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## From Family Reintegration to Carnivalistic Degradation: Dismantling Soviet Communal Myths in Russian Cinema of the Mid-1990s

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# FROM FAMILY REINTEGRATION TO CARNIVALISTIC DEGRADATION: DISMANTLING SOVIET COMMUNAL MYTHS IN RUSSIAN CINEMA OF THE MID-1990S

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The art of the marketplace is the art the people choose by purchasing it, not the art that guardians of the state and culture impose on them. As such for Bakhtin, marketplace art can become a tool of freedom.

— William Paul (110)

Several recent publications about Russian cinema and culture of the 1990s have addressed the search for a new communal identity in post-Soviet cinema.<sup>1</sup> My article here focuses on what I see as Russian cinema's coming to terms with the death of Soviet communal identities in this transitional decade. The defunct myths of communal identity that filmmakers continued revisiting in the cinema of the mid-1990s included the following: the Great Soviet Family led by the state leader; the Great Russian Family led by the Russian intelligentsia; a nuclear family as an alternative to the monumental Great Soviet Family; the small village community as an alternative to the hypocrisy of city life; and the Oriental other as the spiritual alternative to the emptiness of modern civilization. Russian cinema of the mid-1990s was primarily concerned with dismantling these mythological communities while searching for new narrative strategies and visual iconography.

Emerging as it did from more than seventy years of the Soviet experiment, post-Soviet cinema inevitably had to deal with the Soviet myth of the Great Family as the key trope of social organization underlying all other variants of Soviet communality. Katerina Clark noted in this context that

the Soviets focused on the primordial attachments of kinship and projected them as the dominant symbol of social allegiance. Soviet society's leaders became fathers (with Stalin as the patriarch); the national heroes, model "sons"; the state, a "family" or "tribe" [...] (the succession of generations in the "family" stands in for the succession of political leaders and for Stalin's accession to power after Lenin's death [...]). (114–15)

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1. See Beumers 1999 and Larsen.

The Stalinist myth of the Great Family provided a special place for the deracinated protagonist, usually an orphan who “naturally” shed the nuclear family in the turmoil of revolutionary change. Hence, he did not have to deal with a conflict of interests—to choose between allegiance to his nuclear family or to the state family—but could dedicate himself entirely to the latter, which provided him with a readymade value system and a goal, that is, with a stable identity. The orphan also played the role of a clean slate for the new ideology; the story of his reintegration into the Great Soviet Family was one of the major variants of the Socialist Realist master plot.

Post-Stalinist Soviet cinema gradually dismantled the myth of the Great Soviet Family by making it less monumental and more tolerant of individual agency. Fathers became more maternal.<sup>2</sup> Brothers or orphans formed surrogate families, in which the older male played the role of the father figure, while the younger fulfilled the role of the son.<sup>3</sup> Ideological fathers turned into ghosts and dream visions.<sup>4</sup> By the end of perestroika the official mythology was defunct, together with the Soviet film industry. The demise of the Great Soviet Family left post-Soviet cinematic characters deracinated, lacking a sense of stable family and national identity. Consequently, the Russian film hero of this transitional decade is a wanderer and an outsider, displaced, and often ignorant of the language of the community within which he finds himself. He therefore seeks an analogous replacement for the Soviet community that has been lost.

By the mid-1990s Russian cinema had started rethinking its revolutionary experience of perestroika and the first post-Soviet years. Two distinctive ideological trends came out of this reevaluation of the Soviet collapse. One is the cinema that draws on the tradition of Russian classical humanist literature—that of Aleksandr Pushkin, Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, and Lev Tolstoi. Critics noted that in the twentieth century this tradition continued in the official Socialist Realist literature as well as in the literature of dissidents, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who offered their version of humanism as an alternative to Soviet humanism (Erofeev xiii).<sup>5</sup> Arguably, this is also the mainstream tradition of Stalinist and post-Stalinist Soviet cinema, driven by the values of the Enlightenment, belief in the inherent goodness and rationality of human nature, and hope for a perfect community in the remote or immediate future.

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2. See such films as Sergei Bondarchuk's *Fate of a Man* (1959), Georgy Danelia and Igor Talankin's *Serezha* (1960), Tatiana Lioznova's *Evdokia* (1961).

3. See, for example, Marlen Khutsiev's *Spring on Zarechnaia Street* (1957) and *Two Fedors* (1958).

4. See Grigory Kozintsev's adaptation of *Hamlet* (1964) and Khutsiev's *Lenin's Guard* (1962).

5. I would suggest, although this is not a topic of this paper, that the cinema of the major *auteur* filmmakers of the 1980s and 1990s, Aleksei German, Kira Muratova, and Alexander Sokurov, belongs to this anti-enlightenment trend of Russian culture.

The other trend draws on the tradition of Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Sologub, Andrei Platonov, Vladimir Nabokov, and Varlam Shalamov—the anti-humanist *fleurs du mal* of Russian literature, in the words of Viktor Erofeev. This cultural tradition favors carnivalistic degradation and ambiguity, displays the body in its gross manifestations, and privileges the chronotope of liminal spaces. This tradition also questions the possibility of establishing cause and effect relations in a narrative. Hence, the textual diegesis in this tradition has no historical teleology. Moreover, in post-Soviet texts belonging to this tradition, there is no attempt to blame the Soviet past for the current economic and social chaos. In other words, in this irrationalist trend of Russian culture, humanism and reason themselves appear as dangerous and misleading illusions. Soviet experience provides ample evidence of the failure of human reason, but it is viewed as part of a general and ongoing “dialogue with chaos” (Lipovetsky 31).<sup>6</sup> In what follows, I investigate the dynamics of the two ideological trends, humanist and postmodern irrationalist, in the cinema of the mid-1990s as exemplified by four films: *Prisoner of the Mountains* (Kavkazskii plennik, Bodrov 1996), *Muslim* (Musul'manin, Khotinenko 1995), *Window to Paris* (Okno v Parizh, Mamin 1994), and *Particularities of National Hunting in the Autumn* (Osobennosti natsional'noi okhoty v osennii period, Rogozhkin 1995).

These two melodramas (*Prisoner of the Mountains* and *Muslim*) and two comedies (*Window to Paris* and *Particularities of National Hunting*) recycle the myths of Russo-Soviet communal identities. *Prisoner of the Mountains* and *Window to Paris* return to the nineteenth-century ideology of Enlightenment-driven humanism and in this respect attempt to revive Soviet cinematic traditions, while suggesting the possibility of Russia's renewal. *Muslim* and *Particularities*, on the other hand, explore the possibilities of popular cinema beyond Russo-Soviet Enlightenment. Most importantly, these films treat Soviet and Russian imperial communities as surviving beyond the political dissolution of the Soviet Union. Bodrov and Mamin displace the causes of Russia's social ills onto the Soviet past, while presenting Russian imperial mythology as a source of redemption. For Khotinenko and Rogozhkin, Soviet imperial mythology used to provide a thin veneer of humanity, an ideological cover-up disguising a chaotic animalistic existence. The hardships of this existence do not ennoble, and the ideas of humanism and progress are illusions hardly explaining anything about the way the Russian national community operates. While other films of the decade, and especially the mid-1990s, provide additional support for my argument and I will mention them in passing, my discussion focuses on these four films because, in my opinion, they suc-

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6. I follow Lipovetsky's notion of dialogue with chaos as central for the postmodernist notion of paralogical knowledge. Rather than resolving contradictions, this form of knowledge “leads to a new intellectual space for the constant interaction of binary oppositions” (31).

cinctly demonstrate cinematic representations of the society's crisis of identity while simultaneously exemplifying two ideological trends of post-Soviet cinema: quasi-Soviet humanism and postmodern questioning of the possibility of human community built on the principles of rationality and social progress.

My examination of Russian cinema's role in the post-Soviet identity search takes its inspiration from Roland Barthes's definition of the myth's main operating principle: "It transforms history into Nature" (1982, 116). In *Image-Music-Text*, Barthes defines myth as follows:

Myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the "natural." What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural, and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a "matter of course"; under the effect of mythical inversion, the quite contingent foundations of the utterance become Common Sense, Right Reason, the Norm, the General Opinion. (1977, 165)

The displaced protagonist looking for a new community in the films of the 1990s naturalizes the crisis of Russian imperial identity and the urgent need for alternative communal models.

#### *Melodramatic Imagination: Hope vs. Despair*

The dismantling of defunct communities and the search for an alternative identity in the mid-1990s produced a series of films dealing directly or indirectly with Russia's post-colonial wars.<sup>7</sup> These wars were humiliating defeats for the Soviet and Russian military and are associated with the dissolution of the Soviet Empire. In the mid-1990s Sergei Bodrov, Sr., in *Prisoner of the Mountains* and Nikolai Khotinenko in *Muslim* addressed the theme of the cultural fragmentation of the common Soviet family and the need for new identities and languages to come out of the post-Soviet cultural war zone. Both films took recent wars, the Afghan and the First Chechen, as the point of departure and provided somewhat similar narrative schemes, with a protagonist deprived of his previous Soviet identity, having experienced the harmonious identity of the ethnic and religious other, and now confronted with the issue of redefining Russia's own communal identity. Both filmmakers use the family melodrama, a genre focusing on the nuclear family's struggle with the forces of modernity, as a vehicle for their respective identity search stories. Both filmmakers rely on the language barrier as a device to emphasize the fragmentation of the post-Soviet world and the need to articulate a new common ground. The communication barrier serves as a metaphor for cultural alienation and a prologue to physical violence and war. Each protagonist has to overcome linguistic and cultural alienation so as to rebuild his own community. Bodrov in his *Prisoner of the Mountains* follows the tradition of Russian classical literature by taking an Orientalist look at the Caucasus. The filmmaker compares unfavorably the

7. For a detailed discussion of Russian war films of the 1990s see Beumers 2000.

corrupt Soviet civilization with the community of primitive but noble savages. This community provides an example of stable national and family community. Khotinenko, on the other hand, focuses on Russian national and family identity and finds little hope in either.

Bodrov relies heavily on the themes and devices of the Russian version of Orientalism.<sup>8</sup> The title of his film evokes poems by Aleksandr Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, and uses the plot and characters of Lev Tolstoi's short story, but sets it during the First Chechen War of 1994–1996.<sup>9</sup> From Tolstoi, Bodrov also borrows the ideology of the idealized Oriental other. Tolstoi's Russian protagonists are forced to abandon the world of corrupt civilization when they are captured by the mountaineers of the Caucasus region. In Tolstoi's story, the protagonists come into contact with the organic identity of noble "savages" and then return to their corrupt civilized community. Bodrov changes Tolstoi's plot, for Vania returns to Russia, while Sasha (Oleg Men-shikov) perishes. Unlike Vania, Sasha follows the habits of his Soviet upbringing and his doing so eventually leads to his death. He follows the fate of his country, the Soviet Union, while Vania survives, albeit his future is as unclear as the fate of his new country, post-Soviet Russia.

As the more porous and flexible protagonist of *Prisoner of the Mountains*, Vania (Sergei Bodrov, Jr.) can observe and is even willing to accept the simplicity and harmony of the Oriental other. Bodrov's Vania is in part a natural man himself, born too late to enter Soviet civilization and never able to enter any other. Hence, he easily adjusts to the harmony of the savages and finds common ground with the local girl, Dina (Susanna Merkhaliyeva). Blessed by literary models of nineteenth-century Russian literature, the love story between the savage girl and the Russian captive provides the missing piece in the harmonious, gentrified, and literary world of Bodrov's film. Notably, despite Vania's lack of knowledge of the mountaineers' religion, tradition or language, he experiences few communication problems while interacting with his captor, Abdul-Murat (Dzhemal Sikharulidze), and his daughter, Dina.

The film implies that Vania can communicate with the noble savages but cannot be integrated into their community because he lacks both the faith and the language that unify the world of natural savages. Moreover, he keeps his allegiance to the Russian Army, which in the film represents the surviving Soviet state family. The film opens with shots of newly drafted soldiers walking naked through the offices of medical doctors who confirm their ability to serve in the army. The scene acquires a symbolic meaning representing the protagonist's birth as the son of the Great State Family—the army. Having be-

8. For a discussion of the Russian inflection of orientalist ideology as represented by nineteenth-century imperial culture see Layton. See also Michaels's analysis of colonialist discourses in Bodrov's film.

9. For a thorough discussion of the uses of Russian literary classics in Russian films of the 1990s, and specifically *Prisoner of the Mountains*, see Gillespie 121–24.

come the son, Vania acquires numerous father figures—his commanders. Two of them, Vania's sergeant, Sasha Kostylin, and the Russian commander handling the negotiations with the locals, Colonel Maslov, have one thing in common: everything they say is a lie. The commander does not try to release Vania and Sasha when they get captured. Sasha lies about his heroic past and his family—his father, a general, and his mother, a ballerina. According to the film, the difference between the father and the son in the state family is in the fact that father figures know that they are lying, while the sons sincerely believe the fathers' lies.

The film also implies that Vania is not so much a slave of the mountaineers as a slave of the Russian Army, because he believes the lies of his father-commanders and is simply sacrificed by his false fathers in the dirty war that they conduct in order to maintain their corrupt rule. The film, for example, depicts officers exchanging weaponry for vodka at local stores. One of these weapons later is used by the local guerillas to kill Russian soldiers. Vania is just another exchange commodity in the Russian commanders' ongoing profiteering from bloodshed and chaos. In fact, only when Vania ends up in Abdul-Murat's family does his slave status, which originates in his service to the state, become clear to him. Simple mountaineers help him realize his identity: his status as a virtual slave in the Russian Army whose life has already been written off as a negligible loss. Vania's being literally chained to his Soviet-style sergeant points to the source of his enslavement. Notably, the elders in the mountaineers' village demand that Abdul-Murat get rid of the soldier-slaves. They sense intuitively that the very presence of the Russians corrupts their community and will lead to its eventual demise.

*Prisoner of the Mountains* also separates the state, as the official community, from the motherland, which is a spiritual community. This separation dates from the Thaw (see Grigory Chukhrai's *Ballad of a Soldier*, 1959) but was never clearly articulated because the rhetoric of official Soviet ideology purposely merged the Russian state and the spiritual community. One of the most graphic examples of such a policy is Stalin's decision to use the Russian Orthodox Church in the state propaganda effort against the Nazis. Bodrov Sr. separates the state and the spiritual community clearly and unambiguously. Vania's spiritual community is his small family, consisting of mother and son, a narrative and visual incarnation of Russia's most famous icon genre, the *Theotokos*. In the film, Vania's mother is a teacher, that is, an intellectual who serves her people. Thus, she is an ideal member of the intelligentsia, combining kenotic self-sacrifice with service to her people. She comes to the fortress to intercede on behalf of her son and is capable of finding a common language with Abdul-Murat. She and Vania form a spiritual community that has nothing in common with the state. The mother figure is juxtaposed to the military commander Maslov, Vania's surrogate state father. Thus, the film juxtaposes not only the simple life of the Oriental family to the pseudo-family of the

Russian Army, but also the nuclear Russian family, the spiritual community, to the Russian Army as the heir of Soviet totalitarianism.

Bodrov Sr. rejects the Great Soviet Family of the past and its surviving remnants in the present. However, in the good tradition of Soviet-era cinema, the filmmaker suggests the possibility of reconciling the communities of the former Soviet empire. Vania's ability to communicate with the idealized people of the mountains saves his life and provides a utopian hope for the possibility of bringing together the fragmented cultures and identities of the former Soviet Empire. This hope, however, does not save the people of the mountains who spare Vania's life at the film's end. When he is on the road returning from captivity, he desperately tries to stop gunships that are heading in the opposite direction to annihilate the locale of the Oriental idyll.<sup>10</sup> The film suggests that, while the fictional Orient might be the site of faith and family values, this ideal Oriental other is by no means compatible with the remaining brutal state community, represented in the film by the Russian Army. Unfortunately, Russia remains a land controlled by this totalitarian juggernaut. Perhaps Vania learns something from the noble savages who save him from death and bondage, and will be able to use this knowledge to build a free, non-violent Russian family. The major source of evil lies in the Soviet past, while the Tolstoyan humanist tradition, supposedly, is a way out of the impasse of the Great Soviet Family. *Prisoner of the Mountains* is a post-Soviet remake of the Soviet war melodrama of hope and redemption, fake and nauseatingly sentimental. In the final analysis, the only winner in this film is the father figure who represents a recast version of the Great Soviet Family—the liar and murderer, Colonel Maslov. Everyone else is humiliated and insulted, if not killed.

Whereas Bodrov Sr. presents his protagonist's entry into the world of the Oriental other to exemplify an ideal communal other, Khotinenko's *Muslim* uses the idealized Oriental other as a red herring. In this melodrama of captivity and return, the filmmaker takes the Russian soldier Kolia and brings him back from seven years of captivity in Afghanistan to Russia's heartland, the post-Soviet Russian village. Khotinenko and his scriptwriter, Valery Zolotukha, avoid Russian cities where Western-style capitalism has replaced Soviet communism as the model for the brave new world and go where the spiritual roots supposedly are: traditional rural Russia in the middle of fields and forests. The narrative goal of *Muslim* is the same as that of Bodrov's *Prisoner*—to explore the possible communal identities that could replace the defunct Great Soviet Family.

*Muslim* picks up where *Prisoner of the Mountains* leaves off, taking the return of the protagonist, Kolia Ivanov (Evgeny Mironov), from Afghan captivity as its point of departure. Kolia returns to his native village as a believer in

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10. Bodrov's ending pays homage to the tradition of American films about the Vietnam War, above all, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979).



Allah.<sup>11</sup> Kolia's conversion occurs when he, in the midst of war, decides to surrender, which the film equates with the decision to stop killing. Kolia is not only converted, but is also adopted by an Afghan family in which, as we are given to understand, he experiences a stable and loving household for the first time in his life. Though an invaluable personal experience, Kolia's new-found faith finds little understanding among his compatriots. Unlike in Bodrov's picture, the ideal spiritual community exists only in Kolia's inner being and is not visible either to the viewers or to Kolia's fellow citizens in the diegetic world of the film. In this respect, viewers and Kolia's compatriots share the point of view on Kolia and his newly acquired set of beliefs. His faith juxtaposes him to the villagers and his family, who lack all belief and whose Russian nationalistic and pseudo-Orthodox discourse disguises the bestial nature of their existence. The key question of the film is whether it is possible for the protagonist to start his life anew amidst people who maintain only a biological sense of community and have virtually abandoned human forms of existence.

Khotinenko's film challenges several post-Soviet assumptions about Russia's post-Soviet renewal. Chief among them are the assumptions that the Great Soviet Family died with the Soviet Union and that current Russian social and spiritual ills originated in the Soviet era. According to the filmmaker, the Great Soviet Family's ideology merely adjusted to a market economy and is thriving. It is presented as the utopianism inspired by Western Enlightenment ideas and used by Russian authorities to exploit and steal from the common folk. The major proponent of this updated version of the Great State Family is the former chairman of the collective farm (Petr Zaichenko), who in the film steals from his fellow villagers by selling their land for dollars, presumably to Western investors. In his demagogical and meaningless speeches, evoking the ramblings of Gogol's Khlestakov, he promises the villagers the coming of a capitalist paradise on Earth. These speeches are evidently no different from the pronouncements that he used to make during the Soviet era; only now he wears an Orthodox cross instead of carrying his Party membership card. Now the ex-chairman of the collective farm is a businessman and the patriarch of the village. He just needs a son to reestablish the Great Soviet Family that will continue ripping off the villagers in the new millennium under the banner of building the brave new world of capitalism. The returning war veteran is the prime candidate for the exemplary son who would be working under the guidance of his ideological father. Kolia's resistance to joining yet another vicious circle of Russian history constitutes the major conflict in the film.

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11. The filmmaker uses Kolia's Islamic faith to defamiliarize the spiritual message for Kolia's compatriots. Kolia's name evokes St. Nicholas, the magic helper of Russian peasants and Russians' most popular saint (Ivanits 24–26). The green color of Islam is mirrored in the pastures of Russia. Kolia's relatives do not notice the harmony hidden in plain view because they are spiritually blind.

Kolia's refusal to participate in the schemes of the ex-chairman notwithstanding, a farcical version of the Great Soviet Family has already formed between the ex-chairman and Kolia's former fiancée (Evdokia Germanova), who was supposed to wait for his return from the army. Instead, she has opted to become a village floozy, trading her sexual favors for the former chairman's dollars. The Soviet-style community, with the father as ideological mentor and the positive hero as disciple, is travestied as the relationship between a corrupt boss buying sex for the greenbacks acquired by stealing from the villagers. This grotesque picture of a carnivalized ideal is complete when the viewers learn the name of Kolia's ex-fiancée—Vera, "faith" in Russian.

Moreover, Khotinenko's film suggests that Russian society is corrupt not only because it used to be controlled by Soviet ideology, but also because there is something inherently bestial about the Russian community itself. In other words, degradation and evil should not be blamed on society; evil, animalistic behavior precedes reason and religious spirituality as the basic layer of the communal way of life. The village is inhabited by people who can hardly sustain bipedalism due to alcoholism and unbearable living conditions.<sup>12</sup> They follow animal instinct rather than observe social taboos. They steal everything they can because they are guided by their survival instinct, like animals, not because there is any social meaning to their behavior. Moral or religious taboos are not even a consideration, as testified by the conflict between Kolia and his family. When his mother asks Kolia to go and steal feed from the state farm for their own cattle and he refuses, she ostracizes him, not even heeding his explanation that his religion forbids theft. Religion or any other form of social taboo has no meaning in her world.

Drinking also appears in the film as a ubiquitous sign of degradation and animalistic behavior. Primal desire for sex and death are satisfied when they arise, with no moral restrictions observed whatsoever. Kolia's father committed suicide in a state of alcoholic delirium and his alcoholic brother almost succeeds in doing so as well, but Kolia stops him. Kolia's former fiancée is compulsive and indiscriminate in her sexual appetite. She takes money when she can, but, as her offer of sex to Kolia suggests, earning money is not her prime goal. Quite simply, there are no social rules in the village; its inhabitants are a pre-human herd forced to co-exist by survival instincts. Notably, shots of a herd of cows, not humans, are among the last shots of the picture.

The filmmaker and his scriptwriter explore corruption as the fundamental human condition as they witness it in contemporary Russia. At film's end, the gigantic pig, a possible homage to Gogol's predilection for this animal as humans' double, emerges from the village pond as the incarnation of the vil-

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12. Ilia Khrzhanovsky's depiction of a Russian village in *4* (2005) appears to be a direct descendant of the Russian village in Khotinenko's *Muslim*.

lagers' bestiality. The mise-en-scène of this scene establishes the unbroken continuity of corrupt existence in the Soviet past and the post-Soviet present. According to the villagers' lore, the Soviets had built the pond during the 1930s to drown the church in it, and the pond turned into a bottomless pit, which villagers are afraid to approach. In a final scene, one of the local bureaucrats, with a briefcase full of dollars stolen from the villagers, passes by the pond and decides to break with tradition by swimming in this man-made passage to hell. He awakens the monstrous pig and in panic drops his American money into the water. Next morning the villagers retrieve the dollars from the water, claiming that they are "manna from heaven." Susan Larsen notes that in these scenes the filmmaker links, not so subtly, the present villagers' greed to the Soviet past (207). I would argue, however, that the gigantic pig that raises its head over the village also provides a metaphor for Russia's ongoing state of chaos and animalism. This state of degradation cannot be reduced to a survival of the Soviet past, but, rather, shows Khotinenko's view of modernity as the condition of the human spirit's degradation. Villagers are dead souls beyond redemption, and in this context the pig's head crowning the Russian village in lieu of the church's dome evokes, appropriately, the cultural tradition of Gogolian grotesque realism, the genre memory of which is essential for Khotinenko's film.

The major achievement of Khotinenko's picture is the devastating depiction of the small family and the small motherland. Russian literature and cinema have a long and venerable tradition of depicting the Russian village as the victim of Stalinist social experimentation. The tradition of village prose and of Thaw cinema about the small motherland contrasts the Russian village as an authentic and spiritual motherland to the monumental, insincere, and soulless fatherland of Soviet modernity. According to this tradition, Russian villagers are indigenous noble savages. Russian humanist literature and late Soviet cinema made them their sweethearts to be protected at any cost.<sup>13</sup> Khotinenko and Zalotukha take a different route. Whatever abuse the village suffered from Soviet modernity did not trigger any spiritual resistance or rebirth. Abuse causes depression and degradation without redemption. In its degeneracy Khotinenko's village matches the Great State community in its post-Soviet incarnation. Khotinenko's film represents decline and fall as a ubiquitous condition, without any historical reference to or blame on the Soviet past and without hope for redemption or revival. In the world of the film, corruption is the essence of Russia's condition, while cause-and-effect references to the Soviet past explain little in the current condition of Russian identity.

Khotinenko denies the village and Kolia's family—quintessential Rus-

13. See, for example, one of the major documentaries of the glasnost era, *Arkhangel'skii muzhik* (*The True Peasant from Arkhangelsk*, Goldovskaia 1986). The film discovers in the forests of Northern Russia a peasant not spoiled by Soviet culture, with whom the spiritual revival of Russia will begin.

sians, with the surname Ivanov—any rights to spiritual authority. Even Kolia's mother is depicted as a character lacking moral integrity and authority. Larsen traces the genealogy of the mother figure to the peasant matriarchs of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Valentin Rasputin, and Nikita Mikhalkov, and emphasizes that Khotinenko's matriarch lacks the moral authority possessed by earlier peasant heroines. Like the rest of the villagers, she steals, drinks, and exists in a world devoid of faith (208). Moreover, she is depicted as a semi-animalistic creature, yet one more specimen of human cattle obedient to her biological fate. Notably, the mother occasionally appears on all fours, evoking simultaneously the image of the monstrous pig crowning the village and the herd of cows in the film's concluding shots. Thus, the villagers' life is not depicted as the repression of natural spirituality by alien urban civilization, but as an organic addition to the corruption of the entire society.

The filmmaker claims that nothing has changed in Russia since the end of the Soviet Union. The old Soviet community and the new Russian community are the same community of human-looking beasts who do not believe in anything. They have simply replaced Soviet posters with Orthodox icons without undergoing any spiritual change. The hero leaves the Soviet Union as the land of bestial spontaneity, acquires consciousness in a Muslim country, and returns to find the same state of communal bestiality in Russia. In his home country he can only lose his acquired consciousness. By preferring not to do so, he gets killed by his former Soviet-era commander. The filmmaker suggests that the problem does not reside in alienation between a Moslem convert and Orthodox villagers who do not understand Arabic prayer. Indeed, on many occasions Khotinenko has noted that the film has very little to do with Islam, and is about a Russian who tries to start a new life and the inert Russian community that does not change its way of life.<sup>14</sup> Kolia's new life is the life of faith, whereas the villagers' traditional way of life is animalistic pig-worship with, at best, a mechanical repetition of Orthodox rituals, empty of content.<sup>15</sup> There is simply no community into which Kolia can become integrated.

Thus, unlike *Prisoner of the Mountains*, *Muslim* suggests that the Soviet Great Family is just part of a utopian modernity project that Russia is doomed to repeat again and again. The Russian village is not a refuge for spiritual values but an integral part of the animalistic world created by the Russo-Soviet Enlightenment. Kolia's mother, understanding that no viable community exists for his reintegration, asks him to leave because she cannot guarantee his safety in the village. If *Prisoner of the Mountains* suggests that Vania can return at least to his mother and try to start his life anew, *Muslim* offers its protagonist no place of return. The world that Kolia left seven years before has

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14. See Khotinenko and Zalotukha.

15. What Georgy Fedotov calls double-faith [*dvoeverie*] appears in Khotinenko's film as Christianity disguising bestiality.

preserved its cruel, murderous organization from the Soviet past, but now this world has degenerated beyond any possible humanitarian limits and has shed the veneer of Soviet-style humanistic rhetoric.

*Comic Imagination: Didactic Satire vs. Postmodern Carnival*

While Bodrov's and Khotinenko's melodramas explored the void created by the dissolution of the Great and small family communities, comic genres in the hands of other Russian filmmakers explored ways of reanimating Russian communal identity. Russian comic film had been in a coma since the mid-1980s, inspiring Sergei Dobrotvorskii to formulate the following maxim: "Film culture's health can be determined by the presence of good comedy in it. This is the reason why we haven't seen a good post-Soviet comedy."<sup>16</sup> In the early 1990s critics and filmmakers started discussing the formula of "cinema for the people" [*narodnyi fil'm*]. Such a new film was supposed to be a comedy that would entertain and console people who had grown tired of perestroika-era *chernukha*—a post-censorship naturalistic depiction of the dark sides of Soviet life.<sup>17</sup> Both the veterans (Konchalovsky, *Kurochka-Riaba*, 1994; Matveev, *To Love Russian Style*, 1995; Menshov, *Shirli-Myrli*, 1995) and the younger filmmakers (Mamin, *Window to Paris*, 1994; Astrakhan, *Everything Will Be OK*, 1995; Rogozhkin, *Particularities of National Hunting*, 1995) offered their models of "comedy for everyone." Most of the films explore the plot of reintegration: they tell the story of a time of instability leading to the restoration of the small family surrounded, as in a Russian *matrionka*, by the big family of the Russians as a whole. Dmitry Astrakhan perhaps offered the clearest version of such a master plot of the new popular comedy.<sup>18</sup> The bumpy transition to a market economy appears in all of these films as the major cause of instability, while the Soviet past all of a sudden emerges as a happy and non-problematic one. As Julian Graffy demonstrated in his pioneering article about Astrakhan's films, "community, family, and home" are the major values in Astrakhan's films, while the title of one of his most popular pictures, *Everything Will Be OK* (*Vse budet khorosho*, 1995), sums up the promise of the happy future. Despite certain differences, this cinema of renewed hope evokes the romantic comedy of the late-Soviet era. In the mid-1990s, two films stand out among these "new old Soviet" comedies in their rendition of Russian identity: *Window to Paris* and *Particularities of National Hunting*. As opposed to other comedies of the period, they leave very little doubt about the spiritual potential of the Russian state or of the nuclear family as communities to identify with. Both films also deconstruct the myth of Russia's salvation through Westernization. At the same time they rep-

16. "Nalichiem komedii opredeliaetsia zdorov'e kinokul'tury, i imenno poetomu khoroshei post-sovetskoi komedii eshche ne bylo" (cited in Kovalov 592).

17. For a detailed discussion of *chernukha* cinema see Graham.

18. For a discussion of Astrakhan's cinema see Graffy and Prokhorova.

resent two different views on the figure of the intellectual as a potential spiritual leader and teacher of the Russian people. Mamin presents the narrative of potential communal reintegration under the guidance of the Russian intellectual; Rogozhkin questions the very possibility of a community unified by a spiritual leader or ideology.

*Window to Paris* opens as a postmodern parody of the Petersburg tale. The film's title and plot operate primarily on recycled cultural material. The title harks back to the famous line from Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman": "Here we at Nature's own behest shall break a window to the West" (9). Mamin's comic plot presents the initial post-Soviet infatuation with the West as analogous to Herman's obsession in Pushkin's "Queen of Spades" with the old countess's secret, which would allow him to become rich. In fact, the film's main plotline opens with a grotesque scene in which the protagonist, the music teacher Nikolai Chizhov (Sergei Dontsov-Dreiden), reads Pushkin's famous story to his students, who are studying the ABC's of capitalism in a business lyceum.

*Window to Paris* focuses on the politics of representation, parodying one of the most important narratives of modern Russian history: Westernization as the story of Russia's integration into the family of European nations. The film is a tale of two cities: Petersburg represents primarily the ruins of the Soviet utopia, while Paris stands for the consumer paradise of the West. The characters discover a magic window between the two worlds and start traveling back and forth, their perceptions dominated by the incongruity of the two places. Mamin ridicules Russian claims about creating a Western-style democratic society while continuing to act just as they did during the Soviet period. Obsession with Western material culture, mob mentality, and lack of respect for the individual constitute the three main characteristics of Russian identity as it appears in Mamin's satire of Russia's nascent capitalism. When a group of Russians arrives in Paris, they end up in comic situations because they fail to respect people's privacy. They break into homes, steal property, and insult the shocked French. Their communal Russian values are incompatible with the Western notion of individual identity. In short, the story of Russia's integration into the European community can provide only material for slapstick satire about the incompatibility of the two ways of life.

The epitome of the Russians' communal spirit, the Gorokhov family, operates as a communal body driven by survival instincts. Like the Ivanovs in *Muslim*, the Gorokhoffs are beyond any spiritual or moral redemption. When they discover that their Petersburg communal apartment has a direct access to Paris, they see this link to the West as an opportunity to steal. What for the intellectual teacher and for the author of the film is a "window" to European culture and humanist values, for the Gorokhoffs is a window of opportunity to loot rich and gullible Westerners. The Gorokhoffs invade Paris like locusts. They lack individuality and any desires beyond insatiable appetite and greed.

By coincidence or not, Mamin's casting of the Gorokhov family partly overlaps with the casting of the Ivanovs in Khotinenko's *Muslim*. In both films Nina Usatova plays the mother-figure. In Mamin's picture she carries the telling name Vera, literalizing the boorish animalistic materialism as the faith unifying the Gorokhoffs into a community.

Like Herman in Pushkin's tale, the Gorokhoffs lose their minds when they discover that Paris offers all the consumer goods one can dream of. They start hoarding everything they see and pushing their loot through the magic portal into their dismal communal apartment. The key aspect of their consumerism is its senselessness. The stolen goods serve a fetishistic rather than utilitarian function, like Akaky's overcoat in Nikolai Gogol's tale. When Gorokhov manages to get a French-made automobile through the window, he leaves it standing in his living room as a monument to his heroic feat. Russian consumerism becomes a new form of mass idolatry, a quasi-religious practice.

Occasionally one of the Gorokhoffs shows a weak sign of individual conscience by questioning the legitimacy of their communal bestiality, which borders on insanity. The rest of the family brings the splintering member back into the family fold, while Gorokhov-the-husband solves others' moral dilemmas by claiming that what they are doing is not theft, since they are repossessing goods that the West has owed Russia since the Middle Ages for two centuries of protection from the Mongol hordes. Such an absurd rationale for stealing emerges out of the characters' desperate attempts to find Russia's place in European civilization, and is defined by the split between dreams of joining the West in the future and Russia's chaotic present on the outskirts of Western cultural traditions. The film's dual setting literalizes the split.

While the Gorokhoffs appear as a nuclear family turned into an animal community by Western consumerism, the greater society of new capitalist Russia appears as the grotesque double of Soviet socialism. The protagonist teaches music and literature in a newly established private school, where the school administration promotes business and computer science as the new quasi-religion. The methods of endorsing the new ideology to the point of brainwashing, however, remain unchanged since Soviet times. The school leadership simply replaces Soviet slogans with the newly adopted ones, such as "Time is money," and portraits of Marx and Lenin with blow-ups of Western currencies. The images of the British queen and dead American presidents now play the role of saints for the new apocalyptic project: Russians are building a capitalist paradise on Earth instead of a communist utopia. Eventually the school administration decides that the music teacher's reading with his students of the story of poor Herman, whose obsession with money leads to insanity, is harmful to their minds, and they fire the rebel. Mamin sarcastically implies that, after the chaotic years of perestroika, the new rulers have returned Russia to the old and familiar state community, which enforces uniformity of ideas and minds.

The music teacher is probably the most peculiar figure in Mamin's carnivalistic world. Nikolai is a member of the Russian intelligentsia who distances himself from both the Russian authoritarian state community and the Gorokhovs' bestiality. He possesses the power of the Pied Piper over his students, who represent Russia's future. In the course of the film, using his magic pipe, he leads children away from the business school, through the magic portal to Paris, and eventually back to their home country. When the children, tempted by Parisian abundance, stumble and decide to stay in the West and abandon their poor motherland, the teacher suddenly turns into a monological moralist and gives his students a long and boring lecture about the necessity of building one's own prosperity in one's homeland instead of trying to take advantage of a neighbor's wealth. At this point, Mamin abandons the playful atmosphere of the postmodern parody and ends the film on a didactic, hopeful note. Nikolai's upright attitude seems to express a nostalgic longing for the bygone moral power of the intelligentsia in Russian and Soviet imperial culture, transforming him into a peculiar leader figure amidst the chaotic diegesis of *Window to Paris*. Like Kostanzhoglo in the second volume of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Nikolai functions as a hero of mixed identity: he embraces knowledge of both Western culture and Russian spirituality. Mamin hopes that this hybrid spiritual leader will provide guidance for Russia's new generation to a new communal identity. The music teacher is the filmmaker's alter ego in his belief that Russia's spiritual degradation is reversible.

The monological closure of *Window to Paris* marks an abrupt departure not only from the film's narrative trajectory but also from Mamin's career as a satirist of Russia's clumsy pseudo-transition from Soviet to Russian imperial mythology. Russian viewers did not flock to watch a comedy with a didactic closure. They had seen plenty of such films in Soviet times, including the best comedies of Mamin's teacher, Eldar Riazanov. The honor of discovering the formula for a new comic cinema for the people belongs to Aleksandr Rogozhkin.

While Rogozhkin by now is one of the most respected and successful film and television filmmakers, his *Particularities of National Hunting* (1995) occupies the ambiguous status of being the first Russian picture since the Soviet-era *Intergirl* (1988) to enjoy genuine popular success.<sup>19</sup> Yet it is a film about whose aesthetic merits critics have little positive to say.<sup>20</sup> For example, Dmitry Bykov in his otherwise insightful essay about the filmmaker claims that *Particularities* is the weakest film ever made by Rogozhkin. The critic notes that the only reason he made the film was to make money. In a sense,

19. In the absence of movie theater chains, video sales became the major channel for a picture's distribution in Russia and the newly independent states.

20. The film received a lot of prizes and critical attention (Dobrotvorskii, Trofimenkov). Critics tried to explain the surprising success of the picture despite its narrative simplicity and vulgarity.



Rogozhkin in his career as a comedy filmmaker follows the fate of the previous king of Russian comedy, Leonid Gaidai. Rogozhkin is praised for his professionalism, but put down for choosing low aesthetic forms. I would argue, however, that Rogozhkin is engaged in a project radical for Russian cinema—that of questioning not only the very possibility of a unified ideology, but also the necessity for ideological community formation as film's prime goal. The loss of a common cause and identity leads to entropy while providing freedom of ideas and entrepreneurship in cinema. In this respect Bykov's comment about Rogozhkin's shooting a picture in order to make money provides an insight into Rogozhkin's works as the cinema of the marketplace both in its aesthetics and in its functioning within post-Soviet culture. Since *Particularities*, his films have not even tried to provide a unifying ideology or a community into which the protagonist could be integrated. His films provide semiotic material and energy for a community of a different sort—a community of players united temporarily by a narrative game. The community in his films is brought together by chance, not by a goal-oriented ideology. This community is a liminal, hybrid group, the members of which have trouble understanding one another. If anything keeps the community together, it is an interplay of languages at the moment of attempted and, usually, partly successful dialogue. Rogozhkin's characters lack history and teleology. Hence the loss of a community from the past neither leads them to despair nor prevents them from becoming integrated into the community in the present. The dialogic play in the present defines communal and individual identity and never suggests that this community is the final destination of history and ideology. Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the culture of carnival provides the best description of a community with such a strategy of playful existence in a state of constant upheaval and an inversion of hierarchies.

Rogozhkin's lighthearted *Particularities of National Hunting* translates angst about a stable national community into the story of a drinking party mistakenly perceived by one of the participants as a hunting trip. Several Russians and a lonely Westerner—a Finn writing a history of Russian hunting rituals—travel in a boat and on foot on the border between Russia and Finland. Larsen notes that Rogozhkin's *Particularities* “has almost no plot, only a situation in which a series of gags unfold, most of them arising from the hunter's pursuit of an ideal state of inebriation rather than any actual beast of prey” (201). The confusion of rituals (hunting, drinking party) and languages produces a volatile narrative about the peculiarities of Russian identity.

Play, arguably, is the central element of Rogozhkin's *Particularities*. Johan Huizinga, the classic theorist of play, contends that the major characteristics of play include: (1) its voluntary nature, (2) its disinterestedness (independence of meeting basic human needs), (3) its limitedness (it is played out within certain limits of time and space), (4) its orderliness (it provides temporary order within the larger chaos of life), and (5) its communality (a game

creates a community of players). As for the last characteristic of play, Huizinga claims that play “promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means” (13). Huizinga also points out that many languages distinguish play with purpose (above all the contest, *Agon*) and play without rules and limits, which is amusing, creative, and chaotic (*Paidia*) (30–31). I would argue that this anarchic game is based on the interplay of discourses described by Bakhtin as the principle of dialogism. Rogozhkin’s film enacts the state of open-ended dialogical *Paidia* as opposed to any narrative teleology.

In other respects Rogozhkin’s comedy does not readily fit Huizinga’s definition of play. Huizinga claims that play implies a single set of rules that brings a temporary order to the chaos of the world. Rogozhkin offers a different sense of play in his film. He introduces a playful heterogeneity of rules and codes without singling out any master set of rules. In the film’s serio-comic diegesis, double-coding is an important device. The Finn studies the history of Russian hunt rituals and from time to time sees in his dreams the traditional wolf hunt with richly-clad Russian noblemen and their retinue of servants and borzois. When he awakes from his epic dreams, he is confronted with his Russian alcoholic friends enacting an animalistic parody of the noble tradition. Instead of conveying nostalgia for the good old days of Russia’s imperial grandeur, Rogozhkin’s film opts for a doubling that combines the high culture epic and its profane carnivalized double to investigate Russianness in the process of its playful narrative degradation. While the Finn tries to play by an established set of rules, the Russians invent the game as they go along.

The interplay of rules and codes also functions on the level of verbal interaction. Rogozhkin questions the primacy of language as a code essential for communication and a community’s identification. The key figure for this aspect of the film is the Russian translator who accompanies the Finn. He interprets everything fairly accurately in English, but constantly complains under his breath about the inadequacy of translation. On one occasion the Russian General Mikhalych says several phrases in Finnish to the Finn that he learned during his student years in the military academy. All of them are standard phrases from an interrogation manual: “Name,” “Rank,” “Lead us to your rocket launcher.” However, the literal meaning of these phrases does not establish any contact between the Finn and the Russian, only emphasizing the absurdity of cultural assumptions and language on the level of literal meaning. The Finn responds seriously that Finland owns no rockets as far as he knows, and the situation is particularly absurd because the characters have gotten together to drink and not to discuss each other’s armies. In addition, the Russian general cannot understand the Finn because his supply of Finnish has been exhausted. Having realized that the general just listed everything that he knows in Finnish, the Finn starts laughing and, via the irrational short-

cut of humor, establishes contact with his belligerent Russian buddy. A shot of vodka reroutes a potential exchange of political insults into the idyll of a communal inebriated journey.

This travesty of the Tower of Babel story undermines the possibility of any essentialist transcendent community. Rogozhkin's film is based on a constant linguistic code-switching that establishes a sense of permanent disorder. Following Jean-François Lyotard and Steven Connor, Lipovetsky calls such a textual device "a strategy of paralogical reasoning." In other words, this is narration based on "contradictory reasoning, designed to shift the structures of reasoning itself" (Connor 34).<sup>21</sup> Vodka appears in the film as the key signifier of such paralogical reasoning. On the one hand, vodka plays the role of a quasi-religious fetish that unifies the community, on the other, vodka is a travesty of the transcendental signifier because it constantly subverts the hierarchy and order within the community of drunkards. Cyclical crowning and decrowning constitutes the film's irrational narrative rhythm.

Both communities at the film's center—that of drunken friends and that of Russian aristocratic hunters—have unstable identities and porous borders. These communities' way of existence contradicts Huizinga's assumption about play forming a stable community of insiders. The national peculiarities accessible only to the members of the national community emerge as mere absurdity. The traditional wolf hunters' community turns out to be the dream of a Finnish historian, and its ephemeral status is revealed every time the Finn wakes up and faces the farce of a contemporary Russian drinking party. In fact, he exists on the border between his dreams of Russia's past and the alcohol-saturated reality of the Russians' current hunting trip. Moreover, his visions of the wolf hunt evoke Russian literary hunts, such as that in Tolstoi's *War and Peace*. By placing the historical images of the hunt in the "head" of the Westerner, Rogozhkin questions the authenticity and cultural origins of the Russian literary canon. Is it possible to view classical Russian literature as the essence of Russian cultural identity? This theme will resurface in Rogozhkin's later film *Cuckoo* (2000), in which a Russian soldier and a Finnish soldier meet during World War II. Trying to find cognates that his Russian counterpart would recognize, the peaceful Finn mentions Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, showing his familiarity with Russian culture. The ill-read Russian, who lacks that familiarity, does not hear "Dostoevsky," but catches "idiot," and takes the Finn's attempt at rapprochement for an insult. In *Cuckoo* classical Russian literature appears as a misnomer for a literature inspired by Western ideas, written in Russian but unfamiliar to average Russians.

Huizinga contends that a stable set of rules defines play and, in the case of poetic play, these rules depend on the centrality of the poet for the act of creation (134). Rogozhkin assigns the role of the author in charge of creating a

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21. See also Lipovetsky (30–31).

narrative about Russian hunting ritual to the Finn, who knows only a few Russian words. In the film, he arrives with the goal of transforming a chaos of facts into a scholarly narrative about Russian hunting. The author-creator, however, ends up in the middle of an ongoing narrative and becomes an object of narrative play. He assumes that the goal of the game is to hunt a wolf or a bear. The rules of the game, however, change in its course, thus defying the game's finalization. In his discussion of postmodernist Russian literature, Lipovetsky claims that such an insertion of the author as a character in the text constitutes "a philosophical principle: the author-demiurge, who is supposed to be outside of text, now turns into an object of play, one of many involved in the process of intertextual recoding and de-hierarchization" (18). The Finn is central to Rogozhkin's film because he is both the potential author and a focalizer who is undermining the possibility of finding a stable frame of cultural reference for the play that is unveiled before the viewer. He constantly misunderstands his Russian friends. When the ranger explains to him how beautiful Russian girls are, he thinks that the ranger is talking about his sexual intercourse with an elk. The interpreter only adds more confusion to their interaction, misunderstanding the ranger's comments as a promise to have intercourse with the Finn. His reliability as the author-creator hits rock bottom when after yet another round of libations he sees Earth instead of the Moon in the night sky. In short, the author-figure turns out to possess an utterly unreliable vision and no knowledge of the rules of cultural play, and above all of the locals' native language.

Whereas Huizinga claims that play establishes a solid community of insiders who know the rules of the game, Rogozhkin's festive community is by no means stable or unchangeable. The border between insiders and outsiders is permeable and depends only on alcohol consumption. Even animals can join the drinkers. I contend that crossing the border between human and animal behavior is of prime importance because it reveals one of the key aspects of play as the central narrative event. Huizinga reminds us that play is older than culture and does not require human reason, since animals can play as well. Hence, in *Particularities* national identity is neither dependent on reason nor even culture-driven, for the Russians can maintain their community without remaining human. For example, General Mikhalych is confused with the bear by the rest of his drunken compatriots, while a real bear, who "socializes" with the Russians, drinks vodka much like the human characters. The general's name means the son of Michael (or Misha) and evokes the proverbial symbol of Russia: in Russian folklore all bears are named Misha. The carnivalesque play is by no means exclusive and one need not be initiated into the rules of the game to participate in it or enjoy it.

Finally, Rogozhkin presents for the pleasure of his post-Soviet viewers a travesty of the Great Soviet Family: several mentors are in charge of one disciple in the process of acquiring genuine Russian consciousness. General

Mikhalych (the great leader), the local police chief, Semenov (the leader of the small motherland), and the ranger Kuzmich (the keeper of the Russian forest, the mysterious site of the “Russian soul”) initiate the Finn into Russian consciousness. While the narrative of *Particularities* manifests genre memory of the Socialist Realist master plot, specifically the story of a Westerner reeducated by Russians as it has been epitomized in Grigory Alexandrov’s *Circus* (1936), I believe that Rogozhkin’s film questions the possibility of a metaphysics of national identity in general. There is no consciousness, no deep structure to decipher. All the mentor figures, as well as all the characters, are empty shells of defunct ideologies. Their emptiness and the filmmaker’s refusal to endow them with transcendental meaning made them a success with the popular viewer, who instantly transformed them into popular icons. Mikhalych, Kuzmich, and Semenov appeared in commercials and became the names of Russian pubs, while their one-liners were adopted as drinking jokes and proverbs. Most importantly, Rogozhkin’s carnival of the Great Soviet Family is by no means satirical. The filmmaker inverts the traditional Russian structure of militaristic authority without trying to reeducate anybody or to reinvent a new ideology or community. Instead, he ruminates, without passing judgment, on the condition of human authority and community as it borders on absurdity and anarchy.

*Muslim* and *Particularities* mark a definite break with the tradition of the cinema of moral edification and enlightenment, which were the staples of Soviet utopianism. This break was perhaps too radical for other post-Soviet filmmakers. By the mid-1990s, after a decade of dismantling Soviet culture, the ideology of moral hope returned in the works of many filmmakers. Such directors as Bodrov in his *Prisoner of the Mountains* and Mamin in *Window to Paris* actually revived the tradition of ideological preaching and the promise of an ideal monological community after a “time of troubles.” In a sense these films confirm a survival of the spirit of Soviet enlightenment beyond the physical existence of the Soviet Union. The cinema of grotesque realism is opposed to this tradition of celluloid humanism. Rogozhkin’s *Particularities* and Khotinenko’s *Muslim* are united by an aesthetic principle of grotesque realism, articulated and adjusted to the conventions of a specific genre, comedy and melodrama respectively: “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract: it is the transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (Bakhtin 19-20). The two films by Rogozhkin and Khotinenko question the possibility of a unified ideology and a communal identity based on such an ideology. Both films question the necessity of characters’ integration into a stable finalized community of any sort. Khotinenko provides a melodramatic resolution—the death of a hero incapable of being integrated into a family—while Rogozhkin chooses the path of carnivalistic play, rejecting the possibility of any narrative teleology.

These films question the obligation and the ability of cinema to affect the political and nation-building agenda. This alternative cinema repudiates the role of cinema as Russia's imperial hagiography. Rogozhkin's *Particularities*, above all, articulates a serio-comic dialogism as a discursive model of a community alternative to the model of monological community unified by a common language and ideology.

The difference between the humanistic and grotesque trends in Russian cinema becomes especially clear when we look at the function of the outsider protagonist in search of the ideal community. In Russian humanist cinema, such a protagonist plays the role of a consoler who promises to lead the viewer to a new harmonious mythology and community. Bodrov's *Vania* evokes the mythology of Russian classical literature and the nuclear family as an alternative to the brutal state family. In the case of *Window to Paris*, Nikolai Chizhov plays the role of the Russian intellectual-messiah who incarnates the intelligentsia's spiritual leadership and promises a better national community for the future, embodied in the children of Russia. These characters' alleged spiritual authority steers the viewer toward an authorial monological reading in the tradition of Russian humanist literature.

In the cinema of grotesque realism, the outsider protagonist is a focalizer, but viewers are in no position to identify with him because he is the other (a Muslim, a Finn). Instead, viewers are forced to take this alien point of view and look at Russians (that is, at themselves) through a distancing and unflattering magnifying glass. At best, viewers see an animal instead of a human being, a herd instead of a human society. This cruel experience is both sobering and liberating.

In his *Particularities*, Rogozhkin brought back to Russian cinema what William Paul in his Bakhtinian reading of Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* described as the art of the marketplace, "the art the people choose by purchasing it" (110). Unfortunately, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, Russian cinema does not want to part with its obsessive search for a unified community as the model for empire. That is why the cinema of grotesque realism, though quite successful with audiences, has had to give way to an ever-expanding flow of neo-imperialist films that rehearse the restoration of Russia's imperial identity.

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### Абстракт

Александр Прохоров

От воссоздания семьи к карнавалному снижению: демонтаж советских мифов коллективной идентичности в российском кино середины девяностых

На примере российского кинематографа девяностых годов прошлого века и опираясь на теоретическую модель, сформулированную Катериной Кларк, Прохоров рассматривает визуальные стратегии преодоления коллективной идентичности, унаследованной из советских времён, и поиски новых повествовательных моделей, артикулирующих новую российскую коллективную идентичность. Следуя теоретическим посылкам, сформулированным Виктором Ерофеевым в его статье «Русские цветы зла», автор видит две главные повес-

творательные модели, формирующиеся в кино этого переходного десятилетия. Одна модель восходит к гуманистической традиции Александра Пушкина, Льва Толстого, официального соцреализма и диссидентов-гуманистов, как Александр Солженицын. Вторая модель, модель карнавальной деградации, берёт начало в работах Николая Гоголя, Владимира Набокова, Андрея Платонова и Варлама Шаламова. Как примеры первой модели Прохоров анализирует мелодрамы *Кавказский Пленник* Сергея Бордова (1996) и *Окно в Париж* Юрия Мамина (1994). Как примеры второй модели автор рассматривает *Мусульманин* Владимира Хотиненко (1995) и *Особенности национальной охоты в осенний период* Александра Рогожкина (1995). Автор видит основную тенденцию в усилении к концу девяностых гуманистической модели повествования, а с ней и неоимперской коллективной идентичности.