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**Baltic Cinemas—  
Flashbacks in/out of  
the House**



In this paper, I will approach the cinemas of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania using the regionalist concept of ‘Baltic cinemas’, to emphasise shared and general aspects in the national cinematic processes, because ‘by looking regionally we see trends that otherwise remain neglected’ (Iordanova 2003: 12).

The identities of the national cinemas of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are marked by several distinguishing features. They participated in the cultural self-definitions and self-images of the three politically independent nations after they gained their independence in 1918. Discontinued from their pre-war legacy, they became part of the Soviet film industry for the socialist re-invention of national imaginaries. They were challenged radically by the disruption of film production, distributional capabilities and capacities, and screening policies in the transition from the Soviet command economy to a European/global capitalist one. The 1990s and 2000s have brought new cinematic practices and experiences, new ideological agendas to the region, as well as new discussions/interpretations of the notion ‘national cinema’ in its meanings of inclusivity/exclusivity and processuality.

## I

The starting points of the Baltic cinemas were diverse and ‘rhizomatic’.<sup>1</sup> Some critics trace the origins of Estonian cinema ‘back to 1908 when the visit of Swedish King Gustav IV to Tallinn became the first newsreel ever produced.’<sup>2</sup> Other sources indicate that ‘Estonian film history started in 1912 and is tightly connected with the name of Johannes Pääsuke, who produced the first Estonian feature film *Bear Hunt in*



(Fig. 1)  
Johannes Pääsuke

*Pärnumaa* (1914).’ (Tomingas 2006.) Pääsuke, a famous ‘man with two cameras’, is widely seen as the father of Estonian cinema.



(Fig. 2)  
Ladislav Starevich

Latvian film historians are also not unanimous about the origins of their national cinematic tradition. The beginnings are seen either in the first movie screened in Riga on May 28, 1896, the premiere of the first Latvian feature, *I Went to the War* (*Es karā aiziedams*, 1920), or in the documentary films of the cinematographer Aleksandrs Stanke on the unveiling of the monument for Peter the Great in the Riga city centre and the visit of Russian Tsar Nicholas II to Riga in 1910.

National cinematic ‘fatherhood(s)’—documentary/feature, political/artistic, international/imperial/national—were established differently in Lithuania. In 1909, the Lithuanian American émigré Antanas Račiūnas filmed the sights of his native village to show to Lithuanian emigrants in the US. This diasporic ‘root’ of the national cinematic tradition would be an incomplete story of origins without Vladislavas Starevičius (known internationally as Ladislav Starevich), a transnational figure in the contemporary language of migration and belonging. In 1909, he made the film *By the Nieman River* (*Prie Nemuno*) in Kaunas. Starevich is Władysław Starewicz for Poles, and he is also known as ‘Владислав Старевич, русский

1 The concept of rhizome as discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze, Guattari 2004: 3–28).

2 *Estonian Culture* (<http://www.einst.ee/publications/kultuur/cinema.html>).

режиссер' with the films *The Belgian Lily* (*Лилия Бельгии*, 1915) and *Ruslan and Ludmilla* (*Руслан и Людмила*, 1915). He would later become a world-famous film-maker, the 'father of the national animation tradition', with his *The Dragonfly and the Ant* (*Стрекоза и муравей*, 1913) in Russia. The genealogies of the three national traditions in the Baltic cinematic history were as 'national' and 'authentic' (Pääsuke picturing Estonian-ness; Vilis Segliņš introducing the genres of historical drama and combat film in Latvia; and Antanas Račiūnas bringing the spirit of Lithuanian-ness to his community overseas) as they were transnational and culturally hybrid (Ladislav Starevich) and diasporic (Antanas Račiūnas) in their origins.

After Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia became independent nations in 1918, their budding cinematic industries played a significant role in the nation-building processes, because films, as elsewhere in Europe, 'offered a horizon that made it possible to negotiate the historical experience of displacement in a new social form' (Hansen 1991: 92). After their proclamations of independence, national audiences consisted of different and diverse social, ethnic, gender, regional and religious groups of spectators, whose experiences had been repressed, fragmented, alienated and displaced by the events of 1905, gradual, although slow, urbanisation, refugee and combat experiences during World War I, the October Revolution in Russia and by the post-revolutionary period. Very few films, however, were produced in the 1920s. In Lithuania, for example, *The Careful Father* (*Rupestingas tėvas*), a three-minute advertising feature film, was made by Lietfilm in 1927. In 1931, *Annie and Johnny* (*Jonukas ir Onute*), a full-length feature film, was made. In Estonia, comedies (*Grandmother's Present* (*Vanaema kingitus*, 1923), and *Fortunate Solution to an Apartment Crisis* (*Õnnelik korterikriisi lahendus*, 1924)), dramas (*Black Diamond* (*Must teemant*, 1923)), and historical films/screen adaptations (*Shadows of the Past* (*Mineviku varjud*, 1924), *Young Eagles* (*Noored kotkad*, 1927), and *Jüri Rumm*, 1929) were produced. Another interesting development was co-production, for example, Estonian-German (*Waves of Passion* (*Kire lained*,

1930)) and Estonian-Finnish (*Children of the Sun*, (*Päikese lapsed*, 1932), the first Estonian talkie by Theodor Luts).

In the 1930s, film production started to be seen as a significant artistic and economic phenomenon in the national cultures and for cultural policies. There was state financial support for the development of film production. For example, in Latvia the Public Culture Department assisted in initiating three projects: the screen adaptations *The Fisherman's Son* (*Zvejnieka dēls*, 1939) after the novel by Vilis Lācis; *People of Kauguri* (*Kaugurieši*, 1940), after the historical novel by Kārlis Zariņš; and *The Damb* (the film is lost).<sup>3</sup> In 1931, Estonian Culture Film (Eesti Kulturfilm) was founded by the Ministry of Culture, in order to provide financing of films promoting Estonian national identity. Movie-theatre owners were required to show an Estonian newsreel before every film. According to the director of the Estonian Film Archives, Ivi Tomingas:

During the first years of Estonian Culture Film, the emphasis was on the distribution of films and not so much on producing them—there was no proper technical basis for the latter. The clause in the foundation's constitution that cinema owners had the obligation to show the productions of Culture Film was not exactly popular with the owners. They argued that the state was interfering in business. A deeper cause for resistance lay, in fact, elsewhere: foreign newsreels were available very cheaply. And although cinemas in 1933 showed the Culture Film newsreel about the military parade on the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, it could still be said that the foundation survived due to the enthusiasm of its cameramen. (Tomingas 2006: 34–35.)

She emphasises that newsreels

largely relied on the concept of German culture films—the topics of films included locations (*Tallinn Before and Now*, *Pictures of Saku*, *Summer Resorts Beckon*, *Views of Beautiful Viljandimaa*, etc), and

activities (*From Bloom to Beehive, Paper, Oil-shale and Shale Oil Production, Juices as Refreshing Drinks*, etc), where a process of how a product was made was shown from start to finish. Events were recorded both in newsreels and separate films. The latter presented song festivals, President Konstantin Päts's trips around the country, and the activities of the Defence League.' (Tomingas 2006: 35.)

In Lithuania, the first local newsreel was made by Feognijus Dunajevas in 1921. Later Stepas Uzdonas, Stasys Vainalavičius, Alfonsas Žibas, Kazys Lukšys and Ilja Goršeinas worked actively in the production of Lithuanian newsreels during the inter-war period. The newsreels concentrated on different topics; most often, however, they presented the central image of Lithuanian-ness, whether within Lithuania or diasporic (e.g. Kazys Motūzas filming the World Lithuanian Congress in 1935).

The films of the 1920s and 1930s, whether feature films or newsreels and documentaries, participated in cultural policies aimed at detaching the independent present from the colonial past in the Russian empire, *vis-à-vis* Russian and Baltic German histories, cultures and political legacies, and constructing new national, European, historical, cultural and political identities in the Baltic societies, as well as certain cinematic collectivities in formation. This period was a time of the general interest of film-makers across Europe and in the United States in the re-claimed genre of the historical film, symptomatic of nationalist tendencies in inter-war Europe, which was appropriated as a model by the film-makers in the Baltic region. As Laurent Véray and Bill Krohn argue regarding inter-war French cinema:

'French film should not simply be about pleasure; right now it should aid national reconstruction,' stated *La Cinematographie française* in October 1919. This was translated concretely, on the one hand, by the production of highly ideological films, where the portrayal of unrest in the working class showed explicit collusion between the German menace, which had

just been conquered, and the Bolshevik peril, which threatened to spread. (Véray, Krohn 2005: 340.)

This argument holds very true for the Baltic national cinematic contexts of the inter-war period. The invention of nation-states after 1918 was transferred to filmic canvasses, and the genres of historical/combat films, screen adaptations, as well as newsreels and documentaries were particularly instrumental in constructing and valorising a particular image of national identity. At the same time, they reinforced the sense of belonging to a national community. In 1924, the first Estonian full-length feature film was produced, the above-mentioned *Shadows of the Past* (cinematographer Konstantin Märskä). Theodor Luts's full-length *Young Eagles* (1927) was regarded as an outstanding cinematic achievement and it is sometimes regarded as an Estonian equivalent of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).



(Fig. 1)  
*Young Eagles*, dir. Theodor Luts, 1927  
(courtesy of the Estonian Film Archives).

The Latvian historical film *The Bear Slayer* (*Lāčplēsis*, 1931), by Aleksandrs Rusteikis,<sup>4</sup> was produced as a cinematic 'sequel' of the literary epic *Lāčplēsis*, written by Andrejs Pumpurs in the 1880s. The script masterfully inscribed the leading text-myth of Latvian

3 *The Fisherman's Son* was finished before World War II started. *Kauguriēši* was censored and revised in compliance with the tenets of Soviet ideology in 1940.

4 Aleksandrs Rusteikis was trained as an actor in St. Petersburg, worked in Berlin for some time, and later became the art director of the Russian Drama Theatre in Riga.

cultural nationalism of the late 19th century into a film-myth for contemporary political nation-building, proposing a unifying cinematic vernacular (see Hansen 1999) for the Latvian national self-image and its European-ness in the period of post-imperial independence. At the same time, *Lāčplēsis* is a spectacular example of Rusteikis's work as an imaginative translator of German expressionist and Russian avant-garde stylistic techniques into the aesthetics of a passionately nationalist film.

Historical films and screen adaptations of the inter-war period served history and its popularisation in various forms; they were claimed by the nationalist ideological agendas of the day. The past had to be re-imagined and re-apprehended in these historical films, which had the specific social and cultural function of re-enacting the past, its myths and events, in order to 'nationalise' cinematic audiences. In terms of genre, they demonstrated the ways in which the history of the cinema involved relationships with the other arts—as 'organic' continuations of the national literary traditions (for example, in the Estonian *Young Eagles*, or the Latvian *The Fisherman's Son*). These generic hybrids (war/history) were made after the (autobiographical) novels of contemporaries, thus contributing significantly to the elaboration of the literary canon and literary history as part of national cultural policies.

In other words, the national cinemas clearly developed a regional vector of what Thomas Elsaesser calls 'a dual cultural legacy' of European cinema: 'that of the 19th century novel and of the 20th century modernist avant-gardes' (Elsaesser 2005: 9). The Latvian *Lāčplēsis*, in my view, offers an interesting variation of this duality, adding the inflection of the cultural legacy of the Baltic cinemas. It is actually a screen sequel of a literary text, not a novel but an epic poem, with a metanarrative status, based on local legends, telling of the mythic Latvian hero Lāčplēsis (Bear Slayer). This cinematic sequel of the national epic, a fascinating example of cinematic pictorialism, locates the individual adventure of the Latvian peasant Jānis Vanags in the real historical events of early 20th century Latvia. At the beginning of the film, he is reading the book *Lāčplēsis*, so the final pages

of the epic become the opening scenes of the filmic narrative. However, the last pages of his copy of the book are missing. Due to this textual open-endedness, he is not aware of the death of the *mythic* Lāčplēsis in the original, and he is ready to become a new *historical* Lāčplēsis for his nation. The mythic hero, the incarnation of national virtues and a symbol of national heroic masculinity, moves into Vanags's body (somewhat like Siegfried's magic cloak in Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, 1924) and remains the vital magical source of the peasant-soldier's heroic-as-historical deeds for the sake of his beloved woman and nation during the Russian Revolution of 1905, World War I, and the War of Independence. Like Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927), or Fred Niblo's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925), the film had to manifest the moral power of national will and the indomitable energy of national vitality in a male body. Lāčplēsis's spirit, hidden in Vanags's body, clearly implies the ideological meaning of cinematically historicising the present and, at the same time, of overcoming historical causality in the literary-cinematic myth of Lāčplēsis as a powerful and constant identity-motor in the nation-building process.

To conclude this section, in the inter-war period, national film industries as studio systems only started to develop in the three Baltic countries. However, each celebrated the production of feature films, which, despite their generic differences, were the first cinematic representations of the nation, its mythic history and its modern present. Referring to contemporary cinematic schools (Expressionism and the Russian avant-garde) and individual film directors (e.g. Eisenstein and Griffith), they impressively tailored the visual fabric of national cultural memories.

## II

Let me start this part with a couple of excerpts. Back in the early 1950s, one of the young specialists posted to the Tallinfil studio, Aleksandr Vasilyev, wrote about this different world in a letter:

Dear mummy, —I wrote, —I have just arrived in desired and mysterious Tallinn.

At first sight, the city looks pleasant to me: the houses are of absolutely different architecture than in our Penza. I have, certainly, already seen something similar in Germany, but for you it would be something exotic. [---] Truly the Middle Ages, even an iron collar for chaining a criminal has been preserved.

In short, I do not regret at all that I have been posted to work in this city. People here are (I was long searching for a definition as I did not want to tell lies, but it was necessary to encourage my mum, eternally concerned with my life) quite good, of European upbringing, and they talk politely. (Quoted in Shkolnikov 2002.)

Further on, he recalls observantly the psychological nuances and political accents of his meeting with the Estonian Minister of Culture:

The minister's name was Vladimir Antonovich Riis. He had to take a decision which was not in the competence of the studio director, namely to send me away because of my redundancy. The minister stared in my direction. The wrinkles on his dark peasant forehead became even more noticeable.

—Damn it!—he exclaimed.—They send us personnel whom we have not requested. An editor-in-chief! We don't need him, when we lack good cinematographers, equipment engineers and sound technicians. And we do not release enough production now, so our editor copes with it.

—Besides, the director added, our newsreel production—and except for newsreels we haven't released anything else so far—demands exceptional knowledge of the Estonian language.

Yes, I understood, and a turning point came on which it depended whether I would stay here or not. However, for some reason I felt suddenly at ease, that I would leave here with pleasure as soon as possible. They did not want me, but also I was not too thirsty for them.

But some obstinate force had already risen in me. The ambition, ambushed in

unknown hiding places of my soul, surfaced suddenly. Would I, the pride of our class, the hope of my professors, return to Moscow with a beaten look?

—OK, I said with the intonations of the Count of Monte Cristo.—I have understood you and I am ready to leave. I only ask you to write for me here—I got up and pointed in a certain direction—everything that you have just said to me.

—What should I write?—the minister frowned.

—What you have just said. That you don't need experts of my profile. That you are not going to produce feature films. And in general, do you mean that there, in Moscow, where, by the way, they told me absolutely different things than what you are telling me now (I gave the opponents an impudent and relentless look)—there in Moscow they do not know what they are doing? (Quoted in Shkolnikov 2002.)

In terms of power relations such as periphery-centre and belonging-exclusion in the Soviet period, this episode takes us far beyond the incomplete and often simplified, yet perpetuated perceptions of the ways in which national cultural productions in the Soviet republics were organised and censored in different periods of Soviet state socialism. It invites us to scrutinise the complexities, ideological and cultural, personal and political, in the dimensions of 'Soviet', 'regional' and 'national' in the Baltic film-making histories.

After the end of World War II, when the Baltic countries were re-annexed and incorporated to the USSR, most of the pre-war cinematic legacy was rejected by the Stalinist ideological apparatus. In the 1950s, the Baltic countries became a Soviet periphery, with the destroyed statehood, but with a marked difference from other Soviet peripheries. Soviet cultural imagery and political recognition of the region were always influenced by its being part of Europe as cultural and political 'space-time' (Boyarin 1994). Thus, the opposition between 'nature' and 'culture' that 'structured Stalinist representations of progress' (Widdis 2003: 8) asks for a more nuanced analysis of this Soviet

centre-periphery relationship and its procedures for re-inscribing Baltic national and regional cultures into Soviet cultural and ideological values.

In the film industry, a palimpsestic procedure of launching new Soviet national film studios peripheralised them into benefactors of financial allocations and ideological censorship from Moscow. Recognised (or unrecognised) film directors were sent by Moscow. This launch and development of ‘national studios’ in each of the Baltic countries followed the Soviet pre-war policies and experiences of building a film studio in each Soviet republic, and making films in national languages (see, e.g., Kenez 1998: 162).

Beginning in the 1950s, the three Baltic national cinemas were ‘annexed’ into the Soviet film industry, and until the early 1990s they managed to move from the Soviet cinematic periphery to the mainstream of cultural production. Their contribution, in terms of generic and cinematic language, as a complex realm of stylistic and narrative cross-fertilisation, still requires an inclusive and comprehensive re-examination. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the genres of biopic, historical film and screen adaptation, central to the cultural cementing of the post-war Soviet historical and political imaginaries, were instrumental in the visual/ideological domestication of the Baltic region. Particularly in Estonia, a number of films were produced, and they were marked by the stylistics of survey, exploration and observation of the Baltic locations as belonging to the Soviet (cinematic) space.

Among the film professionals posted to the Baltic republics from central film studios in Moscow were such celebrities as Yuli Raizman, the director of the immensely popular *Mashenka* (*Машенька*, 1942). He came to Latvia in order to make the biopic *Rainis* (1949) about the Latvian poet Rainis (aka Jānis Pliekšāns)—one of the key political and cultural figures in the modern national history—in the newly formed Riga Film Studio (Rīgas kinostudija, established in 1948). Rolands Kalniņš started his career in the crew of the film, along with Yuli Raizman and Eduard Tisse, Sergei Eisenstein’s legendary cinematographer. On the one hand, this biopic was part of Stalin’s

plan of monumental cine-propaganda: the late 1940s and early 1950s were a period of prolific production of biopics throughout the USSR. On the other hand, the biopic was, most probably, one of the most successful genres of post-war Stalinist cine-indoctrination (see Dobrenko 2005 and Dobrenko 2007) of national cultural productions with the totalising canons of Soviet historiography. For example, Igor Savchenko made *Taras Shevchenko* (*Тарас Шевченко*, 1951) in Ukraine, Efim Dzigan directed *Jambul* (*Жамбыл*, 1952) in Alma-Ata, and Kamil Yarmatov made *Alisher Navoiy* (*Алишер Навоӣ*, 1948) in Tashkent.



(Fig. 4)  
Herbert Rappaport (holding megaphone), during the shooting of *Life in the Citadel*, 1947  
(courtesy of the Estonian Film Archives).



(Fig. 5)  
Kaljo Kiisk (photo by K. Oras, 1950s,  
courtesy of the Estonian Film Archives).

Herbert Rappaport (*Professor Mamlock* (*Профессор Мамлок*, 1938), *A Musical Story* (*Музыкальная история*, 1940), *Taxi to Heaven* (*Воздушный извозчик*, 1943) and *Aleksandr Popov* (*Александр Попов*, 1949)) was another famous Soviet film director, in his youth having assisted G. W. Pabst in ten films, who came to Estonia to share the collective



ideological and artistic ‘fatherhood’ of the birth of Soviet Baltic cinemas. Mikhail Yegorov (*Yachts at Sea (Jahid merel, 1955)*), Aleksandr Mandrykin (*When Night Falls (Kui saabub õhtu, 1955)* and *The Turning Point (Pöördel, 1957)*), Viktor Nevezhin (*A Chance Encounter (Juhuslik kohtumine, 1960)*) and Igor Yeltsov (*Men Stay at Home (Mehed jäävad koju, 1956)*) made films about the changes during the Sovietisation of post-war Estonia. Screen adaptations were re-claimed in feature film production, as, for example, *In the Back Yard (Tagahoovis, 1957)* by Viktor Nevezhin, after the book by the famous Estonian writer Oskar Luts. Rappaport also directed adaptations, such as *Life in the Citadel (Elu tsitadellis, 1947)*; script by Leonid Trauberg, after the play by the famous Estonian writer August Jakobson) and *Light in Koordi (Valgus Koordis, 1951)*; an adaptation of the book by Hans Leberecht). For *Life in the Citadel* he received the State Stalin Prize. In Rappaport’s third film, *Andrus Finds Happiness (Andruse õnn, 1955)*, Kaljo Kiisk, a legendary Estonian actor and film director, played his first film role. In the 1950s, he was also the only young Estonian film director and co-directed with Viktor Nevezhin (*June Days (Juunikuu päevad, 1957)*) and Juli Kun (*Mischievous Curves (Vallatud kurvid, 1959)*). Georg Ots, who starred in *Light in Koordi* and who would later become an exceptionally popular singer among the Soviet public, received the State Stalin Prize for his role in this film about the agricultural nationalisation reform in Estonia.



(Fig. 6)  
*Life in the Citadel*, dir. Herbert Rappaport, 1947  
(courtesy of the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum).

Screen adaptations of ideologically schematic works by politically engaged writers (e.g.

August Jakobson) were no less important than biopics in fashioning the national literary legacies in compliance with the construction of new, Soviet/Marxist meanings of the national past. Moreover, screen adaptations of works by contemporary Estonian writers, together with the publications of these literary sources in the Russian language, were ideologically instrumental in revising the national literary process in terms of the socialist realist canon and in integrating the re-canonised national literary history of each Baltic republic into the Soviet literary canon. At the same time, through literature, cinema had to achieve authenticity and authority. By framing literature as political authority and the source of cinematic imagination, the films produced by the studios in Tallinn and Riga domesticated the national audiences according to the ideological and political values of the Sovietisation process in the Baltic countries.

In the context of Lithuania, marked by an active anti-Soviet guerrilla movement in the 1950s, the film *Marite* (1947) should be mentioned here. It was dedicated to the young Lithuanian woman Marite Melnikaite, a member of the anti-fascist partisan movement during the war and a Hero of the Soviet Union. The film<sup>5</sup> about a Lithuanian woman as a martyr for the Soviet-as-national liberation cause was produced at Mosfilm, directed by the famous Soviet film-maker Vera Stroyeva, and distributed as part of the Soviet cinematic imagology of Baltic history in World War II. The national studio in Lithuania (Lietuvos kino studija) was launched only in 1956.

### III

The dismantling of the Stalinist ideological imperatives and Khrushchev’s ‘facial’ liberalisation of public and cultural discourses unlocked ways in which the cinemas of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were emerging as clearly distinct national traditions, with innovative schools: for instance, the Riga School of Poetic Documentary (Herz Frank (aka Hercs Franks), Uldis

<sup>5</sup> Young Donatas Banionis played his first role (Petras) in *Marite*; he was the only Lithuanian actor in the cast.

Brauns, Aivars Freimanis, Ivars Seleckis, Ansis Epnerns and Juris Podnieks) and Lithuanian documentary directors (Robertas Verba), *auteur* cinema (Vytautas Žalakevičius) and traditions of animation (Priit Pärn, Rein Raamat and Arnolds Burovs). It is also important to recall here that popular cinema was becoming an influential part of national and regional cinematic production, in many ways having contributed to the rebirth of cultural nationalism. For example, the cult film *The Last Relic* (*Viimne reliikvia*, 1969), made at Tallinfilm in Estonia, offered a clearly nationalist agenda, as a cinematic expression of resistance and longing for independence. The phenomenon of this film's excellent reception and its overall acclaim by the Soviet audience, in my view, offers a way (one of many) to explore not only national and regional, but also Soviet spectatorship as a complex and discontented 'political consumer' of popular cinema beyond the hegemonic ideological and political framework.

After the immense nationwide success of Vytautas Žalakevičius's film *Nobody Wanted to Die* (*Niekas nenorėjo mirti*, 1965), the central and other national studios of the Soviet Union sought actors and actresses with clearly Baltic ('Nordic', 'German', 'European', 'American' or 'alien') appearances. Individual actors and actresses from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were more than welcome in the Soviet film industry.



(Fig. 7)  
Donatas Banionis in *Solaris*,  
dir. Andrey Tarkovsky, 1972.

Most Baltic actors were actively involved in the production of films of specific genres—Westerns, adventure and historical films, science fiction films, spy and detective films, and war films (either in the roles of fascists or spies for the Soviet imaginary of existential alterity or double identity) in the Soviet popular cinema. Their



(Fig. 8)  
Jüri Järvet in *King Lear*, dir. Grigori Kozintsev, 1971  
(courtesy of the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum).

characters were very much different from the stereotyped filmic representations of Soviet heroic masculinity of war and socialism building. Algimantas Masiulis provides a very interesting comment on people's responses to his roles of fascist officers in Soviet war films:

I remember, we were shooting a film in Kaliningrad. Around us there were lots of people gaping. I was in the uniform of a German colonel. During a break I noticed a woman behind the fence, waving her hand at me. I approached her and we started talking. It turned out that during the war she had been in a German concentration camp. 'There I had enough time to look at SS guys. You are the spitting image of an SS guy!', the woman said in admiration. Paradox... And after *The Board and a Sword*, it was written in



(Fig. 9)  
Lembit Ulfsak in *Till Eulenspiegel*,  
dir. Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov, 1976.

*Pravda*: 'The role of the Lithuanian actor Masiulis is a tremendous success. How to explain its popularity? He plays a convinced Nazi, splashing with energy. And energy always causes respect. All the roles of Masiulis are marked with potentiality and energy.'

But spectators are not fools; they want complex images from us. As in life. So I tried to give a certain lustre to my Nazi characters. In fact they were very much prepared, sometimes even educated people!<sup>6</sup>

On the one hand, they often played negative characters, such as spies, terrorists and fascists. On the other, due to their portrayals of very diverse characters in the films of other genres, they were perceived as embodiments of a sort of ideal masculinity—as reliable, familial, reserved, masterful and rational.

The film director Valeri Rubinchik's memories of his work with Regimantas Adomaitis are quite revealing in terms of his stereotyped perceptions of 'occidental masculinity' and 'Baltic otherness' in the actor as unsolved mystery, elevated cultural upbringing, reserved character and distanced nature:

My first impressions of Adomaitis stem from Grigori Mikhailovich Kozintsev's film *King Lear*. Adomaitis amazed me with his unique combination of courage and congenital intelligence. [---]

We filmed in Minsk, and it was almost winter. There was a great deal of penetrating wind, raising a blizzard. It created difficulties, but I never heard any complaints from Adomaitis. He was always disciplined, all business. Our crew loved him very much. He was friendly and communicated remarkably with everybody. He was also a favourite of women, though he was never vulgar and loose. Everyone knew that in Vilnius he had a wife, an actress, and sons. Regimantas always seemed reserved, benevolent and a little bit mysterious. He was and remains a mysterious person to me. (Rubinchik 2007.)



(Fig. 10)  
Ingrida Andriņa in *The Last Relic*,  
dir. Grigori Kromanov, 1969 (photo by O. Vihandi,  
courtesy of the Estonian Film Archives).

Baltic actresses, such as Faime Jūrno, Vija Artmane, Lilita Ozoliņa, Ingrida Andriņa and Eugenia Pleskite, were seen as exalted and idealised examples of 'Western' refined femininity.

The appearance of Baltic actors on the Soviet screen significantly contributed to constructing the social perception of gendered and ethnicised Baltic countries as a liberalised image of the 'West' and 'Europe' in the Soviet psycho-geography. One might say that Baltic 'European-ness' was an unabsorbable transgression in the Baltics' otherwise successfully peripheralised status, and it was shaped into diverse images of difference/alterity in the Soviet cinema. We should also not forget that the 1960s were marked by accelerating urbanisation and the active development of the tourist industry in the Soviet economy, which stressed regional exotics and opportunities to consume this exotic difference in the Soviet peripheries.

'Baltic-ness' as a gendered and ethnicised image of the 'region' was cinematically incorporated into the Soviet ideological and cultural project. I would only like to note here that the dimensions of gender and ethnicity in Soviet cultural production and, more specifically, in its cinematic realm, still wait for researchers to analyse the ways in which the Soviet audiences of different generations and localities were trained to perceive these three nations as a kind of regional totality. This long-term 'synchronisation' of cultural productions, historical legacies, local specificities and linguistic diversities into a totalised and stereotyped regional image of the

6 See <http://www.mk.ru/numbers/297/article9806.htm>.

'Soviet Baltic' could not avoid the emergence of cultural resistance and nostalgia for the past, as an image of 'the own' and 'owned' regional, national and historical differences and, finally, detachment from the Soviet present.

When it comes to the films produced in the Baltic national studios, they had very different destinies of either success, or censorship and silence. Some films were immediately successful countrywide, as *Nobody Wanted to Die*, *The Last Relic*, *The Wagtail's Army* (*Cielaviņš armija*, 1964) and the TV-series *Long Way in the Dunes* (*Ilgais ceļš kāpās*, 1980). In terms of genre development, these few turned out to be among the most successful and popular films in the genres of Soviet Western, adventure film/adaptation and historical/family saga. From an ideological perspective, they also raised uncomfortable questions about the national pasts, identities and belonging, either by turning to the anti-Soviet guerrilla movements and complexities of national histories of the 20th century, or by using an adventure/adaptation framework as an Aesopian means of addressing the contemporary issues of power, resistance and freedom. Films focusing on the war and post-war events and controversies could not avoid the influence of the Polish film school, for example the films of Andrzej Wajda and Jerzy Kawalerowicz. From a comparative perspective, one should devote much broader space to the studies of aesthetic (trans)national authorities, such as Italian neorealism, French New Wave or the Polish film school, in the Baltic cinematic production of the Soviet period.

Another group of films mostly addressed national audiences. This, perhaps, gave way to a more imaginative and ideologically 'porous' national popular cinema. In Estonia, Peeter Urbla, Leida Laius, Kaljo Kiisk, Mikk Mikiver, Peeter Simm and Olav Neuland, in Latvia Rolands Kalniņš, Oļģerts Dunkers, Ēriks Lācis and Jānis Streičs, and in Lithuania Arūnas Žebriūnas, Algimantas Puipa, Jonas Vaitkus and others made films in the 'local' cultural contexts and limited themselves to rather 'peripheral' responsibilities in comparison to the central studios' cinematic production. Popular cinema of various genres played an important role in the recognition of local and national concerns,

e.g. films by Arvo Kruusement and Kaljo Kiisk in Estonia; the works of Gunārs Piesis, Aloizs Brenčs, Leonīds Leimanis and Aivars Freimanis in Latvia; and the productions of Arūnas Žebriūnas, Raimondas Vabalas and Algimantas Puipa in Lithuania. Only a few historical films, such as the Lithuanian *Herkus Mantas* (1972) and the Latvian *The Servants of the Devil* (*Vella kalpi*, 1972), were made. However, many novels representative of national cultural canons were adapted for the screen: for example Arvo Kruusement's *Spring* (*Kevade*, 1969), *Summer* (*Suvi*, 1976) and *Autumn* (*Sūgis*, 1990), after the trilogy of Oskar Luts; the above-mentioned *The Last Relic*, after the legendary Estonian historical tale *Prince Gabriel, or, the Last Days of Piritā Convent* (*Vürst Gabriel, ehk, Piritā kloostri viimsed päevad*, 1893) by Eduard Bornhöhe; *The Slough Wader* (*Purva bridējs*, 1966) by Leonīds Leimanis; *Ceplis* (1972) by Rolands Kalniņš, after the famous novel by Pavils Rozitis; Gunars Piesis's *In the Shadow of Death* (*Nāves ēnā*, 1971), after Rūdolf Blaumanis's short story; *Oh, Blow Ye Wind* (*Pūt, vējiņi*, 1973) by Gunars Piesis, after the legendary play by Rainis etc. An interesting generic development, characteristic of Tallinnfilm, was science fiction cinema (the Polish-Estonian co-production *Navigator Pirx* (*Test pilota Pirxa/Navigaator Pirx*, 1978), *The Dead Mountaineer Hotel* ("Hukkunud alpinisti" hotell, 1979), *Solo* (*Soolo*, 1979) and *Wedding Picture* (*Pulmapilt*, 1981)).

One more group of films includes those that were banned/detained/censored for distribution, such as, for example, the Estonian *Madness* (*Hullumeelsus*, 1968). As the director Kaljo Kiisk recalls, his first banned film was

*Traces* [*Jäljed*, 1963], which I had even managed to show in Italy. It was about organising collective farms. The strongest episode was the scene of parting with the animals when they were taken away to collective farms. Not only the owners of cows, pigs and goats cried on the screen, but also spectators in the theatre. In general, I was accused of laughing at the authorities in the picture. The militiaman, played by the most colourful actor Rudolf Nuude,

did not come across as a respectable man, but as a sort of ridiculous chatterbox, and even the head of a local Party unit did not have a serious 'Soviet' face. The second film banned for many years was *Madness*. Oh, what a remarkable actors' ensemble gathered there! Voldemar Panso, Jüri Järvet, the Lithuanian popular cinema and theatre actors Babkauskas and Bledis; even the great Miltinis agreed to play the role of a mad artist. I brought the film to Moscow for screening, and many people, critics and film directors came. The gossip about a scandalous picture by an Estonian guy probably spread quickly. But after the screening was over, an official from the Committee for Cinematography declared that there would be no discussion, and he invited me for a conversation.

The verdict was severe: the picture would not be allowed distribution. At the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, I was directly told that most probably Kiisk considered them fools, and they understood that the film was about the Soviet 'occupational' armies etc. Until 1990, both films were banned and shelved, and I had no rights to them, and I could not show my works anywhere. (Kiisk 2003.)

Latvian film *I Remember Everything, Richard! or Rock and Splinters (Es visu atceros, Ričard! or Akmens un Šķembas, 1966)* was about Latvians who served in the German army during World War II. The script includes autobiographical elements from the wartime experience of the scriptwriter Viktors Lorencs, and it also addresses the destiny of people of his generation. It was banned several times, many episodes were eliminated, and the title was changed three times.

In the first three sections of this article, I have highlighted only a few aspects of the national/regional cinematic histories. These histories, in my view, will guide researchers to situate the particular Baltic contexts in the framework of national film as a general research paradigm, and to examine the regionally contextualised legacies of Baltic national cinemas. Study of

the Baltic cinematic production—lost, forgotten, erased, displaced—also requires critical re-assessment of the contemporary hegemonic politics of forgetting, crucial to the black and white revisions of the past. Let me give some examples. The work of such masters of cinema as Raizman and Rappaport was part of the post-war Soviet cultural and ideological machinery applied to the context of the Baltics in the 1940s and 1950s. However, we are still missing an analysis of the causes for which they agreed to work and even move to the Baltic capitals at the time of an anti-cosmopolitan and anti-Semitic campaign; this, however, could give us a more complex understanding of the cultural/cinematic/generic hybridisation process, beyond the context of the imposed and pitilessly exercised hegemonic dogmas, ideological frameworks and cultural policies of that period.

Or another example. The Lithuanian film *Nobody Wanted to Die* (1965) opens with a dedication to the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, and thus it can be seen as an apologia to the Soviet power in Lithuania, although its working titles were *Terror* and *Bears*. The refined visual arrangements, existentialist motifs in the problem of the choice between life and death, and even the choice of the Western as a genre—all this expresses a whole range of aesthetic and stylistic influences in this filmic narrative, beyond borders, limits and censorships. The creative use of the Western as a generic framework for the film's narrative had its reverse side, coded in the surname Lokis (Bear) and the figure of a local pagan god, which open and close the filmic narrative. The Lokis family, thus, turn into guardians of the sacral national territory (Lithuanian-ness), and the film follows the ancient plot of sons' revenge for their fathers. This was an element beyond the formally politicised plot. On the one hand, the film addressed the political situation in Soviet Lithuania after the end of the war and the anti-Soviet resistance of the Forest Brethren. This film introduced the theme and the controversies of nationalist resistance to power in the Soviet cinema (as did the Moldavian *Bitter Grains (Горькие зёрна, 1966)*, the Uzbek *Extraordinary Commissar (Чрезвычайный комиссар, 1970)* and the Ukrainian *The White Bird Marked with Black*

(*Белая птица с чёрной отметиной*, 1971)). It showed 'negative' characters in love and pain, the feelings uniting them with 'positive' characters. On the other hand, the narrative framing of the story re-claimed (and essentialised) meanings of 'roots', masculinity, nationality and belonging as important values with universal appeal. In my view, these transgressive, invasive meanings as a manifestation of the film-director's radical 'maroonage' strongly resonated in the Soviet spectatorship of the late 1960s, as they were more mythological, even archaic, than ideological, thus reflecting a growing culture of social dissent.

*The Last Relic*, overwhelmingly successful across the USSR, should also be seen in the post-1968 context. It became a political allegory, reaching far beyond the Soviet Estonian borders, to those spectators who wanted to see its call for freedom and resistance differently from the majority, who were flooded with emotions of a love story and adventure on the Soviet screen. Krzysztof Kieślowski wrote that 'cultural policies may be made by politicians, who ensure their execution, but it could be that the people associated with culture act in line with their own views, language and understanding of the world.' (Quoted in Coates 2005: 16.) Concrete and historically contextualised film analyses would immensely help us in understanding the interaction between politics and image, censorship and subversion, ideology and the Aesopian language in the Baltic cinemas of the Soviet period.

#### IV

The 1990s and early 2000s were a dramatic period for post-Soviet national film industries. On the one hand, a shift occurred from the Soviet centralised financial system and 'republican studios' to the emergence of multiple independent film studios. New small studios had already been founded in the late 1980s: e.g. *Kinema* by Šarūnas Bartas in Lithuania, *Exitfilm* by Peeter Urbla in Estonia, and *Kaupo Filma* by Guntis Trekteris in Latvia. Donatas Vaišnoras has eloquently described the Lithuanian situation: 'Today there are two film camps... The first enjoys the patronage of the Ministry of Culture through nepotism and cronyism, and the

second is independent cinema. The latter is a civic, grassroots initiative, which hopefully will bring some fresh air into this situation.' (Vaišnoras 2006.) On the other hand, rapidly declining national film production and inclusion confronted the new context of European/global film production and distribution. Film industries, distributional capacities and screening policies had to be re-conceptualised and re-experienced in the period of transition to market economies, and also to a new cinematographic Europe. As Randall Halle points out:

The Europe of particulate nation-states ... ended as the Iron Curtain no longer exists. Its borders now surge from the Atlantic, rush to the Urals, flow into the Mediterranean, the Black, and Caspian Seas, and eddy around the Straits of Bosphorus. Anchored by institutions like the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe, the continent is reimagining itself as a community both economically and culturally. The transnationalization of capital in the EU coincides with a transnationalization of culture. (Halle 2002: 7.)

European post-colonial/post-socialist transnationalisation of capital(s) and culture(s) has been crucial to the ways in which the 'old' and 'new' European nation-states today have redrawn themselves as cinematic communities through new production and distribution policies. This process has also influenced post-socialist/post-Soviet discussions of the concept and paradigm of 'national cinema' and its value, closely related to the meanings of a reconstructed and re-imagined nation-state, of nation, of cultural and historical identity. At the same time, beginning in the early 1990s, the national cinemas, called to re-imagine national communities, found themselves in deep financial crises, and with little or no experience in acting within the European ensembles of production. However, the Lithuanian film critic Skirmantas Valiulis (in my opinion, correctly) argues that the 'death of cinema' is a myth:

Everybody says it's because of finances.  
But I think that there are more reasons:

different existence of the state, different themes, coming of other cinematographers; older generation is dying, and middle generation is coming, especially lots of young people, that are just starting or waiting for start and can't go any further. There are many reasons, and the word "dying" is fusing a little bit, as something totally new and unseen for our eyes is coming into life. (Valiulis 2000.)

In this complex economic, ideological and cultural context, the popular cinemas of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania of the 1990s and early 2000s were actively involved in the collective visual re-imagining of post-Soviet national communities. As part of this process, they were preoccupied with searching for their cinematic 'vernacular imaginaries' (see Hansen 1999), to organise, define and subdue the details of past experiences, to bring the past genealogies into conformity with present-day hegemonic ideologies, 'structures of significance' or 'needs' (Geertz 1975: 9). The re-claimed genres of the 1990s and 2000s were the historical film/epic (*Utterly Alone* (*Vienui vieni*, 2004) in Lithuania; *Guards of Riga* (*Rīgas Sargi*, 2007) in Latvia) and screen adaptation (*Wikman's Boys* (*Wikmani poisid*, 1995), after Jaan Kross's autobiographical novel (1988), and *Names in Marble* (*Nimed marmortahvilil*, 2002), after Albert Kivikas's novel (1936) in Estonia; and *The Forest of Gods* (*Dievų miškas*, 2005), after the novel by Balys Sruoga (1957) in Lithuania).<sup>7</sup> The revived interest in these genres in popular Baltic cinemas since the early 1990s is understandable in the political context of the nation- and state-reconstruction, as well as joining the European Union and NATO. As an anonymous critic has said, observantly considering this tendency in the Estonian cinematic context:

This obsession with Estonian history has probably diminished international interest. Primarily directed at the small domestic audience, the conflicts of the characters develop in a specific historical context. Although these stories do not lack a universally understandable starting point, the events only become fully clear to a viewer

who is aware of the historical background. Like art in general, Estonian film, too, was focussed on the issue of national identity. Maintaining national characteristic features acted as an indirect opposition to Soviet ideology which, at least in rhetoric, identified people through class and worldwide mission. The fact that such differentiation had survived in the films of the early 1990s, confirms the prevailing confusion as regards self-determination. Attempts to resuscitate the ideals of the earlier 20-year independence period, characterised the whole of society. But returning to the 'roots' proved impossible.<sup>8</sup>

Historical imagination as a process of remembering and forgetting is a political and affective operation in the culture industry, for the sake of newly favoured and uncritical cultural narratives. However, as Lisa Lowe has argued, culture is both the medium of the present and always the site that mediates the past, the medium "through which history is grasped as difference, as fragments, shocks, and flashes of disjunction"—or, I would suggest, perhaps flashbacks of connection. Indeed, it is in culture that individuals and communities struggle and remember, struggle to remember, and 'in that difficult remembering, imagine and practice both subject and community differently' (Lowe 1998: 8).

On the one hand, the spectator of post-Soviet popular cinema has been immersed in the repertoire of national memories/narratives that "'split off" from the allegedly unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment' (Lowe 1998: 8). Historical combat films, as well as adaptations of autobiographical novels, have been instrumental in producing certain cinematic/cultural/political imaginaries in national post-socialist master narratives, in order to come to terms with the controversial past. Coming to terms is never neutral. It took place in the

7 On the other hand, there have been attempts at ironic deconstructions of metanarratives, such as *All My Lenins* (*Minu Leninid*, 1997) and *Men at Arms* (*Malev*, 2005) in Estonian narrative cinema.

8 See the chapter on feature film in the Internet encyclopaedia *Estonica* ([http://www.estonica.org/eng/lugu.html?categ=41&menyy\\_id=104&alam=57&leht=2](http://www.estonica.org/eng/lugu.html?kateg=41&menyy_id=104&alam=57&leht=2)).

context of capitalist Europeanisation and globalisation as a conditioning/structuring meta-narrative of transitionalism in the Baltic political discourses of the 1990s. Popular cinemas as parts of national cultural productions, in my view, turned the imploding post-socialist ambivalences and controversies within nations into the essentialised idea of nation as an 'organic' and exclusive historical and cultural continuity, and of its 'return to Europe' (delimited by the politically charged meanings of the trauma-recovery discourse). This post-socialist obsession with radical revisions and re-writings of the meanings of the past also includes its cinematic topographies. Most probably, it explains, at least partially, the fact that today we are faced with persistent re-mappings of "national cinemas' framework' and 'attention to the cultural and cinematic process only within a given national cultural context' (Iordanova 2003: 12).

On the other hand, *remembering* in cinematic practices today can turn into certain political acts, or 'flashbacks of connection' (Lowe 1998), against the operations of forgetting and elimination of past and present others/Other. To illustrate this statement, I will address two films: *Flashback/Flashback/Flashback* (2002) by the Latvian documentary film-maker Herz Frank and *Three Days (Trys dienos)*, 1991) by the Lithuanian film-maker Šarūnas Bartas. In Frank's and Bartas's films, historical temporality emerges as an ideological framework re-making a place, a 'body' of heterogeneous experiences and memories, into a space for producing hegemonic discourses on meanings, values and experiences of this evasive past.

Together with the Estonian film-maker Sulev Keedus (*Georgica* (1998) and *Somnambulance (Somnambuul)*, 2003)), also marked by the influence of Tarkovskian anxiety, Šarūnas Bartas is a landmark figure in the Baltic *auteur* cinema of the 1990s. He belongs to the first generation of post-Soviet Lithuanian film-makers, who established a strong presence in the national media in the mid-1990s. Influenced by Andrey Tarkovsky, they generated a specific cinematic language—what Macaitis describes as their 'solemn tone, slow motion and refined plasticity, a philosophical perspective aiming for a universal meaning, which is perceptible only

in the context of a carefully observed totality' (quoted in Vaišnoras 2006). As Bartas admits himself, in Lithuania he is recognised and well-accepted for his worldwide success. He has never left Lithuania, yet his 'home' is virtually transnational, somewhere between Paris, Amsterdam, Vilnius and Moscow. His films are an ultimate exercise in cinematic intertextuality—from Russian avant-garde to Jonas Mekas and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

His creative genealogy records such cinematic 'fathers' as Andrey Tarkovsky and Irakli Kvirikadze.<sup>9</sup> Bartas follows Tarkovsky in seeing cinema as an autonomous form of artistic expression, in the way Viktor Shklovsky defined cinema as a new instrument of human cognition to see and understand reality anew. Similarly to Tarkovsky's specific optical perspective, Bartas shifts from storytelling to minimalism, plotlessness and speechlessness, close-ups and statics, silence and associative technique. His Eurasian cinematic space, from Königsberg (Kaliningrad, Karaliaučius) to the Siberian Sayan Mountains, is loaded with borders and conquests, erasures and palimpsests, exclusions and abjections. These are intriguing 'peripheral' territories still emanating 'forgotten' feelings, such as post-colonial/post-socialist spaces embracing European Kaliningrad-Königsberg-Karaliaučius in *Three Days*, a North African desert near the ocean in *Freedom (Laisvė)*, 2000), the extreme conditions of the Asian Sayan Mountains in *Few of Us (Mūsų nedaug)*, 1996) and the Kerchensky Peninsula in the Crimea in his *Seven Invisible Men (Septyni nematomi žmonės)*, 2005). These are also the corrupted places of private/communal/public reality in *Three Days*, *The House (Namai)*, 1997) and *The Corridor (Koridorius)*, 1995). His films harbour more than the theme of a lost Eden of (Soviet) modernity. Saturated with silence and statics, his films look intensively into the human condition, beyond the discursive battles over the re-significations of 'posts' and pasts. His dissociative and melancholic characters emerge from the depths of the abject delivered in the encounter of modernity with the sublime, in which there is no language for the abject, except for exotic, 'primitive-extinct', socially neglect. What gives him an existential



perspective beyond the compromised perspective of the modern sublime (in its Soviet scenario) is a return to a human face, in its nearly photographic static quality and in the silence of early cinema.

One of his early films, *Three Days*, was made at the time of the implosion of the USSR. Two young Lithuanian men travel away from their remote home in the countryside to Kaliningrad for three days. A young woman, a Tarkovskian stalker, becomes their guide, although not into the Dead Zone, but into the Dying Zone—the urban ‘catacombs’ of the Kaliningrad of the late Soviet period. A cinematic vision of Tarkovsky’s wasteland becomes the real Zone of Kaliningrad, which spreads less across a wreckage of rusted industrial plants, collapsing telephone lines and buildings overtaken by dark forests than around a ‘wreckage’ of humans that does not emanate a mysterious and deadly force. Amidst the human ‘relics’ of Soviet industrial decay, Bartas’s city emerges on the screen as a zone of exclusion. Unlike Tarkovsky’s tattooed and scarred Stalker, Bartas’s silent and fragile ‘fallen’ woman is more of a Eurydice, in the final embrace with the main character before he returns (or not—we never know) to his ever changing/unchanged house/home(?) in the Lithuanian countryside. He returns (or not?) from the capital of the region that historically had been part of Lithuania Minor (excluding Königsberg itself). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Lithuanian language was forbidden as a language of education and reading in Lithuania Major, part of the Russian Empire. In Lithuania Minor, books in the native language were printed and smuggled over to Lithuania Major, thus playing a significant role in the process of cultural nation-building. Smuggling a book is actually re-inscribed by Bartas into the film’s metatextual function of ‘smuggling’ the emotions of anxiety, loss, neglect and anger—across the border between authentic Us and alien Them—into the meanings of the untouched and sacral ‘home’.

In his other films, for example in *The House* and *The Corridor*, Bartas re-draws the space of ‘house’ into the place of ‘home’. Different places overlap and commingle in the nameless characters’ wordless movements and

glances, in their search for home and community, borderless and insecure, beyond the promises and politics of borders and security. In silence, when the post-modern (post-Soviet) spectatorial gaze is challenged by the painterly statics of a shot, Bartas encourages his characters and spectators to look at the world beyond certain linguistic structures, stabilising affiliations and



(Fig. 11)  
*The Corridor*, dir. Sārūnas Bartas, 1995.

9 Bartas was trained in Kvirikadze’s workshop, although he joined the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (Всесоюзный государственный институт кинематографии, VGIK) for the formal reason of obtaining his diploma in film directing.

abjections. Heterogeneities inhabit Bartas's world as possibilities—a possibility of another scene, its vision of the subject, the outside (or the inside) of its coherent address.

His is the space of migration, of movement, of the mythic return. It is at once the space of diaspora, the space of guilt, the space of fear (of economic vulnerability), loss and desire (for home), and the space of *unheimlich* 'in-between-ness'—all of these coming to terms with each other in his carnivalesque finale in *The Corridor*.



(Fig. 12)  
*The Corridor*, dir. Sārūnas Bartas, 1995.

Herz Frank's *Flashback* is about time, with the author confronting his age and illness. Frank, very much a Vertovian film-maker and one of the leading figures in the Riga School of Poetic Documentary in the Soviet period, today travels between Riga and Jerusalem. He has always been a transnational figure, avoiding the constraints of the national and geopolitical constructs of North-South and West-East by his connecting geography of Berlin-Samarkand, Moscow-Riga-Rome etc. in life. In art, his *Flashback* builds on the post-modern discourse of the death of the author. What is the 'death of the author' for Frank himself, so much acclaimed in the Soviet period, and much less

known to the film-goers of Latvia today? When is an author dying? Perhaps it is when his close allies and legendary figures in the perestroika period, Juris Podnieks and Gvido Zvaigzne, die—in different situations but so quickly one after the other? When his wife, whom he calls 'my wife and my mother', is slowly dying of cancer? Finally, is he dying on the operating table when his friend is making a documentary of Frank's heart surgery in Jerusalem? In which part of his beating heart does the authorship hide? Then, perhaps, he dies when his cine-texts are 'lost' or 'forgotten' in the post-Soviet discourses of authenticised national culture and art?

In his autobiographical documentary about the life and death of the author(ship), episodes of heart surgery alternate with flashbacks of his life and excerpts from his documentaries. In the episodes with an old, dissected, naked male body on the table, about which he is helpless to do anything, Frank allows his spectators to travel into the mnemonic 'flashbacks' of his life and film-making. The operation on his heart, thus, becomes the story of his *alter ego*, of an artist, isomorphic to the historical in his personal, private and even very intimate dimension. This self-reflexive version of 'the portrait of an artist' as an old man is Frank's authorised version of his life and art, which does not allow the possibility of either being abjected in post-socialist imaginations, or being considered an 'excess' in the dominant ideological revisions and re-evaluations of national cultural legacies.

In different ways, then, Frank and Bartas have created the quality of diasporicity as a space of resistance to the monologic in their films, taking us beyond the limits of post-socialist historiographies. Their transnationalism versus dominant cultural transitionalism asks for the polyphony and complexity of the national/regional pasts/presents instead of their monolithic/monologic revisions. Yet, in this complex cultural flow of film production, the male figure of *auteur* and the masculinised narrative of nation and history still prevail.

FILMS

- Aleksandr Popov (Александр Попов)*, dir. Herbert Rappaport. Russia, 1949
- Alisher Navoiy (Алишер Навоӣ)*, dir. Kamil Yarmatov. Uzbekistan, 1948
- All My Lenins (Minu Leninid)*, dir. Hardi Volmer. Estonia, 1997
- Andrus Finds Happiness (Andruse õnn)*, dir. Herbert Rappaport. Estonia, 1955
- Annie and Johnny (Jonukas ir Onute)*, dir. Jurgis Linartas, Vldas Stipaitis. Lithuania, 1931
- Autumn (Sūgis)*, dir. Arvo Kruusement. Estonia, 1990
- Battleship Potemkin (Броненосец Потёмкин)*, dir. Sergei Eisenstein. Russia, 1925
- Bear Hunt in Pärnumaa (Karujaht Pärnumaal)*, dir. Johannes Pääsuke. Estonia, 1914
- The Bear Slayer (Lāčplēsis)*, dir. Aleksandrs Rusteiķis. Latvia, 1931
- The Belgian Lily (Лилия Бельгии)*, dir. Ladislav Starevich. Russia, 1915
- Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, dir. Fred Niblo. USA, 1925
- Birth of a Nation*, dir. D. W. Griffith. USA, 1915
- Bitter Grains (Горькие зёрна)*, dir. Valeriu Gagiu. Moldova, 1966
- Black Diamond (Must teemant)*, dir. Fjodor Ljubovski. Estonia, 1923
- By the Nieman River (Prie Nemuno)*, dir. Ladislav Starevich. Lithuania, 1909
- The Careful Father (Rupestingas tėvas)*, Lithuania, 1927
- Ceplis*, dir. Rolands Kalniņš. Latvia, 1972
- A Chance Encounter (Juhuslik kohtumine)*, dir. Viktor Nevezhin. Estonia, 1960
- Children of the Sun (Päikese lapsed)*, dir. Theodor Luts. Estonia, Finland, 1932
- The Corridor (Koridorius)*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas. Lithuania, Germany, 1995
- The Dead Mountaineer Hotel ("Hukkunud alpinisti" hotell)*, dir. Grigori Kromanov. Estonia, 1979
- Dead Season (Мёртвый сезон)*, dir. Savva Kulish. Russia, 1966
- The Dragonfly and the Ant (Стрекоза и муравей)*, dir. Ladislav Starevich. Russia, 1913
- Extraordinary Commissar (Чрезвычайный комиссар)*, dir. Ali Khamrayev. Uzbekistan, 1970
- Few of Us (Mūsų nedaug)*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas. Lithuania, France, Portugal, Germany, 1996
- The Fisherman's Son (Zvejnieka dēls)*, dir. Vilis Lapenieks. Latvia, 1939
- Flashback/Flashback/Flashback*, dir. Herz Frank. Latvia, Germany, 2002
- The Forest of Gods (Dievų miškas)*, dir. Algimantas Puipa. Lithuania, 2005
- Fortunate Solution to an Apartment Crisis (Õnnelik korterikriisi lahendus)*, dir. Konstantin Mārška. Estonia, 1924
- Freedom (Laisvè)*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas. Lithuania, France, Portugal, 2000
- Georgica*, dir. Sulev Keedus. Estonia, 1998
- Grandmother's Present (Vanaema kingitus)*, dir. Fjodor Ljubovski. Estonia, 1923
- Guards of Riga (Rīgas sargi)*, dir. Aigars Grauba. Latvia, 2007
- Herkus Mantas*, dir. Marijonas Giedrys. Lithuania, 1972
- The House (Namai)*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas. Lithuania, France, Portugal, 1997
- I Remember Everything, Richard! or Rock and Splinters (Es visu atceros, Ričard! or Akmens un Šķembas)*, dir. Rolands Kalniņš. Latvia, 1966
- I Went to the War (Es karā aiziedams)*, dir. Vilis Segliņš. Latvia, 1920
- In the Back Yard (Tagahoovis)*, dir. Viktor Nevezhin. Estonia, 1957
- In the Shadow of Death (Nāves ēnā)*, dir. Gunars Piesis. Latvia, 1971
- Jambul (Жамбыл)*, dir. Eflim Dzigana. Kazakhstan, 1952
- June Days (Juunikuu päevad)*, dir. Viktor Nevezhin, Kaljo Kiisk. Estonia, 1957
- Jūri Rumm*, dir. Johannes Loop, cinematographer Konstantin Mārška. Estonia, 1929
- King Lear (Король Лир)*, dir. Grigori Kozintsev. Russia, 1971
- The Last Relic (Viimne reliikvia)*, dir. Grigori Kromanov. Estonia, 1969
- Life in the Citadel (Elu tsitadellis)*, dir. Herbert Rappaport. Russia (Estonia), 1947
- Light in Koordi (Valgus Koordis)*, dir. Herbert Rappaport. Russia (Estonia), 1951
- Long Way in the Dunes (Ilgai ceļš kāpās)*, dir. Aloizis Brenčs. Latvia, 1980
- Madness (Hullumeelsus)*, dir. Kaljo Kiisk. Estonia, 1968
- Marite*, dir. Vera Stroyeva. Russia (Lithuania), 1947
- Mashenka (Машенька)*, dir. Yuli Raizman. Russia, 1942
- Men at Arms (Malev)*, dir. Kaaren Kaer. Estonia, 2005
- Men Stay at Home (Mehed jäävad koju)*, dir. Igor Yeltsov. Estonia, 1956
- Mischievous Curves (Vallatud kurvaid)*, dir. Juli Kun, Kaljo Kiisk. Estonia, 1959
- A Musical Story (Музыкальная история)*, dir. Herbert Rappaport. Russia, 1940
- Names in Marble (Nimed marmortahvlil)*, dir. Elmo Nüganen. Estonia, 2002
- Napoleon (Napoléon)*, dir. Abel Gance. France, 1927
- Navigator Pirx (Test pilota Pirxa/ Navigaator Pirx)*, dir. Marek Piestrak. Poland, Estonia, 1978
- Die Nibelungen*, dir. Fritz Lang. Germany, 1924
- Nobody Wanted to Die (Niekas nenorējo mirti)*, dir. Vytautas Žalakevičius. Lithuania, 1965
- Oh, Blow Ye Wind (Pūt, vējiņi)*, dir. Gunars Piesis. Latvia, 1973
- People of Kauguri (Kaugurieši)*, dir. Voldemārs Pūce. Latvia, 1940
- Professor Mamlock (Профессор Мамлок)*, dir. Herbert Rappaport. Russia, 1938
- Rainis*, dir. Yuli Raizman. Latvia, 1949
- Ruslan and Ludmilla (Руслан и Людмила)*, dir. Ladislav Starevich. Russia, 1915

*The Servants of the Devil (Vella kalpi)*, dir. Aleksandrs Leimanis. Latvia, 1972

*Seven Invisible Men (Septyni nematomi žmonės)*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas. Lithuania, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, 2005

*Shadows of the Past (Mineviki varjud)*, dir. Valter Palm, A. Nugis, cinematographer Konstantin Märsk. Estonia, 1924

*The Slough Wader (Purva bridžs)*, dir. Leonīds Leimanis. Latvia, 1966

*Solaris (Солярис)*, dir. Andrey Tarkovsky. Russia, 1972

*Solo (Soolo)*, dir. Raul Tammet. Estonia, 1979

*Somnambulance (Somnambuul)*, dir. Sulev Keedus. Estonia, 2003

*Spring (Kevade)*, dir. Arvo Kruusement. Estonia, 1969

*Summer (Suvi)*, dir. Arvo Kruusement. Estonia, 1976

*Taras Shevchenko (Тарас Шевченко)*, dir. Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov, Igor Savchenko. Ukraine, 1951

*Taxi to Heaven (Воздушный извозчик)*, dir. Herbert Rappaport. Russia, 1943

*Three Days (Trys dienos)*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas. Lithuania, 1991

*Till Eulenspiegel (Легенда о Тиле)*, dir. Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov. Russia, 1976

*Traces (Jäljed)*, dir. Kaljo Kiisk. Estonia, 1963

*The Turning Point (Pöördel)*, dir. Aleksandr Mandrykin, Kaljo Kiisk. Estonia, 1957

*Utterly Alone (Vienai vienai)*, dir. Jonas Vaitkus. Lithuania, 2004

*The Wagtail's Army (Cielaviņas armija)*, dir. Aleksandrs Leimanis. Latvia, 1964

*Waves of Passion (Kire lained)*, dir. Vladimir Gaidarov. Estonia, Germany, 1930

*Wedding Picture (Pulmapilt)*, dir. Raul Tammet. Estonia, 1981

*When Night Falls (Kui saabub õhtu)*, dir. Aleksandr Mandrykin. Estonia, 1955

*The White Bird Marked with*

*Black (Белая птица с чёрной отметиной)*, dir. Yuri Ilyenko. Ukraine, 1971

*Wikman's Boys (Wikmani poisid)*, dir. Vilja Palm. Estonia, 1995

*Yachts at Sea (Jahid merel)*, dir. Mikhail Yegorov. Estonia, 1955

*Young Eagles (Noored kotkad)*, dir. Theodor Luts. Estonia, 1927

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