shifts the traditional focus away from the gas chambers in death camps, revealing a new historical dimension of the annihilation procedures. Depicting the ravine at Babii Iar as the main locus of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, and presenting survivor testimony which is filmed on this former execution site, *Peace to You, Sholem* challenges Western scholarly discourse of ‘an event without a witness’,⁷² inviting re-considerations of the concepts of survival and testimony.

Throughout this thesis I have been evaluating the role of ideological limitations surrounding film production, accounting for a link between state and self-censorship as a factor in the understated or eluded portrayals of the Holocaust. While so far we have observed cases of coherence between the dominant discourse and the decision of the filmmakers to downplay the subject of the Holocaust (for example in *Ordinary Fascism*, *Remember your Name*, *They Were Actors*, *Come and See*), the next film that I examine here, *Everything is Fine*, demonstrates that, even in the absence of state control, there continued to be cases of filmmakers who preferred not to focus on the Holocaust in their works dedicated to Jewish history.

The rich formal structure of *Everything is Fine* in many ways echoes that of *Peace to You, Sholem*: it is comprised of several thematic chapters, narrating the complex experience of the Soviet Jews through interviews, archival material and hidden-camera footage, as well as through theatre, dance and puppetry performances.

⁷² Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (Oxford: Routledge, 1992), 51.

While openly manifesting its Jewish identity, *Everything is Fine*, however, only briefly acknowledges the history of the Holocaust. The annihilation and persecution of Jews during WWII is mentioned in passing on three occasions: photographing a Jewish cemetery, the camera passes by a grave bearing the inscription ‘Killed by the Nazis’, a Jewish musician mentions ‘the catastrophe’ in relation to Jewish emigration, and a rabbi recounts a story of the miraculous salvation of Jews from a gas chamber on the religious holiday of Simchad Tora. Answering my question as to why the film, which so scrupulously explores the Jewish experience, acknowledges the Holocaust only briefly, film’s director, Iurii Khashchevatskii, explained:

Indeed, the Holocaust is a huge tragedy of the Jewish people and so many tragic films were made about it. My intention was to remind the Jews that they are joyous, witty and talented, and that it would be wrong to define oneself only in relation to the Holocaust. It is important to think of contemporary Jewish issues. The main issue today is Jewish assimilation. So many Jews live completely detached from their religion, customs, language and ethnic identity. The aim of my film was to excite Jews about being Jewish, to revive their sense of love and pride.⁷³

In this case, then, the downplaying of the Holocaust is dictated by the filmmaker’s personal belief in the need to celebrate Jewish culture rather than to commemorate the traumatic history.

While Khashchevatskii makes a creative decision not to focus on the subject of the Holocaust in his film, other directors like Pavel Kogan and Aleksandr Rodnianskii, whose films, *Revolt in Sobibor* and *Meeting with Father*, respectively, I study in the following part of this section, use the newly found ideological and financial freedom to co-produce documentaries dedicated specifically to the Jewish genocide.

⁷³ Iurii Khashchevatskii, e-mail interview, 8 January 2011.

Revolt in Sobibor, co-directed by Kogan and Lily van den Bergh, was the first Soviet-Dutch co-production. Shot in five countries (Brazil, USA, Australia, The Netherlands and USSR), the film depicts the lives of four Jews and one Russian, survivors of and participants in the 1943 revolt in the Sobibor death camp. While the event of the Holocaust is at the heart of the film and it is related mainly from the perspective of the Jewish protagonists, the presence of the Russian survivor and participant in the revolt, Aleksandr Pecherskii, plays an interesting part. In my interview with the film's co-director, van der Bergh,⁷⁴ she recalled that Kogan faced greater difficulty obtaining production means in the Soviet Union for a film about the Holocaust, while she encountered no such issues working in Western Europe.⁷⁵ Consequently, Kogan had to emphasise the heroic role of the Russian survivor in the revolt and his centrality to the film within the Soviet context. No longer controlled by state censorship, the director nevertheless had to consider the opinions of the film studio bureaucrats as well as of financiers, which clearly pointed to the continued reluctance to embrace stories of Jewish heroism and survival.

The final part of the section dedicated to new Soviet documentaries about the Holocaust concludes with a case study of *Meeting with Father* by Aleksandr Rodnianskii. While this film encapsulates some of the key preoccupations of this new group as well as of my thesis at large, by studying *Meeting with Father*, I also intend to offer a new insight into the overlooked directorial career of Rodnianskii, who after the collapse of the Soviet Union became an established film and TV producer.

⁷⁴ Pavel Kogan passed away in 1998.

⁷⁵ Lily van den Bergh, e-mail interview, 28 August 2012.

A Case Study: Meeting with Father

As a founder and CEO of independent TV channels STS in Russia and 1+1 in Ukraine, Rodnianskii has enjoyed the status of a media celebrity in both countries, while his involvement in films like *East-West* (Régis Wargnier, France/Russia/Ukraine/Bulgaria/Spain, 1999) *The Sun* (Aleksandr Sokurov, Italy/France/Switzerland/Russia, 2005) and *Cloud Atlas* (Tom Tykwer, Lana and Andy Wachowski, Germany/USA/Hong Kong/Singapore, 2012) makes him one of the few Russian producers to work in the international film industry. Despite his prominent presence in scholarly and popular film literature as a producer, his earlier directorial career remains largely understudied.

From 1986 to 1994, Rodnianskii worked at the Kiev documentary film studio ‘Kievnauchfilm’, started his private company ‘Innovafilms’, co-financed in Germany, and was employed as producer and director by a German TV channel, ZDF. Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith⁷⁶ as well as Louis Menashe⁷⁷ and Miron Chernenko⁷⁸ all briefly mention this aspect of Rodnianskii’s career. Menashe and Chernenko also acknowledge the crucial contribution of European finance to his distinctly Jewish films.⁷⁹ Additionally, Rodnianskii himself sometimes discusses his earlier career during interviews, master-classes and TV appearances in Russia.⁸⁰ However, there exists no in-depth study of either his directorial work or of its contribution to Holocaust cinema.

⁷⁶ Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith, ed. *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in Contemporary Europe* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 208.

⁷⁷ Louis Menashe, *Moscow Believes in Tears: Russians and their Movies* (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2010), 212, 217, 385-394.

⁷⁸ Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 290.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 212 and ibid., 290.

⁸⁰ Konstantin Shavlovskii, ‘Obmen,’ *Seans* 31 (2007), accessed 24 February 2012.
<http://seance.ru/n/31/sjuzhet31/obmen/>

A master-class at the ‘Cine Fantom’ film club, Moscow, 22 September 2004.

Intellectual talk show ‘Shkola zlosloviia,’ 2 March 2009, accessed 5 November 2012.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NEw1bvbo30>

Born in Kiev to a Jewish family in 1961, Rodnianskii dedicates five of his 11 documentaries to the subject of the Holocaust: *Which one of us is Shai?* (1989) depicts the search for a survivor of the Babii Iar massacre; *The Mission of Raul Wallenberg* (1990) investigates the disappearance in the Soviet Union of a Swedish diplomat who rescued 100,000 Hungarian Jews; *Meeting with Father* (1990) analyses the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of a Jewish massacre; *Farewell, USSR. Film I. Personal* (1992) recollects Soviet-Jewish history; while *The March of the Living* (1993) depicts a memorial ceremony held by Jewish children from around the world in Auschwitz. The centrality of the Holocaust to Rodnianskii's films can be related to his family's experiences: some of his relatives perished in the Babii Iar massacre and his grandfather, Zinovii Rodnianskii, was amongst the wartime cameramen who filmed the aftermath of Nazi occupation, including the discovery of the Babii Iar mass-grave in 1943. The legacy of his grandfather's work clearly informs the portrayal of the Holocaust in Rodnianskii's own films, as the original wartime footage figures in *Meeting with Father* and *Farewell, USSR. Film I. Personal*. While the use of archival footage is in fact a widely recurring device in Soviet film, the personal nature of Rodnianskii's relationship to the images endows them with new qualities. In using wartime footage, the director establishes its Jewish authorship and creates a sense of historical continuity between the immediate Holocaust context and the memory of it in the late 1980s. While this thesis has deliberately departed from an essentialist approach to the ethnicity of the filmmakers, in Rodnianskii's case it is an important, and documented, contributing factor. The intimate, often autobiographical nature of his films, enhanced by the use of voice-over and his physical presence within the frame, as in *Meeting with Father*, makes Rodnianskii both the author of and the protagonist in his work. Thus, his films present

another example of Jewish subjectivity emerging in the late Soviet period, authoring the history of the Holocaust.

The plot of *Meeting with Father* deals with a historical incident, that of a mass murder of 812 Jews in the Ukrainian region of Zhitomir in 1942 and the film explores how this event resonates in the contemporary lives of the protagonists. The three characters in the film, Maria Kampf, Rakhil' Kochanovskaia and Rodnianskii himself, represent the different strands that constitute the legacy of the Holocaust during the last years of the Soviet Union. Firstly, testifying to the emergence of a specifically Jewish discourse within the Soviet understanding of WWII war crimes, the film depicts Maria, whose father, Ivan, is sentenced to death for taking part in the Jewish massacre as a translator to the occupiers. Secondly, the question of official versus personal commemoration of the Holocaust, which recurs throughout the thesis, is represented through Rakhil' – a survivor of the Zhitomir massacre, who plans to re-erect a monument that had been destroyed on the site. Finally, the notions of cinematic record and the creation of a Holocaust memory are reflected upon through a symbolic dialogue between Rodnianskii and his grandfather; it occurs at the textual level of the film through the director's voice-over and the insertion of the archival footage shot by his grandfather.

The process of reclaiming Holocaust history, observed in all documentaries in this group, is evident in the way Rodnianskii re-contextualises his grandfather's footage: the film opens with a record of a 1943 war crime trial in Kharkov, where a group of Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators are sentenced to death for the mass-murder of civilians. While the ethnicity of the victims is elided in the wartime film of the trial (a tendency that we have observed in Chapter 1), Rodnianskii's voice-over introducing Maria Kampf in the following sequence explains that Ivan Kampf is

similarly sentenced to death for taking part in a Jewish massacre. In doing so, he underlines that the original wartime footage depicted anti-Semitic perpetrators.

Despite opening with the theme of state punishment, the film itself is not concerned with investigating the ‘facts’ from the past in order to determine whether Maria’s father is guilty, and thus refrains from condemning either the possible collaborator or the flawed law system of the late Soviet regime that sentenced him to death. The objective tone of the film is evident in the way it explores the perspective of both women, who stand on the opposite sides of this tragic incident. On the one hand it presents Maria, torn between her daughterly love and the ethical dilemma of understanding her father’s (possible) crime, while on the other it shows Rakhil’, who lost her entire family in the massacre and, being its only survivor, acts as the spokeswoman for the dead. The film does not set the women apart in a villain-versus-victim dichotomy; it nevertheless separates them thematically as well as through formal representation. Fighting for her father’s amnesty, Maria is an energetic, emotional and verbal woman, who is consumed by a mixture of feelings from shame and devastation to hope and love. At times she passionately confesses to Rodnianskii about losing her will to live, while at others, she attempts to position herself in her father’s place, appreciating the moral complexity of the situation. Relating Maria’s experience to the film’s portrayal of the Holocaust discourse of the late Soviet period, we can observe how the film introduces the concepts of guilt and responsibility as constituting part of this discourse. Collapsing the binary division of perpetrator-versus-victim in the character of Maria, *Meeting with Father* thus implies that, by suffering from her father’s deeds, Maria also becomes a bearer of Holocaust memory. The complexity of her situation, where she can neither be reconciled with, nor separated from her father (and his crime), is potently encapsulated in the mise-en-

scène of an episode depicting her visiting her father in prison. Shot in a series of tight close-ups, the scene is imbued with a sense of entrapment and hopelessness. The metal bars and the glass partition, which create an aural and spatial barrier between father and daughter, highlight the impossibility of reconciliation, while the telephone cord, enabling the conversation, creates a physical and symbolic connection between them.



Fig. 23: The mise-en-scène accentuates the impossibility of reconciliation.

Maria's struggle to save her father's life is paralleled by Rakhil's effort to commemorate the dead with a monument over the site of their murder. She recollects how an improvised monument, erected after the war, was destroyed in the late 1940s by the authorities, and that her subsequent pleas for official commemoration remained unanswered. Capturing Rakhil's visit to the location of the murder as it does, in the absence of an official monument, the process of filming thus itself becomes an act of Holocaust commemoration. While Maria is depicted as a passionate and energetic woman fighting for her father's life, Rakhil' appears as humble and pensive,

occupying a space between the living and the dead. Her position as the sole survivor of the atrocity – who came back from the dead, as it were – is interpreted through the film's unorthodox formal representation of her character. Departing from the more conventional means of portrayal employed in the scenes featuring Maria, the film creates Rakhil's ghost-like presence, depicting her in slow-motion and disconnecting the sound of her voice from the image track. In contrast to Maria's testimonies, where the woman addresses the director, Rakhil's silent face looks directly at the camera (and the viewer) while her voice, distorted by sound effects, speaks to us from beyond the frame.



Fig. 23.1: The silent face of a Holocaust survivor.

Moreover, as the woman recalls her distressing experience, the car in which she travels is (naturally) moving forward, however, she is facing the camera in the opposite direction, as though, ignoring the natural trajectory of movement, her eyes and mind are set on the past. The unconventional formal properties of the survivor's testimony thus materialise her experience, which she describes as: 'I cannot forget, but I cannot narrate how it happened'. Employing the devices of slow motion and de-

synchronising the sound and the image tracks, the film creates a character haunted by her past, who appears as a ghost-like creature existing both within and outside the frame.

Similarly to the narrative line of Maria and her father, the story of Rakhil' does not reach a closure. It concludes with an inter-title explaining that Rakhil' is still hoping for the creation of the monument. However, symbolically compensating for Rakhil's inability to commemorate her family officially, the film presents an epilogue sequence depicting a Jewish memorial ceremony. As well as realising a function of commemoration, the epilogue implies the process of reconciliation between the victims and the perpetrators when Rodnianskii's voice-over recalls Rakhil's concern for Maria's father. Capturing the last years of the Soviet Union, the film translates the sense of anticipation: both women await a positive resolution to their stories. 'Today, the naivety of these hopes is apparent', states Andrei Plakhov in a 1994 article about the film, 'and the emblem of their double-failure can be seen in two facts – the failure to re-erect the monument and the death sentence realised without any convincing proof of culpability. [Consequently] Maria Kampf emigrated to Germany and Rakhil' Kochanovskaia moved to Israel.'⁸¹

The theme of emigration that emerges from this film retrospectively is also present in other works of the new group of Soviet-Jewish documentaries. Thus, encapsulating its key thematic preoccupations, the Jewish commemoration and the re-appropriation of Holocaust history, *Meeting with Father* on the one hand suggests a positive dynamic in Jewish-Soviet history, yet on the other paints a rather tragic image of a failed encounter between Jews and the Soviet state, suggesting a sort of

⁸¹ Andrei Plakhov, 'Ruiny imperii,' *Kommersant*, 26 July 1994, accessed 24 October 2013. <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=84856>

irreconcilability between the two. This idea arises not only from the film's content but also from the exhibition and reception context.

Faraday's earlier comment regarding the suitability of the new Soviet films for the Western festival and TV circuit leads him to an observation that these works simultaneously bypassed the mainstream Soviet market.⁸² This insight is equally applicable to the Holocaust documentaries under examination here. While gaining some visibility in the national context – *The Mission of Raoul Wallenberg* received a prestigious NIKA award in 1990,⁸³ for example, and *The Jewish Cemetery* was nominated for the same award a year later – these works received a wider circulation and acclaim in the international arena. As well as marking the beginning of *The Commissar*'s triumph in the West, the Berlin Film Festival premiered *Peace to You, Sholem, Everything is Fine* and *The Mission of Raoul Wallenberg*. The latter two, together with *Meeting with Father*, then circulated in the United States and Europe. Rodnianskii's films won awards at the Valencia and the Cracow film festivals. As I had to source some of these films directly from the filmmakers as well as by searching on rare film-streaming websites, it became clear that these works, which once realised an important role of returning the history of the Holocaust to the Soviet Jews, are today largely forgotten and unknown.

Jewish Experience of the Holocaust in Feature Films

Throughout this thesis I have examined the presentation of different types of Jewish characters, whose presence in some cases enabled me to read marginalised Holocaust narratives in the films. As well as presenting anonymous and/or episodic Jewish

⁸² Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 138.

⁸³ An award of the Academy of Cinematographic Arts in Russia.

victims, such as in *Peace to Him Who Enters*, *Eastern Corridor*, *Gold and Come and See* (to name just a few), Soviet cinema created characters like Dr. Fishman and his granddaughter in *The Unvanquished*, Efim Magazannik and his family in *The Commissar*, Abram in *You Are Not an Orphan* and Basia in *The Ascent*. However, as I have argued, most of these characters remained secondary and their agency over the Holocaust narrative was denied.

In the late 1980s Soviet fiction films introduced a new group of Jewish characters: they were the protagonists in stories of the Holocaust. These films thus marked a radical departure from the previous tradition of representation. While there remained some films that continued to represent the Holocaust as marginal to the main story of Slavic wartime struggle, such as *Unknown Pages from the Life of an Intelligence Agent* (Viktor Chebotarev, 1990) and the nine-part TV-series *The Cry of a Quail* (Igor' Dobroliubov, 1991), my analysis here focuses on new Holocaust films such as *Our Father*, *Outcast*, *A Parrot Speaking Yiddish* and *A Ladies' Tailor*. Addressing these in this particular order highlights the increasingly overt depictions of the Jewish genocide and demonstrates how old representational tropes evolve or disappear from these films.

The first film in the group, *Our Father* (1989), is based on a 1946 story by a popular writer and wartime reporter, Valentin Kataev,⁸⁴ which traces 24 hours in the life of a young Jewish mother and her little son, who wander around an occupied Soviet city. Escaping confinement in a ghetto, yet failing to find any refuge, they succumb to severe cold during a night spent on a park bench and their frozen bodies are discovered the next morning. While Kataev's story, based on true events, details numerous examples of Jewish suffering and persecution, Ermolaev's choice of a

⁸⁴ Kataev was founder and editor-in-chief of the liberal journal *Iunost'*, which published Evgenii Yevtushenko's controversial poem *Babii Iar* in 1961 and Boris Vasil'ev's *Dawns Are Quiet Here* in 1969.

metaphorical if not of a surrealist treatment of the original source obscures the narrative of the Holocaust. It departs from historically accurate locations and costumes: for example, the confinement to a ghetto is depicted in a scene set in a railway tunnel, while the Nazi soldiers wear grey ski-masks and capes, instead of authentic uniform.

‘Using the basis of Kataev’s story as a pretext to discuss contemporary life’, as one of the reviews explained,⁸⁵ the film is a bleak meditation on the end of humanity. Its apocalyptic tone then overshadows the story of the unique Jewish plight with Christian symbolism: the film’s title clearly echoes the key Christian prayer, its soundtrack is comprised of religious chanting and a voice-over reciting from the Book of Revelation, while the imagery is imbued with Christian iconography. The overpowering presence of Christian motifs is particularly evident in the scene where the camera captures the face of the Jewish protagonist, played by a popular Russian actress, Margarita Terekhova,⁸⁶ reflected in the icon of the Madonna. Although the film paints a sense of her and her son’s particularly endangered position, the dystopian finale depicts them perishing together with the other non-Jewish characters that they have previously encountered. As the truck collects the dead bodies, frozen during the night, the scene establishes a sense of equality between the victims by granting them equal screen time and capturing them in identical, alienating long shots. Employing a highly expressive, at times absurdist, film language, *Our Father* does not attempt thus to comment on the phenomenon of the Holocaust; rather it employs the tragic story of a Jewish woman as a canvas on which to paint a metaphor for ‘the end’. As such the film can be appreciated as more of a reflection on the collapsing Soviet Union than a depiction of the Holocaust.

⁸⁵ Liudmila Moskovskaia, ‘Otche nash,’ *Sovetskaia Kul’tura*, 29 June 1989.

⁸⁶ Terekhova would be familiar to Western viewers from her main part in *Mirror* (Andrei Tarkovskii, 1974).

Although the next film that I examine here, *Outcast* (1991), offers a realistic depiction of the war, it distorts certain historical aspects of the Holocaust. Produced by Artur Brauner,⁸⁷ this Soviet-German co-production tells the story of a young Jewish couple, Shimon and Basia Reznik, who, escaping the Nazi occupation of Poland, find refuge in a Ukrainian village before the invasion of the Soviet Union. The film clearly establishes them as protagonists, conveying their Jewish identity through both the narrative and formal elements. The characters bear Jewish-sounding names, speak Yiddish and follow religious customs (the Shabbat dinner, kosher food and the *mezuzah* on their doorframe).



Fig. 24: Jewish traditions observed by the Reznik family.

Formally the Jewish origin of the film is related through the use of sound (Klezmer music and Hebrew prayers) and, as in *Peace to You, Sholem*, through

⁸⁷ Artur Brauner is a well-known German producer of Holocaust cinema. His status as an ‘auteur’ producer and some of the films are examined in Ronny Loewy, ‘“The Past in the Present”. The Films of Producer Artur Brauner and Dominant Narratives of the Genocide of European Jews in German Cinema,’ in *Cinema and the Shoah: an Art Confronts the Tragedy of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jean-Michel Frodon, trans. Anna Harrison and Tom Mes (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 173-180.

Hebrew-styled letters in the opening credits. Moreover, the film establishes Shimon and Basia's visual agency by figuring several point of view shots – Basia running through the field and Shimon perishing under a Nazi tank.

The Rezniks' status as refugees from Poland points to the particularly endangered position of Jews in occupied Europe and the characters themselves acknowledge the anti-Semitic atrocities taking place in their home country on numerous occasions. However, by focusing on the experience of the Polish Jews the film ignores the existence of the Soviet Jews and their subsequent plight in occupied Ukraine. The 'otherness' of the Jewish family is particularly underlined in a scene depicting a local wedding. When Basia and Shimon perform a traditional Jewish dance, the Ukrainian villagers encircle them and look at their movements with fascination and surprise. Once the war breaks out in the Soviet Union, the film creates an impression that the Rezniks are the only victims of the Jewish genocide. Thus while relating the Holocaust narrative through the tragic story of a Jewish family, the film ignores the experience of Soviet Jews. In doing so it re-evokes the earlier tendency of alienating the history of the Holocaust from the Soviet context.

Referring back to my argument that the debunking of the war cult enabled the emergence of new Holocaust films, we can observe how some of these works subvert the established conventions by depicting not only the particularity of Jewish victimhood but also Jews' contribution to the war effort. Thus a Jewish soldier appears as the protagonist of *The Parrot Speaking Yiddish*; a film which depicts not only the Holocaust but also the entirety of WWII from a Jewish perspective.

The film, based on the director's own short story *Mother* (1982), is a tragic comedy depicting the experience of a Lithuanian-Jewish soldier, Iankel, during WWII. The subject of the Holocaust appears towards the end of the film as Iankel, upon his

return, finds out that his mother, together with the majority of the Jews in Vilnius, perished in the Holocaust. Although the original literary source features a more detailed depiction of the mass shooting,⁸⁸ the film figures the Holocaust through the familiar cinematic trope of the Jewish death march. However, it does so with a significant difference from the existing tradition. If Soviet cinema of the previous decades tended to depict the Jewish death march from the perspective of Slavic characters (such as in *The Unvanquished* or *The Commissar*), in *The Parrot Speaking Yiddish* it is Iankel, the Jewish protagonist, who conjures up this image in his mind. Resting on Turim's theory of flashbacks, studied in Chapter 2, we can argue that the close-up of Iankel's face, which precedes the scene of the Jewish death march, establishes the subjective nature of the sequence and Iankel as its author. Thus the re-appropriation of Holocaust history, which I have considered in the earlier analysis of the documentaries, similarly occurs here through the use of a flashback-dream sequence depicting the death march from the perspective of the Jewish protagonist.

While Iankel imagines his mother marching off to her death in *The Parrot Speaking Yiddish*, the Jewish tailor Isaac foresees the annihilation of millions of Jews in *A Ladies' Tailor*. The film is adapted for the screen by Aleksandr Borshchiagovskii from his eponymous stage play (1980). A renowned Soviet-Jewish author, Borshchiagovskii suffered from discrimination in the late Stalinist anti-cosmopolitan campaign⁸⁹ and was an outspoken defender of Yevtushenko's poem, *Babii Iar*, in 1961. His play about the last night of a Jewish tailor, Isaac, and his family before the Babii Iar massacre, was staged by the Moscow Jewish Dramatic Ensemble (1981) and then published in a Yiddish newspaper *Sovietish Haimland* in 1982. Possibly unaware

⁸⁸ Efraim Sevela, *Mother* (1982), accessed 5 September 2012.
http://www.lib.ru/INPROZ/SEVELA/ma.txt_with-big-pictures.html

⁸⁹ He depicts his experience in Aleksandr Borshchagovskii, *Zapiski balovnia sud'by* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1991).

of the 1990 film, Lukasz Hirszwicz, writing in 1991, pointed out that the play had never appeared outside the Soviet-Yiddish milieus.⁹⁰ This observation, albeit erroneous, helps us to see the importance of the shifts in historical context from the early to the late 1980s, which enabled *A Ladies' Tailor* to break out from the Soviet-Jewish niche and reach wider audiences in the form of a Soviet-German film adaptation.

While officially the particularity of the Jewish suffering in Babii Iar still remained unacknowledged, *A Ladies' Tailor* commemorated this event as a specifically Jewish tragedy. Placing the massacre at the heart of its narrative, the film (like the relevant chapter in *Peace to You, Sholem*) opens with a close up of the announcement summoning the Jews of Kiev and its vicinity to a meeting point on the corner of Mel'nik Street on 29 September 1941. Immediately stressing the specificity of the predicament of Jewish people in occupied Kiev in the opening shot, the film depicts the Jewish identity of its protagonists equally overtly. It does so, similarly to the previous films in this section, through sound – Klezmer music, Hebrew prayers, Yiddish dialogues and Jewish-sounding names – as well as costume (Isaac wears a traditional orthodox outfit) and through the casting of ethnically Jewish popular actors Innokentii Smoktunovskii⁹¹ and Tat'iana Vasil'eva for the part of Isaac and his daughter.

In his praise for the film, Chernenko values *A Ladies' Tailor* as a counterpart to *The Unvanquished* (1945), making a rather unsubstantiated claim about the genetic memory of the Jewish filmmakers being a connecting tissue between the two films.⁹²

⁹⁰ Lukasz Hirszwicz, 'The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror,' in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941-1945*, eds. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 1993), 55-56.

⁹¹ Chapter 2 mentioned his role as the first Jewish soldier in the cinema of the 'Thaw'.

⁹² Chernenko, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 309-312.

Nevertheless, looking at the film from the point of view of a film historian, it is indeed possible to establish a chronological link between them, valuing *The Unvanquished* as the first and *A Ladies' Tailor* as the last renditions of the Babii Iar massacre in Soviet cinema. As such these films allow us to survey the change in the representational techniques of the Holocaust. The key difference here is the shift in perspective: whereas *The Unvanquished* is related from the point of view of the Ukrainian, Taras, with Dr. Fishman featuring as a secondary character, *A Ladies' Tailor* focuses on the Jewish family, while making the Ukrainian characters secondary. Consequently, the scenes of Jewish martyrdom in the first film are depicted either from Taras' or a neutral perspective, while the later work recreates an image of collective Jewish suffering in the form of Isaac's vision. The difference in contexts also determines a change in the formal approach to the depiction of the massacre itself. *The Unvanquished*, shot on the original location and based on witness accounts, clearly strives for maximum authenticity.⁹³ Made 45 years later, *A Ladies' Tailor* interprets the scene in a symbolic manner, using the archival footage of the liberated death camps to paint the magnitude of Jewish suffering. In this regard, it is essential to underline how the use of this footage to figure the Babii Iar massacre in this film differs from the representational techniques used in *Two Years Above an Abyss*. Whereas the 1966 film, examined in Chapter 2, deploys the archival footage of the death camps to represent Babii Iar as a tragedy affecting Jews, Communists and commissars alike, *A Ladies Tailor*, by employing the same imagery to figure the specifically Jewish trauma, restores the authentic meaning of both the massacre and the newsreel footage.

⁹³ See Jeremy Hicks' account of the discrepancies between the historical event and the cinematic reconstruction in Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938-1946* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 134-157.

The film once again shifts the viewing agency over the massacre: whereas in *Two Years Above an Abyss* it belonged to the Ukrainian collaborator-turned-resistance fighter, in *A Ladies' Tailor* it is attributed to the Jewish protagonist and victim, Isaac. The scene of the death march, featuring the tailor and his family, is followed by a non-diegetic sequence depicting Isaac in an empty courtyard. After focusing on his face in a lingering close-up, the sequence cuts to a shot of burning leaves. Accompanied by heightened sound effect of fire and a melancholic piano tune, a superimposition gradually introduces a series of images of the liberated Majdanek: piles of shoes, suitcases, spectacles and toys.



Fig. 25: Isaac's premonition of the Holocaust restores the original meaning of the archival footage.

The symbolic tone of the film, established in this scene, which connects the Babii Iar massacre and the industrial murder in the camps, carries over into the finale. Having realised a temporal and spatial leap from Kiev of 1941 to the death camps in 1945, the film then travels forward to the present day (presumably Kiev), where it portrays the death march of the Jews in a contemporary setting, as signalled by the modern-day cars in the background of the shot. Such temporal dislocation of the

Holocaust victims can be read as the film's comment on the continued hardships endured by Jews in the contemporary Soviet world.

The four films studied in this section demonstrate the evolution of the existing representational tropes with the most crucial change being the shift in point of view, which enables Jewish characters to reclaim the history of the Holocaust. These films depict both the specific and the universal events of the Holocaust, while their contemporary topicality is evident when related to the emergent anti-Semitic moods of the late Soviet period. Thus the depiction of the Holocaust in these films not only offers a new, Jewish point of view on this historical event, but together with films like *Get Thee Hence!*, *Gambrinus* and *Love* (to name some) also responds to and counters contemporary anti-Semitic discourses.⁹⁴

Despite their importance within the context of the current study, these films remain generally unknown to scholars of Holocaust cinema and are understudied by scholars of Soviet film. Similarly, these works evoked little resonance upon their release.⁹⁵ The concept of alienation, which I have stressed in relation to the Holocaust documentary cinema, equally defines the relationship between these features and their cinematic milieu. The failure of the new film industry model to implement a solid distribution and exhibition system led to a general decline of Soviet cinema on domestic cinema screens, thus contributing to the forgetting of these works. Paradoxically, the groundbreaking changes of the film industry, which enabled the very creation of the new wave of Holocaust cinema, consequently determined its absence from the public and the scholarly eye.

⁹⁴ Julian Graffy makes a similar comment about the contemporary relevance of *Get Thee Hence!* in Graffy 'Popular Cinema for the Time of Uncertainty,' in *Russia on Reels: The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema*, ed. Birgit Beumers (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 163.

⁹⁵ *A Ladies' Tailor* was the only film to receive some critical acclaim in the Soviet period – Smoktunovskii won a Russian NIKA and a Best Actor award at the San Remo Film Festival.

Conclusion

The final chapter of this thesis analyses representations of the Holocaust during the last nine years of the Soviet regime and charts a clear increase in the production of films on this subject in the final years of the regime. There were only four films produced in the mid-1980s where the Holocaust is depicted only briefly, but the corpus is then enriched by an entirely new group of Jewish-themed films. Such a gradual appearance of these films, which I propose should be appreciated as an integral part of the genre of Holocaust cinema, demonstrates a certain kind of retardation of the effect of socio-political changes on cinematic content. Despite the significant changes brought out by Gorbachev's speech in 1986 and the according appearance of socially, politically and historically critical films, the Jewish experience of the war remains largely ignored until 1989 when *Our Father* is released. This fact then points to two ideas. Firstly, having been repressed (to various extents) at the official level for over four decades, the subject of the Holocaust cannot find an immediate direct expression through cinematic discourse. Secondly, as my thesis has already demonstrated, state control is not the only reason for the omitted or covert depictions of this subject; therefore aspects like self-censorship and limited historical knowledge continue to play a part after the change in the political climate. In this light, it is not only the fall of the 'top down' model of industry control that this chapter considers important to the development of the cinematic trajectory, but also the interrelated factors like the release of *The Commissar*, the exhibition of European and US Holocaust films and the new model of co-productions with the West; all of which contribute to the formation of a new epistemological as well as a cinematic framework in which this body of work can be created. Therefore, this chapter argues that it is thanks to these factors that Soviet cinema produces a group of documentary

and feature films where for the first time in Soviet film history the Holocaust is made central to the narrative and is depicted from the Jewish point of view. Documentary films figuring survivor testimonies and feature films presenting Jewish protagonists thus reclaim the history of the Holocaust from a universalist or Soviet perspective for a specifically Jewish narrative.

Despite initially positive dynamics to the trajectory in the late-1980s/early 1990s, the above factors, which were essential to the formation of a new wave of Holocaust films, simultaneously contributed to its forgetting. Highlighting the failure of the new leadership to implement a concrete distribution system, Condee⁹⁶ and Faraday⁹⁷ observe a process of alienation between Soviet films and viewers. They suggest (using other cinematic examples) that the new wave of co-produced films targeted for foreign festival and TV circuits failed to gain prominence in the domestic market, contributing to what Condee calls ‘cine-amnesia’⁹⁸ – a phenomenon where, under the influx of Western cinema on TV and video, Soviet audiences no longer had the opportunity to see the domestic product, which they consequently forgot about.

The theme of emigration, particularly prominent in the documentary films studied here, thus becomes symbolic of the general alienation of Soviet-Jewish films from their national film market. The sense of irreconcilability that is particularly evident in *Jewish Cemetery* and *Meeting with Father* is also palpable in the fact that the distinct Jewish narratives of the Holocaust were only able to emerge in Soviet cinema during the demise of the USSR. Overpowered by the history of the collapse of the Soviet cinema and state, this group of films remains generally ignored in the subsequent scholarly studies. However, despite their relative anonymity in popular and scholarly cinematic discourses, these films are of great importance to my study as

⁹⁶ Condee, *The Imperial Trace*, 53.

⁹⁷ Faraday, *The Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 140.

⁹⁸ Condee, *The Imperial Trace*, 49.

they set in motion a new kind of cinematic approach to the subject of the Holocaust which was to continue into the post-Soviet period.

‘The great and terrible social experiment that began on 7 November 1917 [the Soviet Union] came to a formal end of 25 December 1991’⁹⁹; it is particularly symbolic that the first officially legalised celebration of Jewish Hanukah took place on 18 December, only seven days before the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

⁹⁹ Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 203.

CONCLUSION

This thesis investigates the trajectory of portrayals of the Holocaust in Soviet cinema from the 1930s to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Taking a film historical approach, each chapter studies the relationship between film texts and their historical contexts and constructs a sense of how the subject of the Holocaust is treated in film over a particular period of time. While the thesis is structured chronologically, each chapter is constructed according to its own internal logic. Thus Chapters 1 and 4, surveying the first and the last stages in the trajectory of Holocaust representations, follow a clear ‘rise and fall’ and ‘fall and rise’ pattern, respectively. By contrast, Chapters 2 and 3, while observing an overall chronological coherence, are structured thematically. This choice is determined by, and underlines, the complexity of identifying a clear course of Holocaust depictions in films between the late 1950s and the early 1980s. Together, all four chapters offer a new history of Holocaust films in the Soviet cinematic context.

This thesis first of all uncovers a vast number of unknown and little studied films. Equally, it offers original readings of the existing Soviet classics through a new prism, that of Holocaust cinema. Thus, it introduces a new corpus of works, the examination of which then opens new avenues into the study of Soviet and Holocaust cinema. Setting out to investigate how the discovery of this subject in a national cinema sheds new light onto these two scholarly fields, this work has explored and puts forward several ideas.

In relation to the study of Holocaust cinema this thesis underscores the importance of a historical perspective on the idea of (un)representability in two ways:

the analysis of history depicted *in* the films and the examination of historical context underpinning the creation and reception *of* the films. Thus the first type of analysis introduces a hitherto overlooked representation of a victim group of *Soviet* Jews and with it, audio-visual accounts of a means of annihilation other than the gas chambers. Historical accounts of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union demonstrate that it was the operations of the German mobile killing squads, *Einsatzgruppen*, and their collaborators that conducted the mass annihilation of the Soviet Jews. Most commonly, victims were gathered en masse and marched to the woods or ravines where they were shot with devastating efficiency. Generally speaking, a large number of Jews – it is estimated over 2.5 million – was eliminated in the Soviet Union by 1942.¹ Nevertheless, these *aktionen* (as they were termed by the Germans) not only left numerous survivors but also volumes of visual records, since they took place before the Nazi policy of concealment was established. Interestingly, Joshua Hirsch opens his book on trauma cinema and the Holocaust with a brief discussion of what he calls the ‘only [...] known piece of motion picture footage’² capturing the annihilation of Jews. Filmed by a German naval officer, Reinhard Weiner, this fragment of film captures a mass shooting in the town of Liepaja, Latvia in 1941. In other words, it presents evidence in the form of a moving image of the Holocaust on Soviet territory. So does this piece of film not, then, capture the very murderous machine of the Holocaust in full operation? Does it not give some factual gravity to the debate about the hypothetical *pellicule maudite*? While Hirsch bypasses its significance in relation to the debate about ‘unrepresentability’, my thesis, however, brings to light a whole new corpus of films, which offer fictional and documentary

¹ Il’ia Al’tman presents the following statistics: 255,000 in the Baltic states, 800,000 in Belorussia, 1,400,000 in Ukraine in Al’tman, *Zherty nenavisti* (Moscow: Kovcheg, 2002), 241-298.

² Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 1.

depictions of similar *aktionen* to the one captured by Weiner. For example, the feature film *The Unvanquished* (1945) reconstructs the annihilation of Jews on the authentic location of the Babii Iar massacre and bases the scene on survivors' accounts, while the documentary *Ordinary Fascism* (1965) includes photographic depictions of annihilation in ravines, and another documentary, *Peace to You, Sholem* (1989), presents testimonies of Babii Iar massacre survivors filmed on authentic modern-day location. Uncovering a new historical dimension of the Holocaust, these films, then, stage an encounter between the viewer, the survivor/victim and the site/sight of the Jewish trauma without having to imagine the 'unimaginable'. They thus present a new kind of relationship between the event of the Holocaust and the concepts of survival, witness and testimony.

Secondly, analysing the history of these films, my thesis emphasises the role of the political and ideological climate underpinning their (in)ability to depict the Holocaust. Being the first study to establish a link between this new corpus of Soviet films and the Western philosophical notion of (un)representability, my thesis departs from a more traditional ontological or ethical standpoint and stresses the presence of what I term 'a political *Bilderverbot*' (a political prohibition of images). My work exposes and examines the workings of this *Bilderverbot* in relation to state propaganda, ideology and censorship as well as to filmmakers' individual artistic choices or self-censorship. Overviewing the entire corpus chronologically, this thesis then discovers the varying degrees of (un)representability throughout the entire period under examination. It thus transpires that the films in question are organised in clusters around particular periods, with the late 1950s and late 1980s witnessing an upsurge, while the late 1940s and late 1970s experienced a decline. Furthermore the level of explicitness with which these films depict the Holocaust alters significantly

between these stages. Consequently this study proposes to appreciate (un)representability as a *historical* concept which is fluid and shows important variations over time.

In relation to Soviet cinema, this thesis reconsiders existing scholarly approaches and thus contributes to newly emergent turns in scholarship in relation to three ideas. Firstly, confirming the impossibility of analysing Soviet cinema outside its historical link to the state, this thesis, however, demonstrates the importance of appreciating the various degrees of freedom, deviation and contradiction that constitute this complex relationship. This is made clear through numerous examples and in particular through the examination of wartime cinema, as well as of individual films like *Fate of a Man* and *Ordinary Fascism*. Secondly, this thesis equally highlights the relevance of studying *popular* Soviet cinema, which, contrary to the dominant scholarly view, is far from conformist and unremarkable (at least) in terms of its depiction of the Holocaust. The study of films like *Dawns Are Quiet Here, You Are Not an Orphan, It's Been a Long Time, Five Brave Once* and *I Did All I Could* enable this conclusion. Thirdly, the innovative role of mainstream film, as well as the complexity of the relationship between the state and national cinema, also leads to the need to reconsider the value-laden demarcation of historical periods in Soviet cinema, such as the 'conformist' Stalinist and Stagnation era and the 'liberal' Thaw and perestroika. This departure from the conventional periodisations also gestures towards the necessity for a greater understanding of the historical continuity between these periods, as opposed to the existing (less productive) scholarly quests for definitive cut-off points.

Soviet Holocaust cinema: defining the concept

This thesis is the first work from the discipline of film studies to marry two distinct, yet hitherto largely unrelated, scholarly fields – Holocaust film and Soviet cinema. Introducing an original corpus of films termed ‘Soviet Holocaust cinema’, this work defines the meaning of this concept. While the thesis accounts for over 100 films, its core corpus is comprised of 64 works, the study of which testifies to the diversity of approaches to the subject of the Holocaust. Generally speaking, there are two main types of depictions: films conventionally equating the fate of Jews with the suffering of other Soviet (mostly Slav) people and works which challenge this official view by depicting the specificity of the Jewish plight; this is done with various degrees of covertness and explicitness in each film. The majority of works examined here present the annihilation of Jews as marginal and episodic in the narratives of the (usually) Slav wartime experience. It is only in the 1989 to 1991 period (examined in the final part of Chapter Four) that we find cases where the subject of the Holocaust is placed at the heart of the narrative, creating unique examples of a Jewish perspective on the history of WWII. This particular group of Holocaust films includes only ten works. Therefore, if we are seeking to define Soviet Holocaust cinema strictly as a ‘genre’ of films³ in which the experience of Jewish protagonists is central to the narrative, the cinematic corpus might appear small.

However, what is essential to my study is the fact that Soviet Holocaust cinema does not consist only of explicit representations centred on the Jewish protagonists. As a historical examination of the evolution of this subject my thesis is equally concerned with the telling absences, understatements and distortions.

Therefore, this work gathers under the term of ‘Soviet Holocaust cinema’ films that

³ Barry Langford discusses the complexity of delimiting the genre of Holocaust cinema in Langford, *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 262-266.

allow us not only to learn the histories that comprise this event but also, and most importantly, to understand the degrees of repression and undesirability that surrounded the telling of such histories at different points in time. My work underscores the role of cinema in negotiating and articulating the different currents of official and unofficial knowledge, demonstrating how these films exist at the boundaries of often sharply divergent and often contradictory views. Thus this thesis offers a deeper understanding of Soviet Holocaust films as a site of ideological contestation.

A Holocaust representational system

The key methodological approach for the study of the ideological, epistemological and aesthetic dynamics of Soviet Holocaust cinema is a textual analysis of the chosen films. Throughout the four chapters I identify and explore the evolution of specific narrative tropes, stylistic motifs and formal techniques all of which form what I term ‘a Holocaust representational system.’ My analysis uncovers five main components of this system.

1. Discrepancies between voice-over narration and image. The analyses of these in documentary and newsreel films (*Soiuzkinozhurnal n. 27*, *Battle for Our Soviet Ukraine*, *The Judgement of Peoples*, *Ordinary Fascism*) was particularly useful in demonstrating the presence of several registers of knowledge about the Holocaust and the ways in which a film can communicate its own ideological and epistemological limitations to the viewer.
2. The narrative trope of Jewish children. Running through the entire period under examination here, this trope also allows us to register the tensions between official and unofficial understandings of the Holocaust, as the Jewish children often represent

the truthful (unofficial) knowledge. Moreover, this trope often enables the films to speak about the ideologically problematic subject from the 'safe' premise of children's narrative (as in *You Are not an Orphan*, *Five Brave Ones* and *Deer Hunting*).

3. The usage of found footage. This thesis demonstrates how the first moving image records of the liberated Majdanek (1944) and Auschwitz (1945) play a crucial role in forging a new cinematic idiom to render the Nazi camp system and its murderous apparatus. Equally important is the study of how this footage acts as a connecting tissue between films like *The Judgement of Peoples*, *Two Years above an Abyss*, *Good-bye Boys*, *Ordinary Fascism*, *It Was in May*, *Remember Your Name* and *Peace to You, Sholem*. The examination of how the meaning of these archival materials changes throughout these films enables my work to underscore the fluidity of knowledge and memory of the Holocaust and accentuate the role of cinema in this process.

4. The Jewish death march. The attempt of this thesis to re-think the scholarly and popular tendency to envisage Auschwitz as the ultimate symbol of the Holocaust, in fact, only reaffirms the difficulty of establishing an alternative. The absence of an emblematic annihilation site (such as Auschwitz) on the Soviet territory and the perpetual contestation of the Holocaust at the official level clearly complicate the creation of a single symbol of the Jewish suffering in Soviet commemoration discourse. However, if mass-murder in a ravine is the most common means of annihilation of Soviet Jews, the Jewish death march can be said to be a relatively common trope in Soviet films. It therefore can be considered an iconic image in the Soviet representational system.

5. The absence of Jewish perspective. The difficulty of establishing a symbol of Jewish wartime suffering in the Soviet Union is accompanied by the noticeable absence of a Jewish perspective on the Holocaust in Soviet cinema. As my thesis demonstrates, with the exception of *You Are Not an Orphan* and *Dawns Are Quiet Here*, no film produced from the 1940s until the late 1980s allowed the Jewish characters to author the history of the Holocaust in the narrative. Therefore this absence itself becomes a trope, which permits registering ideological shifts in relation to the Holocaust.

The impossibility to openly depict the Holocaust and the constantly shifting presence of this subject between various ideological pressure points in cinema for the majority of the period studied here, accentuates the perpetual reluctance to accept Jewish history as a distinctive yet inseparable part of the national past. The seminal role occupied by the history and memory of WWII in the process of national self-identification that my thesis underscores then begs the question of how the trajectory of the cinematic depictions of the Holocaust develops once the very concept of Soviet national identity and ideology ceases to exist after the collapse of the regime in 1991. I thus offer below some brief thoughts on how I would proceed to develop this work beyond the boundaries of the present thesis.

Mapping the trajectory of Holocaust cinema in the post-Soviet context

With the fall of the USSR the narrative of Holocaust depictions in Soviet cinema branches off into several directions. Throughout the period studied in this thesis the predominance of certain film studios in the production of Holocaust films, such as Mosfil'm, Dovzhenko film studio and Belarus'fil'm, suggests that Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia were the countries that would continue producing films on this subject.

Therefore an obvious follow-up to this work would be an analysis of the subsequent trajectory of representations of the Holocaust in the post-Soviet cinema of these nations.

Generally speaking Jews living in the post-Soviet countries and the history of their wartime experiences were no longer subjected to state discrimination. However, despite the new openness about the Holocaust, the influences of the Soviet rhetoric on the remembrance of the war continue to colour the collective memory of the Jewish genocide, at least in Russia. This becomes particularly clear during the rule of Vladimir Putin from 2000. His speech at the ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 2005 differs from Brezhnev-era discourse only in its open acknowledgement of Russian anti-Semitism;⁴ his other speech at the unveiling of a monument to the Red Army in Netanya (Israel) in 2012 continues in a similar vein – acknowledging the tragedy of the Holocaust, it places the emphasis on the role of the Soviet Army as saviours of the world from Nazism.⁵ It thus becomes clear that the recurring chauvinistic stance in relation to the memory of WWII does not allow for the Holocaust to exist independently of the official narrative of Soviet military superiority. Such a manner of remembering the Holocaust in Putin's Russia therefore helps to accentuate the point made in Stephen Lovell's 2010 publication that the post-Soviet society continues to live in the shadow of WWII.⁶

Nevertheless, post-Soviet cinema continues the tendency to place Jewish suffering at the heart of a film, started in the late 1980s by the new group of Soviet

⁴ 'Even in our country, in Russia, which did more than any to combat fascism, for the victory over fascism, which did most to save the Jewish people, even in our country we sometimes unfortunately see manifestations of this problem and I, too, am ashamed of that,' BBC News, accessed 19 April 2014, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4210841.stm>

⁵ 'Putin o Kholokoste', Tsentr i fond Kholokost, accessed 19 April 2014, <http://www.holocf.ru/facts/1975>

⁶ Stephen Lovell, *The Shadow of the War: Russia and the USSR 1941 to the Present* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 319.

Holocaust films, with feature films like *From Hell to Hell* (Dmitrii Astrakhan, 1996), *Father* (Vladimir Mashkov, 2004), *Ar'e* (Roman Kachanov, 2004), documentaries *Children from the Abyss* (Pavel Chukhrai, 2000) and *Process* (Aleksandr Zel'dovich 2003) and TV series *Heavy Sand* (Aleksandr Barshchevskii, 2005) and *Life and Fate* (Sergei Ursuliak, 2012). Moreover, since 2000 Western cinema has also turned to the history of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union in films like *Babii Iar* (Jeff Kanew, Germany, 2003), *Everything Is Illuminated* (Liev Schreiber, USA, 2005) and *Defiance* (Edward Zwick, USA, 2008).

At the same time, we cannot overlook the increasing neo-Soviet approach of Russian cinema towards the subject of WWII. The creation of a Foundation for the Support of Patriotic Cinema in 2004, and the production of state-funded WWII films like *Priest* (Vladimir Khotinenko, 2009), *Burnt by the Sun 2* (Nikita Mikhalkov, 2010) and *Stalingrad* (Fedor Bondarchuk, 2013) contribute to the revival of the concept of the 'Holy War'. Coupled with the rise of extreme right-wing nationalism, these recent cinematic tendencies of the state-sponsored historical films leave the future of the Holocaust cinema in Putin's Russia uncertain.

Russia's domestic and international policies implemented since the beginning of Putin's second term as head of state (2012) bring up the important question of whether the Soviet Union, both as a political state and in terms of its meaning as symbol of national identity, ever truly ceased to exist. In this light my thesis acquires new topicality and relevance. Introducing a new concept and corpus of Soviet Holocaust films, my work explores the relationship between the cinema and the state, between a moving image and a state-sponsored atrocity, between official and alternative versions of history and in doing so reaffirms the importance of studying

the past through cinema as well as the on-going relevance of the relation between film and history.

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FILMOGRAPHY

English and original titles of all films listed in this thesis, presented chronologically.

Jewish Luck/Evreiskoe schast'e (Aleksandr Granovskii, Goskino, USSR, 1925)

Conveyor of Death/Konveier smerti (Ivan Pyr'ev, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1933)

Ruddi's Career/Kar'era Ruddi (Vladimir Nemoliaev, Mezhrabpomfil'm, USSR, 1934)

Seekers of Happiness/Iskateli schast'ia (Vladimir Korsh-Sablin, Iosif Shapiro, Belarus'fil'm, USSR, 1936)

Peter the First/Petr Pervyi (Vladimir Petrov, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1937)

Pugachev (Pavel Petrov-Bytov, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1938)

Aleksandr Nevskii (Sergei Eisenstein, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1938)

The Struggle Continues/Bor'ba prodolzhaetsa (Vasilii Zhuravlev, Soiuzdetfil'm, USSR, 1938)

Professor Mamlock (Gerbert Rappoport and Adol'f Minkin, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1938)

Swamp Soldiers/Bolotnye soldaty (Aleksandr Macheret, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1938)

The Oppenheim Family/Sem'ia Oppengeim (Grigorii Roshal', Mosfil'm, USSR, 1938)

If There Should Be War Tomorrow/Esli zavtra voina (Efim Dzigan and Lazar Antsi-Polovskii, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1938)

Squadron Number Five/Eskadril'ia nomer 5 (Abram Room, Kiev film studio, USSR, 1939)

Tank Crew/Tankisty (Zinovii Drapkin, Robert Maiman, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1939)

Jud Süß (Veit Harlan, Germany, 1940)

Chapaev is with Us/Chapaev s nami (Vladimir Petrov, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1941)

Girlfriends, to the Front/Podrugi, na front (Viktor Eisymont, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1941)

Soiuzkinozhurnal n.84 (1941)

The Murderers Are Coming/Ubiitsy vykhodiat na dorogu (Vsevolod Pudovkin, Iurii Tarich, TsOKS, USSR, 1942)

The Regional Party Secretary/Sekretar' raikoma (Ivan Pyr'ev, TsOKS, USSR, 1942)

Partisans in Ukrainian Steppes/Partisany v stepiakh Ukrainy (Igor' Savchenko, TsOKS, USSR, 1942)

A Priceless Head/Bestsennaia golova (Boris Barnet, TsOKS, USSR, 1942)

Soiuzkinozhurnal n.10 (1942)

Soiuzkinozhurnal n.27 (1942)

Young Fritz/Iunyi Frits (Grigorii Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg, TsOKS, USSR, 1943)

Battle for Our Soviet Ukraine/Bitva za nashu sovetskuiu Ukrainu (Aleksandr Dovzhenko, Ukrainian newsreel studio, USSR, 1943)

Wait for Me/Zhdi menia (Aleksandr Stopler and Boris Ivanov, TsOKS, USSR, 1943)

Rainbow/Raduga (Mark Donskoi, TsOKS, USSR, 1943)

She Defends the Motherland/Ona zashchishchaet rodinu (Friedrich Ermler, TsOKS, USSR, 1943)

Majdanek/Maidanek (1944)

Majdanek - the Cemetery of Europe/Majdanek - cmentarzysko Europy (Aleksandr Ford, Poland, 1944)

Auschwitz/Osventsym (1945)

The Unvanquished/Nepokorennye (Mark Donskoi, Kiev film studio, USSR, 1945)

The Judgement of Peoples/Sud narodov (Roman Karmen, Central documentary film studio, USSR, 1946)

Feat of a Spy/Podvig razvedchika (Boris Barnet, Kiev film studio, USSR, 1947)

A Return with Victory/Vozvrashchenie s pobedoi (Aleksandr Ivanov, Riga film studio, USSR, 1947)

Private Aleksandr Matrosov/Riadovoi Aleksandr Matrosov (Leonid Lukov, Soiuzdetfil'm, USSR, 1947)

The Third Blow/Tretii udar (Igor' Savchenko, 1948)

The Young Guard/Molodaia gvardiia (Sergei Gerasimov, Gorkii film studio, USSR, 1948)

Konstantin Zaslونov (Aleksandr Faintsimmer, Belarus' fil'm, USSR, 1949)

Far Away from Moscow/Daleko ot Moskvy (Aleksander Stopler, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1950)

Night and Fog/Nuit et brouillard (Alain Resnais, France, 1955)

Soldiers/Soldaty (Aleksandr Ivanov, Lenfil'm, 1956)

The Partisan Spark/Partizanskaia iskra (Aleksei Masliukov, Dovzhenko film studio, USSR, 1957)

Hiroshima mon Amour (Alain Resnais, France, 1959)

May Stars/Maiskie zvezdy (Stanislav Rostotskii, Gorkii film studio, USSR, 1959)

Fate of a Man/Sud'ba cheloveka (Sergei Bondarchuk, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1959)

In Difficult Times/V trudnyi chas (Igor' Gurin, Gorkii film studio, USSR, 1961)

Peace to Him Who Enters/Mir vkhodiashchemu (Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov, Mosfil'm, 1961)

The Third Half/Tretii taim (Evgenii Karelov, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1962)

You Are Not an Orphan/Ty ne sirota (Shurkhat Abbasov, Uzbekfil'm, USSR, 1962)

Remember, Kaspar/Pomni, Kaspar (Grigorii Nikulin, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1964)

We Draw Fire on Ourselves/Vyzyvaem ogon' na sebia (Sergei Kolosov, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1964)

Good-bye, Boys/Do svidania, mal'chiki (Mikhail Kalik, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1964)

It's Been a Long Time/Skol'ko let, skol'ko zim (Nikolai Figurovskii, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1965)

Ordinary Fascism/Obyknovennyi fashizm (Mikhail Romm, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1965)

Two Years Above an Abyss/Dva goda nad propast'iu (Timofei Levchuk, Dovzhenko film studio, USSR, 1966)

Eastern Corridor/Vostochnyi koridor (Valentin Vinogradov, Belarus' fil'm, USSR, 1966)

Wild Honey/Dikii med (Vladimir Chebotariiev, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1966)

Chronicles of a Dive Bomber/Khronika pikiruiushchego bombardirovshchika (Naum Birman, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1967)

The Commissar/Komissar (Aleksandr Askol'dov, Gorkii film studio, 1967)

Shield and Sword/Shchit i mech (Vladimir Basov, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1967-8)

Dead Season/Mertvyi sezon (Savva Kulish, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1968)

Sons of the Fatherland/Syny otechestva (Latif Faiziev, Uzbekfil'm, USSR, 1968)

The Colour of Pomegranates/Tsvet granata (Sergei Paradzhanov, Armenfil'm studio, USSR, 1968)

Gold/Zoloto (Damir Viatic-Berezhnykh, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1969)

It Was in May/Byl mesiats mai (Marlen Khutsiev, Ekran film studio, USSR, 1970)

No Way Back/Obratnoi dorogi net (Grigorii Lipshits, Dovzhenko film studio, USSR, 1970)

Five Brave Ones/Piaterka otvazhnykh (Leonid Martyniuk, Belarus'fil'm, USSR, 1970)

Bullet Fears the Brave/Smelogo pulia boitsia (Oleg Nikolaevskii, Sverdlovsk film studio, USSR, 1970)

Oginski Polonaise/ Polonez Oginskogo (Lev Golub, Belarus'fil'm, USSR, 1971)

The Dawns Are Quiet Here/A zori zdes' tikhie (Stanislav Rostotskii, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1972)

Earth, on Demand/Zemlia, do vostrebovaniia (Veniamin Dorman, Gorkii film studio, USSR, 1972)

The Return of the Violin/Vozvrashchenie skripki (Shamil' Makhmudbekov, Azerbaidzhanfil'm, USSR, 1972)

For Your Fate/Za tvoiu sud'bu (Timur Zoloev, Odessa film studio, USSR, 1972)

The Girl from Cell Number 25/Devushka iz kamery nomer 25 (David Rondeli, Gruziiia-fil'm, USSR, 1972)

Tracer Element/Mechenyi atom (Igor' Gostev, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1972)

Cabaret (Bob Fosse, USA, 1972)

About Those Whom I Remember and Love/O tekh, kogo pomniu i liubliu (Natal'ia Troshchenko, Anatolii Vekhot'ko, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1973)

Day of Admittance on Personal Matters/Den' priema po lichnym voprosam (Solomon Shuster, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1974)

Remember Your Name/Pomni imia svoe (Sergei Kolosov, Mosfil'm/Studio Filmowe Iluzjon, USSR/Poland, 1974)

Lacombe, Lucien (Louis Malle, 1974)

'Omega' Option/Variant 'Omega' (Antonis Voiazos, Ekran film studio, USSR, 1975)

The Ascent/Voskhozhdenie (Larisa Shepitko, Belarus'fil'm, USSR, 1977)

The Market Woman and the Poet/Torgovka i poet (Samson Samsonov, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1979)

Theme/Tema (Gleb Panfilov, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1979)

They Were Actors/Oni byli akterami (Georgii Natanson, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1981)

Deer Hunting/Olen'ia okhota (Iurii Boretskii, Gorkii film studios, USSR, 1981)

Curfew/Komendantskii chas (Natal'ia Troshchenko, Lenfil'm, USSR, 1981)

Night Witches in the Sky/V nebe nochnye ved'my (Evgeniia Zhigulenko, Gorkii film studio, USSR, 1981)

Mother Maria/Mat' Mariia (Sergei Kolosov, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1982)

I Will Wait for You/Ia vas dozhdus' (Iakov Segel', Gorkii film studio, USSR, 1982)

Sophie's Choice (Alan J. Pakula, USA, 1982)

Kindergarten/Detskii sad (Evgenii Evtushenko, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1984)

Repentance/Pokaianie (Tengiz Abuladze, Gruzii-fil'm, USSR, 1984)

Battle for Moscow/Bitva za Moskvu (Iurii Ozerov, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1985)

Victory/Pobeda (Evgenii Matveev, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1985)

Counter-Strike/Kontr-udar (Vladimir Shevchenko, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1985)

Legal Marriage/Zakonnyi brak (Al'bert Mkrtchian, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1985)

A Date on the Milky Way/Svidanie na mlechnom puti (Janis Strech, Riga film studio, USSR, 1985)

Come and See/Idi i smotri (Elem Klimov, Mosfil'm/Belarus'fil'm, USSR, 1985)

Shoah (Claude Lanzmann, France, 1985)

Sign of Misfortune/Znak bedy (Mikhail Ptashuk, Belarus'fil'm, USSR, 1986)

I Did All I Could/Ia sdelať vse, chto mog (Dmitrii Salynskii, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1986)

Au revoir les enfants (Louis Malle, France, 1987)

Our Father/Otche nash (Boris Ermolaev, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1989)

Which One of Us is Shaia?/Kto iz nas Shaia? (Aleksandr Rodnianskii, Kievnauchfil'm, USSR/Germany, 1989)

Meeting with Father/Svidanie s ottsom (Aleksandr Rodnianskii, Kievnauchfil'm, USSR/Germany, 1990)

Dusk/Zakat (Aleksandr Zel'dovich, Mosfilm, USSR, 1990)

The Mission of Raoul Wallenberg/Missiia Raulia Vallenberga (Aleksandr Rodnianskii, Kievnauchfil'm, USSR/Germany, 1990)

Unknown Pages From the Life of an Intelligence Agent/Neizvestnye stranitsy iz zhizni razvedchika (Viktor Chebotarev, Mosfil'm, USSR, 1990)

Peace to You, Sholem/Mir Vam, Sholom (Vladimir Dvinskii, Lad'ia film studio, USSR, 1990)

Jewish Cemetery/Evreiskoe kladbishche (Rafail Nakhmanovich and Iurii Mar'iamov, Tsentrnauchfil'm, USSR, 1990)

A Ladies' Tailor/Damskii portnoi (Leonid Gorovets, Fora-Film/Progress, USSR, 1990)

Revolt in Sobibor/Vosstanie v Sobibore (Pavel Kogan and Lily van den Bergh, Open Studio/Leningrad documentary film studio, Netherlands/USSR, 1990)

Outcast/Izgoi (Vladimir Savel'ev, Dovzhenko film studio, USSR/Germany, 1991)

A Parrot Speaking Yiddish/Popugai, govoriashchii na idish (Efraim Sevela, Kinoservis, USSR/Germany, 1991)

Everything is Fine/Vse khorosho (Iurii Khashchevatskii, Indikt productions, USSR, 1991)

The Cry of a Quail/Plach perepelki (Igor' Dobroliubov, Belarus'fil'm, USSR, 1991)

Farewell, USSR. Film I. Personal (Aleksandr Rodnianskii, Ukraine/Germany, 1992)

Schindler's List (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1993)

The March of the Living/Marsh zhivyykh (Aleksandr Rodnianskii, Ukraine/Germany, 1993)

From Hell to Hell/Iz ada v ad (Dmitrii Astrakhan, Belarus/Germany, 1996)

Children from the Abyss/Deti iz bezdny (Pavel Chukhrai, Russia/USA, 2000)

The Grey Zone (Tim Blake Edwards, USA, 2001)

Babii Iar/Babij Jar (Jeff Kanew, Germany, 2003)

Process/Protsess (Aleksandr Zel'dovich, Russia, 2003)

Father/Papa (Vladimir Mashkov, Russia, 2004)

Everything Is Illuminated (Liev Schreiber, USA, 2005)

Heavy Sand/Tiazhelyi pesok (Aleksandr Barshchevskii, Russia, 2005)

The Fate of the Commissar/Sud'ba Komissara (Valerii Balaian, Russia, 2006)

Defiance (Edward Zwick, USA, 2008)

Priest/Pop (Vladimir Khotinenko, Russia, 2009)

Burnt by the Sun 2/Utomlennye solntsem 2 (Nikita Mikhalkov, Russia, 2010)

Life and Fate/Zhizn' i sud'ba (Sergei Ursuliak, Russia, 2012)

Stalingrad (Fedor Bondarchuk, Russia, 2013)