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### *Shklovsky in the Cinema, 1926-1932*

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## Notes on Translation, Transliteration, and Dates

All transliteration of Russian conforms to the Library of Congress system (without diacritical marks), except for personal names that have now acquired more familiar English equivalents ('Eisenstein' instead of 'Eizenshtein', 'Dostoevsky' instead of 'Dostoevskii', etc). Titles of literary and cinematic works and all key citations in the text are provided in Russian and English at first mention, and thereafter in English, while titles of newspapers, journals, and magazines are rendered in Russian only. Titles in the footnotes, bibliography, and filmography are exclusively in Russian. All translations from Russian are my own, unless otherwise stated, while Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie* is rendered as 'enstrangement' in accordance with the convention proposed by Benjamin Sher.<sup>1</sup> All dates preceding the 1918 calendar reform are given in the Julian style. Where discrepancies arise over the date of a film's release, the variant stated in *The Annotated Catalogue of Soviet Feature Films* has been deemed authoritative.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Sher, 'Translator's Introduction: Shklovsky and the Revolution', in Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. by Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), pp. xv-xxi (pp. xviii-xix).

<sup>2</sup> *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: Annotirovannyi katalog*, 5 vols (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961-1979), I-III (1961).

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## Introduction

According to Richard Sheldon, ‘Viktor Shklovsky [1893-1984] was the first theoretician to take a semiotic approach to the cinema’.<sup>3</sup> Alongside his colleagues from the so-called ‘school’ of Russian Formalism, who included Boris Eikhenbaum, Iurii Tynianov, Boris Kazansky, and Adrian Piotrovsky, Shklovsky endeavoured to construct a ‘poetics of cinema’ in the mid-1920s comparable to the Formalist poetics of literature.<sup>4</sup> Although the group’s members were principally concerned with attempts to determine a scientific basis for ‘literariness’ (*literaturnost’*), i.e. that which makes a given text a work of literature, their claims for literature’s specificity also implied the formal specificity of other artistic media from which literature is distinguished. As Alastair Renfrew argues:

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Sheldon, ‘Introduction’, in Viktor Shklovsky, *Literature and Cinematography* [1923], trans. by Irina Masinovsky (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008), pp. vii-xvii (p. vii).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to remember that the theorists and critics who have been grouped under the heading ‘Russian Formalism’ do not represent a unified or consistent school, movement, or method of literary theory. They were characterized as such in the 1920s by their opponents, and, conversely, in the 1960s–1980s by their supporters, who were anxious to recover that which had been lost during the Cultural Revolution: see Carol Joyce Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of a Russian Formalist* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1994). For elucidation of Formalist theory, see in particular: Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt, eds, *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973); Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Methuen, 1979); Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History–Doctrine*, 3rd edn (London: Yale U.P., 1981); Aage Hanson-Löve, *Russkii formalizm: metodologicheskaiia rekonstruktsiia razvitiia na osnove printsipa ostraneniia* [1978] (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul’tury, 2001); Robert Louis Jackson and Stephen Rudy, eds, *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance: A Festschrift in Honor of Victor Erlich* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1985); Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton U.P., 1974); Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 1984); René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).

What does the differentiation of the means available to literature imply for ‘not literature’, whether ‘not literature’ be seen primarily as the broad verbal context against which the literary defines itself (‘practical language’), or as the technically variegated forms of art against which, in a sense, it competes—painting, music, theatre, and of course cinema?<sup>5</sup>

The title of the Formalists’ most ambitious collection on film, *The Poetics of Cinema* (*Poetika kino*, 1927), recalls not only Aristotle’s *Poetics* (*Peri poietikes*, c. 335 BC), but also their earlier volume on literary theory *Poetics* (*Poetika*, 1919). In *The Poetics of Cinema*, as in other important Formalist essays on film, such as Tynianov’s ‘Cinema – Word – Music’ (*Kino – slovo – muzyka*, 1924), the theoreticians explore a wide range of issues with reference to cinema and extend their ‘scientific’ methodology of literary study into a field that was alternatively termed ‘cine-stylistics’ (*kino-stilistika*) by Eikhenbaum, ‘cinematology’ (*kinematologiya*) by Kazansky, and ‘cinopoetics’ (*kinopoetika*) by Piotrovsky.<sup>6</sup> Shklovsky’s contribution to this volume in the form of a succinct and provocative outline explores the relationship between ‘prose’ and ‘poetry’ and, respectively, ‘plot’ (*siuzhet*) and ‘plotlessness’ (*bessiuzhetnost’*) in film.<sup>7</sup> For Shklovsky, as for the other so-called Formalists, then, it appears that cinema presents itself as the ideal medium for investigating the intersemiotic translation of concepts previously attributed to

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<sup>5</sup> Alastair Renfrew, ‘Against Adaptation? The Strange Case of (Pod)Poruchik Kizhe’, *Modern Language Review*, 102:1 (January 2007), 157-76 (p. 157).

<sup>6</sup> Iu. Tynianov, ‘Kino – slovo – muzyka’, in *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 320-22. See the respective essays of Eikhenbaum, Kazansky, and Piotrovsky in *Russian Poetics in Translation* (vol. 9: *The Poetics of Cinema*), ed. by Richard Taylor (Oxford: Holdan Books, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Poetry and Prose in the Cinema’ [1927], in *Russian Poetics in Translation* (vol. 9) (see Richard Taylor, ed., above), pp. 87-89.

literature, such as ‘dominant’ (*dominanta*), ‘material’ (*material*), and ‘automatisation’ (*avtomatizatsiia*).

Shklovsky published his first article on cinema in 1919, but it was, in fact, only in Autumn 1921, when he faced imminent arrest for his activities as a right-wing Socialist Revolutionary and fled to Berlin that he began to examine film in more detail.<sup>8</sup> In 1923, Shklovsky edited a collection of articles on Charlie Chaplin, which is considered one of the first Soviet attempts at film analysis.<sup>9</sup> While Shklovsky claimed with characteristic flippancy to have moved from the literary sphere into its cinematic counterpart purely ‘by accident’ (*sluchaino*), he soon began to regard his work in the state’s third film factory as his ‘second profession’ (*vtoraia professiia*).<sup>10</sup> It appears that Shklovsky was attracted to filmic theory and practice because he sought to determine whether his theories on literature could be successfully applied to the new cinematic medium; the aggregate of available filmic materials was still controllable and thus lent itself to Shklovsky’s ‘scientific’ method for approaching, studying, and drawing conclusions from art. Furthermore, cinema bestowed a ‘theoretical laboratory’ that did not exist for the established arts and presented the unique opportunity to consider the development of an art form from the ‘materials of life’ in process.<sup>11</sup> As Kazansky declared:

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<sup>8</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, ‘O kinematografe’, *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 23 February 1919.

<sup>9</sup> Sheldon, ‘Introduction’, pp. vii-xvii (p. viii).

<sup>10</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Kak David pobedil Goliafa’, *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1983), pp. 347-66 (pp. 361-66); A. P. Chudakov, ‘Predislovie’, in Viktor Shklovskii, *Gamburgskii schet: Stat’i – Vospominaniia – Esse (1914-1933)* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), pp. 3-32 (p. 23).

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Eagle, *Russian Formalist Film Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1981), p. 2.

Cinema arose within our own memory and literally developed before our eyes. Thus, its study presents possibilities and promises results which cannot be obtained for the other arts, whose origins extend far back into the darkness of time, hidden from sober investigation by the fog of legend and the dogma of tradition.<sup>12</sup>

Shklovsky's work in the film industry was remarkably prolific and his name appears in archival materials from the 1920s and 1930s more frequently than that of any other writer attracted to the cinema from the 1925 literary campaign onwards.<sup>13</sup> Beginning with his composition of screenplays for *The Traitor (Predatel')*, *Wings of a Serf (Kryl'ia kholopa)*, and *By the Law (Po zakonu)* and intertitles for *Death Bay (Bukhta smerti)* in 1926, Shklovsky wrote themes, librettos, scenarios, and shooting scripts, re-edited foreign films, and worked collaboratively to rewrite or develop other authors' problematic scripts until the release of *The Ballad of Bering and his Friends (Баллада о Беринге и его друзьях)*, which he co-scripted with Iu. Osipov and director Iu. Shvyrev and in which he acted, in 1930.<sup>14</sup> Shklovsky became an almost ubiquitous creative adviser in the cinematic sphere, a role which, it seems, was not initially destabilised by Formalism's eventual 'rout' and Shklovsky's recantation of his former 'scientific errors' in 1930.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Boris Kazansky, 'Nature of Cinema' [1927], in Eagle, *Russian Formalist Film Theory*, trans. by Herbert Eagle, pp. 101-29 (p. 101).

<sup>13</sup> Renfrew, 'Against Adaptation?', 157-76 (p. 159).

<sup>14</sup> During his lengthy career in cinema, Shklovsky only performed in two films; in addition to *The Ballad of Bering and his Friends*, he appeared in *House of the Dead (Mertvyi dom, 1932)* in the role of utopian socialist Mikhail Petrashevsky.

<sup>15</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Pamiatnik nauchnoi oshibke', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27 January 1930, p. 1. See also Erlich 'Crisis and Rout (1926-30)', in his *Russian Formalism*, pp. 118-39; Renfrew, 'Against Adaptation?', 157-76 (p. 159). Shklovsky worked on a total of seven films which were released in the 1930s: four silents – *The Press Machine (Amerikanka, 1930)*, *It's Very Simple (Ochen' prosto, 1931)*, *Magic Hands*

Between the publication of his first major work on cinema *Literature and Cinematography* (*Literatura i kinematograf*, 1923) and the release of the Formalists' collaborative volume, Shklovsky's attitude towards film significantly shifted. In the former text, he acknowledges cinema's uniqueness as a medium distinct from literature and theatre owing to its dependency on action for effect. Since the stunt functions as the basic component of action and action moves rapidly from one stunt to the next, plot is required to arrange these components into an organised structure; hence, for Shklovsky, 'the poetics of the cinema is a poetics of pure plot' (кино-поэтика — это поэтика чистого сюжета).<sup>16</sup>

Yet despite cinema's uniqueness, Shklovsky at this point believes film inferior to art, poetry, and prose due to the limitations imposed by the medium's inherent nature. He considers how Bergson investigated Zeno's paradoxes and subsequently proved that 'we don't have the right to break motion into segments' (мы не имеем права разбивать движение на части).<sup>17</sup> Art, too, according to Shklovsky, is continuous:

In the world of art, the world of continuity, the world of the continuous word, a line of verse cannot be broken into stresses; it has no stress points, it has a place where the lines of force break.

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(*Zolotyie ruki*, 1932), and the documentary feature *Turksib* (1930), and three sound pictures – *House of the Dead* (*Mertvyi dom*, 1932), *Horizon* (*Gorizont*, 1933), and, after a period of politically enforced opposition, *Minin and Pozharskii* (*Minin i Pozharskii*, 1939).

<sup>16</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Kinematograf', in *Literatura i kinematograf* [1923] <[http://biblioteka.teatr-obraz.ru/files/file/Teoriya\\_kino/Shklovskiy\\_lit\\_kino.html](http://biblioteka.teatr-obraz.ru/files/file/Teoriya_kino/Shklovskiy_lit_kino.html)> [accessed 6 January 2009].

<sup>17</sup> Shklovskii, 'Kinematograf'.

Мир искусства, мир непрерывности, мир непрерывного слова, стих не может быть разбит на ударения, он не имеет ударяемых точек, он имеет место перелома силовых линий.<sup>18</sup>

Film, on the other hand, is essentially discontinuous. Reels are composed of shots succeeding each other so rapidly that the human eye perceives them as continuous, while the unconscious recognises them as a series of ‘immovable objects’ (*nepodvizhnye elementy*), which create ‘the illusion of motion’ (*illuziia dvizheniia*).<sup>19</sup> Hence, cinema proves incapable of ever attaining real motion and its status as an art form is irrevocably undermined:

Fundamentally, cinematography is extraneous to art. It grieves me to see the development of cinematography and I want to believe that its triumph is temporary. A century will pass – there will be neither dollars, nor marks, there will be no visas, no states; but these are all trifles, details.

No, a century will pass and human thought will overflow the limit placed before it by the theory of limits, learn to think in processes, and will again perceive the world as continuity. Then there will be no cinema.

Кинематограф в самой основе своей вне искусства. Я с горем вижу развитие кинематографа и хочу верить, что торжество его

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<sup>18</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Kinematograf’.

<sup>19</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Kinematograf’.

временное. Пройдет век — не будет ни доллара, ни марки, не  
будет виз, не будет государств, но все это пустяки, детали.

Нет, пройдет век, и человеческая мысль переплеснёт через предел,  
поставленный ей теорией пределов, научится мыслить  
процессами и снова воспримет мир, как непрерывность. Тогда не  
будет кино.<sup>20</sup>

In his article ‘Poetry and Prose in Cinematography’ (Поэзия и проза в  
кинематографе, 1927), however, Shklovsky demonstrates the extent to which his  
theoretical formulations on cinema had evolved over the last four years; his previous  
belief that the creation of a film without plot that relied entirely on recurring images  
for its effects was impossible had been transformed by his exposure to Sergei  
Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*, 1925).<sup>21</sup> Shklovsky  
identifies the film’s ‘Odessa Steps’ sequence, where Eisenstein delays the  
dénouement to create suspense by means of a cut between soldiers at the top of the  
steps and people at the bottom, as a prime example of his ‘making difficult’ device  
(*zatrudnenie*). As in literature, where a prose work is oriented in semantics and a  
poetic work in form, so in cinema, Shklovsky now maintains, a plotless, or poetic  
product results when technical features supersede their semantic counterparts.<sup>22</sup>

In 1928, Shklovsky wrote a letter to Tynianov deploring the current state of  
Soviet scriptwriting: ‘It is detestable that in cinematography they only have one plot –  
boy loves girl [...]. In the corner, for the sake of ideology, there is a bored worker and  
a peasant’ (В кинематографии отвратительно, сюжет у них один – мальчик

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<sup>20</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Kinematograf’.

<sup>21</sup> Shklovsky, ‘Poetry and Prose in Cinematography’ [1927], pp. 87-89.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 49.

любит девочку [...]. В углу для идеологии скучает рабочий и крестьянин).<sup>23</sup> This concern, among others, was raised that year at the most decisive event in the history of the Soviet film industry, the All-Union Party Conference on Cinema Affairs (Всесоюзное партийное совещание по кинематографии), called on 15 – 21 March by the Agitprop section of the Central Committee.<sup>24</sup> This Conference is widely considered to mark the start of the Cultural Revolution in cinema. Its proceedings explicated the main objectives for governing the entertainment business during the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932), emphasised the authorities' concern that Soviet Cinema consisted merely of a 'leftist' deviation (avant-garde experimental films with an unintelligible message) and a 'rightist' deviation (imitations of the commercial Hollywood model), and attacked Sovkino, the film trust and studios that had been responsible for film production, distribution, and import since 1924, for their commercial-mindedness and inability to prevent the ideological 'faults' inherent in their filmworks.<sup>25</sup> In the financial year 1927-28, box office receipts from Soviet films exceeded those from imported pictures for the very first time and during the First Five Year Plan cinema was expected to increase production and achieve self-sufficiency.<sup>26</sup> By strengthening itself economically and politically, while eliminating all remaining bourgeois values, the industry could also fulfil its role in the realisation of socialist reconstruction. Soviet filmmakers were directed to make film 'accessible to the millions' and were informed that there could be no conflict between ideological

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from V. Shklovskii – Iu. Tynianov [1928], quoted by A. P. Chudakov, 'Predislovie', pp. 3-32 (p. 23).

<sup>24</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Kenez, 'The Cultural Revolution in Cinema', *Slavic Review*, 47:3 (Autumn 1988), 414-33 (p. 422).

<sup>26</sup> Richard Taylor, 'A "Cinema for the Millions": Soviet Socialist Realism and the Problem of Film Comedy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18:3 (1983), 439-61 (p. 446).

considerations and the desire for profit, since the public indisputably craved ideologically valuable films.<sup>27</sup>

Following the First Five Year Plan's initiation, however, almost all the state's resources were devoted to industrialisation. The resolutions formulated by the Conference articulated the need to reverse cinema's dependency on foreign industries and to become a net exporter before 1933. Yet the Soviet Union's recently diminished economic and cultural interaction with the West had resulted in the curtailment of imported film stock, which the studios still relied upon to function. Moreover, these demands for the industry's economic and technical self-sufficiency coincided with the invention of sound film. Soviet cinema had neither mastered silent film technology, nor afforded its own equipment when this technical revolution demanded the replacement of existing devices with expensive apparatus; the transition from silent to sound cinema had not been predicted by the Conference and hence remained unaccounted for in the first economic plan. When coupled with the unrealistic aesthetic and thematic demands for more 'realism' that accompanied the period of Cultural Revolution, these cultural, economic, and technological considerations ensured that by 1932 'the flourishing film culture of the twenties had collapsed'.<sup>28</sup>

The aim of this research project is to examine Shklovsky's engagement with cinema as a theorist, critic, polemicist, screenwriter, and 'creative administrator' who concerned himself with the complex procedure of both accommodating and rejecting revolutionary aims from the release of the first picture on which he worked in 1926,

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<sup>27</sup> B. S. Ol'khovyi, ed., 'Party Cinema Conference Resolution: The Results of Cinema Construction in the USSR and the Tasks of Soviet Cinema', in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*, ed. by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, trans. by Richard Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1988; repr. London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 208-15.

<sup>28</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, 'The Fate of Soviet Popular Cinema during the Stalin Revolution', *Russian Review*, 50:2 (April 1991), 148-62 (p. 149).

coinciding with the point at which the film industry stabilised production and flourished as both art form and entertainment, until Soviet culture's emergence from the Cultural Revolution in 1932, during which time cinema itself was transformed by the transition from silent to sound pictures and the emergence of a centrally-planned industrial model. This question will be addressed from two interlocking and mutually affective perspectives. First, Shklovsky's activities in the cinema (his formulation of conceptual frameworks for narrative exposition, in particular) will be examined in relation to the twentieth-century Russian avant-garde aesthetic practice of traversing previously existing creative boundaries between the spheres of the 'internal' (encompassing private, individual, and domestic concerns) and 'external' (embracing their public, communal, and social counterparts) for an exploration of notions of 'turning space outwards' (*vyvorachivanie prostranstva vovne*).<sup>29</sup> The terms 'internal' and 'external' will not be treated as fixed and monolithic elements of a fundamental dichotomy, but rather as fluid and multi-layered components bound by tensions that shift in relation to contemporary socio-cultural politics, which accommodate the diversity and change inherent in the early post-revolutionary period.

This investigation will then lend itself to an exploration of justice as a legal tradition most frequently attributed to a right that is essentially external and lawful. An examination of the extent to which the behaviours of Shklovsky, his contemporaries, and his cinematic creations appear to be controlled by either luck, chance, fate, and/or powerful others (i.e. external loci of control), or their own efforts and abilities (i.e. internal loci of control) and the extent to which these activities can be reconciled in a society where the balance between freedom and order, liberty and necessity was perpetually modified as a result of revolutionary upheaval will facilitate

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<sup>29</sup> E. Faryno, *Vvedenie v literaturovedenie: Chast' III* (Katowice: 1980), p. 259.

reflection on the extent to which individuals and organisations both within and without the film industry were either willing or obliged to accept responsibility for their actions.<sup>30</sup> Chapter one will analyse how two films on which Shklovsky worked at the beginning of his cinematic career and the end of the Cultural Revolution present the relationship between internal and external with reference to official institutions and procedures for administering justice. Attention will be primarily devoted to the ways in which the narrative, aesthetic, and ideological programmes for these productions were shaped, subverted, and otherwise complicated by Shklovsky's refusal to distinguish between opportunities for individual interpretation and the explicit promotion of state views for public consumption. Chapter two will explore how Shklovsky exploited his unique position as an artist, Futurist, 'Formalist', and former Socialist Revolutionary to portray different manifestations of revolutionary moral fervor based on the ideology of the individual's struggle for justice and modernity through heroism and sacrifice. This will involve considerations of moral reasoning, including ideas of absolute moral values and human rights, principles that apply equally to all people, and a sense of personal commitment to one's ideals, alongside virtues attributed to individuality, such as self-realisation, self-interest, self-respect, self-reliance, originality, creativity, and tolerance of free expression.<sup>31</sup> In chapter three, internal/external boundaries will be identified in relation to the urban landscape, with a particular concentration on the role played by the communal environment in the individual character's journey to political consciousness. The final chapter will focus on Shklovsky's utilisation of the device as a fundamental

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<sup>30</sup> J. B. Rotter, 'Generalized Expectancies for Internal vs. External Control of Reinforcement', *Psychological Monographs*, 80 (1996), whole number 609.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, 'Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach', in *Handbook of Socialization: Research and Theory*, ed. by D. A. Goslin (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), pp. 347-80.

component of the Formalist dichotomous comprehension of the relationship between form and content in his film-texts both pre- and post-production as an effective authorial technique for achieving justice both on- and off-screen.

The dilemmas faced by Shklovsky as the 1920s progressed have thus far been predominantly examined by scholars in terms of literary culture, or from broader political and sociological perspectives. This project will utilise and augment this research by concentrating primarily on Shklovsky's ambivalent engagement with post-revolutionary culture in relation to the rise of cinema as a creative medium and instrument of Russian cultural development more frequently associated with the aims of propaganda ('mass culture') and/or entertainment ('low culture') in order not only to establish the extent and significance of Shklovsky's influence as an individual, but also to utilise this narrative as a basis for analysing the relationship between theory and practice and between the verbal and visual as integral to both the so-called Formalist 'school' and intelligentsia movements. The project is mostly based on primary archival sources collected from the State Film Archives (Gosfil'mofond, Moscow), which include Shklovsky's treatments of thematic concepts throughout the script-development process, reflecting the increasing emphasis placed on the autonomy of the film-script by Soviet authorities throughout the period, articles from the literary and cinematic press, and personal and official correspondence between the filmmakers, studios, and censorial board. This material is supported by Shklovsky's published memoirs and his copious fictional and non-fictional writings. By focusing on the intricate dynamics between the realms of internal and external alongside notions of revolutionary justice, this thesis will examine Shklovsky as a representative intelligentsia figure, while simultaneously analysing his role in conceptualising the boundaries, interactions, and conflicts that arose between different artistic media and

the critical institutions that developed around them during a period that transgresses the usual temporal division between the early revolutionary fervour of the 1920s and Stalinist 1930s as the endpoint of the 'golden age' of Soviet cinematic history.

Through this integration of chronological and thematic focus in relation to a broader artistic and cultural history, this research project will strive towards a better understanding of the nature and extent of Shklovsky's involvement in the Soviet film industry.

## Chapter 1: Criminal Law and the Pursuit of Justice

### Courts without Law

According to Julie A. Cassiday, ‘feature films of the early Soviet period consistently depicted a wide variety of fictional courtrooms, including pre-revolutionary imperial trials, western European “bourgeois” courts, and contemporary Soviet tribunals’.<sup>32</sup> Narrative momentum based on a tripartite formula of confession, repentance, and reintegration into society found its fullest realisation in films that placed their dénouement inside a courtroom, such as Aleksandr Razumnyi’s *The Difficult Years* (*Tiazhelye gody*, 1925), Iakov Protazanov’s *Don Diego and Pelageia* (*Don Diego i Pelageia*, 1927), and Friedrich Ermler’s *The Parisian Cobbler* (*Parizhskii sapozhnik*, 1927).<sup>33</sup> Similar to the pre-revolutionary *agitsud* (mock trial), these films focused on the commission of a social crime and its detrimental effects for the Soviet community as a whole. The climactic trial scene would witness the accused’s initial denial of responsibility, gradual recognition of the criminal nature of his/her activity, followed by confession and remorse as he/she re-enters society a reformed character.

This basic narrative structure, however, is not so clearly defined in the cinematic works of Viktor Shklovsky. Films such as *By the Law* (*Po zakonu*, 1926), *The Traitor* (*Predatel’*, 1926), *The Gadfly* (*Ovod*, 1928), and *House of the Dead* (*Mertvyi dom*, 1932) depict the accomplishment of the crime and the ‘mock’ elements of trial and, by extension, execution, yet all fail to establish either the immediate or

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<sup>32</sup> Julie A. Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial: Early Soviet Courts on Stage and Screen* (Illinois: Northern Illinois U.P., 2000), p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial*, p. 81.

long-term consequences of *samokritika* (self-criticism) typically present in films of the early Soviet period. Shklovsky intentionally shifts narrative emphasis from traditional concerns of confession and repentance to more ambiguous treatments of an individual's reintegration into the socialist community. The distinction between 'right and wrong' in the eyes of the law is obscured, while the boundaries between internal and external increasingly blur owing to the nature of the criminal actions and notions of responsibility explored on-screen.

Working alongside director Lev Kuleshov, Shklovsky based his script for *By the Law* on Jack London's short story 'The Unexpected' (1906). London's original narrative, set at the turn of the nineteenth-century in the Alaskan Yukon, considers a group of gold prospectors and the consequences of a double murder committed in an isolated cabin. The tale explores the psychological and moral implications of vigilante justice in a lawless land by concentrating on the ostensibly innocent witnesses who survive this traumatic ordeal.<sup>34</sup> In Kuleshov's film, however, private matters are transformed into wider public concerns as the film's heroes, Hans and Edith Nelson, remain true to their class interests in trying and executing the murderer, Michael Dennin.

One possible interpretation of the story's events perceives life at the prospecting site as a microcosm of capitalist society on the threshold of revolution, in which the Nelsons represent bourgeois oppressors and Dennin – the downtrodden proletariat. The Irishman does not benefit from his labour and finds himself forced to perform domestic chores, regardless of the fact that he alone initially 'struck gold'. Dennin's murder of his two co-workers and his attempts on the Nelsons' lives could be regarded as the Irishman's effort to overturn the unjust economic and social

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<sup>34</sup> Jack London, 'The Unexpected', *McClure's Magazine* (1906), in *The World of Jack London* <<http://www.jacklondon.net/unexpected.html>> [accessed 8 February 2009].

systems presiding in the cabin. This analysis finds further support in the ‘courtroom’ sequence where Dennin is tried for his crimes. Instead of following official legislative procedure, the Nelsons merely reconstitute oppressive forms of capitalist justice, thereby reinforcing their purported class affiliations. The couple’s minimalist reconstruction of British jurisprudence is so reduced in both procedures and members (Edith and Hans act in every role except defendant) that the alleged objectivity of Western, bourgeois law is exposed as nothing more than ritualistic affectation. The director’s intercutting of shots depicting Edith clutching the Bible and a portrait of Queen Victoria with those showing the trial’s events undermines the legitimacy of the couple’s court for the Soviet viewer. Hence, a spontaneous and unsanctioned method of administering justice is portrayed almost as negatively as the crime itself, since the filmmakers’ plot alterations expose the biases of enforcing legality on behalf of the church and state. As Kuleshov himself declared, *By the Law* was intended to emphasise ‘the inhumanity of people that religion sincerely conceals, [and] the cruelty that it allows’.<sup>35</sup>

However, the ambiguous nature of the film’s dénouement and the satiric inversion of ‘friends’ and ‘foes’ ensure that such an unequivocal interpretation remains subject to doubt. As the narrative progresses, the viewer is unable to pity or condemn either the Nelsons or Dennin with a true sense of conviction; subsequently, the boundaries dividing internal from external are transgressed once more. Despite the Nelsons’ belief in their court’s authentic imitation of bourgeois justice, the Soviet spectator is explicitly invited to identify Dennin’s trial and execution with those conducted more locally: Edith assures her husband that they acted ‘just like in a court at home’ (как у нас на суде). The omission of a specific location for this ‘home’,

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<sup>35</sup> Lev Kuleshov, ““Vest” – “Luch” – “Po zakonu””, in Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial*, p. 146.

when it could be situated in the native country of either Edith, Hans, or Dennin (England, Sweden, or Ireland respectively), forces the viewer to seek information beyond that provided in the intertitles by means of visual clues. The *samosud* (self-



**Fig. 1**

trial, or self-adjudication) itself, consisting of a cloth-covered table on which stationery and a candle have been placed, certainly suggests a Soviet courtroom, rather than any of its Western equivalents, and the portrait of the young Queen Victoria

bears a striking resemblance to the iconographic representations of Lenin in contemporary Soviet courts (Fig. 1).<sup>36</sup>

The importance of these few items deemed worthy of attention in an otherwise sparsely-decorated cabin cannot be overstated. At the time of *By the Law*'s release, Shklovsky argued that cinema was entering its 'second period' (*vtoroi period*), in which it would become 'a factory of the relationship with things' (фабрика отношения к вещам): 'In the cinema in general you should not film things, what you have to do is to elucidate a relationship to them' (В кино вообще нельзя снимать

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<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, a portrait features in a courtroom scene authored by Shklovsky, Abram Room, and L. Nikulin in their cinematic production *The Traitor*, released 27 September 1926. In contrast to the painting of an English monarch utilised in *By the Law*, this second portrait depicts Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin (Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet from 30 March 1919 – 19 July 1938) to encourage the audience's identification of the court on-screen as both modern and Soviet. Contrary to authorial expectations, however, contemporary reviews criticised the portrait as a 'stylised knick-knack' (*stilizovannaia bezdelushka*) that made 'the modern court resemble a sweetshop' (современный губсуд похож на конфектную бонбоньерку): see 'Predatel': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 729, l. 57; N. Volkov, 'Predatel', *Trud*, 1 October 1926.

вещи, а нужно выяснить отношение к ним).<sup>37</sup> This notion firmly places Shklovsky within the early Soviet context as an era characterized by a proliferation of artistic movements that aimed to destroy pure mimesis and reflection in favour of material reality.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the development of doctrines favouring real-life praxis over artistic contemplation, such as the concept of ‘life-building’ (*zhiznestroenie*) advocated by the Left Front of the Arts (*Levyi front iskusstv [Lef]*) and ‘labour theories’ (*trudovye teorii*) that attempted to explain the origins of art, such as those by Georgii Plekhanov, Georgii Iakubovskii, and Maxim Gorky, the Soviet 1920s witnessed the emergence of a creative principle, which proclaimed that proximity to reality could be secured by presenting purely documentary facts: *Lef*’s ‘literature of the fact’ (*literatura fakta*).<sup>39</sup> The first anthology of articles compiled by the *Lef* group, to which Shklovsky himself contributed, considered the writer to be a craftsman whose products were not dissimilar to those of other workers. As such, *Lef* called upon authors to work in and for industrial environments and to compose sketches, diaries, and reports for journals, newspapers, and factories in order to reflect the topical issues of the day.<sup>40</sup> Shklovsky maintained that to create new form, ‘literature requires concreteness and cross-breeding with new life’ (литературе нужна конкретность и скрещивание с новым бытом) and hence he saw in factual material a ‘prelude’ to revolutionized literature.<sup>41</sup> An emphasis on fact would enable the Soviet

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<sup>37</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Pogranichnaia liniia’ [1927], in *Za 60 let: Raboty o kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), pp. 110-13 (pp. 111-12).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Seifrid, ‘Platonov, Socialist Realism, and the Legacy of the Avant-Garde’, in *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, ed. by John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1996), pp. 235-44 (p. 235).

<sup>39</sup> N. F. Chuzhak, ed., *Literatura fakta: Pervyi sbornik materialov rabotnikov LEFa* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929; repr. Moscow: Zakharov, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Vahan D. Barooshian, ‘Russian Futurism in the Late 1920’s: Literature of Fact’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 15:1 (Spring 1971), 38-46 (p. 38).

<sup>41</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Babel’ [1924], in *Gamburgskii schet: Stat’i – Vospominaniia –*

reader to be oriented towards a new perception of reality's uniqueness and to contribute to its transformation. As a result, factual material was held as the key to the 'writer's immediate role in the construction [...] of the times [...] and [...] the relation of all his writings to concrete needs' (прямое участие писателя в строительстве [...] дней [...] и [...] увязка всех его писаний с конкретными нуждами).<sup>42</sup>

In accordance with this artistic concept, Shklovsky introduces 'facts' (*fakty*) into his scenarios in the form of 'things' (*veshchi*). Similarly, director Abram Room, with whom Shklovsky worked on the pictures *The Traitor*, *Death Bay* (*Bukhta smerti*, 1926), *Third Meshchanskaia Street* (*Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, 1927), *Potholes* (*Ukhaby*, 1928), and the documentary feature *Jews on the Land* (*Evrei na zemle*, 1927), highlighted the 'exceptional significance' (*iskliuchitel'noe znachenie*) that must be attributed to the 'thing':

In ordinary life things are *mute*, insignificant. They do not speak of anything and show no activity. In the cinema, on the screen, a thing grows to gigantic proportions and acts with the same force (if not greater) as man himself.

В обыденной жизни вещи *немые*, незначительны. Они ни о чем не говорят и никакой активности не проявляют. В кино, на экране вещь вырастает до исполинских размеров и действует с такою же

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*Esse* (1914-1933) (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), pp. 364-69 (p. 369); 'Togda i seichas', in *Literatura fakta* (see N. F. Chuzhak, ed., above), pp. 129-30 (p. 129). See also Viktor Shklovskii, 'O svobode iskusstva' [1926], in *Eshche nichego ne konchilos'...* (Moscow: Propaganda, 2002), pp. 367-70.

<sup>42</sup> N. Chuzhak, 'Literatura zhiznestroeniia', in *Literatura fakta* (see N. F. Chuzhak, ed., above), pp. 34-67 (p. 61).

силой (если не с большей), что и сам человек (*emphasis in original*).<sup>43</sup>

It can subsequently be argued that the tablecloth, paper, pen, and candle in the Nelsons' court, functioning as Shklovskian fact-things, invert the traditional dichotomy of 'good versus evil' by alluding to the potentially parodic nature of Dennin's trial. The objects obfuscate the audience's determination of whether judgement is passed on Hans and Edith as individual characters, the social and religious values that they purport to hold, Western legal bodies executing methods of bourgeois justice, or the process of legal devolution occurring in contemporary Soviet law.<sup>44</sup> It appears that the accused should be judged not only *po zakonu* (by the law), but also *po sovesti* (according to one's conscience).<sup>45</sup>

As Alexander Herzen attempted to decide 'who was to blame' in 1847 by using his characters' fates to explore the ethical crisis of an unreasonable and unconstructed society, so Shklovsky and Kuleshov exploit their principal protagonists to investigate the role of the individual in the collective by placing human justice before its divine and poetic equivalents.<sup>46</sup> As Dennin confesses, he behaves in a surprisingly submissive manner and hangs his head in ostensible resignation when

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<sup>43</sup> Abram Room, 'Moi kinoubezhdeniia' [1926], in *Abram Matveevich Room, 1894-1976: Materialy k retrospektive fil'mov*, ed. by V. Zabrodin (Moscow: Muzei kino, 1994), pp. 10-12 (p. 12).

<sup>44</sup> Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial*, p. 160. For a more detailed discussion of the devolutionary shift that was taking place in both Soviet culture and the official organs and rituals of Soviet justice at the time of *By the Law*'s production, see Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial* (especially 'Chapter 5: The Redounding Rhetoric of Legal Satire', pp. 134-60).

<sup>45</sup> Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial*, p. 30.

<sup>46</sup> A. I. Gertsen, *Kto vinovat?: Roman v dvukh chastiakh* [1847] (Moscow: Pravda, 1953); Elena Dryzhakova, 'Aleksandr Ivanovich Herzen, 1812-1870: Prose writer, essayist, memoirist, and political theorist', in *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell and Nicole Christian (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), pp. 379-81 (p. 381).

testifying. In contrast to the closing sequence of *The House on Trubnaia Square* (*Dom na Trubnoi*, 1928), co-authored by Shklovsky two years later, in which the tyrannical barber Golikov (played by the same actor who performs as Dennin, Vladimir Fogel') bows his head upon sentencing in despondent self-pity while a striped pattern of light and shadow progressively rises behind him, symbolising his present psychological and future physical imprisonment, the compliance that Dennin shows towards the Nelsons' *samosud* re-casts the character from the role of a brutal murderer to that of a tormented and remorseful hero. This develops previous appeals made to the viewer during the 'birthday party' sequence where the condemned Dennin gives his watch to his female captor. Shklovsky claims that he drew inspiration for this scene from a work by Fyodor Dostoevsky, in which Swiss townspeople exchange sentiments of love with a shepherd whom they are going to execute.<sup>47</sup> Apparently, Shklovsky had no particular reason in mind when he used this episode and even misquotes his source, indicating *The Demons* (*Besy*, 1873), instead of *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ia Karamazovy*, 1880).<sup>48</sup> Yet despite this (potentially ironic) self-effacing proclamation, Shklovsky's portrayal of such compassion in this sequence leads the audience to believe that poetic justice will ultimately be served.

This ominous warning materialises in the script's most significant departure from London's original storyline. Dennin, hanged by Hans and Edith and presumed dead, returns to the cabin wearing a broken noose and threatens the couple before leaving the prospecting site, apparently for good. Upon consideration of the Nelsons' alignment with religious and class-based values, rather than with the Party's

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<sup>47</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Ikh nastoiashchee: 1. Kuleshov' [1927], in *Za sorok let* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 65-70 (p. 68).

<sup>48</sup> A personal interview conducted between Shklovsky and N. M. Lary, March 1976, in N. M. Lary, *Dostoevsky and Soviet Film: Visions of Demonic Realism* (London: Cornell U.P., 1986), p. 39.

prescribed socialist credentials, the frayed rope around Dennin's neck could be deemed evidence of a divine reversal of the couple's verdict and the illegitimacy of their court. Dennin's resurrection consequently proves that the proletariat he represents can be neither contained, nor destroyed by bourgeois law, which confirms the injustice of the Nelsons' *samosud* and reveals the couple's supposed objectivity as nothing more than bourgeois egotism.

However, the filmmakers' decision to re-write the conclusion of London's story should not be overlooked. The closing frames of *By the Law* provide a demonic representation of Dennin's death-white face against the dark and stormy night, which



**Fig. 2**

reminds the audience of the Irishman's previous murderous actions and undermines any feelings of sympathy that may have been subsequently aroused (Fig. 2). Edith's defenceless position before a seemingly indestructible creature extends the

conflict between the couple and Dennin beyond class warfare into the terms of stock Hollywood narrative, whereby Edith assumes the role of potential 'woman-victim'. The film's dénouement therefore seems to suggest that a salvation of justice would ultimately prove futile, since it would merely allow the murderous Dennin to improvise justice in his very own *samosud* (the brutal consequences of his previous attempt have already been depicted). Shklovsky and Kuleshov's film/cinematic-experiment envisages the prospecting site as a microcosm of a nation, in which indestructible murderers, irrespective of their purported religious or class-based beliefs, condemn their enemies according to their own laws (an interpretation that

certainly did not elude critical attention).<sup>49</sup> For all the supposed condemnation of the Nelsons for their superficial alignment with Western values, their reconstruction of bourgeois justice essentially strives towards a moral and compassionate ideal of which Dennin is entirely ignorant.

### **Legalised Lawlessness**

The ambiguous ‘shades of grey’ painted in *By the Law* were no longer to be tolerated by the turn of the decade, as official demands were made for representations exclusively in ‘black and white’. In 1929, the introduction of the First Five Year Plan (*Pervyi piatiletnii plan*, 1929-33) and renewed ideological pressures drastically curtailed the relatively diverse opportunities available for artistic experimentation that had prevailed under Vladimir Lenin’s New Economic Policy (*Novaia ekonomicheskaiia politika* [NEP], 1921-28). According to N. M. Lary:

The modernization of the country had to appear in the light of “scientific” necessity; the course of Russian history had to be “rightly” interpreted, directed, and presented, as did the canon of acknowledged [...] art.<sup>50</sup>

In literature, responsibility for conformity was temporarily entrusted to the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (Российская ассоциация пролетарских писателей [RAPP]) and by the end of the 1920s a campaign of

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<sup>49</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Ikh nastoiashchee’, pp. 65-70 (p. 66); Kh. Khersonskii, ‘Po zakonu’, *Pravda*, 4 December 1926, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Lary, *Dostoevsky and Soviet Film*, p. 23.

criticism had mounted against the so-called Formalist ‘movement’ and all other ‘unorthodox’ approaches to the creative arts.<sup>51</sup> In 1930, when Shklovsky was developing his script for *House of the Dead*, RAPP critics launched an assault on Dostoevsky and the critics and scholars of his work, thereby ensuring the film’s controversy from its very inception.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, it was not only Shklovsky’s choice of literary figure that was to prove contentious. Despite his public renunciation of the ‘scientific error’ (*nauchnaia oshibka*) of Formalism in that same year, Shklovsky’s earlier pronouncements and



**Fig. 3**

affiliations with the Socialist Revolutionary party had not yet been forgotten.<sup>53</sup> The combination of such social and political factors in addition to the introduction of sound and the new possibilities that it

presented for subversion by means of speech, Shklovsky’s selection of a Dostoevskian work for its complexity of themes, and his decision to perform in the role of utopian socialist Mikhail Petrashevsky resulted in his submission

<sup>51</sup> Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History–Doctrine*, 3rd edn (London: Yale U.P., 1980), p. 135. When combined with the personal and professional disputes that were already arising within the Formalist ‘school’, these critical attacks significantly contributed to the ‘silencing’ of the Formal method: see Erlich, ‘Crisis and Rout (1926-1930)’, in his *Russian Formalism*, pp. 118-39.

<sup>52</sup> Lary, *Dostoevsky and Soviet Film*, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> V. B. Shklovskii, ‘Pamiatnik nauchnoi oshibke’, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27 January 1930, p. 4. For an alternative interpretation of what is otherwise regarded as Shklovsky’s recantation of Formalism, see Richard Sheldon, ‘Viktor Shklovsky and the Device of Ostensible Surrender’, *Slavic Review*, 34:1 (March 1975), 86-108. For Shklovsky’s personal account of the period when he was associated with the Socialist Revolutionary party, see his experimental memoirs *Sentimental’noe puteshestvie: Vospominaniia, 1917-1922* [1923], in *Eshche nichego ne konchilos’...* (see Shklovskii, above), pp. 15-266.

of six versions of the film's screenplay and a forced rejection of his 'old' principles in front of the script committee before his work received censorial approval (Fig. 3).<sup>54</sup>

Despite such disparaging encounters, Shklovsky still managed to encapsulate a unique treatment of the relationship between the concerns of individuals and those of the collective in *House of the Dead* with relative success. Regardless of the artistic and political dangers inherent in exploring Dostoevsky as a literary figure and creative personality (the novelist had argued against ideals that were now fully integrated into Marxist-Leninist doctrine by denying that man could be perfected, maintaining that God was necessary for establishing a rightful moral code and, upon his return to the capital following exile in 1861, by insisting upon the presence of an abyss that divided common and elite cultures and hence prevented 'ordinary' Russian people from becoming objects of literary and journalistic inquiry), Shklovsky was irresistibly attracted to the creative possibilities involved in portraying Dostoevsky as a youthful revolutionary and critic of his society on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the writer's death.<sup>55</sup> Shklovsky's screenplay was not a literal adaptation of Dostoevsky's account of penal servitude in Siberia (*Notes from the House of the Dead* [*Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma*], 1861–62), but a progression beyond this narrative for an analysis of the experiences out of which the text's themes and concerns had arisen and an examination of the relevance that they held for both Dostoevsky and humanity

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<sup>54</sup> S. Marvich, 'Mertvyi dom formalizma', *Krasnaia gazeta*, 13 May 1932; V. Fedorov, 'Schet rezhissera', *Kino*, 30 May 1932.

<sup>55</sup> Nancy Ruttenburg, 'Dostoevsky's Estrangement', *Poetics Today*, 26:4 (Winter 2005), 719-51 (p. 719); V. Pertsov: GFF, s. I, f. 3, op. I, ed. khr. 1273, l. 2. Dostoevsky's second wife, Anna Dostoevskaia, wrote in her 1923 memoirs that her husband died in St. Petersburg on 28 January 1881 after suffering an internal haemorrhage: see Peter Sekirin, *The Dostoevsky Archive: Firsthand Accounts of the Novelist from Contemporaries' Memoirs and Rare Periodicals* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997), p. 257.

at large. As discussed above, in the silent feature *By the Law* the private concerns of individual characters boast a broader communal significance and move beyond the realm of the private and domestic into that of the public and communal; in *House of the Dead*, however, this process happens in both directions simultaneously. Thanks to the introduction of sound, Shklovsky was able to exploit a recently-expanded range of cinematic techniques in order to address the significance of the collision between the rebellious and the conformist elements of Dostoevsky's character for both himself and Soviet society.

Shklovsky's retrospective criticism of Dostoevsky's 'memoirs' considers how 'Formalist' literary analyses had been adapted for the cinematic medium. He recognised that Dostoevsky's work was a 'novel' of a new unnamed genre to which Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* (*Geroi nashego vremeni*, 1840) and Leo Tolstoy's *Sevastopol Tales* (*Sevastopol'skie rasskazy*, 1855-56) also belonged.<sup>56</sup> Lermontov had created a unified literary work from separate parts that each focused on different events from a variety of viewpoints, instead of utilising a more traditional narrative structure that depicted the lives of individual heroes or bourgeois families. Similarly, Dostoevsky's repetitive, analogous, and digressive devices both generalised and concentrated on his dominant themes:

The choice of characters is explained by the fate of the writer, who arrived in the prison camp as a revolutionary and in the prison camp, presumably, started by looking for men of decision, revolutionaries, potential revolutionaries, and found them, and then did not know their worth.

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<sup>56</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Novoe khudozhestvennoe edinstvo', in *Za i protiv: Zametki o Dostoevskom* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1957), pp. 85-125.

Выбор героев объясняется судьбой писателя, который пришел на каторгу революционером и на каторге, вероятно, искал сперва решительных людей, революционеров, революционеров в потенции, и нашел их и потом не знал их цены.<sup>57</sup>

The images and *dramatis personae* that Shklovsky intended to portray in *House of the Dead* conform to this same organising principle, as detectable in the film's fundamentally spatial and metonymic transitions. Shklovsky's conception of 'imperial Russia as prison-house' is established by shots of urban St. Petersburg, which include Anichkov Bridge (and its accompanying allegory of revolutionary defeat in Naples) and iron grilles composed of fasces and rods (a motif alluding to their contemporary use as fascist symbols). Fluctuations in lighting, size, and distance were required 'to overcome the film-camera's documentary characteristic [...], to give some subjective shots, [and] to give what in literature we call an image' (преодолеть документальность аппарата[, ] дать субъективную съемку, [и] дать то, что мы в литературе называем образом), thereby removing the film's sense of visual objectivity and blurring the line that distinguishes genres of documentary from those of fiction.<sup>58</sup>

These images of St. Petersburg were also transformed aurally by the employment of asynchronic sound. An off-screen voice begins to recite the introduction to Alexander Pushkin's ambiguous tribute to the imperial capital, 'The Bronze Horseman: A Petersburg Tale' (*Mednyi vsadnik: Peterburgskaia povest'*, 1833), and declares, 'I love you, Peter's own creation' (*Liubliu tebia, Petra tvoren'e*).

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<sup>57</sup> Shklovskii, 'Novoe khudozhestvennoe edinstvo', pp. 85-125 (p. 109).

<sup>58</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, "'Mertvyi Dom'": Avtorskii stsenarii lenty dlia zvukovogo oformleniia': GFF, s. I, f. 3, op. I, ed. khr. 1273, [no pagination].

The narration is then interrupted by the insertion of the line, ‘No, I don’t love you’ (*Net, ne liubliu tebia*), which complicates the poem’s indefinable connotations even



**Fig. 4**



**Fig. 5**

further. The following sequence then depicts the public flogging of a Finnish recruit (a scene witnessed by Dostoevsky himself), employing close-ups to emphasise the resemblance between the instruments of corporal punishment and the fascies of the iron grilles, before shots of a dreary, monumental cityscape finalise Shklovsky’s metaphor for portraying the oppressive social order of the Tsarist regime (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). On the one hand, by utilising the visual and aural stylistic means that had recently been

made available in cinema, Shklovsky was able to exploit the experiences of an infamous individual in his contemporary environment to reveal a distinctive interpretation of an autocratic leadership and the cruelty that it allowed. On the other, his situation of biographical content inside a subjectively constructed form allowed the definition of boundaries between private and public spheres to remain ambiguous; it proves impossible to distinguish whether the film’s presentation of a historical situation is merely a reflection of Shklovsky’s and/or Dostoevsky’s personal views, or whether the viewer’s identification with the images on-screen should prompt his/her recognition of similarities between pre- and post-revolutionary society.

This initially appears to suggest that Shklovsky's digression from a literal adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Notes*, creating a new historical, biographical, and melodramatic genre-fusion, reflects a lack of concern for the on-screen depiction of literal truth. Conversely, however, the film-text itself implies that Shklovsky's primary intention as a creative writer was to remain faithful to the original author's vision when transposing literary material to a new artistic medium, as evidenced by his alteration of Dostoevsky's infamous 'mock execution' at the bequest of Tsar Nicholas I. Following his arrest in April 1849 for participating in the activities of the Petrashevsky circle (a liberal intellectual group whose members were dedicated to the discussion of European revolution and the possibilities of Russian reform), the young Dostoevsky was sentenced to death by firing squad. Moments before the execution was due to take place, however, the Tsar's *aide-de-camp* arrived with a royal pardon and a new sentence for the condemned: four years hard labour in a domain that Dostoevsky would later call 'the house of the dead', followed by four years military service.<sup>59</sup>

In Shklovsky's screenplay, the 'Formalist' devices of 'making difficult' (*zatrudnenie*), 'enstrangement' (*ostranenie*), and 'laying bare' (*obnazhenie*) are utilised when Dostoevsky's death sentence is read aloud by a man with a stammer. The sequence's critics described this speech as a pointless contrivance that had been assigned more importance than the episode's 'real' historical content:

Everything in this film is superficial. Even genuine historical facts acquire a fictitious, ostentatious character in the hands of the scenarist and director. This is precisely how the scene in which the death-

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<sup>59</sup> Ruttenburg, 'Dostoevsky's Estrangement', 719-51 (pp. 723-24).

sentence is read aloud to the condemned members of the Petrashevsky circle comes across. [...] On-screen, this characteristic detail has been turned into a comic attraction and is perceived by the viewing audience as an ostentatious, agitational caricature.

Все декоративно в этой фильме. Даже подлинные исторические факты приобретают под рукой сценариста и режиссера вымышленный нарочитый характер. Именно так звучит сцена чтения приговора осужденным петрашевцам. [...] На экране эта характерная деталь превратилась в комический аттракцион и воспринимается зрительным залом как нарочитый агитационный шарж.<sup>60</sup>

Shklovsky, however, clearly considered the execution's cinematic depiction to be in need of conscious manipulation.<sup>61</sup> The speech does not serve a traditional communicative function: its stuttered form causes its content to bypass the viewer as language is transformed into pure sound. At risk of exposing himself to accusations of a return to Futurist notions of 'trans-sense language' (*zaimnyi iazyk*), Shklovsky incorporated this unique death sentence into *House of the Dead* with the intention of

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<sup>60</sup> B. Alpers, 'Butaforskii istorizm: Mertvyi Dom', *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 21 April 1932, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> V. Zalesskii, 'Ob "original'nykh uglakh zreniia" i neudachnoi fil'me', *Kino*, 30 May 1932. According to contemporary reviews, techniques of repetition and delay were also used in the courtroom scene authored by Shklovsky, Room, and Nikulin in *The Traitor*. Rather than leading to accusations of Formalism, however, this episode prompted concerns over 'mechanical realism' (*mekhanisticheskii materializm*): 'The scenes in the local court are exceptionally unsuccessful; they are delayed, sluggish, and mull over the smallest detail with too much voracity and repetition for the viewer' (Исключительно неудачны сцены в губсуде, замедленные, тягучие, и обсасывающие малейшую деталь со слишком явными для зрителя ненасытностью и повторностью): see M. Zagorskii, 'I vse zhe – eto luchshe srednei evropeiskoi fil'my', *Sovetskii ekran*, 42 (1926), 4-5 (p. 5).

destroying the viewer's previously held (mis)conceptions about this historical episode and subsequently allowing his/her perceptions to be reformulated.<sup>62</sup> For example, members of the crowd (traditionally used to provoke the desired audience response to the action on-screen) are discovered to be doing little more than complaining about the cold and length of the proceedings. The criminals themselves, who assumedly would be attempting to savour their final moments, are, in fact, subjected to an experience whereby time is dragged out in an excruciating manner. Shklovsky, having combined his talents as scenarist, theorist, and artist, uses the images and sounds available to the film-medium to renew the audience's assessment of the events depicted before them and hence destroys all existing boundaries between personal and collective interpretations. For Shklovsky, it seems, it was the overall truth of the experience that counted.

### **Negotiating Responsibility**

*House of the Dead* boasts a distinguished position among the cinematic productions on which Shklovsky worked during the Cultural Revolution as the feature in which his creative intentions were most drastically negated and the feature that was subjected to the most pejorative critical reviews. For example, in the newspaper *Pravda* (the state's preeminent authoritative voice in the mass media), D. Zaslavskii wrote:

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<sup>62</sup> For more details concerning the Futurist 'discovery' of 'trans-sense language', see Willem G. Weststeijn, 'Mayakovsky as Literary Critic', in *Avant-Garde and Criticism*, ed. by Klaus Beekman and Jan de Vries (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 139-55 (p. 140).

A little girl gave a little kopeck coin to the “unfortunate” prisoner Dostoevsky. [...] Dostoevsky recalled this incident with a sentimental tear and this sentimental tear affected both V. Shklovsky [...] and V. Fedor. [...] Upon giving the little cinematic kopeck coin to Dostoevsky, the authors gave away everything that they had. They could not fill their picture with active hatred for Dostoevsky’s political views, because they did not feel this hatred. They were artistically “objective”. This means that with such political resources they should not have attempted to undertake such a subject.

Каторжнику, «несчастненькому» Достоевскому девочка подала копейчку. [...] Достоевский вспоминал об этом со слезой умиления, и этим умилением заразились и В. Шкловский [...] и В. Федоров. [...] Подав кинокопейчку Достоевскому, авторы отдали все, что имели. Они не могли пропитать свою картину живой враждой к политическим взглядам Достоевского, потому что такой вражды и не испытывали. Они были художественно «об’ективны». Это значит, что с такими политическими ресурсами им не следовало браться за такую тему.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> D. Zaslavskii, ‘Kinogroshik’, *Pravda*, 19 May 1932. O. Latsis writes that David Iosifovich Zaslavskii (1880–1965), ‘one of the main contributors to Lenin’s most hated publication, the Menshevik newspaper *Den*’, became, under Stalin, one of the most prominent contributors to *Pravda*’ (Заславский, один из главных сотрудников самого ненавистного Ленину издания — меньшевистской газеты *День*, стал при Сталине одним из видных сотрудников *Правды*). Zaslavskii became a member of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (Российская Социал-Демократическая Рабочая Партия) in 1900, joined the Bund Central Committee and co-edited the newspaper *Arbaiter shtimme* in 1917, and was arrested for his negative response to the Bolshevik coup in January 1918. After a month in prison, Zaslavskii moved to Kiev where he edited Jewish publications until 1919, when he was forced to leave the Bund for working with a press associated with the White Army general

Other critics were equally brutal in their appraisals of the film's artistic, ideological, and historical attributes as they roundly condemned the filmmakers' suggestion that Dostoevsky was a revolutionary of his time and sardonically labelled the film 'The Kingdom of Darkness' (*Temnoe tsarstvo*) and 'The Dead House of Formalism' (*Mertvyi dom formalizma*).<sup>64</sup> In response to this mounting press campaign, Shklovsky published an article in the magazine *Kino* entitled 'Who is to Blame?' (*Kto vinovat?*), in which he attempted to defend his professional reputation and artistic integrity by clarifying that the film's original title, *Prison-House of the People* (*Tiur'ma narodov*), had emphasised his authorial design to use Dostoevsky as a model for elucidating the ways in which citizens suffered at the will of the Tsar in the former Russian Empire; he declared that responsibility for the removal of this motif, which had subsequently left the work vulnerable to charges of Formalism, rested entirely with director Vasilii Fedorov.<sup>65</sup> The scriptwriter also stressed the importance of the film's original grammar, which had been conceived in terms of

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Anton Denikin. Upon the establishment of Bolshevik rule in the Ukraine, Zaslavskii publicly renounced his former views and in 1921 he moved to Moscow, then Petrograd. Three years later, Zaslavskii published a letter in *Pravda* that stated his support for Communist Party policy and he proceeded to earn himself a reputation as a loyal Soviet publicist, writer of satirical articles, and influential Party official. He joined the staff of *Izvestiia* in 1926 and the editorial board of *Pravda* in 1928, whereupon he became a regular and influential columnist. Zaslavskii's application to join the Communist Party was rejected three times, until 1934 when he was finally granted membership after presenting a letter of recommendation from Stalin himself: see O. Latsis, *Perelom: Stalin protiv Lenina. Surovaia drama naroda: Uchenye i publitsisty o prirode stalinizma* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1989), pp. 67-174 (pp. 162-64); Viacheslav Rumiantsev, 'Zaslavskii, David Iosifovich', 26 January 2004, in *Russkaia natsional'naia filosofii v trudakh ee sozdatelei* <[http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio\\_z/zaslavski\\_di.html](http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_z/zaslavski_di.html)> [accessed 4 June 2010].

<sup>64</sup> Zaslavskii, 'Kinogroshik'; S. Boguslavskii, 'Muzyka "Temnogo tsarstva"', *Kino*, 30 May 1932; V. Zalesskii, 'Ob "original'nykh uglakh zreniia" i neudachnoi fil'me'.

<sup>65</sup> V. Shklovskii, 'Kto vinovat?', *Kino*, 30 May 1932, in *Dostoevsky and Soviet Film* (see Lary, above), p. 27.

montage, like in silent cinema, but with additional aural features to provide innovative compositional elements that would make new demands of the viewer:

The script did not have as many conversations as it now has, but it did have a well-organized significant sound... The entire script was constructed on the basis of sound transference from one object to another... Petersburg the Beautiful was shown to the sound of a flute, then Petersburg the Fearsome was shown with the flute signifying a military orchestra.<sup>66</sup>

Shklovsky's assertions are supported by two extant scenarios, which boast a conscious exploration of the functions of internal and external diegetic and non-diegetic sound, synchronous and asynchronous techniques, and direct sound and postsynchronization.<sup>67</sup> While speech is utilised by Shklovsky in a similar fashion to intertitles in silent cinema with its regular and succinct punctuations of the narrative trajectory, other technical features intrinsic to the soundless medium are transferred to its new sound-based counterpart as explicative and catalytic devices. In one script development, for example, Shklovsky treats an episode taken directly from the literary source material where the protagonist and his fellow political prisoner enjoy tea in the prison-camp's 'kitchen for convicts' (*ostrozhaia stolovaia*).<sup>68</sup> After failing to disclose at whose expense they are drinking, the two men are assailed by a huge, intoxicated Tatar named Gazin, who threatens them with a large wooden tray

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<sup>66</sup> Shklovskii, 'Kto vinovat?', p. 27.

<sup>67</sup> V. Shklovskii, 'Tiur'ma narodov': GFF, s. I, f. 3, op. I, ed. khr. 1273, ll. 3-21.

<sup>68</sup> Shklovskii, 'Tiur'ma narodov', ll. 3-21 (ll. 13-14); Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, *Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma. Rasskazy* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006), pp. 48-63.

(*bol'shaia sel'nitsa [lotok]*). The pair are eventually saved by the call of an unknown voice, which informs Gazin that wine has disappeared from the camp's supplies; the drunken giant promptly abandons his weapon and runs from the kitchen. In Shklovsky's scenario, the sequence's final episode depicts the two political prisoners with the eyes of all those present fixed on them, before a manuscript of Dostoevsky's *Notes* is superimposed on the scene:

The pages turn and stop on the third chapter. The camera fixes the words.

– I couldn't check later whether this news about the stolen wine was true or opportunely invented to save us.

Страницы переворачиваются, останавливаются на третьей главе.

Аппарат фиксирует слова.

– Я не мог потом проверить было ли это известие о покраже вина справедливое или кстати придуманное нам на спасение.<sup>69</sup>

While the juxtaposition of essential elements from literary and cinematic practices accentuates *House of the Dead* as a filmic adaptation, the transition from diegetic to non-diegetic sound and the introduction of a graphic intertitle also illustrate Shklovsky's aspiration to reflect the conditions of everyday existence inside the tsarist 'prison-house' by utilising the medium's recently-expanded elements of

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<sup>69</sup> Shklovskii, 'Tiur'ma narodov', ll. 3-21 (l. 14). It is interesting to note that this graphic intertitle is, in fact, a slight misquotation; in the original text, Dostoevsky writes, 'Later, I couldn't find out whether this news about the stolen wine was true or opportunely invented for our redemption' (Я не мог узнать потом, было ли это известие о покраже вина справедливое или кстати придуманное, нам во спасение): see Dostoevskii, *Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma*, p. 63.

silence and sound, visual and aural. Additionally, Shklovsky's focus on external means of presentation occurs alongside a narratological shift from the perspective of an unknown and ostensibly objective third-person to a first-person journalistic account, whereupon a pervasive uncertainty arises in relation to the absolute truth of the story's events. It can subsequently be argued that Shklovsky fully intended to exploit a broad range of technical features from both literature and silent/sound cinema in order to examine the tsarist 'prison-house' in a comprehensive range of social settings, which, in turn, would have enabled an exploration of the consequences of the autocratic distribution of 'justice' (official or otherwise) for the individuals contained within it.

In his article 'Who is to Blame?', Shklovsky criticises Fedorov for failing to understand the intricate interactions between sound and image in his removal of the dominant 'prison-house' theme.<sup>70</sup> Surviving documentation from the production process does, in fact, reveal that Shklovsky's creative intentions were repeatedly disregarded by both Fedorov, who drastically modified the shooting script without consulting its author, and Sovkino, who permitted these radical edits by failing to provide guidelines within which the director should work. For example, Shklovsky introduced a variety of criminal episodes into one of his early scenarios in order to produce an ideologically interesting film without distorting the portrayal of its principal protagonist:

Dostoevsky himself emphasises the gifted nature and high quality of the human material in the labour camp of his day. As a result, social

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<sup>70</sup> Shklovskii, 'Kto vinovat?', p. 27.

reasons for crime are advanced here. There is no ‘Dostoevskian mentality’ (*Dostoevshchina*) in this approach.

Сам Достоевский подчеркивает талантливость и высокую  
качественность человеческого материала тогдашней каторги.  
Таким образом, здесь выдвигаются социальные причины  
преступления. Достоевщины в таком подходе нет.<sup>71</sup>

Shklovsky also intended to integrate events from the Polish uprising, the activities of individual members of the Petrashevsky circle, and incidents from Dostoevsky’s other literary works into his screenplay, so that ‘the film should turn out monumental, but not monotonous’ (лента должна получиться монументальная, но не однообразная).<sup>72</sup>

Sovkino, however, objected to Shklovsky’s representation of the lives of individual inmates as representatives of society at large and instructed the scenarist and director ‘to replace Dostoevsky with a different hero’ (*zamenit’ Dostoevskogo dr. geroem [sic]*). Yet the studio failed to provide the filmmakers with any additional artistic direction and hence sanctioned Fedorov’s elimination of all but the most trivial details about the interactions between Petrashevsky and his followers, including their personal histories and criminal accusations, from Shklovsky’s screenplay and authorised the director’s refusal to insert sequences that were later suggested by the scriptwriter in a bid to portray Dostoevsky as a ‘myth-maker and reactionary’ (*vymyshlennik i reaktsioner*).<sup>73</sup> Upon release, *House of the Dead* was

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<sup>71</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Zapiski iz mertvogo doma: Tiur’ma narodov’: GFF, s. I, f. 3, op. I, ed. khr. 1273, ll. 22-22ob (l. 22).

<sup>72</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Zapiski iz mertvogo doma’, ll. 22-22ob (l. 22ob).

<sup>73</sup> GFF, s. I, f. 3, op. I, ed. khr. 1273, l. 27ob.

heavily condemned by critics, such as B. Alpers, for neglecting to treat social and historical episodes from an account that professed to be based on Dostoevsky's memoirs:

Such a cursory and superficial description of the Russian Fourierists' circle is all the more strange when the means of sound cinema offered the opportunity for a full disclosure of the circle's political aspirations and for drawing individuals portraits of its participants.

Такое беглое и поверхностное описание кружка русских фурьеристов тем более странно, что *средства звукового кино давали возможности полно раскрыть политические устремления кружка и обрисовать отдельные образы его участников* (*emphasis in original*).<sup>74</sup>

It consequently appears that Shklovsky's variegated pattern of cinematic techniques was ultimately overwhelmed by Fedorov's determination to portray Dostoevsky as a straightforward reactionary, which led to the eventual destruction of the script's theme and grammar. The spheres of vision and sound that Shklovsky had intended to present on-screen possessed a variety of synchronic and asynchronic peculiarities: some were identified with military order and autocratic oppression, while others correlated to beauty and an overarching sense of grandeur; citations were presented with revolutionary associations and common aspirations were exposed without diminishing the plights of the individual revolutionaries who held them. Like Dostoevsky, then, it can be argued that Shklovsky was attracted by threshold

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<sup>74</sup> B. Alpers, 'Butaforskii istorizm', p. 3.

situations in his desire to dissolve existing boundaries between personal and collective experience by all available artistic means. Ironically, it was, in fact, Fedorov's elimination of Shklovsky's careful combination of sound and image in a context that was verified by both historical, literary, and biographical sources that left both filmmakers with an ideologically suspect product that was vulnerable to charges that frequently approached indictments of Formalism.<sup>75</sup>

### **Improvised Justice**

In the theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, law forms part of society's 'superstructure' and, in consequence, exclusively serves the interests of the class that controls the infrastructure, i.e. the means of production.<sup>76</sup> Although this proposition is intelligible in relation to the general Marxist programme, it ignores the fact that the law and courts accomplish other tasks besides protecting a society's status quo and the interests of its economically dominant inhabitants. Rather than a means for restricting governmental rule or for protecting individual rights, law, from the Marxist perspective, is considered to be nothing more than an ideological device utilised by rulers for concealing the reality of their power in a society and the corresponding powerlessness of others and its removal is essential for a society to achieve true

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<sup>75</sup> Fedorov not only removed material from Shklovsky's scenarios, but also introduced several significant episodes: these included a revised opening sequence where an aged Dostoevsky delivers his infamous speech at the 1880 Pushkin Jubilee and a scene that depicts a meeting between Dostoevsky and Konstantin Pobedonostsev, procurator of the Holy Synod and the writer's friend in his later years. Pobedonostsev reminds Dostoevsky of his duty to curtail the onset of revolution and receives a request from the author to provide suitable subject matter for the next issue of his *Diary of a Writer* (*Dnevnik pisatel'ia*, 1873-81): see Shklovskii, "'Mertvyi Dom": Avtorskii stsenarii lenty dlia zvukovogo oformleniia', [no pagination]; Shklovskii, 'Tiur'ma narodov', ll. 3-21; Lary, *Dostoevsky and Soviet Film*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Pipes, *Legalised Lawlessness: Soviet Revolutionary Justice* (London: Alliance Publishers, 1986), p. 12.

freedom.<sup>77</sup> It can subsequently be argued that Marxism, posited in opposition to liberalism, envisages as its end result the absolute liberty of man and this paradox casts a new light on the events depicted in *By the Law*, particularly when the feature's various literary drafts are compared and contrasted both with each other and with the final cinematic invention; it becomes increasingly apparent that Edith and Hans, who consider themselves 'rulers' in their hut/microcosmic society, unconsciously behave in the most detrimental fashion on account of their strict adherence to a vague understanding of 'the law'.

In London's story, Edith occupies most of the omniscient narrator's attention and her respect for the law is presented as an unwavering constant, even during episodes when 'the real and the unreal [are shuffled] into perplexing confusion'.<sup>78</sup> When Edith forbids Hans from taking the law into his own hands, arguing that such action would be no more justifiable than Dennin's murderous deed, she is aligned with the traditional stereotype of 'woman as the upholder of morality'.<sup>79</sup> However, a shift in perspective occurs when Edith's perception of the law is actualised and two Indians are forced to witness the trial at gunpoint; the story closes with the Indians' perception of Dennin's execution as they 'solemnly [...] watch the working of the white man's law that compelled a man to dance upon the air'.<sup>80</sup> London increases the number of characters as the narrative approaches its dénouement, thereby expanding the space in which the plot unfolds and facilitating a change in viewpoint. This, in turn, exposes Edith's respect for the law as both necessary for personal survival and absurd within its broader social context. The realization of a response, as perceived

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<sup>77</sup> Hilaire Barnett, 'Marxism and the Rule of Law', in *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 4th edn (London: Cavendish, 2002), pp. 82-83 (p. 82).

<sup>78</sup> London, 'The Unexpected'.

<sup>79</sup> Judith Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film* (Columbus: Ohio State U.P., 1989), p. 44.

<sup>80</sup> London, 'The Unexpected'.

from within, that explicitly contrasts with the visualization of that response as an image, perceived from without, is enabled by the recognition of Edith as a female figure situated both inside and outside ‘white man’s law’.

Although the characters in *By the Law* bear the same names as those in ‘The Unexpected’, an early script reveals the extent to which Shklovsky and co-writer/director Kuleshov were prepared both to develop and to depart from London’s story in terms of narrative structure, character development, and authorial perspective.<sup>81</sup> The introduction of additional material into the scenario for an audience familiar with London’s work renews perception, which conforms to Shklovsky’s notion of estrangement and London’s ‘the unexpected’ without altering events derived from the original source. The filmmakers’ adaptation thus extends London’s tale and creates the illusion of a cinematic space ‘turned outwards’: the story’s central preoccupations are externally modified and exposed for all to see, thereby allowing notions of justice and morality to be explored in a more extensive creative framework.

For example, the role played by the local Indian population was significantly altered during the process of cinematic adaptation. In London’s work, Indians help the gold prospectors to set down ‘their supplies in a lonely bight of land a hundred miles or so beyond Latuya Bay’ and reluctantly witness the Nelsons’ trial and its gruesome consequences.<sup>82</sup> In Shklovsky and Kuleshov’s first scenario, however, the only Indian featured is shot dead and robbed by Hans before the end of part one.<sup>83</sup> The body is then found by Dennin, who, inspired by what has occurred in his absence, determines to acquire assets for his own personal benefit in a similar fashion. The story’s entire perspective has now been shifted, since both Hans and Dennin are depicted as

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<sup>81</sup> Viktor Shklovskii and Lev Kuleshov, ‘Literaturnyi stsenarii: “Po zakonu”’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 696 (nem), [no pagination].

<sup>82</sup> London, ‘The Unexpected’.

<sup>83</sup> Shklovskii and Kuleshov, ‘Literaturnyi stsenarii’, [no pagination].

murderers who consciously kill for material gain. While a small Indian community was previously exploited for its knowledge of the local area and assumed potential to understand the workings of ‘white man’s law’, a single Indian now provides the two prospectors with ostensibly pragmatic reasons to murder. Hence, the reduction of *dramatis personae* allows the Indian’s symbolic function as the innocent victim of and unconscious justification for ‘white man’s greed’ to be heightened. Although the number of characters increases in London’s story, yet decreases in the film-script as their respective plots progress, both authorial techniques ultimately result in the expansion of narrative space.

Throughout Shklovsky and Kuleshov’s scenario, the potential viewer is frequently reminded of the Indian’s fate thanks to the scriptwriters’ introduction of a blanket that is stolen by Hans from the deceased’s body. Despite not appearing in London’s original work, the Indian’s blanket features in a series of recurring and interlocking situations in the scenario and its image, once established, is used as a standard against which to evaluate subsequent cinematic events. The object initially provides warmth and comfort to those selected by Hans: he drapes it around his shivering wife, lays it over the fatally wounded Harky, sleeps under it himself, and strips it from the cabin’s improvised prison-bunk to symbolise the inception of Dennin’s detainment. Yet the image’s terms are soon subject to modulation. After Dennin kicks over a lamp and sets fire to the hut, the script calls for a single shot to depict a small burn-mark in the corner of the Indian’s blanket. Henceforth, the object services no-one except the murderer himself, who wears it like a cloak when led to the hangman’s noose and, upon returning to the hut for his portion of the gold, ties his money inside it like a bag.

The blanket's preliminary use by all characters except Dennin, and then exclusively by Dennin alone, permits the object to function as the script's metaphoric axis. As the plot advances, the combination of the blanket's traditional associations as an indispensable and unpretentious household item and its present connotations as a possession stolen from a hunted civilian not only reminds the intended audience that justice has not yet been served, but also creates a unique author-audience relationship. On the one hand, by evaluating the scriptwriters' additional material alongside London's narrative elements, the deeper meanings embedded in the original text become more explicit through the introduction of 'live' detail, i.e. features from real space. On the other, the constantly shifting symbolic resonances of the object enable a degree of authorial ambiguity to be retained, which, in turn, requires active interpretation on the part of the audience. When combined with the scriptwriters' aforementioned expansion of narrative space, the scenario is able to advance an environment broad enough for the exploration of public concerns, yet the authors' refusal to impart one single interpretation of the events to be depicted on-screen would ultimately provide each audience member with an intensely personal experience.

It is precisely Shklovsky and Kuleshov's refusal to distinguish between the provision of opportunities for individual interpretation and the explicit promotion of state views for public consumption that prompted an anonymous censor to suggest prohibiting the film's production.<sup>84</sup> The arguments expounded in the review can be divided into two rough categories. The first concerns the script's lack of narrative progression, owing in part to the deficit of screen-time allocated to the depiction of the specific 'psychological process' (*psikhologicheskii protsess*) that could allow an

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<sup>84</sup> ““Po zakonu””: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 696 (nem), [no pagination].

individual to execute his/her companions with such ostensible composure; the second highlights the scriptwriters' unacceptable presentation of a series of 'murders, which are not justified by any social considerations whatsoever' (убийства, никакими общественными соображениями не оправданные), thereby rendering the whole project meaningless. As a direct response to these criticisms, Shklovsky maintained that, hereafter, *By the Law* was to focus primarily on the 'psychological processes' (*psikhologicheskoe deistvie*) of 'a minimal number of *dramatis personae*' (*minimal'noe kolichestvo deistvuiushchikh lits*) situated in an 'isolated zone' (*zona izoliatsii*).<sup>85</sup>

Upon initial viewing, Shklovsky and Kuleshov do, in fact, appear to have addressed the censor's principal concerns. The number of characters is reduced to five and the cabin's space assumes a more central location than in its literary predecessors. In London's story, for example, not only do several local Indians frequent the hut, but one even sets eyes on the murder scene itself.<sup>86</sup> In the final feature, however, all cinematic 'extras' are removed. Similarly, the original screenplay shows that life not only exists inside the cabin, but could also be sustained beyond it: the scenario's opening depicts Edith in the kitchen, engaging in household chores, while her male companions hunt in a nearby forest.<sup>87</sup> The film, by contrast, treats the 'isolated zone' in which the cabin is located from two opposing perspectives, emphasising both the emptiness of the immediate vicinity and the cabin's prominence within it as the only place in which the prospectors could survive.

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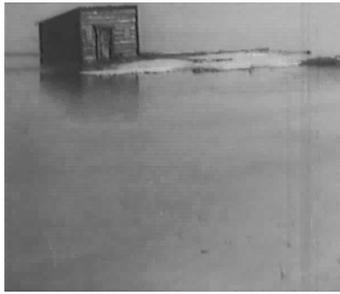
<sup>85</sup> Shklovskii, 'Ikh nastoiashchee', pp. 65-70 (p. 66).

<sup>86</sup> London, 'The Unexpected'.

<sup>87</sup> Shklovskii and Kuleshov, 'Literaturnyi stsenarii', [no pagination].



**Fig. 6**



**Fig. 7**



**Fig. 8**

The hut's location in a boundless expanse of nothingness is established as *By the Law* commences thanks to laconic shots that contain little more than the occasional lone tree (Fig. 6). Throughout the film, the vast amount of space that surrounds the cabin is conveyed by the building's placement in various parts of the frame, but never in a central position (Fig. 7).

This ensures that the majority of visual space is consumed by frozen wilderness and impresses the hut's complete isolation. These shots are then followed by seemingly contradictory images, in which the cabin is shown in relation to the river so that both the building and its reflection are depicted on-screen (Fig. 8). This juxtaposition of shots in which the hut fills only the edges or corners of frames with those in which the structure is presented in

duplicate produces a striking contrast that not only communicates the cabin's remote location, but also accentuates the importance of the building for those living inside it.

The cabin's newly-acquired status becomes particularly poignant when examining the relationship between internal and external in an environment where official institutions of administering justice are, in effect, absent. R. M. MacIver maintains that:

Without law there is no order, and without order men are lost, not knowing where they go, not knowing what they do. [...] Even an

outlaw group [...] has its own code of law, without which it could not exist. The picture of the ‘lawless savage’, running wild in the woods, is wholly fictitious. The ‘savage’ is never lawless; he clings to his own laws more tenaciously, more blindly, than does civilised man.<sup>88</sup>

Hence, when Dennin tries to escape from his cabin-prison while his captors are burying their murdered co-workers, an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness is conveyed. The viewer realises that even if Dennin flees the hut, he has nowhere to go except into an unending expanse, ravaged by the elements, and that as a lone man ‘running wild in the woods’, he would ultimately come to attach himself more strongly to those notions of improvised ‘law’ that he should have left behind. The cabin therefore functions not only as the characters’ enclosure, but also as a physical reminder of the harsh environmental conditions and substantial distance that separate them from ‘lawful’ civilisation, as if they are, in fact, ‘an outlaw group’.

Yet when the story and first scenario are compared to the revised list of intertitles and final cinematic production, the extent to which Shklovsky acceded to censorial demand retains a degree of ambiguity.<sup>89</sup> Rather than developing ‘psychological processes’ by providing access to the thoughts and feelings assigned to various characters, or by altering the film’s composition of ‘plot’ (*siuzhet*) and ‘story’ (*fabula*) to clarify the stimulus for narrative progression, Shklovsky directs schematic focus towards external details.<sup>90</sup> He reduces the elements of London’s tale and the

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<sup>88</sup> R. M. MacIver, *The Web of Government* (London: Macmillan, 1947), p. 61.

<sup>89</sup> London, ‘The Unexpected’; Shklovskii and Kuleshov, ‘Literaturnyi stsenarii: “Po zakonu”’, [no pagination]; ‘Montazhnyi list nadpisei kartiny “Po zakonu”’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 696 (nem), [no pagination].

<sup>90</sup> For Shklovsky’s initial differentiation between the terms *siuzhet* and *fabula*, see Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Sviaz’ priemov siuzhetoslozheniia s obshchimi priemami stilii’ [1919], in his *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), pp. 24-67. For a

initial script that illuminate the characters' back-story to nothing more than their names and countries of origin and instead presents them with expressive 'everyday' (*bytovoi*) detail, whereby a specific feature in the external appearance of one protagonist is seen in the mannerisms of people as a whole.

For example, throughout *By the Law* characters are depicted with dog-like



**Fig. 9**

characteristics to convey less explicit emotional details. The film's opening sequence juxtaposes shots of a carefree Dennin as he pauses from his water-collection duties to play the pipe with close-ups of his dog's ears, creating the impression that the animal is listening to its master's music;

shortly afterwards, the dog even brings its master the pipe to play. Similarly, while the prospectors celebrate 'striking gold', the dog sits on its hind legs and barks in time to Dennin's drumbeat. The harmonious relationship between the animal and its owner thus established, it becomes evident that the only character towards whom Dennin behaves with any degree of intimacy is, in fact, his dog.

After Dennin has committed murder, however, his canine companion is temporarily removed from the story's events and, in its absence, elements of dog-like behaviour are transferred onto the principal protagonists. When Harky and Dutchy are to be buried, for instance, Hans and Edith pull a sledge through the snow by crawling on all fours, while Dennin seizes the opportunity to escape by straining against his

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comprehensive discussion of these concepts, alongside those later developed by other members of the Russian Formalist 'school', see Herbert Eagle, 'Syntagmatics of Cinema', in his *Russian Formalist Film Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1981), pp. 13-18 (especially pp. 17-18). These terms will also be treated in greater detail in the present text: see 'Chapter 4: Metatextual Modes of Judicial Expression'.

binds and baring his teeth in a ferocious display of desperation (Fig. 9 and Fig. 10). It



**Fig. 10**

is not until spring arrives and relations in the cabin show signs of improvement that the dog is re-introduced into the narrative. As Dennin presents Edith with a pocket-watch on her birthday, the pair smile upon seeing a bird outside the window (the first sign of animal life that has been

encountered beyond the cabin's walls since the film began). It is at this moment that Hans enters the frame with Dennin's dog following behind.

This pattern is repeated several times throughout the film. When the characters' negative emotional states are heightened, the dog is inexplicably withdrawn from the narrative, the men snarl and spit with rage, and Edith twitches in nervous anxiety. When these tensions subside, however, the dog re-appears and behaves with the most favourable qualities associated with its species. While a mythological interpretation of this anthropomorphism dehumanises the characters on-screen by transforming them into repulsive non-human creatures in an attempt to legitimise their destruction, it could also be argued that Shklovsky, rather than addressing the 'psychological processes' of artificially constructed characters, strives towards restoring his protagonists' primordial integrity and connections with their surrounding environment by depicting repeated visible habits.<sup>91</sup> Hence, while the

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<sup>91</sup> This technique, whereby visual mannerisms are manipulated in order to link characters with their external surroundings, was also employed in several of Shklovsky's later cinematic works, such as *The Gadfly*, where the identity of Italian revolutionary Artur is ostensibly revealed through his persistent twirling of flowers, and *The Last Attraction (Poslednii attraktsion, 1929)*, where strongman Vanechka's habit of eating at inopportune moments is designed to reflect his 'petit-bourgeois' mentality.

audience's attention is directed inwards as the protagonists' behaviour is shaped in relation to the ubiquitous cabin, it is simultaneously reversed outwards by the narrative's infusion with 'live' details from the natural world. By concurrently shifting perspectives in opposite directions, Shklovsky complies with censorial demand, yet in a thoroughly unexpected manner.

Shklovsky had been presented with the choice of either conforming to official demands and depicting 'psychological processes' in *By the Law*, or rejecting them and subsequently obstructing the film's production; however, it can now be noted that this was not the filmmaker's only available alternative in 1926. To appropriate a remark made by Shklovsky in his article 'On the Freedom of Art' (*O svobode iskusstva*), published in his third set of autobiographical memoirs *Third Factory (Tret'ia fabrika)*:

There is no third path. Yet this is precisely the path that must be followed. An artist should not follow the tram-lines.

Третьего пути нет. Вот по нему и надо идти. Художник не должен идти по трамвайным линиям.<sup>92</sup>

Although a third option was not bestowed by an external body during the screenplay's development, this was precisely the one that Shklovsky selected when he exploited a technique defined by Richard Sheldon as 'the device of ostensible surrender'.<sup>93</sup> The contrast between Shklovsky's personal artistic vision and the outer façade that he presented to the censorial board (i.e. outward obedience undermined by

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<sup>92</sup> Shklovskii, 'O svobode iskusstva', pp. 367-70 (p. 369).

<sup>93</sup> Sheldon, 'Viktor Shklovsky and the Device of Ostensible Surrender', 86-108.

defiance) inversely reflects the relationship between internal psychological processes and the external means by which they are depicted in the film-cum-cinematic-experiment. The censor's explicit instructions would certainly not have satisfied a scriptwriter whose adamant opposition to psychoanalysis formed a significant part of his broader polemic against forms of extra-artistic interpretation.<sup>94</sup> Yet by selecting a 'third path', Shklovsky was able to break conventions successfully and move in a direction that would otherwise have been forbidden; his personal and on-screen projective illusions allowed justice to be achieved on both internal and external artistic levels. The psychic force of iconic imagination that arises as a direct result of the interplay between the realms of internal and external in *By the Law* can therefore be regarded as both off- and on-screen manifestations of a variety of improvised justice that was formulated by Shklovsky for his own immediate artistic and extra-artistic needs.

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<sup>94</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Ornamental'naia proza', *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), pp. 205-25 (especially p. 211): 'One must not be carried away by an artist's biography, he writes, and then looks for motivation. Most of all one should not be carried away by psychoanalysis' (Не нужно увлекаться биографией художника, он пишет, а потом ищет мотивировок. Меньше всего нужно увлекаться психо-анализом). Jurij Striedter notes the importance of Shklovsky's statement, but nevertheless remarks that his stance 'against psychoanalysis is not very sound or very informed': see his *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1989), p. 267, ft. 52.

## **Chapter 2: Realistic Discontent and Utopian Desire**

### **Justice as Social Daydream**

A different configuration of ‘projective illusion’ and the ‘psychic force of iconic imagination’ was encapsulated in a term used by the Russian intelligentsia to express a sense of yearning for a new order: ‘social daydreaming’.<sup>95</sup> For members of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia of the radical socialist persuasion, who felt estranged from the state that they loathed and from the *narod* (peasants, labouring masses, the ‘people’) whom they revered, ‘social daydreaming’ was a vocation that arose in response to the feelings of remorse and embarrassment instigated by the perceived backwardness and oppressiveness of the Russian system.<sup>96</sup> Intellectual practices and detailed initiatives partly imported from the West contributed to the intelligentsia’s development, both internally (instruction in personal revolt) and externally (dedication to society’s reconstruction), in accordance with practical economics and social equity. Although the culture of the Silver Age (approximately 1890–1917) was often at variance with social consciousness in terms of politics, several of the period’s later outgrowths, including Futurism, generated (near)utopian visions of global transformation via aesthetic revolution, in which elements of previous and reformed notions of order and freedom were united in a bid to obtain and then defend welfare and justice. Socialism was believed capable of eliminating autocracy and class oppression, continuing the struggle against capitalism and the

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<sup>95</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1991), p. 13.

<sup>96</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 5.



the young inventor and banishes her lover, captain of the guards Drutskoi, in his favour. Impressed by Nikishka's technical skills, Ivan orders his captive serf to fly in a public demonstration, anticipating that it will secure foreign investment in Russian flax and, to the surprise of all those present, the task is completed successfully. Rather than boast of his subject's triumph, however, the unpredictably volatile Ivan declares the act 'ungodly' (то не божье дело) and demands not only the incineration of the wings that enabled Nikishka's air-borne dive, but also the inventor's execution. In the film's final scenes, the serf escapes from his prison-cell, both thanks to and in spite of the Tsarina's capriciousness, before falling through a trapdoor to his death, while Tsar Ivan is notified of his wife's infidelities and strangles Maria with his own hands.

A critic from the State Film Archives considers the film's primary narrative to revolve around 'the tragic fate of a talented individual who falls victim to religious fanaticism and ignorance' (трагическая судьба таланта из народа, павшего жертвой религиозного фанатизма и невежества).<sup>101</sup> Indisputably, it is Tsar Ivan's perverted view of religion that serves as the foundation for the elaboration of law and administration of justice throughout his reign. Ivan seeks counsel from religious advisors, but in contradistinction to conversations that occur between Artur and cardinal Montanelli in *The Gadfly* and between Dostoevsky and Procurator of the Holy Synod Pobedonostsev in *House of the Dead*, the content of the Tsar's exchanges is never divulged. Subsequently, the extent to which his individual religious conscience is determined by external 'authorities' remains uncertain. For example, in the sequence where the Tsarina's unfaithfulness is finally made known to her husband, a single shot of a church interior incorporating candles and an open Bible is succeeded by a medium-shot of the Tsar dressed in white on which a crucifix is

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<sup>101</sup> 'Gosfil'mofond: Tema, sodержanie i annotatsiia': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 450, ll. I-2 (l. I-Iob).

superimposed, which is then replaced by shots of Ivan wearing a black robe against which his crucifix-necklace prominently shines. As the Tsar disappears inside Maria's bedchamber, his chief priest remains outside the entrance and repeatedly crosses himself in anticipation of the events that are to follow, yet makes no attempt to dissuade the Tsar from committing uxoricide.

This climactic episode is dominated by religious imagery. The ubiquitous crucifix as an internal element of the *mise-en-scène* and post-production superimposition reflects Ivan's incorporation of his belief in God's omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence into his decision-making process in his role as both husband and Tsar. In addition, the direction of the audience's attention towards the colour change of Ivan's robe operates at several interrelated levels.<sup>102</sup> First, the filmmakers exploit the traditional symbolism of white as an indication of purity, cleanliness, and innocence (particularly in clothing as it is easy to stain) in order to insinuate the hypocrisy and arrogance of a Tsar who has already been proven a murderous and tyrannical dictator. Second, in accordance with artistic convention white and black not only symbolise the dichotomy of good and evil, but also metaphorically relate to the light and darkness, day and night, inherent in religious tradition: on the first day of the creation story, God 'saw the light, that *it was good*: and [...] divided the light from the darkness (*emphasis in original*)'.<sup>103</sup>

Yet despite this proliferation of religious under- and overtones, the role assigned to Ivan's chief priest remains indefinable. The clergyman's decision to permit the Tsarina's murder could, on the one hand, be interpreted as a form of

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<sup>102</sup> While *Wings of a Serf* was produced in black and white (the first full-length Soviet colour film, *Grunya Kornakova*, directed by Nikolai Ekk, was not released until 1936), the contrast between the density and saturation of the two tones in this episode is remarkably striking.

<sup>103</sup> Genesis 1. 4.

‘passive manipulation’, whereby the priest is able to control the present environment inactively owing to the entrenchment of the church’s long-standing teachings in Ivan’s conscience. On the other, knowledge of the Tsar’s capacity for brutality could prevent the clergyman from approaching him out of fear for his own safety. It consequently proves impossible to determine whether Ivan’s unique brand of justice is fashioned by himself or others: the filmmakers refuse to clarify whether Ivan rejects his religious advisor’s advances or is subconsciously influenced by his presence. This ambiguity of interpretation is concretised in the film’s concluding shot where incense fills the screen, thereby clouding both the clergyman and the role of religion in the delineation and dispensation of justice that he personifies from view.

After his wife’s execution, the Tsar informs his subjects that ‘in accordance with God’s will, Tsarina Maria has passed away’ (Волей божьей, царица Мария преставилась...) (Fig. 12).<sup>104</sup> The utilisation of the noun *volia* in this instance is



**Fig. 12**

complicated by the filmmakers’ on-screen depiction of all levels of sixteenth-century Russian society, from ‘small fry’ (*melkie liudishki*) to ‘the Terrible himself’ (*sam Groznyi*), and their dominant narratological concentration on serf Nikishka.<sup>105</sup> While Tsar Ivan employs *volia* to signify either will, volition, or

wish(es), the word can alternatively denote notions of freedom, democracy, and liberty.<sup>106</sup> According to Wada Haruki, Russian serfs and peasants were ‘dreamers’ full

<sup>104</sup> ‘Spisok nadpisei fil’ma “Kryl’ia kholopa”’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 450, ll. 3-8 (l. 8).

<sup>105</sup> GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 450, l. 75.

of ‘practical Wisdom’, whose dream-worlds, which were inevitably shaped by ubiquitous religious ceremonies, encompassed appreciations of both *volia* and *pravda*.<sup>107</sup> For a Russian peasant, while *pravda* connoted fairness, straightness, justice, and right (truth, by definition, had to be just), *volia* referred neither to abstract liberty under law, nor to *laissez faire*, nor to parliamentary rule, but to a freedom that meant, as Stites remarks, ‘escape from the oppressive state, *flight if needed*, [and] withdrawal from under the yoke of manor lord and policeman’ (*emphasis added*).<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, their utopian dreams frequently embodied the figure of a ‘just tsar’, a deliverer who would give *volia* and *pravda* to the people he loved; this image thrived in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries and was even applied to Ivan himself.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, by presenting the hierarchical social structure of sixteenth-century Russia in its entirety and exploiting the utopian legend of a leader who promised both freedom and justice, Shklovsky and Tarich permit the Tsarina’s death by the will (*volia*) of God (or, more precisely, with that of the Tsar) to sanction her achievement of freedom (*volia*) and final escape from under Ivan’s tyrannical ‘yoke’.

Nikishka also faces a similar fate to that suffered by Maria; unlike the Tsarina, however, the serf is sentenced to death for accomplishing an *actual* flight at the behest of the Tsar, which is then deemed ‘ungodly’. While in the West, where the concept of ‘flight’, which originated in the Greek legend of ‘Icarus of the Aegean’ and was later moulded by Renaissance secularism and humanism, has traditionally been associated

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<sup>106</sup> Marcus Wheeler, *The Oxford Russian-English Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1972; repr. 1980), p. 83.

<sup>107</sup> Wada Haruki, ‘The Inner World of Russian Peasants’, *Annals of the Institute of Social Science (Tokyo)*, 20 (1979), 61-65. The meanings of these terms were later transformed by the Russian intelligentsia: first by the Populists into ‘Land and Liberty’ (*Zemlia i volia*), and then by the Marxists into ‘socialism’ (*sotsializm*) and ‘democracy’ (*demokratiia*): see Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 15.

<sup>108</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 15.

<sup>109</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, pp. 15-16.

with notions of personal freedom, individual liberation, and spiritual transcendence, in Russia, a country intellectually, religiously, and physically isolated from the changes occurring in Western Europe, flight continued to reflect ancient traditions preserved in early Christianity's spiritual theology.<sup>110</sup> Folkloric narrative structures that were later influenced by the spirituality and imagery of the Orthodox faith served as the perceptual framework by which Russian approaches to comprehending human flight were conditioned, while the frequently negative functions of air travel, typified by characters such as Baba Iaga the Bony-Legged One (Баба-яга, костяная нога), a cannibal witch who flies through the air in a pestle and mortar, and the ancient Russian belief in the soul's rising from the body after death, created a Russian flight culture that represented pre-revolutionary notions of hierarchy and acknowledged the long-standing value of obedience to authority.

While the Tsarina, the embodiment of autocratic decadence, arrogant monarchism, and society's moral decline, makes an escape of sorts by means of metaphoric flight in death from a Russia under Ivan as the personification of reaction enforced with brutality and thoroughness, Nikishka, who represents resourcefulness, invention, and progress, achieves freedom by accomplishing his dream of flight, which, in turn, results in his imprisonment, a failed escape attempt, and, eventually, execution. Hence, by depicting flight on-screen both metaphorically and literally, Shklovsky actively engages with two fundamental concerns that preoccupied the Russian intelligentsia. First, the scriptwriter dissolves the polarisation of East and West on the world map in order to expose the dangers of submitting to autocratic leadership in the hope of attaining justice. Second, Shklovsky presents an artistic polemic with Soviet cultural authorities, concealed behind a temporal veil, which

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<sup>110</sup> Scott W. Palmer, 'Icarus, East: The Symbolic Contexts of Russian Flight', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 49:1 (Spring 2005), 19-47 (p. 19).

foreshadows the intelligentsia's progressively ambivalent engagement with state power, post-revolutionary culture, and the rise of cinema as a creative medium and instrument of Russian cultural development. Shklovsky utilises historical legend, social conditions, linguistic nuance, and iconic visual imagery for the cinematic portrayal of the particulars inherent in the symbolic context of Soviet flight culture, which enables him both to accommodate and reject revolutionary aims by depicting the ideas of personal accomplishment and self-fulfilment engendered in the West, alongside the messages of collectivism and submission to state authority promoted in the Soviet Union. This results in a unique and intricate presentation of a Russia where boundaries are dissolved between East and West, art and life, and individual and public concerns; it appears that Shklovsky later employed his characteristic tone of ironic self-deprecation when he felt compelled to declare, 'it is difficult to describe flight, since it has been described so many times already' (описывать полет трудно, так его уже много раз описывали).<sup>111</sup>

### **God, the State, and Self**

Although the plot of *Wings of a Serf* undoubtedly pivots around the question of whether or not the young inventor Nikishka will accomplish his dream of flight, the contemporary press primarily devoted their attention towards actor L. Leonidov and his portrayal of the scriptwriters' interpretation of Tsar Ivan IV.<sup>112</sup> Extant critical

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<sup>111</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Na samolete', in *Gamburgskii schet* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1928; repr. St. Petersburg: Limbus Press, 2000), pp. 278-80 (p. 278).

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, S. Ermolinskii, 'Kryl'ia kholopa', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 26 November 1926, p. 26; A. Ts., 'Kryl'ia kholopa', *Trud*, 26 November 1926, [p. 26]; B. Mazing, 'Kryl'ia kholopa', [*Krasnaia gazeta*], 21 December 1926, p. 4; N. V.,

reviews can be approximately divided into two opposing categories: (1) those that praise the filmmakers' concentration on the character's internal development and (2) those that revere his symbolically representative exaltation. In an article for the newspaper *Izvestiia*, for example, author N. V. commends the actor, director, and scriptwriters for elaborating Ivan's 'internal representation' (*vnutrennii obraz*) in an attempt to explore his 'very human nature' (*samaia chelovecheskaia natura*), while critic S. Ermolinskii directs praise outwards by revering the Tsar's physical features: 'it seems as though his craftily screwed-up eyes mock everyone' (его хитро прищуренный глаз как-будто насмехается над всеми).<sup>113</sup> B. Mazing, meanwhile, completely transgresses this internal/external divide by connecting Ivan's individual characteristics with the broader social environment in which they are situated:

Ivan the Terrible [...] personifies the entire Muscovite autocratic government. Here we have not a psychopathic tyrant, but "a man of superb intellect and a subtle politician in his own way". Here we have a representative of severe political Machiavellism, but not a romantic villain.

Грозный [...] является олицетворением всего московского самодержавия, это – не психопатологический тиран, а «человек высокого ума и тонкий политик в своем роде», это – представитель жестокой макиавеллистической политики, а не романтический злодей.<sup>114</sup>

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'Kryl'ia kholopa', *Izvestiia*, 9 December 1926, p. 26; GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 450, l. 75.

<sup>113</sup> N. V., 'Kryl'ia kholopa', p. 26; Ermolinskii, 'Kryl'ia kholopa', p. 26.

<sup>114</sup> Mazing, 'Kryl'ia kholopa', p. 4.

Interestingly, the film's most pejorative appraisals appear in the foreign press, where journalists maintain that Shklovsky, Shil'dkret, and Tarich portray the Tsar as an embodiment of superstition, ignorance, and cruelty.<sup>115</sup> One American critic, for instance, condemns the filmmakers' narrative for being 'chiefly concerned with the ruthlessness of the stabbing-and-praying Ivan' and maintains that the Tsar prays after committing murder 'as if he had performed a good act'.<sup>116</sup>

Evidence for all four critical interpretations can be obtained from the cinematic material owing to the film artists' intentionally multidimensional presentation of the Tsar, thereby justifying his alternative epithet 'Powerful'.<sup>117</sup> Although Ivan can be judged morally corrupt, a religious despot, and an intolerant murderer, he also proves accomplished in the spheres of business, politics, and leadership. Shklovsky, Shil'dkret, Tarich, and Leonidov present their on-screen Ivan with the skills and talents required to authenticate his pre-eminent position in sixteenth-century Russian society and consequently transpose his all-seeing and all-judging 'screwed-up eyes' from the realm of melodrama into that of genuine intellectual and political superiority. For instance, Ivan's face as he ascends the church spire to toll bells for his wife's repose remains expressionless, which neither supports, nor contradicts the American critic's assertion that Ivan considers his behaviour 'good'. Moreover, during both private and public acts of worship it proves impossible to determine whether the Tsar believes himself to be an executor of God's will, or whether he does, in fact, repent for his past misdeeds and seek spiritual

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<sup>115</sup> See, for example, 'A Soviet Film': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 450, l. 22; Quinn Martin, 'The New Films: At the Cameo "Czar Ivan the Terrible"': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 450, l. 46.

<sup>116</sup> GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 450, l. 22.

<sup>117</sup> *Ivan Groznyi* can be rendered in English as either 'Ivan the Terrible' or 'Ivan the Powerful'.

guidance. As B. Mazing declares, ‘Ivan is frightful [...] not because of his outbursts of sin, but because of his cold calculation and understanding of the atrocities that he commits’ (Грозный страшен [...] не вспышками гнева, а холодной расчетливостью и пониманием совершаемых зверств).<sup>118</sup>

Tsar Ivan’s idiosyncratic perversion of religion in the dissemination of social justice is not only reflected in his own behaviour, but also in that of his subjects. In a review for the newspaper *Trud*, author A. Ts. describes the deportment of both the Tsar and his court throughout the feature:

The priests poison the air with incense fumes. And the boyars pray, the *oprichniki* pray. All the Tsar’s confidants pray. They pray and guzzle down food like cattle, drinking themselves stupid. [...] And above them all is the Tsar himself. [...] A sanctimonious hypocrite in prayer. A drunkard and glutton at feasts. A vile brute and a butcher towards all those around him.

Попы отравляют воздух чадом своих кадил. И молятся бояре, молятся опричники. Молятся все приближенные царя. Молятся и жрут, как скоты, опиваются до бесчувствия. [...] И над всеми – сам царь. [...] Ханжа – на молитве. Пьяница и обжора – в пиру. Гнусный зверь и палач – в отношении ко всем окружающим.<sup>119</sup>

While it initially seems absurd that Shklovsky, Shil’dkret, and Tarich would construct such a deprecatory portrayal of a populace so securely rooted in religious

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<sup>118</sup> Mazing, ‘Kryl’ia kholopa’, p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> A. Ts., ‘Kryl’ia kholopa’, [p. 26].

culture, it should be noted that the Russian noun *pravoslavie* (orthodoxy) only refers to ‘the correct way to worship or exalt God’; it does not denote a specific form of ‘proper’ behavioural conduct.<sup>120</sup> Before the 1917 October Revolution, the Russian Orthodox Church had never participated in the dissemination of specific moral guidelines, but had instead concentrated on the particularities of ritual (even fragmenting over this issue in the seventeenth-century).<sup>121</sup> This idiosyncrasy was frequently highlighted by post-revolutionary society’s radical critics of religion and some Bolsheviks, whether or not they were ‘Godbuilders’, broached the issue of constructing their own peculiar code of morality.<sup>122</sup> Shklovsky, Shil’dkret, and Tarich foreground this early twentieth-century concern in *Wings of a Serf* thanks to their constant alternation and amalgamation of autocratic oppression and misapplied religious rule in a sixteenth-century setting. This schematic approach prompted B. Mazing to proclaim that:

Of all historical cine-pictures, *Wings of a Serf* is the most notable for both its development of historical detail and its transmission of the general spirit of the reproduced era.

«Крылья холопа» из всех исторических кино–картин – наиболее примечательная, как по обработке исторических деталей, так и по передаче общего духа воспроизводимой эпохи.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 115.

<sup>121</sup> Robin Milner-Gulland and Nikolai Dejevsky, *Cultural Atlas of Russia and the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Checkmark Books, 1998), pp. 76-78.

<sup>122</sup> For a discussion of ‘Godbuilders’ and the issues that surrounded this quasi-religious Bolshevik tendency, see Richard Stites, ‘Godkillers and Godbuilders’, in his *Revolutionary Dreams*, pp. 101-05.

<sup>123</sup> Mazing, ‘Kryl’ia kholopa’, p. 4.

Throughout the feature, the viewer is exposed to the director and scriptwriters' unattractive 'portrayal of work-related and everyday conditions' (показ трудовых и бытовых деталей) and hence observes 'not only the palaces and mansions, but [also] the flax-scutchers, attics, haylofts, backyards, [...] and a reconstruction of the working life of the court's lower strata' (не только дворцы и хоромы, но [и] льнотрепальни, чердаки, сеновалы, задворки, [...] восстановленную трудовую жизнь придворных низов).<sup>124</sup> For example, one of the picture's earliest episodes concerns a raid committed by Boyar Kurliatev against his neighbour Lupatov after the latter refuses to lend his serf, Nikishka, for the reparation of Kurliatev's clock. While praying in church, Tsar Ivan learns of Kurliatev's activities and orders Drutskoi to bring the boyar to court. Ivan's *oprichnina*, led by Drutskoi, arrive just in time to halt the flogging, declare Kurliatev's actions an offence against the Tsar's authority, and seize the opportunity to ravage the estate of an influential boyar whom the Tsar seeks to eliminate.

This sequence demonstrates that Tsar Ivan is not the only character in *Wings of a Serf* capable of disseminating distorted forms of social justice; the behaviour of his employees (described in one review as a group of 'drunkards, robbers, and aggressors' [*p'ianitsy, grabiteli, nasil'niki*]), appears just as fanatical as that of the boyars, whose own actions remain under the direct influence of the Tsar.<sup>125</sup> Thanks to the filmmakers' detailed depiction of sixteenth-century Russian life at the level of both the individual and the collective, the audience is able to witness how the actions of a single character, who arguably believes that he is performing God's will on earth, are replicated throughout the country's social strata. Although critic A. Ts. objected to the 'broadness' (*obshirnost'*) of the feature's 'everyday historical episodes' (*istoriko-*

<sup>124</sup> GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 450, l. 75.

<sup>125</sup> 'Gosfil'mofond: Tema, sodержanie i annotatsiia', ll. I-2 (l. 2).

*bytovye epizody*), Shklovsky, Shil'dkret, and Tarich did, in fact, utilise this creative approach in order to construct a comprehensive representation of an entire epoch with the aim of re-establishing both the Tsar's dominance within society's chain of command and the connections between his behaviour and that of his people.<sup>126</sup> Subsequently, boundaries between private and public, the individual and the collective are destroyed as the Tsar's enticement of his subjects into obedience and loyalty through co-operation leads to the simultaneous fortification and dissolution of Russia's stratified social hierarchy through which a perverted form of social justice can now penetrate. As a result, all characters in *Wings of a Serf*, irrespective of their private intentions, social status, and personal relationship to the crown, suffer on account of their unavoidable interactions with those around them in a society where autocratic oppression exists alongside moral ambiguity and an authorised system of chaos.

### **(Dys/U)topian Dreams of Rebellion**

#### **Active Deeds**

In contrast to Nikishka's compliant and submissive behaviour in his somewhat naïve belief that it will facilitate the realisation of his flight-based dream and a demonstration of 'right' social justice in an environment devoid of selfless co-operation and ethical constraint, the principal protagonists in two films on which Shklovsky later worked, *The Captain's Daughter* (*Kapitanskaia dochka*, 1928) and *House of the Dead*, explore more complex notions of obedience and rebellion in

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<sup>126</sup> A. Ts., 'Kryl'ia kholopa', [p. 26].

relation to social oppression and individual revolt in their attempts to achieve utopian ideals. The plot of *The Captain's Daughter* (alternatively titled *The Guards Sergeant* [*Gvardii serzhant*] and *The Fortress in the Steppe* [*Krepost' v stepi*]) revolves around the adventures of Emel'ian Pugachev (the 'darling' of the anarchist intelligentsia), whose revolt against Empress Catherine II during 1773–74 is honoured as the largest in Russian history before 1905.<sup>127</sup> The development of a screenplay based on Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* (1836) was originally entrusted to writers A. Mariengof (co-author of *The House on Trubnaia Square*) and Gusman, whose detailed scenarios were repeatedly rejected by Sovkino and GRK for failing to address the causes and effects of the Pugachev rebellion in sufficient detail. K. Denisov, for example, criticised one of their earliest script variants, dated 29 November 1926, because:

The objects of hate [for Pugachev and his followers] – the noblemen and their serf-warriors – are presented without alluding to that very oppression and the crimes which provoked the peasant uprising.

Предмет [Пугачева и пугачевцев] ненависти, дворяне и их холопы-военные, даны без намека на тот гнет и преступления, которые и вызвали крестьянское восстание.<sup>128</sup>

Mariengof and Gusman also faced charges of ideological compromise, financial motivation, and pornography before Sovkino eventually appealed to

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<sup>127</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 17.

<sup>128</sup> K. Denisov, "“Kapitanskaia dochka”": Stsenarii Mariengof i Gusman": GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 151-51ob (l. 151).

Shklovsky to provide a detailed critique of the writers' most recent scenario.<sup>129</sup> In his initial appraisal, dated 31 January 1927, Shklovsky condemned Mariengof and Gusman's approach to the literary text and declared it 'completely impossible to write *The Captain's Daughter* for the screen in the same way that Pushkin wrote for the page' (написать Капитанскую дочку для кино по Пушкину совершенно невозможно), since 'what Pushkin wrote is not what he himself thought about the Pugachev rebellion' (Пушкин сам думал о пугачевщине не то, что он написал).<sup>130</sup> Shklovsky's review, in which external references are utilised with greater frequency than in his own cinematic prose and in which Pushkin's story and the scriptwriters' treatment are contrasted with both historical sources and geographical data to highlight the various discrepancies between them, demonstrates an exemplary knowledge of Pushkin's writings and the historical context in which they were composed. Despite Mariengof and Gusman's repeated attempts to defend their artistic integrity, citing restrictions of the film-medium and monetary awareness as their primary motivation for historical and ideological compromise, Sovkino and GRK ultimately judged Shklovsky the more suitable author for the cinematic adaptation of Pushkin's novel.<sup>131</sup> In consequence, Shklovsky found himself working alongside Tarich once more with explicit instructions to portray on-screen what Mariengof and Gusman had failed to address: 'serfdom' (*krepostnoe pravo*), 'the struggle of the

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<sup>129</sup> Glavpolitprosvet, 'Otzyv': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, l. 150; Denisov, "Капитанская дочка": Stsenarii Mariengof i Gusman', ll. 151-51ob. See also his "Капитанская дочка": Stsenarii Gussmana [*sic*]': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, l. 153.

<sup>130</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Капитанская дочка': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 24-25ob (l. 24). For further critical analysis of Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*, see Viktor Shklovsky, 'The Captain's Daughter', in his *Energy of Delusion: A Book on Plot* [1981], trans. by Shushan Avagyan (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2007), pp. 164-76.

<sup>131</sup> Mariengof and Gusman: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 207-11ob (l. 208, 210).

national minorities' (*bor'ba natsional'nykh men'shinstv*), and the three fundamental stages of the Pugachev rebellion ('the Cossack uprising' [*kazach'e vosstanie*], 'the uprising of the repressed nationalities' [*vosstanie ugnetennykh natsional'nostei*], and 'the general peasant revolt' [*obshchekrest'ianskii bunt*]).<sup>132</sup>

Shklovsky commenced work on his assignment by 'correcting' the historical inaccuracies that he had previously highlighted in Pushkin's original tale. He preserved the novel's general narrative outline, but re-drafted the portraits of its principal protagonists and introduced several significant episodes: Savel'ich (Petrusha Grinev's devoted servant) is transformed into Pugachev's secretary and comrade-in-arms, the noble Grinev is characterised as a vacuous dandy and drunken coward, and Shvabrin the exiled officer is assigned a central role as a courageous revolutionary and Pugachev's chief supporter. Shklovsky also inserted an experimental ending 'to complete' the original tale, entitled 'The Chapter that Pushkin Left Unfinished' (*Glava, nezakonchennaia Pushkinym*), during which Grinev is further degraded as he becomes the lover of Empress Catherine II.

Although Shklovsky openly declared in his critique of Mariengof and Gusman's work and authorial statement of intent that the transposition of *The Captain's Daughter* from page to screen could not be treated as a literal procedure, his innovative approach to Pushkin's literary material ensured that the film's production was surrounded by controversy from the submission of his first libretto until several months after the feature had completed its first cinema run. Upon release, *The Captain's Daughter* met with strong criticism in both official and cinematic presses where it was described as a 'catalogue of facts' (*katalog faktov*), a vacant expression of 'pure form' (*chistaia forma*), and 'a bad film that has enriched the list

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<sup>132</sup> Mariengof and Gusman, ll. 207-11ob (l. 207).

of unsuccessful cine-pictures’ (одним плохим фильмом обогатился список неудачных кино-картин).<sup>133</sup> The newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda* even considered it necessary to insert a preface to their ‘Conversation with Director Iu. V. Tarich’ (Беседа с режиссером Ю. В. Таричем), entitled ‘A Brave Attempt’ (*Smelaia popytka*), in which their readers were advised to study Pushkin’s original text, ‘The History of Pugachev’s Revolt’ (*Istoriia pugachevskogo bunta*), and all available secondary literature before viewing the film ‘in order to evaluate more accurately the work of the director, scriptwriter, and actors’ (чтобы правильнее подойти к оценке работы режиссера, сценариста и артистов).<sup>134</sup>

Material charges were also laid against *The Captain’s Daughter*, including accusations that the feature’s production had consumed 26,509 metres of negative film, instead of the 16,000 metres usually needed to create a picture 2,000 metres in length, while the filmmakers’ allocated overdraft (*pereraskhod*) of 140,000 roubles

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<sup>133</sup> Dan Rafalovich, ‘Kapitanskaia dochka’, *Zhizn’ iskusstva*, 1928, p. 9; B. Mazing, ‘Kapitanskaia dochka’, *Krasnaia gazeta*, 19 September 1928. The tone of these press pieces is accurately conveyed in a short satirical feuilleton by P. P-V., which accompanied an article authored by I. Kruti:

With a record quantity of poor workmanship  
 Wit was unable to help,  
 Shklovsky the author – the sizeable broiler  
 Met Pushkin on a dark night  
 And resulting from this unequal marriage  
 Arose

*The Captain’s Daughter.*

При небывалом количестве брака  
 Острым словом невозможно помочь  
 Шкловский писатель – большой забияка  
 Встретился с Пушкиным в темную ночь  
 И в результате неравного брака  
 Произошла

«Капитанская дочь»: see “‘Kapitanskaia dal’niaia rodstvennitsa’”, *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 20 September 1928.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Smelaia popytka: K postanovke kartiny “Kapitanskaia dochka”’, in ‘Beseda s rezhisserom Iu. V. Tarichem’, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 8 August 1928.

(100%) had required a considerable extension to 250% (i.e. 350,000 roubles).<sup>135</sup>

Following the fiscal debates that had arisen during the All-Union Party Conference on Cinema Affairs (Всесоюзное партийное совещание по кинематографии), called on 15–21 March 1928, and the economic problems Sovkino had pledged to address in its proposed production plan for 1928–29 on the eve of Joseph Stalin’s inauguration of his First Five Year Plan when the Soviet Union’s limited resources were to be devoted almost exclusively to industrialisation, the filmmakers’ excessive expenses on a single film were viewed, according to Denise J. Youngblood, as ‘nothing short of counterrevolutionary’.<sup>136</sup>

The film’s poor public and critical reception and reports of its artistic, ideological, and financial failings necessitated a special meeting of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspectorate (*Raboche-krest’ianskaia inspeksiia* [RKI]) and an external inquiry by deputy manager Mokeev and secretaries Zolot’ko and Serebriannaia from the film industry’s Unplanned Inspectorate (*Vneplanovaia Inspeksiia*). Research conducted by the latter body indicated that even though librettos, scenarios, and shooting scripts for *The Captain’s Daughter* had been repeatedly analysed, discussed,

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<sup>135</sup> ‘Postanovlenie’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 19-22 (l. 19). Other estimates indicate that the film had, in fact, cost 323,000 roubles to produce (including advertising): ‘Postanovlenie’, ll. 19-22 (l. 19). Meanwhile, the Unplanned Inspectorate calculated an expenditure of only 280,000 roubles, but since production costs had originally been set at 60,000 roubles, the filmmakers were charged with exceeding their budget almost five times over: see Mokeev, Zolot’ko, and Serebriannaia, ‘O proverke proizvodstva kartiny “Kapitanskaia dochka” Sovkino’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 9-18 (l. 9). Discontent over the unwarranted cost of the feature’s production was further fuelled by the knowledge that on 5 April 1927 (before filming began) censor (*politredaktor*) K. Denisov had insisted that since *The Captain’s Daughter* was not a historical picture, it should not be financed as one. He asserted that no more than the average amount should be spent on the feature’s production and refused to support the filmmakers’ request for a 100,000 roubles expense account: see K. Denisov: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, l. 203.

<sup>136</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918-1935* (Austin: Texas U.P., 1991), pp. 157-62; *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 28.

and reworked between June 1925 and 15 August 1927, and filmed material had been evaluated at various stages of completion on 4 February, 7 March, and 21 March 1928, the final picture neglected to portray the relevance of the Pugachev rebellion and its surrounding issues for present-day Soviet society.<sup>137</sup> Members of RKI declared the feature unsuccessful on account of the production team's failure to adhere to the original production plan, film in accordance with the shooting script, and incorporate changes that had been (repeatedly) suggested by both Sovkino and GRK.<sup>138</sup>

While it initially seems surprising that Tarich and Shklovsky would expose both themselves and their work to such disparaging remarks in their approach to and command of the literary and cinematic material (particularly following the criticisms that had been directed towards their previous feature *Wings of a Serf*), it is important to note that subsequent to the 'regime of economy' campaign that had dominated Soviet cinematic discourse in 1926, an ever-increasing conviction emerged that apportioned all blame for excessive financial and material expenditures to the management of the script-writing process.<sup>139</sup> By 1928, however, the struggle for

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<sup>137</sup> Mokeev, Zolot'ko, and Serebriannaia, 'O proverke proizvodstva kartiny "Kapitanskaia dochka" Sovkino', ll. 9-18 (l. 10). The following reviews demanded that drastic changes be made to the screenplay before it went into production: E. V. Briunchugin and V. I. Kishmindev: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 164-67; Glavpolitprosvet: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 200-00ob; GRK: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 199-99ob; Krumin, "'Kapitanskaia dochka": Stsenarii Shklovskogo': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 201-01ob; GFF: s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, ll. 91-91ob. The script was banned in its entirety on 11 March and 11 July 1927: see GRK: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, l. 122; GRK: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 385, l. 204.

<sup>138</sup> 'Postanovlenie', ll. 19-22 (l. 19).

<sup>139</sup> For a detailed discussion of the 'regime of economy' campaign, see Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era*, pp. 63-68. The film industry's concern with dramatically reducing production costs undoubtedly contributed to the approach and execution of creating *By the Law*, which is, even today, considered the cheapest film ever made in Russia. Shklovsky wrote, 'It was difficult to get the film past censorship, all the more so because Goskino didn't really speak up for it and only allowed it to be filmed as pure experiment. While we were talking, the snow melted. It was necessary to shoot a different location. [...] Of course, shooting a river with "Floodlights"

command over cinematic production commenced and the focal point of discord within the film community came to be occupied not by scenarists or their creative output, but rather by Sovkino itself.<sup>140</sup>

In accordance with this evolution of thought and practice as Soviet culture approached and entered Cultural Revolution, the verdicts of the RKI convention and the ‘independent’ inquiry did not apportion blame for *The Captain’s Daughter’s* alleged shortcomings to Tarich the director and/or Shklovsky the scenarist, but rather to the film trust and studios that had presided over the feature’s production. Reports from each party rebuked Sovkino for its inability to address the needs and interests of the ‘organized viewing public’ (*massovyi organizovannyi zritel’*), control the work of the production group, and demonstrate true leadership qualities and ‘organisational co-ordination’ (*organizatsionnaia uviazka*).<sup>141</sup> The studio was also condemned for its ‘absence of plans, methodologies, and management’ (бесплановость, бессистемность и безхозяйственность), which RKI partly attributed to Sovkino’s fundamental approach to the industry:

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floating on rafts with an underwater power cable and with an underwater aeroplane for creating storms significantly increased production costs; but, all the same, “By the Law” was the cheapest Russian picture’ (Цензура пропустила сценарий с трудом, тем более что Госкино не очень его защищало и разрешило снимать его только в порядке эксперимента. Пока шли разговоры, растаял снег. Появилась необходимость другой натуры. [...] Съемка реки с «Юпитерами», плавающими на плотках, с подводкой электрического кабеля, с подводкой аэроплана для создания бури, конечно, чрезвычайно удорожила постановку, но все равно «По закону» была самой дешевой русской картиной): see Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Ikh nastoiashchee: 1. Kuleshov’, in *Za sorok let* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 65-70 (p. 67).

<sup>140</sup> See Youngblood, ‘Sovkino under Fire (1927-28)’, in her *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era*, pp. 109-32.

<sup>141</sup> Mokeev, Zolot’ko, and Serebriannaia, ‘O proverke proizvodstva kartiny “Kapitanskaia dochka” Sovkino’, ll. 9-18 (ll. 9-10, 16-18); ‘Postanovlenie’, ll. 19-22 (ll. 19-20).

Sovkino [...] looks at cinematography as a means to extract income, and not as a means of mass cultural influence with the aim of popularising and propagandising ideas of class warfare and socialist construction.

Совкино [...] смотрит на кинематографию, как на средство извлечения доходов, а не как на средство культурного воздействия на массы в целях популяризации и пропаганды идей классовой борьбы и социалистического строительства.<sup>142</sup>

It can therefore be argued that the ideological and financially-motivated debates that had arisen and evolved in the Soviet film industry and the changes that they had induced after Shklovsky was first invited to work on *The Captain's Daughter* in January 1927 and before the film's release on 18 September 1928 had granted the scriptwriter the freedom to produce a screenplay in accordance with his own creative vision, as expounded in his preliminary assessment of Mariengof and Gusman's work; the studios, not he or his fellow filmmakers, were ultimately held responsible for the picture's apparent ideological deficiencies and financial extravagance.

While Shklovsky's approach guaranteed that the film's production and release was beset by controversy, it also permitted the director and scriptwriter to produce a film-text that explores utopian dreams of insurgence in a way that would repeatedly surface in the coming revolutions of the twentieth century by focusing on the adventures of a rebellious hero who indulges in violence and iconoclasm.<sup>143</sup> Akin to insurgents such as Sten'ka Razin, Ivan Bolotnikov, and Kondratii Bulavin, Pugachev

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<sup>142</sup> 'Postanovlenie', ll. 19-22 (ll. 20, 21).

<sup>143</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 18.

is presented as an almost mythical character who embraces destructive behaviour against people, objects, buildings, and places in order to advance a utopian vision of a world without nobles where ‘a peaceful life will continue evermore’.<sup>144</sup>

For instance, in one dramatic sequence, an entire town burns to the ground as Pugachev sits on horseback and surveys the chaos that he has induced. His mutiny occurs shortly after Masha Mironova’s marriage ‘celebrations’, during which the intoxicated bridegroom loses consciousness and his tearful bride is attacked by a guest from her own banquet. Pugachev discovers the young girl hiding behind a carriage in the snow and promptly removes her to safety before he sets a barrel of wine alight to signal the start of the insurrection. Close-ups of blasts from a Ukrainian canon circle, followed by explosions in deeper perspective, and then shots of flashing bayonets in a chiaroscuro of night that provide neither field of illusion, nor depth, all serve to impress the immediacy, intensity, and all-embracing nature of battle. Next, images of vertical bayonets are intercut with low-angle close-ups of a wooden fence lit from behind so that its long, thin shadows are cast dramatically upwards. This juxtaposition enhances the size of the insurgents’ weapons, as if they, like the shadows from the fence, are capable of reaching the sky.

While the groom remains slumped behind a table, failing to don his boots before the rebels arrive, a series of silhouettes depict Pugachev on his steed as he watches the town’s buildings blaze. A hard key light eliminates the shots’ fill and background illuminations, thereby creating both sharp shadows around Pugachev and a dark void behind him, highlighting nothing more than the revolutionary’s outline and breath. This economy of light in darkness following visual evidence of revolutionary activity not only fashions Pugachev as an iconic figure with awe-

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<sup>144</sup> John T. Alexander, *Emperor of the Cossacks: Pugachev and the Frontier Jacquerie of 1773-1775* (Lawrence: Coronado, 1973), p. 210.

inspiring utopian ideals of social equality and fairness, but also symbolises the ultimate dream of popular rebellion, as touched by what the founder of intelligentsia socialism, Alexander Herzen, called ‘the moonlight of fantasy’ (*lunnoe osveshchenie fantazii*).<sup>145</sup> The horrifying conditions of this on-screen dystopian reality, which embrace forced marriages, drunkenness, and aggressive behaviour from acquaintances, are temporarily exacerbated by insurgent brutality. Yet the filmmakers’ powerful and almost idolatrous presentation of Pugachev infuses these savage events with an overarching sense of grandeur.

In contrast to the triumphant declaration of women’s rights in *Potholes* (*Ukhaby*, 1927), Maria’s victory lecture upon re-election to the village soviet (*sel’sovet*) in *Ivan and Maria* (*Ivan da Mar’ia*, 1928), the personal and public speeches that accompany the removal of the women’s *yashmaks* and the annulment of the ‘blood war’ (*krovnaia mest’*) in *Victorious Youth* (*Molodost’ pobezhdaet*, 1928), and the agitational speeches made by propagandist Kurapov in *The Last Attraction*, which all constitute celebratory climactic foci where justice is served in a social context at the levels of both the individual and the collective, Pugachev remains silent and alone as he motionlessly observes the consequences of his own destruction. While Shklovsky likens Pugachev’s actions to those of the traditional revolutionary hero in his brutal attacks against the nobility and his assistance to those in need as he strives to overthrow the oppression of the ruling classes and bring his socialist dreams closer to reality, the scriptwriter also seeks to advocate a unique form of the ‘revolution of the spirit’ by means of experimental and utopian visions, inspirational depictions of a cultural myth, hero, and eventual martyr, and a sense of both idealised and degraded moralities. This represents Shklovsky’s individualistic and distinctly revolutionary

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<sup>145</sup> A. I. Gertsen, *Byloe i dumy: Chasti 1–3* [1856–57] (Moscow: GIKHL, 1958), II, p. 287.

moral fervour based on an ideology that necessitates the struggle for attaining justice through heroism and sacrifice without the need for a specific and unequivocal answer or interpretation. It appears that Shklovsky employs the character of Pugachev as a vehicle for the creation of a cinematic space broad enough for more complex notions of justice concerning the destruction and/or (re)creation of society to be explored, while his presentation of injurious action in the name of socialist and utopian ideals reflects a dominant, yet ambiguously defined yearning for a 'new order' in both the film industry and wider Soviet community where the feature was created.

### **Passive Fantasies**

While Stites proposes that 'the most dramatic expression of popular utopianism broke forth in peasant and cossack rebellions', such as the remarkable upheaval of the eighteenth-century presented in *The Captain's Daughter*, Shklovsky creates an equally impressive perception of the struggle for revolutionary utopia by portraying the individual experiences of Dostoevsky.<sup>146</sup> Although the characters' ambitions may not differ in terms of their fundamental representational content, their respective modes of presentation sharply diverge. Pugachev appears on-screen as both an active man of protest, who tirelessly travels through towns and villages to unite others to himself by shared social aspirations, and a vigilante with his own revolutionary agenda, who demonstrates an inherent knowledge that revolution will only come about through the revolutionary act itself and will then be shaped by the nature of these actions; Dostoevsky, on the other hand, possesses rebellious inclinations that never progress beyond a series of dreams.

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<sup>146</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 17.

Lary asserts that ‘the real question’ about Shklovsky’s work as a film biographer ‘concerns not how he could have best presented a subjective view of Dostoevsky’s Russia but whose view he needed to represent’.<sup>147</sup> While the film-work’s diegesis is directly derived from Dostoevsky’s *Notes* about Siberian exile, extant scenarios and librettos are marked by Shklovsky’s distinct authorial style; it is only when the scriptwriter’s early adaptations of Dostoevsky’s *Notes* are compared with the final cinematic product that the extent to which Fedorov and the studios transformed his original creative vision becomes apparent. Shklovsky’s scenarios and librettos are literary and cinematic syntheses that emerge as hybrids of a vivid cinematic conception with enhanced directorial awareness, a literary essay with referenced quotations, and biographical prose text. The utilisation of repetitions, parallels, and digressions to generalise and then concentrate on the dominant theme of tsarist Russia as ‘prison-house of the people’ is detectable in two dream sequences in different script variants where notions of socialist utopia and tsarist dystopia are explored in relation to the contradictions that underlie particular varieties of social, political, and moral consciousness.<sup>148</sup>

In the first scenario, Dostoevsky sleeps in his bedroom shortly before his arrest and dreams of the towns that are to be built under socialism:

It is the dream of a Fourierist. It is unclear, musical, and architecturally grandiose.

He sees all the towns that we want to build.

But the sounds are wrong, some sorts of disharmonious sound.

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<sup>147</sup> N. M. Lary, *Dostoevsky and Soviet Film: Visions of Demonic Realism* (London: Cornell U.P., 1986), p. 33.

<sup>148</sup> It should be noted that neither sequence features in the final edit.

Это сон фурьериста, сон не ясный, музыкальный и архитектурно  
грандиозный.

Он видит все города, которые мы хотим построить.

А звуки не те, какие то неблагозвучные звуки.<sup>149</sup>

Fedorov considered the episode a mere Expressionist device that lacked a sense of the film's overall vision and emphatically refused to shoot it, thereby demonstrating his disregard for the aggregate effect of a sequence's visual and aural elements once more.<sup>150</sup> The protagonist's detachment from his immediate surroundings and transformation into a mere passive observer in his own mental projection, which contains no plot and only vague visual spectacles, conforms to Stites' consideration of the utopian dream as 'visionary in the extreme'.<sup>151</sup> It also exploits what Chalinder Allen refers to as 'constructive imagination', whereby intellectual selection, control, and classification are utilised to create 'some new form for the expression of the ideas of the Man-thing'.<sup>152</sup> Shklovsky intentionally obscures the visual aspects of Dostoevsky's dream, but assigns its sounds (although irrefutably indistinct) the adjective 'disharmonious'. This introduction of cacophony into the film-medium, where soundtracks are customarily employed to guide the viewer's attention towards particular characters and details, impart information about the location and/or time of the given event, or generate the desired tone, prompts the audience's recognition of the episode's discordant visual component: disharmony of

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<sup>149</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Tiur'ma narodov': GFF, s. I, f. 3, op. I, ed. khr. 1273, [no pagination].

<sup>150</sup> See above, 'Chapter 1: Criminal Law and the Pursuit of Justice'; V. Fedorov, 'Schet rezhissera', *Kino*, 30 May 1932.

<sup>151</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 13.

<sup>152</sup> Chalinder Allen, *The Tyranny of Time* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), pp. 97, 190-91.

sound corresponds to disharmony of vision.<sup>153</sup> When combined with the script's otherwise sparse dialogue track, the noise evokes a sense of off-screen phenomena that, in turn, enhances the on-screen palpability of a dream-like vision. The Russian patriotic and religious hymn that was previously played to disguise a meeting of the Petrashevsky circle ('Glorious King' [*Kol' slaven*]), in which François Fourier's ideas about co-operative association and the social basis of religion were discussed, has now been transformed into a dissonant soundtrack for a dream of one of its most prominent members.<sup>154</sup> It consequently appears that Shklovsky's proposed combination of jarring sounds and images is not meaninglessly Expressionistic, as Fedorov maintained, but a device that would have encouraged the viewer to couple the sequence's few recognisable dream-like details (hazy treatments of Fourierism, grandiose architecture, an unfamiliar city) with previous occurrences in the narrative in order to create thematic associations and a dream that is not only 'visionary in the extreme', but also simultaneously ordered and unstructured.

While this episode highlights the notion of self as a mental creation (reminding the intended audience of Dostoevsky's ambiguous portrayal of his own protagonist in *Notes from the House of the Dead*), it also underscores the potential of the character's immediate external environment to adopt a utopian and social-fantastical form when elements from imaginative flight are employed to provide details for the construction of another world.<sup>155</sup> The interdependent relationship between internal and external thus established, Shklovsky proceeds to obfuscate the particulars of his protagonist's vision. Dostoevsky observes the towns that are to be

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<sup>153</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 7th edn (London: McGraw-Hill, 2004), p. 352.

<sup>154</sup> Shklovskii, 'Tiur'ma narodov', [no pagination].

<sup>155</sup> Karla Oeler, 'The Dead Wives in the Dead House: Narrative Inconsistency and Genre Confusion in Dostoevskii's Autobiographical Prison Novel', *Slavic Review*, 61:3 (Autumn 2002), 519-34.

built under socialism, but cannot attain a truly utopian vision owing to the pervasion of discordant and non-diegetic sounds; he is endowed with the desire of the utopian dreamer ‘to describe how the new society looks, lives, and works’, but his vision consists of a series of abstract and incoherent narratological fragments which prove incapable of expounding this image in detail.<sup>156</sup> As a result, the protagonist’s internal projection of a future external environment contains equal quantities of the utopian and the dystopian, but ultimately belongs to neither category and a state of oppressive abeyance promptly ensues. As Dostoevsky is roused from sleep, arrested, and escorted from his bedchamber, the overwhelming feelings of subjugation inherent in the realm of the internal and unconscious are extended into their antipodal counterparts. Consequently, Shklovsky accentuates the necessity of rebellious action for delineating the traditional utopian/dystopian dichotomy by insinuating that Dostoevsky’s enigmatic vision will only be refined once the character has conquered the unjust suppression inherent in his waking environment.

A similar presentation of containment and revolt in a visionary episode by means of an inextricable link between interior and exterior space occurs towards the end of Shklovsky’s second screenplay when a near-delirious Dostoevsky falls asleep in the prison camp’s hospital wing:

A forgotten, suppressed country. He sees snatches of the prisoners’ histories. The Polish uprising. The histories of peasants with scythes, a Kalmyk in the steppe, and a gypsy. A Chechen looks at a burning *aul*.<sup>157</sup> He dreams about the prison-house of the people. Leningrad’s columns move in rows. The small Dostoevsky enters the Kazan

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<sup>156</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 14.

<sup>157</sup> An *aul* is the name given to a mountain village in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Cathedral's portal. The columns are crushing. They change into fences.  
And the Russian people are in the prison-house once again.

Страну забытую, задавленную. Он видит обрывки истории  
каторжников. Польское восстание. Крестьян с косами. Калмыка в  
степи. Цыгана. Чеченец смотрит на горящий аул. Он видит во сне  
тюрьму народов. Ленинградские колонны идут рядами.  
Маленький Достоевский идет в портале Казанского собора. Давят  
колонны. Они сменяются изгородями. И снова народы России в  
тюрьме.<sup>158</sup>

In contrast to his previous treatment of a night-vision, Shklovsky no longer explicitly addresses the distinction between formal elements, but rather expounds internal aspects of the *mise-en-scène* in greater detail. By portraying different nationalities from various social strata, Shklovsky establishes an appreciation of 'Russia as Empire', before he gradually diminishes the size and social prominence of the city's moving architecture (columns become church pillars that transform into fences) in order to encase the country's citizens within the tsarist 'prison-house' from which not even religion, as symbolised by the collapsing Kazan Cathedral, can offer escape.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Tiur'ma narodov': GFF, s. I, f. 3, op. I, ed. khr. 1273, ll. 3-21 (l. 18).

<sup>159</sup> The conception of Russia as 'Empire' and 'prison-house' of its people was also treated in Shklovsky's first scenario. Here, the labour camp is charged with a wider significance than in the finished product, since the metaphorical prison is assigned literal meaning when the convicts approach their punitive destination: 'And the crowd of prisoners began to speak in different languages. They spoke in Hebrew and gypsy, Polish speech could be heard, and only the shackles made identical sounds in this multivoiced noise. [...] The people walk. Russians, Ukrainians, and gypsies walk in the crowd. The prisoners of Russia walk' (И заговорила толпа арестантов на

The following morning, Dostoevsky wakes from his dream to discover that his personal dystopian vision has, in fact, become manifest in public reality:

A beautiful autumn morning beyond the bars.

The bed looks striped from the shadows cast by the bars. On the bed lies the body of a schismatic in shackles.

Прекрасное осеннее утро за решеткой.

Решетчато освещена кровать. На кровати лежит труп раскольника в кандалах.<sup>160</sup>

The bars of the city's architecture are replaced by a striped pattern of light and shadow that falls on the recently deceased convict. This graphic continuity ensures that the prisoner's confinement is presented not only literally inside the hospital wing of the Siberian labour camp, but also symbolically as an extension of the Russia as 'prison-house' metaphor. Shklovsky elucidated the significance of this sequence in a note that he later inserted inside the script:

We've become accustomed to imagining Dostoevsky by his later things; meanwhile, in penal servitude Dostoevsky was still a socialist member of the Petrashevsky circle. Dostoevsky was a revolutionary, but a broken one.

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разных языках. Говорят на еврейском, цыганском, слышна польская речь и только кандалы одинаково звучат в этом разноголосом шуме. [...] Идут люди. Идут в толпе русские, украинцы, цыгане. Идут пленники России.): see Shklovskii, 'Tjur'ma narodov', [no pagination].

<sup>160</sup> Shklovskii, 'Tjur'ma narodov', ll. 3-21 (l. 19).

Мы привыкли представлять себе Достоевского по его поздним вещам, между тем на каторге Достоевский был еще социалистом петрашевцем. Достоевский революционер, но сломленный.<sup>161</sup>

While the visionary episode in Shklovsky's earlier screenplay alluded to the possibilities available for Dostoevsky to conquer oppression and obtain an unknown socialist utopia and right social justice by means of rebellion, the scriptwriter's introduction of a second character into his later treatment of a 'sleeping/awakening' sequence expands the social concerns depicted on-screen beyond the experiences of an individual protagonist into his sphere of acquaintance, which, in turn, invests these events with an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness. The transference of the prison bars and their symbolic associations from urban architecture in the public environment to the body of an individual convict reveals the extent to which the autocratic distribution of justice affects not only Dostoevsky, but all citizens contained within the tsarist 'prison-house'; as the schismatic dies, so does the promise of rebellion needed for the attainment of utopian ideals and social equity. Hence, Dostoevsky's personal identification of dystopian reality by means of dystopian dreaming ensures that his belief in the potential achievement of a socialist utopia via rebellion is irrevocably removed and, subsequently, his revolutionary spirit is 'broken' once and for all.

It is interesting to note a particular pair of adjectives in this episode that allude to a correlation between Dostoevsky's fantastical dystopia and Shklovsky's position within early twentieth-century Soviet society. First, the scriptwriter assigns the moving columns that Dostoevsky believes will imprison him to Leningrad

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<sup>161</sup> Shklovskii, 'Tiur'ma narodov', ll. 3-21 (l. 18).

(*leningradskie*), rather than St. Petersburg. The imperial capital, founded in 1703 by Tsar Peter I, was known as St. Petersburg until 1914, when its German sounding name was changed to Petrograd with the onset of the First World War. Then, after Lenin's death in 1924, Petrograd was renamed Leningrad and it was not until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 that the city became St. Petersburg once more.<sup>162</sup>

It was in the imperial capital that Shklovsky was born and raised, became acquainted with his artistic colleagues Vladimir Mayakovsky and Osip Brik, formed the makeshift publishing enterprise 'Art of the Young' (*Iskusstvo molodykh* [IMO]), composed *Revolution and the Front* (*Revoliutsiia i front*, 1921), which was later to become Part One of *A Sentimental Journey*, lectured on theory at the Literary Translation Studio (*Studiia khudozhestvennogo perevoda*), moved into the House of Arts (*Dom iskusstv*), which was renowned as the city's centre of active literary life, and officially formed the writers' group Serapion Brothers (*Serapionovy brat'ia*).<sup>163</sup>

Then, in February 1922, Shklovsky, facing arrest for his affiliations with the Socialist Revolutionary Party, was forced to flee St. Petersburg (by now Petrograd), and, travelling via Finland, arrived in Berlin where he was to live until 1924. When Shklovsky obtained permission to return to Russia, however, he elected not to reside in his home town, but rather to settle in Moscow where he was able to join the circle of Mayakovsky and Brik.<sup>164</sup>

Despite his intimate knowledge of the imperial capital, Shklovsky repeatedly refers to the city by incorrect names in his literary and cinematic writings. For

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<sup>162</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 3rd edn (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 16.

<sup>163</sup> Richard Sheldon, 'Making Armored Cars and Novels: A Literary Introduction', in Viktor Shklovsky, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922* [1923], trans. by Richard Sheldon (repr. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2004), pp. ix-xxv; Aleksandr Galushkin, 'Prigovorenniy smotret', in Viktor Shklovskii, *Eshche nichego ne konchilos'...* (Moscow: Propaganda, 2002), pp. 5-14.

<sup>164</sup> David Shub, 'The Trial of the SRs', *Russian Review*, 23:4 (October 1964), 362-69.

example, he confuses city nomenclature in an early scenario for *The Last Attraction* when he describes urban starvation during the Civil War period. Agitator Saltykov (a character later erased from the film’s narrative during the script-writing process) receives a message from the Red Army’s headquarters concerning provisions in the city: ‘Two cartloads of horses’ heads arrived in Petersburg, the food situation is...’ (В Петербург прибыло два вагона конских голов, продовольственное положение...).<sup>165</sup> Critic Khrisanf Khersonskii flagged up this sentence in his appraisal of the scenario:

The horses’ heads aren’t necessary – it’s sadism again; it would be easier to say “Petrograd... has only received two cartloads of flour in one month”. In the script, “Petersburg” is incorrect; at that time it was Petrograd.

Не нужны конские головы, – опять садизм; проще “Петроград... за месяц прибыло только два вагона муки”. Неверно в сценарии “Петербург”, тогда был Петроград.<sup>166</sup>

Shklovsky also incorporates an urban misnomer and an image of a deceased horse into another description of Civil War starvation in his article ‘Petersburg during the Blockade’ (*Peterburg v blokade*), published in the first edition of his critical collection *The Knight’s Move* (*Khod konia*, 1923).<sup>167</sup> This short piece, originally

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<sup>165</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Agitfurgon’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 41-49 (l. 42ob).

<sup>166</sup> Kh. Khersonskii, ‘Zamechaniia k stsenariiu “Agitfurgon”’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 70-75 (l. 72).

<sup>167</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Petersburg During the Blockade’, in *Knight’s Move* [1923], trans. by Richard Sheldon (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), pp. 9-20 (p. 14).

written for the newspaper *Zhizn' iskusstva*, exposes a devastating period in the city's history: Petrograd (not Petersburg, as indicated in the article's title) lacked electricity, transportation, and fuel, while hunger and disease were widespread. Shklovsky even describes the 'month of falling horses', a time when starving animals would collapse in the street, die and be eaten by dogs and, eventually, people.<sup>168</sup>

For a writer concerned with linguistic scrutiny and historical accuracy, this appellative 'mistake' does not appear unintentional. The seemingly haphazard and careless employment of proper nouns not only presents itself as a typical Shklovskian accumulation of culturally remote phenomena, but also exemplifies a device identified by Polina Barskova as the 'aesthetic filter between the observer and the painful reality'.<sup>169</sup> In his employment of familiar objects in an unfamiliar manner by means of obfuscatory nomenclature and dead horses in the urban environment, Shklovsky simultaneously embraces and distances destruction in order to blend his artistic expression of and direct contact with a tumultuous period of Russian history.

In his elaboration of Dostoevsky's dream sequence, Shklovsky projects movement along the temporal axis as he transforms the imperial capital's name into its future variant (Petersburg's columns become those of Leningrad). By likening the pillars of Dostoevsky's visionary St. Petersburg to those of Shklovsky's everyday Leningrad, the scriptwriter draws an explicit parallel between the conditions of pre- and post-revolutionary societies. To apply Barskova's definition, the dream undoubtedly functions as the episode's 'aesthetic filter', but the identities of 'observer' and 'painful reality' are not so easily ascertained. Although Dostoevsky is clearly named as a participant in this sequence, his status as 'observer' is undermined

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<sup>168</sup> Shklovsky, 'Petersburg During the Blockade', pp. 9-20 (pp. 14-15).

<sup>169</sup> Polina Barskova, 'Piranesi in Petrograd: Sources, Strategies, and Dilemmas in Modernist Depictions of the Ruins (1918-1921)', *Slavic Review*, 65:4 (Winter 2006), 694-711 (p. 695).

by Shklovsky's narration in the third-person singular; hence, it appears that the visionary episode embodies a 'painful reality' not only for Dostoevsky, but also for Shklovsky himself.

A second adjective in this sequence unites the creator, his creation, and their contemporary environments, since Shklovsky's attribution of the qualifier 'small' (*malen'kii*) to the literally and symbolically imprisoned Dostoevsky connects this cinematic episode with the scriptwriter's later reminiscences of infancy in his literary compilation *Theory of Prose (O teorii prozy, 1983)*:

In childhood I slept on a low bed with bars so as not to fall on the floor. And my first world was a little world behind bars.

В детстве я спал на низких кроватях с сетками, чтобы не падать на пол. И первый мир был для меня мирок через сетку.<sup>170</sup>

These concrete recollections of jail-like imagery from the beginning of human life are then fused with a conception of art through the premise of 'the dream':

Dreams are made up of pieces, they are montaged together like the building of poetry.

The dream and the drawing on a stone are the first things that doubled life for mankind [...]

Dreams know how to be finished, dreams know how to unite broken pieces of what has been seen and heard. [...]

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<sup>170</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Puti, vedushchie k postroeniiu proizvedenii, perekreshchivaiutsia: Udvoeniia i parallelizmy', in *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1983), pp. 213-22 (p. 213).

Dreams are stratified.

Сны состояются из кусков, они монтажны, как построения поэзии.

Сон и рисунок на камне – это первое, что удвоило для человека жизнь [...]

Сны умеют кончаться, сны умеют соединять разбитые куски увиденного, услышанного. [...]

Сны расслаивают.<sup>171</sup>

It initially seems surprising that Shklovsky attempts to merge reality and the everyday with art through the prism of the dream, since it operated as a prevailing dominant in Symbolist poetry against which ‘some of the most savage blasts of Futurist rhetoric were aimed’.<sup>172</sup> Yet while the dream proved attractive to Symbolists such as Alexander Blok and Andrei Belyi for its displacement of and competition with ‘reality’, Shklovsky considers the phenomenon to be ‘the duplication of life, a type of *cinema* of the human brain, which he shows to himself’ (удвоение жизни, своего рода кино человеческого мозга, которое он показывает самому себе [*emphasis in original*]).<sup>173</sup>

For Shklovsky, then, the dream’s layered nature resides in the alternation of ‘real’ pictures of the world with reflections about transferring literature to the cinema screen, i.e. the rotation of objective series when describing actual and

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<sup>171</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Puti, vedushchie k postroeniiu proizvedenii, perekreshchivaiutsia’, pp. 213-22 (pp. 213-14).

<sup>172</sup> Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History–Doctrine*, 3rd edn (London: Yale U.P., 1981), p. 42.

<sup>173</sup> Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 42; Ol’ga Panchenko, *Viktor Shklovskii: Tekst – Mif – Real’nost’ (K probleme literaturnoi i iazykovoï lichnosti)* (Szczecin: Wydawn. Nauk. Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 1997), pp. 53-56.

literary/cinematic facts to allow the real and the unreal to superimpose upon and hence strengthen each other. The dream-image of Dostoevsky enclosed in architectural columns, symbolising his personal experience of autocratic oppression, is extended by means of the adjectives 'Leningrad' and 'small' into the realm of Shklovsky's personal existence. As a result, it appears that the scenarist utilises the 'aesthetic filter' of the on-screen Dostoevskian dream to present his own 'painful reality' both to himself and the intended viewing public in the role of 'observers', thereby drawing a specific parallel between himself and Dostoevsky as 'broken revolutionaries' possessing (dys/u)topian dreams of rebellion inside the ruling regime's 'prison-house'. As Shklovsky wrote:

Dream = premonition, dream = prediction and, often at the same time, preparation for a definite perception of a future event; sometimes a dream is simply used to motivate the fantastic.

I shall not offer examples; look at Dostoevsky for yourselves.

Сон=предчувствие, сон=предсказание и часто в то же время подготовка к определенному восприятию будущего события; иногда же сон берется просто как мотивировка фантастики.

Примеров я не стану приводить; просмотрите сами

Достоевского.<sup>174</sup>

The scenarist exhaustively engaged with Dostoevsky's life and works when composing his librettos, scenarios, and shooting scripts for *House of the Dead*

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<sup>174</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Ornamental'naia proza', in *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), pp. 205-25 (pp. 210-11).

between 1929-32 and his book *For and Against (Za i protiv)* in 1957. The content and release-dates of these works, i.e. at the beginning and end of the period of tightest control over the arts, suggest that Shklovsky, like Dostoevsky, was interested in threshold situations, the hypocrisy of men, and the question of relationship to authority. Shklovsky's yearning for a new social order is witnessed in his obedience to and rebellion against enforced direction in his cinematic conception, development, and ultimate presentation of male revolutionary (anti)heroes Dostoevsky, Pugachev, and Nikishka; the distancing of the first two protagonists by their status in literary adaptations and all three by time suggests that the scriptwriter intended not only to relate the experiences of exceptional personalities, but also to reflect his own situation in the film industry and post-revolutionary society as a whole.

Despite these contrasts in discourse and an overarching sense of experimentation owing to the juxtaposition of fantasy with reality, obedience with rebellion, and their respective imports for both the individual and society at large as conditioned by Shklovsky's unique position as an artist, Futurist, 'Formalist', and Socialist Revolutionary determined to survive in an ever-changing social, political, and cultural environment, the scriptwriter's film-works contain common themes in their explorations of how social justice can be achieved: the desertion of the old, 'traditional' faith, the search for something new, the virtues of comradeship, a vision of the future (be it utopian or dystopian), and the exaltation of sacrifice. Shklovsky's ever-shifting stance within the tradition of twentieth-century revolutionary activity can subsequently be compared to the views of nineteenth-century cultural nihilists, who preferred science to faith, artefacts to art, materialism to idealism, and realism to romanticism.<sup>175</sup> Both Shklovsky and the cultural nihilists of the 1860s represent a

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<sup>175</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, pp. 68-72.

permanent tendency ensconced in the Russian/Soviet intelligentsia to hold anything old or well-established in contempt, particularly when it is expressed by means of romantic idiom, celebrates a privileged way of life, or grieves over life's insignificant trifles.<sup>176</sup> In the nineteenth-century, this type of everyday life was derided as 'gentry intolerance', or Oblomovism (*oblomovshchina*); in the twentieth-century, it was called *meshchanstvo*.

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<sup>176</sup> Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, p. 69.

### Chapter 3: Myths of Domestic Life and Social Responsibility

#### At Home in the City

The noun *meshchanstvo*, referred to by Denise J. Youngblood as ‘one of the most evocative and oft-used epithets in Soviet Russian’ and incorporated into the very title of the film *Third Meshchanskaia Street (Tret’ia Meshchanskaia)*, on which Shklovsky worked from July 1926 until its release on 15 March 1927, was first introduced into the Russian legal code in a manifesto of 17 March 1775 as a purely descriptive term to refer to urban citizens who were not registered in the merchant class (*kupechestvo*).<sup>177</sup> By the end of the nineteenth-century, however, *meshchanstvo* had come to imply philistine vulgarity and narrow-mindedness and after 1917 the term was habitually cited to refer to the obstinate survival of those pre-revolutionary class-based and social ‘deficiencies’ that should, by now, have been extinguished. *Meshchanstvo* was thus used to explain the survival of those differences that continued to separate contemporary Soviet reality from the promised utopian ideal. Alongside *byt* (approximately translated as ‘everyday life’), *meshchanstvo* came to symbolise the ‘old’ (*staryi*) world that Soviet society would replace with *novyi byt* (a new kind of daily existence in a new kind of domestic environment) by eradicating existing boundaries between private and public spaces.<sup>178</sup> If the latter were

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<sup>177</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, ‘The Fiction Film as a Source for Soviet Social History: The Third Meshchanskaia Street Affair’, *Film and History*, 19:3 (September 1989), 50-60 (p. 52); Julian Graffy, *Bed and Sofa: The Film Companion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), p. 21.

<sup>178</sup> Olga Matich, ‘Remaking the Bed: Utopia in Daily Life’, in *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, ed. by John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1996), pp. 59-78 (p. 60).

successfully eliminated, then *novyi byt* would be able to remove both *meshchanstvo* and the old *byt* in their entirety.<sup>179</sup>

In *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, Shklovsky and co-scenarist/director Abram Room examine the domestic issues that emerge when private concerns are juxtaposed with those of the collective, thereby supporting Olga Matich's claim that 'early Soviet utopianism as reflected in the program of the avant-garde of the 1920s introduced new forms of everyday life'.<sup>180</sup> Several films on which Shklovsky worked between 1926 and 1932 distinguish between pre- and post-revolutionary society by attempting to destroy earlier forms of domesticity and create *novyi byt* as an alternative to the *byt* associated with the shameful values of the petit-bourgeoisie (*meshchanstvo*). This process of radical social transformation was facilitated to a certain extent in the 1920s by *okrest'ianivanie* (ruralisation of the cities) and throughout the first post-revolutionary decade the mass influx of employment-seeking rural workers into major Soviet cities led to a severe shortage of urban living space.<sup>181</sup> By exploring the boundaries that separate the private sphere from the public, Shklovsky was able to incorporate the theme of the 'housing crisis' into the plots of *Third Meshchanskaia Street* and *The House on Trubnaia Square* in order to expose not only the practical difficulties associated with a deficit of accommodation, but also the qualities required

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<sup>179</sup> For a detailed discussion of the history of *byt*, see Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1994), especially pp. 29-40. See also Catriona Kelly, 'Byt: Identity and Everyday Life', in *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, ed. by Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 149-67.

<sup>180</sup> Matich, 'Remaking the Bed', pp. 59-78 (p. 59).

<sup>181</sup> Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (London: Yale U.P., 2003), p. 87.

by the new domestic environment that was to house the new Soviet citizens of the new Soviet era.<sup>182</sup>

*Third Meshchanskaia Street* commences when Volodia the printer arrives in Moscow from the countryside in search of work, but finds himself without a place to live. By chance, he runs into his old friend Kolia Batalov with whom he served in the Red Army and is immediately invited to sleep on his sofa; this generosity is much to the annoyance of Kolia's wife Liuda, whose entire existence consists of fulfilling domestic duties inside their one-roomed semi-basement flat. Yet Volodia soon proves to be the perfect lodger: he assists Liuda with her chores, buys her gifts, and compliments her appearance. Following Kolia's departure on business, Volodia escorts his friend's wife to the cinema and the 14 July *Aviakhim* celebrations, whereupon their affair commences and the printer is relocated from the sofa to the bed.<sup>183</sup>

When Kolia returns from his trip, the couple's relationship is revealed and Liuda elects for the newly-established lodger to remain with her in the flat in preference to her husband. Kolia, like Volodia before him, cannot find residence in the city and eventually resigns himself to dozing on his office desk where he fantasises about the domestic comforts of life in his former apartment. When Kolia later revisits the flat in the pouring rain to collect his possessions, Liuda takes pity on

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<sup>182</sup> For an examination of the roles played by 'new citizens' in 1920s and 1930s Soviet society, see Lynne Attwood and Catriona Kelly, 'Programmes for Identity: The "New Man" and the "New Woman"', in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution, 1881-1940*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: OUP, 1998; repr. 2005), pp. 256-90.

<sup>183</sup> Formed in May 1925, *Aviakhim*, or the Society of Friends of Aviation and Chemical Construction (Общество друзей авиационной и химической промышленности), was a 'voluntary' society that aimed to raise chemical awareness, generate public support for state policies, and promote 'air-mindedness' by means of aeronautical spectacles, air shows, and agit-flights: see Scott W. Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), p. 115.

him and suggests that he sleeps on the sofa. Tensions presently arise between the three protagonists as Kolia and Volodia, in a bid to deprive each other of time alone with Liuda, immerse themselves in endless games of draughts and cease to pay their wife attention.<sup>184</sup> Emotional friction eventually reaches a climax when a jealous Volodia locks the apartment door and hides the key to prevent his wife from leaving and his friend from entering; when Kolia finally manages to break in through the window, Liuda allows her husband to climb back into bed with her.

Two months later, Liuda reveals that she is pregnant. Kolia and Volodia, unable to determine who is the father and repelled by the possibility of raising another man's child, insist that she have an abortion. Liuda goes to a private clinic, but after catching sight of young children outside the window and witnessing an emergency in the operating room, elects to keep her baby. She returns to the flat to collect her things and leaves a note for Kolia and Volodia informing them of her decision to leave. Her two husbands are shocked by their wife's departure and recognise the role that they played in forcing her from their apartment. Nevertheless, when Kolia reclines on the bed and Volodia on the sofa as they prepare to enjoy tea and jam, the two men promptly establish themselves as the new couple in the one-roomed semi-basement flat. The film's final shots show Liuda leaning out the train window as she speeds away from Moscow to an unknown destination.

With the flourishing of small-scale enterprise under Lenin's NEP (when the events of *Third Meshchanskaia Street* are set), an individual's utilisation of private

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<sup>184</sup> For discussions of the *de facto* marriage, *de facto* divorce, and the 'postcard' divorce introduced by the 1926 Code of Laws on Marriage, the Family, and Guardianship (Кодекс законов о браке, семье и опеке), see John Quigley, 'The 1926 Soviet Family Code: Retreat from Free Love', *Soviet Union/Union Sovietique*, 6:2 (1979), 166-75; B. Brodsky Farnsworth, 'Bolshevik Alternatives and the Soviet Family: The 1926 Marriage Law Debate', in *Women in Russia*, ed. by Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978; repr. Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1997), pp. 139-65.

space came to be interpreted as a reflection of his/her revolutionary status. While the Communist utopia of the future prescribed collective living quarters, minimal decoration, and multi-functional furniture, the profits earned from the Government's temporary tolerance of private ownership threatened utopian ideals with the lure of petit-bourgeois domesticity; the temptation to create a stable and more personal living environment in the fluctuating post-revolutionary context was too great to ignore. The opening of *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, for example, depicts Kolia and Liuda submerged in the depths of private, petit-bourgeois comforts. No object in the Batalovs' flat is ideologically neutral: the pile of well-stuffed pillows (*gorka*), for instance, that had signified prosperity before the Revolution, was now rejected according to the terms of *novyi byt*.<sup>185</sup> Common sayings, such as 'Sleep quickly – your comrade needs your pillow!' (Спи скорей – твоя подушка нужна товарищу!), ensured that even objects belonging to those who were still unwilling to renounce their night-time comforts were made communal property.<sup>186</sup> In his directorial statement of intent, Abram Room drew attention to the fact that:

This room on the real Third Meshchanskaia Street [...] is populated by things. Each of them has a fate, its own past, present, and future. Together they all live, breathe, interfere in a person's life and keep him in close captivity.

Эта комната на настоящей Третьей Мещанской [...] заселена вещами. Каждая из них имеет судьбу, свое прошлое, настоящее и

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<sup>185</sup> Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 28.

<sup>186</sup> Matich, 'Remaking the Bed', pp. 59-78 (p. 65).

будущее. Все вместе они живут, дышат, вмешиваются в жизнь человека и держат его в цепком плену.<sup>187</sup>

While the Party prescribed that the post-revolutionary apartment should be light and airy, leaving no room for what Lenin termed the ‘dirt of the old world’ (*griaz’ starogo mira*), and encouraged citizens to whitewash walls and paint their furniture white, the Batalovs’ hoarding of trinkets and the darkness of their semi-basement flat clearly constitute their submission to the ‘cult of possessions’ and transgression of the Party’s attempts to enforce utopian credentials.<sup>188</sup>

An analogous treatment of early Soviet concerns about defining and delineating the new post-revolutionary way of life can also be perceived in the *bytovaia komediia* (comedy about everyday life), *The House on Trubnaia Square*. The film’s narrative concerns the exploitation of Parasha Pitunova, a young villager who arrives in Moscow and is hired as a domestic helper by two of the eponymous house’s inhabitants, the Golikovs, precisely because she does not belong to a trade union (*profsoiuz*, or *professional’nyi soiuz*). Golikov the barber and his idle wife mercilessly mistreat the timid and inexperienced Parasha by forcing her to work both at home and in their barber shop. Fenia, a fellow domestic servant, offers Parasha the opportunity to join the trade union, but Golikov steals his employee’s application form and, following a series of tragicomic misunderstandings, fires the young girl and evicts her from the apartment. Suddenly, upon receiving information that Parasha has been elected to the Moscow City Council (*Mossovet*), the Golikovs drastically alter their demeanour and, much to Parasha’s surprise, organise a banquet in her honour. As

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<sup>187</sup> Abram Room, “‘Tret’ia Meshchanskaia”: Beseda s rezhisserom A. M. Roomom’ [1926], in *Abram Matveevich Room, 1894-1976: Materialy k retrospektive fil’mov*, ed. by V. Zabrodin (Moscow: Muzei kino, 1994), pp. 13-15 (p.14).

<sup>188</sup> Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 27.

soon as it transpires that the new delegate is not Parasha but her namesake, the Golikovs chase the domestic servant from their apartment, whereupon she is saved by representatives from the trade union. The film's final sequence depicts Golikov the barber in court as he is tried and accordingly sentenced for his crimes.



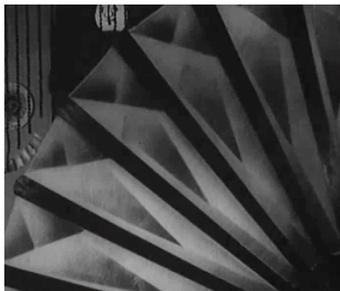
**Fig. 13**



**Fig. 14**



**Fig. 15**



**Fig. 16**

A deliberate parody of *meshchanstvo*, similar to that portrayed in *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, is detectable in the filmmakers' presentation of the Golikovs' apartment. First, the couple's dog is allowed to sleep on the bed, while their domestic servant is reduced to dozing on a straight-backed wooden chair. Second, their walls are adorned with ornamental fans, an object that Shklovsky exploits in several other productions to allude to the pre-revolutionary deportment of the characters to whom they belong: a paper fan decorates the wall above 'petit-bourgeois' Polly's head in *The Last Attraction*, an ornate variety partially conceals the face of Elizaveta Petrovna, wife of the Russian crown prince and lover of Volynskii, as she flirts with men at court in *The Ice House* (*Ledianoi dom*, 1928), and a folded curtain in the shape and design of a fan screens courtesan Wanda's boudoir from view upon the arrival of gentleman caller Nikolai Neratov in *The Traitor* (Figs. 13-16). Third, in a sequence intended to

depict Parasha's domestic burdens, the heroine attempts to stack a mattress on a trunk that is balanced atop a chest of drawers. The mattress (an object endowed with bourgeois symbolism) repeatedly slides to the floor and becomes an obstacle around which Parasha must move in order to complete her chores. This injection of humour into an otherwise tragic sequence utilises a comic principle identified by Adrian Piotrovsky (a theoretician who, like Shklovsky, came to be associated with the so-called 'school' of Russian Formalism) as 'the eccentric deployment of objects'.<sup>189</sup> Parasha's portrayal as the embodiment of rural 'innocence', achieved visually by means of her wide open eyes, waddling gait, and tightly-bound *platok* (headscarf), functions as an appropriate vehicle for the collision of 'objects of urban civilization [...] with the renovated mark of the lowly simpleton'.<sup>190</sup> By positing Parasha's exploited labour against a backdrop of 'superfluous' articles of petit-bourgeois decadence, Shklovsky and his co-scenarists B. Zorich, A. Mariengof, V. Shershenevich, and N. Erdman were not only able to reveal the heroine's personal qualities of obedience, patience, and good-humour as distinct moral virtues, but could also present her individual journey to political consciousness as an idealised model against which the viewing public could compare their own behaviour.

For Parasha, as for Il'ia in director Boris Barnet's solo debut *The Girl with a Hatbox* (*Devushka s korobkoi*, 1927), arrival in Moscow is accompanied by disorientation. With a duck under one arm, Parasha attempts to locate the house of her Uncle Fedia, who, as the viewer already knows, will not be at home to welcome her. Parasha walks a great distance from the Moscow station and asks passers-by for directions. The juxtaposition of shots placing Parasha in relation to Moscow's various

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<sup>189</sup> Adrian Piotrovsky, 'Towards a Theory of Film Genres', in *Russian Poetics in Translation* (vol. 9: *The Poetics of Cinema*), ed. by Richard Taylor (Oxford: Holdan Books, 1982), pp. 90-106 (p. 98).

<sup>190</sup> Piotrovsky, 'Towards a Theory of Film Genres', pp. 90-106 (p. 99).

landmarks, which have been filmed from unexpected angles, with shots depicting her attempts to move through dense and chaotic crowds creates a paradoxical portrayal of the capital city. Cameraman Evgenii Alekseev's fragmented depiction of famous statues and edifices as a background for uncertain pointing gestures denies the capital its status as a monumental urban centre and prevents familiar structures from serving as points of orientation.<sup>191</sup> Consequently, the city is imbued with a dynamic energy as both its human and structural inhabitants appear to exist in a state of constant fluctuation.

It can also be argued that Parasha's disorientation as a stranger in the capital city catalyses her own personal character development. In an article subtitled 'Moscow in Summer' (*Moskva letom*), Shklovsky writes:

When you get lost in Moscow, where even the soil has changed, and you recognize a street by trees that haven't been built on – it is then that time will appear and, with time, self-reflection.

Когда заблудишься в Москве, в которой переменялась даже почва, и узнаешь улицу по деревьям, которые не надстраивают, - тогда появляется время и с временем мысль о себе.<sup>192</sup>

By the end of the opening sequence, Parasha fails to reach her final destination, but when she herself is asked for directions, manages to provide her interlocutor with the correct information. Accordingly, Parasha's triumph over initial

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<sup>191</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 84.

<sup>192</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Konets barokko: O liudiakh, kotorye idut po odnoi i toi zhe doroge i ob etom ne znaiut: Moskva letom' [1932], in *Gamburgskii schet: Stat'i – vospominaniia – esse (1914-1933)* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), pp. 448.

topographical confusion ensures that a cinematic space is created in which self-reflection and, by extension, the young girl's journey to revolutionary consciousness may occur. Nevertheless, it is only when Parasha finds work as a domestic helper in the eponymous house on Trubnaia Square that a more stable and more private environment emerges within this tumultuous public city-space.



**Fig. 17**

private flat, the inhabitants of the house on Trubnaia Square fulfil their individual domestic duties simultaneously, thereby making housework a communal concern. A single long-shot that slowly ascends the house's central, shared staircase reveals the chaotic consequences that emerge when mutual co-operation is lacking (Fig. 17).

Seemingly insignificant household chores cannot be completed owing to the inconsiderate behaviour of others when performing their own menial tasks: Golikov the barber, for example, tries to shake dust from his curtains as crockery is smashed on him from above and the house's residents are forced to jump over pots as they roll down the stairs. While the demands made of Liuda in her home on Third Meshchanskaia Street are markedly conveyed (the only gift she receives from Kolia is a box of fruit from which she is expected to make jam), the dangers of placing

The house's depiction in one of the film's earliest sequences effectively synthesises the realms of private and public in the filmmakers' attempt to communicate the importance of social responsibility in early twentieth-century Moscow. Unlike the living arrangement explored in *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, where the female protagonist completes all the chores for the two men in their small,

individual matters above those of the collective are more explicitly communicated in the later script on which Shklovsky worked.

Moscow, where both the house on Trubnaia Square and the flat on Third Meshchanskaia Street are situated, is established as a hectic, discombobulating urban centre and ‘a space of lived experience’ characterised by ‘new types of physical experience’ in the form of public transport.<sup>193</sup> As the former feature witnesses Parasha boarding a train for Moscow, so the latter commences with scenes of a railway track transporting Volodia the printer to the capital city in search of work. Although the Lumière brothers’ picture *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (*L’arrivée d’un train en gare de la Ciotat*, 1895), first demonstrated in Russia in 1896, is the origin myth of Russian cinema, as it is in the West, it was only in the 1920s that the filmic representation of the train, embracing notions of industrialisation, the expansion of rail network systems, and the ruralisation of the cities, came to be utilised in Soviet film as both cultural allegory and practical necessity.<sup>194</sup> In contradistinction to the



**Fig. 18**

opening scenes of *The House on Trubnaia Square*, the first sequence in *Third Meshchanskaia Street* predominantly emphasises the presentation of speed and the interplay between light and shadow as images of the railway track and moving parts of

the train on which Volodia is travelling are shot from the vehicle in motion (Fig. 18).

<sup>193</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, pp. 84, 91.

<sup>194</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 13. See also Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, ed. by Richard Taylor, trans. by Alan Bodger (London: Chicago U.P., 1994; repr. 1998), pp. 135-47. For a discussion of the train myth in early Russian cinema, see also his ‘K simvolike poezda v rannem kino’, *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, 21 (1987), 119-35.

Volodia leans out the train window in excitement as he undertakes his journey to Moscow, crossing the physical divide that separates interior from exterior, and remains in this dangerous position until a second train rushes past, which causes the inside of his carriage to flash with rapid alternations of light and shadow. Shots of the printer's arrival in Moscow thus stand in sharp contrast to the motionless images of the Batalovs asleep in a room surrounded by objects central to domestic routine with which they are intercut and, as a result, Volodia is invested with a dynamic energy that the Batalovs and 'sleeping' Moscow are still lacking.

The opening sequence of *Third Meshchanskaia Street* ultimately develops into a tripartite montage of Kolia and Liuda stirring, Volodia travelling, and Moscow awakening. In comparison to Shklovsky's previous treatments of this episode in earlier script variants where the notion of 'awakening' is confined almost exclusively to the street on which the Batalovs' flat is situated, the final cinematic production presents the viewer with images of the Kremlin, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, partially-constructed buildings, a flock of pigeons, a bridge, and dozens of street sweepers, which accumulatively constitute an ostensible panegyric to Moscow in accordance with the traditions of the 'city symphony' genre to which Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*, 1929) most famously belonged. Intercutting between the three principal components of this sequence leads Julian Graffy to suggest that the couple's semi-basement flat represents a microcosm of the city and Judith Mayne to argue that 'a sense of harmony [is created] between the apartment and the city at large'.<sup>195</sup>

An additional interpretation could also be proposed upon consideration of the three intertitles that punctuate this introductory sequence: (1) 'Moscow was still

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<sup>195</sup> Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 25; Judith Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film* (Columbus: Ohio State U.P., 1989), p. 113.

sleeping' (*Moskva eshche spala*); (2) 'Third Meshchanskaia Street is sleeping...' (*Spit Tret'ia Meshchanskaia...*); (3) '... along with its inhabitants' (... *i ee obitateli*). The gradual concentration of the referred object's spatial dimensions with each intertitle (from the capital city to a particular street to a pair of characters), which occurs alongside an increase in the number of shots that present activity inside the flat, rather than in the city beyond it, draws the viewer's attention from the public sphere inwards towards that of the private. The film's initial sense of openness, achieved visually by the juxtaposition of aerial perspectives with tracking shots of the city's monuments and deserted public areas, is swiftly contracted owing to the introduction of cluttered



**Fig. 19**

internal scenes filmed from awkward camera angles: in the apartment's establishing shot, for example, the staircase, rather than the principal protagonists, occupies the central area of the frame, thereby highlighting the restricted space and room for manoeuvre

inside the flat (Fig. 19). Shklovsky and Room's increasing focus on private space as the intertitles progress operates at several interconnected levels. The device presents a discourse with domesticity in the bourgeois interior and stresses 'the value of everyday life pared down and lived through the collective'.<sup>196</sup> When combined with the filmmakers' ambiguous portrayal of Moscow as an urban centre and their incorporation of an existent address into the film's very title, the contraction of focus from the public sphere to that of the private demarcates the flat and the street on which it is situated more prominently than the city as a whole. It therefore appears

<sup>196</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 91.

that Shklovsky and Room exploit integral filmic features and practices in order to draw attention to the fact that the social concerns represented by images of the city and its inhabitants are to be shown in *Third Meshchanskaia Street* at the level of the individual.<sup>197</sup>

In all his treatments of the narrative for *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, Shklovsky repeatedly indicates that each shot should be taken either through the apartment window or fully outside; while those filmed from inside the semi-basement flat offer a limited view, many taken outdoors emphasise depth and an overarching perspective of the city and its inhabitants' activities.<sup>198</sup> For Kolia, who works as a supervisor on a building site, a panoramic view of Moscow from atop the Bol'shoi Theatre is a daily occurrence, but for his wife Liuda, a window serves as her only

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<sup>197</sup> A comparable device is applied in *The House on Trubnaia Square*, where the opening intertitles read: (1) 'The town is sleeping' (Город спит); (2) 'The House on Trubnaia Square is also sleeping...' (Спит и дом на Трубной...); (3) 'The town was waking up' (Город просыпался...); (4) '... and looking in the mirror, it began to wash' (... и посмотрившись в зеркало, начал умываться). As in *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, this film's introductory sequence presents shots of Muscovite architecture and deserted streets to convey the ambience of a still Moscow morning. This tranquility is then disturbed by the sweeping of street cleaners' brooms; both films therefore depict Moscow and its inhabitants as they wake and wash, sweep and clean. In the later film, however, the focus of the intertitles differs. While in *Third Meshchanskaia Street* the audience's attention is progressively turned inwards from considerations of city life to that inside the semi-basement flat, in *The House on Trubnaia Square* this process is ultimately reversed: perceptual awareness is first shifted from the town to the house (from social to domestic), then promptly turned outwards from the house back to the town (from domestic to social). Hence, while narrative focus in *Third Meshchanskaia Street* remains fixed on the film's principal protagonists, in *The House on Trubnaia Square* a more dominant role is assigned to communal concerns.

<sup>198</sup> See Viktor Shklovskii, 'Libretto: "Liubov' vtroem"': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, ll. 214-24; 'Liubov' vtroem': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, ll. 133-63; 'Liubov' vtroem': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, ll. 180-87; 'Liubov' vtroem': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, l. 210; "'Liubov' vtroem" /3-ia Meshchanskaia/': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, ll. 43-100; GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, ll. 192-203.

connection to the public sphere and determines her status as a detached observer.<sup>199</sup> Indeed, apart from her two lovers, the only character with whom Liuda converses during the course of the narrative is the yardman (*dvornik*), a figure ingrained in the domestic sphere, who works inside the house and on the street in which the building is situated, and whose topics of conversation are kept strictly to those of an official nature.



**Fig. 20**

As Liuda and Kolia awake in their semi-basement flat, the yardman's feet are seen through a closed window, which fills the majority of the screen and creates a 'frame within a frame effect' (Fig. 20).<sup>200</sup> Due to its association with

thresholds, this frame symbolises a potential transition, development, or shift within the sequence, allegorically acknowledges a distinction between interior and exterior (as demonstrated in the earlier alternation of street and apartment shots), and suggests a metaphorical boundary that separates the Batalovs' traditional 'bourgeois' view of the safety of domestic order from the world outside. These three interpretations, contained within a single shot, all potentially denote the same concept: the

<sup>199</sup> In Shklovsky's earliest treatments of the cinematic narrative Kolia labours on top of the Lenin Institute (*institut im. Lenina*), but in the final cinematic feature the supervisor's workplace is transposed to the Bol'shoi Theatre. This latter building is imbued with cultural symbolism of the pre-revolutionary past, thereby reinforcing Kolia's petit-bourgeois credentials by the very nature of his work, regardless of its public nature: see Shklovskii, 'Libretto: "Liubov' vtroem"', ll. 214-24 (l. 215); ll. 192-203 (l. 194); Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 31.

<sup>200</sup> A former libretto and script specify that the feet of the individual sweeping outside the flat's window belong to the yardman, although this is not made explicit in the final cinematic product: see Shklovskii, 'Libretto: "Liubov' vtroem"', ll. 214-24 (l. 214); ll. 192-203 (l. 193).

filmmakers' desire for the 'comfortable' domain of petit-bourgeois, NEP existence to be abandoned in favour of a dynamic, socialist, and revolutionary approach.

This image also exemplifies the flat's totality as the extent of the couple's existence. A lampshade situated in the left of the frame demonstrates the height to which the audience's perspective has to be raised in order to glimpse a mere fraction of the world beyond the apartment building (a literal expression of the metaphorical depths to which the couple have sunk). Several horizontal lines in the shot, caused by the window frame, sill, and the design of the net curtains, invest the picture with a linearity that reminds the viewer of the train-tracks on which Volodia is now travelling; graphic continuity is achieved by the visual correspondence of otherwise dissociated shots. Hence, it can be proposed that the closed window serves not only as a barrier, but also as a link between the couple and the outside world, or, more specifically, between the couple and the railway on which one character will soon arrive and on which another will eventually depart.

The sequence's initial contraction of the audience's outlook from the public realm to that of the private by means of montage, intertitles, and *mise-en-scène*, reducing the narrative's concern with equality and fairness from social issues to matters at the level of the individual, is now, consequently, turned outwards. Shklovsky explicitly acknowledges the importance assigned to Moscow in his cinematic conception in a note that he attached to an early treatment of the film's theme that was submitted for the studios' approval:

Moscow, shot as a landscape at all times of the day, is the script's main subject-matter. [...] Fogel', Batalov, and Semonova, in turn, wind up

homeless and look at the city. Hence, the script will not focus purely on “the everyday”.

Основное содержание сценария – Москва взятая, как пейзаж во все времена дня. [...] Фогель, Баталов, Семенова по очереди оказываются бездомными и смотрят город. Поэтому установка сценария не будет чисто бытовой.<sup>201</sup>

Certainly, in Shklovsky’s previous scripts and librettos for *Third Meshchanskaia Street* (first named *Ménage à trois* [*Liubov’ vtroem*], which became the film’s alternative title and the name under which it was released abroad, and then later *Second Meshchanskaia Street* [*Vtoraia Meshchanskaia*]) Moscow was assigned a prominent role in catalysing narrative progression. In the scenarist’s first libretto, for example, Batalov and Kolia refuse to resign their game of draughts and Liuda leaves the flat in anger with the intention of spending the night in the city. Soon, she is mistaken for a prostitute and swiftly elects to return to her two husbands.<sup>202</sup> Likewise, in a later script variant, Shklovsky has Batalov sleep on top of the Lenin Institute after Liuda chooses to live with his best friend, but the supervisor derives little comfort from his view of Moscow’s night-time cityscape.<sup>203</sup> In this same treatment Volodia, imbued with the very energy and dynamism that he exhumes in the final cinematic feature, arrives in the capital city:

The station, third class. The station doors open. People enter the station and lie on the floor. This is homeless Moscow.

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<sup>201</sup> ‘Vtoraia Meshchanskaia’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, l. 191.

<sup>202</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Liubov’ vtroem’, ll. 180-87 (ll. 185-86).

<sup>203</sup> Shklovskii, ll. 192-203 (ll. 198-99).

Вокзал III-го класса. Открываются двери вокзала. Люди входят в вокзал и ложатся на пол. Это бездомная Москва.<sup>204</sup>

After leaving the terminus, Volodia's eyes fall on the road stretched before him, the length of which is emphasised by light from the morning sun. Discouraged, the printer returns inside the building and lies down on the ground to sleep among the homeless.<sup>205</sup>

In all three examples, conditions in the capital city ultimately guide each protagonist back towards the cluttered semi-basement apartment. Moscow's inability to provide alternative forms of accommodation, even for one night, for those seeking to escape the confines of 'petit-bourgeois' domesticity means that life in the Third Meshchanskaia Street flat with its comfortable furnishings and promise of companionship always proves more favourable than attempts to move into the city alone. For scriptwriter Shklovsky and co-scriptwriter/director Room, the realisation of Moscow as a public, communal, and social space cannot compete on either an emotional or a practical level with the familiar sphere of the private, personal, and domestic; hence, the filmmakers emphasis on Moscow, paradoxically, reinforces the prominence of the flat to which, at this stage of narrative progression in the numerous script-variants, the protagonists must inevitably return.

### **Private House, Public Home**

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<sup>204</sup> Shklovskii, ll. 192-203 (l. 193).

<sup>205</sup> Shklovskii, ll. 192-203 (l. 193).

The exploration of the individual's search for parity within ambiguously defined domestic and social spaces is also exposed to a complex treatment in a later film on which Shklovsky worked, where notions of private and public in relation to the house and home, the city and village, and the domestic and vocational are presented in a single conceptual framework made manifest in the form of an *agitfurgon* (a vehicle for the distribution of revolutionary propaganda). *The Last Attraction*, based on a story by Marietta Shaginian, is a 'half-comedy, half-adventure' (*polukomediinaia, poluprikliuchencheskaiia*) hybrid-picture that strives to depict the awakening of revolutionary consciousness among members of a travelling circus as they journey across the front line during the Civil War.<sup>206</sup> Directed by Ol'ga Preobrazhenskaia and Ivan Pravov for Sovkino and released on 9 September 1929, the film explores notions of personal responsibility within collectives of various sizes.<sup>207</sup> The development of the feature's shooting script was a complex process that not only reveals significant details about Shklovsky's role and position as author in the Soviet film industry, but also develops an understanding of broader concerns in relation to authorship, script-production, and the perception of these activities by external organs. A close examination of the themes, librettos, and scenarios that were

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<sup>206</sup> Kazhuro, 'Zakliuchenie': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 56; Vsev. Ivanov, 'Agit-furgon': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 57; 'Agit-furgon': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 58.

<sup>207</sup> When Shklovsky composed his initial libretto and script, he intended for the eventual feature to be directed by Abram Room. On 10 October 1927, Room reviewed Shklovsky's work and sent his comments to Khrisanf Khersonskii, informing the critic that he considered Shklovsky's script 'on the whole [...] fully acceptable' (в основном [...] вполне приемлем) and 'sufficiently problem-free' (достаточно благополучным): see A. Room: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 33. Extant sources do not explain why the assignment was eventually allocated to Preobrazhenskaia and Pravov, but it could be proposed that the decision was partially dictated by Room's engagement in several projects at this time, which would have prevented him from undertaking another: in 1927, he co-wrote and directed *The Traitor*, *Jews on the Land*, and *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, while he also acted in *The Kiss of Mary Pickford* (*Potselui Meri Pikford*), which was directed by Sergei Komarov.

submitted at various stages of the production process illuminates a delicacy of interaction between the realms of internal and external, private and public in Shklovsky's relentless search for integrity, reasonableness, and 'right' behaviour not only in the film-text itself, but also in the working environment where his cinematic compositions were created.

At the film's inception, the five-member circus troupe deems itself politically neutral, which allows it to entertain both Red and White factions and collect the corresponding duplication in 'revenue' (food products). One of the group's performances is attended by Comrade Kurapov, a propagandist for the Red Army's political division who, despite inexhaustible efforts, finds himself unable to achieve his principal revolutionary aims of encouraging villagers to ration their bread provisions and help ease starvation in the cities. Upon witnessing the sacks of eggs, flour, and sugar collected by the circus as an 'entrance fee' and the performers' remarkable ability to attract and maintain public attention, Kurapov requisitions the troupe and their caravan-home, subordinating the former to the Red Army's political division and transforming the latter into an *agitfurgon*.

Despite the initial animosity shown by the circus artists towards their intruder, Maria the tightrope walker becomes increasingly enchanted by Kurapov's energy, industriousness, and commitment to the Red campaign. Her co-performer and loving admirer Serzh cannot cope with the feelings of jealousy that Maria's attentions towards Kurapov arouse; hence, when the *agitfurgon* is captured by the Whites on the Caucasian front, Serzh abandons the circus with the intention of betraying Kurapov to the enemy. The remaining entertainers are forced by their captors to organise a pantomime atop a tank in honour of the colonel's visit to the Whites' military headquarters, but just as their preparations begin, news arrives that Kurapov has been

shot. Dismayed, yet not discouraged by their loss, the artists perform for the Whites in the hope of rescue. In accordance with the assumed tenets of a Soviet cinematic adventure-comedy, the ‘good’ pro-Bolshevik circus is saved from the ‘evil’ Whites by the Red Army cavalry led by none other than Serzh himself, who, it now emerges, did not renounce Kurapov before his execution. Following a bloody battle, the Whites are defeated and the troupe flees to safety inside its tank-cum-stage. The artists bury Kurapov with both his army and circus uniforms and subsequently separate: Maria and Serzh join the Red forces to continue their fight against Denikin’s White army, while the remaining three performers return to their circus-caravan.<sup>208</sup>

The opening sequence of *The Last Attraction* is a concentrated depiction of a



**Fig. 21**



**Fig. 22**

country thrown into the turmoil of Civil War and the place occupied by a travelling circus within it; as Shklovsky informed the directors, ‘Don’t be scared of the beginning: this script has a running start’ (Не бойтесь начала: это сценарий берет разбег).<sup>209</sup> The combination of the first intertitle (‘When...’ [*Kogda...*]) and an establishing shot of a field ravaged by battle decisively secures the film’s thematic content within a wartime framework (Fig. 21). Bodies are strewn

across the ground alongside broken vehicles and discarded weapons, while two burnt

<sup>208</sup> Anton Ivanovich Denikin (16 December 1872 – 8 August 1947) was commander-in-chief of the anti-Bolshevik White forces on the southern front from 1918 until 1920.

<sup>209</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Agitfurgon’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 81.

trees balance the frame's haphazard composition. The depth of field normally established by such landscape shots is impeded by the emergence of smoke that steadily floods the screen (Fig. 22). While this smog forces the audience's attention towards the macabre objects in the front of the frame, it simultaneously dissolves and obscures these images from view. On a functional level, this conveys an acute awareness of the recency of battle, yet metaphorically the sequence alludes to the human compulsion to 'blur' and block out horrific memories of war. In the following three shots, clouds and mist only fill the top half of the frame, which suggests that this 'fog' of psychological repression is soon to be lifted in the context of this cinematic work. Interestingly, the shift from manmade gun-smoke to environmental phenomena indicates that this progression is entirely natural and one that the audience should wholeheartedly embrace.

Such an interpretation is further supported by the repetition of the first intertitle in large block capitals and an ensuing rapid montage sequence, which informs the audience that 'Revolution had begun to seize the Caucasus' (Революция начала захлестывать Кавказ). The 'stillness' integral to the first half of the opening sequence is now destabilised by an inherent sense of movement. The static clouds and mist in previous long-shots are replaced by close-ups of foaming water gushing from several directions, steady landscapes are exchanged for a single close-range tracking-shot of firearm smoke, and images of soldiers riding on horseback superimposed onto the Caucasian landscape move across the screen with such speed that the cavalry's members become difficult to isolate individually, thereby emphasising their number and unity in the cause. The rapid, insistent pulse of editing mimics the beat of the horses' hooves and generates energy, dynamism, and a heightened sense of perception in this sequence. While the memories of Civil War may have (un)intentionally faded

for some, the filmmakers' injection of motion into the opening sequence of *The Last Attraction* demonstrates their candid intention to depict the tumult of war in its full intensity.

By means of a cut, these stimulating Civil War pursuits are juxtaposed with a slow-moving circus caravan on the roads of the mountainous Kuban (Fig. 23).<sup>210</sup> The



**Fig. 23**

caravan's introductory, high-angle shot not only makes the vehicle seem small and vulnerable, but also intimates that the audience is positioned at an omniscient height. Both these impressions are, however, promptly undermined:

first, the narrow, winding road along which the caravan is travelling and the long shadow that it casts behind itself emphasise the amount of space that the cumbersome vehicle occupies; second, the audience's view of the moving caravan is severely curtailed by the camera's placement at a fixed point and by trees that obscure all potential full-length shots. This establishes a playful irony that deconstructs the preceding wartime allegorical narrative by visually exposing the ways in which cinematic fiction is capable of betraying the social knowledge articulated in images and metaphors. Subsequently, the authoritarian/non-authoritarian dichotomy in relation to the presentation and interpretation of on-screen information is revealed, while traditional genre boundaries between historical, adventure, and comic pictures are irrevocably blurred. It appears that the film's teasingly ironic self-reflexivity is utilised for public comment, inasmuch as it pre-emptly the audience's identification

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<sup>210</sup> The Kuban is a geographic region of Southern Russia that lies on the Black Sea between the Don Steppe, Volga Delta, and the Caucasus.

with the filmmakers-cum-narrator by establishing the latter as a perpetually elusive, inconsistent, and self-parodic figure. Consequently, it seems that the praise bestowed by Shklovsky upon the literary and theatrical ‘flicker effect’ (*mertsaiushchaia illiuziia*) in his article ‘On Psychological Footlights’ (*O psikhologicheskoi rampe*) has now been transposed into the cinematic medium in order to create, and then intentionally shatter an illusion of reality.<sup>211</sup>

The importance assigned to the circus-caravan in *The Last Attraction* is demonstrated by its inclusion in Shklovsky’s provisional list of *dramatis personae*, despite its inanimate state.<sup>212</sup> A former funeral-hearse, it was acquired by ringmaster Klim when he previously worked as an undertaker and it now operates as a residential and storage area for the circus troupe.<sup>213</sup> While Shklovsky initially intended the vehicle to function as ‘a place of refuge for the actors’ (*mesto pristanishcha akterov*), the ever-increasing severity of the disagreements that occur either inside, or in relation to the vehicle would appear to suggest otherwise.<sup>214</sup> Shklovsky’s personification of the funeral-hearse-cum-circus-caravan blends together a curious ratio of elements from the spheres of both private and public: while the vehicle provides the circus artists with a domestic space that is distinct from the insurrectionist chaos that surrounds them, it affords neither private, nor personal environments for members of the circus troupe as individuals.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘O psikhologicheskoi rampe’ [1920], in *Gamburgskii schet* (see Shklovskii, 1990, above), pp. 90-91.

<sup>212</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Agitfurgon (Poslednii attraktsion): Obrazy’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 113-14 (l. 114).

<sup>213</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Agitfurgon (Poslednii attraktsion): Obrazy’, ll. 113-14 (l. 113).

<sup>214</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Agitfurgon (Poslednii attraktsion): Obrazy’, ll. 113-14 (l. 114).

<sup>215</sup> The set for *The Last Attraction* was designed by Sergei Iutkevich, who closely adhered to Shklovsky’s directions for the construction and arrangement of the *mise-en-scène*. Having previously worked with the scriptwriter on the features *The Traitor* and *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, Iutkevich explicitly requested in a letter dated 18 August 1927 to be involved in the *The Last Attraction*’s production. He described

The extent of the characters' lack of privacy is demonstrated in an early sequence when three protagonists (Maria the tightrope walker, Vanechka the strongman, and Polly the dancer and ringmaster's wife) attempt to complete their morning ablutions. In contradistinction to Kolia's prolonged wash beneath a samovar in *Third Meshchanskaia Street* and Tsar Nicholas I's leisurely shave in *House of the Dead*, these characters are required to clean themselves in a nearby stream, fully clothed, and in front of each other. Vanechka is sent by Polly to collect water for washing, but Maria meets the strongman by the stream and convinces him to give her the water instead. Serzh serenades Maria while she cleans herself, until the young girl, irritated by this public display of affection, throws water over both him and his guitar. Meanwhile, Polly becomes infuriated when she sees Maria using the water that was intended for her and the first of many arguments among the circus performers ensues. While Polly attempts to wrestle the water-bucket from Vanechka, Maria overturns the container and all its remaining contents splash down onto both her and Polly. Ironically, while neither female character secures the water for her own personal use, both women are ultimately 'washed'.



**Fig. 24**

Owing to the lack of room and facilities inside the circus-caravan, the private ritual of cleansing traditionally conducted indoors is transformed into an open-air water-fight. An inherent sense of 'openness' is conveyed by shot

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Shklovsky's scenario as 'remarkable' (замечателен), noted its 'exceptional peculiarity and originality' (исключительное своеобразие и оригинальность), and remarked that despite its 'clowning' (эксцентрика), the script remained 'sound and, most importantly, humane' (правдоподобен и главное человечен): see Sergei Iutkevich: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 38.

composition, whereby the characters' full-length images are contained in the centre of the frame to emphasise the natural expanse that surrounds them (Fig. 24). As such, a scene where justice is comically served becomes problematic to define in terms of private and public. Unlike in *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, where prolonged shots of Kolia's smiling face as he rubs his torso, intercut with close-ups of his naked arms and legs, suggest an element of narcissism (his personal routine reveals a fundamental aspect of his own character), in *The Last Attraction* idiosyncrasies are developed by means of the protagonists' interactions with each other in relation to the group as a whole. The filmmakers' expert manipulation of space and artful construction of the *mise-en-scène* therefore cause the private/public boundary at the level of individual characters to be completely dissolved; the only sense of 'private' is that which is shared between all five protagonists.

Similarly, the funeral-hearse/circus-caravan can be defined as a 'private' location, since it functions as a 'home' for the troupe. Within this space, however, each protagonist is assigned nothing more than a bed to call his/her own. Two makeshift curtains divide the characters' sleeping quarters from the rest of the



**Fig. 25**

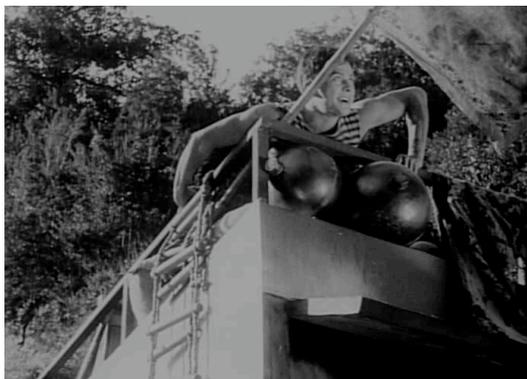
carriage and this space is so confined that Polly, the smallest member of the troupe, can barely fit into her bunk.

The remainder of the caravan's interior is cluttered with a variety of objects that boast different shapes, sizes, and patterns, including circus equipment, a

table, kitchen utensils, pipes, posters, wall-fans, pillows, blankets, and clothes, which all significantly darken and contract the space inside the portable dwelling. A portrait

of a circus performer is painted directly onto an internal wall, which creates the impression that even more people reside in the caravan than do in actuality, but even this image is partially covered by ‘things’ (Fig. 25). In fact, space is so limited inside the former funeral-hearse that even the vehicle’s exterior functions as a storeroom: objects are attached to its surface (a coiled rope, horn, and lantern) and props, including banners and dumbbells, dangle from its rooftop. Soon, it transpires that the vehicle’s interior is so overcrowded with both people and objects that it has become preferable for Serzh to sleep on the roof. A ladder attached to the side of the caravan suggests that its exterior is utilised in this manner on a permanent basis and the traditional function of the vehicle’s domestic/vocational interior is subsequently transposed to its external façade.

The audience is first introduced to Serzh as he wakes, stretches, and looks out from his ‘bed’ to admire an overarching perspective of the troupe’s eventual destination from his elevated position (Fig. 26). The tightrope walker is filmed from



**Fig. 26**

below, which not only associates the character with his profession, but also, according to standard cinematic convention, exalts him and signifies his merit for the audience’s respect and attention. A montage sequence then intercuts shots of Serzh playing his

guitar with those of a tumbling waterfall, as if he is serenading the natural phenomenon.<sup>216</sup> This juxtaposition of interior (eye-level close-ups of sleeping circus

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<sup>216</sup> The waterfall cascades down the mountain in a single stream and divides in two, serving as a visual expression of the film’s primary narrative thread: like the flowing water, the circus troupe will eventually split in half.

artists and their possessions) and exterior (a low-angle shot of Serzh, aerial shots of the city, and a descriptive shot of the waterfall) creates a stark contrast that inextricably connects Serzh with his surrounding, natural environment.

In accordance with artistic tradition, it would be assumed that if a protagonist's internal processes are associated with his/her external setting, then his/her actions and emotions are replicated by a scene's weather and locale. Indeed, as the sun shines in a clear sky, Serzh unreservedly attempts to woo Maria by singing:

I do, he says,

Love you, he says,

In vain!

Я ж, говорит,

Люблю, говорит,

Тебя напрасно!

While Shklovsky occasionally exploits the natural environment in his cinematic works for purposes of pathetic fallacy, as seen in *Third Meshchanskaia Street* when torrential rain soaks a forlorn Kolia as he returns to collect his possessions from his apartment and in *By the Law* when a thunderstorm reflects the Nelsons' terror upon Dennin's ostensibly posthumous return to the prospectors' cabin, it appears that the scriptwriter more frequently employs this device with ironic intent. Bright sunshine, for example, serves as a backdrop for the exotic beach on which Mariula's baby daughter is kidnapped in *The Ice House*, for the tranquil lake on which the remains of gallows, still bearing their hanged victims, float past in *The Captain's Daughter*, and for the snowy fields in which the execution posts prominently stand in

*House of the Dead*. In *The Last Attraction*, however, Shklovsky's ironic inversion of this narrative convention is cultivated even further.

Serzh, who is described by Shklovsky as a man unable to control his passions (человек плохо сдерживаемых больших страстей), joyfully serenades Maria while she washes.<sup>217</sup> As a result, she intentionally throws water on him and the young man leaves, crestfallen and offended: the 'rain' that falls on him alone causes his good humour to wane. It should be noted that this change in 'weather' was induced by an individual and not by any broader concept of natural phenomena. The distinction between Serzh's feelings and their visual expression with respect to his external environment is abolished by the behaviour and attitudes of a single female protagonist, who, by taking it upon herself to administer so-called 'justice', upturns traditional notions of pathetic fallacy and concentrates the basic component of a reflexive narrative device from the natural world to that of the individual. This 'turning inwards' creates a unique and inextricable bond between Maria and Serzh and subsequently establishes a directly proportional relationship between her actions and his.



**Fig. 27**

The extent to which Maria's behaviour conditions that of her co-performer is further explored when Comrade Kurapov requisitions their caravan. After collecting revolutionary literature in a nearby town, the political agitator drives the *agitfurgon*

and the circus artists inside it to the Cossack villages (*v stanitsy*). While Kurapov

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<sup>217</sup> Shklovskii, 'Agitfurgon (Poslednii attraktsion): Obrazy', ll. 113-14 (l. 113).

admires the beautiful landscape and whistles contentedly, Maria stares out of the window-vents at the scenery passing by, her thoughts clearly occupied with other matters. Maria's face appears trapped within horizontal bars of light and shadow as she gazes outwards through the vent (Fig. 27). By juxtaposing shots of the passing road with Maria's contemplative stare, the audience's attention is drawn not only to the bars that obstruct her view, but also to the stripes of light (the brightest feature of the frame) that demonstrate her ability to see through the 'window'. In conjunction with Maria's visual isolation and physical distance from the other circus performers, this formal presentation of the female protagonist substantiates an interpretation of her entrapment in the present situation, while also alluding to the possibility of her future escape. The fundamental tenets of Shklovsky's ideology, which the scriptwriter intends to explore throughout the cinematic narrative, are consequently exposed: individual needs and desires, platonic and sexual relationships, and the determination



**Fig. 28**

of one's role in society.

A similar technique was employed by Shklovsky and director Room in *Third Meshchanskaia Street*: when shots of Liuda sewing a button onto Volodia's shirt as she daydreams are intercut with scenes of Volodia at work as he stares straight ahead near the printing machine, a pattern

of light and shadow falls on Volodia's face, which recalls that cast by a cane rocking chair onto Liuda's face when Volodia first arrived at the Batalovs' flat (Fig. 28 and Fig. 29). The device therefore presents itself as an operative link between the two characters that transcends space and (potentially) time. Graffy defines this invention

in terms of vocational gender politics: each character is thinking of the other, but ‘the sexual division of labour – male paid work outside the flat, traditional female



**Fig. 29**

‘housework’ within it – has not been disturbed’.<sup>218</sup> Mayne, meanwhile, considers the pattern ‘an extremely condensed example of a device used in film to suggest the distance between the apartment and the outside world’.<sup>219</sup> While both these

interpretations undoubtedly ring true, the question of whether the shadow-pattern indicates the inclusion or exclusion of Liuda and/or Volodia from the outside world remains to be addressed.

An examination of the actors’ movements in the shots where patterns of light and shadow occur proves informative. In *The Last Attraction*, Maria stares out through the window-vents at the countryside, but before the end of the shot she looks inwards to seek means of distraction from her thoughts. In *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, Volodia stares straight ahead, but shifts his gaze outwards and away from the shadow-casting source when he returns to work. Liuda’s gaze, however, remains fixed inwards as she watches Volodia inside the apartment when she meets him for the first time. The characters’ actions while their faces are marked with light/shadow designs therefore indicate that at this point in the films’ respective narrative trajectories Volodia is able to manoeuvre freely between private and public spaces, Maria possesses both the desire and the capacity to transgress this boundary, while Liuda remains trapped within the confines of her private domestic flat.

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<sup>218</sup> Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 51

<sup>219</sup> Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question*, p. 116.

The utilisation of space inside the caravan reveals that Maria is, in fact, the only character in *The Last Attraction* who retains a degree of equanimity when confronted by a permanent transgression of the private/public divide. When the tightrope walker turns her head away from the window-vent, she sees Polly moodily eating pastries on her bunk with Klim, who has now been deprived of his position as the vehicle's driver. Maria casually walks over to the couple, steals one of their pastries, runs across the caravan, jumps on her bunk, and flashes the couple a victorious smile as she bites into her spoil. In anger, Polly races over to Maria's bed and waves her fists in the air, but she stops short at the foot of the bunk and hesitates at the prospect of invading the young girl's personal space. Eventually, however, feelings of rage overwhelm Polly's respect for the tightrope walker's privacy and she hits Maria in a bid to avenge the girl's petty theft.

Polly's infringement of the *agitfurgon's* only form of personal space in her unorthodox attempt to obtain an idiosyncratic form of justice demonstrates the extent to which relations between the artists have disintegrated since Kurapov's forced intrusion into their private/public and domestic/vocational area. Serzh alone refrains from entering Maria's 'bedroom' and his hauling of Klim and Polly from on top of the young girl before he throws them across the caravan undoubtedly constitutes his attempt to re-establish the frontier between the caravan's private and public domains. Polly, outraged and offended by Serzh's behaviour, seeks revenge by exposing the nature of the tightrope walkers' relationship, shouting:

[Maria's] wearing her eyes out looking at the commissar, but you're pining away in love with her!

[Мария] на комиссара все глаза проглядела, а ты от любви к ней  
сохнешь!

In consequence, a heartbroken Serzh leaves Polly to launch another attack on Maria, Klim to defend the former girl, and Vanechka the latter. Maria escapes the brawl by crawling onto the raised bunk on which Serzh was previously reclining and enthusiastically beats the characters below with her boot. In contrast to nearly all Shklovsky's other female protagonists, such as Liuda in *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, Tania in *Potholes*, and Maro in *It's Very Simple (Ochen' prosto, 1931)*, Maria appears completely at ease when moving between private and public spaces from the film's very inception. While Maria demonstrates an awareness of private zones in the funeral-hearse-cum-circus-caravan-cum-*agitfurgon*, as witnessed in her determination to reach her own bunk before Polly catches her, she does not hesitate to flout these internal spatial boundaries if such action serves her own immediate needs. It subsequently seems inevitable that Maria will be the first character to leave the domestic environment and join the revolutionary cause as the ultimate transgression of the border that separates private from public. Meanwhile, Shklovsky's previous inversion of traditional notions of pathetic fallacy for the creation of the tightrope walkers' inter-connectivity indicates that Maria will not cross this frontier alone; indeed, in the film's final scenes, Serzh joins his co-worker in a bid to fight for social justice and achieve personal happiness.

The tremendous importance that Shklovsky attaches to the role of the *agitfurgon* in *The Last Attraction* is evidenced not only in his list of *dramatis personae*, but also in his initial conception of the film's thematic content, which was

submitted to Sovkino in the form of a libretto on 16 February 1927.<sup>220</sup> This work is incredibly short in comparison to Shklovsky's previous cinematic writings and contains many lexical 'mistakes', which have been crossed-out, but remain visible underneath their replacements. This explicit demonstration of self-imposed 'correction' proves revealing in relation to Shklovsky's consideration of justice both within and without the film-text. For example, in this preliminary libretto Shklovsky does not stipulate that two horses, one black and one white, should draw the caravan, as appears in the final feature. Instead, he writes that the former funeral-hearse is to be led by a 'camel and donkey' (*verbliud i osel*), then crosses these animals out and replaces them with a 'crab and pike' (*rak i shchuka*), before situating a monkey (*obez'iana*) on the vehicle's roof.<sup>221</sup>

Although Shklovsky's selection of animals initially seems absurd, this strange conglomerate does, in fact, draw from several aspects of Russian cultural tradition. It recalls the expression 'swan, crab, and pike' (*lebed', rak i shchuka*), derived from I. A. Krylov's 1816 fable of the same name, which features in the Russian language as an ironic qualification for conflicting actions among participants who work in a common field. Shklovsky's replacement of the swan with a monkey invests this idiomatic formula with a satirical dimension, since the ape in traditional Russian symbolism represents 'imitation, mockery, and comedy'.<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, the utilisation of the pike would inevitably remind a Soviet audience of the adventures of Emelia, a character from Russian folklore who spends the majority of his life lying on top of a stove. Despite his idleness, Emelia is fundamentally good-natured and hence

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<sup>220</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Agitfurgon': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 61-62.

<sup>221</sup> Shklovskii, 'Agitfurgon', ll. 61-62 (l. 61).

<sup>222</sup> Nestor Maksimovič-Ambodik, *Emvlemy i simvoly (1788): The First Russian Emblem Book*, ed. and trans. by Anthony Hippisley (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1989), p. 34.

always winds up lucky. One day the young boy is sent to collect water from a nearby stream, whereupon he catches a magical pike that promises to fulfil his wishes if he throws him back into the current. Emelia complies with the fish's demands and henceforth only has to utter the phrase, 'By the command of the pike, I'll get what I like' (По щучьему веленью, по моему хотению) for all his tasks to be magically completed; the lazy, yet affable hero never has to work again.<sup>223</sup>

Before Shklovsky submitted this narrative outline for *The Last Attraction*, he had faced severe criticisms for his script-work from the studios, censorial board, and official and cinematic presses alike. The condemnation of his plot construction for the 1926 feature *The Traitor*, for example, was so unremitting (even though it had received public support from Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii) that the scenarist published an (almost certainly ironic) explanation of his authorial procedure in an attempt to suspend the barrage of critical abuse:

Since my surname is mentioned at the beginning of the film *The Traitor* (with my consent), I attest that I wrote the script for *The Traitor* when the material had already been shot. I was shown people on the screen and asked, "What are they doing here?"

[...] [T]he high art of the scriptwriter cannot dress a woman on the screen who has already been filmed.

Поскольку моя фамилия упоминается в начале ленты "Предателя"  
(с моего ведома) заявляю: я писал сценарий к "Предателю" по

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<sup>223</sup> G. P. Pervushina, 'O nashem otnoshenii k rabote: Levsha i Emelia', in *Stranovedenie* (Krasnoiarsk: Krasnoiarskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2005), pp. 26-28 (p. 26).

снятому материалу. Мне показывали людей на экране и спрашивали: “Что они здесь делают?”

[...] [В]ысокая техника сценариста не может одеть на экране уже снятую женщину.<sup>224</sup>

*The Last Attraction*, like *The Traitor* and all Shklovsky’s previous librettos and screenplays, had been transformed into a cinematic feature at the state film factory, which by the time Shklovsky submitted his narrative outline in 1927 had become the target of a critical campaign following the unsuccessful ‘regime of economy’ operation, the scenario crisis, and the still unresolved debates between entertainment and enlightenment and the acted/non-acted film. It is possible to perceive Shklovsky’s presentation of this ostensibly comic libretto to the studios, then, as an almost direct affront against the environment in which his previous cinematic works had been created and the treatment to which they were subsequently exposed. Superficially, Shklovsky’s work appears to be a hurried and careless composition that lacks a coherent narrative, fails to provide personal names for its protagonists, and accommodates spelling errors, but a more exhaustive analysis reveals that his utilisation of animal imagery does, in fact, impart a sardonic portrait of an *agitfurgon* as a manifestation of his professional and creative discontent. Shklovsky’s manipulation of Russian phraseology presents a mocking reflection of the discord that was currently presiding in the Soviet film community, while his allusion to a well-known Russian fairytale substantiates his employment of an outwardly haphazard style: an exasperated Shklovsky, it seems, projects the illusion of ‘idleness’ in a paradoxical bid for success.

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<sup>224</sup> A. Lunacharskii, ‘Lunacharskii o “Predatele”’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 729, l. 72; Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Ia umyvaiu ruki’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 42 (1926), 4-5 (p. 5).

Surprisingly, such ironic, metaphorical undertones and an equivocal style of writing did not prevent Shklovsky's libretto from meeting with unanimous praise. V. Ivanov, for example, labelled the work 'light and cheerful' (*legkaia i bodraia*), while Kazhuro, Director of the Department for the Production of Feature Films (Зав. Худож. Сценар. Частью Произ. Отд. [*sic*]), believed that it could become a 'picture with a strong ideological orientation' (картину с крепкой идеологической установкой).<sup>225</sup> After introducing several superficial alterations proposed by the critics, on 23 June 1927 Shklovsky sent a developed version of this first libretto to the studios, which, upon review five days later, also received unanimous critical and censorial approval; Ippolit Sokolov described it as:

V. Shklovsky's first and only script that is constructed correctly in the dramaturgical sense: there is a plot and no kinds of disconnected pieces or tricks.

Первый и единственный сценарий В. Шкловского, который драматургически построен правильно: есть сюжет, а не какие-то разрозненные кусочки и трюки.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Ivanov, 'Agit-furgon', l. 57; Kazhuro, 'Zakliuchenie', l. 56.

<sup>226</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Agit-furgon': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 41-49; Ippolit Sokolov, 'Zakliuchenie po stsenariiu "Agit-furgon" V. Shklovskogo': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 77-78 (l. 77). The covering letter that Shklovsky attached to his scenario apologised for the late completion of his assignment. Sent from Tiflis, the document explained that Shklovsky would not return to Moscow for another month for reasons that included illness, sightseeing, work on *The Ice House*, and the need for a holiday. It is conceivable, however, that Shklovsky's presence in Tiflis was connected with the planning and preparation of five films that he was to release with the Georgian studio Goskinprom Gruzii over the next five years: *The Cossacks* (*Kazaki*, 1928), *The Gadfly* (1928), *Victorious Youth* (1929), *The Press Machine* (*Amerikanka*, 1930), and *It's Very Simple* (1931): see Viktor Shklovskii, Letter to Comrade Donashevskii: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 50.

Ironically, Shklovsky's most praised cinematic work of the given period expresses a strongly held and heterodox view of the conditions that prevailed in the Soviet film industry and, by extension, in Soviet society at large. Shklovsky, who had always regarded himself a revolutionary both within and without artistic spheres, but who was repeatedly denounced for his 'Formalist' approach and practices in the 'cosmopolitan discipline' of comparative literature, finally composed a unanimously commended, yet fundamentally 'Formalist' scenario.<sup>227</sup> While the incorporation of elements of the absurd into the adventures of a travelling circus troupe creates a 'light and cheerful' premise in which 'good' conquers 'evil', the first libretto and scenario for *The Last Attraction* also allegorically constitute Shklovsky's indignant attempt to comment on the creative conditions in which he worked and defend his own artistic integrity, thereby seeking justice at both individual and collective levels. Shklovsky's interest in the overlap, interplay, and interchange between opposites which are seldom polar and antithetical (*staryi* and *novyi byt*, domestic and public spaces, arrivals to and departures from the city and/or countryside, notions of personal and collective responsibility, freedom and confinement, outside and in) as a fundamental structural element of his *bytovye fil'my* permits the exploration of not only the complex relationship between the new Soviet citizen and his/her new Soviet environment in the new Soviet era, but also the extent to which this citizen's private feelings are, in fact, entwined with public interest.

As Liuda, Parasha, and Maria escape from the confines of petit-bourgeois domesticity in accordance with the terms of an ideologically 'correct' Soviet narrative, so Shklovsky grants himself a degree of creative freedom via his subversive expression of indignation as a reflection of the sentiments held in the wider filmic

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<sup>227</sup> Svetlana Boym, 'Poetics and Politics of Estrangement: Victor Shklovsky and Hannah Arendt', *Poetics Today*, 26:4 (Winter 2005), 581-611 (p. 593).

community, which, in turn, produces a narrative framework for the exact sort of 'movie for the masses' that was desired by the studios and censorial board. This enigmatic notion of duality is further developed in these three cinematic features as Shklovsky investigates alternative means for exploring notions of justice and morality in increasingly stratified on-screen 'realities'. He exploits his own experiences, as well as those of his acquaintances, friends, and family, to formulate conceptual frameworks for his cinematic narratives in an attempt to undermine the idea of a realistic representation of the relationship between art and life; in consequence, Shklovsky not only preserved, but also foregrounded the dichotomous understanding of the aesthetic and ideological questions about form and content that rapidly became one of the most animated debates of the Soviet 1920s.

## Chapter 4: Metatextual Modes of Judicial Expression

### Self-Reflexive Performance and Genre Hybridity

One of the most prominent theoretical interests of the variety of scholars who were grouped under the ‘Formalist’ rubric in Soviet Russia was the desire to establish an autonomous ‘science’ of literature by defining its object of study and methods of inquiry. The question of ‘literariness’ was raised as these theoreticians attempted to identify the formal and linguistic qualities that distinguish literature and poetry from other forms of discourse and they maintained that the problem of literature’s specificity could be resolved only with reference to a work’s formal properties and not by recourse to the historical forces effective in textual composition. This assumption brought the Formalist scholars into conflict with developing schools of Marxist criticism in the Soviet Union and presented a serious threat to the pre-eminent position of ‘historical materialism’ (*istoricheskii materializm*), which had officially been declared the only legitimate approach to literature and doctrine worthy of the revolutionary era.<sup>228</sup> As Victor Erlich notes, ‘the ultra-Formalist tendency to divorce art from social life was bound to provoke a vehement reaction on the part of critics bent [...] on determining the “sociological equivalent” of the literary phenomenon’.<sup>229</sup>

Shklovsky began his erudite career among Russian Futurists whose ‘battle cry’ was the primacy of form over content.<sup>230</sup> He staunchly expressed his commitment to this doctrine in, among other works, ‘How *Don Quixote* is Made’ (Как сделан *Дон-Кухом*, 1920) and *Knight’s Move*, the latter of which became the ‘opening gun’

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<sup>228</sup> Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History–Doctrine*, 3rd edn (London: Yale U.P., 1981), p. 99.

<sup>229</sup> Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 99.

<sup>230</sup> Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 45.

in the Marxist offensive against the Formalist ‘school’ in the form of Lev Trotskii’s *Literature and Revolution (Literatura i revoliutsiia, 1923)*.<sup>231</sup> According to Alastair Renfrew, in these texts Shklovsky rejects the Marxist aesthetic principle that distinguishes between the (economic) ‘base’ and the (ideological) ‘superstructure’, which implies:

Not only that form predominates over content, but does so to such an extent that content, and hence meaning, is finally *expelled*, if not quite from the literary work ‘in itself’, then at least from the process of its study (*emphasis in original*).<sup>232</sup>

This process of ‘expulsion’ involves two interconnected procedures. First, the ‘material’ of the literary work is associated with *fabula*, defined by Erlich as ‘the basic story stuff, the sum-total of events to be related in the work of fiction, [...] the “material for narrative construction”’, which are artistically organised to form its *siuzhet* (the ways in which the *fabula* are linked together) and converted into a variety of processes that would later become a principal focus of Formalist theoretical attention; if a literary work is composed of diverse elements of its ‘pre-literary environment’, then the aim of literary study should be to determine how this process occurs.<sup>233</sup> Secondly, the Soviet Marxist notion of the literary as a bowl into which ready-made material is ‘poured’ is reversed and the material, instead, serves as ‘the

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<sup>231</sup> Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, pp. 45, 100; Lev Trotskii, *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Krasnaia Nov’, 1923; repr. Moscow: Politizdat, 1991)

<sup>232</sup> Alastair Renfrew, ‘Introduction: Between the Lines in the Soviet 1920s’, in *Towards a New Material Aesthetics: Bakhtin, Genre and the Fates of Literary Theory* (London: Legenda, 2006), pp. I-20 (pp. 6, 8).

<sup>233</sup> Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 240; Viktor Shklovsky, *Literature and Cinematography* [1923], trans. by Irina Masinovsky (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008); Renfrew, ‘Introduction’, pp. I-20 (p. 8).

motivation of the constructive device'.<sup>234</sup> Hence, the literary work's 'content' is significant not in itself, but for its facilitation of 'various transformative techniques, specifically, various compositional devices', including 'laying bare' (*obnazhenie*), 'making difficult' (*zatrudnenie*), 'braking' (*tormozhenie*), etc., as basic units of poetic form and agents of literariness.<sup>235</sup> As Shklovsky himself writes:

There are many reasons for the strangeness of the knight's move and the main reason is the conventionality of art... I write about the conventions of art.

Много причин странности хода коня, и главная из них – условность искусства... Я пишу об условности искусства.<sup>236</sup>

This 'conventionality' was a prevalent theme in Shklovsky's writings and in Russian Formalist criticism as a whole. If imaginative literature was a system of signs organised to be 'perceptible', then it was essential to determine the group of conventions superimposed on materials as an aesthetic systematising principle: *what* a literary composition expresses cannot be divorced from *how* it is expressed.<sup>237</sup> Hence, the so-called Russian Formalists deemed the social pressures and psychological processes that influenced a literary work's development irrelevant and instead

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<sup>234</sup> Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 186; Renfrew, 'Introduction', pp. I-20 (p. 8); M. M. Bakhtin and P. N. Medvedev, 'Material and Device as Components of the Poetic Construction', in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (Johns Hopkins U.P.: London, 1978), pp. 104-28 (p. 107).

<sup>235</sup> Renfrew, 'Introduction', pp. I-20 (p. 8); Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 190.

<sup>236</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Pervoe predislovie', *Khod konia* [1923], in *Gamburgskii schet: Stat'i – vospominaniia – esse (1914-1933)* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), pp. 74-75 (p. 74).

<sup>237</sup> See, for example, Viktor Shklovskii, 'Kak sdelan *Don Quixote*', in *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), pp. 91-124.

concerned themselves with identifying the particular aesthetic norms of a given type of literature which impressed on the author, regardless of his social inclinations or artistic disposition.<sup>238</sup>

However, this approach was condemned by philosopher, literary critic, and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin, who suggested that an artwork gains prominence only through the interaction of form, content, and material. Bakhtin observed that the Formalists' doctrine '[could] not be recognised as completely true and satisfactory' (не может быть признана вполне верной и удовлетворительной) because their position remained conditioned by:

An incorrect, or, at best, a methodologically undefined relationship between their constructed poetics and general, systematic, philosophical aesthetics.

Неправильным или в лучшем случае методически неопределенным отношением строяемой ими поэтики к общей систематико-философской эстетике.<sup>239</sup>

In general terms, he considered the meaning of art to accrue from the comprehension of its place and function in the whole of culture and in relation to other cultural domains and his theory of discourse surpassed all binary notions when

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<sup>238</sup> Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 191.

<sup>239</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Problema soderzhaniia, materiala i formy v slovesnom khudozhestvennom tvorchestve' (1924), in *Biblioteka Gumer* <[http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek\\_Buks/Literat/bahtin/probl\\_sod.php](http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_Buks/Literat/bahtin/probl_sod.php)> [accessed 11 February 2009].

he suggested that the ‘unity of the work of art is ensured by form as the verbal expression of a subjective and active relation to content, realized in the material’.<sup>240</sup>

The Formalists’ preservation of a dichotomous appreciation of the relationship between form and content, assigning preference to the former over the latter in their disregard for direct causality, is, therefore, rejected by Bakhtin in favour of a tripartite formula of indissociable form, content, and material. In this final chapter, this opposition will be reflected by a shift of emphasis from the thematic content of Shklovsky’s cinematic works in both their off- and on-screen manifestations to a consideration of form and technique, while a particular concentration on the notion of ‘enstrangement’ as the Formalist ‘master device’ will facilitate progression beyond this traditional artistic dichotomy for an exploration of the Bakhtinian triple internal structure.<sup>241</sup>

‘The play within the film’ describes a dramatic device that enables the construction of a cinematic text containing within its narrative parameters a second theatrical performance, in which on-screen actors appear as on-stage actors playing an additional role. This replication of cinematic actuality is often fortified by an on-screen, ‘internal’ audience whose responses and reactions are intended to be mirrored by the off-screen, ‘external’ audience in the movie theatre. Dramaturgical terms, such as ‘frame play’ or ‘outer play’ (*Rahmenstück, pièce-cadre*) and ‘interior’ or ‘internal play’ (*Binnenstück, pièce-intérieure*), alongside those employed in theories of narrativity, such as *mise en abîme, Rahmenerzählung* (frame story), and *Binnenerzählung* (inner story, or story within a story), are frequently utilised to identify

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<sup>240</sup> Karine Zbinden, *Bakhtin Between East and West: Cross-Cultural Transmission* (London: Legenda, 2005).

<sup>241</sup> Renfrew, ‘Introduction’, pp. I-20 (p. 8).

the main components of the theatrical ‘play within the play’.<sup>242</sup> The import of these terminologies may be transposed to the cinematic medium, where ‘the play within the film’ similarly reproduces an aesthetic experience that already presents a dual reality. The actor, who appears both on-screen in his/her own presence and in the part that he/she is playing, assumes another role upon participation in an ‘internal play’ that incorporates a third identity into his/her representation. In the cinematic works that Shklovsky produced between 1926 and 1932, ‘the play within the film’ manifests itself in a variety of forms and fulfils a variety of functions, operating as an agent of self-reference and self-reflection, a tool to mediate between conventional cinematic genres, a medium for exploring fields of socio-historical and inter-/intra-cultural exchange, and a mode of perception to present alternative perspectives and to allow for seemingly unorthodox interpretations.

The famous Shakespearean metaphor, which was given its definitive shape by the Spanish playwright Calderón de la Barca in the middle of the seventeenth-century, of ‘all the world’s a stage’ is considered by Herbert Herzmann to be a ‘quintessential Baroque figure of speech that expresses the worldview of an entire epoch’.<sup>243</sup> Shklovsky revives Shakespeare’s trope in his film-works through a complex mixture of the comic, tragic, farcical, and emotionally charged that featured as integral elements of Baroque theatre. While it initially seems remarkable that the theatrical language and sign-system of the Baroque expresses the dilemmas of early twentieth-century Soviet art and culture, Shklovsky does, in fact, employ the term ‘Baroque’

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<sup>242</sup> Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner, ‘The Play within the Play: Scholarly Perspectives’, in *The Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*, ed. by Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. xi-xvi (p. xi).

<sup>243</sup> Herbert Herzmann, ‘Play and Reality in Austrian Drama: The Figure of the Magister Ludi’, in *The Play within the Play* (see Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner, eds, above), pp. 220-36 (p. 222).

(*barokko*) to define the style of artistic metalanguage utilised by his contemporaries in their writings for literature, theatre, and cinema.<sup>244</sup> Concerned with notions of a new simplicity of form and the generalisation of details, Shklovsky evaluates texts from the position of the ‘intensive detail’ (*intensivnaia detal’*). Characterised by an explicit nominative function that is associated with the repeated literary perspectives found in the works of Osip Mandelstam, Sergei Eisenstein, Iurii Olesha, Iurii Tynianov, and Isaak Babel’, Shklovsky’s identification of these Modernist writers with a turn towards the Baroque coincides with the much-discussed notion among the Formalist ‘school’ that the history of literature is not an uninterrupted line, but rather a ‘knight’s move’ (*khod konia*), whereby legacy is passed from uncle to nephew (Shklovsky) or from grandfather to grandson (Tynianov).<sup>245</sup> In his *Quest for Optimism (Poiski optimizma*, 1931), Shklovsky refers to many of his generation, including writers, as ‘people of the baroque’ (*liudi barokko*) and concludes that ‘the Baroque, a life of intensive detail, is not a defect, but a characteristic of our time’ (Барокко, жизнь интенсивной детали, не порок, а свойство нашего времени).<sup>246</sup>

In his cinematic writings, however, Shklovsky advances a more ambiguous relationship with the traditional concept of the Baroque. He begins a letter to Eisenstein by praising the filmmaker’s complexity of technique and combination of theory with practice as standard elements of Baroque style:

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<sup>244</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Konets barokko: O liudiakh, kotorye idut po odnoi i toi zhe doroge i ob etom ne znaiut’ [1932], in *Gamburgskii schet: Stat’i – vospominaniia – esse (1914-1933)* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), pp. 448-49.

<sup>245</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, *Literature and Cinematography* [1923], trans. by Irina Masinovsky (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008), p. 33. According to Tynianov’s famous aphorism, in the history of literature ‘there is no return to the past, but only a struggle with fathers, in which a grandson turns out to resemble his grandfather’ (это не возврат к старому, а только борьба с отцами, в которой внук оказывается похожим на деда): see Iurii Tynianov, ‘Promezhutok’ [1924], in *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 168-95 (p. 182).

<sup>246</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Zolotoi krai’ [1931], in *Gamburgskii schet* (see Shklovskii, 1990, above), pp. 443-46 (p. 444).

You have passed from the method of arousing emotions via the method of intellectual cinema, which works through physiological methods, on to a new path.

You now have different things.

You are on the path of classical art.

Вы прошли от метода вызывания эмоций через метод интеллектуального кино, работающего физиологическими методами, на новый путь.

У Вас сейчас иные вещи.

Вы на пути классического искусства.<sup>247</sup>

Paradoxically, however, Shklovsky concludes his correspondence by reminding the avant-garde director of the need for simplicity:

You have to take a simple thing, like any thing, as simple.

The time of the Baroque has passed.

Unbroken art is coming.

Нужно брать простую вещь, как всякую вещь, как простую.

Время барокко прошло.

Наступает непрерывное искусство.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Konets barokko: Pis'mo Eizenshteinu', in *Za sorok let* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 118-19 (pp. 118-19).

<sup>248</sup> Shklovskii, 'Konets barokko: Pis'mo Eizenshteinu', pp. 118-19 (p. 119).

At first, it seems ironic that Shklovsky, the writer and critic who had previously promoted ‘making things difficult’ to denote the way in which art heightens perception and short-circuits the automatised response, boasted a distinctive fragmentary style of writing, and canonised a compound genre-fusion in his autobiographical memoirs should predict the cessation of Baroque and the arrival of an unknown, ‘unbroken art’. In practice, however, Shklovsky utilises ‘the play within the film’ device to fuse disjointed internal episodes without sacrificing sequential autonomy, thereby forming a coherent external narrative in which notions of revolutionary justice can be explored and exposed. His ‘play within the film’ device functions as a complete and self-contained work that depicts a theatrical stage as representative of ‘the world’, but which also features as a discrete part of the film in which it is contained; the internal play thus functions as both fragment and whole. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of Shklovsky’s ‘plays within the film’ are interrupted before completion so that the distinction between ‘fragment’ (the internal theatrical play) and ‘whole’ (the external cinematic aggregate) is irrevocably destroyed. By fracturing the unity of the internal play, Shklovsky simultaneously ‘repairs’ the external film by permitting theatrical events to flow into the cinematic narrative, thereby erasing the boundary between internal and external. Ironically, it appears that Shklovsky is able to utilise characteristics of the Baroque in order to destroy the very notion of ‘intensive detail’ that it signified and welcome the arrival of a new, ‘unbroken art’.

In *The House on Trubnaia Square*, for example, ‘the play within the film’ functions as a narrative catalyst, whereby the interruption of the internal play furthers the events of the external film-text. Fenia invites Parasha to attend the theatrical performance ‘The Storming of the Bastille’ (*Spektakl’ ‘Vzятие Bastilii’*) at the local

workers' club, but Golikov refuses to release his employee from duty and hence



**Fig. 30**

curtains her transition from the confines of the domestic workplace into a public space intended by the regime to operate as a centre of cultural enlightenment.<sup>249</sup> As the club's doors open, shots of an eager crowd rushing into the temporary 'theatre' and clambering over benches to secure the best

seats are intercut with scenes of Parasha sitting alone in the Golikovs' kitchen. The workers' chaotic energy as they applaud, stamp, and play-fight in excitement sharply contrasts with Parasha's slow turning of the head as she surveys the static and near-indeterminate objects that surround her; this juxtaposition firmly situates Parasha within the boundaries of the kitchen as the hub of domestic labour (Fig. 30).

The young girl's attendance at the amateur performance is shortly secured, however, thanks to an unforeseen prop shortage. Moments before 'The Storming of the Bastille' is due to commence, the club's manager discovers that the actors' wigs have been misplaced. He runs across town to the barber's shop to request the loan of substitute hairpieces and, after a frustrating delay when Golikov shaves his final customer, the satisfied club-manager and the remarkably complicit barber depart for the 'theatre' with Parasha and the necessary props in tow. A further backstage calamity necessitates Golikov and Parasha's continued presence at the production: the gentleman cast in the role of General arrives late and is too inebriated to perform. After a little persuasion, Golikov agrees to play the part instead and allows Parasha to join the animated audience. At first, the domestic servant stands apart from the crowd

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<sup>249</sup> Kate Transchel, *Under the Influence: Working-Class Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895-1932* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh U.P., 2006), p. 142.

at the back of the hall, but their whistles, stamps, and shouts soon prove infectious. In the following shots, Parasha becomes increasingly integrated into the audience and soon she is clapping in unison with the entire hall. Her participation in this coordinated action confirms her newly-acquired status as an audience member and her transformation from an individual isolated within the sphere of vocational-based domesticity into a working member of the collective. Previously, the Golikovs' servant was encircled by pots and pans, but now she is surrounded by like-minded,



**Fig. 31**



**Fig. 32**

theatre-hungry, proletarian workers.

As the play begins, a tracking shot progresses down the length of the aisle and reveals the extent to which the entire audience is transfixed by the theatrical events. For Parasha, however, the plot proves so engrossing that the borderline between on-stage 'fiction' and on-screen 'reality' begins to blur. While the domestic servant initially recognizes her friend Semen the chauffeur when he appears on-stage in military uniform, she soon forgets that he is playing a fictional role. Semen stars as the leading

revolutionary who, following several rather convoluted battle scenes, defeats an enemy horde single-handedly and climbs onto a raised platform to declare his side victorious. Full- and mid-length shots of Semen as he issues a triumphant declaration

intercut with close-ups of Parasha's love-struck expression reveal that any romantic feelings that she previously held for the young man have now been cemented and augmented by a performance that she deems representative of Semen's true character; the fictitious public exploits of Semen on-screen/on-stage have potentially affected the personal experience, individual perceptions, and private emotions of Parasha on-screen/off-stage (Fig. 31 and Fig. 32).

The extent to which the boundary between reality/fantasy and private/public has been transgressed is conclusively exposed when the rival army's General, played by Golikov, enters stage right in order to shoot the young revolutionary as he delivers his victory speech. When the General pulls the trigger, Parasha is so overcome by horror that she hurls herself onto the stage and, to the audience's delight, beats Golikov with the revolutionary's flag. Parasha's feelings towards Semen as both on-screen chauffeur (cinematic 'reality') and on-screen/on-stage insurgent (theatrical 'fantasy') become so inextricably intertwined that the servant's private sentiments manifest themselves in a public display of emotion. While Parasha's transgression from private to public following her conflation of the played and unplayed, fantasy and reality is exposed by means of her initial recognition and subsequent perceptual distortion of Semen, no extant visual or written evidence suggests that Parasha ever identifies the General as her employer.

It can therefore be proposed that Shklovsky's 'play within the film' in *The House on Trubnaia Square* features as a meta-theatrical strategy of self-reflection inside a cinematic frame of reference. In the modern context, as defined by Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner as 'the establishment and foundation of a concept of the self' (i.e. the confirmation of a self-conscious subject that surpasses the façade of the behaviours, rights, and obligations dictated by social convention in a given situation),

Parasha, a cinema actor whose character unwittingly becomes a stage ‘actor’, achieves self-affirmation and cements the prospect of her transition from private to public spheres by means of her on-screen and on-stage transcendence of the social roles that had previously been established in the film-text.<sup>250</sup> Parasha’s prior behaviour towards her *khoziain* (master, boss) expressed loyalty, obedience, and an eagerness to please; she even followed Golikov’s commands in the courtyard before he had offered her employment. Golikov, on the other hand, is consistently portrayed as a tyrant and relic of the pre-revolutionary bourgeois past: he expects Parasha to work at home and in the shop simultaneously, steals her application form to join the trade union, and summons her with cries of ‘Boy!’ (*Mal’chik!*). The barber only agrees to fulfil the role of General on account of the club-manager’s flattery that he is ‘a man close to art’ (человек близкий к искусству) and his inflated ego soon proves incapable of contending with insecurities about appearing before a large audience with no rehearsal and only a prompt for guidance.

Consequently, the fictional film’s fictional play publicly reverses the private roles of ‘downtrodden servant’ and ‘oppressive master’ in a transitory attainment of justice: Parasha confidently, yet inadvertently avenges herself for her previous mistreatment at the hands of her employer, while Golikov allows himself, and is allowed by the audience, to be beaten. The internal play’s interruption, then, permits the exposition of the external narrative’s private concerns and their (albeit temporary) rectification in a public context. Shklovsky’s decision to interrupt his ‘play within the film’ erases the segmentation between internal and external narratives, while simultaneously preserving the theatrical performance as a distinguishable event from the film-text in which it is situated. In doing so, traditional dichotomies of

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<sup>250</sup> Fischer and Greiner, ‘The Play within the Play: Scholarly Perspectives’, pp. xi-xvi (p. xiii).

private/public, domestic/social, played/unplayed, and reality/fantasy are irreversibly dissolved. The ‘intensive detail’ that Shklovsky identifies as characteristic of the Baroque is thus paradoxically utilised in this instance in order to destroy the conception of an overly-elaborate style and to create an example of ‘unbroken’ cinematic art.

While Shklovsky exploits ‘the play within the film’ as a creative technique for exploring notions of justice both on a technical level, by reflecting and accentuating in the internal theatrical play an element of the external cinematic narrative, and on a philosophical level, by blurring the boundaries between different levels of fiction and hence challenging the viewer’s perception of reality, he also elucidates the administration of justice as a thematic problem from numerous (and often mutually exclusive) perspectives. In *The House on Trubnaia Square*, for instance, elements of the tragic and comic (genres traditionally deemed incompatible from a systematic viewpoint) are united in the film’s internal productions, while this cross-genre and cross-medium application of a self-reflexive device illustrates how Romantic irony functions in the feature’s form and content at different levels of authorial control.

The German writer and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel’s definition of Romantic irony believes its two major features to be (1) the harmonious mixture of the comic and the serious, and (2) self-reflexivity, i.e. a work that reflects back on itself and its own existence.<sup>251</sup> For Schlegel, the comic is a crucial component of the serious and, as a result, fiction becomes the ideal conduit for the conveyance of truth. As the distinctions between the comic and the serious, appearance and truth increasingly blur, the ensuing instability (or irony) obliges the audience to consider

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<sup>251</sup> Yifen Beus, ‘Self-Reflexivity in the Play within the Play and its Cross-Genre Manifestation’, in *The Play within the Play* (see Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner, eds, above), pp. 15-26 (p. 16).

reality from both within and without the work. In the theatrical context, as referred to by Schlegel, this conglomerate of artistic and commonplace qualities reflects an enquiring attitude towards the traditional, classical views of reality and truth, and subsequently proves essential to ‘the play within the play’ as a device of deception and illusion that possesses a broader truth-telling power about the nature of the performance.<sup>252</sup>

According to Fredric Jameson, Shklovsky and Schlegel have much in common as leading figures of literary ‘movements’ in parallel moments of creation and synthesis: the unification of seminal ideas, intellectual impudence, and a disjointed artistic style that lead to the canonization of the fragment as a genre.<sup>253</sup> In parallel with Schlegel’s treatment of the theatrical context, Shklovsky in the film-medium uses the philosophical potential of ‘the play within the film’ to embrace ontological and epistemological concerns about the distinction between fiction, illusion, and reality in general. Svetlana Boym maintains that in Schlegel’s definition, Romantic irony ‘presupposes open-endedness, a vertigo of self-questioning, and a possibility of self-transcendence’ and therefore presents itself as a truly Shklovskian device for exploring notions of truth and justice in its encouragement of individual assimilation and interpretation as part of a collective experience.<sup>254</sup>

One such instance of the unification of these disparate genres occurs in ‘the play within the film’ sequence where the events of an otherwise tragic episode are altered to the extent that not only the incident itself, but also the film in which it

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<sup>252</sup> Beus, ‘Self-Reflexivity in the Play within the Play’, pp. 15-26 (p. 17).

<sup>253</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton U.P., 1974), pp. 47-48.

<sup>254</sup> Svetlana Boym, ‘Poetics and Politics of Estrangement: Victor Shklovsky and Hannah Arendt’, *Poetics Today*, 26:4 (Winter 2005), 581-611 (p. 607, n. 26).

appears can still be considered comic.<sup>255</sup> The viewer is presented with a potentially disquieting illustration of Parasha's behaviour as she mercilessly beats her employer in the presence of others, but this violence is defused by the scriptwriters' provision of the off-screen audience with a more extensive knowledge of the circumstances that surround the imbroglio than that possessed by the protagonist herself. An awareness of Golikov's previous cruelty towards his domestic servant in conjunction with the striking visual nature of his grotesque stage make-up emotionally distances the viewer from the physical pain that Parasha causes him as she passionately seizes the opportunity to avenge herself. Hence, even during the sequence's most threatening and prospectively tragic moment, both the internal play and the film in which it appears remain essentially comic; on the one hand, all potentially negative emotional responses are neutralized by the audience's knowledge of Parasha's unconscious attainment of justice and, on the other, the action's multiple distancing enables the continuation of this comic tone without obfuscating the episode's symbolic message.

While this 'play within the film' generates comedy from tragedy, it soon proves capable of reversing this process. Parasha's intrusion into the internal play is considered by the on-screen audience to be a hilarious, unsurpassable finale and the events on-stage are swiftly concluded after her impromptu 'defeat' of the revolutionary enemy. Parasha's 'performance' is greeted with a standing ovation and, upon leaving the hall, she is subsumed by the crowd and thrown into the air in

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<sup>255</sup> A critical review by E. Skachkova and Kapronova published in *Kino* magazine just over two months after the release of *The House on Trubnaia Square* declares that the film boasts 'few comic moments, but, to compensate, these moments are witty, motivated, and truthful' (Мало комических моментов, но зато они остроумны, осмысленны и правдивы): see E. Skachkova and Kapronova, "'Dom na Trubnoi'", *Kino*, 13 November 1928. See also SKhF, 'Dom na Trubnoi', p. 259; 'Pervym ekranom': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 263, l. 5; 'Pokaz fil'ma "Dom na Trubnoi"': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 263, [no pagination]; GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 263, l. 10.

celebration. Golikov, however, refuses to participate in the festivities, leads Parasha outside the club to avoid spectators, and reprimands her severely. The outdoors, by definition an open and public environment, is subsequently converted into a private and isolated space and the comic sequence concurrently descends into the depths of tragedy. With his make-up smudged and facial prosthetics partially detached (monstrously symbolising his transgression from an on-stage/on-screen General to off-stage/on-screen employer), Golikov pushes Parasha and orders her to ‘get out of the house’ (*Von, iz doma!*). The lack of a possessive pronoun in the barber’s command not only depersonalises the building on Trubnaia Square for both himself and Parasha, but also, paradoxically, emphasises the severity of Parasha’s loss; she has been evicted not only from the Golikovs’ home, but also from the entire block in which their flat is situated.

The significance of this personal and social forfeiture is symbolised when Parasha returns her apron to Golikov: the comic events of ‘the play within the film’ have caused her to lose her home, employment, collective living space, opportunity to join the trade union, and hope of participation in the club’s activities. Hence, her attainment of justice has, at this point in the narrative, been momentarily reversed. With the parting words, ‘May you never set foot in here again!’ (Чтоб твоей ноги не было), Golikov re-enters the workers’ club, thereby appropriating the space originally intended for his servant as his own. Parasha, unable to return to the house on Trubnaia Square or inside the makeshift theatre, is now truly isolated. As she casts one last look into the club’s entrance before slowly tottering into the shadows at the back of the frame, the filmmakers underscore the extent to which the fusion of the comic and the tragic in the internal play has destroyed all possibilities for establishing a boundary

between private and public and achieving justice in the domestic and social spheres at this point in the external narrative.

### **Art Beyond Representation**

*The Last Attraction*, released two years after *The House on Trubnaia Square*, contains three examples of ‘the play within a film’ device (two circus shows and a theatrical production) that are instigated by the circus artists themselves. As the only film that Shklovsky worked on in the given period that specifically concentrates on the exploits of a band of entertainers, it seems fitting that *The Last Attraction* should also contain the highest number of internal performances. Unlike the theatrical shows in *The House on Trubnaia Square* and *Potholes*, or the dance ‘performances’ in *The Traitor* and *The Ice House*, the internal productions in *The Last Attraction* are primarily based in the realm of the circus. In a short critical piece originally published in the newspaper *Zhizn’ iskusstva*, Shklovsky discusses the structure of art as that which transforms material into something artistically experienced.<sup>256</sup> He considers the arrangement and techniques of the circus performance and divides a traditional show as follows:

[F]irst, the farcical-theatrical section (with clowns); second, the acrobatic section; third, animal performances – artistically structured only in its first section.

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<sup>256</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Iskusstvo tsirka’ [1919], in *Gamburgskii schet* (see Shklovskii, 1990, above), pp. 106-07.

[В]о-первых, фарсово-театральную часть (у клоунов); во-вторых, на часть акробатическую; в-третьих, на представление со зверями, – художественно построены только в первой своей части.<sup>257</sup>

Shklovsky maintains that the individual acts of these three sections cannot be considered ‘art’: only the circus performance in its entirety belongs to this category.<sup>258</sup> Consequently, in the first internal production in *The Last Attraction* (a street performance described in an early libretto as ‘ideologically inconsistent, but interesting’ [*ideologicheski nevyderzhanno, no interesno*]), it is important to note the presence of farcical-theatrical elements (clowns, feats of strength, music-making) and acrobatic displays (stilt- and tightrope walking), whereas animal performances appear in neither this, nor in any of the film’s other internal productions.<sup>259</sup>

The omission of this essential structural component from the troupe’s first show is explained by the performance’s interruption and consequent cessation by Kurapov; since the political agitator disturbs Shklovsky’s configuration of a traditional circus performance, it follows that he will be required to complete it again. Following the travelling circus’ requisition, Kurapov repaints their funeral-hearse-cum-circus-caravan’s exterior with the slogan, ‘The enemy brings slavery, hunger, and death’ (Враг несет рабство, голод и смерть), before suggesting to his ‘comrades’ (*tovarishchi*) that they prepare to leave. The artists express their dissatisfaction at their unexpected and forced loss of independence by stubbornly refusing to enter the vehicle and leaving Kurapov to saddle the horses himself. Klim, Serzh, Vanechka, and Polly cannot conceal their laughter as Kurapov, delivering

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<sup>257</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Iskusstvo tsirka’, pp. 106-07 (p. 106).

<sup>258</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Iskusstvo tsirka’, pp. 106-07 (pp. 106-07).

<sup>259</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Agit-Furgon’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 61-62 (l. 61).

standard equestrian commands with a whip, proves incapable of exerting control over the circus animal. Maria, however, takes pity on the propagandist, walks behind the caravan and, believing herself to be hidden from view, secretly instructs Kurapov to throw down the tool. The political agitator obeys and the horse immediately calms.

In accordance with the devices of *zatrudnenie* ('making difficult') and 'enstrangement', a section of Shklovsky's tripartite formula for a traditional circus performance is removed from within a conventional 'play within the film' setting and transposed to the external narrative where it becomes not only a cause for the artists' amusement and an accurate reflection of their mood and attitude, but also a narrative catalyst and trigger for individual character development.<sup>260</sup> While four of the performers delight in Kurapov's struggle with the horse, perceiving the event as a form of retribution for the forced requisitioning of their domestic and vocational environments, Maria's 'betrayal' injects the narrative with the element of romance (*roman*) that critics from both the studios and the censorial board had advised Shklovsky to introduce.<sup>261</sup> On the one hand, the physical manifestation of Maria's (unreciprocated) affections towards Kurapov inflames Serzh's jealousy, which, in

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<sup>260</sup> The benefit of staggering events throughout the narrative was also emphasised by Shklovsky in a characteristically anecdotal *feuilleton*: 'I understand the joy of the inventor, choked with ideas that are jumping over each other in his head like a flock of sheep. But all the same, upon seeing all possible tricks united in one place, I remembered that [...] high school student who wrote his composition without a single punctuation mark and placed all the marks there are in a large clump at the very end, and I want to end my article with that student's phrase: "Take your places" (Я понимаю радость изобретателя, захлебывающегося от мыслей, которые у него в голове прыгают друг через друга, как бараны в стаде. Но все же, видя всевозможные трюки, соединенные в одном месте, я вспомнил [...] гимназиста, написавшего свое сочинение без единого знака препинания и поставившего все знаки, какие есть, и в большом количестве, в самом конце, и мне хочется кончить свою статью фразой этого гимназиста: "Марш по местам"): see Viktor Shklovskii, 'Komicheskoe i tragicheskoe' [1921], in *Gamburgskii schet* (see Shklovskii, 1990, above), pp. 113-15 (p. 115).

<sup>261</sup> See, for example, 'Agit-furgon': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 58; V. Shurkin, 'Agit-furgon': GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, l. 60.

turn, rouses the protective instincts of the remaining circus artists; Maria, described by Shklovsky as ‘the circus’ bone of contention’ (*iabloko razdora tsirka*), is subsequently alienated from the rest of the group.<sup>262</sup> On the other, the shift from public performance to private spectacle as dictated by Shklovsky’s structural delay denotes the onset of Kurapov’s integration into the travelling circus.

Shklovsky writes that the circus has no need of plot or beauty because the element of difficulty is always present: ‘it is difficult to lift weights, it is difficult to bend like a snake, it is terrifying, that is, also difficult, to put your head in the jaws of a lion. [...] Making it difficult – that is the circus device’ (Трудно поднять тяжесть, трудно изогнуться змеей, страшно, то есть тоже трудно, вложить голову в пасть льва. [...] Затруднение – вот цирковой прием).<sup>263</sup> Despite Kurapov’s initial difficulty in controlling the horse, symbolizing the naivety of his spontaneous and forceful requisitioning of a travelling circus, his eventual mastery of the animal and ability to overcome such challenges with Maria’s assistance reveals his underlying potential to become a circus performer, as well as a more effective agitator, in a variation of the obligatory Soviet narrative journey to revolutionary consciousness. By delaying the cinematic appearance of the third component of the internal circus show, Shklovsky transforms a public performance into a private demonstration that functions not only to obtain justice for the despondent circus artists, but also to initiate Kurapov’s character development as he discovers how to engage with those citizens around him who may not yet share his unrestrained passion for attaining revolutionary ideals.

This interpretation is further fortified in the second ‘play within the film’, when Kurapov is obliged to lead the circus artists in a performance for Cossack

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<sup>262</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Libretto’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 82-92 (l. 83).

<sup>263</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Iskusstvo tsirka’, pp. 106-07 (p. 107).

villagers. Despite not possessing any circus-related skills, Kurapov proves his worth as both artist and delegate by replacing his lack of training with humour. Wearing fake muscles, the commissar effortlessly spins an artificial dumbbell in order to demonstrate his ‘incredible strength’ to the viewing public. Vanechka the strongman, unwilling to allow Kurapov to steal his act, grabs the weights from the political agitator, places them on the ground, and declares, ‘Cheat! He can’t do it like that!’ (Мошенничество, он так не умеет!) Vanechka then pretends to lift the dumbbell as if it is, in fact, incredibly heavy. The revelation of the trick’s secret before it is performed delights the crowd and, for this reason alone, Vanechka welcomes Kurapov into the circus: ‘Let me shake your hand, as artist to artist’ (Позвольте пожать вам руку, как артист-артисту [*sic*]). Kurapov takes advantage of his theatrical success to halt the performance, circulate revolutionary literature, and deliver an agitational speech to the villagers.

While Shklovsky, in his position as both a theoretician and practitioner associated with the so-called ‘school’ of Formalism, aims ‘to undermine an idea of “faithful” realistic representation and, by extension, deterministic conceptions of the relationship between art and life’, in these two examples of ‘the play within the film’ the scriptwriter does, in fact, ironically foreground the material relationship between the two culturally remote phenomena.<sup>264</sup> The situation of the internal play (on-stage/on-screen ‘reality’) in a cinematic framework where it is watched by villagers (on-screen ‘reality’) in a movie theatre where it is seen by the ‘live’ audience (off-screen reality) artistically distances ‘the play within the film’ in a three-part enstrangement, thereby recalling not only the triangular relationship between

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<sup>264</sup> Renfrew, ‘Introduction’, pp. I-20 (p. 8).

Kurapov, Maria, and Serzh, but also Bakhtin's tripartite aesthetic formula of content, material, and form.

Jurij Striedter defines the principal objectives of estrangement as follows: 'to make an already automated perception difficult; to attain in this way a new seeing of the objects; and thus to correct one's attitude to the surrounding world (*Umwelt*)'.<sup>265</sup> This notion of 'automated' (or automatised) perception had been borrowed by the Russian Formalists from Henri Bergson and the psychology of William James, but, according to Caryl Emerson, the theorists proceeded to aestheticise the idea and reinforce its dependency on the material world.<sup>266</sup> When an individual's perceptions become automatised, he/she ceases to be stimulated by his/her immediate environment and when he/she walks around a room, dusts a sofa, and cannot remember whether or not the sofa has already been dusted, his/her 'life, held accountable for nothing, fades into nothingness' (пропадает, в ничто вмняясь, жизнь).<sup>267</sup> Such an individual requires ideas conveyed by means of startling images and juxtapositions, the shock of which will jolt him/her in an unexpected mental direction.

Subsequently, in the Shklovskian scenario, the body is presented like any other 'material' (in the Formalist sense of the word) and waits for the application of a device that will arouse it and save it from automatised life, which 'eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at one's wife, at one's fear of war' (съедает вещи, платье,

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<sup>265</sup> Jurij Striedter (1981 [1969]), quoted in Galin Tihanov, 'The Politics of Estrangement: The Case of the Early Shklovsky', *Poetics Today*, 26:4 (Winter 2005), 665-96 (p. 672, n. 14).

<sup>266</sup> Caryl Emerson, 'Shklovsky's *ostranenie*, Bakhtin's *vnenakhodimost'* (How Distance Serves an Aesthetics of Arousal Differently from an Aesthetics Based on Pain)', *Poetics Today*, 26:4 (Winter 2005), 637-64, p. 645.

<sup>267</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Iskusstvo, kak priem' [1917], in *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), pp. 7-23 (pp. 12-13).

мебель, жену и страх войны).<sup>268</sup> As Bakhtin argues in his critique of the Formalists' pursuit of precision, real-life material cannot be so easily detached from art because 'real life' is already aestheticized; life only becomes 'real' in 'aesthetic intuition' (*esteticheskaia intuitsiia*) and there is no 'neutral reality' (*neitral'naia deistvitel'nost'*) that exists in opposition to art.<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, the Formalists' desire to establish art as an objective enterprise of scientific inquiry prevented them from realising that art's autonomy is guaranteed not by its seclusion from life but, paradoxically, by its participation in it: by the 'unique, necessary, and irreplaceable place' (своеобразное, [...] необходимое и незаместимое место) it inhabits in life.<sup>270</sup>



**Fig. 33**



**Fig. 34**

Hence, the boundary between private and public is once more transgressed in both directions simultaneously as artistic triple distancing and the prominence assigned to the material relationship between life and art proves the ideal vehicle for rewarding Kurapov's 'correct' revolutionary/agitational behaviour. The second 'play within the film' not only enables Kurapov to advance his private concerns into the public realm as he becomes

<sup>268</sup> Shklovskii, 'Iskusstvo, kak priem', pp. 7-23 (p. 13); Emerson, 'Shklovsky's *ostranenie*, Bakhtin's *vnenakhodimost'*', 637-64, p. 645.

<sup>269</sup> Bakhtin, 'Problema sodержaniia, materiala i formy'; Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1990), p. 79.

<sup>270</sup> Bakhtin, 'Problema sodержaniia, materiala i formy'.

increasingly integrated into the circus troupe, performing effectively as both artist and propagandist, but also exceeds the agitator's own expectations with regard to his abilities for contributing effectively to the pro-Bolshevik cause and lays the foundations for further character development. Certainly, the image of Kurapov distributing literature from atop the *agitfurgon* that he himself requisitioned and re-decorated leaves a more indelible impression than his earlier self-projection of success onto a wooden easel (Fig. 33 and Fig. 34).

The silhouettes of Serzh and Maria positioned behind Kurapov as he agitates not only serve as a visual reminder of the commissar's current dependency on the circus for his political campaign, but also reflect the tightrope walkers' individual attitudes towards him: Maria watches Kurapov attentively and strains to listen to his declarations, while Serzh looks away and downwards, miserable at the commissar's success. While initially it was Serzh, shot from below, who merited the audience's focus as he awoke and played his guitar atop the *agitfurgon*, now it is Kurapov who stands on top of the vehicle and commands the spectators' attention. It can therefore be argued that this second 'play within the film' uniquely demonstrates the organic unity of form, material, and content in the film-text by exposing personal tensions in the most public of environments, developing Kurapov's personal qualities in relation to those around him without necessitating his full integration into the circus troupe, and exhibiting the extent to which he has developed as artist, propagandist, and revolutionary. The fusion of Kurapov's moral incentive, collective interest, and revolutionary consciousness with his motivation for material gain, concern for personal success, and awareness of individuality via 'the play within the film' allows Shklovsky, it seems, to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable.

## Entertainment and/or Enlightenment

While ‘the play within the film’ device dissolves the distinction between private and public and internal and external concerns when exploring notions of fairness and equality in *The Last Attraction* as a single, unified film-text, it also addresses Shklovsky’s personal inclinations as scriptwriter towards the aesthetic, commercial, social, and political issues that influenced the film’s development in the second half of the 1920s. Following the travelling circus’ requisition, the name of the troupe is changed from ‘The Harlequin Assassin’ (*Arlekin ubiitsa*) to ‘The Red Harlequin’ (*Krasnyi arlekin*) to reflect the group’s recently-imposed pro-Bolshevik credentials (although, ironically, it is only once the troupe adopts this revolutionary orientation that its members become involved in acts of murder) and their caravan-cum-*agitfurgon* is driven into a Cossack village for the circus’ first agitational show.

In his initial treatment of this episode, Shklovsky writes that ‘The Red Harlequin’ cannot perform in the village because it scares away the local inhabitants.<sup>271</sup> The troupe endeavours to attract an audience for their up-coming show by passing through the countryside playing drums and trumpets ‘in the American style’ (*po-amerikanski*).<sup>272</sup> Yet this alarms the village’s residents so greatly that they evacuate their homes, leaving the puzzled performers with no option but to continue their journey. Hence, the now-pro-Bolshevik circus is unable to attract and sustain the attention of its viewing public in the same way that it did when it was politically neutral. Interestingly, however, in the Cossacks’ haste to flee the village, produce is left behind for the troupe (*im ostalis’ produkty*).<sup>273</sup> Shklovsky does not specify

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<sup>271</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Agit-Furgon’, ll. 61-62.

<sup>272</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Agit-Furgon’, ll. 61-62.

<sup>273</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Agit-Furgon’, ll. 61-62 (l. 61).

whether this ostensible ‘forgetfulness’ assumes the form of a payment, donation, peace-offering, or sacrifice; nevertheless, it appears that the circus has, in fact, achieved its primary agitational aim by collecting food for the starving cities. The performers’ inability to connect with the masses, however, does not go unpunished and their departure from the rural community soon results in their capture and detention by the enemy’s army.<sup>274</sup>

In the final cinematic production, ‘The Red Harlequin’ enters a Cossack village in a similar fashion: the *agitfurgon* clatters over a hilltop as Serzh grinds the organ and Maria dances atop the vehicle’s roof. All the local population, including children, geese, and a goat, run away in fright, and one woman even prostrates herself as she does so. In contradistinction to Shklovsky’s initial libretto, however, the troupe succeeds in drawing the villagers back towards their circus-caravan by blowing kisses and turning cartwheels. This re-establishes the performers’ rapport with the viewing public that had been so readily obtainable when they were politically neutral. The performance continues with displays of acrobatics, slapstick gags, and clowning, and concludes with an exemplary agitational demonstration; the troupe’s originally shocking American-style entrance and nonsensical circus acts facilitate not only the entertainment, but also the enlightenment of the Cossack viewing public.

Shklovsky’s exploration of different techniques for the effective dissemination of propaganda proves highly pertinent when considering his selection of the ‘Civil War’ template in the Soviet cinematic context. During the Civil War years (1917-22), early Soviet pedagogues and ‘proletarian’ artists had actively promoted ‘popular’ art, or ‘art for the masses’, by transforming the concept of ‘popular cinema’; movies that appealed to the majority (i.e. those which contained love, sex, violence, humour,

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<sup>274</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Agit-Furgon’, ll. 61-62 (ll. 61-62).

action, human interest, and/or happy endings) were to be modified into vehicles for social, political, and cultural enlightenment.<sup>275</sup> Under the terms of NEP, however, cinema became a commercial commodity and disagreements over the medium's role and purpose arose almost immediately between Glavpolitprosvet (Narkompros' Main Committee on Political Education) and Sovkino.<sup>276</sup> While both parties agreed that 'futurist' or 'formalist' art was not the preferred choice of the people (as consumers), the institutions disagreed over whether 'movies for the masses' involved the audience's entertainment or enlightenment. Glavpolitprosvet advocated the educational film and cinefication campaign and attacked both avant-garde and entertainment features as incompatible with the aims of socialist society. The avant-garde also criticized the entertainment film as a 'bourgeois' and 'petit-bourgeois' creation, but Sovkino believed that the only way to secure the future of the Soviet film industry was to release movies that the population wanted to see (i.e. foreign hits or their Soviet equivalents).<sup>277</sup> Part of the revenue generated by these commercial endeavours would then be invested into the production of movies that were less likely to be financially successful.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 32-33, 38; 'The Fate of Soviet Popular Cinema during the Stalin Revolution', *Russian Review*, 50:2 (April 1991), 148-62 (p. 152).

<sup>276</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, 'The Entertainment or Enlightenment Debate', in her *Movies for the Masses*, pp. 35-49.

<sup>277</sup> It is important to remember that the avant-garde was not a coherent group; avant-gardists disagreed over such issues as the use of montage and, later, the use of sound, the role of the actor, the relative revolutionary merits of the documentary over the played film, etc. Yet they all believed that their works would raise the artistic consciousness of the masses and the majority condemned the films that were proposed for mass consumption by the pedagogues and proletarians. Richard Taylor discusses the 'art or entertainment' debate in his article 'Ideology and Popular Culture in Soviet Cinema: *The Kiss of Mary Pickford*', in *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema*, ed. by Anna Lawton (London: Routledge, 1992; repr. 2002), pp. 42-65.

<sup>278</sup> Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, p. 39.

By the initiation of the All-Union Party Conference on Cinema Affairs, however, authorities expressed their concern that cinema consisted merely of a ‘leftist’ deviation (avant-garde experimental films with an unintelligible message) and a ‘rightist’ deviation (imitations of commercial Hollywood models).<sup>279</sup> While the conference’s central polemic concentrated on Sovkino’s accountability for the film industry’s lack of social responsibility and absence of a secure financial basis, its proceedings also addressed the question of whether or not ideologically acceptable films could also entertain mass audiences.<sup>280</sup>

By the end of the year, a ‘crisis theory’ was identified in Soviet cinema.<sup>281</sup> Ippolit Sokolov published an article in *Kino* entitled ‘The Reasons for the Latest Failures’ (*Prichiny poslednikh neudach*), in which experimentalism was isolated as the primary cause for Soviet cinema’s current state. Sokolov declared Shklovsky to be a proponent of a ‘leftist infantile sickness’ of innovation, and wrote, ‘We need genuine mastery, but not naïve so-called “inventiveness”’.<sup>282</sup> Owing to filmmakers like Shklovsky, Soviet cinema was characterized by films such as *The House on Trubnaia Square* and *The Captain’s Daughter*, which Sokolov claimed were like ‘prison sentences’ to watch.<sup>283</sup> G. Lenobl’ responded to Sokolov’s article by writing that progress in cinema was impossible without experimentation, and that artists, like

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<sup>279</sup> B. S. Ol’khovyi, ed., ‘Party Cinema Conference Resolution: The Results of Cinema Construction in the USSR and the Tasks of Soviet Cinema’, in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*, ed. by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, trans. by Richard Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1988; repr. London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 208-15; Peter Kenez, ‘The Cultural Revolution in Cinema’, *Slavic Review*, 47:3 (Autumn 1988), 414-33 (p. 422).

<sup>280</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918-1935* (Austin: Texas U.P., 1991), p. 157; Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, ‘1928: Introduction’, in their *The Film Factory*, pp. 191-94 (p. 191).

<sup>281</sup> Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era*, p. 169.

<sup>282</sup> Ippolit Sokolov, ‘Prichiny poslednikh neudach’, *Kino*, 1928, pp. 4-5.

<sup>283</sup> Sokolov, ‘Prichiny poslednikh neudach’, pp. 4-5.

everyone else, have the right to make mistakes. As Shklovsky himself had written the previous year in *Novyi Lef*:

Art very often moves forward because mistakes are made and unresolvable tasks are set. A mistake that is properly noted and carried through to its conclusion turns out to be an invention.

Но искусство очень часто подвигается вперед благодаря постановке неразрешимых задач и ошибкам. Правильно намеченная и до конца проведенная ошибка оказывается изобретением.<sup>284</sup>

Shklovsky's device of the internal play in *The Last Attraction* is clearly one such remarked invention, distinguished by its overt exploration of whether serving the masses meant entertaining or enlightening them. From the viewpoint of efficient propaganda as portrayed in Kurapov's revolutionary plight, the circus troupe's second production is undoubtedly their most successful. The crowd roar with laughter at the circus acts, watch attentively as Kurapov delivers his agitational speech, and race to catch revolutionary pamphlets as they fall through the air (despite their presumably low levels of literacy).<sup>285</sup> Kurapov's passionate gesticulations as he stands on top of the *agitfurgon* even remind the viewer of those poses struck by Lenin as he delivers a stirring revolutionary speech in the closing sequence of *The Press Machine*, co-

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<sup>284</sup> G. Lenobl', 'Cherez porazheniia k pobedam', *Kino*, 1928, p. 5; V. Shklovskii, 'Oshibki i izobreniia (Diskussionno)', *Novyi Lef*, 11-12 (November-December 1927), 29-33 (p. 29).

<sup>285</sup> For details on the extent of peasant illiteracy during the Civil War period, see Peter Kenez, 'The Struggle for the Peasants', in his *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 50-69.

authored by Shklovsky, G. Mdivani (who worked with Shklovsky during the script-development process for the feature films *Victorious Youth* and *It's Very Simple*), and Georgii Sturua for the Georgian studio Goskinprom Gruzii. The circus show in the Cossack village is notable for its status as the only uninterrupted internal performance in *The Last Attraction* and, as such, its conclusion is presented as a natural, positive, and enlightening climax for a truly entertaining display.

The extent to which this demonstration of a delicate balance between entertainment and enlightenment for the purpose of realising a particular revolutionary objective can be considered successful is made all the more explicit when the film's second internal play is compared with its third. The curtains of a self-constructed theatre open to reveal Klim attached to a spider's web, rolling his eyes, and dressed in a top hat emblazoned with an American flag and a sack labelled Capital (*kapital*). Polly enters stage-right wearing fairy wings, ballet shoes, a large hat with a feather, and a crudely painted sign attached to her rear that reads 'The World Bourgeoisie' (*Mirovaia burzhuaziia*). She assists Capital in dismantling the spider's



**Fig. 35**

cutting down the web of capitalism, Serzh as the Young Revolutionary holding a bayonet over the defeated Capital and World Bourgeoisie, Maria the Peasant Girl

web, whereupon the personified political and social 'evils' cuddle and dance across the stage, before Vanechka, in the role of Metalworker, emerges to destroy them. The 'play' concludes with a group image of the Metalworker

clasping wheat and raising a giant sickle in triumph, and Kurapov emerging to deliver his propagandistic speech (Fig. 35).

Undoubtedly, the ‘plot’ of this internal production is more explicitly related to the aims and objectives of the revolutionary plight than the haphazard sequence of variety acts previously shown in the Cossack village. A series of cuts from the action on-stage/on-screen to the audience’s reaction off-stage/on-screen initially implies that an increase in overtly revolutionary content has resulted in a corresponding increase in immediate ideological impact: as the Metalworker hacks down Capital’s web, audience members cheer and a man situated front row centre mimics the chopping action, as if holding the hatchet himself.

However, the energy exuded by this peasant audience does not compare with that generated by the spectators in either of the film’s previous internal plays, or in ‘The Storming of the Bastille’ in *The House on Trubnaia Square*. Rather than concentrating on the dramatisation before them, the children in the audience amuse themselves by playing games and imitating the peasant women spitting sunflower seeds, while their elders talk at the back of the hall and only direct the occasional glance towards the events on-stage.<sup>286</sup> The potential of this third internal play for direct ideological influence was, in fact, severely curtailed during the script-development process. In one of Shklovsky’s librettos, for example, Kurapov’s speech reduces an old woman to tears, inducing her to shove the man sitting next to her and

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<sup>286</sup> Sunflower seeds are a popular snack food in Russia; they are chewed and their husks are spat out. Shklovskii utilises this culinary habit not only in *The Last Attraction* to express the audience’s lack of interest in the theatrical proceedings, but also in *The Cossacks* to present the village women as pre-emancipatory, uneducated, and uncultured, in an early treatment of *Third Meshchanskaia Street* to distinguish the streetwalkers from other women in Moscow, and in *The Prostitute* where Liuba offends a young boy’s mother by offering seeds to the child; his mother tells him, ‘Have nothing to do with Liubka – she’s a fallen woman’ (С Любкой не знайся – она пропащая).

shout, ‘You feed the pigs with bread and just look at the hunger there!’ (А ты вот свиной кормишь хлебом – вишь голод то там [sic]).<sup>287</sup> This exclamation, which boasts an unequivocal demonstration of the persuasive nature of Kurapov’s propaganda, along with all other verbal indications of the audience’s reaction, was not included in the film’s final edit. Undoubtedly, a more ecstatic and enthusiastic audience response was generated by the film’s second internal play, the content of which encompassed cartwheels, music-making, and visual puns. These tricks hardly reflect the constructive edification and pedagogic didacticism promoted by supporters of ‘enlightenment’, but they ultimately prove to be the most effective means of attracting and retaining the audience’s attention when attempting to convey a particular ideological message. It therefore appears that while Glavpolitprosvet and Sovkino disagreed on whether serving the masses meant entertaining or enlightening them, Shklovsky exploited ‘the play within the film’ device to demonstrate that the achievement of one does not necessarily have to occur at the exclusion of the other; as Shklovsky had previously noted in *Novyi Lef*, ‘the times have demanded their own cinema’ (время вытребовало себе свою кинематографию).<sup>288</sup>

### **Intertextual and Intercultural Authorial Strategies**

Shklovsky incorporates a modification of ‘the play within the film’ device into an early libretto for *Third Meshchanskaia Street* by introducing an episode where Volodia escorts Kolia’s wife to the cinema to see the commercially successful American farce *The Marriage Circle* (Fig. 36). In Shklovsky’s treatment of this

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<sup>287</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Agitfurgon (Poslednii attraktsion)’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 705, ll. 115-22 (l. 119).

<sup>288</sup> Shklovskii, ‘Oshibki i izobreteniiia’, pp. 29-33 (p. 31).

episode, ‘the film within the film’ commences and *The Marriage Circle* is presented like this: ‘a parallel play of frames and intertitles from the picture and shots of Semenova and Fogel’ (параллельная игра кадров и надписей из картины и Семеновской и Фогеля).<sup>289</sup> *The Marriage Circle*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch and released in 1924, narrates the (mis)endeavours of divorce-bound Professor Josef



**Fig. 36**

Stock, whose wife, Mizzi, attempts to seduce Dr. Franz Braun, the husband of her best friend Charlotte. Charlotte, in turn, is admired by Dr. Gustav Mueller, Braun’s new business partner, but neither she, nor her husband pay heed to Mueller’s infatuation. Stock employs

a detective to obtain evidence of his wife’s infidelities for the divorce proceedings, which leads to a series of gross misunderstandings that include Charlotte’s request for the coquettish Mizzi to look after her husband, as she fears that he has been unfaithful. Despite the ensuing commotion, arguments, and embarrassments, the film concludes with Braun and Charlotte’s happy reunion and the turning of Mizzi and Mueller’s attentions towards each other.

Shklovsky’s alternation of such Western, ‘petit-bourgeois’ incidents with Volodia and Liuda’s responses to them enables the scriptwriter to exploit the broad appeal of an American feature, which embraces love, comedy, action, and human interest, for the accentuation of existing cultural and class boundaries between capitalist America and post-revolutionary Soviet society. The relationship between foreign cinematic products and Soviet film culture had been an integral part of the entertainment/enlightenment debate since Goskino’s establishment (and Sovkino’s

<sup>289</sup> Viktor Sklovskii, ‘Libretto: “Liubov’ vtroem”’: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, ll. 214-24 (l. 218).

continuation) of the importation of foreign films as its fundamental policy for resurrecting the Soviet film industry. In the 1920s almost two thirds of the pictures exhibited in the Soviet Union had been imported from overseas, while the number of American films demonstrated almost equalled that of screened Soviet products (944 compared to 971).<sup>290</sup> Despite the steady decrease in the quantities of foreign movies entering the Soviet Union throughout the decade, the industry continued to rely on imports for generating revenue and in 1927, the year in which *Third Meshchanskaia Street* was released, Sovkino's chairman K. M. Shvedchikov declared that if it were not for the success of its import policy, the film trust and studios would now be bankrupt.<sup>291</sup>

Since antagonistic attitudes towards the importation of foreign films were expressed in all areas of the industry on creative, commercial, and ideological grounds, Shklovsky's juxtaposition of his cinematic creation with a foreign farce proves highly significant.<sup>292</sup> *The Marriage Circle* was not only regarded as a 'petit-bourgeois' comedy, but also as an exemplification of 'Americanism' (*amerikanshchina*) and 'detectivism' (*detektivshchina*) in relation to the more generic term 'foreignism' (*inostranshchina*) that was derogatorily employed in the Soviet Union to characterise the popularity of imported features.<sup>293</sup> By the time work on *Third Meshchanskaia Street* began in earnest, Soviet filmmakers were already engaged in a self-defeating competition with foreignism that disclosed a sense of

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<sup>290</sup> Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>291</sup> Vladimir Kirshon reported that for 1926/27 fiscal year, Sovkino's income was 11.8 million roubles from Soviet films and 18.7 million from foreign films: see Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, pp. 51, 64.

<sup>292</sup> For an elaboration of these concerns, see Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, p. 64.

<sup>293</sup> Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, p. 50.

national inferiority, which fundamentally characterises Soviet efforts to accommodate American films:

The Soviet reaction was that everything was done better in the West, especially in Hollywood. Americans spent more money on movies and spent it more wisely, their women were prettier, their comedians funnier, [...] their stories more interesting, their lives more – lively.<sup>294</sup>

This sentiment recalls Shklovsky's definition of 'enstrangement', whereby 'automatised perception' is eradicated in favour of a rigorous analysis of 'both the arrangement of words and the semantic structures based on them' (и [...] расположения слов, и [...] смысловых построений, составленных из ее слов) in order to generate new interpretations and 'make the stone stony' (*delat' kamen' kamennym*) once more.<sup>295</sup> Shklovsky's coined neologism suggests both 'distancing' (dislocation, *dépaysement*) and 'making strange', while its root (*stran*) also features in the Russian noun 'country' (*strana*) and adjective 'strange' (*strannyi*). Svetlana Boym proposes that the superimposition of these Latin and Slavic roots on top of each other creates 'a wealth of [...] associations and false etymologies' that causes Shklovsky's notion of foreignness to appear 'poetic and productive [...], enticing rather than alienating'.<sup>296</sup> Indeed, Shklovsky's enstrangement foregrounds the process of art

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<sup>294</sup> Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, p. 58.

<sup>295</sup> Shklovskii, 'Iskusstvo, kak priem', pp. 7-23 (pp. 13, 21).

<sup>296</sup> Indeed, Shklovsky's *ostranenie* is defined from the outset as different from 'alienation', which is normally rendered in Russian as *otchuzhdenie*: see Svetlana Boym, 'Poetics and Politics of Estrangement', 581-611 (p. 586). In a memoir included in his 1983 anthology 'On the Theory of Prose', Shklovsky admits that he made at least one mistake in 'Art as Device' and cites the spelling of *ostranenie* as an example: 'And then I invented the term 'enstrangement' and, since I can now already admit that I made grammatical mistakes, I shall confess that I wrote one *n* when I

(rather than its product), the suspension of the work's dénouement, and the obfuscation of the audience's comprehension in order 'to return sensation' (*vernut' oshchushchenie*) to life and experience the world anew by means of 'vision' (*videnie*), rather than mere 'recognition' (*uznavanie*).<sup>297</sup> In this early libretto for *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, then, Shklovsky not only presents the viewer with a modified example of triple distancing (on-screen/on-screen 'reality', on-screen 'reality', off-screen reality), but also divides his screen time between two films in order to produce an autonomous formal construction that places the potential viewer at an even greater distance from the events depicted on-screen and exposes their 'reverse, [...] true, mirror image, [their] negativity'.<sup>298</sup>

It can be argued that Shklovsky's desire to intercut shots of Volodia and Liuda's cinema visit with frames and intertitles from *The Marriage Circle* is designed not to reflect his protagonists' petit-bourgeois credentials by comparing their behaviour with that of their American counterparts, but rather to highlight the *differences* between them. Volodia and Liuda's circumstances are posited against the American fictional characters' world of scandal, infidelity, and marital concerns by drawing attention to a fundamental discrepancy in the nature of their relationship:

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should have written two. And so off it went with one *n* and, like a dog with a severed ear, runs around the world' (И я тогда создал термин «остранение»; и так как уже могу сегодня признаваться в том, что делал грамматические ошибки, то я написал одно «н». Надо «странный» было написать. Так оно и пошло с одним «н» и, как собака с отрезанным ухом, бегаёт по миру): see Viktor Shklovskii, 'Slova osvobodhaiut dushu ot tesnoty: Rasskaz ob OPOIAZe', *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1983). Eric Naiman notes that this dog probably forms part of a pun, given that a few paragraphs later Shklovsky once again describes the process of estrangement in Tolstoy and mentions as his first example the hero of *War and Peace* (*Voina i mir*, 1865-69) Pierre Bezukhov (literally Pierre Earless [*bez ukhov*]): see Eric Naiman, 'Shklovsky's Dog and Mulvey's Pleasure: The Secret Life of Defamiliarization', *Comparative Literature*, 50:4 (Autumn 1998), 333-52 (p. 346, n. 18).

<sup>297</sup> Shklovskii, 'Iskusstvo, kak priem', pp. 7-23 (p. 13).

<sup>298</sup> Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (London: Cornell U.P., 1990), p. 45.

rather than swapping partners in unions based on duality, the inhabitants of the one-roomed semi-basement apartment on Third Meshchanskaia Street form a *ménage à trois* and, in consequence, ‘the triangle which has never closed up before – the husband, the wife, the lover – closes up and takes shape officially’ (никогда не замыкавшийся треугольник – муж, жена, любовник – замыкается и оформляется официально).<sup>299</sup>

Graffy asserts that for most of the century before production on *Third Meshchanskaia Street* began, Russian culture had been ‘preoccupied with the

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<sup>299</sup> Abram Room, “‘Tret’ia Meshchanskaia”: Beseda s rezhisserom A. M. Roomom’ [1926], in *Abram Matveevich Room, 1894-1976: Materialy k retrospektive fil’mov*, ed. by V. Zabrodin (Moscow: Muzei kino, 1994), pp. 13-15 (p. 14). The importance of the triangular relationship in this cinematic work is reflected in the fact that its original title was, in fact, *Ménage à trois (Liubov’ vtroem)* and two extensive librettos and a screenplay were composed with this name. On 19 August 1926, however, *Glavpolitprosvet*’s Deputy Chairman, A. Kostina, and Secretary of the Council for Cinema, Aleksandrov, banned the distribution of *Ménage à trois* because of its title and the distorting slant that it imposed on the feature’s otherwise unobjectionable content. The reviewers argued, ‘Husbands extremely rarely react in this manner to a wife’s unfaithfulness; there’s no point in developing a *ménage à trois*. Thus, it is necessary to throw this very *ménage à trois* out of the script’ (Мужья чрезвычайно редко так реагируют на измену жены, культивировать ‘любовь втроем’ незачем, поэтому надо выбросить из сценария именно ‘любовь втроем’). However, the critics acknowledged that the on-screen exploration of a family’s daily existence in the context of the housing crisis was undoubtedly a ‘matter of interest’ (*predstavliaet interes*) and, as such, Shklovsky and Room were ordered to rework the scenario’s material to produce not ‘triple love’, but ‘triple life’ (*zhizn’ vtroem*): see A. Kostina and Aleksandrov: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, l. 209. Shklovsky and Room’s reaction to these comments was far from ambiguous: their next screenplay was submitted without a title at all. Every explicit reference made to ‘triple life’ in their previous librettos and scripts was removed, while the reviewers’ suggestions were almost *verbatim et literatim* tagged onto the end of otherwise unmodified scenes: see V. Shklovskii and A. Room: GFF, s. I, f. 2, op. I, ed. khr. 943, ll. 192-203 (especially ll. 198-200). For the scriptwriter and director, the title *Ménage à trois* clearly fulfilled the informative, expressive, and vocative functions required to establish the film’s narrative tone, convey the plot’s main focus, and stimulate the public’s desire to see the production. By responding to the critics’ comments in an explicit, yet apparently crude fashion, it seems that Shklovsky and Room intended to provoke the censorial board into either allowing their feature to be produced under its original title or banning it entirely. Authorial compromise, however, was ultimately not an option for either party and, following this incident, *Ménage à trois* came to be restored as an alternative title to that by which the film came to be known.

elaboration of new social models’, raising questions of sexual morality and specifically theorising about the nature of the triangular relationship.<sup>300</sup> The idealised triple union expressed in Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s 1863 novel *What is to be Done?* (*Chto delat’?*), subtitled ‘From Tales about New People’ (Из рассказов о новых людях), was displaced from a literary framework into its real-life equivalent in the first decade of the twentieth-century when Symbolist poets Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and Zinaida Gippius combined a celibate marriage with Dmitrii Filosofov. After the Revolution, prominent member of the Bolshevik party, influential theorist, and feminist agitator Alexandra Kollontai addressed the love-triangle in her 1923 article ‘Make Way for the Winged Eros’ (*Dorogu krylatomu erosu*), in which she emphasised that ‘love is not only a powerful factor of nature, a biological force, but also a social factor’.<sup>301</sup> In order to resolve the transformation of ‘the healthy sex instinct, the attraction of the two sexes for the aim of reproduction’ into an ‘unhealthy lust’ owing to ‘the pressure of abnormal socio-economic conditions, particularly under the hegemony of capitalism’, Kollontai proposed ‘love-comradeship’, as an ideal ‘needed’ by the proletariat for the destruction of bourgeois marital exclusivity and the ultimate transformation of people’s individual feelings into collective ones.<sup>302</sup>

One of early Soviet culture’s most famous triple unions was unquestionably that of Vladimir Mayakovsky and Osip Brik, Shklovsky’s colleagues through his Futurist, ‘Formalist’, and *Lef*-based connections, who were both in love with Osip’s wife Lilia. After fleeing the Soviet Union and arriving in Berlin in 1922, Shklovsky became enamoured with the younger sister of Lilia Brik, Elsa Triolet; Mayakovsky

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<sup>300</sup> Julian Graffy, *Bed and Sofa: The Film Companion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>301</sup> Alexandra Kollontai, ‘Make Way for the Winged Eros’ [1923], in *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*, ed. by William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1984), pp. 84-94 (p. 86).

<sup>302</sup> Kollontai, ‘Make Way for the Winged Eros’, pp. 84-94 (pp. 87, 92).

had previously courted Elsa, but in May 1915, upon visiting her in Petrograd, swiftly and ardently fell in love with her older sister. At this very meeting, Lilia's husband Osip, a recent law-school graduate, heard Mayakovksy recite his works and proposed to publish an edition of his poem 'A Cloud in Trousers' (*Oblako v shtanakh*), thereby forming the crucial connection that led to his later career as publisher and literary critic.<sup>303</sup> At the end of 1922 both Shklovsky and Mayakovsky, spurned by their sister of choice, began to compose dissimilar, yet distinctive literary works based on the themes of unrequited love and the ruthlessness of bourgeois society; in Moscow, Mayakovksy penned his long poem 'About This' (*Pro eto*), while Shklovsky in Berlin compiled his epistolary novel-memoir *Zoo, or Letters Not About Love* (Зoo, или Письма не о любви). Shklovsky reminisced nostalgically about his unspoiled homeland, declaring in a letter to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (Всероссийский Центральный Исполнительный Комитет [VTsIK]):

I cannot live in Berlin.

I am tied to the Russia of today by my entire way of life, by all my habits. I am able to work only for her.

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<sup>303</sup> Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Oblako v shtanakh' (1914-15), in *Internet biblioteka Alekseia Komarova* <<http://ilibrary.ru/text/1241/p.1/index.html>> [accessed 1 June 2009]. Shklovsky's relationship with Lilia Brik was notoriously tense and, when considering the dominant themes of *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, one quarrel proves particularly notable. During a meeting of *Lef* and/or the editorial team of *Novyi Lef* that took place no earlier than 16 September 1928, a work was discussed about which Lilia Brik expressed a negative opinion. In response, Shklovsky told her, 'Here you are only a housewife!' (Ты здесь только домашняя хозяйка!) and an argument swiftly ensued. Mayakovsky and Brik defended Lilia, but Shklovsky refused to apologise and left the meeting: see Aleksandr Galushkin, "'I tak, stavshi na kostiakh, budem trubit' sbor...": K istorii nesostoiavshegosia vozrozhdeniia Opoiaza v 1928-1930 gg.', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 44 (2000), 136-58 (p. 137). See also I. Svetlikova, "'Gubernator zakhvachennykh territorii": Osip Brik v razgovorakh Viktora Shklovskogo s Aleksandrom Chudakovym', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 41 (2000), 99-107 (p. 105).

Я не могу жить в Берлине.

Всем бытом, всеми навыками я связан с сегодняшней Россией.

Умею работать только для нее.<sup>304</sup>

Mayakovsky's poem, on the contrary, as a discourse between the old and the new, simultaneously indicts and sympathises with romantic love and everyday life, while also renouncing the resurrection of bourgeois propensities following the induction of NEP. The poem approaches its conclusion with an affirmation of a bedless utopian love:

Resurrect me –

I want to live out my life!

So that love would not be a servant

of marriage,

of lust,

or of bread.

Cursing the beds,

rising from stove-benches,

so that love can make its way through the entire universe.

Воскреси –

свое дожить хочу!

Чтоб не было любви – служанки

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<sup>304</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Pis'mo dvadtsat' deviatoe', in *Zoo, ili Pis'ma ne o liubvi* [1923], in *Eshche nichego ne konchilos'...* (Moscow: Propaganda, 2002), pp. 329-32 (p. 329).

замужеств,  
похоти,  
хлебов.  
Постели прокляв,  
встав с лежанки,  
чтоб всей вселенной шла любовь.<sup>305</sup>

When considering the development of the triangular relationship as the dominant theme in Shklovsky's film-text, Mayakovsky's poem proves revealing. The interrelated and interconnected lives of the three male avant-gardists and their respective lovers are reflected in the work both on a literal level, as part of a domestic dialogue among the members and acquaintances of *Lef* who were housed in the Briks' communal apartment, referred to by Shklovsky as 'the little *Lef* flat' (*kvartirka Lefa*), and on a structural level, as the poem's composition with the bed as its centrepiece echoes the determination of Shklovsky's cinematic plot by positioning protagonists in relation to furniture.<sup>306</sup> While Irina Grashchenkova claims that the inspiration for *Third Meshchanskaia Street* was based on an article that Shklovsky happened upon in the newspaper *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, the fact that work on the scenario commenced when the film's scriptwriter and director were shooting the documentary feature *Jews on the Land* in the Crimea alongside Mayakovsky and Lilia suggests that

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<sup>305</sup> Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Pro eto', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1955-61), IV (1957), p. 184.

<sup>306</sup> Olga Matich, 'Remaking the Bed: Utopia in Daily Life', in *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, ed. by John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1996), pp. 59-78 (p. 73); Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1994), p. 133.

the influence exerted by this very public *ménage à trois* on the filmmakers and their creative thought should not be overlooked.<sup>307</sup>

Subsequently, it can be argued that Shklovsky's alternation of events from the American farce *The Marriage Circle* with cinematic fragments depicting Liuda and Volodia in his early libretto for *Third Meshchanskaia Street* functions as an intricate intertextual layering of the artistic, theoretical, and ideological concerns of both the author's immediate circle of acquaintance and contemporary Soviet society at large. The strategy's complexity resides in its metafictional and self-reflexive essence, as it addresses the potential viewer and forces him/her to create and connect various elements of the feature's subtexts. Shklovsky problematises the identification of a narratological voice by imparting equal significance to those incidents taken from *The Marriage Circle*, thereby exploiting the pleasure of recognition in order to connect audience members in the movie theatres both on- and off-screen, and to Volodia and Liuda's immediate reactions, which simultaneously separates the off-screen cinema goers from their on-screen counterparts and affords them the role of detached observers. Hence, chronological disruption by means of a montage sequence that contests and subverts the narrative's linear and diachronic development challenges the expectations of the viewer who seeks the order, unity, and classification of traditional cinematic representation. The demonstration of an unspecified portion of the American 'film within a film' while concurrently furthering plot development in *Third Meshchanskaia Street* also advances an impression of the 'timeless' existence

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<sup>307</sup> The newspaper article reports that two young men arrived at a maternity hospital where a woman had given birth to a son. Both claimed to be the child's father because the new mother considered herself the wife of both men and did not know which one was the father. All three were members of the Komsomol and the Workers' Educational Faculty (*rabfakovtsy*) and insisted that this social, political, and ideological alignment immunised them against feelings of jealousy, referring to their relationship as a *ménage à trois*: see Irina Grashchenkova, *Mastera sovetskogo teatra i kino: Abram Room* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), pp. 85-86.

of both on-screen narratives: the conflict between the two illustrations is one of a seemingly eternal present. Consequently, while Shklovsky utilises this creative strategy in his early libretto to distinguish Liuda and Volodia's behaviour from that of their American counterparts, it also appears that his dissolution of internal/external boundaries by juxtaposing the self-reflexive and metafictional as a means of representation that is at once both autobiographical and illusory, ultimately advances a fundamentally ambiguous view of his protagonists that can be classified as neither petit-bourgeois, nor wholeheartedly pro-revolutionary.

In this chapter the preeminent position assigned to Shklovsky's utilisation of artistic strategies and the device as a fundamental component of the Formalist dichotomous comprehension of the relationship between form (device) and content (theme) in his film-texts both pre- and post-production has, in fact, brought out the extent to which these two artistic components are related by a third element (material) in accordance with Bakhtin's postulation of art as an indivisible, organic whole. This notion of the triple is then extended not only into the narratological sphere by means of triangular relationships between protagonists, but also back into the realm of 'Formalist' polemics via enstrangement as the events of 'the play/film within the film' are portrayed in three different 'realities' simultaneously. In *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, as in *The House on Trubnaia Square* and *The Last Attraction*, Shklovsky's artistic triple distancing permits the on-screen depiction of disquieting concerns without destroying the audience's pleasure and provides the scriptwriter with the narrative space required to address the dominant issues of the outer film in its internal theatrical/cinematic counterpart. While it is possible to reason that cinema is inclined to be self-conscious and hence Shklovsky's presentation of a second production on an internal stage/screen provides access both to himself and his own

creative intentions, it should also be remembered that the scriptwriter overtly emphasises the nature of the distance he desires between the production and the off-screen audience; while a second degree of illusion may disclose a primary truth, the experience of this truth by an audience in a third reality paradoxically enables Shklovsky to retain authorial ambiguity. Like a magician who pretends to reveal his secret while continuing to deceive his audience, Shklovsky composes his film-texts in a unique coded language and it is by virtue of this oblique product and its distinctive application that the magician successfully preserves his power.

## Conclusion

In his third set of autobiographical memoirs published in 1926, Shklovsky bemoans his existence as an artist in the Soviet Union on the eve of Cultural Revolution:

I live badly. [...] I don't work in Moscow. [...] I haven't got time for books. [...] I work at Goskino's third factory and revise film-reels. My whole head is full of pieces of film-reel. Like the bin in the editing room. An incidental life.

Rotten, perhaps. I don't have the strength to resist the times and, perhaps, it isn't necessary. Perhaps, the times are right. They have processed me in their own way.

Я живу плохо. [...] В Москве не работаю. [...] Нет у меня времени для книги. [...] Служу на Третьей Госкинофабрике и переделываю ленты. Вся голова завалена обрывками лент. Как корзина в монтажной. Случайная жизнь.

Испорченная, может быть. Нет сил сопротивляться времени и, может быть, ненужно. Может быть, время право. Оно обрабатывало меня по-своему.<sup>308</sup>

Yet his practical career in the film industry was only just beginning. Over the next six years, Shklovsky was credited for significantly contributing to the conception

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<sup>308</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Chto iz menia delaiut', *Tret'ia fabrika* [1926], in *Eshche nichego ne konchilos'...* (Moscow: Propaganda, 2002), pp. 372-74 (pp. 372-73).

and development of twenty-three pictures (working on an additional twenty-one before his 'retirement' from cinema in 1970), while innumerable demands made for his services as a 'script consultant' ensured that his creative influence penetrated even deeper into cinema as an art form, financial industry, and educational tool. When Shklovsky commenced work on his first scenario, Soviet film was still defining itself and members of its artistic cadre were able to test the limits of the permissible in an environment that was to become increasingly subjected to the state's vision of a unified and tightly-controlled sphere run by authoritarian methods and backed by social and political power. While the severity of Shklovsky's treatment at the hands of the studios, censorial board, and printed media escalated throughout the Cultural Revolution, despite his renunciation of his 'scientific error' of Formalism, it should be noted that Shklovsky was, in fact, one of the few 'revolutionary' artists whose career survived the cessation of cinema's 'golden age' and he continued to work on six titles that were released between 1930 and 1933.<sup>309</sup> His maintenance of a degree of artistic integrity during these years suggests that the Soviet cinematic framework remained broad enough for Shklovsky to apply, adapt, and reformulate his appreciations on art and address primary aesthetic concerns in relation to breaking down habitual motivation, automatised response, and mere recognition for the restoration of perception and self-consciousness. His ability to adopt an attitude of ironic distance when approaching his thematic material by means of devices such as 'estrangement', 'impediment', and 'laying bare' and a variety of temporal and geographic locations, as opposed to adhering to ideological formulations, not only ensured that his creative

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<sup>309</sup> 830 feature films were shown in the Soviet Union between 1926-29, while only 422 were demonstrated over the next three years (1930-33). The fact that Shklovsky worked on one of only 35 films released in 1933 is testament to his ability to survive in turbulent creative environments: see Denise J. Youngblood, 'The Fate of Soviet Popular Cinema during the Stalin Revolution', *Russian Review*, 50:2 (April 1991), 148-62 (p. 153, table 3).

output remained free from schematization and tendentiousness, but also helped him to persevere in an ever-changing social, political, and cultural environment.

All twenty-three pictures on which Shklovsky worked from the release of *The Traitor* on 27 September 1926 to *House of the Dead* on 10 April 1932, which were produced by fifteen different directors in ten different studios, demonstrate the extent to which the filmmaker was interested in exploring threshold situations. Questions of allegiance to authority provided uncertain answers and Shklovsky developed various methods to protect his artistic integrity: he utilised the unpretentious *agitsud* to unite pre-revolutionary legal, religious, and class-based rituals for the creation of a new hybrid in the Soviet practice of *samokritika*, negotiated responsibility when elements from intricately constructed formulae for maximum use of economy and expressiveness of means were threatened by external parties, exposed the dangers of submitting to autocratic leadership in societies where moral ambiguity and authorized chaos reign, revealed the necessity of struggle for the attainment of right social justice through heroism and sacrifice without recourse to specific and unequivocal answers or interpretations, underscored the necessity for deserting the old and traditional in search of something new, ambiguously delineated domestic and social environments as spaces of lived experience and the role of the Soviet citizen within them, and exploited triple-distancing strategies to maintain the necessary ironic detachment for balancing social comment with self-preservation. Moreover, these techniques afforded Shklovsky the opportunity to elaborate his own formulations on cinematic theory and to respond to and react against those of others.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> It should also be noted that Shklovsky worked on screenplays that were never realised as film-products, such as his composition of a screenplay in 1928 based on Tynianov's initial treatment of his novel *The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar* (*Smert' Vazir-Mukhtara*) and his replacement of Tynianov on Esfir Shub's unrealised documentary project about Pushkin in 1936: see Alastair Renfrew, 'Against Adaptation? The

As an author of themes, librettos, scenarios, shooting scripts, and intertitles, literary and cinematic critic and theoretician, ‘creative administrator’, script ‘consultant’, and an artist associated with Futurist, Formalist, modernist, and intelligentsia ‘movements’, Shklovsky was able to continue interior discourse within (roughly) delineated circles and to participate in experimental creative activities to demonstrate to society at large that he wished to challenge authoritarian doctrine both within and without the film industry. The fates of Shklovsky’s protagonists, who are neither generic character ‘types’, nor stereotypical representations of the so-called ‘everyday (wo)man’, but artificial constructs which actively represent the part of the spectrum of human existence where the individual and society meet, clearly participate in a broader dialogue of communal concern; Shklovsky exploited the situations in which he and his contemporaries found themselves, then simultaneously contracted and conflated his conceptual focus by looking exclusively at how these circumstances affected his protagonists as representatives of society at large.

Shklovsky’s exploration of the inherent tensions between the realms of the internal and external and, by extension, his investigation of notions of (revolutionary) justice in his film-texts has proven an effective vehicle for analysing the exchanges that occurred in the Soviet Union between textual and visual media within broader narratives of historical progress, cultural identity, and industrial supremacy. The identification of organising principles in Shklovsky’s cinematic works has emphasised the interrelatedness and equivalent status of a remarkably disparate array of objects and events, while simultaneously underscoring how crucially different they are from each other; with playful scepticism, compelling hopefulness, and the vibrancy of youth, Shklovsky embraced the tempestuous atmosphere of the 1920s to

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Strange Case of (Pod) *Poruchik Kizhe*’, *Modern Language Review*, 102:1 (January 2007), 157-76 (p. 159, n. 7).

present speculations about traditional comprehensions of rural and urban, old and new, near and far, authoritarian and libertarian, collectivist and nihilist. When opportunities for experimentation became increasingly curtailed as the Cultural Revolution got underway, Shklovsky drew upon artistic resources from the realms of both literature and cinema to refrain from indulging in the indiscriminate visions of perfection that were soon to become commonplace with the introduction of 'socialist realism' in 1934. Despite the tightening of censorial control and administrative strictures by the end of the Cultural Revolution, Shklovsky effectively synthesised his creative and scientific approaches to art in a bid to remain faithful to his authorial vision, which he 'turned outwards' to comment on his immediate environment, believing in its rightness and justice. As a result, the films on which he worked between 1926 and 1932 achieve precisely that which Shklovsky defined as the primary goal of art at the beginning of his career in 1914: the restoration of sensation to the world, the resurrection of things, and the death of pessimism.

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*Dva bronevika* ('Bronevik'), dir. by S. Timoshenko (Sovkino, L., 1928)

*Evrei na zemle*, dir. by A. Room (VUFKU, 1927)

*Gorizont*, dir. by L. Kuleshov (Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1933)

*Grunya Kornakova* ('Solovei-solovushko'), dir. by N. Ekk (Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1936)

*Ivan da Mar'ia* ('Shivorot-navyvorot'), dir. by V. Shirokov (Sovkino, M., 1928)

*Kapitanskaia dochka* ('Gvardii serzhant', 'Krepost' v stepi'), dir. by Iu. Tarich (Sovkino, M., 1928)

*Kazaki*, dir. by V. Barskii (Goskinprom Gruzii, 1928)

*Kryl'ia kholopa*, dir. by Iu. Tarich (Sovkino, 1926)

*Ledianoi dom* ('Biron i Volynskii', 'Ledianoi dvorets'), dir. by K. Eggert (Mezhrabpom-Rus', 1928)

*The Marriage Circle*, dir. by E. Lubitsch (Warner Bros., 1924)

*Mertvyi Dom* ('Tiur'ma narodov'), dir. by V. Fedorov (Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1932)

*Molodost' pobezhdaet* ('Komsomol'tsy'), dir. by M. Gelovani (Goskinprom Gruzii, 1929)

*Ochen' prosto* ('Priemnyi otets'), dir. by G. Lomidze (Goskinprom Gruzii, 1931)

*Ovod*, dir. by K. Mardzhanov (Goskinprom Gruzii, 1928)

*Parizhskii sapozhnik*, dir. by F. Ermler (Sovkino, L., 1927)

*Poslednii attraktsion* ('Agitfurgon'), dir. by O. Preobrazhenskaia i I. Pravov (Sovkino, M., 1929)

*Potselui Meri Pikford*, dir. by S. Komarov (Mezhrabpomfil'm/Sovkino, 1927)  
*Po zakonu* ('*Troe*'), dir. by L. Kuleshov (Goskino, 1926)  
*Predatel'*, dir. by A. Room (Goskino, 1926)  
*Prostitutka* ('*Ubitaia zhizn'iu*'), dir. by O. Frelikh (Belgoskino, 1927)  
*Schastlivye cherepki* ('*Gonchary*'), dir. by E. Ioganson (Sovkino, L., 1927)  
*Tiazhelye gody*, dir. by A. Razumnyi (Goskino, L., 1925)  
*Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* ('*Liubov' vtroem*'), dir. by A. Room (Sovkino, M., 1927)  
*Turksib* ('*Stal'noi put'*'), dir. by V. Turin (Vostokkino, 1930)  
*Ukhaby* ('*Ukhaby zhizni*'), dir. by A. Room (Sovkino, M., 1928)  
*Zolotye ruki* ('*Nelaskovyi dom*', '*Domokhoziaika*'), dir. by S. Glagolin (Soiuzkino, L., 1932)