

Introduction

This issue of “Images” is entitled *Ukraine in Flames*, echoing the English-language adaptation of a renowned cinematic creation by Ukrainian director Oleksandr Dovzhenko (1894–1956). In 1944, Stalin’s regime condemned this masterpiece to oblivion, citing unfounded allegations of “Ukrainian nationalism”. The volume is being published amid another war waged on Ukrainian soil, where the nation defends itself against an external aggressor seeking to take it over. This war has shocked the world. People are being introduced to this conflict predominantly through audiovisual media. For those who have experienced it, it is an inescapable, tragic reality, but for others it has become, to a large extent, a quasi-filmic spectacle which, regrettably, risks losing its gravity due to its daily presence on screens...

Ukraine has garnered considerable attention due to this war. However, it would be inappropriate for the perception of this country to remain solely at the level of the image of a nation fighting tenaciously for the independence and integrity of its state. The prevailing circumstances demand a deeper exploration of Ukraine’s cultural heritage and the intricacies of its identity, aspects which Russia’s aggression is precisely seeking to annihilate. A self-contained heritage and a separate identity, by their very existence, undermine the imperial, Great-Russian myths that instrumentalise the past.

Since the 18th century, when imperial Russia took its full form, suppressing all forms of cultural distinctiveness, particularly Ukrainian but also Polish, became one of the central objectives of the state. Consequently, the development of Ukrainian culture has perpetually intertwined with political struggle. The aforementioned Oleksandr Dovzhenko confirmed this by stating that in the Soviet Union, “every creator of Ukrainian culture is seen as a potential enemy. Anyone who loves their nation is a nationalist...”. Similarly, Sarkis Parajanian (Serhiy Parajanov, 1924–1990), director of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964), said the following about himself: “I am an Armenian who was born in Tbilisi and was imprisoned in Russia for Ukrainian nationalism”.

During the Soviet era and the Iron Curtain, Ukraine's true independence was obscured, leading to minimal recognition of Ukrainian cinema in Europe and worldwide. Ukrainian art was subsumed under the broader Soviet umbrella, often conflated with dominant Russian artistic traditions. The awards that Ukrainian artists did receive at international festivals, as well as their standing and authority, fed the prestige of the Soviet Union, which, incidentally, was often called Russia for short. Only a handful of instances acknowledged Ukrainians as the bearers of a distinct culture.

Post-Soviet Ukraine yearned to present itself to the world, yet the challenging transition to a market-driven economy hindered the production of indigenous films during the 1990s and early 2000s. It was only in the 2010s that the situation began to change, although primarily within the domestic market. Ukrainian cinema remains relatively obscure on the global stage and is arguably underrated.

This volume aims to bridge the gap in scholarly discourse surrounding Ukrainian cinema. It comprises contributions from Ukrainian and Polish scholars, delving into various periods of Ukrainian cinematic history, with a significant focus on the contemporary landscape.

The issue explores cinematic, cultural, and historical Ukrainian-Russian relations within the backdrop of the ongoing conflict since 2014 but also in the context of earlier, sometimes long-lasting processes and events. It also sheds light on wartime realities within the Ukrainian film industry, on selected phenomena spanning over a century of Ukrainian cinematic history, and on Ukrainian-Polish cinematic and historical relations. The *Varia* section, in which we publish a number of texts unrelated to the main theme, begins, however, with interviews featuring prominent figures in Polish cinema – the directors Jerzy Hoffman and Krzysztof Zanussi. These discussions, conducted in July 2022, revolve broadly around Ukrainian culture and cinema.

To complete this thematic thread, our *Author Gallery* showcases the works of distinguished Ukrainian visual artists from two generations, Heorhiy (1930–2000) and Serhiy (1952–2017) Yakutovych. These pieces have been generously provided by Pavel Hudimov's Ya Gallery and the Bohdan Stupka Charitable Foundation (Kyiv). Additionally, we feature excerpts from a photographic chronicle of the ongoing conflict, captured by acclaimed Kharkiv-based artist Vladislav Krasnoshchok.

We hope that with this volume of “Images”, we are contributing to the process of construction – in our case, construction through knowledge – in a world scarred by permanent destruction and degradation due to the ongoing war...

Liubov Krupnyk, Andrzej Szpulak, Adrianna Woroch