



Special joint issue of *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* and *Culture of Ukraine (Kul'tura Ukrainy)*

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To cite this article: Jeremy Hicks & Leonid Machulin (10 Oct 2024): Special joint issue of *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* and *Culture of Ukraine (Kul'tura Ukrainy)*, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, DOI: [10.1080/17503132.2024.2405346](https://doi.org/10.1080/17503132.2024.2405346)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503132.2024.2405346>



Published online: 10 Oct 2024.



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Special joint issue of *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema and Culture of Ukraine (Kul'tura Ukrainy)*

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This introduction is aimed at both those reading the Ukrainian version, published in *Culture of Ukraine* and the English-language version, published in *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*. This collaboration between a Ukrainian and a UK-based journal is intended as an expression of support for Ukrainian culture, and specifically, scholarship on Ukrainian film history, in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion against that country, launched in February 2022. Over one hundred years after its beginnings, Ukrainian cinema remains as relevant domestically as it does for the whole world. To illustrate this, we begin with a brief essay on the history of Ukrainian cinema, especially its political context, before setting out an overview of the state of film scholarship on the various key periods of Ukrainian film history.

Ukrainian cinema as a reflection of art under authoritarian rule

Studying the history of Ukrainian cinema without considering its historical context can produce a distorted picture. Indeed, the history of art more generally is influenced by numerous, constantly evolving, external factors. As philosopher Thomas Adajian argues, any definition of art has to reckon with a number of facts, including its mutability. The arts are always changing, just as the rest of culture is: 'as artists experiment creatively, new genres, art-forms, and styles develop; standards of taste and sensibilities evolve; understandings of aesthetic properties, aesthetic experience, and the nature of art evolve' (Adajian 2022). However, in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes, there are constraints upon art that do not exist in democratic countries. Art itself and the study of it need to be analysed with different methodologies in democratic countries as opposed to authoritarian countries. The spectrum of constraints upon artists, such as self-censorship, as well as state censorship, can vary over time according to circumstances, as can a creative individual's responses to these, spanning from sincere exaltation, to covert resistance and the use of Aesopian language.

The history of Ukrainian cinema is an instructive example of what can happen to film when it becomes an instrument of state politics. The earliest films made in Ukraine date from 1897, while the first feature-length Ukrainian film, *Zaporizhian Sich* (*Zaporiz'ka sich*, directed by Danylo Sakhnenko), came out in 1911. Film studios had

been set up in Odesa, Kharkiv and Kyiv. Following the Bolshevik entry into Kyiv in January 1919 and proclamation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in March 1919, there was a protracted and messy nationalisation process that differed from that in Russia (Kozlenko 2024). As part of the compromise following Ukraine's unsuccessful struggle for independence in 1917–21 (often misleadingly referred to as the Russian Civil War), Ukraine kept a large degree of cultural autonomy in the 1920s, and on 13 March 1922 created the state monopoly VUFKU (Vseukrainskoe fotokinoupravlenie) under the Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR. Through a subsequent decree on 22 April signed by the Commissar and the Soviet Interior Ministry (NKVD) it combined the whole film industry, including film production, distribution and education for Ukraine and Crimea (Myslavs'kyi 2018, 307; Nebesio 2009, 160).

Despite the increasing state control and constant interference from the Bolshevik party, until the beginning of the 1930s, Ukrainian national cinema exemplified a stage in the construction of a socialist version of national culture, under the wider orientation of the 1920's Soviet policy of 'Ukrainianisation'. As one Ukrainian film historian has put it:

Even if it was flawed in a number of ways, the existence of VUFKU enabled trials and experiments which gave rise to a distinct culture of Ukrainian cinema, a film aesthetic, and formed a generation of truly creative cadres, and created the necessary cinema educational institutions, guaranteed state distribution and was able to organise film production, rebuilding the film studio in Odesa and creating one in Kyiv. (Samoilenko 2010, 35)

The successful development of Ukrainian cinema fostered an urge in Moscow to take control over it, to subordinate it, both for economic and political reasons. Ukrainian cinema became more and more nationally-oriented. As leading Ukrainian film scholar, Volodymyr Myslavs'kyi has described the situation:

The period of the Soviet New Economic Policy in cinema, when cinema developed in conditions of competition, and the orientation of film production and distribution organisations towards financial independence and the receipt of maximum revenue, showed, firstly, the effectiveness of the independent economic path of development, which had led to Ukrainian cinema becoming, in the course of a few years, one of the leading forces in the Soviet Union, and secondly, demonstrated the impossibility of a coexistence between market economics and Bolshevism. (Myslavs'kyi 2016, 304)

Following the 11 January 1929 resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (VKP(b)) 'On the leading cadres of cinema workers', Soviet cinema became even more of a 'matter of state'. As the resolution stated, 'cinema is one of the most important tools of the cultural revolution and should occupy a major position in party work as a powerful weapon of mass agitation and propaganda' (Bondareva 2005, 97). Having centralised the governance of the film sector, on 29 January 1929, Sovnarkom created the All-union Film Committee for the Regulation of Film and Photo Affairs (Vsesoiuznyi kinokomitete po regulirovaniu del kino i foto). It comprised 31 members, of whom 27 were representatives of the RSFSR. There remained four places for the other republics of the USSR (Rosliak 2016, 152). Even if we note that there were then only six union republics, and they alone had working film studios, the Russian dominance is clear. Ukrainian national cinema, in essence, in the colourful expression of a leading Ukrainian

film historian, Serhii Trymbach, for the next two decades or more turned into a colonial fragment of the wider Soviet film machine:

The participation of Russian directors in the making of Ukrainian films was a guarantee of the fulfilment of the programme and goals of so-called de-nationalisation, where Ukrainians were rural types who better grasped the standards of the new communist consciousness the more they resembled Russians, their obligatory *vyshyvanka* shirts notwithstanding. (Trymbach 2022, 63)

Thus, after ten years of relative autonomy under VUFKU, Ukrainian cinema was now dominated by two basic tendencies: the creeping influence of the state, alongside denationalisation, ending with the subordination to central (i.e. Moscow-based) power. One way of seeing the subsequent history Ukrainian cinema is through the personal stories of directors and actors who, for reasons of self-interest, were participants in the transformation of the industry, possessing as they did the required experience for the task. People from the art world became instruments in the creation of a totalitarian state. It should nevertheless be noted that resistance to the regime in any form (even passive in the form of non-acceptance of policies) was punished severely.

A well-known example is that of the world-famous Ukrainian director Oleksandr Dovzhenko, who was on the list of those due to be executed in 1933, and together with his wife Luliia Solntseva even fled to Sukhumi, hoping to hide there (Trymbach 2023). Stalin then granted him a reprieve, but almost until his death the threat of physical annihilation constantly hung over him, looming particularly large with the release of every new film. In January 1944, during a discussion of Dovzhenko's unfinished masterpiece *Ukraine in Flames* (*Ukraina v ohni*), Stalin portentously reminded the director, that it was dangerous to be a Ukrainian (Rosliak 2021, 331). The 'executed renaissance' was a term that Polish writer and activist Jerzy Giedroyc along with Ukrainian writer Lurii Lavrinenko gave to Ukrainian national literature of the 1920s-30s (Lavrinenko [1959] 2001). Over the course of time, it became a wider concept, denoting the tragedy of the artist in the totalitarian system, including many filmmakers.

In Ukraine, the value of a film was determined not by the market and audiences, but by political censorship, which was carried out in the 1920s by various instances including, at republican level, VUFKU, in its capacity as a section of the Commissariat of Education, and where it related to written materials, such as screenplays, Ukrholovlit, the Ukrainian SSR's branch of Glavlit (Hodun 2008, 160). If a film was taken out of circulation, this meant that it had ideologically deviated from the course of the party and the author could expect to be persecuted. Political censorship was accompanied by 'purges' of the party, conducted in this period approximately every other year. While on the wider Soviet level such purges began in cinema with the 'cultural revolution' of 1928 and the first five-year plan, from autumn 1930, there was a purge of the directors of Ukrainfilm with the aim of 'removing those obstructing the construction of a socialist culture in its most important sphere'. As a result, seven filmmakers were accused of counter-revolutionary activities and Trotskyism (Miller 2010, 72–90; Kuziuk 2010, 126). In his analysis of the factors defining the development of cinema in the Ukrainian SSR in the pre-war period, Kuziuk concluded that 'the formation of a new ideology in art led to a mutilation of creative identity of the artists. The state deprived artists of their freedom as a community to decide their own creative method, theme, style, the creation of images and so forth' (Kuziuk 2010, 127). The

Ukrainian philosopher Miroslav Popovych stated that the victory of art that was 'national in form but socialist in content' became possible only due to the coercive pressure of the punitive organs of the communist party on its creators (Popovych 2003, 270).

After the death of Stalin, the Soviet state's means of coercing dissenting voices, including on those in art and culture, became less physically cruel, but employed greater psychological pressure, from regular critical articles in party publications to resolutions passed by the central bodies of the communist party. Right up until the end of the Soviet period, Ukrainian cinema was compelled to follow the party line: to depict the builders of communism and affirm communist ideals. Its activities were rigidly controlled by the central organs of state. The Central Committee issued a number of resolutions, which effectively denied Ukrainian cinema the right to determine its own path. Some of these were specifically directed at Ukraine, such as 'On the Further Improvement and Development of The Art of Cinema in Ukraine' (1971), whereas others dictated the thematic and ideological content of Ukrainian cinema along with that of the other Union republics. These include: 'On the measures for the further development of Soviet cinematography' (1972), 'On literary and art criticism' (1972), 'On the further improvement of ideological, political and educational work' (1979), 'On the measure for the further raising of the conceptual and artistic level of films and the strengthening of the material and technical basis of cinematography' (1984) (Khovaiba 2009, 96). The period from Stalin's death in 1953 to Ukrainian independence in 1991 can thus be understood as continuing the previous Soviet goal of controlling Ukrainian cinema, only by different means.

Why did Ukraine's independence in 1991 not lead to the resurgence of its national cinema? In the middle of Gorbachev's perestroika, the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR dissolved the Ukrainian State Committee for Cinematography, but failed to create a replacement body (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy 1988). Consequently, for nearly 20 years, Ukrainian filmmakers, who were used to working within certain parameters and with state funding, tried to learn how to swim, having been plunged into the deep end of the new market conditions. As with other post-Soviet countries, a small number of filmmakers continued to produce artistically ambitious films primarily aimed not at domestic viewers, but international film festivals and art house audiences. Acclaimed Odesa-based director Kira Muratova produced four films in the 1990s and seven in the 2000s. She was followed by her pupil, Eva Neymann (based in Germany since 1993). Both directors have been honoured by the Ukrainian film industry with a number of festival prizes, but their films are shot in Russian.

During this period, until 2014, the Ukrainian film and TV market was filled with Russian productions, with little or no interest or sympathy for the Ukrainian national project. Ukrainian media scholar, Volodymyr Kulyk argues that this had to do with the economics of producing Russian-language content: with a larger domestic market, Russian producers could recoup their investment more easily, and then make further profits by exporting to Ukraine and other post-Soviet states. Unlike English-language programmes, these were not translated, but their ideological influence was more profound, as they portrayed spaces and events familiar to the Ukrainian audiences, but conveyed an implicitly pro-Russian or pro-Soviet take (Kulyk 2013, 69–73). This attitude, on the part of pro-Russian production companies, to the Ukrainian language, continued right up until a law was introduced in 2019, which envisaged a transition to the overwhelming use of Ukrainian in

film and television by 2021, making the use of Ukrainian (or dubbing or subtitling in that language) obligatory for all films and series shown on national TV (Verkhovna Rada Ukraine 2019). As Trymbach described the situation:

The theatrical and TV film pushed the view, exploited by current Russian propaganda, that Ukrainians and Russians are a single people, that the differences between them are artificial and can be easily overcome. At the same time, Ukrainian TV channels were acquired by oligarchs and oligarchical clans [...] that, like their Russian media counterparts and fellow oligarchs strove to turn the people to a mass, whose herd instincts could be manipulated through TV and other media. (Trymbach 2022, 63)

While the 1990s and 2000s were challenging for the Ukrainian film industry, the creation of the Ukrainian State Film Agency (Derzhavne ahentstvo Ukrainy z pytan' kino) in 2011 saw an improvement in funding and production, and some Ukrainian features have attracted considerable international attention, most notably Myroslav Slaboshpyts'kyi's *The Tribe* (*Plem'ia* 2014). While not a priority in state cultural policy, and still not generously funded, Ukrainian cinema, and documentary film in particular, has played an important role in contemporary Ukrainian culture and helped Ukrainians grasp a sense of their identity as Ukrainians (Biedarieva 2021, 55).

The founder of the *Babylon 13* documentary film production collective, Volodymyr Tikhyi declared that, 'in Ukraine people are making documentary films whether or not they have funding. The new generation of directors is no longer willing to sit and wait for the finance package, but relies on a different kind of motivation to make films' (in Korkodum 2016). The ethical and political force of Ukrainian documentary has been recognised internationally, notably with the 2024 award of an Academy Award (Oscar) for Mystyslav Chernov's *Twenty Days in Mariupol* (*20 dniv u Mariupoli*, 2023).

While many documentary films are focused on the present situation, the vexed issue of how to evaluate Ukraine's past is one that film faces no less than other spheres of culture. In a process that was incredibly belated compared, for example, with the Baltic states, in 2015 the Ukrainian government ratified three laws that initiated the process later dubbed 'decommunisation': the removal of Soviet era monuments and changing of place names associated with the communist past (Verkhovna Rada Ukraine 2015). More than 50,000 urban toponyms were renamed, as were the names of certain large towns and many smaller. In 2022 this package of laws was supplemented by another, which gave a legal basis for the removal of symbols of Russian imperial and Soviet totalitarian politics and ideology from the state register of monuments of cultural heritage (Verkhovna Rada Ukraine 2022). The goal of these laws is to clear the cultural space and national memory of all that is connected to the colonial past. Alongside, Ukraine has experienced a particularly complex version of the ubiquitous debate as to how to attribute the nationality of films, and what makes a film Ukrainian, with ramifications for the evaluation of its cultural heritage. Is a film Ukrainian if it is made in Ukraine or by a citizen of Ukraine, or in the Ukrainian language or by an ethnic Ukrainian? What should be done with the Ukrainian cultural heritage of the Soviet period? One particularly vivid example from the sphere of cinema, which illustrates the complexity of the issue of 'decommunising' Ukrainian culture, is that of the famous Ukrainian filmmaker Oleksandr Dovzhenko. His poetic films, such as *Earth* (*Zemlia*, 1930) introduced

Ukrainian cinema, along with its wider culture and history, to audiences around the world. At the same time, at the suggestion of Stalin, in 1939 he made *Shchors*, one of his most popular films, which propagandised the Bolshevik myth of their seizure of power in Ukraine and celebrated the crushing of Ukrainian independence by its eponymous hero, Mykola Shchors.¹

There are many cases like this with Ukrainian culture of the Soviet and Russian Imperial periods. Moreover, Ukrainian culture of the tsarist and Soviet periods was highly multi-ethnic. The case of Sergo Paradjanov is particularly interesting: born in Georgia to Armenian parents, he studied in Moscow, but launched his career in Ukraine with his 1965 film, *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* (*Tini zabutykh predkiv*) playing an important role in the development of the Ukrainian poetic school of filmmaking. Film historians' commentaries on the life of artists under authoritarian and colonial regimes could, we contend, become a basis for societal consensus. We hope that the articles included in this special issue, can widen understanding as to the difficulties of defining and evaluating Ukrainian film history.

The study of Ukrainian film history

Ukrainian-American film historian Bohdan Nebesio has argued that the 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union precipitated the need for scholars to re-examine the monolith of Soviet cinema through the lens of the nations that followed in its wake (Nebesio 2011, 475). While there have been great strides made, this implicit challenge has not always been one that those writing about Soviet film history in English have responded to adequately. Moreover, most attempts to write about Soviet film history by necessity write about Ukrainian film and or films made in Ukraine, as for instance, books about Dziga Vertov and Soviet films of World War Two written by one of the co-authors of this introduction show (Hicks 2007, 2012). There is nevertheless a dominant tendency to view Soviet film history through the lens of Russian film history, and trace narratives from the Soviet past onto the present-day Russian Federation. While understandable to a degree, in that Russia dominated Soviet culture and, as its formal successor state, explicitly embraced the heritage and history of the Soviet Union to a far greater extent than any of the other post-Soviet states, this approach has obstructed attempts to respond to Nebesio's invitation and has tended, perhaps inadvertently, both to appropriate this history as Russian and to hold back attempts to extract other distinct national threads from wider Soviet film production.

There has, however, since 1991 been a growing number of attempts to write Ukrainian film history. But there has not been as much of this as might have been hoped: Serhy Yekelchuk's statement in 2014 that there is no English-language history of Ukrainian film still holds true, and a single French-language history by Lubomir Hosejko, the Ukrainian translation of which remains the most scholarly and comprehensive volume available in that language too (Yekelchuk 2014; Hosejko 2001; Hoseiko 2005 [2001]), even if there is a great deal of valuable, archivally-informed scholarship on Ukrainian film history published in that country (see, for example, the works by Myslavskyi, some of which are referenced in this introduction). In English, the lack of a single volume has been partially filled by a number of specially focused journal issues: the 2009 issue of *KinoKultura* under the editorship of Vitaly Chernetsky

constitutes arguably the most comprehensive examination of Ukrainian cinema currently available in English (Chernetsky 2009). A cluster of articles, including Nebesio's own, in a 2011 special issue of *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, makes an important contribution (Nebesio 2011).

As Yekelchik notes, the other materials available are books focused on Ukraine's best-known director, Oleksandr Dovzhenko, including the biography by George Liber (Liber 2002), Joshua First's important book about Ukrainian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s (First 2014), and a range of contributions to anthologies and periodicals, including a special issue of the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* on Dovzhenko (Nebesio 1994).

Since the full-scale Russian invasion of February 2022 more publications have come out, including two issues of *KinoKultura*, one on contemporary Ukrainian film across all genres, edited by Olga Blackledge, Vincent Bohlinger, Joshua First, and Yuliya V. Ladygina and one on Ukrainian documentary film edited by Bohlinger and Ladygina, but these have focused on recent cinema and the contributions have been reviews and interviews rather than in-depth scholarly work (Blackledge et al. 2022; Bohlinger and Ladygina 2023). This focus on the contemporary is much needed, and helps to convey the vibrancy of Ukrainian culture despite the terrible situation of the war. However, more work on the historical sweep of Ukrainian film is needed. In Ukraine there has been much more work of this kind, including Stanislav Menzelevs'kyi's edited volume on Donbas (Menzelevs'kyi 2017). The special issue of *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* makes an important contribution, combining a focus on recent Ukrainian film and on the salient moments of the 1960s and the work of Kira Muratova and Eva Neymann (Lihus and Branco 2023). This special joint issue of *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* and *Culture of Ukraine* is an attempt to contribute to that ongoing scholarship, with a historical emphasis, but it makes no pretensions to being comprehensive.

An important starting point for the articles that follow is the debate as to what is a Ukrainian film and on what basis can a film be defined as Ukrainian, and which Soviet-era films should be included in Ukrainian cinema and a history of it? One way of approaching this is to look for a distinctly Ukrainian cinema, made by Ukrainians, employing the Ukrainian language and relating to Ukrainian culture and hence distinct from the cinema of other nations. This approach effectively focuses on the purest, and most Ukrainian examples of Ukrainian film made in the Soviet era, or even more recently, and is motivated by the desire to free Ukrainian film (and Ukrainian culture more broadly) from the legacy of the Russian imperial dominance that has consistently denied its distinct status. Shevchuk has described this process as 'imperial appropriation' which he describes as 'such a discursive presentation of the colonized that their culture, history, language, and other identity traits either disappear completely or merge with the respective aspects of the hegemonic imperial identity' (Shevchuk 2009). The effects of this are 'the "dissolution" of Ukraine as a culture and its cinema in particular within the Russian discourse, and as a result make Ukraine hard to spot today on the cultural map of Europe' (Shevchuk 2009).

According to this interpretation, Russian-language cinema made in Ukraine can be acknowledged as participating in and serving as a vehicle for the suppression of the Ukrainian language and the national culture of Ukraine, and Shevchuk also sees the Russification of Ukrainian names as an example of the cultural assimilation. Indeed, he

argues that French historian Hosejko's study is the only Western history to consistently follow Ukrainian spellings.

Cinema that pushes back against this discourse and articulates a distinct Ukrainian national cinema tradition would usually be that made by Ukrainians and almost always employing the Ukrainian language. It would also engage with Ukrainian culture and film history: 'in addition to Dovzhenko's poetic tradition, they include an engagement with the national past and working with (or subverting) ethnographic cultural models' (Yekelchuk 2014). But this version of Ukrainian cinema was one sanctioned by the Soviets with certain themes and stylistic traits:

The Soviet authorities also supported the development of a Ukrainian 'national school' as an important attribute of nation building in the Ukrainian republic. Originally defined by Ukrainian topics or settings (historical and contemporary) and some connection to peasant culture, the Ukrainian national school quickly developed common aesthetic traits in the form of a romantic, or 'poetic,' vision first articulated in the 1920s and reaffirmed in the 1960s. The 'Ukrainian school' can thus include the work of non-Ukrainian directors contributing to this tradition, as well as those who went on to directorial careers elsewhere, while still demonstrating their formative 'Ukrainian' influence. In contrast, other films made in Ukraine can be discussed as part of the all-Soviet context in which Ukrainian cinema developed'. (Yekelchuk 2014, 4)

However, there is a danger here of restricting the scope of Ukrainian film to 'Ukrainian themes'; as Nebesio points out, this was historically used as a way for the Russian and Soviet empires to grant Ukrainian the status of ethnic cinema, a subcategory of the Great Russian national cinema, which could be about anything (Nebesio 2011, 479).

Ukrainian cinema can also be defined more inclusively and expansively, incorporating not solely Ukrainian language films. Hosejko (2001) presents a picture of national cinema in Ukraine rather than the much narrower vision of Ukrainian national cinema (Nebesio 2011, 479). He emphasises place, including all films made within the borders of present-day Ukraine, regardless of what language they employ, rather than the nationality (i.e. ethnicity) of people involved, such as producers and directors, and regardless of the presence or not of 'Ukrainian themes'. In a similar vein, Chernetsky looks at the phenomenon of multi-lingualism in Ukrainian film from the beginning of the sound era (Chernetsky 2020). Menzelev'skyi's edited volume on films made in and about the Donbas indicates this inclusive approach to Ukrainian film history, and sensibly, given the widespread use of Russian in that region of Ukraine, includes articles on many films made in Russian, by Russophone filmmakers.

The contributions to this issue

This joint special issue takes the more inclusive approach to Ukrainian film history, building on the existing track record of *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, which has published a number of articles on Ukrainian cinema over many years, including by prominent Ukrainian film scholar Trymbach (2012), and most recently in May 2024 (Lacny 2024).

The articles published in the current volume stretch from the 1920s right up until the post-Soviet period and Ukraine's founding as an independent state after 1991, and fall into three groups. The first pair of articles relate to the 1920s and the period in which

Ukrainian cinema enjoyed a relative autonomy under VUFKU, when film was part of the project of Ukrainianisation. This led to a great flowering of Ukrainian film, as discussed above. The first article that examines aspects of this period are Stanislav Menzelevs'kyi's 'The *Kino* magazine: the rise and fall Ukrainian film criticism in the 1920s', looking not at cinema itself, but the distinct nature of and role played by the wider media ecosystem of film publications in 1920's Ukraine. Vincent Bohlinger takes a completely different approach in 'Mykola Shpykovskiy's *Bread* and the Style of Late VUFKU Films', which examines the style of a single film by Shpykovskiy in relation to the wider editing norms of Ukrainian film in the 1920s.

The second pair of articles are about Ukrainian film of the 1930s and 1940s, typically seen as a dead period for Ukrainian cinema, between the high point of the 1920s and early 1930s and a revival in the 1960s (Briukhovets'ka and Olynyk 2014, 9). In 'Oleksandr Dovzhenko's film-pedagogical experiment', Oleksandr Bezruchko shows how the director's teaching practice in the late 1930s demonstrates the Dovzhenko's ongoing commitment to Ukrainian-language film and provides an insight into his work with actors. In 'The Place of Ukraine in Mark Donskoi's *The Rainbow* (1943)', Jeremy Hicks considers the extent to which a film adaptation of a novel by a Polish author and made in Central Asia may be considered part of Ukrainian cinema.

The final pair of articles look at the depiction of key moments in Ukrainian history in recent film. In 'Gareth Jones: the most tragic events of Ukrainian history on the world screen', Nataliia Cherkasova places Agnieszka Holland's film in the wider context of Ukrainian cinematic treatments of the Holodomor, and the challenges for film of representing famine. In the final article in the issue, 'Against Observation: The Panoramic Legacy of Sergei Loznitsa's Documentary Films', Lora Maslenitsyna argues that the 2014 film *Maidan* is not an observational film, as has been frequently claimed, but a panoramic film, and situates this technique in a wider history. In including this article about the internationally best-known film about the Maidan protests, a key moment in modern Ukrainian history, we are not attempting to intervene in the debate as to the relation of Loznitsa and his films to Ukrainian culture, a topic for a separate discussion.

A notable absence in this special issue is that of 1960's Ukrainian Poetic Cinema. This wonderful period of national reawakening in film is one that has received the most attention from scholars in English-language publications, for instance in Joshua First's excellent 2015 monograph, as well as in previous issues of *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* (Chernetsky 2008; Gurga 2012; Kim 2022) and in many other studies of particular directors and films. This attention is more than merited, but the current special issue draws our attention to other, more neglected aspects of Ukrainian cinema. It could also be argued that the absence of the 1960s is an advantage: arguments for the distinct nature of Ukrainian cinema are usually predicated on the importance of the 1960s in particular. Our collection of articles completely omits this period. While it might be argued that this is an oversight, it might also be countered that it makes a claim for the distinctiveness of Ukrainian cinema based on other periods.

The issue, which is being published in English and Ukrainian, is intended not only to draw more scholarly attention to Ukrainian film and depictions of Ukraine in film, but also to Ukrainian film scholarship, be that by authors based in Ukraine or elsewhere. We hope that readers, be they in Ukraine or elsewhere, will value these contributions to debates about Ukrainian film. They will have succeeded if they stimulate further discussion.

Note

1. Making a film about revolutionary history in this period was a hazardous one, as the official accounts of it were constantly changing, with Stalin becoming more prominent, and old Bolsheviks such as Shchors' deputy and the film's historical consultant, Ivan Dubovyi being arrested. Thus the dialogue in *Shchors* was frequently changed, Dubovyi had to be cut out and Dovzhenko was berated by Stalin on a number of occasions, possibly for not inserting him into the narrative (Liber 2001, 1103–1106).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Leonid Machulin heads the editorial and publishing section and teaches communications at Kharkiv State Academy of Culture. He received a Doctor of Philosophy from The H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University in 2013, and is the author of twelve books for a general readership on the history of Kharkiv and Sloboda Ukraine, including *The Ukrainian Capital for the Red Emperor* (2009), which was the basis for a documentary film on Ukrainian national TV (UT-1). He is currently researching topical matters of decolonisation, decommunisation, commemoration at a local and regional level. These topics form the subject of his book, *The Streets and Squares of Kharkiv* (2007) and a series of articles.

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