KINO
KLASSIKA

17 February - 15 April 2017
Regent Street Cinema

A World To Win:

A Century of Revolution on Screen

Curated by Ian Christie,
Maria Korolkova and Justine Waddell

A World to Win: A Century of Revolution on Screen

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About the Season

Marx proclaimed that the proletariat had “a world to win”. On the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Kino Klassika hosted a season of cinematic masterpieces from around the world, as well as discussions and curated talks, which investigate that impulse of profound change. The season explored the revolutionary spirit through the camera lens. It asked what these films can mean today.

Bringing together provocative films by directors such as Sergei Eisenstein, Mikhail Kalatozov, Jean-Luc Godard, Gauber Rocha, Andrzej Wajda, Bernardo Bertolucci and Ken Loach, the *‘A World to Win’* season offered a highly curated programme of iconic filmmaking which included a rare screening of the once-banned Soviet film commissioned to commemorate the 50th anniversary of 1917, Larisa Shepitko and Andrei Smirnov’s *The Beginning of an Unknown Century* on March 8, International Womens Day. Screening at Regent Street Cinema and other venues from Friday 17 February 2017, the season will culminate in a landmark screening of Sergei Eisenstein’s *October* with the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican Centre on the 26th October 2017.

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The Battleship Potemkin

1925 | Sergei Eisenstein

A Collaboration with Max Reinhardt's Instant Orchestra

The Battleship Potemkin became Sergei Eisenstein's passport to worldwide and lasting fame, although its actual form owed much to chance and improvisation. The starting point was a Central Committee decision in March 1925 to commission a film commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the failed 1905 Russian uprising – an early example of the Soviet propaganda use of anniversaries, and a concrete step towards backing Lenin's faith in film as 'the most important art'. Choosing the young Eisenstein, just twenty seven and having made only one feature, *The Strike,* was a risk.

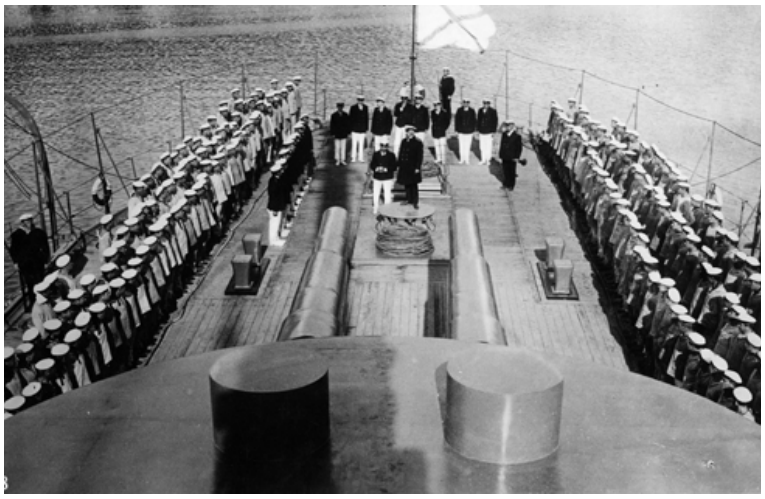
The scale of the planned film was epic, spanning the Russo-Japanese war, strikes and uprisings, and the Bloody Sunday massacre in St Petersburg. Eisenstein promised as film as ambitious as Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* saga, but after a disastrous attempt to film in what had become Leningrad, he was advised to try to meet the end-of-year deadline by heading south to shoot the Black Sea mutiny episode, occupying less than a twentieth of the scenario.

Once in Odessa at the end of August, there were further delays due to foggy weather and the problems of shooting at sea on a sister-ship of the original Potemkin dangerously loaded with live mines. Yet improvisation saved the day, with Eisenstein spending two weeks on the fictitious Odessa steps massacre, and filming stone lions at Alupka in the Crimea (neither in the original script). Back in Moscow, Eisenstein had just three weeks to edit his footage, with other members of the team still filming some key shots. And he would later recall that the print was delivered reel by reel to the Bolshoi Theatre for its triumphant premiere on 21 December, with the edits still un-cemented.

Although it was hardly the failure in Russia that has often been claimed, shortage of prints prevented it being widely and rapidly seen. The film's international success began with its spring release in Germany, accompanied by Edmund Meisel's driving, rhythmic score. Here, as elsewhere, it was censored; and in Britain banned from public exhibition until the 1950s.

Yet precisely because of the censorship, it became the most controversial and ultimately popular emblem of the Bolshevik Revolution, inspiring activists to organise guerrilla screenings, and film enthusiasts to wax lyrical about its radical techniques of montage – making it the inspiration for a new poetics of cinema.

Eisenstein returned to it regularly throughout his life. In 1926, he was somewhat apologetic, describing it



Poster for the film 'The Battleship Potemkin', 1926.
Artist: Anton Lavinsky

as the 'first step in the NEP phase of the struggle', implying that the film pandered to its audiences' expectations, providing a 'flood of emotionalism'. Nearly twenty years later, struggling with the third draft of his essay on Walt Disney, he took an anthropological view: 'The organism of Potemkin is completely archaic! The outline of the boat-fish is a synthetic man made from a myriad of smaller ones.'

Meanwhile, successive generations continue to find new inspiration in it through homage, parody - and adding new forms of accompaniment, as in our presentation with the Instant Orchestra.

— Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, Birkbeck, University of London

Participant Biography

Professor Ian Christie is a world-renowned film scholar and trustee of Kino Klassika Foundation. He has written books on Sergei Eisenstein, Martin Scorsese and the development of cinema in both Russia and Britain. He is a member of the British Academy, a regular contributor to Sight and Sound and a frequent broadcaster. Christie is currently Professor of Film and Media History at Birkbeck, University of London.

I am Cuba

1962 | Mikhail Kalatozov

Eager to help spread Communist ideas, Mosfilm studio seized upon the chance to produce a film about the Cuban revolutionary experience in 1962. Famed Russian director Mikhail Kalatozov and cinematographer Sergei Uresevsky were dispatched to Havana. Production started a week after the Cuban missile crisis. Kalatozov set out to create a work as powerful as Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* and the scene of a student demonstration on the steps of Havana University distinctly echoes the celebrated massacre on Odessa's steps.
The film was received with scepticism by Cuban audiences and remained unknown until it was presented by Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola at the New York Film Forum in the mid-1990s. Hailed then as "one of the most stylistically vigorous films of all time", *I Am Cuba* is now considered a masterpiece of world cinema.

About the Film

I first saw *I am Cuba* when I was in Havana researching a book on Cuban cinema around 1980. It has to be said that this is not a Cuban film but a Russian one. It is 'Cuba the exotic isle'. It harks back to Mayakovsky's visit in the 1920's and that sort of revolutionary romanticism. The filmmakers were quite aware that they were outsiders. The cinematographer Urusevsky spoke about how they knew they couldn't get inside their subject and decided instead to opt for a poetic vision. The script was written by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a popular Russian poet working with a young Cuban, Enrique Pineda Barnet. It's not a good script. It's not well acted. But the cinematography is extraordinary.

I am Cuba is marked by high-contrast black-and-white filming which renders the sugar cane fields a searing white, replete with hand-held wide angle lens distortion, and some amazing shots, highly choreographed. Even now you say 'how the hell did

they do that!?' This makes it very different from, say, the way that a Hollywood film would have pictured it, but also how the Cubans themselves saw it.
The main influence on Cuban cinema at the time, and the New Latin American Cinema movement in general, as it emerged in the 60s, was principally Italian neo-realism, which meant eschewing the epic approach of the Russians which they could not themselves afford anyway. This is one of the things that makes *I am Cuba* not exactly one of the Cubans' favourite films. It's not the way they saw themselves, in that kind of highly expressionist imagery. What came out of Latin America in the 1960s was a new cinema which was essentially and fundamentally political and shared the aspirations of the revolutionary left movements of the period.
The cinemas that emerged in Cuba, in Brazil, in Chile, was a shared critique of Hollywood, a critique of conventional genre cinema, and a desire to express their own cultural needs which, in the spirit of the time, meant a whole different cinema. *I am Cuba* is something else again.

— Michael Chanan, Documentary Filmmaker and Film Scholar

Participant Biography

Michael Chanan is a Professor of Film & Video at Roehampton University, London. He is a documentary film-maker since 1971, erstwhile music critic, and author, editor and translator of books and articles on film and media, on subjects including early cinema, the social history of music, and the history of recording. Michael Chanan is the author of several books on Cuban Cinema, having first visited the island in 1979. His book *The Politics of Documentary* was published by the BFI in 2007, and his most recent film, *Money Puzzles*, was released in 2016.

Weekend

1967 | Jean-Luc Godard

Weekend was Godard's fifteenth feature film in eight years. This astonishing rate of production was accelerating, with *Weekend* his fourth film to be released in 1967. And then came a radical break: a shift to different types of film, different sources of funding, different modes of production and a wholly different aesthetic. The famous *'End of Cinema'* title at the end of the film announces the change to come.

This change in Godard's filmmaking coincided with the social breakdown that would culminate in the events of May 68. *Weekend* and the preceding film *La Chinoise* form a diptych, with both pitting a fantasy of armed revolution against the irremediable decadence of the bourgeoisie, but – and this cannot be emphasised strongly enough – neither film announces, anticipates, predicts or in any way foresees May 68. That is a retrospective fantasy on the part of those who attribute magic powers to art. *Weekend* is about the state of France in 1967.

Revolution is, of course, a key preoccupation in *Weekend*. The film's rapacious bourgeois protagonists are given a lift by two refuse collectors, one North African, the other sub-Saharan, who recite recent texts by Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon advocating armed insurrection. These echo the 1791 text on liberty and violence by French Revolutionary leader Saint-Just, earlier recited by Jean-Pierre Léaud, in full period costume. The film ends in a parody of revolutionary violence,

with the cannibalistic machismo of the ridiculously named Liberation Front for the Department of Seine-et-Oise.

The social realities underlying this dystopian fantasy are class struggle and class difference: the incompatibility of bourgeois desire and proletarian demands. The emblematic shot of this impasse is the *faux tographie*, the false photograph, showing bourgeois, workers and peasants posing as a group. Fantasies of class harmony are, on the evidence of *Weekend*, as horrific as fantasies of revolution.

— Roland-Francois Lack, Senior Lecturer,
University College London

Participant Biography

Roland-Francois Lack is Senior Lecturer at University College London, where he teaches nineteenth-century French literature and twentieth-century Film. Lack's interests include, cinema and place, which he explores through his website Cine-Tourist *(http://www.thecinetourist.net)*, French and Swiss film, and francophone literature.

The Beginning of an Unknown Century

1967 | Larisa Sheptiko & Andrei Smirnov

About the Film

This two-part omnibus film, commissioned to mark the 50th anniversary of the Revolution, was deemed too critical by Brezhnev's censors. It was immediately banned and first shown to the public 20 years later in 1987, long after film director Larisa Shepitko's tragic death. Andrei Smirnov's film *Angel* is a story of everyday heroism and brutality during the 1920s Civil War. It follows a group of refugees, whose train is derailed and captured by bandits. In Shepitko's *Homeland of Electricity*, a young mechanic is sent to a famine-stricken village to bring electricity to the people. Sheptiko's trademark striking black-and-white visuals are frequently compared to the works of Aleksandr Dovzhenko, her teacher at film school. The film is one of only four surviving works by Shepitko, one of Russia's most important yet unknown film directors.

Thoughts on Sheptiko

If a car accident in the summer of 1979 had not cut short the life of Larisa Shepitko, she would perhaps in her late 70s be enjoying an international reputation, maybe even on a par with Andrei Tarkovsky. Instead, only four features remain, along with shorts and this rarely glimpsed segment, *Homeland of Electricity*.

What's apparent is that Shepitko was a filmmaker of extraordinary sensitivity, ambition and skill. Her first feature after film school, *Wings*, centres on a middle-aged woman, headmistress Nadezhda Petrovna, once a World War II fighter pilot. Forced by the system into a judgmental mindset, she's wistful for her former autonomy in the skies. Shepitko was not yet thirty when she made *Wings* yet the film is laced with delicate, mature insights and a subtle depiction of the stresses of totalitarianism.

Her next project - one of the films comprising *Beginning of an Unknown Century* - was deemed subversive, too depressing by Brezhnev-era authorities. Adapted from Andrei Platonov's story, Shepitko's vision of famine in Communism's early years has an epic grandeur that never dwarfs the vivid depiction of the villagers, whom hunger has rendered almost ethereal.

As the young engineer struggles to power an irrigation pump, electricity literally galvanises the starving villagers into cooperation and collectivism. Yet, even in this lyricism there's ambiguity. How does it affect individuals? Figures onscreen for no more than a few moments are given depth and detail. The camera seems to move naturally with them but always finds an endpoint that reveals so much more. If Shepitko's masterpiece is the allegorical struggle of two Byelorussian soldiers in *The Ascent* (1977) then *Homeland of Electricity* proves a luminous study of humanity's ability to endure. "My heart keeps beating", says the old woman worn down by grief, it doesn't listen to me.

— Francine Stock, Presenter, Film Programme, BBC Radio 4

Participant Biography

Francine Stock joined the BBC in 1983 as a producer, and has presented various documentaries and discussion programmes since then. In 2005, she became chair of the Tate Members Council and in 2007 she was elected as the first female Honorary Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford. She has published several novels, including *A Foreign Country* (1999) and *Man-Made Fibre* (2002).

On Censorship in Early Soviet Cinema

by Dr Jamie Miller

As part of "Censorship in Film: a Discussion" with Dash Arts

Censorship of a number of films in the 1920s was circumvented by patron-client relations involving such individuals as Anatolii Lunacharskii (Head of Commissariat of Enlightenment) and director Yakov Protazanov. On several occasions, Lunacharskii intervened to protect Protazanov and other leading filmmakers of the time by ordering the censor, Glavrepertkom, to authorise films that were on the verge of being prohibited from release. Protazanov's *The Forty First*, which offered a controversial depiction of the class relationship between a female red partisan and a white officer, was one such film. Lunacharskii was not so favourable to his enemies, including Mikhail Bulgakov. Lunacharskii had a particularly close relationship with the Mezhrabpom studio where he also wrote scripts and where his wife was gainfully employed, suggesting (also in response to a question from the audience) that censorship decisions were about more than ideology.

The purges of the Great Terror of 1936 - 1938 impacted on film-makers. Many of the well-known directors avoided arrest or direct sanctions against them (Protazanov, Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Pudovkin and so on). Nonetheless, these individuals were threatened by other methods. One approach would be to arrest close friends and family. For example, a senior and well respected administrator, Albert Slivkin, who lived next door to film director Mikhail Room, was arrested in the middle of the night. This was witnessed by the Romm family and these sort of actions functioned as a warning signal to a nervous creative community. It is, therefore, all the more remarkable that films, such as Iulii Raizman's *The Last Night* (1936) which offer alternative views on the place of ordinary people in the Revolution were made and released, albeit with difficulties.

Vis the matter of the relationship between the artist and the state. It is certainly true that, in many cases, the repressive state versus artist victim does sometimes characterise relationships in the USSR. Nevertheless, one can argue that the relationship could also be more complex. For example, in the 1930s Eisenstein had fallen out of favour with the industry incumbent boss, Boris Shumiatskii, which meant that he had difficulty making films or getting them released. Eisenstein and some of his peers adopted the approach of becoming strategic insiders whereby they became part of official institutions, such as artistic councils which had real powers in terms of decision making and resource distribution. These strategies, which changed from time to time depending on circumstances and opportunities, gave certain filmmakers a degree of creative autonomy to develop their own projects. The reality of state-artist relations was thus often characterised by a more complex interaction and interdependency.

Responding to a question from the audience regarding the nature and impact of the Soviet films that were exported for foreign audiences to view, I noted that in the early days of Soviet cinema, many of the films were banned from public exhibition in the United Kingdom as it was feared that they might provoke revolutionary sympathy. This affected films including Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* which was shown in private film societies but not to the public. The UK government took this issue very seriously and film distributors of the day were closely monitored by MI5 and the security services. Indeed, in the early decades, censorship of Soviet films was a major issue throughout the world. Nonetheless, there was still a transnational culture of creative ferment partly due to journeys made by Soviet directors to Europe and America (western directors also brought their ideas to the USSR) who gave lectures and talks on many occasions.

Dr Jamie Miller is a freelance writer, researcher and translator. He is also a specialist in Soviet cinema in the 1920s and 1930s. He is the author of *Soviet Cinema: Politics and Persuasion under Stalin* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), as well as various journal articles and book chapters. He is now completing his second book *Propaganda and Popular Entertainment in the USSR: The Mezhrabpom Studio.*

Black God, White Devil

1964 | Glauber Rocha

Glauber Rocha is Brazil's most celebrated director and *Black God, White Devil* is probably his most celebrated film. The film's Portuguese title, *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (*'God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun'*) gives a clue to an aspect of its particular effect. The land in question, the sertão, an arid region in North East Brazil and symbol of terrible privation, is baked by the sun. Like the sertão, the film stock itself is scorched by the light, creating an astonishing aesthetic of flame and flare.

Even in this glare, a viewer can make out shadows cast by other revolutionary cinemas. Like the great Soviet directors and the Nouvelle Vague filmmakers in France, Rocha was critic first, a writer of manifestoes which combine bold leftist politics with searing aesthetic theory. Like the Italian neo-realists, his camera roams through authentic locations and the real lives of people existing in a moment of political upheaval. And, reminiscent of Eisenstein's towering works of the 1920s, *Black God, White Devil* expresses political dialectics through startling montage; indeed, the Odessa Steps of *The Battleship Potemkin* are explicitly echoed in Rocha's own massacre scene.

However, the shadows cast by distant filmmakers should not eclipse the Brazilian qualities of the film. Its style remains unmistakably a product of its place. The landscape of the sertão, the daily ordeal of the rural lumpenproletariat, the seductive messianic cults that swept the region, the tales of bandits, that sun: all these are chronicled in a heady bricolage that combines Brazilian cordel literature, traditional balladry, and innovative camerawork.

The film is a key work of Cinema Novo, the revolutionary movement in Brazilian film that, from the late 1950s, rejected Hollywood illusionism and turned to the sun-drowned lives of the forgotten millions, abandoned within a landscape of underdevelopment and indifference. The glossy images of Brazil's mainstream cinema are a million miles from Rocha's aesthetics of hunger: ugly-beautiful, unconventional, violent. This is no Hollywood fantasy pretending that distracting an audience from its woes can be a type of political resistance. *Black God, White Devil* – in search of freedom and an end to intellectual censorship – showed its Latin American viewers a searing image of their own misery in both jolting montage and relentlessly frank long takes, in saturated images of heat and passion and despair.

It caught the attention of Europe's film festivals in 1964, along with two other Cinema Novo films. But its release also more or less coincided with a military coup in Brazil, the beginning of a regime which would ultimately drive Rocha into exile and Cinema Novo into silence. Except that here we are, decades after Brazil's military regime passed to nothing, still watching *Black God, White Devil*, and still learning from its revolutionary resistance to tyrannical political movements in which cinema, too often, is complicit.

— Benedict Morrison, lecturer in English literature and film, University of Exeter

Participant Biography

Benedict Morrison is a lecturer in English Literature and Film at the University of Exeter. He is currently working on a monograph on inarticulate film form, mapping out alternative critical approaches to cinematic incoherence. He hopes to pursue research into modes of queerness in Brazilian cinema.

Z

1969 | Costa-Gavras

Based on real life events in Greece, filmed entirely in Algiers with a French-speaking cast and mainly financed by French producers, *Z* constitutes both a complicated and intriguing example of revolutionary cinema.

The film chronicles the 1963 assassination of left-wing MP Gregoris Lambrakis in Thessaloniki (northern Greece) and the subsequent examination of his case by an incorruptible magistrate (Christos Sartzetakis). Notably, the novel *Z* was written by Vassilis Vassilikos in 1966 and published in chapters in a popular weekly magazine during the trial, in the hope that it would influence the final outcome. The film was not shown in Greece at the time of its release, 1969, as the country was already under the regime of the Colonels (The Junta 1967-1974). At the time, Costa-Gavras already lived in Paris, Vassilikos had fled the country, and Mikis Theodorakis (who wrote the original film score) had been imprisoned because of his communist beliefs.

In this context, and although *Z* remains a political thriller in its essence, it is also interesting to note the way it functions equally as a hybrid, managing to incorporate comic and cinéma vérité elements that seem to constantly balance out its strong political agenda. The government officials are often presented as caricatures, the magistrate as a dry civil servant with a strong sense of duty, and Lambrakis' murderers as ignorant pawns in a surreal pyramid of hierarchy. Accused by left-wing critics for making a political cinema for the greater public instead of an intellectually engaging militant film with a clearly set revolutionary agenda and scope, Costa-Gavras has repeatedly argued for a simple language as well as for the importance of a 'universal message' in cinema.

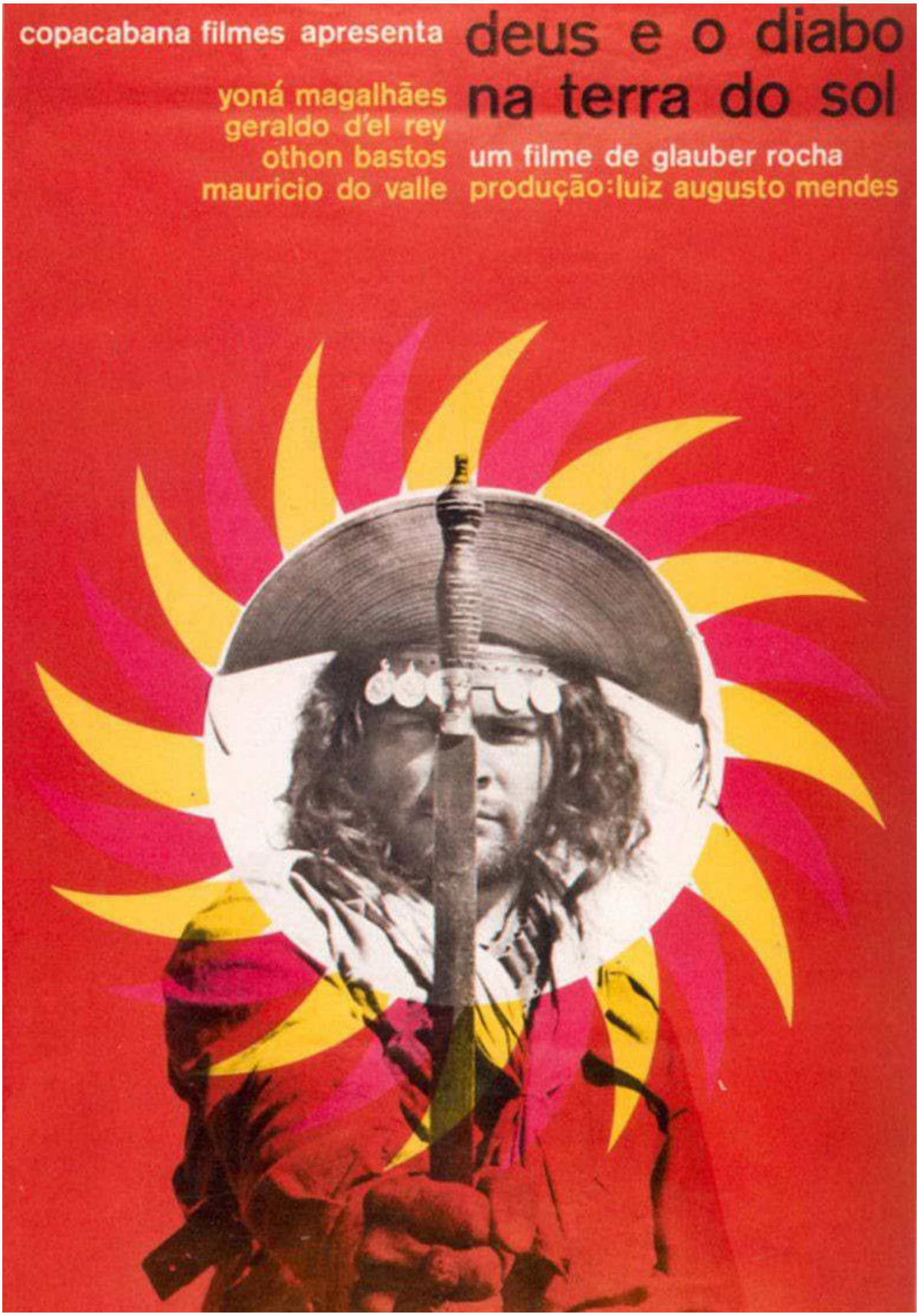
Appealing to post-May '68 France, the film marked a huge success at the box office in France and worldwide, winning numerous awards in International Film Festivals (including two Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film and Editing, a Best Actor award and the Jury Prize at Cannes Film Festival, Film Music award at the BAFTAs). It thus made the Greek political situation known to a wider audience.

Clearly placing himself against fascist regimes, oppression and the state, Costa-Gavras' *Z* manages to remain at the same time universal. No country or geographical references are mentioned anywhere in the film. In this, it maintains both an 'abstraction' and 'relevance': this could happen to any country, to any person, at any given time under the 'wrong' circumstances. At some point in the film, the photojournalist takes a statement from an uncorrupt witness who urges him to publish the story in "his" (i.e. anti-government) newspaper. The photojournalist replies: "What do you want? To please or to be efficient? In a local leftist paper, no one will see it! In mine (big daily newspaper), it's sensational news!" One could argue that the very significance of *Z* lays precisely in its success in presenting an 'irrelevant' event that took place in an 'irrelevant' country and elevating it to a universal status.

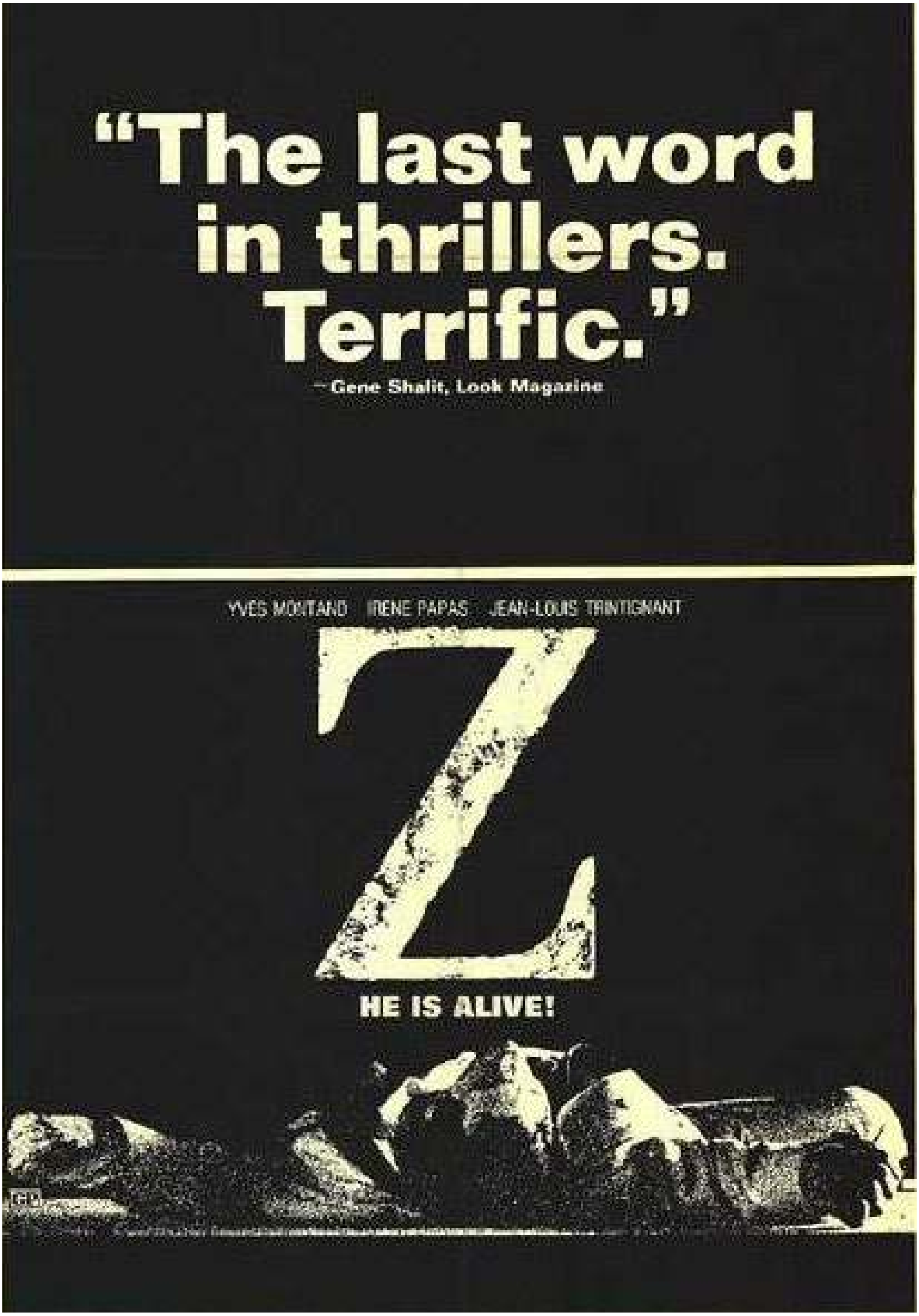
— Elena Papadaki, Greenwich University

Participant Biography

Elena Papadaki is a lecturer at the Department of Creative Professions and Digital Arts (University of Greenwich) and a founder of Incandescent Square, a collaborative meeting point for research and design. Her doctoral research (Goldsmiths, University of London) examined the curation of the moving image in diverse physical environments. Her current research interests include screen-based arts, the new Greek cinema, and exhibition practices *in open air cinemas.*



Theatrical release poster for Black God, White Devil



Poster for the film Z by Diener-Hauser

A Midlife Crisis: Censorship in Stalinist Cinema

by Claire Knight

As part of "Censorship in Film: a Discussion" with Dash Arts

Let's talk about the death of Soviet Cinema — the period when censorship was so tight that film production ground to a near halt and filmmaking as an art form died. It began in 1945, when the Party-state was scrambling to reassert Stalinist orthodoxy after having allowed some breathing space during the war, and lasted until Stalin's death in 1953. These years produced the most stereotypical cinema, the kind of fare one might anticipate from a supposedly totalitarian culture: films about Stalin's exploits and the evils of the West, like Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin* (1950), or the happy life of collective farm workers, who sing joyously over the harvest, as in Pyr'ev's *Cossacks of the Kuban* (1950); films that show us just how far Stalin's cult of personality had gone in deifying the leader and the extent to which socialist realism (the official aesthetic of the USSR) varnished reality. In short, dull, predictable, clichéd films drained of life and well worth avoiding in any anthology of the gems of Soviet cinema.

Yet, such were not the films that Soviet viewers saw—in two senses. First, when we consider film reviews and the handfuls of viewers' letters that survive the Soviet period, we find that rather than propagandistic pap, many audience members found something life-giving in these films. Instead of the apotheosis of Stalin as the lone architect of victory, viewers saw the greatness of the Soviet people reflected in Chiaureli's epic; they saw 'our' victory, for which Stalin was indebted 'to us'. Instead of being offended at Pyr'ev's creation of a wonderland of edible abundance (thanks to some skilfully executed papier mâché) at a time when the Kuban region was still shaky from severe famine, many viewers received the film as a gift of hope, the reward that was theirs by rights for their sacrifice during the war, but which had hitherto eluded them.

Second, these were not the only films that Soviets saw. In cinemas across the USSR, odes to the beatific Stalin were followed by the deafening cry of Tarzan as he swung his way to Jane, while showgirls like Marika Rökk, the Nazi *Woman of My Dreams* (Jacoby, 1944), followed on the heels of peasant folk dances, revealing more leg than had been seen in a generation. These Hollywood and Nazi films were trophies of war captured by the Red Army and edited for Soviet release, and made for a lively battle of cultures on cinema screens across the USSR. This contest continues to resonate on the silver screen today, and indeed even in the headlines. Just the other week, Rökk—who was banned from acting for two years in 1945 for her close ties to the Nazi leadership—was revealed to have been a Soviet spy all along. If this little footnote and the deathly dull films of postwar Stalinism can teach us anything, it is that things are not always as they seem.

Claire Knight is based at St Antony's College, Oxford, where she is the Max Hayward Visiting Fellow at the Russian and Eurasian Studies Centre for 2016-17. She works on late Stalin era cinema, 1945-53, a period known as "the death of Soviet cinema" for its stringent censorship, low production rates, and seemingly cliched films replete with happy peasants and odes to Stalin. Her research focuses particularly on popular films and trophy films, which were Hollywood and Nazi productions captured by the Red Army as spoils of war and re-edited for Soviet audiences during the early Cold War. Claire is currently preparing her first book on postwar popular Soviet cinema, based on her doctorate research at the University of Cambridge. Her publications on trophy films are found in the latest issue of Kritika, and online at www.kinokultura.com.

Danton

1983 | Andrzej Wajda

Andrzej Wajda's film *Danton* is based on or, at any rate, inspired by a play he had already mounted in the theatre – not the famous play by Büchner, but a Polish play known variously as *The Danton Affair* or *The Danton Case*, written in the '20s by Stanislawa Przybyszewska. She was an intriguing figure, one of the many illegitimate children of a dissolute poet; and she died young of morphine and malnutrition in Gdansk in 1935. Whereas Büchner, born within ten years of Danton's execution, made of his Danton one of the first existential heroes, Przybyszewska was obsessed and entranced by the character of Robespierre, to whom she devoted years of study.

Jean-Claude Carrière, the screenwriter, is not a man to be constrained by his source material; *Danton* was one of four films written by him in 1983. Nor is he especially possessive about his screenplays; and, in this case, Wajda and his Polish collaborators, including Agnieszka Holland, were concerned to rework the material to reflect the distressing developments in the Poland of the '80s, where a military dictatorship was intent on suppressing and dismantling the Solidarity Movement. So Robespierre, brilliantly played by Wojciech Pszoniak, under a sheen of cold sweat, is pinched and alienated, rather than heroic and Danton resumes the centre of the stage.

The fact is that in a season of revolutionary films, *Danton* is the anti-revolutionary joker in the pack. Concentrated in those few weeks of 1794 when the Revolution turned and consumed its own, "have no pity!" is the watchword from the start. Danton walks almost somnambulistically to his doom and Robespierre, far from enjoying his victory, is left catatonic with remorse and nursing the conclusion that "democracy is an illusion." Wajda, whose father was slaughtered at Katyn by Soviet forces, has a beady eye for the excesses of idealism and of course a sense of the sufferings inflicted on Poland by right and left in the course of a murderous century.

If I have said little about the cinematic qualities of *Danton*, it is because the restrained settings and the modestly effective tracking shots are all designed to contribute to the narrative drive and the moral gesture of the film. This, in other words, is an actors' and writers' film. Certain sly procedures – the casting of French actors to play Danton's followers and Polish actors to play Robespierre and his disciples – and a few frugal images – the naked child, the singing of the Marseillaise at the most ignominious low-point of political expediency and cowardice, the boldly deferred appearance of the guillotine – are enough to reveal a master film-maker, otherwise content to trust his actors: above all Depardieu, whose extraordinary blend of brute strength and delicacy has rarely been better revealed; who steers a perfect line between energy and fatalism; and whose final fall somehow gathers within itself all the victims squandered by the supreme wastefulness of Revolution.

— *Christopher Hampton, Screenwriter*

Participant Biography

Christopher Hampton's plays, musicals and translations have won many awards including four Tonys and three Oliviers. Prizes for his screenplays include an Oscar, Hollywood Screenwriter of the Year and awards at the Cannes and Venice film festivals. Plays include *Appomattox*, *The Talking Cure* and *Tales from Hollywood*; plus translations of plays by Chekhov, Ibsen, Moliere, Horvath, Yasmina Reza and Florian Zeller.

Land and Freedom

1995 | Ken Loach

Now that the United Kingdom begins its muddled and bad-tempered retreat from the European Union, and launches a diversionary threat of war with Spain over Gibraltar, this is an excellent time to be revisiting Ken Loach's passionate film *Land And Freedom*, about a young man from Liverpool in the 1930s who joins the fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War. Viewing it again twenty years on, the only thing I find myself quarrelling with is the title. For me, the film is all about freedom, not so much about land. The Spanish Civil War is still, to some extent, covered in a conspiracy of hushed denial in British public life, because the liberal West came to a tacit accommodation with Hitler's ally, Franco, triumphantly staying in power for thirty more years after the end of the Second World War.

This film breaks that silence, and for me it is one of three key artworks about the Civil War. The other two are Picasso's 1937 painting *Guernica* and George Orwell's 1938 memoir *Homage To Catalonia*, about Orwell's experiences fighting in Spain for the revolutionary militia, POUM, Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, or the Workers' Party Of Marxist Unification. Jim Allen's screenplay for *Land And Freedom* is clearly influenced by George Orwell. Ian Hart plays David Carr, a Communist Party member who travels to Spain in conditions of danger and hardship to join POUM; he is electrified by the idealism and sense of purpose, and he falls in love with a fellow warrior, Blanca, played by Rosana Pastor. But he enrages her by what she sees as his betrayal; disillusioned by lack of supplies and working weapon — having been badly wounded by a misfiring rifle — David joins the Soviet-backed international brigades, participates briefly in the bitter and squalid infighting in Barcelona before rejoining his old comrades who are themselves finally to be sold out.

No-one could accuse Ken Loach of being sentimental or starry-eyed about the anti-fascist struggle in *Land And Freedom*. Just as in his film *The Wind That Shakes The Barley*, about Irish republicanism, his focus is fiercely upon internal divisions, with all the anger and bewilderment that those divisions caused. *Land And Freedom* is a war movie, almost an action movie – and also a love story. I don't think I have ever seen a war movie with battle scenes shown so clearly and matter-of-factly. Loach takes out the adrenalin, and puts in the confusion and the fear. Even with some extraordinarily powerful scenes, such as the execution of the collaborationist priest, there is a kind of cold water clarity (though not detachment) to all the scenes that Loach creates.

Watching those scenes, I can imagine being in the fighting, in a way that I can't with almost any other war film: I can imagine being the old woman whose basket full of vegetables gets shot; I can imagine being David shouting across to a Manchester Communist who is fighting for the other faction. And it is a film about ideas and about talking. Two of the most important, and longest scenes, are just discussion. Whether to collectivise just the big house in which the militia find themselves — or the whole district?

Whether to accept help and arms from larger authorities such as the Soviet Communists, and accept therefore their authority, or to fight on, uncompromised, untarnished? Again, these are real scenes. They feel like real life. When the French soldier mispronounces and stumbles over the word "socialism" it no longer feels more honest and more authentic than a conventionally dramatised scene. *Land And Freedom* is a very moving film: a hammer-blow against parochialism and defeatism.

— Peter Bradshaw, writer, film critic at The Guardian

Participant Biography

Peter Bradshaw has been chief film critic at The Guardian since 1999. Bradshaw is also the author of several novels, including *Lucky Baby Jesus* (1999), *Dr Sweet and his Daughter* (2003) and *Night of Triumph* (2013), as well as radio programmes for the BBC.

The Final Decades of Soviet Cinema

by Alex Graham

As part of "Censorship in Film: a Discussion" with Dash Arts

Censorship is a rather unwieldy notion to apply to the final three decades of Soviet cinema. On one hand, this term is the most accessible point of departure from which Western audiences can explore the functioning of a system whose masters valued ideological compliance and artistic orthodoxy above all else. On the other, its implications – interdiction, intervention, suppression – lead us into the trap of imagining an oppositional power dynamic between filmmakers and bureaucracy that has outlived its usefulness. Increasingly, cultural historians and film scholars – myself included – are questioning its adequacy as a category that could encompass a range of political operations in the Soviet film industry of the post-Stalin era. We certainly can say that repressive, top-down censorship has a place in this history, but equally that it cannot, as Kristen Roth-Ey so aptly insists, "capture the intricacy of the dance" between feature-film production and ideological control.

It is useful to acknowledge that the mechanisms of political management affected late-Soviet cinema at every stage of the production process. From screenplay development and casting to the assessment of a finished film, ideological compliance was the collaborative responsibility of creative direction and executive production at all levels of the industry, with strategic anticipation at the former end and supervisory powers of approval at the latter. Everyday business flowed through a busy intersection of local and central authorities: the communist party committee within a major film studio or the culture department of a city-level party organization could sometimes prove a bigger and more immediate threat to the protection of creativity than the central administration, Goskino. 'Screening', 'policing', 'rewarding' and 'reprimanding' can all be understood as censorial practices when film projects were, at every turn, subjected to criteria ranging from recent political diktats to uncodified aesthetic dogma, passing through all the grey areas between the implicitly forbidden and the never-before dared. In this world, filmmakers often became bureaucratic negotiators, while lifelong political functionaries from other branches of public service could become the ultimate arbiters of a project's artistic viability at a film studio.

Artists and executives alike were bound together by the glue of an official language that was beginning to come unstuck at precisely the moment when Soviet film production was expanding in the wake of its Stalin-era drought. To be accused of 'formalism' in 1963 did not mean the threat to livelihood and safety that the same label might have signalled in 1936, but rather that the film in question somehow deviated aesthetically from the officially approved style: anything considered insufficiently socialist-realist could be decried as such. Conversely, 'excessively naturalistic' – another favourite conservative reproach – did not imply the detection of stylistic influences from Zola or Gorkii, but was instead a catch-all euphemism for everything that proved too 'real' for the decision-makers to handle. Since 'reality' should have concerned the Soviet artist principally for the depiction of its revolutionary essence or potential, any interest in details of life that were deemed to wander from that goal or disrupt the clarity of its message – coarseness, triviality, violence, backwardness – were lambasted along with those who had allowed such 'mistakes' to be made.

When filmmakers exacted vengeance on the industry's decaying executive organs during perestroika, the obfuscations of this language were one and the same object of grievance as the powerful figures who had used its hollow terminology to justify the indefinite 'shelving' of around 250 feature and television films between 1965 and 1986. If anything, the high-profile reversal of that repressive practice in the last years of the USSR did much to shape Western ideas of how Soviet censorship might have operated before this righteous vanquishing. In fact, the strategies of punishment and coercion were many and varied. Films could be passed with the lowest category of official approval and printed in miniscule quantities, before running for a week in provinces far from major cities, never to be screened again. Because

of the hole in plan-fulfilment created by an unapproved film, an entire studio's artistic cohort could be denied the quarterly bonus payments that enhanced its paltry salaries, as happened repeatedly with director Aleksei German at Lenfil´m. When Kira Muratova's second feature was shelved, a 'professional downgrade' effectively prohibited her from directing another film. However, by refusing to accept administrative or assistant film-work and expressing instead her interest in applying to be a cleaner or gardener at the Odessa studio, Muratova exposed the anxious face behind the pseudo-egalitarian mask of the late-Soviet institution. A sympathetic studio executive is rumoured to have created a new studio museum with the sole purpose of appointing Muratova its director, to avoid embarrassment for all concerned.

Such anecdotes abound in the memoirs and supplements to archival research that have been published in Russia since the fall of the USSR. However, a personality-focused history of late-Soviet cinema has limited usefulness for an understanding of the system's structural mechanisms. When film production expanded rapidly in the late-1950s, its exponential growth was accommodated by the creation of permanently operational production units, which were in place at all major studios by the early 1960s. These units were afforded unprecedented powers, from the crucial right to commission and develop screenplays for eventual approval to the appointment of creative consultants and advisory editors. From these bases, senior filmmakers-cum-executive producers in the units could develop hitherto inconceivable production strategies for engaging with higher levels of authority. At the same time, the ranks of those upper administrative hierarchies swelled, as a veritable army of new script editors and officials was recruited to exhaustively police the annual repertoires of the studios. Under the Ministry of Culture in the mid-to-late-1950s, this was the work of 70 people, with a further 100 managing central film distribution. When Goskino was established in 1963, this office had grown to 400 officials; by the time of a reorganization and (bloodless) executive purge in 1972, the Goskino body had swollen to no fewer than 700 Moscow-based administrative overlords.

The negotiation of initiative and agency between these production units and the party/state administration was the true battleground of late-Soviet ideological screening. The veteran Lenfil´m director Iosif Kheifits worked at the top of the profession during each period covered during our conversation at the Dash Arts Café. In the mid-1960s, he argued that it was "the dialectic of our production that gave birth to the production units" at major Soviet studios. These words can be taken as a politically commendable euphemism for the tense counterbalance between institutionalized artistic autonomy and communist party control that determined whether films would be made, mutilated, buried or smothered at birth. By learning more about the steps and tempos of this intricate dance, we can expand the notion of censorship into a fuller appreciation of the strategies for policing Soviet cinema that held sway during its most artistically diverse and politically complex period.

Alex Graham is a PhD candidate and Wolfson Foundation scholar at UCL-SSEES. His doctoral research focuses on the politics of film production at the Lenfil'm studio in the years between 1961 and 1991. It combines the study of innovation in film aesthetics and institutional structures to ask how late-Soviet cinema functioned as a creative industry and an ideological system. Alex has written an extended article on the cinema of Aleksei German Sr. and maintains an active research interest in the work of this filmmaker. His recent collaborations in screening Russian and Soviet cinema include participation in the BIMI Essay Film Festival, the Open City Documentary Festival and the SSEES Centenary Film Festival.

1900

1976 | Bernardo Bertolucci

A Screening and Supper Club with KinoVino

The Shortest Introduction to the Longest Film

With *Novecento* (*1900*) I dreamed of building a bridge between the Soviet Union and the USA – a half Soviet half American production – Olmo, the farmer would be a Soviet actor and Alfredo the landowner a Hollywood actor. I was dreaming that I would bring to the USA the biggest red flag they'd ever seen! That was the peak of my megalomania!

In fact the spirit of the film is love of the countryside of my childhood, where kids would catch frogs in ditches and witness the cruel ritual of the pig slaughter. *Novecento*, like in farming, is conceived in seasons – Summer is childhood, Autumn and Winter fascism, and Spring the Revolution. I wanted to show the birth of communism in the Po valley and the repression of the black shirts of Mussolini. The film ends with the landowner (Robert De Niro) put on trial by his peasants in the farm court yard where the utopian revolution takes place. The sentence is "Il padrone e morto" the landowner is dead. And that's why *Novecento* was never properly released in the States!

This film could never be made now. We, the actors, the farmers, the crew, the Parma ham, the cheese, the wine were all living a dream. Today the only red left are in North Korea!

— *Bernardo Bertolucci, Film Director*

It is exactly because of this ambition to change the world by the means of cinema we included *Novecento*, (*1900*), a five-hour long political saga, as the grand finale of our season *A World to Win: A Century of Revolution on Screen*. We never thought that by the day of our last screening the idea of building (new) bridges between Moscow and Washington, never mind North Korea, would become so relevant – a surprising reason to revisit and rethink this stunning masterpiece.

The narrative frame is bluntly simple and highly symbolic. It starts with the announcement of the death of the great Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi on 27 January 1901. In true Verdian inspiration, the same day two boys are born: one Alfredo Berlinghieri (Robert de Niro), the son of a wealthy landowner to be favoured as a true bourgeois, and the other Olmo Dalcò (Gérard Depardieu) the son of a peasant who works for the Berlinghieri estate. This film is a story of their friendship, which, like a drop of water in the ocean, reveals the inequality of Italian society in the first half of the twentieth century.

The death of Verdi might be important to Bertolucci as this is the death of the nineteenth-century aesthetic of domestic bourgeois melodrama (he even names Alfredo after the protagonist in *La Traviata*), and the start of the new baroque even grotesque aesthetics of the Mussolini-inspired zeitgeist of the 20th century. As Bertolucci says above, he wanted a Soviet actor to play Olmo, but refused to submit the script to the Russians and 'ended up' with young Depardieu, who by an irony of fate recently got Russian citizenship. Bertolucci of course does not make it subtle which side he takes between the two boys.

Novecento's symbolism continues throughout the film: time in this film is time of the peasants. It is marked by the turn of the seasons with a summer of childhood, then autumn and winter darkened by fascism, and spring symbolising the utopian Revolution.

Both De Niro and Depardieu deliver extraordinary performances, which become the heart of the film. We watch them frog hunt, eat and drink, masturbate, lay down for certain suicide before an approaching train. It is easy to link this complex friendship with Bertolucci's earlier profound interest in both Freud and communism. There is even a famous scene where the two men share a bed with an epileptic prostitute. It is at first disturbing, then deeply sarcastic.

Today's supper club might encourage us to notice the food and wine ('vino speciale' could probably be named another character of the film, it is consumed literally everywhere). And then we might celebrate the film's length. During post-production Bertolucci was allegedly banned from the editing room by its producers, but still refused to release a shortened 195-minute version, which despite that, was shown in many countries. The version you are going to watch today is the director's favourite five hour and twenty minutes marathon. It has certainly changed the history of cinema, if not more.

— *Maria Korolkova, Senior Lecturer*
University of Greenwich

Participant Biographies

Bernardo Bertolucci is a double Academy award winning director and screenwriter, whose films include *The Conformist, Last Tango in Paris, 1900, The Last Emperor, The Sheltering Sky, Stealing Beauty* and *The Dreamers.* He was presented with the inaugural Honorary Palme d'Or Award at the opening ceremony of the 2011 Cannes Film Festival.

Maria Korolkova is a Senior Lecturer in Media & Communications at the University of Greenwich. Before that she taught Cultural Theory at Richmond, and European Cinema at the University of Oxford, where she also completed a Doctorate on Representations of Space in Russian Cinema of 1910s and 1920s. Maria is an independent film critic, with articles featuring in the BBC World Service, Calvert Journal, Forbes and Times Literary Supplement.

KinoVino is rapidly gaining recognition as one of London's most original projects, that unites food and film. Featured in British Vogue and named one of 10 best supper clubs by TimeOut London, KinoVino marries best of world cinema with some of the most innovative menus inspired by the films. For each edition, it's founder, Dr. Alissa Timoshkina, who holds a PhD in film history, creates an immersive experience where film, food and wine are curated under one theme, with the original room decor and tablescapes reflecting and enhancing the theme of the night.

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