

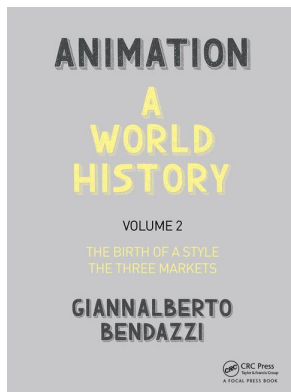
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Giannalberto Bendazzi

Soviet Union I

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SOVIET UNION I¹

Russia

Thaw

The period considered in this chapter encompasses almost the entire late Soviet era. Therefore, its characterization, in terms of sociopolitical development and cultural implications, is necessarily complex, split into several subperiods and different planes.

Politically, the beginning of 1960s was marked by the continuation of Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw. It was inconsistent, but it let society open up to the world and its own troubled past. When Khrushchev was ousted by an inside-party coup and replaced by a 'collective leadership' headed by Leonid Brezhnev in October 1964, it was not immediately clear what reaction would follow. Thus, the mood of the Thaw lasted a few more years and its effects were tangible even longer, despite the crawling 're-Stalinization' that was noticeable by the end of the decade.

The outbreaks of Cold War were important (and propagandistically exploited), but they didn't seem to have a decisive impact on the atmosphere inside the country. It was rather a time of optimism and energetic drive. The first manned space flight in 1961 was a cause of national pride. The cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became a symbolic hero, and enthusiasm about space exploration became one of the era's major themes, along with aspirations of discoveries in scientific research. The romanticized figure of the 'physicist' (a personification of a scientist at large) also become emblematic.

Almost the same enthusiasm was sometimes expressed, early on, towards certain cultural endeavours; for example,

public poetry readings that drew hundreds at Moscow squares and, later, thousands at the stadiums.

The period was relatively relaxed, compared to the terror of Stalinism, yet it carried its own major tensions. For many people, the entire order was threatened. The debate at party pulpits and kitchen tables surrounding the 'certain tragic mistakes of the past' became a search for 'human' socialism. It evolved into a discussion on communism itself, and even into questioning the entire Soviet project. Directly or indirectly, this informed the public discourse, which was largely concentrated in and around arts and culture. In animation, though, this discussion took implicit, somewhat masked forms.

A special term appeared: *Shestidesiatniki* = 'Sixtiers', or people of the 1960s. It marked less a generation than a subcultural 'breed' of intelligentsia. They bore the era's major traits and expressed its contradictions and aspirations. Soon they were largely squeezed out of public life and civil service, but they continued to make an impact through the next decades. With the advent of perestroika in the mid-1980s, they were influential again.

Acclaim

Soviet cinema saw the emergence of bright talents, acclaimed worldwide: Tarkovsky, Parajanov. Though somewhat less-known abroad, Marlen Khutsiyev was often called the Russian Antonioni. On stage, there were exercises in the refreshed Stanislavsky tradition, such as those by the young company The Contemporary (Sovremennik). The Taganka Theatre, headed by the director Yuri Lyubimov, made bold use of Brechtian aesthetics.

¹ By Mikhail Gurevich and Giannalberto Bendazzi.

In the fine arts, the confrontation between the ‘approved’ neo-academism and modernist trends continued. The aesthetic history of the century was being rediscovered through eye-opening exhibits from abroad (such as Léger in 1962) and the opening up of domestic museums’ vaults, with their hidden treasures of both Russian and European modern art. The process lasted well into the 1970s.

On the literary front – traditionally, the main ideological domain – the fight between ‘progressive’ and ‘conservative’ forces was also taking place. Previously banned and pushed aside authors were returning to the light. The ‘young prose’ and the semi-officially recognized poetry (Evtushenko, Voznesensky) was published mainly in *Yunost* (Youth).

A bombshell was the publication in *Novy Mir* (New World) of Solzhenitsyn’s novella, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962). It was the first account of Stalin’s labour camps to be openly made public. The novella was considered for the highest state literary award, but eventually the idea was discarded. Later, Solzhenitsyn was only able to publish a few short stories, while his major novels went into ‘sam-izdat’ (self-publishing) and ‘tam-izdat’ (there-publishing, that is, publishing abroad).

In 1964, the then-unpublished young poet Iosif Brodsky (later Nobel Prize winner and US Poet Laureate) was exiled in a remote village for ‘social parasitism’. In 1966, the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel received prison terms for publishing ‘anti-Soviet materials’ abroad. *Novy Mir* magazine, the principal venue for the ‘Sixtiers’, was practically gutted when the editor-in-chief poet Aleksandr Tvardovsky was forced to resign in 1970.

However, artistically free and innovative expression continued to develop, even under the tightening censorship. This was especially true in grey areas, such as the so-called bard movement of ‘sung’ poetry, performed to a guitar.

The global turbulence of the 1960s peaked in 1968. Within the Soviet bloc was the Prague Spring, an attempt by the local leadership to head the wave of liberalization. The Kremlin saw this as a mortal threat and invaded Czechoslovakia. This shocked many of the Russian intelligentsia and became a watershed event. Seven activists staged a protest on the Red Square, beginning a dissident movement.

Stagnation

The period following the Thaw is usually called Stagnation. Brezhnev’s rule, consolidated by the 1970s, was mostly inspired by the unspoken idea of stability. The slogan of Khrushchev’s era, ‘Catch up with and outdo America!’ was largely abandoned. Living standards were improving. After decades of turmoil, the striving for ‘normal life’ and elemental comfort was not a complete heresy.

The spirit of the 1970s was, in essence, ‘live and let live’. It was the time of a second wave of dramatic urbanization. Millions of newly uprooted ‘migrants’ flocked into the cities, bringing with them mixed tastes and cultural demands, provoking new ideological tensions and twists. These were expressed in the so-called ‘village prose’ and other nativist trends, with certain nationalist overtones. The century-old discourse of ‘return to soil’ (*poshvenichestvo*), and the dispute between ‘slavophiles’ and ‘westernizers’, were reincarnated in disguise.²

The atmosphere was becoming stale, the political climate stifling. Small circles of dissidents and human rights activists risked prison terms and forced psychiatric treatment. A much larger milieu of sympathizers faced milder yet quite tangible repercussions: education interrupted, careers stopped, travel restricted. Some would try to find a middle ground to survive in their trade without losing face: turning to entertainment, working with neutral themes and developing dubiously hidden subtexts.

At the same time, there was a quite fruitful period of soul-searching and cultural reflection. National classics were rediscovered or reinterpreted. Old Russian art – icons, frescoes, architecture, chronicles – became focuses of interest, as did issues of faith. Mass culture and the entertainment industry took root in specific local forms, together with a tangible injection of foreign influence, from pop music to fashion.

The Best Animation Ever

All this informed the rich animation of the period. Furthermore, some writers, artists and composers, hampered in their respective domains, migrated into ‘applied’ fields. Animation production often offered them a relatively safe haven. Animation was not necessarily the focus of the

²The Cold War was going on, fought mainly through proxy wars in different parts of the world. For the Soviet public, these conflicts went by largely unnoticed, given the lack of open discussion – until it hit really close to home in late 1979, when Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. This started a long and bloody conflict and ended the decade on a very grim note.

administration and could experience less censorship at times.

For Soviet-Russian animation it was a time of laboured, hampered flourishing, great names being born, genres and styles (re)discovered and artistic freedom gained. If Russian animated films had a worldwide resonance, it came about mainly then. The period encompasses several eras, both in terms of sociocultural context and industrial development. Several waves of newcomers entered the trade, and it is hard to make clean distinctions between the (sub)generations of directors and artists.

Although this book presents the states of the former imperial body separately, we must still deal with Soviet animation as a whole. The studios and 'schools' of the Federated Republics were established gradually with Moscow's pushes and constraints. In turn, strong 'national' films and individual styles would influence Russian animation.³ Cross-pollination was an inescapable part of the trade.

The institutional-industrial history of Russian animation has not been properly written. Raw data are barely available and are just beginning to be systematically analyzed. Here, we will try to frame certain issues of importance and their effects on the artistic history.

The number of animation titles produced rose through the mid-1960s and into the 1970s and 1980s, up to fifty a year. At a certain point, Soyuzmultfilm alone employed more than 500 people and was considered the largest animation studio in Europe. In terms of hours of footage a year, though, the numbers are only approximate and probably not that impressive. Perhaps seven to ten hours were produced annually, at the industry's peak in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when other studios came on line as well. Russian animation remained pretty much a 'cottage industry'⁴ compared with America.

On the other hand, the period saw the beginning of series, again in miniature. A serial of three to five parts would be a success, and *Just You Wait*, with over a dozen parts, was a unique exception. Some 'series' only consisted of a single ten-minute film or of two ten-minute films. These became very common formats; not coincidentally, they were also the most conventional formats for the proliferating festivals, gradually opening to Soviet filmmakers.

The institutional and organizational nature of the 'industry' is dubious, even two-faced. Contrary to early

slogans and later complaints, Soyuzmultfilm never totally became a full-fledged assembly line. Leading directors had more or less established, though informal, teams under their wing, though animators often moved between different projects. In the new era of fresh approaches – and organizational demands on 'creative process' – these tendencies were pushed further, mostly from the bottom up.

On his director's debut *Story of a Crime*, Fedor Khitruk already worked with a certain team through the project. So did Andrei Khrzhanovsky (who would bring in outsiders, some with unofficial or semi-official status⁵), and others.

In the words of some insiders, Soyuzmultfilm (and other studios to different degrees) was a hybrid: a half-factory, half-confederacy of artistic workshops. Of course such an organism was complex and conflicted, not just with regard to administrative rule but also to the filmmakers' collectives. At certain crucial points, the tensions between colleagues, as well as the pressure from above, would cause the closure of projects and the ostracizing of artists. They included some of the most acclaimed, conflict-bound filmmakers, from Khrzhanovsky to Norstein.

Late into the period under discussion, animation shorts were regularly shown with features. There were also 'packaged' matinee animation programs, specifically for children at low prices. Specialized theatres of 'children films' were established in some big cities. Among them were a few devoted to animation. The Moscow movie house *Barrikady* (Barricades) was an animation mecca for decades, with special programming and even a tiny museum of film puppets in its foyer. Also, in the first Moscow multiplex *Rossiya* (Russia), the smallest of three theatres (it probably seated about fifty people) showed Soyuzmultfilm releases more or less regularly.

TV releases gained weight later into the period, but they remained largely irregular and virtually anonymous, without a proper place and/or announcement in the program. The exceptions were the most popular items such as *Just You Wait!* Soviet animation of the time, primarily oriented to children or families, came to be broadly appreciated, even beloved mainly through theatrical distribution, despite its not quite systematic patterns.

Theatrical box-office records were hard, if not impossible, to tally in case of animation (shorts subjects especially),

³The most clear examples, probably, being the Estonians, from Rein Raamat to Priit Pärn.

⁴The overall picture might be distorted since features and featurettes, a staple from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s (all fairy tales), were largely abandoned in the following decade. They returned only gradually later on and only in small numbers.

⁵In the Soviet regime, the official artists were blindly obedient. Then there were artists with various levels of acceptance by the regime, from 'undisciplined but faithful' to 'true dissidents'.

because of the packaged and dispersed nature of their distribution. Therefore they were not considered seriously as a measure of success, either for studios or individual creators. As for television, it would largely just take films for free.

There are certain institutions in play, perhaps unique for this culture, which are not fully understood and rarely taken into account by foreign observers. First, there were the so-called editors and editorial boards on different levels. Their very name is misleading with regard to film production; they were closer to the editors in print media. The function of the studio editor was complex: it was an all-round project management on the creative side, at all stages of development. It was a quality assurance role where personal tastes and attitudes could play a significant part.

Editors fulfilled a censor's role, too. But they mostly did so by necessity, and in terms of preemptive self-censorship. Often they were involved in elaborate engineering of disguises to protect some 'hard-to-push-through' ideas and stylistics. An editor could be either a director's worst enemy or a best friend, or not uncommonly, a mix of both.

There was also the studio editor-in-chief, who had influence on both the ideological and the artistic side.

Further up the administrative ladder, there was a Goskino (cinema ministry) editorial board, charged with final approval of the films and therefore with ultimate

censorship. It was here where the projects' life-and-death battles were fought.

In the words of writer Lyudmila Petrushevskaja (who was screenwriter on *Tale of Tales*), 'In Russia there has always been what you could call a 'mafia of decent people . . . ' Khitruk fought to ensure that Norstein got a State award. If Norstein hadn't received that award, *Tale of Tales* would probably have remained banned until 1986. Norstein would not have had a chance if Khitruk had not been so involved. That's how the 'mafia of the decent people' worked. And in the sphere of animation, Khitruk was the ringleader'.⁶

The ideology of the trade was deeply rooted in the notion of an Artist as a creative personality, not just a meagre professional craftsman. Derived from a deeply rooted Russian tradition of culture as a whole, this ambition was reinforced by the very vocabulary of Soviet discourse. Even mere production values would often be evaluated as artistic ones. The public was supposed to be served not with entertainment product but rather with Art – which nevertheless was supposed to be as accessible ('popular') as possible.⁷

Parallel to administrative hierarchy, there were artistic councils. Composed of leading creative cadres along with chief editors and administrators, artistic councils often became battlegrounds of interests and ambitions. At Soyuzmultfilm, debates between innovators and traditionalists often took place during artistic council meetings.

⁶ *The Spirit of Genius*. Directed by Otto Alder. Tag/Traum, 1998. Quotation as in subtitles. Also quoted in Laura Pontieri, *Soviet Animation and the Thaw of the 1960s. Not Only for Children*, New Barnet, UK: John Libbey, 2012, pp. 83–84.

⁷ Historian Georgy Borodin holds (<http://www animator.ru/articles/article.phtml?id=11>) that Russian–Soviet animation, of this most fruitful period specifically, was unique in that it produced 'popular' and yet highly artistically exquisite spectacle in one and the same body of films. (It was unlike, say, American animation practice where 'popular' and 'artistic' were different genres.) That might be true, but despite the high number of masterful films, the bulk of production often had poor imagination and execution.

With the notion of 'commercial' almost a taboo, the people involved in or promoting essentially commercial productions never openly recognized them as such. The labels of elitist vs. popular were used as substitutes for real differences in intentions and aesthetic choices. The true divide would separate not so much loyalists and rebels, but rather those who dared to take the proclaimed mission seriously and those who complied with common pretence. For the involved observer it was noticeable that many of the films carried different emotional messages and signals within them.

Russian scholar Natalya Krivulya observes that in the new era there were two major orientations: towards the 'far past' – the depth of national culture, including folklore/folk art; and 'near past' – the avant-garde/modernist achievements of the early Soviet era. She also points out that key works had traits such as a subjective–metaphorical world vision, a psychological approach, move towards metamorphoses and shifts from 'macro' to 'micro' universes (Natalya Krivulya, *Labirinty animatsii* (Labyrinths of Animation), Moscow: Graal, 2002, pp. 27–280).

David MacFadyen talks of the entire post-war Soviet animation up to the 1990s as a largely 'emotional' enterprise, to be distinguished from a rational–propagandistic model (David MacFadyen, *Yellow Crocodiles and Blue Oranges: Russian Animated Film Since World War Two*, Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2005, p. xii). We may amend this to say that the industry fell into the lyrical mode (its best examples were primarily but not exclusively lyrical). Lyricism of a broad variety penetrated quite different genres and plot lines.

Stagnation after Stagnation

By 1980, the average age of Politburo members (the highest party leadership) was about seventy years, and the regime was labelled a ‘gerontocracy’. ‘Stagnation’ was now in force. Innovation in science and industry was lagging, effectively losing in the arms race. Economic and social inefficiency was everywhere. After developing huge oil and gas deposits, the country became hooked on income from exporting natural resources. This income was used to buy imports which covered for bad harvests and the lack of production of consumer goods. Now, with world oil prices plummeting after a temporary peak, ‘deficits’ (a buzz-word for shortages) in food and goods became a fixture of life. However, the broad population was already accustomed to a certain level of consumerism.

Meanwhile, certain cultural endeavours became more sophisticated, supported by an increasingly educated elite public that was accustomed to reading ‘between the lines’. On the margins of the establishment, there were semi-official lectures, screenings, and performances taking place. Academic seminars by mathematicians or linguists often turned into historical or social disputes. In ‘serious’ music, composers of ‘second-wave avant-garde’, such as Schnittke, Gubaidulina and Denisov, were obtaining belated recognition.

Quality Hatches at Soyuzmultfilm

In 1960 the patriarch Ivan Ivanov-Vano moved to the puppet and cut-outs unit of Soyuzmultfilm. Here, he and Vladimir Danilevich (1924–2001) co-directed *Levsha* (The Left-Handed Man, 1964) based on an 1881 tale by Nikolay Leskov.⁸ The story is not for children, though it can be adapted that way (like *Gulliver’s Travels*). The contradictory Russian mentality is shown: pride for national talent, resentment at the rulers’ little-mindedness and mediocrity.

⁸The tale is famous in Russia but untranslatable, being totally based on idioms, dialect expressions and the liveliness of the spoken language. Plot: the Tsar wants a subject of his to improve on a microscopic mechanical flea that has been invented in England. A trio of poor craftsmen agrees to take on that task and return with what seems to be the same flea. One of them, Levsha, shows the Russian improvement: without any microscopes, they have put horseshoes (with the craftsmen’s engraved signatures) on the flea’s paws. Levsha is courted by foreigners and misunderstood in his own country, but he chooses to go home and dies in a hospice.

⁹This was the third animated version of the tale, following Tsekhanovsky’s film of the early 1930s, banned during its production, and a second in 1939 by Panteleimon Sasonov (1895–1950).

¹⁰This veteran (1904–1985) of Soviet cinema officialdom was visibly reaching out here to his avant-garde-ish roots, in the 1920s experimental collective FEKS.

The young designer Arkady Tyurin, a recent student of Ivanov-Vano, chose a *lubok* (Russian popular print) look, adding nineteenth-century caricatures and etchings (taken from libraries) and any kind of popular art. The film is a visual masterpiece, but it is lacking in pace, conviction and concentration. Nevertheless, Ivanov-Vano rightly commented that drawn animation could never have had the same rich, ornamental texture that cut-outs permitted.

Anatoly Karanovich

Anatoly Karanovich (Leningrad [now St. Petersburg] 23 June 1911–Moscow, 5 July 1976) started working in the 1930s as an actor and then a director in drama and music theatres. Later he filmed puppet variety shows and theatre performances (for instance, *Puppets Have the Floor*, 1957), before he came to puppet animation proper. His first successful film, both nationally and internationally, was *The Cloud in Love*, which will be discussed below.

Before that, he made *The Tale of the Pope and Balda His Servant* (1956).⁹ Karanovich also brought Vladimir Mayakovsky’s play *The Bathhouse* to the screen, having made a Mayakovsky adaptation in 1960 (a ten-minute film of the poem *Read It and Go to Paris and China*).

The Bathhouse (released in 1962 and co-directed with the live-action veteran Sergei Yutkevich¹⁰) was far from perfect. Yet it succeeded in bringing Mayakovsky’s acerbic, fantastic, ‘adult’ spirit back into fashion and reviving figurative suggestions from the constructivist and futurist movements. The film was a collage-like exercise with various forms, quite brave for the time. It was instrumental in refreshing genre thinking and paving the road to more modern views of puppets and their capacities.

Mister Twister (1963) was adapted from Samuil Marshak’s poem about a racist American millionaire travelling to USSR and trying to find ‘Whites only’ accommodation. Though a Soviet propaganda product, the film is interesting for modern-looking cut-outs, playing out the action as

if on the book pages themselves. Late in life, Karanovich also wrote an informative book, *Puppets My Friends* (1971).

Roman Kachanov

Roman Kachanov (Smolensk, 25 February 1921–Moscow, 4 March 1993) is probably the most underrated of the Russian animation directors of the times. He spent years as an animator, layout man and assistant director. His debut was a collaboration with Karanovich on the already mentioned *The Cloud in Love* (1959). A stylized tale by the Turkish poet Nazym Hikmet, it was made in an unusual combination of drawings and puppets. The film won awards in Oberhausen, Annecy and Bucharest.

Moving to the studio's puppet division, Kachanov made a breakthrough with *Varezhka* (*The Mitten*, 1967), which won awards at Moscow, Annecy, Gijon and other festivals. It features a little girl who cannot have a dog, and therefore walks her mitten as if it were a pet on a winter day; the mitten even participates in a dog pageant. Despite its tacked-on, disturbing music, *The Mitten* is a treasure in its genre. The 'Kachanov touch' (with an important contribution from designer Leonid Shvartsman) creates a delicate atmosphere, which avoids sentiment, and stresses the communication problems between adults and children.

Ghena the Crocodile (1969), a film about the balancing act of solitude and friendship, introduces the title reptile and his friend Cheburashka, a pleasant, fantastic creature halfway between a child and a teddy bear. Cheburashka later returned in the more successful *Cheburashka* (1971). *Shapoklyak* (*Chapeau klak*, 1974) features the two animals and an old woman, Shapoklyak, acting as defenders of nature.

The fourth and last film was *Cheburashka idet v shkolu* (*Cheburashka Goes to School*, 1983). The fourth part was not born all at once. Simply it occurred to writer Eduard Uspensky¹¹ and director Kachanov that children grow up, while Cheburashka remains forever a child. Cheburashka cannot even read. Too bad. Children must study. Which was the starting point of the new script.

Based on understatement and without trite effects, Kachanov's cinema focuses on nuances and simple things, without losing its forcefulness. Yuri Norstein, an animator on some of Kachanov's films, recalled: 'Roman is fixed in my memory. He was strong, tall, athletic. Physically

unshakable. At the same time he had a tender, almost childish soul. It was a charming contrast. Everything enchanted him, everything was a discovery. It's probably an important quality for a director, and for a creative person in general.

'His understanding of [the] human, of any living creature's behaviour, bordered on science fiction. I think in this he was the only one who could compete with Fedor Khitruk. He didn't immediately make discoveries. His most deafening discovery was *The Mitten*, the puppet film he directed in 1967. I participated in this film as an animator. To me, the most moving experience making that film was to witness Roman Kachanov's ability to daydream. He invented good ideas at once, and [he] would at once renounce [them] as he had invented something better.

'As an animator, I might have been working on a certain scene, and obviously a puppet animator's work is bound to minimal changes of the puppet's position – in other words, you can't divert your attention from the rhythm you have in your mind. Well, in the middle of your scene, Roman would get there: "Yurochka, can you break loose from that?" – ". . . Yes" – "Come over, please". He had invented something and wanted your advice.

'I think he also attained so high results because he chose the right designer. For most of his career he worked with Leonid Shvartsman. Leonid was a very gifted artist, and had only worked on drawn animation until Kachanov invited him to the puppet film studio division. So he arrived with a fresher mind'.¹²

At Long Last Cheburashka

The long-desired Russian Mickey Mouse arrived in 1969. Roman Kachanov had read and loved a book for children, written in 1966 by Eduard Uspensky: *Krokodil Ghena i ego druzya* (*Ghena the Crocodile and His Friends*).

The well-mannered crocodile Ghena, an employee of the city zoo, meets a strange creature and befriends him. His life will be forever linked with this friend and with a strange, skinny old lady called Shapoklyak (which sounds like chapeau klak, the kind of old-fashioned hat she always wears). Cheburashka looks like a child, mixed with a plush

¹¹ This prolific author was forced to switch from being an adult humorist to a children's writer early in his career. He was an influential force in animation, creating several popular characters and dozens of film scripts. He later became a TV and radio personality.

¹² Yuri Norstein, telephone interview with Giannalberto Bendazzi, 2009.

teddy bear and a monkey, with two large, round ears. A greengrocer found him inside an orange box, so groggy he couldn't stay upright and always tumbled down.

Yuri Norstein comments: 'Cheburashka is not a made-up name. It's an old word which comes from the Nizhny Novgorod area. You find it in the Dal dictionary: *cheburakhat*, *cheburakhnut* means 'make something fall', and *cheburshka* means 'wobbly man', the toy. Designed by Leonid Shvartsman, it has become the trademark of Soviet Union first, Russia later'.¹³

The character is endearing, though not aimed as widely as Mickey Mouse, who had been invented to please children and grown-ups alike. He is cute but not maudlin, funny but dignified, short but smart. And, especially, he's just agreeable to watch.

Merchandising of the character is very developed, not only in the former Soviet Bloc, but in some other countries, including Sweden and Japan. The Japanese TV animated series *Cheburashka arere?* (twenty-six episodes of three minutes each, drawn animation) premiered on 7 October 2009.

Anatoly Petrov

Anatoly Petrov (Moscow, 15 September 1937–3 March 2010) began directing in his early thirties, after a career as a very in-demand animator. He was among the founders of the series *Veselaya Karusel* (Merry-Go-Round), where he deployed fine graphic, pictorial, dynamic and musical elements. His partnership with musician Shandor Kallosh began here. *Rasseynny Dzhovanni* (Scatterbrained Giovanni, 1969) was influenced by abstract art. *Goluboy Meteorit* (Blue Meteorite, 1971) is a metaphor on the theme of knowledge.

Between 1973 and 1975, Petrov developed a special volumetric definition in chiaroscuro of the film, with a visual result that was midway between rotoscoping and puppet animation. He would often use the technique in the following years. He never used rotoscoping itself, which he judged too weak for his purposes.¹⁴

I mama menya prostit (And Mother Will Forgive Me Too, 1975) is the didactic, hyperrealistic and dreamlike story of a child who quarrels with his mother and leaves for a long journey alone through Russia. *Poligon* (Firing Range, 1977) is inspired by a novel by Sever Gansovsky. A scientist creates a tank that can read the mind of enemies, chasing them the moment they reveal their fear. On the set of an island occupied by soldiers to test the invention, the scientist directs the machine against the generals who led his son to his death. The tank kills them; eventually, however, it kills its creator as well.

Five shorts based on Greek myth followed: *Gerakl u Admeta* (Hercules at Admetus, 1986), *Rozhdenie Erota* (The Birth of Eros, 1989), *Dafna* (Daphne, 1990), *Nimfa Salmaka* (Salmaka the Nymph, 1992), and *Polifem, Akid i Galatea* (Polyphemus, Akid and Galatea, 1996). The atmosphere of the myths is expressed in naturalistic settings, in suspended and repetitive time and in the creation of ambient sounds. Petrov's sources are Euripides and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but also texts from the Apollodor collection, published by Nauka in 1972.¹⁵

Hercules at Admetus, the first episode, is possibly the best of the series and one of the most striking examples of moving painting by Petrov. The human attitudes are perfectly natural, and even the less dynamic moments maintain a pure animation. Shandor Kallosh's music plays a fundamental role. *Salmaka the Nymph* is more traditional. It explores the empathic relations between humans, animals and gods, focusing on the rhythm of sounds and dialogue.

These aspects return in the last masterpiece, *Polyphemus, Akid and Galatea*.¹⁶ The Mediterranean island and the creatures that live there are fully described. Humans live in

¹³ Yuri Norstein, telephone interview with Giannalberto Bendazzi, 2009.

¹⁴ 'For what concerns rotoscope or rotoscoping in the animated drawing, I care to emphasize that I never used it. In 50 years of working on drawing, I analyzed very carefully my beloved job. With rotoscoping the movement is very weak' (e-mailed message of Anatoly Petrov to Paolo Parmiggiani, 26 November 2008).

¹⁵ 'I'm attracted by stories from Greek myths. In particular, love myths. Here in Russia, we never develop an erotic literature of such beauty. Apart from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Euripides, I got the information about [the] life and adventures of my heroes from Encyclopaedias, in the notes, in the appendix. I've got a lot of Greek literature' (e-mailed message of Anatoly Petrov to Paolo Parmiggiani, 26 November 2008).

¹⁶ 'I worked in a lot of films (more than one hundred) for Soyuzmultfilm. I think that my best ones are: *Firing range* [. . .], *Hercules at Admetus* [. . .], *Polyphemus, Akid and Galatea* [. . .]. Both as a director and animator, I tried to make approachable and amusing films for all people' (e-mailed message of Anatoly Petrov to Paolo Parmiggiani, 26 November 2008).

harmony with nature, in a world ruled by divine whims. The satyrs idle and play with nymphs, teasing Polyphemus the cyclops. Akid and Galatea are in love, but the woman becomes Polyphemus's object of desire, so the tension grows until a scene where the cyclops plays the pan flute for a night and day to seduce Galatea. The growing rhythm of montage accompanies the violent action of the cyclops, who throws a giant rock at Akid, killing him. The scene of Akid trying to run away is one of Petrov's most dynamic.

After the Greek myths, Petrov concentrated on teaching and illustration.

Boris Stepanov

Boris Stepanov (Moscow, 7 December 1928–21 May 1983) worked both with puppets and animated drawings, but had his best results with the latter. In 1960, he won an award at Annecy for *Petia and Little Red Riding Hood* (best children's film) and at the Karlovy Vary film festival (1960, first Soviet wide-screen animated film) for *Murzilka on the Sputnik*.

His adaptations of Astrid Lindgren's Karlsson-on-the-Roof (*Karlsson and the Kid*, 1968, and *Karlsson Returned*, 1970) became a childhood staple of the time. The character joined the pantheon of beloved icons, along with Cheburashka and a few others. Stepanov's most popular, ambitious work is *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, based on the tale by E.T.A. Hoffmann and Tchaikovsky's music.

Stepanov also made two puppet films in 1974 adapting Gogol's *Dead Souls* (with the participation of Vladimir Danilevich): the titles were *Chichikov's Adventures: Manilov* and *Chichikov's Adventures: Nozdryov*. He moved from Soyuzmultfilm to Multtelefilm (see below), serving as its artistic director from 1979 to 1982. He was ASIFA vice president over the same period.

Nikolay Serebriakov

Nikolay Serebriakov (Leningrad,¹⁷ 14 December 1928–Moscow, 9 August 2005), trained first as an

actor and then as an artist-designer. He had extensive experience in industry, stage design and live action and TV productions, before he became a director of puppet films.

In 1963 he made *Khochu byt' otvazhnym* (I Want to Be Brave), co-directed by Vadim Kurchevsky. The pair made further films: *Zhizn' i stradanya Ivana Semenova* (The Life and Suffering of Ivan Semenov, 1964) and *Ni Bogu ni Chertu* (Neither for God nor for the Devil, 1965).

Ya zhdu ptenca (I Am Waiting for a Little Bird, 1966) was directed by Serebriakov alone. In it, he displayed the modern rhythm, the tilt towards decorative perspective and the certain theatricality which characterizes his mature works. We find him at his best in *Ne v shlyape schast'e* (Not in the Hat Is There Happiness, 1968) and *Klubok* (The Yarn Ball, 1968, about greed and ingratitude).

His most frequent art director and wife Alina Speshneva (1940–1984) must be credited for her great contribution to his work. After her death, a broken Serebriakov would make only a few more films. *Pritcha ob artiste* (Parable of an Actor, 1989) is drawn animation, while *Othello* and *Macbeth* (1994) are both part of the *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* series co-produced with Britain.

Not in the Hat Is There Happiness shows the director's love of detail and attention to contemporary art (the film explicitly refers to Chagall). *Klubok* (The Yarn Ball, 1968), based on the narrative poem by Ovsey Driz,¹⁸ is a more laconic, compact film about contrasting attitudes towards life – one egoistical, the other energetically creative.

The humble masterpiece *The Yarn Ball* reveals a deeply insightful take on the metaphoric nature of puppetry. The whole world is knitted before our eyes, and then destroyed by pulling a thread. Critic Mikhail Iampolski sees in the film a 'transformation of drawn poetics into the puppet one – thread here is likened to [the] line [. . .] and the disappearance of this ephemeral little world is akin to the reverse travel of a film reel, running the picture back to the initial nothingness'.¹⁹

In later years, Serebriakov continued to explore the capacities of puppets in more folkloric and grotesque films, based on writings by Boris Shergin, the ironic bard of Russia's Far North. He experimented with collage and

¹⁷ Today Saint Petersburg.

¹⁸ Ovsey Driz, 1908–1971, a Soviet Jewish poet, wrote in Yiddish.

¹⁹ Mikhail Iampolski, 'Nikolay Serebriakov and Alina Speshneva', in anthology *Directors and Artists of Soviet Animation*, Moscow, 1984. Cited as in Encyclopedia of National Cinema, <http://www.russiancinema.ru/names/name841/>. Serebriakov added: 'This script was for puppets and for puppets only. Here the thought finds its only possible expression for that material'. [Ref.: A. Karanovich, 'Puppets My Friends', Moscow, 1971. Cited as in Encyclopedia of National Cinema, <http://www.russiancinema.ru/names/name841/>]

mixed media in *Poezd pamyati* (Memory Train, 1975), an ideologically loaded homage to the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. *Razluchennyi*²⁰ (Separated, 1980) is about two children of a king. The boy is raised by acrobats, the girl in an artificial, aseptic environment. She also has a mechanical double, which makes the story all the more challenging to adapt as a puppet film.

Ivan Ufimtsev

Ivan Ufimtsev (Sverdlovsk [today Yekaterinburg], 15 January 1928–Moscow, 31 August 2010) was an actor who studied under the supervision of Aleksey Popov.²¹ During this time, he learned that the most important skill for a director is being able to gather a close-knit team.

He entered animation by chance, and did not leave it for the rest of his life. From 1971 to 1976, he worked with the illustrator Tamara Poletika and made films adapted from Nikolay Nekrasov, Samuil Marshak and Sofya Prokofyeva: *General Toplygin* (id., 1971), *Pro Petrushku* (About Petrushka, 1973) and *Chasy s kukushkoy* (The Cuckoo Clock, 1973). The most important was *Losharik* (id., 1972), a beautiful story about a circus horse made of wooden balls.

In 1976, Ufimtsev began the series *38 popugaev* (38 Parrots), ten films in fifteen years. Illustrator Leonid Shvartsman (the man who invented Cheburashka for Roman Kachanov, above) created fascinating characters with strong, sometimes ridiculous and crazy behaviour: there was Martyshka (the monkey), Slonenok (the elephant), Udav (the boa serpent) and Popugay (the parrot).

After that, Ufimtsev and Shvartsman made *Ezhik plyus cherepakha* (The Little Hedgehog Plus Tortoise, 1981), *Kak Budio* (As If, 1981), *Derevensky Vodevil* (A Village Vaudeville, 1993) and *Akh, eti Zhmurki* (Ah, the Blind Man's Buff, 1994). They hinged on honesty, probity, goodwill and unselfishness.

Ufimtsev also tried making different kinds of film, but with only mild acclaim. For example, there was *Kasha iz topora* (The Porridge Made of Axe, 1982) based on a Russian story about a clever soldier, as well as *Slonenok poshel uchitsya* (The Little Elephant Went to School, 1984), *Slonenok zabolet* (The Little Elephant Caught a Cold, 1985), and *Slonenok – Turist* (The Little Elephant the Tourist, 1992).

²⁰ After the famous novella by Yuri Olesha (1899–1960) *Tri Tolstyaka* (The Three Fat Men, 1924), a stylized modern tale with strong anti-bourgeois pathos.

²¹ Aleksey Dmitrievich Popov (1892–1961) was an important theatre drama director in Moscow.

²² In 1830 Pushkin used the same story in his one act 'little tragedy' *Mozart and Salieri*, reflecting on genius versus mediocrity. A Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov opera of the same name premiered in Moscow on 7 December 1898. The film is loosely based on these famous works.

Vadim Kurchevsky

Vadim Kurchevsky (Kolomna, 14 April 1928–Moscow, 15 August 1997) was educated in applied and decorative art. He was then hired at Soyuzmultfilm in 1957. After many minor jobs, he became a director of puppet films. *Moy zeleny krokodil* (My Green Crocodile, 1966) was his first hit, a highly stylized film with inventive textures. The love story between two weird and touching characters, a cow and a crocodile, would linger in the audience's emotional memory.

With *Frantishkek* (id., 1967) he turned to more adult subjects, gradually building up an entire saga in puppets. *Legenda o Grige* (The Legend of Grieg, 1967) brilliantly combines almost original, almost abstract, characters with a more realistic Grieg, playing the piano.

But the true visual masterpiece is *Master iz Clamecy* (The Teacher of Clamecy, 1972), based on Romain Rolland's *Colas Breugnon*. Inspired by Brueghel's paintings (which are quoted abundantly), this film pays attention to figurative values and character acting; the protagonist is modelled after Cézanne's self-portraits. The imagery has an extraordinary, almost tactile, quality and a very high, consistent stylistic level.

Kurchevsky's later films include *Sadko bogaty* (The Rich Sadko, 1975, based on the popular Russian tale), *Tayna Zapechnogo Sverchka* (The Mystery of the Domestic Cricket, 1977, about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's childhood and his first teacher, a cricket), and *Legenda o Sal'eri* (Salieri's Legend, 1986). The latter is another little masterpiece, brilliantly retelling the story that Mozart was fatally poisoned by his rival, Antonio Salieri.²²

In his different works, Kurchevsky moves between extremes of decorative and psychological puppets, and his work is insightful and deep. A cultivated, tasteful director with a solid, though not striking presence, Kurchevsky attends to humanist themes: the relationship between the artist and authority, the nature of talent and the immortality of Art.

Gennady Sokolsky

Born in Moscow on 1 December 1937, Gennady Mikhailovich Sokolsky began his career at the Soyuzmultfilm studio, as an animator on Fedor Khitruk's *Story of a*

Crime, 1962. During the 1960s he made his first film as director in the children's 'newsreel' anthology film, *The Happy Merry-Go-Round*. Sokolsky's short animation began a series called *Nu, Pogodi!* (Well, Just You Wait!, 1969–2006), which followed the comic adventures of a mischievous wolf trying to catch a hare. Additional characters help the hare or interfere with the wolf's plans, but basically the series presents the same duel as that between Tom and Jerry, or the Coyote and Roadrunner. It has been very popular in Russia ever since. In the first film, set designers Felix Kamov, Aleksandr Kurlyandsky and Arkady Khait defined the rules on which all later episodes were based.

Due to the success of the series, the managers decided to employ the most known and expert of the directors, Vyacheslav Kotenochkin (1927–2000), while Sokolsky returned to his animator's work. At the time Khitruk was working on a three-episode series based on Winnie the Pooh, and he enlisted Sokolsky. In 1972, Sokolsky co-directed the third of these films.

He loved to be not just the director, but also the background artist and the animator of his works. He made some lyrical comedies with animals and birds as protagonists; for example *Ptichka Tari* (The Bird Tari, 1976), *Myshonok Pik* (Pick the Little Mouse, 1978) and *Priklucheniya pingvinenka Lolo* (Adventures of the Little Penguin Lolo, 1986–1987), a trilogy co-directed with Japan's Kinjiro Yoshida.

In 1977, Sokolsky made a different kind of film. *Serebrayanoie kopytse* (A Little Silver Hoof, 1977) was an adaptation of a Pavel Bazhov fable which Sokolsky brought to the screen lyrically with beautiful dialogue, emotional intensity and realistic sets.

In the late 1970s, he was churning out a film nearly every year, based on traditional Russian animation subjects. In 1981 he made the comedy *Ivashka iz dvortsa pionerov* (Ivashka from Young Pioneer's Place, 1981), followed by the modern fable *Zamok Lgunov* (Liar's Castle, 1983). In the 1990s he left animation to focus solely on illustration.

Leonid Nosyrev

Leonid Viktorovich Nosyrev (Ivanteevka, Moscow region, 22 January 1937) was heavily attuned to traditional Russian folklore films, perhaps because he was surrounded

by them since his childhood. They are difficult to understand abroad, but they are expressions of a fascinating and unique voice in cinema.

Nosyrev attended the miniature-painting course at Fedoskino School, and then graduated in illustration and animation at Soyuzmultfilm. He was an animator on *Istoriya odnogo prestupleniya* (The Story of a Crime, 1962), *Kanikuly Bonifatsiya* (Boniface's Vacations, 1965) and *Steklyannaya garmonika* (The Glass Harmonica, 1968).

In 1969 directors Anatoly Petrov and Galina Barinova proposed a series of children's movies, so they began the 'newsreel' anthology *Veselaya karusel* (The Happy Merry-Go-Round, 1969) in which Nosyrev debuted as director. This series was unbelievably successful and was eventually entrusted to a specialized group of filmmakers.

Later, Nosyrev directed *Vershki i koshki* (The Eops and The Roots, 1974) and *Komarov* (id., 1975), *Churidilo* (id., 1976). He also made one last *Veselaya karusel* episode as a freelancer: *Khomyak-molchun* (The Hamster Who Refused to Speak, 1972).

In the 1960s, Nosyrev became excited by the Russian North after he discovered Boris Shergin's²³ stories. In 1963 he made his first journey there. In Ferapontov Monastery²⁴ he copied frescoes; he then lived on a beautiful river bank and he was astonished by the sumptuous temple architecture, as well as the strong architecture of the peasantry. In 1978 he made *Dozhd* (Rain), his first adaptations of North's novels by the writers and folklorists Stepan Pisakhov and Boris Shergin. Then, he directed *Volshebnoe Koltso* (The Magic Ring, 1979), *Arkhangel'skie novelly* (Archangel's Stories, 1986), *Pomorskaya byl* (Coast-Dweller True Story, 1987), *Smekh i gore u bela morya* (The Laughter and the Grief near the White Sea, 1988) and *Mister Pronka* (id., 1991).

With these films he tried reflecting the true nature of the Russian North people's life, with all its joys and sorrows. His collaborators included writer Yuri Kovalev and painter Vera Kudryavtseva-Engalycheva.

Stanislav Sokolov

In September 1965, six years before his graduation at VGIK (the All-Russian State University of Cinematography, today known as the Gerasimov Institute), where he would later teach computer graphics animation, Stanislav

²³Boris Viktorovich Shergin (1896, Arkhangelsk–1973, Moscow) was a Soviet writer and folklorist.

²⁴The Ferapontov convent, in the Vologda region of Russia, is considered one of the purest examples of Russian medieval art, a reason given by UNESCO for the convent's presence on the World Heritage List.

Mikhailovich Sokolov (Moscow, 18 May 1947) entered Soyuzmultfilm and worked with the most important names of Soviet animation. His first work as an animator was on *Zhil-Byl Kozyavin* (Once Upon a Time There Lived Koziavin, by Andrey Khrzhanovsky, 1966). He soon chose to devote himself to puppet animation and became one of the most prolific and awarded directors in the state-controlled factory.

In this role, his first film was *Dogada* (The Guess, 1977). Using a puppet theatre, a storyteller relates the adventures of the title character, a big, good villager who solves his fellow villagers' problems with his muscles and good sense. Without overanimating the puppets, Sokolov exploits their expressivity at its best, using light and shadow as dramatic entities. From this start, Sokolov demonstrated he could successfully adapt pre-existing stories, often from folk tradition: examples are *Pro Ersha Ershovicha* (About Ersh Ershovich, a.k.a. About Ruff Ruffovich, 1979, inspired by Boris Shergin's fairy tales), *Bezdomnye Domovye* (The Homeless Hobgoblins, a.k.a. Hosts Without Home, 1981, about two house spirits) and *Bol'shoj Podzemnyj Bal* (The Great Underground Dance, 1987, based on Andersen's tale *The Hill of Forest Spirits*).

Through his career, Sokolov developed his skills in working in international co-productions. After the fall of the Soviet Union, he would work in Russian–British productions (see below). As early as the Cold War years, though, Soyuzmultfilm often joined the Eastern German production company DEFA to make animated shorts. He directed *Soldat i Sad / Der Soldat und der Garten* (The Soldier and the Garden, 1980, a hymn to world peace) and *Padayuschaya Ten' / Der Fallende Schatten* (The Falling Shade, 1986), which echoes the Icarus myth. An old architect follows and nurtures his son/pupil's remarkable skills, until the youngster is picked up by a king, who offers him riches and fame. However, the young architect loses his touch and his mind, until he returns to his father.

The duration and the pace of Sokolov's Soviet films give them consistency. In spite of their length (they are never much shorter than ten minutes, and usually run around twenty), they are seldom boring. Both light and time are often parts of the action and all the seconds Sokolov creates are ultimately necessary, even if the plots seem simple.

This is particularly true in two poetic films of the early 1980s: *Rybya Upryazhka* (The Fish Harness, 1982, the symbolist story of a fish harnessed by a raven) and especially

Cherno-Beloe Kino (Black-and-White Cinema, 1984), each twenty minutes long. During a party in his home, a man finds solitude and lets his mind follow memories through a collection of old photos, remembering his youth and a mysterious friend with whom he shared significant events. Finally, the man decides to return to the past and his friend in the pictures, committing metaphorical suicide with an old photo camera.

Delicate and nostalgic, but never crossing the border of melancholy, *Black-and-White Cinema* was awarded in the Zagreb, Espinho and Hiroshima festivals. It can be considered Sokolov's masterpiece in the Soviet era. His direction works especially well in the shifts between the fully coloured present and the black-and-white past. He also pays great attention to costume design, which will be his forte from the 1990s.

Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Stanislav Sokolov completed the eighty-five-minute feature *Zolotaya Shpaga* (The Gold Sword, 1990, with Gennady Shumsky) and the twenty-minute *Chto Tam Pod Maskoj?* (And What Is under the Mask?, 1991). The former mixes puppet animation and live action; it tells a tale of a magic land where little men live in peace, until a day the Gold Sword, symbolizing the power of the law, is stolen. The latter film is a 'metatheatrical' reflection on the role of the personae in a show.

Ideya Garanina

Ideya Garanina (Cherm, Irkutsk Region, 8 August 1937–Korolevo Kalyazin, Tver Region, 19 March 2010) was a leading specialist of puppet animation at the Soyuzmultfilm studio from the 1970s until the early 1990s. She graduated in film direction at VGIK in Moscow, under the supervision of Grigory Chukhrai,²⁵ with an animated film based on African tales: *Pauchok Anansi i volshebnaya palochka* (Spider Anansi and the Magic Wand, 1973).

She made her debut in puppet animation in 1977: *Zhuravliny perya* (Crane Feathers), a story about greed, based on a Japanese fairy tale commonly called *The Crane Wife*. Together with her cinematographer, Aleksandr Vikhansky, she tried to express the character's emotions in the manner of Jiří Trnka's animation, using lighting instead of puppets' movements.

²⁵ Grigori Naumovich Chukhrai (1921–2001) was a prominent Soviet film director and screenwriter. His most famous film is *Ballada o soldate* (Ballad of a Soldier, 1959).

Bednaya Liza (Poor Liza, 1978) is the story of a village girl who commits suicide after a tragic love affair, based on the classic sentimental novella by Nikolay Karamzin (1766–1826). In this short, Garanina used close-ups and subjective shots; she later considered these the most interesting elements in all her work. The film's designer was Nina Vinogradova. It was a hard film to make, using various animation techniques to tell the story of the origin of human civilization, in partnership with domesticated animals.

Balagan (The Tomfoolery, 1981) was an adaptation of three Federico García Lorca plays.²⁶ This is probably Garanina's best film and one of the most beautiful ever made in volumetric animation. It is also important in terms of aesthetics of the art form. The first part is a knockabout comedy in which puppets are hanged by strings; the film shows all the machinery behind the scenes. The second part is a romantic drama in which the puppets are free in cinematic space and don Cristóbal, the main character, dies trying to reach his lover.

In this film, everything seems perfect: the drawings by Elena Livanova and Larisa Zenevich, the camera work by Vikhansky, the music by Sofya Gubaydulina music (with vocals by Valaentina Ponomaryova and Rolan Bykov) and the acting by performers Nina Timofeeva, Natalya Dabizha and Lidya Mayatnikova.

After this film, Ideya Garanina made a couple of shorts in the early 1990s and then abandoned filmmaking. She left Moscow and kept a farm, where she was murdered on 19 March 2010.

Nina Shorina

Born in Moscow on 10 March 1943, Nina Shorina was initially fascinated by live-action and documentary film. She appeared in professional movie releases from her childhood on; she then studied in VGIK first as an actress, to finally graduate as documentary director. Thanks to her connections in the film industry, Nina saw the difficult relationship between the State's power and the freedom

of artistic expression,²⁷ a recurring theme in many of her puppet films.

Shorina landed in the animation world in 1976. She worked with Yuri Norstein and Garri Bardin, with whom she shared the love for animation art as 'the only field in which the artistic image, the individual thought and the virtue of example are still ruling'.²⁸

She directed several animated TV works and some at Soyuzmultfilm, and at the big studio she directed the remarkable *Skazka ob ochen vysokom cheloveke* (Tale of a Very Tall Man, 1983). The film only appeared to be targeted at children. Its high-quality puppet animation and well-arranged images of popular culture reveal the true message: a humble person can have a destination, too. In 1984 Shorina made *Pro Bukur* (About Boca), based on a moral children's fairy tale written by herself, in collaboration with Genrikh Sapgir, a known poet and children's writer with dozens scripts for animation.

In 1985, she made herself known internationally with the theatrical short *The Poodle*, a love story between an old lady and her lively dog.

Shorina often faced the disapproval of political authorities and the board of censors, but she continued her work in search of new paths and freedom from mainstream thematic and aesthetic standards. In 1986, before perestroika was reinforced, she overcame the resistance of Soyuzmultfilm administrators with her masterpiece *Dver* (The Door). It was the first of a film trilogy for adults, and was probably a satire of Soviet citizens' daily routine and their lack of communication. *Dver* won several international awards (including the Special Jury Award at Annecy in 1987).

The film explores the reaction of the Russian people subject to radical and traumatic political change. Through carefully planned shots, it shows tenants in a house trying to pass through a shut door. Grotesque scenes alternate with dreamlike ideas (the lyrical flight of a bride is accompanied by the music of Debussy), tragicomic shots (falling suitcases, hysterical shouts) and 'quotations' (a balloon is reminiscent of *Le ballon rouge* by the French live-action director Albert Lamorisse). Such images follow each other without interruption, even after a boy succeeds in opening

²⁶ *Love of Don Perlimplin and Belisa in his Garden, The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife and The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal*. The film derides platitude and hypocrisy.

²⁷ In Irina Margolina and Natalya Lozinskaya (eds.), *Nashi multfilmy* (Our Animated Films), Moscow: Izdatelskaya Programma Interros, 2006, in which Shorina adds: 'I have seen plenty of broken paths in acting and filmmaking during those years; cinema was surrounded by an enormous quantity of useless people, sometimes harmful to creativity as well'.

²⁸ Nina Shorina, in Irina Margolina and Natalya Lozinskaya (eds.), *Nashi multfilmy* (Our Animated Films), Moscow: Izdatelskaya Programma Interros, 2006.

the door. Shorina finds the unconscious mechanisms of the human mind, and she achieves a balance between Russian, narrative fiction and technical experimentation. *Son* (Dream, 1988) – inspired by the motives of classic Russian novels – represents the flux of consciousness of a helpless intellectual, nostalgically dreaming the past. In the last film of the trilogy, *AlterEgo* (id., 1988), the artist portrays herself (or another self?), assembling objects, landscapes, paintings, masks and photographs. Scenic German expressionism meets extreme Švankmajer surrealism (the mincing and grinding of food). The avant-garde experimentalism, as well as the montage of highlights, winks at Griffiths films as Shorina pushes animation language to its extreme.

And Many, Many More

It is not possible to cover the innumerable Soyuzmultfilm directors in detail, but we must mention at least a few in passing, as well as several important and popular projects.

The fairly prolific director Inessa Kovalevskaya (Moscow, 1933) used the musical genre, most notably in *Bremenskie muzykanty* (Bremen Town Musicians, 1969), a loose adaptation of the Brothers Grimm tale, using the music of Gennady Gladkov. It had elements of rock and roll and hints of hippy culture. It provoked some scandalized reaction and ideological accusations, but it also had a strong and long-lasting popular following (and sequels, directed by others, in 1973 and 2000).²⁹

Efim Gamburg (Moscow, 1925–2000), besides working on conventional children’s productions, created a niche for himself in semi-serious adult subjects within rather sharp limits, usually conceived and executed in caricatural drawings. The best known were the detective thriller parodies *Shpionskiye strasti* (Passions of Spies, 1967) and *Ograblenie po... (Robbery According to... (1978);* *Paradoksy v stile rok* (Paradoxes in Rock Style, 1982); and also the mini-series *Kontakty... konflikty* (Contacts... Conflicts, 1984–87), based on the variety theatre sketches of the comic-satirist Mikhail Zhvanetsky.

Vladimir Popov (Moscow, 1930–1987) was responsible for *Troe iz Prostokaashino* (Three from Buttermilkville, 1978, sequels in 1980, 1984; the scripts were by the prolific and influential Eduard Uspensky). It was a quite popular modern-life humorous narrative, told with easy-going drawing and aimed at children and families.

Another quite good (and popular) children’s mini-series was *Vozvrashchenie bludnogo popugaya* (The Return of the

Prodigal Parrot, three instalments, 1984–88). Its director was Valentin Karavaev (1929–2001), who worked on other children’s animation. He had also had previous experience in caricature and satirical print media. He strove to bring it to animation from the late 1960s, making the adult mini-series *Yumoreski* (Humoresques, three instalments, 1973–74) and a notable adaptation of Saltykov-Shchedrin’s nineteenth-century satire, *Premudry peskar* (The Wise Gudgeon, 1979).

His closest collaborator was Khitruck’s early designer Sergey Alimov. As late as 1991, they made Karavaev’s life-long dream project, based on Shchedrin’s classic *Istoriya odnogo goroda* (Story of a Town).

Rising through the studio ranks, several mid-generation artists directed notable works from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. Vladimir Tarasov (Moscow, 1937) had doubtful taste in most of his works, but made his mark in sci-fi narratives with a psychedelic look (designed by Nikolay Koshkin) and mood. They included *Kontakt* (Contact, 1978) and *Vozvrashcheniye* (The Return, 1980). He also made the stylized montage-clip piece *Yubiley* (The Jubilee, 1983) on studio history.

Valery Ugarov (Moscow, 1941–2007), a respected master animator, created another sub-genre: playful and humorous grade-school anecdotes, especially the mini-series *Na zadney parte* (On the Back Desk, 1978–85). He then made stylish, phantasmagorical tales: *Khalif-Aist* (Caliph Stork, 1981), based on Wilhelm Hauff, and *Navazhdenie Rodamusa Kverka* (Rodamus Qwerck’s Delusion, 1983). Later he and Andrei Khrzhanovsky (below) co-directed a 1987 animated documentary about the artist Yulo Sooster. It was called *Shkola izyashnih iskusstv: peyzazh s mozhzhevelnikom* (School of Fine Arts: Landscape with the Juniper).

Ugarov also made a dark, expressive adult piece in rough cut-outs, *Sapozhnik i rusalka* (The Shoemaker and the Mermaid, 1989). In the 1990s and 2000s, he was involved in co-productions, directing high-quality films of Celtic folklore and *Canterbury Tales*, *Magic Flute* and *Nutcracker*.

Aleksandr Gorlenko (Krasnoyarsk, 1944) directed a few films for a target audience which was only loosely defined: *Uvelichitelnoye steklo* (The Magnifying Glass, 1982), *Pro shmelej i koroley* (On Bumble Bees and Kings, 1984) and *Staraya lestnitsa* (The Old Stairs, 1985). They surprised the viewer with lyricism, an emphasis on pure visual narration, and taste for clever gags and metamorphoses. Later he went into teaching, becoming a principal animation instructor in VGIK.

²⁹ Records with songs from the film reached a circulation of 28 million in just a couple of years.

In the puppet division, Natalya Dabizha's (1948) background and experience was in puppet theatre. She took a familiar path through years of animator's work for master directors to directing refined and cultured children's films, in anthology films and then shorts which were credited to her. An example is *Vanya i Krokodil* (Vanya and Crocodile, 1984), from the story by Korney Chukovsky.

The career of Viacheslav Kotenochkin (Moscow, 20 June 1927–20 November 2000) took a peculiar turn. After a long apprenticeship, he became very popular in 1969 with the series *Nu, pogody!* (Just You Wait!), featuring a wolf and a hare. The series, which ran for years, was loved by audiences in the Soviet Union and abroad. An unusual case of openly comic Soviet animation, it is in the tradition of Roadrunner & Coyote, but quieter, less violent and fanciful. The episodes lack refined animation, but they are characterized by a sure sense of performance.

Multtelefilm, Soyuzmultfilm's Competitor

In 1968, under the auspices of the Central TV authority, studio Ekran (Screen) set out to produce original broadcast content with an animation division within it (later called Multtelefilm).

The division started production in 1970. At first it only made puppet films (as economic and organizational factors dictated), but it later diversified to other techniques. To facilitate professional development, some creative cadres were transferred from Soyuzmultfilm. Later directors, designers and animators migrated between these two Moscow factories.

At first, TV studio was considered an inferior medium, with cheaper methods and a lower artistic and professional level. It was administratively separate from the cinema authority, lacking its history and tradition, and usually survived on lower budgets and wages. Soon, though, the distinctions began to blur. Despite the supposedly more severe censorship (due to the medium's propagandistic value), Multtelefilm welcomed stylistic and thematic diversity at times.

In the 1980s, Khitruk assumed the role of artistic supervisor for a period, assuring the quality to a degree. In 1980, the studio also experienced a boom due to commissions for the Moscow Olympics. These helped stimulate the infusion of fresh blood (for instance, this was when and how Aleksandr Tatarsky emerged, having moved from Kiev; he would become famous later).

Marianna Novogrudskaia (Moscow, 1943) worked extensively from 1971, primarily in puppets and cut-outs. Her most notable films of the time were Samuil Marshak's adaptations *Vot kakoy rasseyannyi* (What an Absent-minded Person, 1975) and *Koshkin dom* (Cat's House, 1982); then *Riki-khokholok* (Ricky of the Tuft, 1985) from Charles Perrault's tale.

Young Maria Mouat (Moscow, 1951) came to prominence with puppets in the early 1980s, especially with films from English children's and comic poetry. Her films include *Starukha dver zakroy* (Old Woman, Shut the Door, 1982) and *Shaltay-Boltay* (Humpty Dumpty, 1983). She later moved to Soyuzmultfilm.

Widely respected and loved, Natan Lerner (Baku, 1932–Moscow, 1993) worked in drawings and puppets at both studios, on quality conventional film which had a clever, gentle tone. He also showed wit and elegance in *Plyukh i Plikh* (Plish and Plum, 1984), a sharp puppet performance based on Daniil Kharms' absurdist versification of Wilhelm Busch's work.

Yulian Kalisher (Ashgabat, 1935–Moscow province, 2007) directed puppets on stage in Uzbekistan and Moscow. Coming to animation proper, he developed the techniques of flattened puppets and semi-volumetric cut-outs. He was also known for seemingly easy-going, though in fact rather sophisticated, subjects, like his humble masterpiece *Bolshoy secret dlya malenkey kompanii* (A Big Secret for a Little Company, 1979).

There were also filmmakers on the opposite side of the cultural spectrum. The prolific, acclaimed Anatoly Reznikov (Belostok, 1940) is a director of energetic cartoons with questionable taste and messages. He is mainly known for a loose series between 1975 and 1993 featuring Kot Leopold (Leopold the Cat).

Aida Zyabliakova

Aida Zyabliakova (Voroshilovgrad, Soviet Union [now Luhansk, Ukraine], 16 March 1940) fell in love with puppets the first time she stood before an animation table. To her, puppets' emotions were just like live actors' emotions. Puppets had their own souls, and Zyabliakova tried to give those souls form and movement.

After her studies at Artistic School in Yaroslavl, she graduated at VGIK. Her artistic career began in 1971 as an animator at the Soyuzmultfilm studio. Then she moved to Multtelefilm. From 1971 to 1975, she worked in the staff of various projects, and in 1978 she directed her first films: *Mumu Troll i drugie* (Mumi-Troll and the Others) and

Mumu Troll' i kometa (Mumi-Troll and the Comet). They were both episodes of a short series based on the book *Comet in Moominland*, by the Finnish illustrator and writer Tove Jansson.

Aida Zyabliakova followed the rules of the traditional puppets' animation school, so most of her films were based on children's stories, such as *Akairo* (id., 1980), *Zhil-byt Saushkin* (Once upon a Time Saushkin, 1981) and *Tri medvedya* (Three Bears, 1984). She mostly worked for television, where films which were popular with the audience needed a second episode or more. Her most important series was *Domovenok Kuzya* (Brownie Kuzya, four episodes, 1984–1987), with Mikhail Meyerovich's unforgettable music.

The plot focuses on a house spirit, Domovenok Kuzya, who used to guard a family in a small cottage on the outskirts of the city, before the cranes reduce the cottage to dust. The family moved to what looked like a skyscraper to Kuzya, a nine-floor apartment building. Kuzya tags along to continue giving luck to his host family. The series rapidly became the most popular animated television production in Russia.

After this, Zyabliakova moved on to more serious and adult themes. She made *Rasskazhite skazku, doktor* (Tell a Story, Doctor, 1988), the film version of Janusz Korczak's³⁰ tragic novella *Król Maciuś Pierwszy* (King Matt the First). It presents the children's perspective on the adults who manage power and shows how children would probably be more honest than the adults. Then Zyabliakova worked on the multi-award-winning crime story *Karmannik* (The Pickpocket, 1990) and the two-part series *V Strane Bobberov* (In the Land of Beavers, 1991) about strange creatures oppressed by a monster.

After the closure of Multtelefilm, Zyabliakova collaborated with the Christmas Films studio, taking part in some projects produced by British Television. In 1993 she was involved in *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*,³¹ followed by *Testament: The Bible in Animation*³² in 1996. For the former she directed *Ukroshchenie Stroptivoi* (The Taming of the Shrew) and for the latter, *Iosif* (Joseph). She also worked on *Kenterberiskie rasskazy* (Canterbury Tales) in 2000.

Zyabliakova's later titles include *Mir Hemi i Gofa* (Khemi and Gopha's World, 2002), *Krol'ik s Kapustnogo Ogoroda* (The

Rabbit from the Cabbage Garden, 2006) and *Menu* (The Menu, 2007).

Anatoly Solin

Anatoly Ivanovich Solin (Moscow, 21 April 1939) worked at Soyuzmultfilm for three different periods between 1959 and 1980. He also worked at the Kievnauchfilm studio, and then at Multtelefilm, first as an animator–illustrator and then as a director.

In 1972, he began directing his own films with illustrator I. A. Pshenichnaya, starting with *Sos* (id., 1972). At the time, he was still teaching animator and illustrator courses in Kiev and Moscow. He received a diploma from the Milan Film Festival in 1979 for his *Spasibo, aist!* (Thank You, Stork!, 1978), the story of a stork trying to find a right parents for a child. In the same year he received another diploma from the Oberhausen International Film Festival for *Chelovek i ego ptitsa* (The Man and His Bird, 1975), about a man who is tired of the city and its frenetic rhythm. The man wants to become a bird; on the other hand, he possesses a bird which loves the city and wants to be a man.

In 1979, Solin directed *Kak lisa zaitsa dogonyala* (How the Fox Tried to Catch a Hare, 1979) about a sly fox who wants to eat a naive rabbit. Solin was also the first director to make animated TV series, including *Funtik* (id., 1986–1988), *Priklucheniya Myunhgauzena* (Münchhausen's Adventures, 1973–1995) and *Velikolepnyi Gosha* (Magnificent Gosha, 1981–1985).

Fedor Khitruk

The major Russian animation director of the 1960s was undoubtedly Fedor Khitruk (Tver, 1 May 1917–Moscow, 3 December 2012). As a teenager, he spent some years in Germany (where his father served as a technical expert for a Soviet trade mission) and attended art school. He continued his vocational training upon his return and came to the newly formed Soyuzmultfilm as a young man.

³⁰ Pen name of Henryk Goldszmit (Warsaw, 1878–Treblinka, 1942). He was a Polish pedagogist and writer.

³¹ *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* (also known as *The Animated Shakespeare*) comprised two six-part television series, first broadcast in 1992 and 1994. Each episode was an animated half-hour adaptation of one of Shakespeare's plays.

³² *Testament: The Bible in Animation* (1997) featured animated versions of stories from the Bible, each story using its own unique style of animation. It ran for two seasons in the United Kingdom and won one Emmy, with three nominations, in the United States.

Before becoming a director, Khitruk worked twenty-four years as an animator (except for the war years when he served at the front line). ‘When he was an animator everyone would want him’, recalled his colleague Evgeny Migunov. ‘His participation was a passport to success. Directors would plan episodes in advance with him in mind, which would be bound to succeed in his hands.’³³

Khitruk himself characteristically considered this experience in broader terms. ‘I had played over two hundred roles in a hundred and three films’, he said, emphasizing the acting nature of the profession.³⁴ Evgeny Migunov said of him, ‘His type-casting as an animator was quite clear-cut. [. . .] He was good in thinking through rhythm, pauses, gestures and mimics of a character, contrasts and changes in tempo. He knew the secrets of a character’s inner life, hence how to express the psychological believability of his behaviour [. . .] He expressed himself in [an] even more subtle way when he transitioned from an animator–psychologist to a director–psychologist’.³⁵

‘The animator’s work demands enormous effort’, Khitruk himself said. ‘When I became aware that my physical strength was diminishing . . . I became a director’.³⁶

His first film, *Istoriya odnogo prestupleniya* (Story of a Crime, 1961), had a neorealist flavour and a UPA design. It was supposed to be – and indeed came out – ‘as a bomb’, to use the director’s own

expression. Why does a quiet, reserved clerk kill a noisy little lady? Because he is a victim of the many people who make noise, at all times of the day and night, and do not let him sleep. He is eventually pushed over the edge and he kills the boisterous woman.³⁷

The idea of a film about ‘noise terrorism’ was partly autobiographical, but it reflected important sociocultural shifts of the era, the second wave of urbanization. It also gave a good excuse to go into unconventional genre and thematic territory and make bold formal moves. Khitruk’s graphics (with a major contribution from beginner Sergei Alimov as a designer³⁸) were innovative. The play of cinematic devices was shockingly fresh: split screen, camera movements and angles.³⁹ Also new was the limited animation, which went against the grain of the company and Khitruk’s professional habits.

The next film was supposed to be a stylistic sequel, close to the Theatre of the Absurd (using a script called *Death of a Passenger*), but Khitruk had to give it up after the artistic council’s objections. Instead, he turned to children’s subjects, again in not quite conventional fashion. *Tóptyzhka* (Little Stompy, 1964), a gentle, softly humorous story of a bear cub, was stylized after the animalist aquarelles of Evgeny Charushin (1901–1965), letting the characters appear without rigid contours. (The film was designed by Sergei Alimov).

³³ Evgeny Migunov, ‘O Khitruke’ (On Khitruk); <http://www.animator.ru/articles/article.phtml?id=69>

³⁴ Fedor Khitruk, *Professia – animator* (Profession – Animator), in two volumes, Moscow: Live Book, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 146.

³⁵ Evgeny Migunov, ‘O Khitruke’, (On Khitruk); <http://www.animator.ru/articles/article.phtml?id=69>

³⁶ Fedor Khitruk, personal communication to Giannalberto Bendazzi (1974).

³⁷ Interestingly enough, like other seminal animated films (*Steamboat Willie*, *Gerald McBoing Boing*), *Story of a Crime* is based on a strong relationship between sound and images.

³⁸ ‘He brought in his drawings done in modern style, very harsh and sharp. He made a distinctive picture of the city that looked like a conglomerate of sorts. Buildings were [drawn] as if hanging in the air, not just giving an impression of simple architectural composition, but rather obtaining image-like, anthropomorphic characteristics. It was as if they were little universes. I realized: now the film is gaining exactly the distancing from everyday-life details and sharpness that I was searching for’. (Fedor Khitruk, *Professia – animator* (Profession – Animator), in two volumes, Moscow: Live Book, 2008, Vol. 1, pp. 159–160). According to many sources, the aforementioned Evgeny Migunov (1921–2004), a brilliant and innovative designer, had tried stylized imagery and limited animation in the mid-1950s, when he was doing some minor or commissioned work with Khitruk. In the late 1950s, he had a couple of proposals/scripts, including one on Mayakovsky. He was stopped, tainted with scandal. By 1960, he was forced out. Khitruk came to him with the first drafts of *Story of a Crime* when Migunov was an outcast. Migunov suggested going back to those earlier experiments. – See: Evgeny Migunov, ‘O Khitruke’ (On Khitruk); <http://www.animator.ru/articles/article.phtml?id=69>

³⁹ As a result, the depiction of the entire environment appears ironic, as the critic Dina Goder notes. See <http://www.animator.ru/articles/article.phtml?id=54>.

Kanikuly Bonifaciya (Boniface's Vacation, 1965), based on a story of a good-hearted circus lion by Czech writer Miloš Macourek, was another rare example of a nonrhetorical, delicate yet playful film for children. An adaptation of *Winnie the Pooh* followed, original in style and tone (there were three instalments in 1969, 1972 and 1973, designed by Vladimir Zuykov and Eduard Nazarov). These films became an important part of the viewing experience for generations.

In 1966, Fedor Khitruk directed *Chelovek v ramke* (The Man in the Frame). It was a dry, merciless satire against bureaucrats, opportunists, timeservers and power climbers. Satire had always existed in Soviet animation; however, this time, it didn't attack general human behaviour, or an enemy, but criticized the Soviet system overtly. Formally, *The Man in the Frame* was just as irreverent, combining very stylized cut-outs, people's photographs and a reproduction of Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*.

Yuri Norstein noted: 'Khitruk wasn't afraid to face a different language [in *The Man in the Frame*] . . . By means of different plastic forms, forms of graphics, [in a way] unprecedented in animation, he creates the psychological reality of the time. That's truly unique'.⁴⁰ Despite this all, the censors didn't stop the film or punish Khitruk. In 1968, he directed the comedy *Film Film Film* (id.) about filmmaking, from creation to directing. Again it pokes fun (though more gently) at Soviet bureaucracy.

Khitruk was an expert, clever craftsman who liked to keep up to date and concerned. 'Modern topics require a modern acting style', he said about his characters, adding 'I do not believe there is an art which does not deal with social problems; and everything which deals with man is, by itself, a social problem'.

Still, he is well rooted in tradition and is not a revolutionary ('My master is still the great Chaplin', he said. 'A director is impoverished if he does not turn to children's tales from time to time'.)

Ostrov (The Island, 1973) and *Ikar i mudretsy* (Icarus and the Wisemen, 1977) have a more preachy tone

than his other films. Despite that, the laconic *The Island* (which won the Palme d'Or in Cannes) shows the potential of the broad-stroke social parable of the post-Zagreb genre. *Icarus* is a daring and cleverly indignant film, a slap at conformists. Icarus attempts to fly despite the derision of the establishment and intellectuals, who later bury him with a eulogy.

Another sincere film, and Khitruk's last directorial work, was *Lev i byk* (The Lion and the Bull, 1983). It is a warning against war (including nuclear war), which threatens to break out between the two giant animals after they are both betrayed by a malevolent creature.

Despite an artistic career that would have labelled anybody else a dissident, by the late 1970s Khitruk succeeded Ivan Ivanov-Vano, both as head of the animation section in the Filmmakers' union, and as the unofficial godfather of all Soviet animators. He was instrumental in establishing an animation program at the national Higher Courses for Screenwriters and Directors at the turn of 1980s. 'Directing of animated films as a separate educational subject is being introduced for the first time at Higher Courses', he said. 'Before that, directors were trained empirically, within the production system [. . .] Higher Courses, besides fulfilling [the] immediate educational function, must become also a laboratory where methods in teaching this unique profession will be fine-tuned'.⁴¹

Historian Sergey Anashkin wrote, 'While Khitruk's rejection of common visual norms established by his forerunners was strikingly obvious, he didn't go for a full break with the 'positive' values of old Soviet animation. Having transformed the vocabulary of animation, he didn't disturb the cornerstone humanist assumptions, and therefore could be a mediator between generations of directors'.⁴²

Unfailingly loyal to friends and country, Khitruk was a smart and at the same time cautious politician, who spoke fluent German and English. In the ASIFA Board meetings (as vice president in

⁴⁰ Fedor Khitruk, *Professia – animator* (Profession – Animator), in two volumes, Moscow: Live Book, 2008, Vol. 2, pp. 146, 236.

⁴¹ Fedor Khitruk, *Professia – animator* (Profession – Animator), in two volumes, Moscow: Live Book, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 95.

⁴² Sergey Anashkin, 'Fedor Khitruk', in *Newest History of National Cinema. 1986–2000. Cinema and Context*, Vol. 3, St. Petersburg: Seans, 2001.

Cited as in www.russiancinema.ru/names/name1005/

1980–88), his behaviour was not always inspired by pure democracy. His death on 3 December 2012 became a national headline, giving him such titles as ‘The father of Russian animation’. His funeral was attended by a Who’s Who of the industry.

In one of the numerous obituaries, Dina Goder wrote: ‘Russian animation community was fortunate: for many years even senior masters could consider themselves understudies with Khitruk close by, like grown-up children with parents still living, who would protect you up to your old age’.⁴³

Eduard Nazarov

Eduard Nazarov (Moscow, 23 November 1941) exhibited an original humour mixed with amused self-irony. His seemingly simple style conceals a sophisticated attention to detail. In 1959 he was hired at Soyuzmultfilm, first as an artist-renderer and animator, then as an art director. In all these capacities he worked frequently with Khitruk on his major projects. Together with Vladimir Zuykov, Nazarov designed *Winnie the Pooh*, *Island*, and *Icarus and the Wise Men*.

His directorial debut, *Ravnovesye strakha* (The Balance of Fear, 1973), was a two-minute parabola of pacifist pathos. Then he made children’s mini-films, already marked with his dry wit and soft ironic distancing, for the almanac Merry-Go-Round. They were followed by a regular short: *Okhota* (The Hunting, 1979), a paradoxical exploration of teenage fantasies and aspirations.

Nazarov’s real breakthrough came with *Zhyl-byl pyos* (Once Upon a Time There Lived a Dog, 1982). It became an immediate popular hit, received festival awards and acquired a long-lasting cult status. Based on a Ukrainian folk tale, it tells the touchingly funny story of a dog and a wolf. They are sworn foes by their job description, but as they age, facing ‘retirement’ from their social roles, they become companions in misfortune.

The seemingly simplistic, folkish style and conventional narrative devices mask the sophisticated attention to detail. Nazarov’s colleague Yuri Norstein says that *Once Upon a*

Time There Lived a Dog is full of ‘scenes-masterpieces’, that it should be ‘analysed frame by little frame, detail by little detail, and that one could hardly find such a brilliant acting through precise gestures in the entire live-action cinema, except perhaps for Chaplin’.⁴⁴

Puteshestvie muravya (An Ant’s Travel, 1983) was more humble but equally exquisite in craftsmanship and taste. *Pro Sidorova Vovy* (About Sidorov Vova, 1985) was trenchant and ambivalent, about a spoiled youth drafted into the army. After that, there was a historical piece with satirical overtones: *Martynko* (id., 1987), based on the writings of Boris Shergin. It used stylized vernacular and the local colours of northern Russia.

With that, Nazarov stopped directing. He explained it semi-jokingly, taking his trademark stance of a sad clown. ‘Animation has eaten up my life. [. . .] To make films is a really frightening thing; it actually means to be sick with them’.⁴⁵ However, Nazarov stayed in the trade as a designer, artistic supervisor and even a voice actor. From the 1990s, Nazarov became an informal authority in the community, often serving as its public voice. In 1989 he succeeded Khitruk as ASIFA vice president. After the untimely death of Aleksandr Tatarsky in 2007, he headed the Pilot studio.

Garri Bardin

Garri Bardin (Orenburg, 11 September 1941) was trained as an actor. He started on stage, then wrote some puppet plays and was invited to the Obraztsov puppet theatre, where he worked several years as a director.

In 1975 he settled at Soyuzmultfilm and went on to make several modest drawn films, including the adult urban joke *Dorozhnaya skazka* (Road Tale, 1981). Then he found the form which brought him artistic success and fame: ‘object-texture’ animation which aimed at exploring the textures of objects, rather than strictly puppet animation. The sarcastic antiwar *Konflikt* (The Conflict, 1983) was played out with matches. It is perhaps his richest ‘material metaphor’, strongly realized in the tragic coda, of an apocalyptic landscape of civilization burned to ashes.

⁴³ *Bolshoy Gorod* (Big City) magazine, 3 December 2012; http://bg.ru/society/umer_fedor_hitruk-15932/

⁴⁴ See Irina Margolina and Natalya Lozinskaya (eds.), *Nashi multfilmy* (Our Animated Films), Moscow: Izdatelskaya Programma Interros, 2006, p. 242.

⁴⁵ See Irina Margolina and Natalya Lozinskaya (eds.), *Nashi multfilmy* (Our Animated Films), Moscow: Izdatelskaya Programma Interros, 2006, p. 243.

He turned to clay for the light satire *Tyap-lyap malyary* (Quick-and-Dirty House Painters, 1984), but more inventively in *Brek!* (Break! 1985). This was an amusing rendition of a boxing match, made with witty bravado and taste for musical rhythm (it won a number of festival awards).

Switching back to the realm of things and odd materials, Bardin made *Banquet* (Banquet, 1986), an ironic, lightly elegiac tale about ghostly table companions stuffing themselves. *Brak* (1987, the name translates as both Marriage and Defect) employs two ropes to tell a love-life story. *Vykrutasy* (Twists-and-Turns, 1987) is an almost absurdist parable of human obsessions, made with wires. This weirdly exquisite exercise received wide recognition at festivals, including the Palme d'Or in Cannes.

In 1990, Bardin returned to clay puppetry, making a dashing, loosely modernized interpretation of Perrault's fable, *Seryi volk end Krasnaya shapochka* (The Grey Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood). In this musical parody, the girl travels from Moscow to Paris to visit her granny, the wolf sings Kurt Weill songs and eats the Seven Dwarfs, and so on. Spoken in a 'musical Esperanto' of cross-cultural smash hits and employing a 'brilliant eclectic cast of personalities',⁴⁶ the film had a reserved reaction at home. Abroad, though, it became perhaps the most acclaimed and recognized example of liberated Russian tastes and modes at the height of perestroika. The film grabbed multiple awards in Annecy alone.

Andrei Khrzhanovsky

As critic Dina Goder notes, Andrei Khrzhanovsky was probably the truest 'Sixtier' of his cohort. He was a man whose 'artistic quest goes along the main line of the nonconformist art discoveries of the era – with all its protestation, metaphors, irony [. . .] Khrzhanovsky was not a stranger in the unofficial art circle, and used to invite some of the iconic cultural figures of the time for collaboration'.⁴⁷

His family environment and social milieu played a large role in Khrzhanovsky's artistic

vocation. He was born in Moscow on 30 November 1939, the son of a known painter (a disciple of Malevich and Filonov), who was also a lover of books, passing on his interests in art and narrative. In his mature years, Khrzhanovsky often adapted literary works. He was trained in VGIK as a live-action director, taught by Lev Kuleshov. However, he chose to go to Soyuzmultfilm to speed up his path to a profession.⁴⁸

There he spent about two years as an intern, often with Khitruk's group, before making his own first film *Zhil-byt Kozyavin* (Once Upon a Time Kozyavin, 1966). It was a satire of the conforming, insensitive bureaucrat, a classic figure in Russian (and not only Russian) culture.⁴⁹ The bureaucrat is ordered to head in a particular direction while looking for a person. So he does, taking a trip around the world and treading on everything and everybody, before returning to his starting point.

Situated, as if deliberately, between Khitruk's *Story of a Crime* and *Man in a Frame*, this film appeared a pointed artistic gesture in its tone, style and message. It shared the modern design traits of Khitruk's works, tilting more towards the 'realistic grotesque' with surreal overtones. Like the elder master's films, strangely, it passed through the censorship, though without official acclaim or any distribution to speak of.

That wasn't the case with Khrzhanovsky's next project. In *Steklyannaya Garmonika* (The Glass Harmonica, 1968), he used a mix of different styles – maybe an excessive mix – to tell a tale of freedom, hope and repression. The film was written by *Kozyavin's* scriptwriter Gennady Shpalikov. Meanwhile, *Steklyannaya Garmonika's* designers Yulo Sooster and Yuri Sobolev (noticeable figures in the nonconformist art circle) created a Bosch-like medieval city populated by monsters and Renaissance portraits. The authoritarian power is disguised as

⁴⁶ Larisa Malyukova, *Newest History of National Cinema. 1986–2000. Cinema and Context*. Vol. 5, St. Petersburg: Seans, 2004; <http://www.russiancinema.ru/names/name76/>

⁴⁷ Dina Goder, *Russian Animation: To be continued –*; <http://www animator.ru/articles/article.phtml?id=54>

⁴⁸ Official debuts as graduation projects were supposed to be made in a real studio production. Graduates had to stand in line waiting for the next opportunity, sometimes for years.

⁴⁹ The screenwriter of *Kozyavin*, Gennady Shpalikov had already scripted some important live-action features of the early Thaw: *Walking the Streets of Moscow* (1964) and *I Am Twenty* (1965).

the ‘no-man’ in a bowler hat⁵⁰ painted by Magritte. The project experienced a number of obstacles, at the Artistic Council level in particular,⁵¹ and went through a number of revisions.

When the finished film was submitted – at an unfortunate moment, at the start of the invasion of Czechoslovakia – it was banned (‘shelved’) for nearly twenty years, as it appeared. The official production copy was physically axed in the studio backyard. A single public screening was attended by members of the intelligentsia, to a rousing reception. Through some underground showings and word of mouth, the film had some influence in the profession.

Soon after, Khrzhanovsky, an officer in reserve, was drafted for active military duty and had to spend two years in the Navy. Upon returning to civil life and the studio, he started anew with the less directly pointed, but still sharp, Kafkaesque parable *Shkaf* (The Armoire, 1971). It is about a man’s obsession with his armoire, which gradually encapsulates his entire world.

More films followed: the almost psychedelic *Babochka* (The Butterfly, 1972), *V mire basen* (In the World of Fables, 1973, a radical take on a national classic by Ivan Krylov), *Den’ chudesnyi* (A Day of Marvels, 1975), *Dom, kotoryi postroil Dzhek* (The House That Jack Built, 1976) and *Chudesna v reshete* (Miracles in a Sieve, 1976). The latter is a collection

of children’s rhymes such as *Robin Bobin*, *Visiting the Queen*, *Impossible* and *Three Wise Men*. These were playful, witty presentations of nonsense verse, made using combinations of drawings and cut-outs; they were intelligent films for children, but not limited to that audience.

In the late 1970s Khrzhanovsky undertook an ambitious project: a trilogy of mid-length films, based on drawings, notes and poems by Aleksandr Pushkin. The films were called *I Fly Toward You in My Memories* (1977), *I s vami snova ya* (And I Am with You Again, 1980) and *Autumn* (1982). Subsequently the films were re-edited in a feature-length version (*Lyubimoye moyo vremya*, My Favourite Time, 1987). Although dealing with the tutelary deity or Russian literature weighs heavily on the project and the filmmaker’s creative freedom, Khrzhanovsky’s visionary skills remain intact, and his literary knowledge safely leads the viewers through this multifaceted narrative. Writes Sergei Asenin:

The central episode of the first film, *The Poet and the Czar*, a sort of film-in-the film, and the best of the trilogy, consists of an ironic dialogue based on a draft of *Imaginary Conversation with Alexander I* (December 1824). The visual presentation of this episode uses only one drawing: a humoristic self-portrait drawn by the poet that same year. In

⁵⁰ One of the film’s characters has a kind of obsession with money. Years later, when the film became available for specialist audiences abroad, in the USA in particular, the character was criticized as being too close to an anti-Semitic caricature. This is a misreading that is worth clarifying.

First, one of the film’s plotlines centres on the evil power of money. Among the art history quotations, we find Quentin Matsys’s *The Money-changer and his Wife* (1514). And in the film, the relevant figure was a creation of the designer Yulo Sooster, an Estonian by origin and a cosmopolite by spirit. Moreover, in the USSR of mid-1960, anti-Semitic iconography wasn’t really at the front of cultural consciousness, and any resemblances just wouldn’t ring a bell.

Moreover, as Khrzhanovsky himself noted when confronted directly with the issue (personal communication with Mikhail Gurevitch, Moscow, 5 December 2012), rather than looking for recent connotations, it’s better to pay attention to the faces of Italian portraiture, and Leonardo’s sketches in particular.

⁵¹ Mikhail Valkov, managing director of the studio, made this characteristic remark: ‘In its current form, the danger of political tactlessness is hidden in the script [. . .] Let’s talk openly – the script deals with the relations [of the artist towards society and of society towards the artist. If the script’s author intends to talk about the Soviet artist in these terms (I am laying it out here, because no one talks about it, while everyone thinks about it, so I am consciously revealing this), then I would not like to do this film, because it would not correspond to the reality’.

Besides, the film’s very imagery caused concerns for its perceived ‘pathology’. Generally speaking, the film’s overall visual language seemed suspiciously overcomplicated and therefore too ‘elitist’. See a detailed account in Laura Pontieri, *Soviet Animation and the Thaw of the 1960s. Not Only for Children*, New Barnet, UK: John Libbey, 2012, pp. 163–164.

a way which is made possible only by animation, the film shows what Pushkin imagines being an emperor must mean. The animator (Yuri Norstein undertook this complex role) plays the scene so skilfully that the one drawing seems to multiply. The result gives the impression of a totally new vision and of a specific contact with Pushkin's incomparable personality, the journeys of his soul and the creative process behind his ideas.⁵²

Khrzhanovsky made a new excellent film in 1985: *The King's Breakfast*, based on A. A. Milne. In this merrily sarcastic film, a kingdom falls into chaos when the king whimsically demands bread and butter for breakfast. The imagery is a sumptuous synthesis of styles, while the humour is harshly ironic about the apparatus of power.

Later in his career, Khrzhanovsky returned to the approach of his Pushkin films. He made films inspired by the artist Yulo Sooster,⁵³ as well as animating imagery from the artist's oeuvre, they included live interviews and tilted towards a bio-documentary portrait. A later literary study on Josef Brodsky,⁵⁴ *Poltora kota* (A Cat and a Half, 2002), once again made playful use of a poet's drawings to explore his artistic-personal world. Ideas in this twenty-six-minute film were later developed into the feature *Poltory komnaty ili Sentimentalnoe puteshestvie na Rodinu* (A Room and a Half or Sentimental Voyage to the Motherland, 2009). This biopic, or mockumentary, was mainly made in live action with animated inserts and gained significant public attention.⁵⁵ About his art, Khrzhanovsky wrote:

It is necessary to build a meaningful frame, which demands of viewers the highest level of

participation. The free structures of composition and the combination of various stylistic elements must aim at one sole goal: obtaining a direct, pregnant expression, a balance between emotions and the logical order of things.⁵⁶

Mikhail Iampolski observed: 'In the films of Andrei Khrzhanovsky, the world would appear through the description of cultures, through the description of other fine art systems. Animation would reflect not the world but rather its systems of representation. Hence here it is stylistically quite important [. . .] the orientation towards collage. [. . .] The technical device [of cut-outs] is understood here as an aesthetic move'.⁵⁷

Beyond their captivating exteriors, Khrzhanovsky's films are rich in cross-references and different levels of interpretation. Cultivated but not cerebral, they show the expert hand of a director who can create a new, independent visual universe from several artistic suggestions. (It should be stressed that Khrzhanovsky did not draw himself, but coordinated the efforts of different artists, chosen specifically for each film; for example, the art director Natalia Orlova).⁵⁸

Khrzhanovsky's contemporary use of ironic and lyrical themes is typical of late twentieth-century intellectuals: power and its degeneration, freedom and spiritual searching. Like the work by his colleague Yuri Norstein, Khrzhanovsky's animation is linked to the human, psychological and imaginative avenues explored by Russian cinema as a whole and, at its best, in the live-action works by Andrei Tarkovsky and Nikita Mikhalkov, among others.

⁵² Sergei Asenin, 'Andrei Khrzhanovsky', *Zagreb 86 Retrospectives*, 1986, Zagreb, p. 59.

⁵³ *Shkola iziashchnykh iskusstv, film 1: Peizazh s mozhzhevelnikom* (The School of Fine Arts, Film 1: Landscape with Juniper, 1987, co-directed with V. Ugarov); *Shkola iziashchnykh iskusstv, film 2: Vozvrashchenie* (The School of Fine Arts, Film 2: The Return, 1990). The re-edited version of the two combined films was presented in 1990.

⁵⁴ Brodsky, who was forced to emigrate from the USSR in 1972, was given the Nobel Prize in literature in 1987.

⁵⁵ Two lengthy short films, made with the Italian screenwriter Tonino Guerra, are also notable. *Lev s sedoy borodoy* (The Lion with a Grey Beard, 1995, music by Nino Rota and Astor Piazzolla, artwork by stage designer Sergey Barkhin) was based on Guerra's tale of an aging circus lion. *Dolgoe puteshestvie* (Long Voyage, 1997) employed sketch drawings of Federico Fellini.

⁵⁶ Sergei Asenin, 'Andrei Khrzhanovsky', *Zagreb 86 Retrospectives*, 1986, Zagreb, p. 59.

⁵⁷ Mikhail Iampolski, 'Prostranstvo animatsii' (The Space of Animation), *Iskusstvo kino* (Cinema Art), No. 3, 1982, Moscow, p. 84.

⁵⁸ It must be also pointed out that the music for his films was often provided by one of the greatest composers of the second half of the twentieth century, Alfred Schnittke (Engels, Russia, 24 November 1934–Hamburg, Germany, 3 August 1998).

Yuri Norstein⁵⁹

Yuri Norstein's⁶⁰ films represent the highest point ever reached by Soviet animation. At one point of his artistic career, this artist reacted to the limitations imposed by the regime by skipping any social theme altogether. Instead he favoured an intimate analysis of his characters' inner world, conducted up to the highest degree of introspection and subjective involvement. Blessed by outstanding formal qualities, Norstein's works follow an artistic path of admirable coherence.

Yuri Norstein was born on 15 September 1941 in the village of Andreiev, in the outskirts of Moscow. His family evacuated during World War II. Curiously, he described his childhood as being 'happy, because of its being dramatic'. He was fourteen when his father died. Norstein learned cabinetmaking and later attended a drafting course at Soyuzmultfilm.

In 1961, when Norstein was twenty, he joined the staff at Soyuzmultfilm. He worked as an animator and art director on innumerable films, including *Who Has Said Meow?*, *My Green Crocodile* and Ivan Ivanov-Vano's *The Left-Handed*.

In 1968, he debuted as a director, together with Arkadi Tiurin, with the film *25-e, pervy den'* (25th October, the First Day), commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the October revolution. The film features music by Shostakovich and pays homage to the revolution through the art of avant-garde painters of that time. The list of reported references is long, from Malevich to Rodchenko to Chagall. (Norstein had Filonov in mind too, though he didn't visually quote him).

The most important influences, though, are from cubism, especially Braque in his rendering of urban landscapes, and Russian Futurism. The futurist aesthetics of velocity finds one of its most accurate renderings in film, through a combination of techniques including multiple exposures and contrasting superimposed movements.

The distinctive visual style not only pay homage to Futurism, but contains the core of Norstein's aesthetics (which will develop in a full-fledged poetic way later). These aesthetics would challenge the realistic qualities of images. Typical Soviet animation still accepted the Disney style of descriptive realism, which meant detailed and 'well drawn' 2D characters, and moving shapes that were uniform colour fields, fully contained by well-defined black lines. Norstein's images took a much more suggestive approach. They followed (probably unconsciously) the visual footsteps of authors such as Berthold Bartosch and Alexandre Alexeieff.

25th October, the First Day shows the revolutionaries, a featureless and indistinct crowd, attacking the Winter Palace. The rich and the bourgeois, portrayed individually with grotesque features reminiscent of George Grosz's expressionism, flee and hide. After the revolution, a new and more human order emerges. Despite its propagandistic purposes, obvious at the beginning and end (the ending is based on live-action images and a recorded speech by Lenin), the film is dynamic and vibrant.

Especially striking is the attack of the revolutionaries, who suddenly turn from grey to red and storm the palace like demonic flames; the scene has almost abstract qualities. The film is undeniably sincere, and reflects the idealization of Lenin's figure (Stalin was very unpopular by 1968). Yet *25th October, the First Day* suffered from political censorship. An image of Lenin commanding the insurrection, static and in striking contrast with the film's swift movements, was inserted for better 'comprehension'.

In 1971, Norstein and Ivan Ivanov-Vano co-directed *Secha pri Kerzhence* (The Battle at Kerzhnets). Loosely based on the opera *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, the film celebrates the Russian people's resistance against the Tatar invasion in the thirteenth century.

⁵⁹ By Giovanni Russo.

⁶⁰ The correct transliteration from the Russian alphabet should be 'Norshteyn', in the same way as Sergei Eisenstein's name should be 'Eyzhenshteyn'. Accepting well-established Western habits, both names have been spelled erroneously in this book.

25th October took inspiration from avant-garde art; similarly *The Battle at Kerzhenets* takes inspiration from traditional Russian art (icons and frescoes). The film is also structurally similar; the difference is that, instead of revolutionaries fighting for a new social order, a foreign enemy threatens an idealized social order. (This order doesn't resemble that of medieval Russia; rather, it looks like a socialist utopia).

The city is unnamed (in the Rimsky-Korsakov opera it's the legendary city of Kitezh, but here it stands for all Russia). No man is at work: they're all gathering to go to battle against the Tatars. (The idea of a 'people's army', completely inaccurate for medieval Russia, is an obvious reference to the Red Army). After saying farewell to the mourning women, the Russians leave the city, and await the horde on the shores of River Kerzhenets.

The Tatars, depicted as an unstoppable natural force, eventually defeat the Russians. In the original opera, the whole city disappeared under water. In the film, the spirits of the dead Russians rise, and the Tatars retreat. The sacrifice of the Russian people has saved the city. The epilogue celebrates the restored social harmony: men are at work again, children play in the fields.

The nationalistic and propagandistic twist is typical of Ivanov-Vano's films and especially obvious in the cheap epilogue. But the film is powerful and visually stunning: the solemnity of the images, the perfect cut-out animation, the sensitivity to space and light (evident even with flat characters). The powerful pace of the battle scene is reminiscent of Eisenstein's results in *Aleksandr Nevsky*, and perhaps exceeds them; it has Norstein's unmistakable signature.

It's interesting to compare the attack of the revolutionaries in *25th October* to the battle scenes in *Kerzhenets*. In *25th October* the revolutionaries are depicted as flames. In *Kerzhenets* the Tartar hordes look like a tempestuous sea, and the Russians look like sailors fighting against giant black waves. The abstract quality of the two scenes is equal. Both the crowds in Saint Petersburg and the Tartars have a faceless, indistinct look. They are both assimilated to natural forces and used to their fullest graphic potential, so that these scenes undermine any obvious propaganda. *Kerzhenets* only partly succeeds as

a celebration of Russian national history, but completely succeeds as a celebration of the Russian figurative tradition.

In 1973, Norstein's first film as sole director was *Lisa i zayac* (The Fox and the Rabbit). It's a classic animal tale, about a rabbit who tries to reclaim his house from a female fox. A wolf, a bear and a bull try to help the rabbit in turn, but the fox defeats them all. In the end, helped by a rooster who wears boots and wields a sword, the rabbit gets his house back.

It's a simple film, far less ambitious than those before and after. It's important, though, as it's the first film to feature drawings by Norstein's wife, Francesca Yarusova. These bring a touch of gentle humour to the characters. The cut-out technique is also perfected, reaching an unprecedented level of fluidity and naturalness. The film also has the first examples of Norstein's masterful use of the multi-plane camera, which he would use to the full in his next films, going far beyond mere 'depth of field'.

In 1974, Norstein directed his first introspective film, *Caplya i zhuravl'* (The Heron and the Crane). The plot is about the never-ending courtship between a male crane and a female heron. Each time either of them is about to accept the other's love, the other companion changes his or her mind. Interestingly, the film doesn't have a resolution. The courting goes on forever, and there is no chance for the two birds to really understand each other.

It is often said this is a tale about incommunicability, but this is highly questionable. Instead, it's a tale about the ambivalence of feelings. The two characters long for love and fear it. Their continuous changes of mind testify to their fear of a mature relationship, as well as their desperate need of it. Ironically, the perpetual pursuit of each other is a kind of relationship in itself. In it, they might find a strange, personal kind of happiness.

The visual style reflects the soul of the two characters: the foggy backgrounds, the reeds in which the two birds often disappear. The film makes psychological use of backgrounds and lighting, which will become metaphysical in the later films. From this point, external reality won't matter anymore, visually or poetically. Norstein's interest will only be in the inner life, of his characters and his own, made up of feelings, memories and relationships. In

a striking accord between visuals and content, the images won't be to 'show', but to 'suggest'.

Ezhik v tumane (The Hedgehog in the Fog, 1975) is probably Norstein's masterpiece. The plot, again, seems to be a classic animal tale. A hedgehog is on his way to meet his friend, a little bear. He is bringing a jar of strawberry jam, and together they will drink tea and count the stars in the sky. But to reach his friend, the hedgehog must cross a field covered with fog. He gets lost in the fog, and meets other animals (an owl, a white horse, a dog and a mysterious fish). In his fantasy, they assume the features of nightmarish creatures. He experiences real danger, falling into a creek. He eventually reaches his friend, but his mind is still with the mysterious events in the fog.

Life is a mystery; the outside world is shrouded in fog. The only possible reality emerges from the relationships we establish with people around us. They are as lost as we are, and may even look threatening, but in Norstein's humanistic view, they reveal a facet of solidarity. In this context, there is no room for social propaganda, because there is no social structure. The hedgehog is not a social entity; the mysteries he faces precede any possible society. Mysteries of life, and attempts of giving meaning to it, are fully contained in a personal dimension. Human beings, in Norstein's vision, are singular entities. The best they can do is try to build bonds with other, similarly singular entities that happen to be close to them, like the crane and the heron in the previous film.

Despite the seemingly gloomy appearance, it's hard not to feel the film is actually optimistic. The people we meet may seem frightening at first, but they are gentle, even helpful. The owl just wants to play, the white horse seems curious but benevolent, the dog brings back the lost jar, and the invisible fish saves the hedgehog's life when he is resigned to die. This mixture of optimism and pessimism is one of the paradoxes that make the film so lively.

The Hedgehog in the Fog wouldn't have been so effective if it hadn't been for its outstanding formal qualities. The space doesn't exist anymore, the fog dissolves it. In the previous film, the fog reflected

the characters' confused feelings, but now it is a gateway to the absolute. Through it, the deepest fears of our unconscious mind emerge, and a mystery well beyond our inner self. The hedgehog's journey through the fog is a metaphor for life and our struggle to give it meaning.

It's easy to forgive the film for the residuals of trite formulae: the use of a narrator, the invoking of traditional animal tales, and the absolute clarity of exposition, in striking contrast with the visual ethos of the film.

In 1979 Norstein directed *Skazka skazok* (Tale of Tales), certainly his most famous achievement.⁶¹ The film doesn't have a real plot: it's a collection of memories and suggestions, freely associated with a logic which isn't narrative, but purely poetic. Many different situations intersect. A family of peasants lives its everyday life. The father is a fisherman, the mother brings up the babies, the daughter plays with a reminiscent-of-Picasso bull and helps her mother as needed, and the poet, maybe the elder son, composes his poems. They meet a stranger, who accepts their hospitality and then leaves again. A young boy looks at crows on a tree and imagines being with them, before his parents take him away. The drama of World War II is evoked through many dancing couples, from which the men suddenly disappear leaving the women alone.

Keeping everything together is a grey little wolf, a character from a traditional Russian lullaby ('sleep, my son, otherwise the grey little wolf will come and take you away'). He observes all the different stories, and wants to live his own. In a meaningful scene, the little wolf steals a sheet of paper from the poet, and a few moments later the scroll becomes a crying baby. The scene suggests a total identification between art and life, a metaphor of Norstein's film itself. While *Hedgehog* had a real narrative, *Tale of Tales* rejects it altogether.

A pivotal point of traditional Soviet production was that films should have pedagogic purposes. But even without such intentions, every film has a 'social value', for the very reason that it's released in the public space. This usually implies a certain degree of 'realism' that is pre-political in nature. It

⁶¹ For a deep analysis of this film, see More About It at the end of the chapter.

takes into account all the constraints imposed on the film, which is the result of a production and distribution process which regulates how the audience interacts with it.

Tale of Tales rejects these limitations and put the author at the centre instead of the audience. Almost inevitably, it works as a manifesto. Since its release in animation festivals worldwide (despite the resistance of the Soviet establishment and thanks to Fedor Khitruk, who used his enormous prestige to persuade hostile parties), the film was highly celebrated. In 1984, a jury of experts even declared it the best animated film ever made. The fact it demonstrated a softening of Soviet Union cultural policy only added to the general enthusiasm.

Regardless of its content, *Tale of Tales* showed what the role, the self-respect and the attitude of an animation artist could be. It is definitely Norstein's most personal film, and the culmination of a long and consistent artistic research. It has often been said that Norstein's position in Soviet cinema is similar to the live-action master, Andrei Tarkovsky. Indeed, there are similarities. Both Tarkovsky and Norstein went off the official path, not by openly fighting it but eluding it altogether, going in a completely different direction – personal and introspective for Norstein, symbolic and metaphysical for Tarkovsky.

There are moments in *Tale of Tales* when style becomes substance and transfigures memories in a magical and suspended atmosphere, as in one of the film's last scenes, where golden apples fall slowly and silently in snow. Overall, the film suffers from its carefully planned structure, which runs contrary to the poetic approach of free associations that it wants to embrace. The different threads of inspiration, included in the carefully interwoven episodes, are somewhat sterilized by the uniform level of care and attention put in their visual rendering.

There is an undeniable hint of formalism in Norstein's approach. However, the formalism must not be intended as supremacy of style over content. On the contrary, it must be meant as evidence that the supreme act of visual creativity itself is the centre of Norstein's inspiration.

Norstein is a true visionary. This can be seen even in *25th October* or in *Kerzhnets*, where the real motif is the film's confronting of the Russian figurative tradition, rather than a celebration of the October Revolution, or an episode of the nation's epic story. Style finds its best poetic justification in *Hedgehog in the Fog*, where the metaphor of life's mysteries is established on purely visual terms.

Tales of Tales represents the culmination of a coherent reaction to political responsibility towards society, in the name of the artist's subjective freedom. The previous steps can be seen in all Norstein's other works.⁶² In this light, it is not so surprising that, since *Tale of Tales*, Norstein hasn't released any new film. An adaptation of Gogol's *The Overcoat* has been reportedly ongoing since 1981.⁶³

His visual talent was intact, though: the proof is his opening segment of *Winter Days*, a collective work by thirty-five animators, coordinated by Kawamoto Kihachiro and inspired by a *renku* poem by the Japanese poet Bashō, and commissioned works, such as the wonderful opening and closing sequences of the TV Russian program *Good Night Children*, which were too dark and sophisticated to be appreciated by the intended audience.

Francesca Yarusova⁶⁴

Born on 13 October 1942 in Alma-Ata,⁶⁵ Francesca Yarusova studied on the art directors' course of the VGIK (All-Union State Cinema Institute) in Moscow, the major Soviet film school. She was

⁶² Norstein's repeated criticism of experimental art, which he identifies with formalism, should be viewed in this perspective. To him, artistic research is the deepening of sensitivity and analysis (including formal analysis) of emotional and human conditions, in a 'classical' manner. Avant-garde art exists in a totally different cultural background.

⁶³ Norstein has presented portions of the film at public events.

⁶⁴ By Clare Kitson.

⁶⁵ Today Almaty, Kazakhstan. Francesca's muscovite family evacuated to what was then Soviet Kazakhstan while Moscow was under threat from the German army. Her mother took her back to Moscow in 1943.

inclined towards live action but was lured into animation by one of her tutors, Ivan Ivanov-Vano. (A towering and always busy figure, Ivanov-Vano gave his students a pleasing amount of freedom but, according to Yarusova, distressingly little tuition in traditional animation techniques). Both factors would later contribute to Yarusova's effective deployment of stylistic and technical innovations in the films of Yuri Norstein.

On graduation, Yarusova was sent to work at Soyuzmultfilm in Moscow. She worked as art director on four films before teaming up with Norstein. Of these four, the first was *The Little Steam Engine from Romashkovo* (1967), made in drawn animation and directed by Vladimir Degtyarev. The film was given a second-class certificate, with a special mention that the art director was very inexperienced and unprofessional.

The next three films, *A White Coat*, *The Plasticine Hedgehog* and *The Boy and the Ball*, used puppet animation and were directed by Vladimir Danilevich. Although she found this unit more congenial, she was still young, nervous of giving the director her opinions, and the films were not really to her taste.

Earlier, though, Yarusova had worked part-time on films while she was a student at VGIK, and these were probably more important in her development. Directed by her tutor Ivanov-Vano, they provided her first experience of working with cut-outs. They also reunited her with film school colleague Arkadi Tyurin and introduced her to Yuri Norstein.

It was during the production of *The Left-Handed Craftsman* (1964) that the art director Tyurin was shocked – the inexperienced Yarusova presumably less so – to see Norstein, already an iconoclast, systematically removing carefully constructed hinges from cut-out figures, in order to give them greater flexibility of movement.

Yarusova married Norstein in 1967. By 1970 she had two small children to look after, an obvious brake on her career development. However, Ivanov-Vano (again) offered a lifeline. He gave Norstein a co-director role on *Battle by the Kerzhenets* (1971), with special responsibility for the technical aspects. He also gave Yarusova some background work she could do at home, though in the event she also painted characters. When Norstein was given his first film as solo director, *The Fox and the Hare*

(1973), Yarusova was its art director. In fact, she became the whole art department, for she alone produced the film's myriad tiny cut-out elements.

Yarusova and Norstein are in total agreement about the roles of director and art director. Both insist the director must make all the rules; the art director's only duty is to fulfil the director's aspirations for his film. If anything, Yarusova is more vehement on this point. As a director, Norstein is unusually prescriptive, leaving his art director little room for initiative. But he recognizes only she can actually give him what he needs.

Working at tremendous speed, Yarusova can conjure up characters and background elements, brimming with vitality. It is, in fact, Yarusova's knowledge and instincts about the animal and plant world which elicit the most rapt admiration from her husband. The couple argue a lot: both are strong characters, and the strain of working as well as living together must be hard for them to bear. Yet they agree on the big creative issues.

Asked about her own style, Yarusova insists she does not have one: she works in any number of styles. It all depends what the film needs. In *The Fox and the Hare*, the couple decided to base the design on folk-art painting found on ancient distaffs in a museum. *Tale of Tales* (1979) includes scenes in which simply outlined characters move against a luminous background. They sometimes suggest Picasso, or perhaps Pushkin's rapid doodles in the margins of his manuscripts. But this was not the aim. It was, simply, what the scenes required. Both Norstein and Yarusova do, of course, know their art history, and can use it to help solve specific problems. Strangely enough, a Paul Klee painting called *The Clown* was used in the hunt for a particular effect in *Hedgehog in the Fog* (1975).

Yet while Yarusova would disclaim any individual style, she does appear to have a preferred palette and preferred media. She uses oils very rarely. Instead she draws with a pen and Indian ink, and paints with watercolour and titanium white. She is fussy about which watercolours she uses. Children's painting sets, she finds, offer far more delicate gradations than the more expensive brands. And delicate gradations are required, because she works with such a limited palette of, usually, three or four colours. As well as brushes and pens, fingers

are used a great deal. The tools are the same for her initial sketches – usually on paper – and for the cut-out elements to be animated. Unusually, these elements are all made with celluloid.

Yarbusova and Norstein are convinced of the primacy of texturing, which is far more difficult to achieve than perfect drawings. They feel, however, that texture is far more important in bestowing vitality on the animation. Yet, while speed of execution is crucial to obtaining the correct textures, the overall process of producing the cut-outs is far from simple. Layers of celluloid and paint alternate, with great attention paid to the thickness of the paint and the direction of the brush strokes. Sometimes a thin watercolour paint is rubbed into the grooves left by brush strokes, or by scratching on the surface of the celluloid.

The Old and the New

Three things, basically, shook the static production profile of animation in the country in the first half of the 1980s.

An animation division at two-year Higher Courses for screenwriters and directors was opened up to animation specialists as well, in order to produce professionals not only for Moscow but even more so for studios in republics and regions. Not all the faraway places had good facilities and trained technical personnel. It was expedient to prepare future directors to work in limited conditions. The teaching practice soon drifted towards auteur cinema, because the graduates were supposed to acquire also the tools of the animator's and designer's profession. Sverdlovsk (later Ekaterinburg) became, in effect, a new focal point of animation development since a good part of younger generation and Courses fresh graduates happened to concentrate there. The film studio was short of materials, and that was why its directors looked for 'unusual' techniques: sand, painting on glass and drawing on tracing paper. In turn, the unconventional technologies prompted innovation in form, artistic decisions, film language and so forth.

Another hotbed of the new culture was found in the Tatarsky-Kovalyov group. This was formed at Multtelefilm and lived in relative isolation. Tatarsky was a man of

restless energy, passionately striving for independence. He had his own views on organizing the production process and on the mission of animation. He came into the field with a philosophy more conducive to creative work under capitalist conditions.

Lastly, 'creative seminars' were organized in Bolshevo, the filmmakers' union retreat outside Moscow. There were screenwriters, animators from the federated republics and many figures from Multtelefilm, including Tatarsky and his group. Lastly, there were scholar-writers who had come to animation only recently and became actively involved in criticism.

In late 1980s, this cohort of critics would openly voice new animation ideology that would become dominant in emerging specialist publications. In one article, Anatoly Prokhorov postulated that when animation abandons its children's orientation, it becomes an art form equal to literature, music and painting, then it reaches a new stage of evolution. As a result of this ideology, coupled with the withering of the theatrical exhibition system, there was a split between auteur cinema (often too pretentious) and commercial cinema (almost deprived of artistic value).

Soyuzmultfilm folks were not going to Bolshevo. They had their own territory, and socializing and creative exchange took place within the studio walls. For Bolshevo regulars, seminars turned into the communication space. They gradually cemented the new group, which discovered common interests and common ground, differing from those at Soyuzmultfilm.

When the time of Perestroika came, and all Soviet organizations were told to comply with the process, the sharpest criticism of Soyuzmultfilm would come from the new professional group. At the same time, Soyuzmultfilm was subjected to ill-advised organizational reform and entered a period of several crises. These had personnel, structural, legal, production and artistic aspects. In 1989, a good part of Bolshevo's 'hang-out crowd' formed the All-Union (later International) festival Krok. It boosted Bolshevo's status and gave it an official festival pulpit to propagate its views and opinions.⁶⁶

Perestroika

The end of the Soviet era was marked with a rather brief period of dramatic change and turmoil. In March 1985, the leadership passed to Mikhail Gorbachev, a relatively

⁶⁶ We express our gratitude to Georgy Borodin for having provided information and opinions that shape this section.

young and energetic Party apparatchik. He was willing to recognize the severe problems that the country, and the system, faced, and to take drastic steps to address them.

The changes were meant to come gradually and in limited scope, but they accelerated on their own, finally running out of control. What was supposed to strengthen a failing economy – suffering from the unsustainable arms race and geopolitical competition – and to put a more human face on the regime, spread into the political structure and social fabric.

The semi-liberated media thrived on hot topics of the day and critical investigation of the past. In literature and art, works and names that were banned or silenced came out into the open, strongly influencing the nascent public discourse. The intelligentsia came into relevance, with some long-marginalized ‘Sixtiers’ coming to the foreground.

A good part of the cinema community emerged as vanguard of the changes. At the Fifth Congress of the Filmmakers’ Union, held in May 1986 in the Kremlin (of all places), the old men on the top were replaced by progressive, nonconformist figures. One of the first matters of business was ‘clearing the shelf’ of films previously banned and/or removed from distribution.⁶⁷ The Moscow filmmakers’ club Dom Kino (House of Cinema) became the hot spot of discussions and even pure political events, almost in the vein of the Jacobin Club in revolutionary France.

Live-action fiction cinema and animation were slow to react to the issues of the day, because of the restrictions of their production. Instead, it was the time for documentaries. Khrzhanovsky’s semi-documentary work about his collaborator Yulo Sooster – an iconic figure of the recent ‘forbidden history’ – was characteristic of the time, both in theme and genre.

The animation guild wasn’t the most politicized part of the filmmakers’ crowd. Even so, the screenings and reviews of the studios’ yearly production became a battleground, fought over by the new critics. They were ready and eager to go beyond formerly unspoken conventions, separating fresh aesthetics from musty or servile output.

At Soyuzmultfilm, the new times came with belated directorial passes for mid-generation artists, those who had been long rising through the ranks. They included Ugarov, Gorlenko and others. Some fresh air came with the influx of women directors (Natalia Dabizha, Ekaterina Obratsova, Natalia Orlova); their works even had some feminist qualities.⁶⁸ Moreover, some individual projects, which had been hard to push through before, could now be made. At the same time, institutional problems were mounting at Soyuzmultfilm, with no effective resolve to solve them. By the decade’s end, the major working masters (Norstein, Khrzhanovsky, Bardin, Karavaev) had already left or were on their way out of the studio.

At Multtelefilm, not-so-conventional films were made at this time by the relatively young Olga Rozovskaya⁶⁹ and Aleksandr Fedulov (1947–1996).⁷⁰ The real thrust, though, was associated with the ‘Tatarsky gang’. Even before perestroika, the charismatic Kiev director had managed to dig an unofficial niche for himself and a team of collaborators (many of whom were themselves trained on semi-official courses). His films of the early to mid-1980s⁷¹ were perceived as distinctive in their rhythm and pace, their brave humour and bold gags; they also brought in several festival awards. In 1986–87, together with Kovalyov, Tatarsky conceived and co-directed a mini-series, *Sledstvie vedut Kolobki* (Kolobki Investigate). It was an unvarnished exercise in the good old elements of the ‘comic’ animation, almost in pure form, which characteristically spoofed trite conventions and genres. It was an immediate hit.

⁶⁷ In animation, technically only *Glass Harmonica* seemed to qualify as such. However, the history of censorship in this domain – especially of thrown-away or halted projects, and films that were mutilated before they were approved – is intriguing but not well known. See extracts from the forthcoming book, *Animation the Dependent* by Georgy Borodin, published in *Kinograph* magazine, No. 16; ‘Kinovedcheskie zapiski’ (Film Studies Notes), Nos. 73, 80, 81, date unavailable.

⁶⁸ For instance, Elena Prorokova’s *S devyati do shesti* (From 9 AM to 6 PM, 1987), about a day in the lives of working woman, and Mouat’s humorous tale for adults *Vlyubchivaya Vorona* (The Crow of an Amorous Disposition, 1988). Both films were scripted by Irina Margolina.

⁶⁹ Born in 1951, she directed, among others, the puppet films *Pravitel Turroputo* (Turroputo the Ruler, 1988), *Navazhdenye* (The Delusion, 1989) and *Pro Matveya Kuzmicha* (About Matvey Kuzmich, 1990, co-directed with Dmitri Naumov), showing a surreal inspiration.

⁷⁰ The latter showed a rather sharp caricatural style, loaded with social-leaning messages, in such films as *Razreshite proyti?* (Can I Pass? 1987), *Naedine s prirodoy* (Alone with Nature, 1988), *Park kulturny* (Park of Culture, 1988) and *Bochka* (The Barrel, 1990).

⁷¹ They included *Plastilinnovaya vorona* (Plasticin Crow, 1981), *Padal proshlogodniy sneg* (The Last Year’s Snow Was Falling, 1983) and *Obratnaya storona luny* (The Dark Side of the Moon, 1984). They were all made in collaboration, of different ways, with another Kiev ex-pat and lifelong friend, Igor Kovalyov.

Still, under constant censorship pressure and threats to his professional existence, Tatarsky had been impatiently pawing the ground for a long time, looking for independence. In early 1988, the newly established state agency VideoFilm offered him work in an autonomous production unit, within its structure and budget. The unit was formed by the autumn, and the core team moved out of Multtelefilm. By then, however, a new law let so-called cooperatives operate as quasi-private enterprises in certain areas, and so the Pilot Studio was finally born as the first studio of its kind.⁷²

VideoFilm remained as an exclusive customer, and also provided some equipment and facilities assistance. The new entity was still on state financing, but it would soon be the first to also earn money on advertising and the like. Almost immediately, it became an important force in the industry and the guild.⁷³

The first Pilot production was an anthology of ultra-short subjects, *Lift* (The Elevator: the first three films in 1989, the following three in 1991–92). Some of the former team's animators debuted on them as directors, including Evgeniy Delyusin, Andrey Svislotsky and Dmitri Naumov. The anthology presented the founder's artistic ideology, combining exquisite auteur stylistics with democratically approachable spectacle, which the directors preferred to play out in unabashed farces.⁷⁴

An entire new generation of directors advanced onto the stage. These were mainly the graduates of Higher Courses for directors and screenwriters, taught by Khitruk, Kachanov, Kurchevsky, Norstein, Khrzhanovsky, Nazarov and other masters. Some managed to debut at Soyuzmultfilm – for example, Mikhail Aldashin with his film *Kéle* (co-directed with Pehep Pedmanson, 1988, a fresh

and genuine variation on Chukchee folklore). Another was Ivan Maksimov with *FRU-89. Sleva napravo* (FRU-89. From Left to Right, 1989).⁷⁵

Both directors would release their second films just a year later, already on the Pilot label. Maksimov's quietly original *5/4*, based on the famous Desmond-Brubeck tune, was a real breakthrough. At Multtelefilm, Vladlen Barbe made a segment in the Tatarsky-led anthology, Rubik's Cube Clownade. He followed it up in 1988 with a sharp and audacious parody of a popular tale, *Grom ne gryanet* (Without the Growl of Thunder, 1988).

Unusually numerous, talented newcomers were concentrated in the Urals city of Sverdlovsk,⁷⁶ where an animation division at the regional film studio had been doing minor production since the early 1970s.⁷⁷ Aleksey Karaev (born 1954) debuted as early as 1982, but it was his third directorial work, *Kot v kolpake* (The Cat in the Hat, 1984, from Dr. Seuss's classic), that attracted attention for its skill, playful gags and imagination. The following films, *Dobro pozhalovat!* (Welcome! 1986, another Dr. Seuss entry), and especially *Zhiltsy starogo doma* (The Dwellers of the Old House, 1988, from the Soviet classic Konstantin Paustovsky), tilted towards touching lyricism and a gentle, painterly style.

Oksana Cherkasova (born 1951) showed a strong devotion to, and deep understanding of, indigenous Siberian folklore. Her films included *Kutkh i mysh* (Kutkh and the Mouse, 1985) and *Beskrylyi gusyonok* (Wingless Gosling, 1987). The latter was a masterpiece, penetrating the mythological consciousness with a high primitivist style. She then switched to more contemporary 'village folk tall tales', spinning yarns in *Delo proshloe* (Let Bygones Be Bygones, 1989), which was just as genuine in spirit and style.

⁷²The founding members of the 'cooperative' were Tatarsky, Kovalyov, creative producer Anatoly Prokhorov and producer Igor Gelashvili. The studio was planned to become a multifaceted enterprise, to cover artistic and commercial production; the plan was also that it would provide its own training and even theoretical research and publishing.

Curiously, the formation of Pilot coincided with the first visit to Moscow of a Disney studio delegation. Khitruk, who was receiving the honourable guests, took them to this brand-new institution, where hosts decided to use the occasion for an impromptu inauguration with red tape snapping and friendly banquette. So, 'It appeared [. . .] that Pilot was officially opened by Khitruk together with Roy Disney', as Andrei Svislotsky recalls. See Fedor Khitruk, *Professia – animator* (Profession – Animator), in two volumes, Moscow: Live Book, 2008, Vol. 2, pp. 278–279.

⁷³For a detailed account of early Pilot history, people and work, see Mikhail Gurevich, *Nezavisimye* (The Independent Ones), *Iskusstvo Kino* (Cinema Art), No. 11, 1992, Moscow.

⁷⁴Here also one finds examples of visual jokes, sometimes pregnant with direct political connotations but also with a broader, philosophical irony.

⁷⁵At Soyuzmultfilm, a notable film in this regard was the dashing, grotesque *Medvezhut* (Bear/night/mare, 1988) by the trio of director-friends Vasiliy Kafanov, Aleksey Shelmanov, and Aleksey Turkus.

⁷⁶Later the prerevolutionary name Yekaterinburg was reinstated.

⁷⁷This was mostly in puppet animation; the principal director of the time was Valery Fomin (born 1939).

Vladimir Petkevich (born 1952) debuted with *Noch* (Night, 1984), from a short story by Andrey Platonov, an ‘underground genius’ of mid-century Soviet literature. It was an impressive meditative étude in dark graphics. He followed it with the exquisitely developed, densely poetic children’s film *Skazochka pro kozyavochku* (Little Tale of a Little Beetle, 1985), which made use of sand animation and painting. It was followed by more adult, heavily existential parables: *Derevo Rodiny* (The Motherland’s Tree, 1987), *Kak stat chelovekom* (How to Become a Man, 1988) and *Kharanitel* (The Guardian, 1989). After 1990, Petkevich moved to Belarus and worked in Minsk.

Aleksandr Petrov (born 1957) started as a designer for Petkevich, Karaev and others.⁷⁸ Later he began the painstaking painting on glass that became his trademark, with *Korova* (The Cow), released under the Pilot label in 1989. A year later, it won him his first Oscar nomination and other awards. There was also the bright, strange debut of former artist Sergey Ainutdinov: *Amentisia* (Amentia, 1990). The film’s content fitted the title; it and Ainutdinov’s later work had the theme of ‘sarcastic psychiatry’.

In October 1989, the first All-Union animation festival was held in Kiev. There were about seventy films in competition from some twenty studios. The Grand Prix went to *Dom Kultury* (Culture Centre, a satirical slap by Riho Unt. Pilot won awards both for *Lift* and the first personal project of Igor Kovalyov, *Yego zhena kuritsa* (Hen His Wife).

The new generation was on the rise; the genre system and aims shifting, geography widening as artists entered from Estonia, Armenia, Kazakhstan and other territories and the industry decentralizing, with fresh themes and ideas being introduced. Several general paradigms were noticeable, from ‘Norsteinian’ to ‘Estonian’. There were conflicts between commercial inclination and auteur ambition, traditionalist and modernizing stylistics, all in the broader context of the Soviet empire.

The most important cultural gesture of perestroika animation, on the nature of personal and artistic freedom, came in Estonian Priit Pärn’s *Breakfast on the Grass*. The most politicized utterances came perhaps in the Armenian Robert Saakyants’ films, *Wind* and *Button*.

Arguably, this period sees the advent of the Second New Wave in animation (after the one in the early 1960s), within the USSR and Russia proper as well.

Through the three days and nights of the attempted coup in August 1991, Pilot artists drew nonstop. A couple of days later, they showed a two-minute cartoon *Putsch*, probably the best farewell to a historic era.

More About It

Russian-American critic Mikhail Gurevich wrote the following essay for this book: *Dream of Eternity, Lullaby of Re-birth – Notes on Re-reading Tale of Tales*.

Many decades after its creation, *Tale of Tales*, repeatedly recognized as the greatest animated film of all time, remains an enigmatic masterpiece. Its meaning or message is not fully deciphered. The film’s charm and power are indisputable and irresistible; and yet, complete and concrete understanding escapes us somehow.

When I first attempted reading this film back in 1987, not much of the (recorded) discourse around it had been yet generated. By now, however, it is probably the most reflected upon animated film in history; especially, and mostly through the self-reflection of the director Yuri Norstein himself, in his numerous lectures, talks and interviews (which were eventually collected/re-edited into several books). Virtually every move and image is described and attributed, in terms of origins and connotations, and put tightly within the film-(making) context. And yet, one hardly finds an explicit articulation of the film’s ultimate goal or message.

A book appeared in English, by Clare Kitson, to justified acclaim. It was a detailed, nearly exhaustive account of the work process, the surrounding circumstances, the real life context and such. Yet the book culminated in just a descriptive record of the film material in the final cut, presented in its entirety and in every minor move or device – but with no inclination to interpretive reading per se.

This kind of a ‘perception gap’ must have something to do with the artistic nature of the subject at hand, with its poetics and structure.

. . . An old house, boarded-up windows, a stove, and fire in the stove, and an old woman in its reflected light; a yard, an old tree; the fire from burning leaves, which vanishes after a brief flash; and a sparse, ghostly little wood. Earlier, an old-fashioned, wretched street light over a tiny dance floor; and men, torn from the dance by the crackle as the gramophone needle is plucked off, and a rainproof marquee, extending into the sky, and women’s eerily solitary tango, an invalid accordion player, tears on the glass; and then, throughout, a strange creature staring fixedly at everything . . .

And there are also other worlds – dimensions of existence – parallel ones, separate in style and storyline. Another house, by the sea, and a family, a bull (a Minotaur?), and a poet, and a passer-by. And yet *another* family, on their Sunday walk; a woman with a high hat, a man with a bottle, a boy with an apple, and crows in snow. Here and there, a day in life; in its simplest and main elements. And in both places there is a child: a happy slip of a girl participating in the ritual flow of the everyday; and a poor little boy, held tightly by the hand, but deprived of anything worth participating in, a dreamer and a rebel alone within and by himself.

Three worlds, three planes (and correspondingly, a stylistic collage of clearly ‘quoted’ styles); three dimensions, separated – is it by space or time? A shabby and dear past, warmly mythologized;

a mask-wearing present, vulgar and itchy and still deserving compassion; and the mysteriously transparent, elemental, so close, Eternity.

The narrative structure of *Tale of Tales* is not exactly memory-like (as suggested, for example, by Mikhail Iampolsky), and it does not simply consist of recollection (as this critic had argued earlier). Rather its nature is oneiric. The film is an oneiric screen, where even the fleshly real images with straightforward connotations inevitably acquire a degree of conditionality. The Reality of this dream world doubles and reduplicates itself, blurring in the gallery of mirrors. At the same time, in a paradoxical way, the Reality is also obtaining a new degree of substantive density.

Actually somebody complicates things: it's the 'agent' of the dream(s), the Little Wolf. The character himself is an oneiric element, a chimera of dreams. *Tale of Tales* is the dream about a vision, a fantasy of insight, a dreamy state of awakening. It is about awakening, after all, most of all; if not a spiritual awakening, then one of the mind and soul.

So this is more or less the topic. How is the film told? By the blissful mumbling of a child's dream; by the blissful self-sufficiency of a poetic speech. There is a common world, a common ground for all the things and beings here – the world of the film itself, the *whole* of the author's utterance. It is sewn through with many reiterated and harsh threads – refrains, repetitions, momentary flashes: a dry leaf, gliding down to the ground, an echelon, marching past, violent tapping, and the table-cloth, flying down off the tables, covering the whole town . . .

For that is how a lyrical narrative takes shape, in a 'lyrical induction' (Lidia Ginzburg's term). It is an attribute of the poetry of our age: from the specific to the general; from the concrete, the detailed, and the material to the existential.

Tale of Tales is a poetic utterance par excellence. It is shaped, basically, after literary examples, as verse (one more testament to the literary-cantered nature of the Russian culture-mentality). It is worth clarifying the film's more precise references to literary sources. It borrows its title from a short poem of Nazym Khikmet, the Turkish political émigré in Soviet Union. However, Norstein's poetics is closer to the more sophisticated modernist lyrics of the twentieth century; in terms of the interplay between the implicit motifs-impulses and the explicit moves-images that will manifest them.

In Russian tradition, the ultimate representative of this approach is the poetry of Osip Mandelstam. At first glance, it is an often totally enigmatic free flight of seemingly unrelated, albeit strikingly precise, tropes. However, under close reading-analysis, they reveal an absolute coherence and iron-cast logic in their unwinding of metaphors into the narrative of meaning. The resembling mechanism is at work: a flow of free distant associations, visualized impressions, pregnant with metaphors, which are nevertheless solidly grounded and interlinked on a deeper level, beyond the frame and off the screen.

Now let's risk losing the poetic nerve, and try to ground this thorough vision in historic reality, in space and time, starting with the plain topography. The neighbourhood of Maryina Roshcha (which the director constantly evokes as a 'holy land' of his childhood and a principal protoplast of the filmic space) is not really a Moscow

suburb, as some Western commentators would hold. A long time back, it was a town's woody edge (as its very name hints: *roshcha* stands for 'grove'). Then it was a shabby, sort of blue collar, tenement barracks outskirts, notorious for its low-life hide-outs. Now it lies practically within the city's central belt, a fifteen- to twenty-minute bus ride from the Red Square vicinity, halfway to the TV tower and broadcasting centre Ostankino.

Yuri Norstein left the neighbourhood around 1967. I moved in maybe the same or the next year, but already it was a different environment. My family left communal dwelling in the central quarters for a separate-individual apartment here; the same reason drove Norstein from the area. The sign of changing times – a changing era, in fact – took place gradually, from the early 1960s on. Old tenement buildings, or 'barracks' in common lingo, were demolished to give place for a new variety of more or less the same: pre-fabricated panel middle-rises, usually 5-storied in the first generation.

But still, the change wasn't merely technical. Essential ideological shifts ensued. In one of her most remarkable and revealing sketch drawings, Francesca Yarusova, who was *Tale of Tales*' designer and Norstein's wife, shows the entire block of barracks-houses, linked like train cars, start to burn and bend upwards into the sky, as if about to take off, to fly away. The entire way of life, a complete universe was being pushed aside by bulldozers. Norstein was not the only one who felt phantom limb pain. It was a common theme in the literature, theatre and film of the period: meditations on the loss, nostalgia for the poor and pure past.

Some authors would look deeper and sharper. Yuri Trifonov's novella *Exchange* alluded not only to an apartment swap, but to betrayal and the sell-off of moral values and ethical codes that all come along the process. It seems that Norstein shares, to an extent, this kind of sentiment. The 'classic' Soviet history and way of life was ending, transforming into the late degenerative phase. This was essentially, neo-petit-bourgeois – a tangible departure from the (proclaimed and in some sense interiorized) austerity, sacrificial spirit and 'equality in the common misery' of the heroic and tragic era.

In a clear way, though obliquely and metaphorically, *Tale of Tales* documents the dubious nature of the emasculated ideological empire, trying to adjust somewhat to 'normal' human conditions, at the price of gradual decline and moral disrepair.

In the world(s) of *Tale of Tales*, those 'eras' and 'codes' are manifested by almost direct juxtapositions of their material epitomes. There is, for example, a rusty-old sewing machine of the once reputable German brand Singer (that likely served the needs of the entire apartment block for generations), versus a glossy-new Zhiguli compact car, the first to be mass-produced, under Fiat license at a turn-key purchased plant. There are palpable-sensible signs of change – remember how Little Wolf swings on the treadmill of the Singer, and steps off to look into the car's wheel cap, as if into a magic mirror.

In the film's virtual space and time, Little Wolf is the 'missing link' between the worlds. He is either the liaison or the spy who penetrates them all. He can go out of the old house through the luminous door, leading into the eternal one; and he can even come

back. But, for some deeper reason, he cannot go into the snowy park of the *present*. That path is locked, and *that* boy is not under his wing. As an old dwelling's house spirit. Little Wolf materializes when the walls are falling: exactly on this crucial divide (in the late 1960s or early 1970s) rather than in (post)war time.

Norstein himself, born in 1941, certainly carries the war in his bones, not as an actual conscious experience, but rather as a family-community memory. It is exactly through the imagery and tone of the impersonal-common recollection that this motif plays out in the film. But there is more to that. This is a *collectivist* experience-memory par excellence. And it is exactly the collectivist ethics, the code of conduct – presumably, the core facet of ideology's 'human face', and the corner stone in the communal survival – that is being washed away by the flow of time.

Houses with their backyards, and street corners under the lamp-post, and the tables put together – none of them can escape the bulldozers, can fly to the heavens. Only the village-long table-cloth will wind itself into a strange ball in the mid-air. The ethical foundation of existence (and of educating, of bringing up the new generation) is gone. New times are marching – and they are like the new Iron Age, deprived of bygone warmth and depth and tragic clarity.

Another foundation is needed. Will it be an *individualistic* one? Not exactly, or not necessarily so. The Little Wolf, the lyric protagonist, as well as the actual author behind him, are rather left striving for yet another community, if only of a different kind. They seem to have discovered a *virtual* one, in the (mythologized) depths of cultural tradition and artistic canon. The fisherman fishes, the mother nurses the child, the Bull swings the rope, the girl stamps her feet, and the poet twangs the lyre. It's a community where they all are of equal rights and merits; where, once again, they all have a place at the same table – the true golden age, this harmony of simple existence.

The artist would keep, nonetheless, full responsibility for all the dust and groans of the generation's common fate, of the flow of history. This moral obligation is not cast off. The same goes for this poor, dear, tragic, zany, immortal baseness of the everyday. That's why there is so much concealed pain in the grotesque parable about the family walk in the wintry public garden. All obligations are still valid. Simply, the artist's true place, his ecological niche, is *there*.

The principal undertaking of the 1970s generation (that is to say, the 'progressive' intelligentsia, except for the thin layer of dissidents and a much thicker layer of those who would choose hopeless conformity if not the officialdom), was a quasi-spiritual journey 'inside themselves'. An escape, if you will – but as a *way out*. In the wake of reaction that followed Khrushchev's 1960s 'Thaw', here comes the quest for a (new) cultural identity, realized mainly through immersion, study and quiet experimentation. In a sense, this dim time was perhaps the most fruitful period in the late Soviet era.

Here is a telling example, immediately related to our theme. Andrei Khrzhanovsky's *Pushkin Trilogy*, for all its uniqueness and exposure as a cross-genre experiment, was almost an emblematic cultural gesture of the time. Attempting to put into play the very texture of the poet's manuscripts, animating his draft drawing as a backdrop to a rich textual collage of verses, letters, diaries and

such, Khrzhanovsky was trying to reacquire the most sacred icon of the national culture, long expropriated and exploited by both officialdom and mass culture, to revisit and to revive his figure, drawing out, in essence, existential lessons.

While the *Tale of Tales* project was hanging in a limbo at its preliminary stage, Norstein was invited by a colleague-friend to join an exceptional gang of collaborators: a couple of the best Russian dramatic actors, the great composer Alfred Schnittke. While animating Pushkin's self-portraits in *Pushkin Trilogy* – essentially, playing the poet's part – Norstein was also taking part in a larger game of deconstructing and reconstructing a cultural mythology. His bold acting here was daringly liberating. Norstein, practically a self-made artistic personality, remarkably self-educated through a laborious personal journey, accomplishes his own breakthroughs within the broader quest; absorbing, naturally, various influences, helped by co-workers and the friendly circle, but still succeeding as if by a sheer power of intuitive insight.

Little Wolf, left alone on the waste ground, with no one to scare and to nurture, flees to the eternal shores – and engages in an act of 'cultural introspection'. He reaches for an empty page, coming to surmise that word equals life. Then it is no wonder – though still the boldest of metaphors – that the scroll would indeed come to envelop a newborn. Isn't it what he was longing for? – the empty nest guardian angel . . .

The new child will grow up here, at the ashes of hearth and home; but he had come from *there*. And the luminous sheet of paper that Little Wolf steals from the Poet (who is not accidentally a kind of a composite of many poets, from Pushkin to Mandelstam to Gumilev, with hints of others and more) is the deed of estate. Here is inscribed the Word, the genetic code of culture, inherited by the newborn and the artist. While Little Wolf's job is still the same; to sing this old lullaby, so that it too would be memorized . . .

Aesthetically, *Tale of Tales* encompasses, it may seem, too much of a territory. This is really a 'mill of styles', from Picasso to Chagall to Russian folk primitivism of the nineteenth century and Soviet book illustration of 1930s. The styles include, strange as it may seem, some that are trite and trivial, and overexploited as propagandistic-kitschy cliché imagery, especially those on the 'war' theme. The same goes to certain filmic devices that look like unabashed borrowings from the Soviet cinema of the somewhat affectedly pathetic kind (along, however, with visual quotations from Tarkovsky's *Mirror*); and even to the music score, in which sweet and stale tango intertwines with Bach and Mozart.

Yet, we tend to happily accept this neo-eclectics, and to perceive all the unevenness as strength, not weakness. True son of the land and time, this artist is luckily free of snobbish limitations of refinement. His ethos presumes fidelity to all the facets and manifestations of common experience. He embraces this universe of the everyday and its historical-cultural context, together with his own artistic quest – as a (stylistic) whole, equalizing all the elements and harmonizing them in the thin air of higher purpose.

And that is, in part, what makes *Tale of Tales* such a masterpiece across national identities. Being an unquestionable example of high-brow auteur cinema, the film is yet a democratic utterance, open to everyone willing to watch and feel.