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## The Hand that Turns the Handle: Camera Operators and the Poetics of the Camera in Pre-Revolutionary Russian Film

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‘Is there any real necessity for you? What are you? *A hand that turns the handle*. Couldn’t they do without this hand? Couldn’t you be eliminated, replaced by some piece of machinery?’

I smiled as I answered:

‘In time, Sir, perhaps.’<sup>1</sup>

The person who turns the handle of the camera-apparatus, and who is therefore responsible for the poor-quality print, is called the ‘operator’. There are good and bad operators. The good ones are foreign; the bad ones are Russian. The art of the camera operator is still at an embryonic stage, and for this reason is difficult to describe.<sup>2</sup>

To study the art of the cinematographer in the pre-revolutionary silent era is to observe a process of relentless degradation. In his own time the camera operator was rarely credited for his work, and even when this was the case, his creative contribution to the finished product was obscured by popular misconceptions and critical ignorance. To a

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<sup>1</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio or (Shoot!)* [1915], trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, Sawtry, 1990, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> From an anonymous article published in 1918 in *Kinogazeta*. It is cited in M. Kushnirov, ‘A. A. Levitskii’ (hereafter, ‘A. A. Levitskii’), in M. Goldovskaia (ed.), *Desiat’ operatorskikh biografii*, Moscow, 1978, pp. 14–31 (p. 18). All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

certain extent the pathos of the cinematographer is bound inextricably to the tragedy of silent cinema as a whole. Once the camera negative of a film had been used to strike a print, its physical survival became subject to a variety of different pressures: the dangers and costs of storage (nitrate was a well-known fire hazard), the carelessness of owners, the prejudices of cultural policy-makers and archivists, the expense of restoration and transfer and, most importantly, the chemical decomposition of the cellulose nitrate itself. The number of pre-revolutionary films preserved in Russia, for example, amounts to only 15 per cent of the total production for the period, with hardly any tinted and toned versions surviving, and some important treasures apparently lost for ever. Add to this the complex genealogy of the individual release-print, which means that copies available for public viewing and commercial release may not have been struck from first-generation negatives or positives, and it is hardly surprising that the work of the camera operator has been consistently undervalued. If his influence persists in the work of those who succeed him, the expression of his imagination in its physical form is nevertheless unstable and for the most part transient.

This essay seeks to chart the evolving nature of the camera operator's function at a time when Russian cinema was facing the challenge of self-definition, not only in relation to other art forms, but also in relation to world cinema. The contemporary view of the man behind the camera as merely a 'hand that turns the handle', a technician (if not automaton) who was responsible only for the correct speed of shooting, is a gross distortion of the reality. If camera operation started out as a rudimentary craft, one that was nevertheless valued because the mechanisms of the cinematograph were little understood, it rapidly became an art form as the language of silent cinema acquired sophistication. The involvement of the operator in the positioning and angle of the camera, the composition of the frame, the movement of the actors within the frame, the arrangement and lighting of the set, and the chemical development of the print meant that he enjoyed a primary responsibility for the 'look' of the moving picture, its visual style, structure, and harmony. Within the larger film-making unit, it was the operator who found himself at the forefront of the conflict between the demands of the creative imagination and the limitations of available technology. His relationship with the director, which was initially fluid but gradually evolved into a stable pattern which many would recognize today, became the site for several competing influences which subsequently came to define the language of cinema, both in Russia and abroad. This essay will examine the development of certain conventions which pertained to the role of the camera and which controlled the expression of dramatic ideas in visual form. It will also

seek to identify the reasons for a number of major aesthetic shifts which took place in Russian cinema during the period concerned, and the importance of the visual arts — in particular painting and photography — in determining those shifts.<sup>3</sup>

*Part I: Camera Operation and the Beginnings of Russian Cinema*

Bearing in mind the historical neglect of pre-revolutionary Russian cinema generally, it is unsurprising that the camera operators of the period have elicited little scholarly interest. This situation has persisted despite the publication some time ago of memoirs by Louis Forestier and Aleksandr Levitskii, both of whom started their careers in Russia's nascent film industry around 1910 and continued to be important figures within cinematographic circles after the October Revolution.<sup>4</sup> These monographs are among the very few detailed literary sources for the period. Furthermore, when combined with information from other sources (most importantly the extant films themselves), they afford a considerable degree of insight into the aesthetics and mechanics of the early silent era, in particular in relation to the role of the camera operator. Such evidence suggests that the technical level of Russian cinema was impressive and certainly on a par with the American and European industries by the middle of the 1910s. It is clear, moreover, that the second decade of the twentieth century produced a number of intelligent and sophisticated cameramen, the creative endeavours of whom must be deemed at least partly responsible for the achievements of several contemporary directors. These include Boris Zavelev, a collaborator with Petr Chardynin and Evgenii Bauer at the Khanzhonkov & Co. film studio during the First World War; Nikolai Kozlovskii, an actualities specialist who worked for Aleksandr Drankov and

<sup>3</sup> I am extremely grateful to Gosfil'mofond for granting me access to their film holdings as part of the research for this article. In particular, I would like to thank Valerii Bosenko, director of international liaison, for facilitating the making of frame-stills. I was permitted to watch safety positive (triacetate) viewing copies on a French-made CTM editing table at a speed of 16 frames per second. I will be referring to individual sequences from these films in the text and notes by reel and frame number. Unfortunately, very few of the works which form the basis for the ensuing discussion are commercially available at present, although a number of them have been distributed by the British Film Institute as part of its ten-volume *Early Russian Cinema* series; this was produced by Erich Sargeant and released in 1992. The series contains titles translated by Julian Graffy, original music composed by Neil Brand, and notes supplied by Ian Christie. Where helpful, the sequences from the films released as part of this series will be cited in the notes with the relevant volume number. I am grateful to the British Academy for funding two research trips to Gosfil'mofond in February and July 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Lui Forest'e [Louis Forestier], *Velikii nemoi: Vospominaniia kinooperatora*, Moscow, 1945 (hereafter, *Vospominaniia*), and A. Levitskii, *Rasskazy o kinematografe*, Moscow, 1964 (hereafter, *Rasskazy*). One might also mention the memoirs of the actualities specialists Ivan Frolov and Petr Novitskii, brief extracts of which have appeared in M. I. Volotskii (ed.), *Migaiushchii sinema: Rannie gody russkoi kinematografii: Vospominaniia, dokumenty, stat'i*, Moscow, 1995 (hereafter, *Migaiushchii sinema*), pp. 193–202 and 211–12, respectively.

subsequently photographed Bauer's debut, *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi* (Twilight of a Woman's Soul, 1913); Władysław Starewicz, celebrated today as one of the pioneers of three-dimensional animation, but someone who worked regularly both as a cameraman and director during the period concerned; Evgenii Slavinskii, who photographed Iakov Protazanov's *Pikovaia dama* (The Queen of Spades, 1916) before himself moving into direction, most famously when he invited the Futurist poet Vladimir Maiakovskii (the author of the screenplay) to assume a leading role in *Baryshnia i khuligan* (The Lady and the Hooligan, 1918); and the aforementioned Forestier and Levitskii, the latter of whom worked on a number of projects associated with the prestigious *Zolotaia seriia* or 'Golden Series', the Russian equivalent of the French-Italian 'Film d'Art' productions.

Forestier's memoirs offer a series of illuminating insights into the background and interests of the typical camera operator at this time. Born in France, Forestier's enthusiasm for the moving picture was triggered by his encounter with Georges Méliès's 'magical' trick films in Paris in 1906; later, after learning to use a stills camera and working briefly for a Paris magazine, he managed through contacts to arrange a job for himself at the Gaumont film factory in Belleville. His apprenticeship involved a thorough introduction to all aspects of film production, from editing (splicing the strips together with glue) through to printing and developing, tinting and toning the positive release-prints with colour dyes, and working as a mechanic on the projecting apparatus — only then was he permitted to work alongside the four camera operators employed in the studio at the time (the Gaumont factory, like many others, combined both film-making and processing operations on a single site). On his own admission, however, Forestier received only superficial instruction as to the basic functioning of the motion-picture camera. For this reason, in the general absence of technical literature, he was forced to acquire the rudiments of his craft, such as how to adjust focus and execute panorama shots, by trial and error. At that time the camera operator was obliged to photograph everything and anything that was pushed in his direction: comedies, dramas, 'spectacles', and actualities. As he comments:

Little was demanded of the camera operator: only that the image be sharp and clearly visible, and that the main protagonists were not truncated by the edge of the frame. No one had the slightest conception of soft-focus, close-ups, or lighting effects.<sup>5</sup>

The Gaumont studio, like several others in Europe and America, was built of glass, with blinds made of cotton sheets pulled across the window-panes in order to diffuse the harsh shadows produced by

<sup>5</sup> Forest'e, *Vospominaniia*, p. 9.

strong sunlight. The camera was fixed in a perpendicular position in relation to the stage so that the decor was entirely in view (the Gaumont cameras were mounted on little platforms with wheels — this was also the case in Méliès's studio — but they were never allowed to move). The actors were photographed in their entirety, with no part of the body permitted to transgress the frame of the picture: for this reason the actor's movements around the stage were strictly circumscribed either by wooden planks laid across the floor or markings made by chalk. If the actor transgressed this notional boundary, it was considered a technical deficiency and the sequence was perforce re-shot (the maxim that 'a man cannot walk without legs' was universal currency at this time). The cameras employed in the studio were British-manufactured Urbans or Prestwiches with German-made Tessar-Zeiss or Voigtländer lenses. Lighter cameras, such as the French-manufactured Debrie-L and Parvo, made their appearance around 1908. Another popular camera at this time was the French Pathé Studio Model, which had been introduced in 1903. This was instantly recognizable because its film-cassettes were attached to the top of the camera, rather than placed inside (and for this reason it was fondly known as the 'camel' among Russian operators). Forestier confirms that 50mm lenses were standard at this time, and that although lenses of different focal lengths were apparently available (for example, 75, 90, and 120mm lenses), they were employed for the most part only in actualities and travelogues.<sup>6</sup>

Although Forestier started his career in France, he was one of a number of foreign operators who were sent to Russia by their employers from 1907 onwards either to make actualities or to work on features for foreign companies with branches there. Having transferred in the meantime from Gaumont to Éclair, another French company, Forestier was sent to Moscow in 1910 to work for its Russian representative, Aleksandr Khanzhonkov, who was in the process of establishing his own film-making business. His snapshot impressions of Krylatskoe, the Khanzhonkov summer studio where Chardynin was shooting his adaptation of Lermontov's *Maskarad* (A Masquerade, 1910), are as humorous as they are informative. The 'stage' was little more than a small wooden platform erected in a large garden: the decorations had been painted on to a canvas backdrop which ruffled and swelled every time there was a breeze or gust of wind; the furniture had been chosen with little thought for historical authenticity; and the costumes had been rented and did not fit the actors particularly well.<sup>7</sup> The accuracy of these memoirs can be gauged by reference to the early Khanzhonkov

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 5–25.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

productions which have been fortunate enough to survive. Chardynin's adaptation of Dostoevskii's *Idiot* (The Idiot, 1910), for example, also shot at Krylatskoe, but this time with Forestier behind the camera, employs blatantly artificial and physically fragile stage-sets: doors wobble when opened; mantelpieces sink under the weight of human elbows; pot-plants move in the breeze; and the scenes beyond the windows are clearly painted.

Despite Forestier's assertion that little was demanded of the camera operator at this time, even this limited requirement sometimes proved elusive. Khanzhonkov's memoirs contain several examples of productions which could not be released because they were technically deficient. In the non-extant *Palochkin i Galochkin* (Palochkin and Galochkin, 1907), a one-act comedy photographed by Vladimir Siverson, the top of the frame unfortunately truncated the heads of the eponymous clowns.<sup>8</sup> In a subsequent and more ambitious project — *Pesn' pro kuptsa Kalashnikova* (Song About the Merchant Kalashnikov, 1908) — the shots of the Kremlin walls were rendered black on the release-prints because Siverson had not realized that orthochromatic film was insensitive to the red end of the spectrum.<sup>9</sup> Later still, using natural light in a local railway-station club for the filming of Gogol's *Zhenit'ba* (Marriage, 1909) and *Mertvye dushi* (Dead Souls, 1909), Siverson miscalculated the required quantity of light and consequently underexposed the image.<sup>10</sup> Such amateurishness is not untypical for this period in Russia, especially in those cases, such as Siverson's, where the camera operator in question had little training and hardly any experience. Even those photographers with some formal experience were occasionally prone to elementary errors. While working on *Boris Godunov* (1907), the first Russian film to be given a commercial release, Drankov encountered problems with the viewing mechanism of the Pathé camera which he had brought back from Paris, and with fitting the actors full-length into the frame given the height and width of the stage at the Eden open-air theatre.<sup>11</sup> Protazanov, while working as a translator for the Spanish operator Antonio Serrano at Thiemann and Reinhardt's Gloria studio, later recalled the memorable occasion on which he (Serrano) failed to convert the focusing calibrations on his British-made camera (given in feet) into metres, thus shooting the entire film out of focus.<sup>12</sup> Such

<sup>8</sup> A. A. Khanzhonkov, *Pervye gody russkoi kinematografii*, Moscow, 1937 (hereafter, *Pervye gody*), p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

<sup>11</sup> See Yuri Tsivian, 'Early Russian Cinema: Some Observations' (hereafter, 'Early Russian Cinema'), in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (eds), *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, London, 1991, pp. 7–30 (p. 12).

<sup>12</sup> S. Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii*, Moscow, 1963 (hereafter, *Kinematografiia*), p. 132.

oversights, it should be stressed, were the product of human error, and not the primitive nature of the apparatus. Although the viewing and focusing mechanisms on the old cameras were complicated, these same cameras were capable of producing excellent images — even in the 1960s, as lovingly restored and maintained museum exhibits, they could certainly compete on an equal footing with their contemporary equivalents when equipped with modern film stock.<sup>13</sup>

Time and experience were required before Russia could compete technically with the rest of the world. As elsewhere, the nascent industry attracted its fair share of charlatans, adventurers, and hard-headed entrepreneurs. Camera operators were little different in this regard, although from the limited sources available it would appear that a majority of first-generation practitioners were drawn from the ranks of professional still photographers and actuality makers. Levitskii, for example, worked as a photo-correspondent prior to his move to Pathé Frères in 1910.<sup>14</sup> Zavelev, Grigorii Lemberg, and Nikolai Efremov, all of whom were still working in the 1920s, started their careers as professional still photographers.<sup>15</sup> Kozlovskii owned a photographic studio in Kiev prior to making actualities for local cinemas; he joined Drankov's cinematographic 'atelier' after the public announcement of its opening in 1907.<sup>16</sup> Drankov himself, before acquiring a reputation as a cut-throat entrepreneur and general hustler, was making a modest living as a news photographer: he enjoyed accreditation with the London *Times*, was employed as the official photographer of the State Duma, and his studio boasted the very latest in modern equipment (a 'mirror' camera and artificial electric lighting, both brought back with him from a trip to London). Drankov's speciality, in keeping with his journalistic instincts, lay in sensational actualities: his first releases included footage of a genuine fire (a cinematic coup by the standards of the day), and a documentary about Moscow down-and-outs, fragments of which were later incorporated into Esfir' Shub's *Rossia Nikolaia II i*

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed description of these focusing procedures, see Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, second edn., London, 1992 (hereafter, *Film Style and Technology*), p. 46. On the quality of the Pathé cameras, see George Mitchell, 'Billy Bitzer — Pioneer and Innovator: Part 2', *American Cinematographer*, 46, 1965, 1, pp. 35, 36, 54–58 (pp. 36 and 54).

<sup>14</sup> Levitskii, *Rasskazy*, p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> Zavelev and Lemberg are both mentioned in Forest'e, *Vospominaniia*, p. 67. For the information about Efremov, see Viacheslav Gordanov, *Zapiski kinooperatora*, Leningrad, 1973 (hereafter, *Zapiski*), pp. 18–19, and Ia. L. Butovskii, *Andrei Moskvín, kinooperator*, St Petersburg, 2000 (hereafter, *Andrei Moskvín*), p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia*, p. 43.

*Lev Tolstoi* (The Russia of Nicholas II and Lev Tolstoi, 1927).<sup>17</sup> Slavinskii, by contrast, entered the film industry by means of the travelogues or ‘picture postcards’ (‘vidovye kartinki’) which he filmed during the winter of 1908–09 aboard the ice-breaker ‘Ermak’ as it attempted to establish a ‘northern route’: this was the beginning of a successful career as an actualities specialist for Pathé Frères prior to his move to the Ermol’ev film studio in 1912.<sup>18</sup> Fedor Verigo-Darovskii, an eccentric, flamboyant, and by all accounts acrobatic character who worked alongside the FEKS directors during the making of *Pokhozhdeniia Oktiabriny* (The Adventures of Oktiabrina, 1924), their first film project, entered the industry in 1915: prior to this he had studied ballet, worked as a photographer and laboratory technician, and then gained experience as an actuality maker (at great risk to his own life he managed to shoot sensational footage during a typhoid epidemic in Tsaritsyn in 1911).<sup>19</sup> Starewicz, who won several prizes for art-work and costume-design in his youth, subsequently developed an interest in still photography and was first engaged by Khanzhonkov in order to make travelogues: his first work, *Nad Nemanom* (On the River Neman), was made in 1909.<sup>20</sup>

Anecdotal evidence and popular myth portray the pre-revolutionary generation of operators as conspiratorial and sect-like, reluctant to divulge the secrets of their trade (even to fellow members) and prone to eccentric behaviour. It has been claimed that Lev Drankov, the brother of Aleksandr, whose career began in 1908 and spanned nearly two decades, was superstitiously wedded to a pair of white boots — these were donned just prior to shooting, apparently in the belief that they ensured correct exposure.<sup>21</sup> Efremov was reported always to have covered his head with a black cloth while peering through the viewfinder, a habit presumably retained from his days as a stills photographer.<sup>22</sup> The status of such men, both within the industry and at large, was a curious and paradoxical one. On the one hand, as masters of the mysterious mechanism of the cinematograph, they

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 45–47. Grigorii Lemberg (see note 15 above) was Drankov’s brother-in-law. It was while living for several years with the Lemberg family that Drankov acquired the rudiments of photography before later establishing his own studio with his brother Lev in 1905. On this and other aspects of Drankov’s early career, see Rashit Iangirov, ‘A. Drankov’ (hereafter, ‘A. Drankov’), in *Migaiushchii sinema*, pp. 77–94 (p. 83).

<sup>18</sup> Mariia Slavinskaia, ‘Odin iz pervykh’ (hereafter, ‘Odin iz pervykh’), in O. T. Nesterovich (ed.), *Zhizn’ v kino: Veterany o sebe i svoikh tovarishchakh*, Moscow, 1979, pp. 131–48 (pp. 132–35).

<sup>19</sup> Khanzhonkov, *Pervye gody*, p. 56. See also Gordanov, *Zapiski*, pp. 16–17.

<sup>20</sup> See Vladimir Antropov’s biographical résumé in *Velikii kinemo: Katalog sokhranivshikhsia igrovykh fil’mov Rossii 1908–1919*, Moscow, 2002 (hereafter, *Velikii kinemo*), pp. 517–21, and also Marina Karaseva, ‘Vladislav Starevich’, in *Migaiushchii sinema*, pp. 147–60.

<sup>21</sup> Gordanov, *Zapiski*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>22</sup> Butovskii, *Andrei Moskvín*, p. 29.



enjoyed something of the reputation of *magi*. Slavinskii recalls that the arrival of the camera to record spectacular events — his particular anecdote concerns the documentary filming of flight pioneers — would invariably provoke more curiosity among the crowds than the actual event itself.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that the cameraman was also equated with the comic and the farcical. This can be gauged by a series of humorous sketches released at some point in the mid-1910s by Drankov under the collective title *Lysyi — operator* (Baldie — The Operator). These sketches took as their subject the ludicrous adventures of a bald and amorous cameraman, the model for which may well have been Max Mack's *Der Stellungenlose Photograph* (The Unemployed Photographer, 1912), a German film which similarly exploited the conceit of the camera as quasi-phallic instrument (the cameraman in question takes advantage of his apparatus to lure, and then seduce, aspiring film actresses).<sup>24</sup> Such subjects testify to an early appreciation of the camera as an instrument of male voyeurism — to capture the female form on silver nitrate becomes the equivalent of seduction. Starewicz had produced a parodic subversion of this idea in *Mest' kinematograficheskogo operatora* (The Revenge of the Camera Operator, 1912), his second film involving animated plasticine models. Here the camera functions as an instrument of sexual revenge on the part of an emasculated subject. A camera operator (the grasshopper) is brutally shouldered aside by a married rival (the beetle) during an amorous advance on an attractive nightclub singer (the dragonfly). Aggrieved, he uses his camera adroitly to capture the subsequent seduction on film (an early and inventive example of *cinéma vérité*); and then, at the local cinema where he doubles as a projectionist, he shows the resulting footage under the title *Nevernyi muzh* (The Unfaithful Husband), much to the horror and indignation of his victim, who is watching in the audience with his wife. The theme of the camera operator as romantic hero/adventurer continues into the 1920s with *Papirosnitsa ot Mossel'proma* (The Cigarette-Girl from Mosselprom, 1924), a light-hearted comedy directed and photographed by Iurii Zheliabuzhskii, himself an operator of some considerable standing who had joined the Ermol'ev film studio in 1916. Many years later, with another slight variation but set in the same historical period, the theme resurfaces in *Raba ljubvi* (Slave to Love, 1975), a retro-style melodrama directed by Nikita Mikhalkov and loosely based on the life of the pre-revolutionary starlet

<sup>23</sup> Slavinskaia, 'Odin iz pervykh', p. 133.

<sup>24</sup> Four films of the series have survived: *Lysyi vliublen v tantsovshchitsu*; *Lysyi — kinooperator*; *Lysyi priglasen na uzhin*, and *Lysyi khotel, chtoby u nego vyrosli volosy*. See Vel'kii kinemo, pp. 332, 333, 351. For a stimulating discussion of Mack's earlier film, see Sabine Hake, 'Self-Referentiality in Early German Cinema', in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*, Amsterdam, 1996 (hereafter, *A Second Life*), pp. 237–45 (pp. 238–39).

Vera Kholodnaia. The leading male protagonist is a camera operator who is shooting a silent film for a studio which has decamped south in order to avoid the chaos of the October Revolution. While secretly recording footage of White executions, and thus risking his life, he simultaneously pursues an off-stage romance with the studio's leading lady, partly in an attempt to influence her naive political views. His lack of romantic success (he is arrested before the relationship is consummated) is compensated for by the fact that the object of his love, having watched the footage, realizes the banality of her previous existence.

These popular images testify to a slightly disparaging view of the camera operator during the early years of film. In some respects, however, this should hardly come as a surprise. Early cinema was a mass-production process which varied greatly in terms of technical quality. As Slavinskii's memoirs testify, the severity of the competition meant that the camera operator was forced to work around the clock, shooting films in rapid succession with a variety of different directors on the basis of what can only be described as a conveyor-belt system.<sup>25</sup> Little was known about the camera operator's function, and little credit was given for his contribution. The gradual promotion of the director to celebrity status — his name figuring prominently alongside the actors and actresses with star billing in the publicity posters — subsequently placed the cameraman in the shade. As Kevin Brownlow has argued, however, this perceived marginalization masked the very serious degree of responsibility that he actually enjoyed in practice.<sup>26</sup> Popular misconceptions notwithstanding, the camera operator was directly responsible for lighting, composition, collaboration with the set-designer over the choice and arrangement of décor, the chemical development of the film-stock, and the choice of tints and tones for the release-prints. As film language became more sophisticated and complex, these spheres began to assume greater importance: this was especially so in the case of silent cinema, the poetics of which, in the absence of spoken dialogue, placed tremendous emphasis on the visual. Significantly, the second decade of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a number of collaborative relationships, which suggests awareness on the part of the studio and the director that the choice of camera operator was crucial, in particular for those companies which prided themselves on the quality of their products. How these collaborations functioned in practice is difficult to establish with precision in the relative absence of published testimonies. Nevertheless,

<sup>25</sup> Slavinskaia, 'Odin iz pervykh', p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> See chapter seventeen, 'The Cameraman', in Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By . . .*, London, 1968, pp. 212–25 (p. 212).

by comparing the films of different working partnerships, it is possible to investigate the 'signatures' or trademark features of certain cinematographers, and thus to appreciate how they worked with, and at times radically assaulted, cherished cinematic conventions.

*Part II: Early Cinema and Theatrical Convention*

It is common to stress the theatrical conventions which underpinned the aesthetic assumptions of early cinema, both at the point when the cinematograph made its appearance, and later, as film-making sought cultural respectability, away from its origins as a kind of technological marvel or fairground attraction. These conventions determined the height of the camera (between four-and-a-half and five feet), which was reckoned according to the supposed eye-level view of the spectator seated in the central aisle;<sup>27</sup> and the distance of the camera in relation to the stage, which was calculated in terms of the position of this spectator and the requirement that the figures projected on to the typical screen of the time be perceived as life-size.<sup>28</sup> The insistence that the image be sharply focused, that the depth of field be relatively large (from medium- to long-shot), that the camera be static, and that the actors be fully in view derived essentially from theatrical norms.<sup>29</sup> Like the early work of Méliès, which evolved from stage presentations in the Théâtre Robert-Houdin, certain Russian films during this period were shot on theatre stages using theatrical lighting equipment. The first Khanzhonkov productions, *Pesn' pro kuptsa Kalashnikova*, *Vybor tsarskoi nevesty* (The Selection of the Tsar's Bride, 1908), and *Russkaia svad'ba XVI stoletii* (A Russian Wedding in the Sixteenth Century, 1908) were all shot at the Vvedenskii narodnyi dom in Lefortovo with footlights and Jupiter-arcs.<sup>30</sup> The filming of genuine theatrical productions — Khanzhonkov mentions the popular pantomime *Slezy* (Tears, 1912), which had been staged in a special silent version by the Moscow Arts Theatre — further testifies to the aspiration that cinema, despite the absence of spoken dialogue, should be taken seriously as a form of dramatic performance.<sup>31</sup> Even the luxury film palaces which began to

<sup>27</sup> A rare exception to this rule was the Pathé convention of placing the camera at waist height with the lens axis horizontal. This convention was adopted for the shooting of *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise*, made by Calmettes and Le Bargy at the end of 1908 for the Film d'Art company. See Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, pp. 87–88. This same position can also be witnessed in some early Russian productions by the Moscow branch of the Pathé Frères company. See, for example, *Kniazhna Tarakanova* (1910), which is available in volume one of the BFI series.

<sup>28</sup> See Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film*, Oxford, 1997 (hereafter, *Theatre to Cinema*), pp. 164–66.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>30</sup> Khanzhonkov, *Pervye gody*, pp. 22–23. *Russkaia svad'ba*, which is available in volume two of the BFI series, shows clearly the impact of these arcs.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

appear in Russian cities at the beginning of the 1910s attempted in subtle ways to evoke the architecture of the theatre. We witness the movement away from tunnel-shaped auditoria towards rectangular 'shoe-boxes'; the incorporation of a notional stage on which the screen was placed; and an obligatory curtain raised and lowered at the end of performances. This has been interpreted as evidence of a reception shift, an attempt to cloak the nakedly technological marvel of the cinematograph in the mantle of cultural respectability.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, there were certain technical features of the cinematograph which possessed aesthetic implications and underlined cinema's kinship with painting and photography. Lens optics, for example, meant that the spatial dynamic of the studio stage was the precise opposite of the theatre: whereas the playing space of the latter consisted of a wide fan, the broadest part of which coincided with the front of the stage, and the narrowest with the rear of the stage, the field of view of the motion-picture camera consisted of a rectangular pyramid lying on its side, the apex of which was located at the camera lens (the type of lens fitted to the camera thus determined the angle of vision which radiated out from this apex).<sup>33</sup> By the same token, it would appear that the aspect ratio of the frame — in other words, the relative dimensions of the horizontal and vertical sides in relation to one another — was developed, not on the basis of the dimensions of the typical theatre proscenium, as has been variously claimed, but on the basis of the standard size of photographic glass-plate in the nineteenth-century: after various experiments in wide-gauge film-making in the early years, prompted by the need to avoid abusing the Edison patents, these dimensions settled in 1909 at around 1.31:1 on the basis of the Kinetograph and Kinetoscope viewing machines designed in 1891 by W. K. L. Dickson at the Edison laboratories.<sup>34</sup>

The optical properties of the camera lens and the presence of a frame-boundary had profound aesthetic implications for the future of cinema. As Aumont has observed, they signified the potential organization of the image into a plastic space consisting of distinct visual elements: the pattern of geometric relationships within the frame (the compositional elements); the range of values (degrees of luminosity) across the different zones of the frame; the range and gradation of tonal values (across the spectrum from deep black to extreme white if one

<sup>32</sup> See Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception*, ed. Richard Taylor, trans. Alan Bodger, foreword by Tom Gunning, Chicago, IL and London, 1994 (hereafter, *Early Cinema in Russia*), pp. 28–30.

<sup>33</sup> Brewster and Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema*, pp. 170–71.

<sup>34</sup> For consideration of the economic, technological, and cultural factors which may have influenced Dickson's choice, see John Belton, 'The Origins of 35mm Film as Standard', *SMPTE Journal*, 99, 1990, 3, pp. 652–61.

assumes the absence of tinting and toning); and what Aumont calls the 'materiality' of the image (the grain of the print).<sup>35</sup> This resulted in a particular visual sensitivity, and the adoption of certain pictorial conventions long established in painting, such as the tendency towards *cadrage* or centering.<sup>36</sup> Even the earliest shorts, most famously the Lumière brothers' *L'Arrivée du train en gare de la Ciotat* (1895), revealed an awareness of the boundary as a site of tension which might be transgressed for potentially traumatic effect. Furthermore, cinema began to distinguish itself markedly from the theatre in its treatment of exterior landscape.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting here to speculate on the ways in which filming *en plein air* began to influence the theatre-based conventions of studio cinematography. On external locations the operator was free to choose the position of his camera in relation to the actors. In addition, he was able to explore outdoors more fully the problems of spatial representation and perspective, and the organization of the image in terms of its tonal values. It is instructive from this point of view to compare the interior sequences in Chardynin's *Idiot* — which are conventional and patently unnatural — with the exterior sequences, which are full of glorious sunshine, and where the actresses are positioned deliberately so that their white dresses and hats flare brightly in dazzling sunlight. This use of directed rather than diffuse light sources enriches the textural and tonal values of the image, and is particularly evident in the wedding sequence in the second reel (2:5760). The scene in question is composed on the basis of a number of contrasting verticals — the white columns of the church in the background balanced by the dark grey, semi-silhouetted trees in the foreground — with the dappled sunlight supplying a lyrical ambiance inconceivable in the studio. This composition serves as a useful testimony to the aestheticizing tendencies of early cinematography, the desire to elevate the purely technical role of the operator into a more creative realm.

As cinematic narratives in Russia became longer and more complex, moving away from single-scene adaptations of literary classics and folkloric subjects towards melodramatic parables of modern life, so the

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Aumont, *The Image*, trans. Claire Pajackowska, London, 1997, p. 99.

<sup>36</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *The Power of the Center*, Berkeley, CA, 1981 (hereafter, *The Power of the Center*). One caveat should be mentioned, however. By utilizing a depth of field which tended to show all the objects within the frame in sharp focus, the early cinematograph compromised a central precept of Renaissance aesthetics, namely that the image should have a single focus which was 'pre-selected by the artist and signalled to the onlooker by obscuring other, less important details, either by deliberate overlapping or by the indistinctness of aerial perspective or by some other definition-reducing technique'. See Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia*, p. 146.

<sup>37</sup> Vladimir Nilsen [Nil'sen], *The Cinema as a Graphic Art: On a Theory of Representation in the Cinema*, trans. Stephen Garry, [London], 1937, p. 156.

theatrical assumptions on which they were based began to shift. The most important development here was the movement towards staging in depth. Russian practice in this regard imitated the French model, developing relatively rapidly after the move into glass-bound studios and the influx of professional set-designers from the theatre.<sup>38</sup> This involved not merely a deepening of the sets themselves, but a different approach to picture composition altogether, with certain objects on the stage, such as pieces of furniture and curtains, positioned in the foreground to increase the sense of perspective. To a certain extent the move towards such stagings had been anticipated by the shifting position of the camera, which had begun to move away from its usual axial position towards a diagonal vantage point whereby the lines on the set (walls and floorboards) gradually receded into the depth of the frame. Starting around 1911, sets became more realistic, with the décor and decorative objects generally beginning to function as semiotic signifiers.<sup>39</sup> By 1913, it is possible to encounter stagings, the complexity of which suggests that directors were rapidly becoming aware of the symbolic and metaphorical dynamic of film space, with its attendant implications for cinematography and the function of the camera as a creative interpreter of the diegesis, rather than merely a passive and supposedly objective observer.

*Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*, Bauer's cinematic debut with Khanzhonkov and Pathé Co. (the film was released on 26 November 1913), is an impressive example of this modern tendency. Bauer himself was a theatrical impresario with a background in outdoor extravaganzas who had entered the industry as a set-designer on Drankov's *Trekhsotletie tsarstvovaniia doma Romanovykh* (The Tercentenary of the Rule of the Romanov Dynasty, 1913). In the second sequence of *Sumerki*, a film photographed in four reels by Nikolai Kozlovskii, staging in depth and a sophisticated lighting arrangement enhance the dramatic and symbolic potential of the *mise-en-scène*. The scene in question shows the boudoir of the main female protagonist, Vera, played by Nina

<sup>38</sup> Paul Thiemann acquired the Pathé Frères studio in 1912, and in September of that year launched the prestigious 'Golden Series'. See Rashit Iangirov's biographical résumé in *Velikii kinemo*, pp. 521–23 (pp. 521–22). Khanzhonkov established a proper studio in Moscow in 1912 in order to be able to film all year round. See Khanzhonkov, *Pervye gody*, p. 59. For discussion of similar developments in France, see Ben Brewster, 'Deep Staging in French Films 1900–1914', in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (eds), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, London, 1990, pp. 45–55.

<sup>39</sup> Czesław Sabiński at Thiemann and Reinhardt, and Boris Mikhin at Khanzhonkov & Co., are usually credited with the move towards what in Russia became known as the *fundusnaia sistema*, the word *fundus* being a theatrical term in German meaning 'basic equipment'. According to Mikhin, this system was introduced in the autumn of 1911 for the sets used on Chardynin's *Kreitserova sonata*. See Mikhin, 'Rozhdenie fundusa', *Iz istorii kino*, 9, 1974, pp. 148–54.

Chernova (1:2208 [Figure 1]). At this initial moment Vera is located in the depths of the frame, alone and deep in thought, just before she is called by a manservant to join a lavish society function hosted by her parents. The stage is divided at this juncture into two distinct spheres: the foreground, shrouded in dark and buttressed symmetrically on both sides by tall vases containing flowers; and the background, bathed in bright light, and in the middle of which sits Vera. The chasteness and purity of her attitude, and the symbolic properties of the light which surrounds her, are underlined by the fact that the two spaces, foreground and background, are divided by an opaque gauze curtain which is drawn, not quite completely, across the stage: this has the function of placing a semi-transparent 'veil' between Vera and the camera, thus softening her image, but also, symbolically, of denoting her virginity. Later in the first reel this private space is transgressed by the odious Maksim, a working-class layabout who is seeking to exploit Vera's selfless devotion to the poor for his own duplicitous ends: this scene shows him entering the premises illegally through her bedroom window with a view to leaving a note arranging a rendezvous (1:15024 [Figure 2]). This scene looks forward and backward at the same time. On one level it functions as a symbolic anticipation of her later rape in his attic lodgings: Maksim, appropriately in view of his menacing intentions, is silhouetted against the light, his hands suggestively drawing the curtain apart. At the same time, however, it refers back to the initial scene: the ethereal lighting, the positioning of the curtain, and the division between foreground and background are identical. The scene is disturbing in a number of ways, not only because of the symbolic defloration which occurs before the spectator's eyes, but also because of the complicity of the camera: Maksim's act of gazing upon Vera while she sleeps has been anticipated earlier by the camera gazing upon Vera while she sits deep in thought. The emphasis on distance created by the staging reinforces the spectator's sense of the camera 'spying' on Vera voyeuristically; this is especially so since, at other moments during this first reel, the very same stage space is presented naturalistically, with the foreground generously illuminated, and the vantage point of the camera slightly altered. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that the opening sequence is a projected fantasy, one which we are forced to repudiate because of its potentially injurious consequences (Maksim rapes Vera precisely because of his perception that she is vulnerable). In essence, *Sumerki* is a rites of passage film: it charts the liberation of the female protagonist from virginal fantasy-figure and cherished ideal (the kind of stereotyped image of unsullied purity which the men of Bauer's era entertained and expected in relation to their intended spouses) towards her own discovery of

freedom, independence, and self-definition beyond the confines of marriage and the male gaze.<sup>40</sup>

This activation of the camera, the potential for drawing attention to its presence by means of modelling spaces, receives its corollary in the first tentative steps towards movement in relation to the space of the stage, and thus the compromising of the hitherto rigid limits of the frame. The emergence of tracking shots and panning shots (both vertical and horizontal) was the product of aesthetic choice, not sudden technical availability. Panning shots, which derived their name from the concept of the panorama, had been employed routinely in actualities since 1897, which marked the appearance of the first ‘panning-head’ in Britain.<sup>41</sup> Khanzhonkov has referred explicitly to the documentary origins of this manoeuvre, and it is noteworthy that it was first adopted in Russian film-plays — *Drama v tabore podmoskovnykh tsygan* (Drama in a Gypsy Camp, 1908) and *Sten'ka Razin* (1908) — where the action took place on exterior locations.<sup>42</sup> The same holds true for tracking shots, which had been employed at regular intervals in travelogues and the popular entertainment shorts known as ‘phantom rides’, which derived their effects from attaching the tripod of the camera to fast-moving objects (such as steam-trains and roller-coasters). Russian sources suggest that within the studio directors resorted to an improvised and customized version of the modern-day dolly, which at the time was not commercially available: this is a good illustration of the way in which the creative imagination tends to drive the development of technology.<sup>43</sup> The significance of this development cannot be

<sup>40</sup> My analysis of this sequence in the film has in part been aided by Rachel Morley's excellent analysis of gender relations in Bauer's works. See Morley, ‘Gender Relations in the Films of Evgenii Bauer’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 81, 2003, 1, pp. 32–69 (pp. 38–43).

<sup>41</sup> See Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, pp. 32–33, 46.

<sup>42</sup> See Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia*, p. 127.

<sup>43</sup> One of the most famous tracking shots in pre-revolutionary Russian cinema occurs in Protazanov's *Pikovaia dama*. Slavinskii, the camera operator, described the shot as a means of showing the leading protagonist's agitation as he walked through the vast antechambers of the Countess's mansion. He writes: ‘Kogda noch'iu German kradetsia k grafine, on prokhorit anfiladu komnat, sil'no volnuias'. Chtoby pokazat' ego perezhivaniia, byla primenena s'emka s dvizheniia. Telezhek togda ne znali i dlia togo, chtoby vezti apparat pered Germanom, vtashchili v pavil'on khoziaiskuiu proletku na “dutikakh”, s kotoroi i proveli etu s'emku.’ (‘When in the middle of the night German makes his way towards the Countess, he passes through a suite of rooms, greatly agitated. In order to show these feelings of agitation, we employed a mobile camera. Because there were no dollies at the time, we dragged into the studio a ladies' shopping trolley with inflatable tyres: this was used to transport the camera in front of German and to shoot the sequence.’) Cited in Slavinskaia, ‘Odin iz pervykh’, p. 137. This statement contradicts the view expressed by the set-designer, V. Balliuzek, who described the camera travelling *behind* German, the rationale being the desire to show the magnitude of the house: ‘Dvizhushchiasia kinokamera zastaviala zritelei ispytyvat' to zhe chuvstvo, kotoroe ispytyval German, v pervye obozrevaia





FIGURE 1: *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*: Vera sits alone in her boudoir



FIGURE 2: *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*: Maksim enters Vera's boudoir at night



FIGURE 3: *Kreitserova sonata*: Poznyshev seeks his wife



FIGURE 4: *Kreitserova sonata*: de-centred arrangement after the leftward panning shot



FIGURE 5: *Taina doma no. 5*: jilted courtesan El'za appears to her ex-lover in the guise of a portrait painting



FIGURE 6: *Taina doma no. 5*: the ex-lover is shot by El'za's accomplice as he seeks to escape

All frame stills reprinted courtesy of Gosfil'mofond Rossii.



FIGURE 7: *Kormilitsa*: central protagonist, Georgii, sitting at the desk in his study



FIGURE 8: *Ty pomnish' li?*: portrait of Ivan Mozzhukhin as the violinist-lover Iaron



FIGURE 9: *Ty pomnish' li?*: Vera Karalli and Petr Chardynin stand by a large mirror



FIGURE 10: *Ty pomnish' li?*: Karalli enters her husband's study



FIGURE 11: *Posle smerti*: Zavelev's portrait of Karalli



FIGURE 12: *Iurii Nagornyĭ*: lighting for the depth of the stage in the opening sequence



FIGURE 13: *Iurii Nagornyĭ*: Emma Bauer performs as dancer



FIGURE 14: *Iurii Nagornyĭ*: lighting *mise-en-abîme* — Emma Bauer enters the room



FIGURE 15: *Iurii Nagornyĭ*: Emma Bauer moves towards the table



FIGURE 16: *Iurii Nagornyĭ*: the husband now enters the room



FIGURE 17: *Iurii Nagornyĭ*: low-key scene as the sister reaches for her father's gun



FIGURE 18: *Iurii Nagorny*: medium close-up of Emma Bauer and Andrei Gromov



FIGURE 19: *Iurii Nagorny*: the husband stands pensively in his study

overemphasized, since with one bound the camera succeeded in liberating itself from theatrical convention and launched itself on a voyage of discovery which would lead relatively swiftly (indeed as early as the mid-1920s) to the point where it would be freed from the restraining tripod altogether.

The French film critic André Bazin has argued that the frames of painting and moving images have different impacts on the viewer: the former functions centripetally, and has the effect of directing the attention of the spectator towards the centre of the composition, whereas the latter functions centrifugally, and has the effect of propelling the eye of the spectator outwards, towards that which lies beyond the frame.<sup>44</sup> Panning and tracking shots thus reinforce this tension by exploring precisely what lies beyond the frame. On one level such devices serve to emphasize the realism of the fictional space: the actors are no longer 'imprisoned' by the frame and are shown to inhabit an 'authentic' living space. A distinction must be made here between extended re-framings, designed to keep the actors in the centre of the picture, and the more significant pans which impart new information to the viewer or offer extended and different vistas. Early panning shots in Russian cinema, as elsewhere, tend to be extended re-framings. The initial pans in *Sten'ka Razin*, for example, follow the motion of the eponymous hero's boat as it navigates its way along the Volga river. However, due to the absence of an easily identifiable horizon-line, and the frequent transgressions of the frame by additional boats, the movement itself is barely perceptible. By contrast, the slightly longer pans in *Drama v tabore podmoskovnykh tsygan* hold the two Gypsy protagonists centre-stage while showing them simultaneously to inhabit an authentically rural space (the film featured a genuine Gypsy camp which Khanzhonkov had chanced upon near his summer studio in Krylatskoe). An interesting example, because it possesses a diegetic significance, can be witnessed in *Krest'ianskaia dolia* (The Peasants' Lot, 1912), a melodrama in three reels directed by Vasilii Goncharov and photographed by Forestier, also at Krylatskoe. In the second sequence the camera focuses on a drunken peasant, and then follows him leftward for eleven seconds as he staggers unsteadily over to a young couple sitting by a small bundle of hay (1:1176–1464). At first glance, this might seem merely a pretext with which to introduce the young

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neznakomuiu obstanovku.' ('The travelling movie-camera forced the viewer to share the feelings which were experienced by German when first faced with this unfamiliar surrounding.') See V. Balliuzek, 'Na s"emkakh "Pikovoï damy"', *Iz istorii kino*, 7, 1968, pp. 99–103 (p. 102). Since the sequence has not survived in any extant prints, it is impossible to judge which of the reminiscences is the more accurate.

<sup>44</sup> See André Bazin, 'Cinema and Painting', in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols, Berkeley, CA, 1967, 1, 164–69 (pp. 165–66).

couple: as we subsequently discover, they are the film's key protagonists. In the scenes which follow immediately afterwards, however, we realize that the drunken peasant in question (Maksim, played by Arsenii Bibikov) is a far from incidental figure. On the contrary, as a quasi-official matchmaker, he is the means by which the couple make their romantic intentions known to their respective parents. The panning shot thus serves as a 'spontaneous' narrative bridge, a mechanism for linking the characters together and for propelling the diegesis forward.

Such an emphasis, barely two years after *Krest'ianskaia dolia*, acquires a strongly emotional resonance in the first part of Chardynin's *Zhenshchina zavtrashnego dnia* (The Woman of Tomorrow, 1914), a film scripted by Aleksandr Voznesenskii and photographed by Boris Zavelev. The plot centres on the increasingly strained marital relationship between a successful doctor, Anna Betskaia, played by Vera Iureneva, and her civil-servant husband, Nikolai, played by Ivan Mozzhukhin. The husband, finding himself marginalized by his wife's pursuit of her career, initiates an affair with a waitress in a local café, Iuzia, and then finds himself in something of a dilemma when she becomes pregnant and gives birth to their child. Nikolai seeks initially to keep the affair secret from his wife. However, when Iuzia suffers post-natal complications and falls dangerously ill, his wife is summoned to her bedside as the only doctor able to save her life. Anna discovers the affair only when her husband is reluctantly and somewhat nervously called to the scene; this moment of appalled recognition, brilliantly recalled in Iureneva's memoirs, is one of the high points of silent cinema acting.<sup>45</sup> The dénouement, after the wife has rejected her husband's plea for forgiveness, is equally powerful. As Nikolai visits the cabin where Iuzia is recuperating with their child, the camera repeatedly holds him in its embrace. Initially, as he walks towards the camera via a tree-lined, snow-bound avenue, it pans leftwards for fifteen seconds to follow him as he moves towards the steps of the veranda (3:9465–9720). Then, after an editing cut which repositions the camera to one side of this veranda, the camera watches as he opts not to enter, but instead to return down the steps and walk away from the cabin, to the right, back towards the tree-lined avenue from whence he had arrived. The camera here executes three movements: a brief vertical pan as he descends the steps; a small horizontal re-framing leftwards as he peers through a window; and a horizontal pan rightwards, broken by momentary pauses, as he moves back hesitantly towards the avenue, pulls out a gun from his pocket and, seconds later, shoots himself (3:11275–11947). It is not the duration of this sequence (around forty-two seconds in total) which impresses most, but rather its

<sup>45</sup> The relevant excerpt is reprinted in *Velikii kinemo*, pp. 199–200.

rhythmic execution. Zavelev's camera clings doggedly to the character in his last desperate moments, his brief pauses for troubled thought matched by the lens, and his speed exactly rivalled. The actor is never allowed to move from the centre of attention, and in this sense the panning movements, with their momentary pauses, create an unbearable tension.

Innovative use of the exterior panning shot was relatively rare in Russian silent cinema prior to the 1920s, and it is a tribute to the resourceful spirit of Chardynin and Zavelev that they could devise and successfully execute such a masterly sequence. Panning shots within the studio were also rare, but here also, in the hands of enterprising directors and camera operators, they could be employed to great dramatic effect. Levitskii's horizontal panning shot in reel two of *Kreitserova sonata* (The Kreutzer Sonata, 1914), the screen adaptation of Tolstoi's novella directed by Vladimir Gardin for the 'Golden Series', is one such example (2:6585–6707). The *mise-en-scène* in this sequence is experimental in the sense that the space of the stage is divided vertically into two interconnecting spheres, a staging both in depth and in width. In the first part of this sequence, Poznyshev, played by Boris Orskii, has been searching for his wife, played by Elizaveta Uvarova (2:6585 [Figure 3]). Having failed to locate her in the recessed room situated in the centre of the frame, he moves towards the camera, and then leftwards, followed by the camera, to reveal a second space, also staged in depth, which is occupied by his wife (2:6707 [Figure 4]). This is an unusual and interesting example of *décadrage*, the two characters at this juncture occupying approximately only one third of the frame. This off-balance arrangement, which is repeated in reel three, conveniently emphasizes their growing separation and dislocation, and at the same time, paradoxically, the sense of claustrophobia which oppresses them. Furthermore, it signals an awareness of the limitations of the editing cut, a device which, in this particular instance, would have negated the symbolic significance of the spatial arrangement. Similar approaches, while certainly not common, can also be witnessed in other films of the period. In Bauer's *Leon Drei* (1915), for example, the camera operator Konstantin Bauer executes an exquisite vertical pan in the second reel to reveal the eponymous seducer attempting to play footsie with the wife of his host during a dinner-party sequence (2:5571–5698). The movement of the camera is unhurried, moving downwards and then upwards rather slyly to register the surprised reaction on the part of the intended victim; by means of this device, the camera reveals its critical position, its willingness to expose the leading protagonist as a hypocritical seducer. Such an impression could not have been provoked quite as effectively by an editing cut.

As far as tracking shots are concerned, we encounter a similar awareness of the dramatic potential of the movement itself and its ability to explore spatial relationships. Bauer's films after 1914 make repeated and innovatory use of track-ins and track-outs. Many of these camera movements, like the celebrated 'Cabiria movement', which tracks laterally and at an angle, serve to reveal the huge dimensions and opulent quality of his sets.<sup>46</sup> It is no coincidence that such shots are encountered at a point when Khanzhonkov, having made his fortune as a film entrepreneur, had established one of the most sophisticated and sizeable studios of its time, rivalling many both in America and Europe. Some commentators have argued that the tracking shots were designed simply to fetishize the landscapes of *haut bourgeois* opulence enjoyed by Bauer's protagonists, but this ignores the ironic and thoughtful ways in which his *mise-en-scène* operates.<sup>47</sup> In *Ditia bol'shogo goroda* (Child of the Big City, 1914), for example, we encounter an extended tracking shot in the second reel which takes the viewer over the heads of the assembled company in a restaurant towards a stage on which a dancer is performing an exotic oriental dance (2:4240–4840). As Tsivian rightly observes, this procedure functions primarily to accentuate the depth of the staging and to provide stereoscopy of vision.<sup>48</sup> However, it also highlights the central female protagonist's increasing seduction by wealth and societal position (marked by the fact that she has ascended an impressively large staircase in order to reach the restaurant). The unusual height of the camera as it tracks towards its subject communicates something of the dizzy excitement experienced by this protagonist, a young woman plucked from working-class obscurity who is here enjoying the pleasures of affluence for the first time. In effect it is a quasi point-of-view shot, but one complicated by the fact that, by the end of the film, after this heroine has adopted the cynical codes of her new milieu and unceremoniously abandoned her husband (he commits suicide on the steps outside her apartment immediately after having been rejected), Bauer's antipathy towards this woman has been made explicit. Collusion has been replaced by alienation, and the viewer is forced to contemplate the scene once again and unravel its ambiguities.

<sup>46</sup> The tracking shot in question was named after *Cabiria*, a film directed by Giovanni Pastrone for the Cines film company in 1914. It was released in Russia during the 1915–16 season. For the influence of this shot on American directors, see Kristin Thompson, 'Classical Narrative Space and the Spectator's Attention' (hereafter, 'Classical Narrative Space'), in D. Bordwell, J. Staiger, K. Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, London, 1985 (hereafter, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*), pp. 214–30 (pp. 228–29).

<sup>47</sup> Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia*, p. 313.

<sup>48</sup> *Early Cinema in Russia*, p. 205.



Such tracking shots represent much more than merely an energizing of the diegesis. The fact that they are intended to be discursive, and possess a syntagmatic function, can be demonstrated by another example from Bauer, *Umiraiushchii lebed'* (The Dying Swan, 1916), a 'tragic novella' scripted by Zoia Barantsevich and photographed by Zavelev in the environs of Sochi. The film tells the story of a mute Italian ballet dancer, Giselle, played by Vera Karalli, who acquires a reputation in the locality for her interpretation of Mikhail Fokin's *La Mort du cygne*. Chardynin had derived sensational benefit from a similar kind of plot device two years earlier in his film *Khrizantemy* (Chrysanthemums, 1914), a tragic melodrama in which a ballerina, also played by Karalli, dances to her death after having taken a phial of poison. In Bauer, however, the plot is complicated by the introduction of a death-obsessed Russian painter who finds in Giselle's melancholic eyes the ultimate expression of the morbid truth that he has been seeking to capture on his canvas. The tracking movement in question occurs at the moment when Giselle, having been invited to pose for the painter in costume, has a dream which seems to justify her father's apprehensions about his untrustworthiness. The camera is positioned initially by her bedside as flashes of lightning signal the eruption of a violent storm outside her bedroom window. Contrary to modern expectation, which would anticipate the camera moving towards the actress as an indication that we are about to enter her unconscious mind, the camera withdraws slowly for about twenty seconds, at which point this movement is interrupted by an editing cut which launches the dream proper. This dream, in particular the nightmare vision which constitutes its disturbing core, has been investigated as a symbolic representation of lustful masculine desire.<sup>49</sup> In actual fact it is a prophetic dream: the multiple hands which reach out to Giselle do so not in order to caress her, but in order to strangle her. This is confirmed subsequently in reel four when Bauer intercuts the earlier sequence with the moment when the painter, disappointed that Giselle has found happiness through love, reaches out to strangle her so that her pose might regain its original authenticity.

There is no sexual imperative here. By moving *away* from the subject, the camera indicates to the viewer that the dream is not the product of suppressed desire or neurotic anxiety. In effect the camera leads the viewer to the location of the dream, the place where its drama is enacted and its symbolism articulated, and where, in a further twist to Bauer's complex game of signification, we have previously encountered another tracking movement. The place in question is a black-and-white

<sup>49</sup> See Yuri Tsivian, 'Two "Stylists" of the Teens: Franz Hofer and Yevgenii Bauer' (hereafter, 'Two "Stylists" of the Teens'), in *A Second Life*, pp. 264–76 (pp. 266–69).

tilled corridor, suitably Gothic in décor and atmosphere, which leads directly to the painter's studio. This earlier tracking shot occurs as Giselle moves leftwards apprehensively towards the edge of the frame, which marks the entrance to the studio proper. The movement, which lasts around eleven seconds, is designed to create tension at the margins of the frame, and to suggest that what lies beyond might be dangerous, even fatal. This same suggestion is echoed in the second tracking movement: by moving backwards, and revealing gradually to the spectator (along the right-hand side of the frame) an open window, a net curtain blowing in the wind, and flowers from the window-sill dropping to the ground, the camera invites the viewer to consider the significance of frame boundaries and their inevitable tension. The movement, like the dream itself, constitutes a gradual process of revelation, and thus a gradual heightening of tension.

Another intriguing tracking shot occurs in Bauer's *Posle smerti* (After Death, 1915): here the presence and gaze of the camera poses an acute interpretational dilemma. In the first reel of this film, again photographed by Zavelev, we encounter a complex staging which represents a society function to which the main protagonist, Andrei, played by Vitol'd Polonskii, has been invited by a friend. The initial *mise-en-scène* of this sequence involves an extended horizontal pan from left to right across the faces of the guests as they sit conversing at various tables (1:4847–5757). This minute-long movement serves largely to communicate the size of the party and the impressive width of the set. It is followed, however, by an editing cut and a re-positioning of the camera to the right which now shows Andrei arriving in the company of friends. The camera then executes an extended, slow, almost two-minute-long tracking shot backwards into the depths of the party as Andrei is introduced to the various guests, including the performer Zoia Kadmina, played by Vera Karalli (1:6250–7753). Technically, as Tsivian has observed, this is a track-out, but this definition must be open to question in view of the fact that, rather than pulling the viewer away from the action, the camera is actually drawing Andrei into the midst of the occasion. This point of view is further complicated by the ensuing turn of events, and in particular an astonishing five-second sequence, unprecedented in the cinema of this period, which involves Karalli walking towards the camera, her eyes unblinking and her face filling the screen until her features move into total darkness, just at the point where the clarity of the image is about to be compromised (2:3352–3432). Diegetically, the status of this looming close-up is ambiguous. It takes place after Andrei has been introduced to her — we are told explicitly in the intertitles that he is overwhelmed by the intensity of her gaze — and after he has watched her perform a poetry recital at an occasion which succeeds, but is distinct from, the initial

society function. It cannot be associated straightforwardly with his point of view, however, because at the moment when it takes place Andrei has left the recital. We might conjecture that Karalli's movement towards the camera represents his memory of the recital minutes beforehand. This is suggested by the fact she is wearing the same head-garment, but this possibility is undermined by the fact that the camera's angle of view does not accord with that of someone sitting in the front row (this was Andrei's position during the recital). Alternatively, it might represent the young bachelor's projected wish-fulfilment after the recital, in other words, the desire for Zoia to advance physically towards him, possibly even to embrace or kiss him. We might also approach the sequence as an 'objective' portrait, divorced from the immediate diegetic context, which emphasizes Zoia's eyes (the key motif of *Klara Milich* [1882], the Turgenev novella on which the screenplay was based) and anticipates her suicide: by moving from lightness into darkness, and thus metaphorically 'exiting' from the frame (from the 'front', as it were), she is marked as someone whose death in the immediate future is unavoidable. In other words, Bauer has exploited the 'fourth wall' of the camera, and by extension the cinema screen, as a symbolic boundary separating this world from the next.

As a reflection on the haunting power of the gaze, this is a fascinating sequence. Whatever its diegetic status, the sequence is clearly necessary for Bauer because he requires a mechanism for communicating Zoia's mesmerizing power and that inner passion which causes her, first, to declare her love to a complete stranger (Andrei), and then, after having been rejected, to commit suicide. In the light of this sequence, the earlier tracking shot begins to acquire a slightly different nuance. Here are two formal innovations which, through their very novelty, would appear to be establishing a poetic relationship with each other. Viewed a second time, frame by frame, the tracking shot can be seen to consist of a number of interrupted, rather than continuous, movements. This is not an 'accompanying track' in the conventional sense, with the distance between the camera and the actor rigidly unchanging during the course of the movement. What happens is that the camera actually instigates the movement — which is to say that at the very beginning of the track the camera launches its movement prior to Andrei, and on the three subsequent occasions when both halt for a moment (Andrei stops to converse briefly with guests), it is the camera that moves off first. The fact that this occurs on three separate occasions, with the pattern identical on each occasion, suggests that it is not an accidental by-product of the manoeuvre, but rather a specifically choreographed pattern aimed at establishing a relationship between the actor and the camera. In the light of Zoia's later advance on the apparatus, and her symbolic merging with it, it might be proposed that the camera during

the tracking sequence is the mechanical embodiment of her captivating power, one that draws him (and by extension us, the viewer) inexorably into her embrace. Like a supernatural mechanism, or the action of fate, the camera engineers their collision.

*Part III: Lighting and Composition*

*Posle smerti* demonstrates the degree of sophistication of Russian cinema only seven years after the establishment of a home-grown film industry. By this stage, as Forestier has observed, the camera operator's craft had become technically more sophisticated and creative, in particular in relation to lighting.<sup>50</sup> The 'vision' of Karalli discussed above is remarkable among other things as an exercise in photographic portraiture; this was a skill increasingly in demand as directors and studios became aware of the narrative and commercial potential of the close-up. Noticeable here is the subtle application of make-up, a far cry from the garish *maquillage* which characterized the theatre of this time, and which was still very much in evidence in the films of the early twenties (2:3352 [Figure 11]). The portrait is also intriguing in terms of the optical challenges which must have confronted Zavelev in his attempt to keep Karalli in focus as she moved close to the camera lens. The slight distortion of her features, which has resulted in her narrow, almost bird-like countenance being flattened, suggests the employment of a longer lens, possibly what became known subsequently as the 'portrait lens' (90mm). This hypothesis is further supported by the restricted depth of field, indicated by the fact that the background and certain parts of the actress's head and costume (in particular the ears and the earrings) are not in sharp focus. The lighting arrangement only partially compensates for this perspectival compression, yet constitutes a revealing approach to the problem of lighting a human figure at this relatively early stage. Two arcs have been positioned at approximately equal distances on either side of the actress's face (these can be seen from the dual reflections in her eyes). In addition, these arcs appear to be more or less equally strong in terms of their intensity. The result is an even illumination which manages to remove nearly all traces of potential shadow area on the actress's face until she moves extremely close to the camera, while at the same time producing gentle highlights along the surface of her jewellery. The evenness of this illumination, its flattering rendition of skin tone, and its capturing of the haunting quality of Karalli's eyes, are the great strengths of Zavelev's portrait.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Forest'e, *Vospominaniia*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>51</sup> For American approaches to portrait lighting at this time, see Thompson, 'Classical Narrative Space', p. 224.

Here in embryonic form is the 'star-system', the point at which cinematography, the publicity-still, and fashion photography intersect.

The sphere of lighting is traditionally the preserve of the camera operator, and no inquiry into the development of cinematography would be complete without serious consideration of lighting practices during the pre-revolutionary era. Direct information about lighting techniques in the pre-1917 period in Russia, as elsewhere, is anecdotal and fragmentary. Much of it derives from the memoirs of actors and set-designers, and for this reason should be treated with caution. In general it would appear that the exact division of responsibility between director and camera operator during this period was fluid. Bauer, perhaps as a result of his theatrical background, was certainly knowledgeable about lighting and took an exceptionally active interest in the visual composition of his films.<sup>52</sup> Vsevolod Meierkol'd's innovative adaptation for screen of Oscar Wilde's *Portret Dorian Greia* (The Portrait of Dorian Gray, 1915) offers further evidence for the view that certain progressive ideas about lighting may have crossed over into cinema from the avant-garde theatre. Whatever the relative influence of such directors — and this can only be gauged by comparing the work of individual camera operators in collaboration with different directors — a number of general tendencies can be observed which mirrored practices in America and Europe. For economic reasons, the glass studios began to be blacked out, with artificial sources preferred to natural sunlight; diffuse lighting and an aesthetic of total visibility gave way gradually to selective lighting and chiaroscuro (known at the extremes as low-key or 'Rembrandt lighting'); sculpting or modelling with light for dramatic and expressive purposes became a standard cinematographic technique; and lighting effects and effects-lighting were manipulated for the creation of mood and atmosphere. We encounter an impressive array of lighting approaches during this period: back-lighting, side-lighting, overhead-lighting, three-quarters back-lighting, the artificial lighting of night-time exteriors, and the emergence of the infamous 'three-point' system for portraiture, a classic positioning of arcs which later became codified in both mainstream Hollywood and Soviet practice.<sup>53</sup> This was coupled with bold experiments in the use of sunlight on exterior locations, in particular the emergence of *contre-jour* (shooting in the direction of the

<sup>52</sup> For detailed information on this aspect of Bauer's background, see Viktor Korotkii, 'A. E. Bliumental'-Tamarin i E. F. Bauer: Materialy k istorii russkogo svetotvorchestva', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 56, 2000, pp. 236–71.

<sup>53</sup> For standard Soviet lighting procedures during the interwar period, see A. Golovnia, *Svet v iskusstve operatora*, Moscow, 1945. For the equivalent American system during the same period, see chapter two ('Motion Picture Illumination') in John Alton, *Painting with Light*, second edn, Berkeley, CA, 1995, pp. 18–42.

sun), which had previously been regarded as ‘aesthetically displeasing’.<sup>54</sup>

The first confirmation of an artificial light source (‘dobavochnoe osveshchenie’) employed by the moving-picture industry in Russia occurs in a Khanzhonkov actuality about the Katyk metal-cartridge factory in 1908.<sup>55</sup> Around three years later certain Moscow film studios had become equipped with mercury-vapour lamps (‘rtutnye kolby’) and Jupiters (*iupitery*).<sup>56</sup> The first was a diffuse light source which was manufactured in banks of six to eight tubes and had been deployed in some American and European studios from as early as 1902 (they were usually known as ‘Cooper-Hewitts’).<sup>57</sup> The second refers to a colloquial Russian term for the arcs on floor-stands manufactured by the Jupiter-Kunstlicht company in Berlin: these were directed light sources of varying degrees of intensity which consisted of a single or dual carbon housed in an open-metal casing, the beam reflected by means of a parabolic mirror into parallel lines.<sup>58</sup> Initially, at least, the deployment of these artificial sources, including the enclosed overhead arcs hung from the studio ceiling, produced little in the way of experimentation. The typical Russian product c. 1912 exhibited a high degree of overall shadowless exposure. Subsequently, however, very possibly under the influence of Scandinavian and Italian cinema, there was a shift towards selective, low-key, and zonal lighting. This can be witnessed by the degree of interest in effects-lighting, made possible by the customization and subsequent commercial manufacture of so-called ‘effects-lamps’ — in other words, arcs disguised in the form of bedside table-lamps, standing-lamps, carriage-lamps, chandeliers, and street-lamps, and arcs which aimed to simulate the illumination produced by torches, fires, hand-held lanterns, and candles. Such units were utilized as naturalistic devices, since lamps positioned within the frame could now be switched on and off more realistically. More significantly, they allowed low-key effects from a source positioned within the frame, with a concomitant gain in authenticity. The arrival of the Jupiter spotlight further encouraged this tendency, and permitted a whole range of modelling and sculpting effects. Such a light cast a focused beam which could be directed with pinpoint accuracy towards both objects and

<sup>54</sup> Forest’e, *Vospominaniia*, p. 84.

<sup>55</sup> M. E. Goldovskaia, *Tekhnika i tvorchestvo*, Moscow, 1986, p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Forest’e, *Vospominaniia*, p. 56, and Levitskii, *Rasskazy*, p. 167.

<sup>57</sup> For lighting trends both within studios and on exteriors in Europe and America up to 1913, see Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, pp. 40–44, 64–72, and Kristin Thompson, ‘Initial Standardization of the Basic Technology’, in *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, pp. 263–75 (in particular, pp. 270–75).

<sup>58</sup> Detailed descriptions of such lamps can be found in Guido Seeber’s handbook on cinematography, published in Berlin in 1927. See G. Seeber and G. V. Mendel (eds), *Der Praktische Kameramann. Theorie und Praxis der kinematographischen Aufnahmetechnik*, reprinted edn., 3 vols, Frankfurt, 1980, 1 (*Arbeits-Gerät und Arbeits-Stätten des Kameramannes*), pp. 260–79.

human subjects, and from any particular height or angle. It is usually credited with the emergence in America of the technique of back-lighting, a device by means of which a rim of light was created around the head or figure of the actor, thus separating him or her from the background décor.<sup>59</sup> At some juncture, presumably in the early 1910s, Russian cinema also absorbed certain lighting tricks, such as the use of mirrors or other reflectors to direct light into inaccessible shadow areas or to balance the illumination from directed sources. According to Protazanov, it was the Alsatian operator Georges Meyer who, while working for Pathé Frères, first introduced this practice into Russia.<sup>60</sup> In addition, while the effect may have been unflattering, it has been claimed that Bauer occasionally positioned reflectors along the floor so that the beams of overhead arcs did not unduly distract his actors ('Klieg eye', caused by the vapours released from arcs, was a notorious problem at this time).<sup>61</sup>

Writing on lighting techniques generally stresses the influence of theatre in shifting aesthetic assumptions. The process by means of which theatre liberated itself from the artificial conventions of the nineteenth century — painted sets, gas-light, and footlights running along the front of the stage — in favour of augmented realism clearly preceded and anticipated that of cinema. The type of equipment employed in the film studios — both arc-floods and spots — had previously been exploited in the theatre; indeed, by 1914 these kinds of units were being rendered obsolete because they were a safety hazard and replaced with incandescent lamps.<sup>62</sup> Lighting conventions themselves had also undergone radical reassessment. The theoretical writings of Adolphe Appia, with their stress on the importance of planes, masses, and 'living volumes'; the pictorial tendencies of the Belasco theatre in New York, with their emphasis on mood and atmosphere; the expressionist and stylized lighting of certain Meierkhol'd and Stanislavskii productions at the Moscow Arts Theatre after 1905; and the experimental stagings of Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin meant that by the beginning of the First World War lighting had been transformed into an effective staging device.<sup>63</sup> It is undeniable that the influx of trained personnel from the theatre into the film industry brought in its wake something of an aesthetic revolution both in Russia and abroad. It has been argued that the

<sup>59</sup> Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, pp. 116–17.

<sup>60</sup> Kushnirov, 'A. A. Levitskii', p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> See Tsivian's biographical résumé of Bauer's career in *Velikii kinemo*, pp. 498–500 (p. 499).

<sup>62</sup> Peter Baxter, 'On the History and Ideology of Film Lighting', *Screen*, 16, 1975, pp. 83–106.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86–88.

American phenomenon known as 'Lasky lighting', a low-key effect attained by means of spots and witnessed most spectacularly in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915), can be explained by the arrival of Wilfred Buckland, a theatre designer whom DeMille had hired as an art-director from the Belasco theatre.<sup>64</sup> The emergence of shadow-play and low-angle lighting has also been attributed to the influence of the stage.<sup>65</sup>

A major distinction between cinema and theatre, however, lay in the greater flexibility of the film studio in terms of the positioning of lighting units. It should be stressed that most discussions of modern lighting techniques as far as theatre is concerned tend to focus on the more progressive end of the market, in particular the Art Theatre movement, and on theoretical writings (such as those of Appia and Gordon Craig) which were only rarely put into practice. For the vast majority of theatres, lighting was conventional and uncontroversial, with diffuse lighting by means of incandescent bulbs remaining the norm. The evidence of Russian pre-revolutionary films suggests that staging in depth created challenges which could not be overcome by recourse to the lighting conventions of the theatre: the shallow area of the stage, which restricted the positioning of arcs to the wings or to the high railings in front of the stage, limited the degree to which volume and perspective could be rendered by means of light. Furthermore, the emergence of the technique of the close-up, related as it was to the impact of still photography, required much greater attention to the sculpting and modelling of the face than in the theatre. It is symptomatic of this difference in emphasis that the vast majority of theatres were still using 'unflattering' footlights as late as 1919, despite the attempts of certain avant-garde productions to dispense with them altogether.<sup>66</sup>

In this context it is more fruitful to consider the relative influence of still photography, which had long employed artificial light and reflectors in glass-bound studios, and which for some time had been engaged in a quest to rival the figurative arts in the skill of its portraiture. This was particularly evident at the beginning of the century when photography, influenced by French Impressionism, was seeking to move away from its scientific beginnings as a fixer of

<sup>64</sup> Lea Jacobs, 'Lasky Lighting', in Paulo Cherchi Usai et al. (eds), *L'Eredità DeMille/The DeMille Legacy*, Pordenone, 1991, pp. 250–61, and also Jack Grant, 'Hollywood's First Art Director', *American Cinematographer*, 22, 1941, 5, pp. 219, 238, 240.

<sup>65</sup> Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, pp. 69–70. Low-angle lighting appears in several Russian films during this period. In almost all cases it is justified dramatically by the context of a theatrical performance and, by extension, the presence of footlights. See, for example, the scene in reel three of Bauer's *Posle smerti* where Karalli, playing Zoia Kadmina, takes poison and commits suicide (3:4009): this occurs while she is performing on stage.

<sup>66</sup> For a detailed discussion of this problem in the theatre, see Brewster and Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema*, pp. 150–51.



'objective' reality towards sustained exploration of the poetic possibilities of light. In the work of Iulii Eremin, Sergei Lobovikov, Nikolai Svishchev-Paola and Anatolii Trapani, Russia could boast some of the more interesting and talented supporters of Stieglitz's Photo-Secessionist movement.<sup>67</sup> The art of chiaroscuro was practised by a number of professional and amateur photographers — this can be witnessed in the colour and black-and-white pictures of Leonid Andreev in the second decade of the twentieth century.<sup>68</sup> It is interesting in general to observe the influence of studio photography on the lighting of the introductory cameos which started to feature in Russian films around 1913; Bauer's *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*, where the viewer is presented both with a series of such cameos and a set of 'publicity shots' of Vera as an opera star at the end of the last reel, is a revealing case in point.<sup>69</sup> Back-lighting on interior and exterior locations had also featured in professional still photography, most notably in the nude studies of Constant Puyo, a French Pictorialist whose works had featured in Stieglitz's *Camera Work* and at several international exhibitions, including Kiev in 1911.<sup>70</sup> It goes without saying that many of these techniques derived from painting, in particular those movements which over the centuries had been pursuing an active investigation into the action of light. It is symptomatic of this influence that references to 'Rembrandt lighting' began to appear in the Russian film press as early as 1916, at roughly the same time as in America.

Aleksandr Levitskii is usually credited with the most creative approach to lighting in the pre-revolutionary era. This reputation rests on a number of films with different directors, many of which, unfortunately, have not survived. Levitskii was one of the first camera operators to stand up for the artistic independence of his profession. Protazanov, for example, recorded the following observation about him as a young cinematographer:

We soon understood that this was a young man with a strong set of personal convictions, his own — sometimes correct, sometimes incorrect, but always independent — view of what was good and what was bad. He was an expert as far as technical matters were concerned, and quickly acquired the reputation of being a superb camera operator.<sup>71</sup>

Major disagreements with Meierkhol'd over the making of *Portret Doriانا Greia*, which caused the theatre director to reject him in favour

<sup>67</sup> See David Elliott (ed.), *Photography in Russia: 1840–1940*, London, 1992 (hereafter, *Photography in Russia*).

<sup>68</sup> *Leonid Andreev: Photographs by a Russian Writer*, edited with an introduction by Richard Davies, London, 1989.

<sup>69</sup> *Photography in Russia*, p. 155.

<sup>70</sup> Elena Barkhatova, 'Pictorialism: Photography as Art', in *ibid.*, pp. 51–60 (p. 54).

<sup>71</sup> Cited in Kushnirov, 'A. A. Levitskii', p. 20.

of another cinematographer for his next project, suggested an artistically conservative and academic temperament.<sup>72</sup> Such a view would seem to be confirmed by his parting of the ways with Sergei Eizenshtein over the early sequences of what would later become *Bronenosets Potemkin* (Battleship Potemkin, 1925), which Levitskii had photographed in Leningrad. One year later, in his recollections of these events, Eizenshtein suggested acidly that Levitskii's artistic temperament was clearly better suited to mainstream blockbusters than to avant-garde experimentation (he was referring to Levitskii's subsequent involvement in Gardin's *Krest i mauzer* [The Cross and the Mauser], 1926).<sup>73</sup> The extant films and memoirs, however, present a more complex and intriguing picture. These suggest that he was more than able and willing to experiment where it was dramatically required, and where he was permitted and encouraged to do so. This can be witnessed in *Taina doma no. 5* (The Secret of House No. 5, 1912), an early film in his career which he photographed in collaboration with Georges Meyer for the director Kai Hansen. According to Cherchi Usai, this was the first attempt to introduce the 'aesthetics of the "sensational"' into Russia, the term understood as a proto-expressionist tendency, usually with satanic undertones, which launched the movement towards low-key lighting in Denmark and Sweden.<sup>74</sup> The crucial sequence occurs in the second reel. The jilted courtesan El'za, having challenged her former lover to spend the night in a haunted house, seeks revenge by means of an elaborate *trompe l'oeil*: this involves appearing to her tormentor initially in the guise of a portrait hanging on the wall (2:5240 [Figure 5]); and then subsequently arranging for him to be murdered by an accomplice after she has stepped out of the painting and half scared him to death (2:8256 [Figure 6]). From the lighting point of view, the sequence is innovatory in a number of ways. As Count Darskii, the former lover, makes his entrance, the viewer is presented with an extremely low-key staging (2:4056). The light at this point is sufficient only to illuminate two strategic and clearly atmospheric sculptures: a chimera standing by a window to the left, and a sphinx positioned in the centre of the stage. Darskii initially employs a pocket-torch to find his way around — a novel example of effects-lighting at this time — but subsequently lights the candles located on the dresser to our right (2:4896): these are then extinguished as El'za steps out of the painting and appears before her ex-lover. As the gunshot rings out,

<sup>72</sup> Vs. Meierkhol'd, "Portret Dorian Greia", *Iz istorii kino*, 6, 1965, pp. 15–24.

<sup>73</sup> S. M. Eizenshtein, "Tezisy k vystupleniiu v ARK" [1926], *Kino i zhritel'*, 2, 1985, pp. 31–34 (p. 31).

<sup>74</sup> See Paolo Cherchi Usai et al. (eds), *Testimoni silenziosi: Film russi, 1908–1919/Silent Witnesses: Russian Films 1908–1919*, research and coordination Yuri Tsivian, Pordenone, 1989, p. 156.

we note the care and attention with which Levitskii ensures that the smoke from the gun and the figure of the courtesan herself are strongly illuminated against the dark background. This is an excellent and extremely early example of 'Rembrandt lighting'. Even at this stage a link is clearly being established between low-key lighting and genre (a *noir*-ish atmosphere of mystery and suspense).

Levitskii was first and foremost a master of mood. He was particularly sensitive to the changing qualities of sunlight, captured and controlled at moments, mostly in the early morning and evening, when it is atmospherically charged. His description of the country estate borrowed for the location of *Dvorianskoe gnezdo* (A Nest of Gentlefolk, 1915), a 'Golden Series' adaptation directed by Gardin for the studio of Thiemann and Reinhardt, but sadly no longer extant, richly attests to this: here we learn of his controlled use of patches of soft evening light to accentuate the melancholic mood of the 'Moonlight Sonata' sequence.<sup>75</sup> In the first reel of another 'Golden Series' adaptation, Gardin's *Kreitserova sonata*, we encounter a bravura manipulation of *contre-jour* for the creation of lyrical ambiance. The sequence in question shows Poznyshchev rowing his fiancée slowly across a small lake as part of their early courtship. The opening shot, which carefully balances the two verticals supplied by a column of light (the reflection of the sun on the surface of the water) and a silhouetted tree on the bankside, witnesses the young couple's boat moving towards the shore (1:8264). The next images, viewed in long-shot, see the boat turning towards the camera, the late-afternoon light catching its side and causing it to flash briefly (1:9924). Later, after the couple have alighted, they walk towards the camera across a small glade, the sun behind them providing a rim of light along the contours of their heads (1:11062). The gentle poetry of these scenes is employed for ironic effect, however, since the innocence and purity of these moments will later become corrupted in the emptiness and hostility of the couple's subsequent marriage.

Both films reveal Levitskii's subtle understanding of the dramatic and expressive potential of light. His partnership with Meierkhol'd on the production of *Portret Doriانا Greia* consolidated his reputation further. The fact that the film has survived only in the form of a few production stills means that analysis of its lighting innovations is inevitably speculative. In his memoirs — he devotes an entire chapter to the making of this film — Levitskii refers to a number of novel techniques: *contre-jour* combined with customized spotlights from the front which were focused on the eyes of the leading actress for medium close-ups; the manipulation of different luminosities of natural sunlight to convey the surreal and disturbing transformations of the portrait;

<sup>75</sup> Levitskii, *Rasskazy*, pp. 53–55.

and the use of smoke to create aerial perspective in an ‘exterior’ sequence.<sup>76</sup> This chapter is important because it provides confirmation of the camera operator’s prime responsibility for lighting, even when working with a director who clearly had his own radical ideas on the subject, and gives a detailed account of the aesthetic and dramatic principles which underpinned the project. *Portret Dorian Greia* was clearly a milestone in the sense that it constituted a sustained enquiry into cinematic self-definition at the point where the theatrical and the visual intersect. It is highly pertinent that the film subsequently became famous for its ‘black and white masses’ and its ‘lines and contours’, rather than for its success as an adaptation of a literary text — indeed, its innovations in the sphere of stage design and proto-expressionist lighting would prompt comparison later with Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* (1921).<sup>77</sup>

In conventional terms, with its privileging of the visually static over the visually dynamic, *Portret Dorian Greia* might be considered ‘uncinematic’. If so, it is a trait shared with a number of pre-revolutionary Russian films in which the principle of painterly immobility had become enshrined as something sacred, and where the slow rhythms of the acting and the relatively unobtrusive montage had distinguished them markedly from their American or European counterparts. Tsivian has explored this ‘Russian style’ and painterly tendency in relation to Bauer, but his exploration has taken place for the most part in the context of visual motifs or stagings borrowed from works of art.<sup>78</sup> The lighting procedures of these films, by contrast, have received scant attention, and little interest has been evinced in Bauer’s creative partnership with Zavelev, his camera operator at the Khanzhonkov studio for the best part of three years. This is an intriguing collaboration in the sense that it produced some of the most visually arresting films of the decade. The vast majority of commentators assume that Bauer was single-handedly responsible for these achievements. Tributes to his artistry on the part of those who worked alongside him are unfailingly generous and probably accurately reflect his genuine interest in the visual aesthetic of his films. Valentin Turkin has remarked on Bauer’s habit of looking through the viewfinder to check the arrangements of the décor and the positions of the actors within the frame prior to shooting.<sup>79</sup> The actor Ivan Perestiani, moreover, first employed by

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 78–106.

<sup>77</sup> This comparison was made by Sergei Sudeikin, a professional painter who also worked in the theatre as a set-designer. His reminiscences form the basis of the discussion of this film in Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, London, 1960, pp. 81–87.

<sup>78</sup> Tsivian, ‘Two “Stylists” of the Teens’, pp. 264–76.

<sup>79</sup> Cited by Tsivian in his biographical résumé of Bauer’s career in *Velikii kinemo*, p. 499.

Bauer in 1915, has claimed that he was, in essence, a quasi camera operator:

Understanding light as perfectly as he did, Bauer was the outstanding operator of his time. In essence, many of today's celebrated operators were his pupils and followers. They adopted the lighting devices which he, being an artist, understood and was sensitive towards in a way that few others were.<sup>80</sup>

Other sources qualify such views, however, and suggest that Bauer's films were more collaborative enterprises. Lev Kuleshov, who worked as a set-designer at the Khanzhonkov studio from 1916 onwards, has testified that:

Bauer taught myself as artist-decorator and Zavelev as camera operator to work together harmoniously as a genuine team. We worked together, not merely in relation to each and every arrangement of the décor, but on each individual frame and each individual positioning of the camera. Such a partnership between artist and camera operator is a rare phenomenon, even today.<sup>81</sup>

Perestiani's actual reminiscences, if they are to be believed, tend to undermine the claim for Bauer's individual genius — one of his anecdotes recalls Bauer and Zavelev, not Bauer alone, working together on the choice of an innovative lighting arrangement.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the evidence of films photographed by Zavelev prior to his collaborations with Bauer demonstrates that he was a vital force at the Khanzhonkov studio, both innovatory and sophisticated in equal measure.

Unlike Levitskii, whose work with Kuleshov in the 1920s ensured his posthumous reputation, Zavelev ranks as one of the great forgotten names of the silent era in Russia. His relative obscurity has been compounded by the fact that he himself committed nothing to print during his own lifetime. He has received little critical attention, even on the part of cinematographers who have written extensively about their profession, and he barely rates a mention in the standard monographs about the period. For four years, however, he was the chief cinematographer at the Khanzhonkov studio, with around thirty extant pre-revolutionary films now to his credit. Furthermore, he continued to work in the Soviet Union after the revolution. After a brief sojourn in the south with the Khanzhonkov studio, prompted by the desire to escape the revolutionary turmoil in Moscow, Zavelev

<sup>80</sup> I. Perestiani, *75 let zhizni v iskusstve*, Moscow, 1962 (hereafter, *75 let zhizni*), p. 257.

<sup>81</sup> Lev Kuleshov, 'Evgenii Frantsevich Bauer [k sorokaletiiu so dnia smerti]' (hereafter, 'Evgenii Frantsevich Bauer'), in his *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, ed. P. N. Iurenev et al., Moscow, 1987–88 (hereafter, *Sobranie sochinenii*), 2 (*Vospominaniia: Rezhissura: Dramaturgiiia*), 1987, pp. 403–09 (p. 405).

<sup>82</sup> Perestiani, *75 let zhizni*, p. 292.

resumed his activities for the next two decades alongside such directors as Gardin, Chardynin, Perestiani, and Aleksandr Dovzhenko, all of whom were important figures within the emerging industries of Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia.<sup>83</sup> Where he is mentioned, the references are always complimentary but never particularly expansive. Gardin, for example, having worked with him on *Prizrak brodit po Evrope* (The Spectre that Haunts Europe, 1923), an adaptation for screen of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Red Masque*, observed that Zavelev was a 'genuine professional, with an inventive and agile frame of mind'.<sup>84</sup> Kuleshov, moreover, rated him as highly as Levitskii in terms of his importance for pre-revolutionary cinematography.<sup>85</sup> It should be noted that Zavelev's career was initially forged with Chardynin, the actor with the Vvedenskii narodnyi dom who joined the Khanzhonkov studio in 1909 (many commentators now referring to him as the 'father of Russian cinema').<sup>86</sup> His name is first encountered alongside Chardynin's at roughly the same time in relation to some brief experiments with 'sound films'.<sup>87</sup> Subsequently, in the crucial year of 1914, when his name first appears in the credits for Khanzhonkov productions, he was making more films with Chardynin than with Bauer. This close collaboration continued throughout 1915. Indeed, if Chardynin had not been poached by the Kharitonov studio at the beginning of 1916, it is highly likely that Zavelev's active partnership with him would have continued, as it did after the revolution, when he (Chardynin) was put in charge of the Ukrainian film industry.

The early Chardynin-Zavelev productions show a remarkably sophisticated and innovative approach to lighting. With the exception of the actual set-designs, and one or two exceptionally modern and unusual lighting techniques, the visual design of their films corresponds very closely to what would later become associated with Bauer: extreme decorativeness or, to borrow Zorkaia's phrase, the 'aestheticism of photographic textures'.<sup>88</sup> The underlying principle of this approach can be described as the sculpting and modelling of space by means of light to ensure the richest possible textural and tonal combinations. This involved the use of chiaroscuro and the careful distribution of such light-accented glimmers, reflections, highlights, and patches or pools of light within the frame to provide relief, volume, and

<sup>83</sup> Zavelev has twenty-two films to his credit in the post-revolutionary period, and was still working as late as 1938. See *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: Annotirovannyi katalog*, ed. A. V. Macheret et al., Moscow, 1961, 3 (*Prilozheniia*), ed. G. K. Elizarov, 1961, p. 153.

<sup>84</sup> Cited in Kushnirov, 'A. A. Levitskii', p. 24.

<sup>85</sup> Kuleshov, 'Evgenii Frantsevich Bauer', p. 405.

<sup>86</sup> See Tsivian and Langirov's biographical résumé in *Velikii kinemo*, pp. 530–31.

<sup>87</sup> Tsivian, 'Early Russian Cinema', p. 19.

<sup>88</sup> N. Zorkaia, 'Kinorezhisser Evgenii Bauer v poiskakh "iskusstva svetopisi"', in *Mir Iskusstv: Al'manakh*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 270–85 (p. 284).

perspective. The overall impression is that of a carefully organized, painterly composition which, with its intricate networks of lines, contours, and tonal gradations, is aimed primarily to please the eye. The appeal is undeniably aesthetic, a kind of decadent ‘art for art’s sake’, but one nevertheless which is rigorously harnessed to dramatic requirements. Chardynin’s responsibility for the development of this modern aesthetic is highly unlikely, however. Despite his own proficiency in the sphere of camera operation, one which saw him photographing several of his post-1915 productions himself, his works prior to the collaborations with Zavelev are unremarkable in terms of their lighting — see, for example, *Domik v Kolomne* (The Little House in Kolomna, 1913), which never strays beyond the convention of total visibility (Starewicz was the cameraman in question). However solid and intelligent a director, Chardynin belonged to the prosaic rather than poetic school of Russian film-making. According to Khanzhonkov, he was regarded at the studio as someone essentially ‘without invention’; indeed, his departure in early 1916 has been explained in terms of his irritation and hurt at being increasingly eclipsed by the more talented and original Bauer.<sup>89</sup> For these reasons, it is logical to seek the inspiration for his lighting innovations elsewhere, primarily with Zavelev, but also perhaps in the influences which were beginning to be felt from other national cinemas, in particular Denmark, Sweden, and Italy. Many of Zavelev’s trademark features — the subtle and elegant manner in which he lights his portraits, the meticulous fashion in which he arranges objects and figures within the frame, and the precise way in which arcs are deployed to bring out the textures of the surfaces and the gradations of tones — can be found in European films at this time, but rarely with the same degree of extravagance.

One technique which Zavelev promotes consistently in his films with Chardynin is that of side-lighting. This is a classic technique in painting and studio photography for the rendering of texture and volume. The frame-still from reel two of *Kormilitsa* (The Wet-Nurse, 1914) which shows Georgii, the main protagonist, sitting at a desk in his study, is a useful illustration of this approach (2:1280 [Figure 7]). The side-lighting here, the artificial sources of which can be glimpsed in the reflections on the top of the table-lamp, produces highlights running vertically up and down the book-cabinet and the wardrobe at the edge of the right-hand-side frame (the strong shadows produced by the arcs can be seen to the left of this wardrobe). It also produces reflections and gleams on the metallic objects on the table, while at the same time modelling Georgii’s face (the broad band of light which runs down the

<sup>89</sup> See Forest’e, *Vospominaniia*, p. 88; Khanzhonkov, *Pervye gody*, p. 98, and Tsivian and Iangirov’s biographical résumé in *Velikii kinemo*, pp. 529–31.

right-hand-side of his face and the shiny streak along his hair), and emphasizing the whiteness of his shirt and the pages of the book lying open on his desk. Compositionally, compared to Zavelev's later work, this is not a particularly complex arrangement. One notes, however, the inch-perfect position of the table-lamp, its dark tone prevented from clashing with the wood of the book-cabinet, and offset instead against the lighter tone of the door; the division of the frame into strongly emphasized verticals; and the distributional balance created by the cabinet and the door — both rectangular shapes, their point of contact lying just to the right of the centre of the frame in order to produce a counterweight to Georgii's slightly left-of-centre position at the desk. A similar kind of arrangement can be witnessed in several of Zavelev's compositions from this period — for example the portrait of Mozzhukhin as the violinist-lover Iaron in the first reel of *Ty pomnish' li?* (Do You Remember?, 1914 (1:7200 [Figure 8])). Here the illumination from the side is more accentuated. A powerful arc has been used to emphasize the folds in the curtains and the tuxedo, and produces a clean division of the face into light and shade. In addition, highlights can be detected along the body of the violin itself, on the strings, along the hairs of the bow, and on the tuning pegs. Judging from the reflections in the actor's eyes, there would appear to be an additional but weaker frontal source of illumination which projects light at an angle towards the violin-case and the sheet of music lying to the right of the frame. The composition is organized strongly along vertical lines, all the way to the beaded curtain hanging foreground-left, and just slightly out of focus. The soft chiaroscuro has narrowed the range of tonal values within the frame, but has presumably been deployed to emphasize something of the sinister attractiveness of Mozzhukhin in this particular role.

Zavelev's deployment of side-lighting is unusual in the sense that, according to the informal practice which was rapidly becoming a convention, arcs were usually positioned frontally and at an angle for portrait purposes, with fill-light (*podsvetka*) sometimes applied from the other side to model the face and eliminate shadow areas: this was the procedure for the introductory cameos of *dramatis personae* in Russian films from 1913 onwards, and witnessed for example, albeit crudely, in Bauer's *Nemye svideteli* (Silent Witnesses, 1914; the cinematographer is unknown). Elsewhere in *Ty pomnish' li?*, more complicated variants of this device become apparent. In the opening sequence, for example, we are presented with medium close-ups of Vera Karalli, playing Elena, and Petr Chardynin, playing Lev Nil'skii, as they stand next to each other by a large mirror (1:2232 [Figure 9]). The main source of directed light here is an arc concealed by the ornate shade of a standing-lamp — it is positioned beyond the frame to the left, directly



behind Karalli's head, and is partly reflected in the mirror itself. As far as Karalli's reflection is concerned, this arc functions as a slightly diffuse *contre-jour* effect, producing a rim of light which literally 'spills over' in front of her face. For Chardynin, by contrast, it produces a narrow strip of light running down the side of his jaw and beard, leaving his eyes and most of his face sunken in shadow. Here, as with the later portrait of Mozzhukhin, the lighting has a thoughtful, coded valence. Karalli plays a young wife on the verge of renewing a romantic relationship with a musical friend from her youth; Chardynin plays an ageing writer disturbed by what he perceives as the growing emotional distance between himself and his wife. Both characters are contemplative: Karalli admires herself in this sequence with an air of icy *hauteur*; Chardynin is clearly emotionally perturbed. In a later sequence from the same reel, after Karalli has renewed her acquaintance with the violinist, Zavelev arranges the lights for a similarly dramatic emphasis. This is a complex staging in depth which starts with a low-key, medium close-up of Chardynin sitting next to a log fire. The camera pans left for about fifteen seconds as he moves across to an illuminated, patterned window positioned to the left-hand side of the frame. The camera subsequently pans back slightly for Karalli's entrance from the rear of the room, walking at a slight angle towards the viewer (1:6520 [Figure 10]). At this juncture, the side-lighting fragments the stage into parallel, luminous spaces: the light coming through the patterned window (foreground-left); the light which illuminates the recess in the background from which Karalli makes her entrance; and the beams which catch Karalli's fox-fur stole as she strides purposefully towards the camera. From the compositional point of view, the same trademark features are detectable: the highlights which run along the metallic objects located on the desk (the candle-holder, the ink-well, the ashtray, and the statue of Pegasus); the juxtaposition between these (cold) metallic surfaces and the (warm) texture of the stole; and the division of the stage space into rectangular blocks of light and shade. Most importantly, we note the dramatic juxtaposition in terms of body-language: Chardynin, immobile and shrouded in gloom; Karalli, smiling, radiant, and triumphant.

Although only a single reel of *Ty pomnish' li?* has survived, it offers sufficient evidence of a mature visual style. In terms of interior lighting, it pioneers a number of techniques which later characterize the Bauer 'school', one which Kuleshov has defined in terms of staging in depth and the positioning of concealed lighting units (Jupiters) between gaps along the side of the decorations.<sup>90</sup> Any number of subsequent Bauer/Zavelev collaborations would serve to highlight the formal echoes, but

<sup>90</sup> Kuleshov, 'Evgenii Frantsevich Bauer', p. 404.

the film which does so most comprehensively is *Iurii Nagorny*, a low-key revenge drama produced by the Khanzhonkov studio towards the end of 1915. Such is the precision and clarity of its cinematic language that, despite the absence of intertitles and the innovative disruption of chronology (the plot reverses back on itself), the narrative development is easily followed. The plot, loosely summarized, concerns the tragic fate of an innocent young woman who is first seduced and then abandoned by the eponymous hero; in her misery, and after committing the affair to her diary, she commits suicide by shooting herself in the park outside her family home. On discovering the diary, her elder sister, a dancer played by Emma Bauer (the director's wife in real life), first entices and then tries to murder Nagorny by getting him inebriated and setting fire to his apartment: he survives, but with the punishment of facial burns that will scar him for life (his inner moral corruption now matched by his grotesque external appearance). The screenplay, penned by Andrei Gromov, the actor playing opposite Emma Bauer as her brooding husband, was criticized at the time for its improbability.<sup>91</sup> In terms of its visual expressivity, however, it must rank alongside such celebrated American works as DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915) and Thomas Ince's *His Phantom Sweetheart* (1915), works regarded by many as the archetypal embodiment of low-key aesthetics at this time. It is certainly far more radical than anything attempted by the 'Golden Series' productions of this period. In the main this is because *Iurii Nagorny* not only explores the action of light poetically, but does so in a sustained and integrated manner. Each episode is a lighting *tour-de-force*, but one which harmonizes with the visual design of the whole. One sequence in particular might be said to be a lighting *mise-en-abîme*, since it reveals, by the action of switching on individual sources in succession, how light functions artistically within the space of the enclosed stage.

Because *Iurii Nagorny* is not commercially available, it is necessary to refer substantially to frame-stills in order to demonstrate the above thesis. These show a variety of different moments during the film's progression, from the opening sequences which take place backstage in the theatre where Nagorny and the dancer regularly perform, to the low-key shot of the younger sister at the point where she steals a gun from her father's drawer at the family home prior to shooting herself. The opening sequence constitutes an extreme staging in depth, so extreme that, if not for the testimony of Amo Bek-Nazarov, the actor making his screen debut as Nagorny, one might suspect that it was photographed in a genuine locale (1:152 [Figure 12]).<sup>92</sup> We see a

<sup>91</sup> See the reviews cited in *Velikii kinemo*, pp. 293–94.

<sup>92</sup> See his memoirs, the relevant fragment of which is cited in *ibid.*, p. 295.

member of the audience looking at a programme through his pince-nez (foreground-right); the dancer and her husband seated on chairs (medium foreground-left); and a group of *bons viveurs* seated around a table (medium-background), two of whom are throwing and catching a ball — as we subsequently learn, this group consists of Nagorny's louche acquaintances. The stage is divided into areas of greater and lesser luminosity by virtue of arcs positioned at various intervals offstage left and right: one offstage right in the foreground (see the tell-tale strip of light running down the face of the man reading his programme); one offstage left in the foreground (clearly illuminating the dancer and her husband); the bright area of luminosity which emerges from behind the recess on the left, and the light which strikes the wall in the background, beyond the doorway, in the depths of the frame.

The cut to medium close-up on the dancer and her husband at the point when the former looks up suddenly and recognizes Nagorny has resulted in a careful and highly complex adjustment of this overall arrangement (1:654 [Figure 18]). The portraits here are modelled in such a way as to suggest the deployment of spotlights (the beams are focused precisely so that they catch only localized areas). There is an offstage arc striking the frame at an angle from left to right: this illuminates the shawl wrapped around Emma Bauer's shoulders, its beam reflected by the corner of her husband's chair. Another offstage arc supplies light from the right, probably slightly from above (note the reflections in her eyes), which strikes her face frontally but leaves the side of her face closest to the viewer in relative shadow. There is possibly a second spot hitting the front of her dress from a lower angle: we note the area of luminosity on her knee, the strips of light which can be seen running along the knuckle and finger of her left hand, and the left-hand fingers of the husband's hand, and the highlights running along the right-hand side of his chair. As far as the husband is concerned, we observe a beam striking the top right-hand side of his head (as we look at the frame), his right ear, and the edge of his right cheek. This is very probably the same source which illuminates Bauer's face from the front (this has been confirmed at a juncture just prior to the frame-still when he moves his head forward and in doing so casts a noticeable shadow across her face and neck). The right side of his face is illuminated by the same offstage arc which sheds light on Bauer's shawl: we can see this from the reflections in his eyes and the highlights running along the back of his chair (the lower level of intensity here reflects his further distance from the source).

The final frame from this sequence shows Bauer performing on stage (1:3904 [Figure 13]). This is a reasonably low-key sequence in which she is illuminated by two arcs flooding the stage from left and right.

The footlights at the front of the stage are purely functional (this is, after all, the stage); and the audience is being illuminated, not by them, but by arcs positioned just below the level of the stage (the glare from one of them is just visible to the right of the actress's knee). The candle which stands on the piano, the flame of which is intensified by the offstage arc, is a pleasing atmospheric effect which nevertheless has no appreciable impact on the lighting design of the whole.

As the film progresses, these lighting principles remain constant; indeed, in one key sequence, mentioned above, they are actually 'laid bare'. The sequence in question occurs after the dancer and her husband have returned home after the performance. The initial frames, which show the shadow of Emma Bauer's body on the door as she enters the room, is extremely low-key: a spotlight offstage right (but slightly from the front) weakly illuminates a transparent hanging, the back of a chair, and an ornate column on the left-hand side of the frame (1:8419 [Figure 14]). The shadow itself is produced by an arc positioned behind the anterior wall. Bauer enters the room, shuts the door, removes her coat and hat, and then disappears offstage left in order to switch on a light positioned behind the column to the rear of the room (1:8717 [Figure 15]). She then returns, sits down at a table, switches on a standing lamp, takes out a small box, and removes a photograph from it. Seconds later, her husband enters and moves towards her (1:9213 [Figure 16]). By means of these intricate manoeuvres, the spatial dynamic of the room, as well as its decorative elegance and textures, has been gradually revealed to us. The lighting procedure also carries a dramatic implication: the gradual flooding of the room with light reflects the gradual realization on the part of the dancer that the performer seen earlier at the theatre (Nagorny) had been the lover who caused her sister's suicide. By the same token, the gradual descent into darkness as the film progresses reflects the murderous deeds which are about to be contemplated (see here the scene in which the younger sister steals the gun while her father sleeps — 4:5295 [Figure 17]).

One of the startling innovations in this film — one that is not encountered in Zavelev's work with Chardynin — involves the creative deployment of artificial top-lighting. A good illustration of this method can be found in the sequence which witnesses the husband musing thoughtfully in his study (1:10110 [Figure 19]). As a pictorial composition, this is highly unusual for its time. The borders of the frame are conventionally anchored by verticals, but the interior of the frame consists of a number of steep and flat diagonals: the bookcase (and the books), the settee positioned on the right, the two door-buttresses, the patterned shadow formed by the door-glass on the left-hand buttress, the head-rest of the chaise-longue (foreground-centre), and the corner of the table (far left). The distribution of highlights and accents within

the frame, in particular the reflections visible in the dark vase which stands background-left, give an indication of the type and positions of the various lighting units. In the foreground to medium-foreground area, columns of vertical light fall onto the husband's head and shoulders. They produce highlights along the headrest of the chaise-longue, illuminate the patterned seat and right-hand arm of the chair positioned to the left by the desk, and produce gleams in the metal of the telephone and the metallic studs which run along the side of the desk and the front of the arm of the chair. The truncated shadows of the book lying on the desk and the telephone are themselves consequently the result of this overhead source. As a result, all the surfaces facing perpendicularly towards the camera in this area of the frame are either completely dark or partially in shadow. Towards the rear, the distribution is even more complex. An angular column of light strikes the bookcase, the lower end of the right-hand door-buttress, and a portion of the floor just behind the husband's legs; a later sequence, shot within the same interior, but from a slightly different angle, suggests that this is the result of an arc being projected downwards through a rear window to simulate sunlight.<sup>93</sup> Overhead lighting has been employed to accentuate areas of patterned wallpaper, both on the left (leading down to the vase), and on the right (the fragment just visible beneath the shade of the standing lamp). It has also been used to accentuate the sloping surface of the door-buttress (the luminosity is slightly greater towards the top than the bottom). In addition, the arc positioned behind the anterior door, which throws the pattern of the glass onto the buttress, would appear to have been positioned at a high level, since the rays are clearly striking downwards (the angle of the light can also be gauged by the distribution of glints along the surface of the glass).

Neither the tradition of studio painting nor that of still photography explains the novelty of this composition. It is further distinguished by its multiple lighting sources, anticipating by several years, if not an entire decade, the kind of complex arrangements which would become standard practice in film studios before they were challenged by the *vérité* movement of the 1950s and early 1960s. Light here renders every area of the frame pictorially dynamic, unlike the contemporary American approach, which sought to focus the attention of the spectator ruthlessly on the mime, gestures, and movements of the actor. In this sequence, by contrast, the eye of the viewer is inevitably distracted by the mass of sensory data: the wealth of tones, the relationships between the masses and volumes, the movement of lines,

<sup>93</sup> Salt reproduces a still from *Iurii Nagomyi* to illustrate his discussion of interior design. It shows the same study, but with the camera moved around to the right. See *Film Style and Technology*, p. 133.

and the distribution of different luminosities within the frame. This is actively promoted by the *mise-en-scène* which, by halting the action for a few seconds, and reducing human movement to a minimum, encourages the eye to roam. From the dramatic point of view, it is questionable whether the sumptuous décor of this house really deserves our attention. As a metonymic representation of the key protagonists, it undoubtedly serves as a useful indication of their wealth, social standing, and tastes. However, it is clearly not pertinent or, at the very least, is only tangential to the ethical question which Bauer poses in this film — the justification for revenge (approached, interestingly, through the prism of a powerful sisterly bond). What *Iurii Nagomyi* proposes is the potential significance for the diegesis of background detail and interior landscape.

When we come to study the exterior cinematography in Russian films, we will see a similar process at work: landscape moves from being a realistic or picturesque backdrop and assumes a more sustained diegetic importance. By the same token, the action of sunlight itself becomes associated with certain ideas or moods. The touchstone for this process is again the works photographed by Zavelev for Bauer, although it continues after the latter's death, most impressively in *V strane liubvi* (In the Land of Love, 1918), a screen adaptation of a novella published in 1893 by Aleksandr Amfiteatrov (he also authored the screenplay) and directed by Aleksandr Ural'skii, an actor-turned-director and well-known Bauer acolyte. Although the novella and screenplay are set in a north Italian coastal resort, the screen adaptation itself was filmed in Yalta. In this sense, therefore, *V strane liubvi* belongs with a group of films, the exteriors for which Zavelev photographed for Bauer in the Russian South: *Prikliuchenie Liny v Sochi* (The Adventures of Lina in Sochi, 1916), *Umiraiushchii lebed'* (1917) and *Za schast'em* (In Search of Happiness, 1917). Despite their different generic status (*Prikliuchenie Liny v Sochi* is a comedy), these works revel in the combination of bright light and the white classical architecture of the Russian Riviera. The adoption of certain modern lighting techniques, however, in particular *contre-jour*, is only haphazardly integrated into the plot. The relevant scenes are aesthetically pleasing, and were praised by reviewers, but only rarely accentuate the drama unfolding before the spectator's eyes.

In *V strane liubvi*, by contrast, picturesque image and romantic atmosphere are crucial to the theme of the novella. The screenplay, which is largely faithful to the original, tells the story of a young Italian woman of simple origins who falls passionately but unrequitedly in love with an émigré Russian painter before subsequently being murdered by a jealous, would-be fiancé. Zavelev's prime task involves evoking the light, textures, and tones of a supposedly Mediterranean

landscape in a way which successfully communicates its appeal to the painterly eye.<sup>94</sup> *V strane liubvi* is very possibly the first Russian film where the landscape is a diegetically integrated element in the cinematic text. For much of the film Zavelev opts for romantic *contre-jour*. Many of the seascapes, and several of the portraits of Giulia, the main female protagonist, are photographed towards the sun. Zavelev's intent is signalled in the very first image, a technical *tour-de-force* bearing in mind the insensitivities of orthochromatic film, which shows the sun setting over the sea, partially obscured by cloud. This establishes the poetic and elegiac tone for the ensuing drama. Subsequent shots of the sea, taken from the shore at different angles and times of the day, and capturing the different moods of the ocean, all face towards the sun, with the rays dancing and sparkling on the surface of the water. Significantly, the only moment when this light is absent occurs in the final shot of incoming waves which follows Giulia's brutal murder. As if to reinforce the camera's symbolic identification with the sea, the shot of her stabbed body being pushed over the quayside by her would-be fiancé is taken with the camera positioned on a rowing-boat, the frame bobbing upwards and downwards in accordance with the swelling of the waves (5:11460). The centre of this image-nexus lies in a series of portraits of Giulia. An early medium-foreground portrait of her in the company of well-heeled admirers (1:5955), and a later sequence just prior to her murder in which she tries to engage a male passer-by in dialogue (5:7364), are staged by quayside railings with the lens looking almost directly into the sun. A key moment occurs in reel two when, having sat for her portrait, and after having left the painter's studio, Giulia takes a rowing boat out to sea (2:4611). The initial sequence shows her pushing the boat offshore, with a column of reflected sunlight on the surface of the water neatly dividing the frame into two equal halves; subsequently, as she sits contemplatively in the boat, we are presented with a medium close-up, again shot against the light (2:5520). In this image the light is soft and the mood romantic. Zavelev exposes for the actress's face so that her expression remains visible and the unnecessary detail behind her lost, with the light gently curving around her face. The strategic timing of this portrait, coming after Giulia has just finished posing for the artist, is interesting in terms of the camera's diegetic significance. Here it seeks to capture and

<sup>94</sup> The importance of this challenge should not be underestimated in view of the fact that Amfiteatrov's novella alludes explicitly to the attractiveness of Italy. His painter, for example, seeks Giulia as a model for his depiction of Mignon, the mysterious and passionate character from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, whose song at the beginning of Book 3, chapter one ('Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen') is explicitly associated with the author-narrator's powerful longing to travel there.

communicate something of Giulia's aura, that particular aspect of her character and features which has presumably attracted the painter, who is intent on exploiting her as a model for his portrait of Mignon. At this juncture, the eye of the camera and the painter are fused harmoniously into one. The film is a monument to the poetic possibilities of *contre-jour* well before it had become something of a cinematographic cliché.<sup>95</sup>

The art of cinematography had travelled a great distance since the inception of Russian film in 1908. As evidenced in the work of operators like Zavelev, it reached a level of technical mastery and creativity which could rival the best of American and European cinema. The tragedy of this period lay in the fact that it immediately became the object of scorn on the part of the revolutionary avant-garde. Nothing illustrates this attitude better than the oft-quoted anecdote propagated by Kuleshov at the expense of Zavelev, supposedly so wedded to the convention of the static camera that he would insist on the set-designers moving the cumbersome décor around the set, rather than shifting the position of his camera — this of an operator who had executed more tracking shots in his early career than the vast majority of his contemporaries.<sup>96</sup> This ideological hostility prevailed well into the 1980s, and affected not only public access to the treasures of this period, but also attempts to celebrate and resurrect its poetics. Rustam Khamdamov's diploma film, *V gorakh moe serdtse* (My Heart Lies in the Mountains, 1967), perhaps the most elegant and sophisticated 'retro' attempt to communicate the visual aesthetic of the silent movie, was banned for more than twenty years before finally being shown on television (to add insult to injury, it was discovered that the camera-negative had been destroyed, apparently through carelessness).<sup>97</sup> Even today, with the pre-revolutionary silent era beginning to attract the attention of scholars, the attempt to engage with the films themselves is

<sup>95</sup> Henri Alekan, a French cinematographer best known for his work on Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1945), dates the overexploitation of this device to the late 1920s and early 1930s: see Alekan, *Des lumières et des ombres*, Paris, 1984, p. 204. French critic and film-maker Louis Delluc, however, was protesting about the 'abuse' of *contre-jour* as early as 1920. See Delluc, 'Photogénie' [1920], in *Écrits cinématographiques I: Le cinéma et les cinéastes*, ed. Pierre L'Herminier, Paris, 1985, pp. 34–77 (p. 38).

<sup>96</sup> The anecdote in question, with Zavelev's name omitted, was first publicly recounted in chapter four of *Iskusstvo kino* [1929]. See Kuleshov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1 (*Teoriia: Kritika: Pedagogika*), Moscow, 1987, pp. 161–225 (p. 200). It was repeated nearly fifty years later, however, with Zavelev explicitly named. See L. Kuleshov and A. Khokhlova, *50 let v kino*, Moscow, 1975, p. 27. It is possible that Kuleshov's remark was intended more as a joke than a true record of an actual event, but it was nevertheless doing the rounds in the early 1920s as evidence of the supposedly antediluvian mentality of the 'old school' of pre-revolutionary camera operators. See Evgenii Mikhailov, 'Vospominaniia ob A. N. Moskvine', in *Kinooperator Andrei Moskvin: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva: Vospominaniia tovarishchei*, ed. F. G. Gukasian, Leningrad, 1971, pp. 154–63 (p. 156).

<sup>97</sup> Dmitrii Popov, '“V gorakh moe serdtse”', *Iskusstvo kino*, 1988, 5, pp. 68–71.



fraught with difficulties. The loss of important negatives, the knowledge that hardly any tinted and toned versions have survived, the fact that those prints which have survived are available only on relatively primitive safety film stock (Soviet-era Svema), and the fact that so few have found commercial distributors (even in Russia) suggest that it may well be some time before they find the audience they deserve. This is unfortunate, not only because the films themselves deserve recognition, but because, in their absence, the history of Russian and Soviet cinema has become subject to a gross and unacceptable distortion. This can be witnessed by the fact that, in the most recent collection of essays to appear on Russian cinema, the pre-1917 period has been almost completely excluded.<sup>98</sup> Yet the continuities which bind the pre- and post-revolutionary eras in the sphere of cinematography are significant. They can be demonstrated not only with reference to the operators who continued to work into the Soviet era, but also with reference to the aesthetic approaches, in particular lighting procedures, which characterized mainstream film-making practice in the 1920s and 1930s. In many respects, paradoxically, it was this practice, rather than that of the revolutionary avant-garde, which later became the predominant Soviet tradition.

<sup>98</sup> David Gillespie, *Russian Cinema*, Inside Film Series, Harlow, 2003.