Peter C. Pozefsky

Culture of Victory:

The Memory of World War II in Post-War Soviet Film

Overview:

The Great Patriotic War was the chief site of historical memory in the late Soviet period. Commemoration of the war played an important role in Soviet culture and in the legitimation of the regime through the end of the 1980s. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the war was eclipsed by the Stalin years as the principal site of national memory. Subsequently, public commemoration of the war declined in popularity and significance. Beginning in 2000, the first year of his presidency, Vladimir Putin acted to revive the commemorations of the Victory and linked this project to national renewal. The intensity and success of these efforts has already been the subject of considerable research. Scholars in a variety of fields, including history, have linked the revival of the memory of the war to social, political and cultural trends. They differ, however, on the question of whether this revival of the memory of the Great Patriotic War should be seen as part of a return to Soviet political mythology or a creative use of the past to move the country in new directions.

Among the most important and influential artifacts of the memory of the war are films, both from the Soviet era and more recent works. Scholars have shown how films were used by the Soviet and Russian leadership, past and present, to shape the memory of the war. Reciprocally, scholars have also used the films as traces of that memory in order to explain its evolution. It is the assertion of this paper, however, that although there are many studies of Soviet films about the Great Patriotic War (individually and as a group), the scholarship has not produced a model for the memory of the war in Soviet film. Such a model, is important in part because those media-memories fashioned at the regimes behest largely replaced the evanescent popular memory of the war and in part because such a model might facilitate the formulation of more precise judgments about the relationship between contemporary memory practices and those from the Soviet past.

This paper takes a small step toward the formulation of such a model for the memory of the war in Soviet film. Film scholars have long spoken of the two master narratives about the Great Patriotic War that emerged in the immediate postwar decades. A Stalinist narrative conceived during the late Stalin years highlights Stalin himself, the Victory and collective suffering. Its riposte, a Humanist narrative, was a product of the Thaw. It downplays the Victory and the leadership and instead highlights the role of average citizens in the war and the impact of wartime suffering on individuals. The body of this paper will attempt to move beyond these thematic descriptors (and the description of the two distinctive mythologies) by delineating the underpinnings of those mythologies – that is the central features of what I would describe as two cinematic metanarratives. This should allow for a better understanding of the way the mythologies work and, in particular, of how they engendered contrasting representations of the passage of historical time and of the war as a distinctive historical space.

The analysis of the Stalinist metanarrative relies heavily on one film, Mikheil Chiaureli's , *The Fall of Berlin* (1949). Its central features include the intertwining of parallel narratives (one with actual historical figures and one with imagined characters), the celebration of Stalin as the architect of the victory and the father of his country, the representation of the social order as just and unified, large-scale combat as the films' narrative and visual dominant, the representation of death as sad but comprehensible, the Soviets as victims and, finally, Soviet Triumphalism (in which Victory purges the memory of individual loss and suffering). The analysis of the Humanist metanarrative, which is the core of the paper, involves a much larger group of Thaw-era films and films made in the spirit of the Thaw from as late as the seventies. The key features of this narrative include a reliance on the perspective of ordinary people and, in particular, junior officers, the representation of the war as a construct of memory (rather than as objective truth), the depiction of wartime society as divided (sometimes represented in terms of gender issues), the use of love and death to individualize characters and amplify the sense of wartime losses, and a depiction of combat that deemphasizes epic battle scenes and their role in history and instead calls attention to nature and the landscape.

While the later evolution of the memory of the war in Russian film lies outside the scope of this paper, it suggests that subsequent iterations of a memory of the war involve both variations of the two narratives and their hybridization, sometimes with paradoxical results. For example, Iurii Ozerov's *Liberation* (1968-1972), the Brezhnev-era apotheosis of the Stalinist narrative adapts features of the humanist narrative, while two highly prominent contemporary works, Fedor Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad* (2013) and Renat Davlyetarov's remake, *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (2015), employ thaw era-narratives with humanistic implications to reassert patriotic myths previously more akin to the Stalinist narrative.

Introduction

Since the first election of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2000, the Russian state has energetically promoted public commemorations of the Soviet victory in World War II, which, as he proclaimed in his first Victory Day speech, "would help our generation build a strong and prosperous country."[1] The holiday that he worked steadily to revive had been of paramount importance for most of the late Soviet period, but had been dwindling in popularity and prominence since the years of Glasnost' and Perestroika in the late 1980s. It

[1] As cited in Stephen M. Norris, "Memory for Sale: Victory Day 2010 and Russian Remembrance," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38 (2011): 210.

could be argued either that society followed Putin readily in this endeavor or, alternately, that autonomous social forces were moving in the same direction. The revival of the Russian victory day and its political, social and cultural implications has already been the subject of considerable research.[2] Two studies, which I will look at in some depth as examples of recent scholarship, point to the underlying social and political significance of this growth in the stature of the memory of the war in a way that suggests important continuities with Soviet culture in contemporary Russian life.

Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Center for sociological research, argues that the celebration of the Victory has risen to prominence as an important part of national identity. Given the failure of the Soviet project and the economic, social and political calamities of the 1990s, it was the only remaining accomplishment of the past century in which it was still possible for most Russians to take pride. He adds, that it is not simply that the Victory has become an important component of a contemporary identity, but that the narrative of the War (its tropes and rhetorical figures) has become an important means for navigating the present:

> After their devaluation [the devaluation of most chapters of 20th century Soviet and Russian history] has brought to the fore a range of complexes of hurt self–esteem and inferiority,

[2] For example, see Elizabeth A. Wood, "Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of World War Ii in Russia," ibid.; Nikolai Koposov, ""The Armored Train of Memory": The Politics of History in Post-Soviet Russia," *Perspectives on History* (2011), https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2011/the-armored-train-of-memory-the-politics-of-history-in-post-soviet-russia.. The first historian to examine the Soviet phenomenon of World War II commemorations and conceptualize it for historians was Nina Tumarkin. She refered to it as the "War Cult". Nina Tumarkin, *The Living & the Dead : The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War Ii in Russia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994).

> Victory now stands out as a stone pillar in the desert, the vestige of a weathered rock. All the most important interpretations of the present are concentrated around Victory; it provides them with their standards of evaluation and their rhetorical means of expression. [3]

But where does the memory of the war come from? According to Gudkov, it did not arise organically as a distillation of the aggregate of private memories of the war. Rather, the dominant memory (what some scholars would call a mythic structure rather than a memory) was carefully crafted by the state in the post-war years to legitimate its authority. An actual memory of the war, the product of real individual memories, had one survived, would have extended well beyond the parameters of the Victory celebrations of today (and of the Soviet period), which, in general, have elided (or downplayed), among other things, the discussion of strategic and tactical mistakes made by military leaders, the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Soviet alliance with Great Britain and the United States. While the celebrations foreground the idea of a national tragedy and collective suffering, they have less successfully addressed the toll of the war on individual combatants and civilians. Gudkov explains that a broader, more encompassing memory of the war, (a collective-memory based on private memories), did in fact exist in the years just following the war, when by virtue of its force and freshness, it persisted (if quietly) alongside Stalinist mythologies. However, given what social scientists know about nature of collective memory as a concrete sociological phenomenon it is not surprising that those popular memories did not

[3] Lev Gudkov, "The Fetters of Victory: How the War Provides Russia with Its Identity," *Eurozine* (2005), http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-05-03-gudkov-en.html.

last long. To do so would have required a level of institutional support and coordination that simply did not exist.[4]

The corollary of this principle, which explains the disappearance of a more genuine collective memory, is that the actual myths underlying the decades of Soviet commemoration of the Victory and current commemorations were fashioned to a large extent by the regime, which employed the cultural and educational apparatus at its disposal to shape them. Films, Gudkov notes, were a particularly important way of spreading the myths at the foundation of the official version of a wartime memory. He points to director Yuri Ozerov's 5-part cinema epic, *Liberation* (1968-1972) from the Brezhnev-era, as the apotheosis of the Soviet interpretation of "the Victory" and sees other films, including those created by more critically-minded independent directors (He gives Aleksei German's *Trial on the Road*, 1971 as an example.) as variations on the myths contained in *Liberation* rather than critiques of an official memory or as sources of alternative narratives.[5] He observes that the continued strong presence of Soviet era films about the war on television today (as much as 5-8% of all programming – more during commemorations) is one important explanation for the persistence of the Soviet-era memory into the present.[6]

Gudkov also notes that in spite of the official Soviet foundations of the current memory of the war, the phenomenon that he is describing, the revival of that memory, is contemporary and not Soviet. He is also careful to point out that, in spite of its apparent

[4] Ibid., 3.
[5] Ibid., 8.
[6] Ibid., 6.

authoritarianism, Putinism is by no means a reincarnation of Stalinism. Nonetheless, the celebration of Victory and its mythology, first articulated under Stalin, has served the state in the present as a tool to justify its authoritarianism, its disregard for the rights of individuals and the use of violence to maintain order domestically. Of the current regime and the memory of the war, he concludes that:

> Memories of the war … legitimate a centralized and repressive social order; they are built into a general post–totalitarian traditionalization of culture in a society that has not been able to cope with budding social change. This is why the Russian authorities constantly have to return to those traumatic circumstances of its past that reproduce key moments of national mobilization. The repression of the war keeps spawning state–sponsored aggression –– the Chechen war and the restoration of a repressive regime.[7]

While Lev Gudkov emphasizes the role of the State in shaping present-day memories of the war, historian Seth Bernstein in "Remembering War, Remaining Soviet: Digital Commemoration of World War II in Putin's Russia" examines privately run websites that collect and communicate personal memories of the war. Bernstein pays particular attention to two popular websites. *Pomnite Nas* ("Remember Us") gathers photos and information on war memorials, while *Ia Pomniu* ("I Remember") gathers the previously uncollected memoirs of Soviet soldiers.

Bernstein 's findings, based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, are somewhat surprising. While one might expect that new civil society institutions employ new technologies would come up with new narratives about the war,

[7] Ibid., 11.

Bernstein suggest that they instead serve to recycle the old Soviet-era, state-sponsored myths. While from time to time posts appear that deviate from the established wartime memories, these are not significant in terms of numbers or impact. Moreover, there are, on these occasions, what Bernstein describes as "mnemonic battles," in which commenters, by virtue of their arguments and numbers, undermine and discredit the materials that they find subversive.[8]

He observes that:

> These commemorative projects express mourning for lost family members and attempt to regain what their authors see as the lost status that veterans experienced in the 1990s. In doing so, these websites and their user participants reaffirm broad aspects of Soviet war memory, including of national unity, shared trauma and the privileged status of frontline soldiers. Simultaneously, these aspects of war memory tend to displace divisive narratives with the unifying story of collective loss.[9]

Like Gudkov, Bernstein sees the origins of these myths in late-Soviet culture and draws special attention to film in the initial formulation and later reproduction of those myths. He too uses film as a source for studying their evolution.

Like Bernstein and Gudkov, historian Stephen Norris has studied Victory celebrations used film has a tool for unpacking contemporary memories of the war. His research, however, has led him to different conclusions regarding the relationship between those memories and continuities between the Soviet Union and Putin's Russia. In "Memory

[8] Seth Bernstein, "Remembering War, Remaining Soviet: Digital Commemoration of World War Ii in Putin's Russia," *Memory Studies* (2015).
[9] Ibid., 2.

for Sale: Victory Day 2010 and Russian Remembrance, " he uses an analysis of the celebration of 9 May 2010 to look at the evolution of memory practices surrounding the war and, more particularly, at the evolution of Victory day celebrations. He argues, ultimately that while there are many traces of Soviet practice in current ritual, there is also a great deal that is new. Yes, there are disturbingly reverential images of Stalin but also references to state crimes as well as failures of military strategy and diplomacy that could never have been mentioned in Soviet times. Moreover, the rise of veterans' organizations and the large-scale commercialization of the festivities has led to commemorative practices that are more diverse, less ideological and less state-driven than they were in Soviet times. [10]

Norris' monograph, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory and Patriotism,* also emphasizes change as opposed to continuities in contemporary memories of the war. Films are described as "a powerful medium that shape individual and group memories of the past" and contemporary films placed within the context of an older Soviet film tradition, "that by the Stalin era had become the medium of history itself and, more than any other media form, created historical myths and provided the 'right' interpretation of history."[11] He notes later that beginning in 2002 there is a rapid growth in interest in films about World War II and that, while the new films "reinforced the war's importance," they did not reinforce the Soviet state's memory project but instead "shattered Soviet myths."[12] As with his discussion of the Victory Day Celebrations of 2010, the novelty in

[10] Norris, "Memory for Sale: Victory Day 2010 and Russian Remembrance," 229.
[11] *Blockbuster History in the New Russia : Movies, Memory, and Patriotism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 6.
[12] Ibid., 17.

contemporary films is explained by their commercial foundation (including for-profit studios and modern distribution networks), and a political climate vastly different from any phase of the late Soviet Period. Norris convincingly argues his point in more depth in relation to Nikolai Dostal's television serial, *The Penal Battalion* (2004), which, in its regular references to state crimes, incompetence and indifference to human life, serves as an a example of contemporary treatment of the war. About it, he concludes, "Given this performance, it is hard to buy into the critical view that the Great Patriotic War on small and large screens amounts to a rebirth of Soviet ideology." [13]

The three pieces I've discussed, representatives of the growing literature on the memory of the Great Patriotic War in contemporary Russia, agree both on the importance of that memory for understanding contemporary Russia and on the significance of films both in shaping that memory and as a source for studying its evolution. They also call attention to the role of the memory war in Russians' attempt to make sense of the present. What they disagree on is the degree to which the present day memory of the war as it appears in commemorations and in film represents a recycling of memories produced in the Soviet period or something new. For Bernstein and Gudkov, continuity is key, while for Norris, change and innovation, are more characteristic of current memory practice.

In the current paper, I would like to explore this question in its relation to film in more depth. My inclination, probably one that all three of the scholars I have discussed could agree with, is that there are significant degrees of continuity and innovation in most present day attempts to memorialize the war (on film or in other realms of culture) and

[13] Ibid., 138.

that the challenge for scholars is not only to reach conclusions as to whether the degree of change is more important than continuity or vice versa but also to be able to distinguish with some precision the old from the new in individual articulations of the memory of the war. An obstacle is that while there is a great deal of research on Soviet and Russian film in general and there are books and articles on individual war films and even on war films as a group, there is no well-articulated model for a Soviet memory of the war on film that can be used to make comparison to its contemporary manifestations. Without such a model, which would ideally outline the chief components of the Soviet memory of the war on film, there is no way to assess properly either the lasting power of Soviet war narratives or to discern the novelty of contemporary works. This paper marks a small step in that direction.

Thanks to the work of Nina Tumarkin, Denise Youngblood and Josephine Woll,[14] among others, the larger trajectory of the development of the war cult and the memory of the war in Soviet and Russian films is well known. While important films about the war appeared before the Soviet victory in 1945, films produced during wartime, which were attempts to mobilize, inform, comfort and entertain the population, represent the war as ongoing rather than as a memory. The cinematic attempt to establish the memory of the war came afterwards and arrived in roughly three waves, whose chronological boundaries coincide with those employed by Denise Youngblood to define distinctive periods in

[14] Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films : On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007); Josephine Woll, *Real Images : Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, Kino, the Russian Cinema Series (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Tumarkin, *The Living & the Dead : The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War Ii in Russia*; Denise J. Youngblood, "A War Remembered: Soviet Films of the Great Patriotic War," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001).

Russian filmmaking in her monumental study of Russian war films.[15] Each of the first two periods, 1946-1955 and 1956-1966, produced a highly distinctive World War II narrative. The post-war attempt to craft the memory of the war begins in the conservative late Stalin years, with the articulation of a narrative centering on the Victory (and on well-know battles in which the Soviets were victorious, beginning in 1943 with the final weeks of Stalingrad) and emphasizing Stalin's commanding role in that victory, the supporting role of an inner circle of generals, as well as the collective sacrifice and struggle that were deemed to be its other principal components. The chief representative of this narrative line is Mikheil Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin* (1949).

A second narrative emerges in the Khrushchev years and ends several years after his ouster in 1964 (1956-1966). A reaction (or even rebuttal) to the Stalinist narrative, it radically shifts the emphasis of the representation of the war. It focuses neither on the victory nor on the leadership but on the one hand, on the dedication of individual soldiers to the war effort and, on the other, on the disastrous impact of the war on individuals and their families. Its stories are often set in the chaos and confusion of the first year of war and in clashes between the Red Army and the Germans that are small and fictionalized or else little known. Examples of this narrative include such well known films as Mikhail Kalotozov's T*he Cranes Are Flying* (1957), Grigorii Chukhrai's *The Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (1962).

The third phase in the evolution of the cinematic memory of the war (1967-1979 – combining two of Youngblood's periods) saw the production of films that employed both of

[15] *Russian War Films : On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005*.

the narratives developed during the first two periods and, consequently, kept alive both the memory of the war and the dispute over its significance. With the ouster of Khrushchev, the Stalinist narrative reemerges in somewhat modified form, the chief example being Yuri Ozerov's *Liberation* (1968-1972). However, the humanist narrative survives into the 1970s in the work of some gifted filmmakers including Aleksei German and Larisa Shepitko, the makers of art films, and in the work of the popular filmmaker Stanislav Rostotski. Moreover, the modified Stalinist narrative incorporates some of the innovations of the humanist filmmakers from the 1960s, including a greater emphasis on the lives of rank-and-file soldiers and the depiction of individuals suffering as a consequence of the war.

During the 1980s and 1990s, public interest in the war was temporarily eclipsed by society's interest in Stalin's rule as debates over the historical significance of Stalinism framed political discussion at a time when Stalinism was linked to political and cultural conservatism and political parties defined themselves by their support for or resistance to liberal reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev and then Boris Yeltsin. When, in the last years of the 1990s, Russian society grew disillusioned by the prospects of reform, the interest in a critical debate over the Stalin years dissipated rapidly and the Second World War returned to prominence as a site in Russia's historical memory.[16] The reasons for this return of public interest in the war and, consequently, in representations of the war on film, are not difficult to understand. The victory, unlike the divisive legacy of liberal reforms in the 1990s or the legacy of Stalinism, seemed to offer the possibility of uniting a fractured society. At the same time, memory of the victory was a source of national pride, one that

[16] Gudkov observes that interest in the Stalin Question and interest in the war are reciprocal. When interest in one increases, interest in the other declines. Gudkov, "The Fetters of Victory: How the War Provides Russia with Its Identity". 7.

fed nostalgia for Russia's lost status as a global power. As mentioned, the Great Patriotic War serves to this day as an excuse for public displays of military might (parades) as well as a theme for popular television and film and as a commonly used reference point in political speech and public explanations of foreign policy.

What is important for the attempt to model the memory of the war on film, however, is that almost all of the Soviet World War II films can be placed within the context of the two narrative traditions, Stalinist and humanist and, in the rest of this paper, I would like to lay out in the form of a typology, the essential features of these two post-War meta-narratives, paying careful attention to the way their specific features help shape a memory of the war.

The Stalinist Narrative

In examining the Stalinist narrative, I will focus almost exclusively on Chiaureli's *Fall of Berlin* (1949). It might seem strange to construct one of the two meta-narratives almost entirely on the basis of a single film but there are several reasons for doing so. In the immediate post-war period, the USSR suffered from what some scholars have referred to as a film famine.[17] Very few films were actually made – about the war or any other subject. There were other war films that come close to the narrative paradigm of *The Fall of Berlin*, including Fridrikh Ermler's *The Great Turning Point* (1945), Igor Savchenko's *The Third Blow* (1948) and Vladimir Petrov's *The Battle of Stalingrad* (1949).[18] There were also films

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[17] Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2009), 109.
[18] Youngblood, *Russian War Films : On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005*, 96. Vladimir Petrov, "The Battle of Stalingrad," (1949); Mikheil Chiaureli, "The Fall of Berlin," (1949); Fridrikh Ermler, "The Great Turning Point," (1945); Igor Savchenko, "The Third Blow," (1948).

that followed a different state-driven ideological paradigm that was less important in subsequent decades for enshrining the official memory of the war. The climactic moment in these films is the self- sacrifice of the hero or heroes. In Aleksander Stolper's *The Story of a Real Man* (1948), for example, a pilot is shot down, loses both of his legs, and yet returns to front the front, while in Sergei Gerasimov's *The Young Guard* (1948), a small group of Komsomol members act as partisans, fighting the Germans in occupied territory.[19] After a series of successes, they are hunted down, tortured and executed. *The Fall of Berlin*, however, remains the most visible representative of the Stalinist narrative of the war, serving as a template for subsequent films in that tradition, and as the narrative model against which Thaw-era humanist films were an implicit response.

The plot of *The Fall of Berlin* follows the war from the German invasion through the Soviet occupation of Berlin through two characters -- Alesha, a steelworker, and Natasha, a school teacher. Both live in an unnamed Soviet city, close enough to Western boundary of the USSR to be overrun in the very earliest stages of the war. Before the war begins, Alesha, wins the Lenin Prize for setting a world record in steel production. Natasha, whose young students are visiting the plant the very day Alesha sets his record, is smitten. The two fall in love but Alesha, a worker, is intimidated by the poetry-loving Natasha's education and intelligence and, consequently, has trouble approaching her. In the meantime, Alesha travels to Moscow, where he has an audience with Stalin, who wishes to congratulate him in-person for his world record. Initially, Alesha is tongue tied in the presence of the leader. But the leader, depicted as soft spoken and affectionate, deftly puts him at ease. Alesha is

[19] Sergei Gerasimov, "The Young Guard," (1948); Aleksander Stolper, "The Story of a Real Man," (1948).

soon discussing his personal life with Stalin, ultimately confiding his apprehensions about Natasha. Stalin advises him to have courage, not to be afraid of poetry, to tell Natasha straight out that he loves her, and to write to him if things don't work out.

Upon his return, Alesha proposes to Natasha. Natasha readily accepts, but moments later, the German invasion begins. Bombs fall. The quiet wheat field in which they are standing is suddenly filled with smoke and fire as the Germans shell Natasha and Alesha's home town. A German motorcycle brigade initiates an occupation. Alesha, knocked out by a bomb, wakes up in a hospital months later to discover that the Germans have advanced to Moscow, that his mother has been killed and that Natasha has disappeared. She is rumored to have been taken captive and sent to Germany. A friend tries to persuade him to return to steel production. The country requires his extraordinary gifts. Alesha, however, proclaims that the only commodity he will be producing now is "dead Fritzes".

The rest of the film follows the progress of the Red Army to Berlin. Scenes alternate between the story of the fictional common people (Alesha and Natasha) and scenes featuring historical figures such as Stalin negotiating with Roosevelt and Churchill, Stalin planning the war with his generals, and Hitler doing the same with his inner circle. At the end of the film, the Red Army takes Berlin. Following the battle, Stalin arrives in Berlin by plane and, in the film's final scene, delivers a victory speech at the airfield. He is cheered by an international crowd of thousands, including soldiers, civilians and freed prisoners. Alesha, who has played a pivotal role in the battle for Berlin and Natasha, who has just been freed by the Red Army from enslavement in a German factory, find each other on the airfield in Stalin's immediate presence. Standing beside Alesha and in front of a wildly

cheering crowd, Natasha asks Stalin if she can kiss him and then thanks him for everything he has done on behalf of the people. The film ends as the audience chants long live Stalin, and Stalin promises to preserve the post-war peace.

Central Features of the Stalinist War Narrative

The Stalinist war narrative can be broken down into several key features.

1. Parallel Plots: History Plus Fiction

2. Stalin and the Cult of Personality

3. A Just and Unified Social Order

4. The Representation of the Battlefield and Combat

5. The Good/Comprehensible Death

6. Victimization at the Hands of the Nazis

7. Triumphalism

1. Parallel Plots: History Plus Fiction

The narrative features two plotlines. One is purely fictional. It is the story of imagined ordinary people as they love, tend to their families, and fight the Germans or simply struggle to survive. This plotline exhibits the commitment to the war effort of the people as well as their contentment with the regime. The second plotline, although fictionalized, is

the story of actual historical figures involved in well-known historical events. In this case those events surround the Soviet military campaign culminating in the fall of Berlin. Beyond Alesha and Natasha's story, *The Fall of Berlin* tells the story of the leaders of Germany and the Soviet Union. This national story emphasizes Stalin's role in military decision-making, the insanity of Hitler and his circle, and the unreliability of Russia's purported allies (American and European), who hesitate to commit their own troops to the European war and allow Russia to bear the brunt of the fighting.

2. Stalin and the Cult of Personality

Denise Youngblood calls the film, "the most famous cinematic artifact of the Stalin cult."[20] One of the central features of the film is its depiction of Stalin's role in military decision-making. While military leaders such as Marshal Georgy Zhukov and Army Chief of Staff Marshal Alexander Vasilievsky attend to Stalin, Stalin is the decider. He makes decisions by himself. He performs analysis in front of the Marshals, studying maps, reviewing data about troops and armaments, while reading observations aloud from his notes. Having reached his own decisions, he patiently communicates their rationale to the admiring commanders. Their role in the war, meanwhile, is reduced from that of national heroes to that of the capable executors of Stalin's will.

But Stalin in this film is not simply presented as a military genius. He is also father of his country in a sense that goes beyond the symbolism of the term and its abstract meaning in other national cultures. He serves as an actual father figure or even surrogate father for heroes and heroines who lack fathers of their own. Particularly relevant here is a scene in

[20] Youngblood, *Russian War Films : On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005*, 97.

which Stalin advises the fatherless Alesha on how to conduct himself with Natasha or the way that early in the film (before the USSR is invaded), Natasha ends a speech honoring Alesha's world record in steel production by singing the praises of Stalin. She even confides in the audience (in an embarrassed stage whisper) her desire to express her love for Stalin in person. Barring that possibility, she wishes simply to thank him, on behalf of everyone in the hall, for giving us our happy lives. She proclaims, "Long Live Stalin who gave us our happy lives." A monumental portrait of a paternal Stalin hangs on the auditorium wall during Natasha's speech.

In the final scene on the Berlin airfield, in which Natasha actually succeeds in telling Stalin of her love for him, Stalin descends from the heavens in his plane, disembarks and is greeted like a god by an ecstatic multinational crowd.

3. A Just Social Order and National Unity

The narrative reaffirms the benevolence of the social order. Political leaders, including Stalin and military commanders, are well meaning and sympathetic. They take pride in their subordinates' achievements and are eager that those subordinates should receive credit for them. Interactions between leaders and subordinates – whether it is between a factory director and his workers in an industrial setting or between a general and his troops on the battlefield -- are mythologized as unforced, congenial and even jolly. Authority is maintained even as the rituals and formalities of deference associated with traditional hierarchies are, at the leaders' initiative, dispensed with. If Stalin is the father, field marshals and generals are kindly big brothers. Likewise, there is a noticeable absence of social tension. Secondary characters, such as Yusupov, a Central Asian soldier, who fights

valiantly beside Alesha, represent the national minorities. Society is unified behind the war effort and unanimous in support of the policies of the government and strategies of the military.

A centerpiece of this social order is the idea of the good Soviet soldier. He is a simple person, who understands his country's predicament in no uncertain terms as a struggle between good and evil. He follows orders without question and is motivated to kill Germans by a combination of love of country, love of Stalin, a desire to defend loved ones on the home front and an overpowering urge to avenge the death of family members already killed in the war.

4. The Representation of the Battlefield and Combat

Visually, the dominant feature of the film is the epic battle scene, staged in several instances with a massive display of men and military hardware spread out over rural battlefields or, in the case of the final battle for Berlin, placed in an urban setting. Soldiers and machines move in formation, as in a parade. At times they swarm, overwhelming the enemy by virtue of the soldiers' enthusiasm and numbers, but at other times they move forward in clearly demarcated rows and columns, to demonstrate the power of the Soviet State but also to illustrate the extent to which the army's effectiveness depends less on the initiative of individuals or small groups than on the precise well-coordinated plans of the leaders. Another visual characteristic of these scenes of the battlefield is that they are literally crammed with men and machines, an overabundance of which leaves little room for open space of any kind.

If the battlefield full of men and machines is the film's visual dominant, the dominant activity in the film narrative is combat. Combat is prepared for by the leaders and then, in the film's climactic moments, unfolds on the battlefield. On the macro-level, huge armies, as described above, confront each other. At the micro-level, as part of the choreography of the larger battle, individuals in small units (usually with the larger battlefield as a backdrop or visually in close proximity) engage in some form of hand-to-hand combat. While there are Soviet casualties, invariably the Soviets (Russians with a symbolic presence of ethnic minorities), superior in character, intelligence, organization and even in their physiques prevail. Combat is glorified as spectacle and is pleasurable to watch, not only because it provides a visually arresting spectacle, but also because its resolution in favor of the Soviets upholds the moral order as the "virtuous" Soviets defeat the "evil" Germans.

5. The Good/Comprehensible Death:

A few recognizable characters die at the hands of the Germans in combat or in other circumstances (for example, as victims of abuse). Their deaths may be represented as melodramatic, including spectacular agonizing moments as wounded characters endure their death spasms. Other characters may even lament those deaths, offering emotional words and gestures to demonstrate their sense of loss. But the deaths are calibrated to make an argument rather than elicit an emotional response. In part, this is because typically the characters that die in battle, like most of the characters in the film, are types. They have not been well developed, and, therefore, the audience lacks a narrative foundation for empathy. Instead, the deaths depicted exemplify dimensions of wartime

experience that support the Stalinist narrative, reminding audiences of the abuse of civilians by the Nazis, of the willingness of Soviet soldiers to make the ultimate sacrifice, and of the high cost of victory. Because the films in this tradition are designed essentially to make these points rather than elicit emotional resonance over the fate of individuals, the anguish engendered by these deaths is easily (and purposefully) subordinated to the celebration of victory. The long-term impact of the death of loved ones, a theme with the potential to engender emotions and illustrate the impact of wartime deaths after the war is over, is left virtually unexplored.

6. Victimization at the Hands of the Nazis

Another key component of the narrative is the visual representation of German devastation of the Soviet homeland. This motif casts the Soviets as victims and does much to explain both the logic of the war and the motivation of Soviet soldiers. Closely related to this motif is the vilification of the German leadership, including Hitler and his inner circle. They are portrayed not simply as enemies or even as sadists, but as cartoonish (clownish) embodiments of insanity and vice. The picture of the enemy as not simply sadistic or cruel but also deranged makes Soviet suffering at the hands of the Nazis more comprehensible while, at the same time, the contrast with a Soviet leadership that is calm and balanced even under extreme pressure, casts the regime in a favorable light.

7. Triumphalism

Perhaps the most important component of the Stalinist narrative is the celebration of triumph at the very end of the film. The celebration is presided over by Stalin himself in the presence of his generals. At the moment of celebration, victory is unalloyed by the

death and destruction caused by the war. Losses are put aside or forgotten. Alesha does not mourn the loss of his mother or of his wartime friend Yussupov as he stands of the Berlin airfield listening to Stalin's victory speech.

The Humanist Narrative

The Humanist Narrative, which individualizes the experience of the war and attempts to restores the memory of loss to the understanding of the war, emerges during the Thaw and extends beyond Khrushchev's ouster (1956-1966). It is part of a larger trend in literature and the arts that lays emphasis on the development of the individual and also evolves from criticisms of Stalin's cult of personality, the official history of the war and of the actual conduct of the war first articulated by Khrushchev in his "Secret Speech" of 1956. However, the environment in which the filmmakers worked was still highly constrained. They were aware that the attempt to alter the official narrative was risky and that there were still limits on what could be depicted on film. Consequently, their critique of the Stalinist narrative remains implicit. They simply presented another version of the story. The essential elements of the Humanist meta-narrative are drawn from a wide range of films produced between the late 1950s and early 1960s.[21] While the individual films discussed here do not necessarily, share all of the elements of the Humanist meta-narrative,

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[21] Films examined for the research in this section include: Aleksei German, "20 Days without War " (1977); Larisa Shepitko, "The Ascent," (1977); Grigorii Chukhrai, "Ballad of a Soldier," (1959); Elem Klimov, "Come and See," (1985); Mikhail Kalatozov, "The Cranes Are Flying," (1957); Stanislav Rostotsky, "The Dawns Here Are Quiet," (1972); Lev Kulidzhanov and Yakov Segal, "The House in Which I Live," (1957); Marlen Khustiev, "I Am 20," (1965); Aleksander Stolper, "The Living and the Dead," (1966); Aleksander Alov and Victor Naumov, "Peace to Him Who Enters," (1961); Aleksei German, "Trial on the Road," (1971); Larisa Shepitko, "Wings," (1966); Andrei Tarkovsky, "Ivan's Childhood," (1962); Sergei Bondarchuk, "The Fate of a Man," (1959); Grigorii Chukhrai, "Clear Skies," (1961).

they do share multiple components.[22] For each principle, I will provide a definition and concrete examples, including variations.

Key Elements of the Humanist Narrative:

1. Lieutenant's War

2. The War As A (Fractured) Memory

3. Social Tensions (vs Reaffirmation of the Social Order)

4. Depictions of Love and Death As Tools for the Individualization of Characters

5. The Nature of Combat (Combat and Landscape)

1. The Lieutenant's War[23]

In contrast to the Stalinist narrative, the humanist narrative has no parallel narratives that include historical figures to complement the story of the film's fictional protagonist. Moreover, this fictional narrative typically represents the war from the perspective of a lieutenant, a junior officer or another "ordinary" person. This perspective

[22] I would describe the set of films that share the Humanist narrative as a polythetic category – one in which members of the group share certain characteristics but need not share them all. This is in contrast to a monothetic category, in which all members share all of the characteristics. The term was adapted by Carlo Ginzburg to cultural history in *Ecstasies*, his book on the witches' Sabbath. For a good explanation of how such a category works, see Perry Anderson's review of *Ecstasies* in *The London Review of Books*. Perry Anderson, "Witchcraft," *The London Review of Books* 12, no. 21 (1990), http://www.lrb.co.uk/v12/n21/perry-anderson/witchcraft.

[23] The idea of a Lieutenant's War is borrowed from the notion of "The Lieutenant's Prose," a literary term used to refer to Soviet writers who had themselves served in World War II and published stories in the 1940s and 1950s that examined the war from the perspective of junior officers.

allows the director to provide a view of the war from the bottom up as opposed to the top down. One consequence of this shift in perspective is that the larger trajectory of the war and the process by which leaders make strategic decisions, a process to which lieutenants have no access, are less closely examined than everyday life, in which the lieutenants are mired.

2. The War As A (Fractured) Memory

The Humanist narrative is typically presented not as objective history but as memory. For example, *Ballad of a Soldier* is the story of a peasant boy, Aleksei Skvortsev, who, after an act of heroism on the battlefield is given several days leave to return to his village. The film focuses on his journey home. En route, he encounters soldiers and civilians whose lives have been turned upside down by the war. In each instance, Alesha tries to help out. As a result, he runs out of time. By the time he arrives home, he has just enough time to embrace his mother and head back to the front. We learn through the narration that this was to be their last embrace as Alesha never returns from the war. Through Alesha and his encounters on his wartime journey home, Chukhrai tells the story of a country at war that focuses not on battles with the Germans but on society.

What I want to discuss here, however, is not the plot or meaning of the film, but the way that the film is introduced and concluded in order to examine its character as a work of memory. The way this is done in *Ballad of a Soldier* is characteristic of Thaw-era films about the war. The film begins with the appearance of a lean peasant women, neither old or young. Dressed in black, she walks through her village and stands at its perimeter, looking out at a long road that passes through cultivated fields and stretches into a vanishing in the

horizon. We see her and then we see the road from her perspective, as though we were standing beside her. A narrator explains that this is the road that connects the village to the rest of the world but that the woman is not waiting for anyone. She is simply contemplating the road that her son took en-route to the front, never to return. The narrator adds a few thoughts about the son and his relationship to his mother. "He is buried far from home in a place with a foreign name, where people knew him simply as the Russian Soldier, a hero and a liberator." "For her", the author asserts, "he was none of those things but simply her son. She knew everything about him from the day he was born until the day he left home for the front. He was our friend and we are going to tell a story about him that not even she knows. "

The picture fades and the mother, somewhat younger in appearance, wearing a white rather than a black kerchief, reappears. It is several years earlier, but she looks down the same road with tears in her eyes. Although we are still in the opening minutes of the film, for a few brief moments we are transported to its final minutes (back in time), when Alesha parted from his mother and his village for the last time. Then the shot of the mother's face fades into the battlefield scene in which Alesha completes the heroic deed that is the starting point for his journey home. The film ends as he arrives in the village. He embraces his mother. They talk and, wearing the same white kerchief, she watches him leave town on that very road.

In this way, the story of the war is framed by a story told in the imagined present in which the film was made. If the parallel plot explicitly articulated in the Stalinist narrative is a story about the country's leaders that places the plot involving imagined ordinary

people within the larger context of the European war, the less explicitly articulated parallel plot in the humanist narrative is the story of the survivors and their attempt to use the memories of the war to come to terms with wartime losses.

The parallel story of the leaders in the Stalinist narrative is told in a very different way than the parallel story of memory. In addition to being told explicitly, it is inserted in scenes throughout the film, whereas the story of memory work in the Humanist narrative is told by inference and implication, mostly through suggestive imagery. This is done in brief passages, typically, at the very beginning and very end of the film. In these rapid scenes, the filmmaker suggests to his audience that the significance of his story is found not only in its objectivity or in the relationship between the story told and the larger course of the war but also in its highly subjective meaning for individuals who years or decades after the war are still alive. In the instance of *Ballad of a Soldier*, it is that meaning for the hero's mother and his friends, who years after the war are still attempting to make sense of Alesha's short life and their own survival. The meaning they find, moreover, is not the result of placing Alesha's life or death within the context of the Soviet victory, but by imagining his experiences and his inner life during his final days.

A similar parallel plot set in an imagined postwar present frames the wartime story of another film in the humanist tradition, Stanislav Rotstosky's *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (1972). The film tells the story of a detachment of women soldiers at a remote outpost in Northern Russia, where the man the anti-aircraft guns that defend a segment of a strategically important railroad. The region, far from the main theaters of the war, is quiet. When the soldiers discover evidence that a pair of German scouts has infiltrated the region,

potentially threatening the railroad, the commanding officer, Sergeant Vaskov, forms an expedition party that includes himself and five young women. Armed with rifles, they march into the forest in pursuit of the Germans. Far away from potential reinforcements, they discover that they are actually facing sixteen Germans armed with machine guns. In the end, Vaskov's unit defeats the Germans but the losses are terrible. Vaskov returns to his base with three German prisoners, the only survivors from among the Germans. All of the young women under his command have perished.

Just as *The Ballad of a Soldier's* narrative focus is Alesha's final hours, so the focus of the *Dawns Here Are Quiet* is on the final hours of the young women. And, like *The Ballad of a Soldier*, the film begins and ends with memory work and an intimated parallel plot set in the present in which the film was made. In fact, the film begins in the present, which is shot in color, in contrast to scenes that depict the war, which (apart from other instances of memory-work, the in-color representations of the young women's flashbacks) are shot in black and white. In the opening color shot, a young girl in a bright red jacket and yellow motorcycle helmet surveys a picturesque northern landscape. Forested hills line the banks of a lake. The steeple of a historic church stands out in the distance. The woman appears several times in the course of the film but is never introduced or mentioned by name. Neither is she incorporated into the plot. Initially, it is unclear why she appears in the film at all. But, as the parallel wartime narrative progresses, the scene that she observes in the opening scene reappears and we come to understand that the landscape she appreciates in admires for its natural beauty is the site of the small battle in which women her age lost their lives.

At the very end of the first of the film's two episodes Vaskov and company discover that there are more than just two Germans. At that tense moment, the film drops its historic account of war and returns for a second time to the present. We see that the woman in red and her friends (who are the same age as the women soldiers) have come to this spot for recreational purposes, oblivious to the fact that the ground on which they are pitching their tens had been a battlefield. The images of the present are fleeting. After a few moments in the present both at the end of the first episode and the beginning of the second, the film, using auditory cues (sounds of nature/bird calls) as a transition, returns from color to black and white and from the present to the war. The second of the film's two episodes focuses on the battle itself. highlighting the death of each of the young women. It ends as Vaskov, the sole survivor, wounded and exhausted, outsmarts the few remaining Germans and returns to his base with prisoners. The young women have lost their lives but won the battle.

During the film's final moments the narrative once again jumps to the present. The woman in red sees two mysterious looking men walking in the distance. As she approaches them, we see that one of the two is a much older Vaskov, a pensioner has grey hair and is wearing a dark civilian suit with combat ribbons pinned to his chest. He is accompanied by a young man in a military uniform, his adopted son. As we know from context, he is the biological son of one of the young women who died in the battle. The two approach a modest stone memorial hidden in a grove of trees. On it, the names of the women soldiers who died on that spot have been inscribed. The woman in red suddenly understands the significance of the site and the monument. The film ends as she places a wreath of autumn

leaves in front of the memorial and stands beside Vaskov and his son as together they pay their respects to the women who died on the spot.

While Vaskov and his women soldiers won their battle, the story, in contrast to *The Fall of Berlin*, does not highlight the victory or its contribution to the war effort but instead foregrounds the human cost. In particular, it calls attention to the difficulty survivors like Vaskov and his contemporaries faced in coming to terms with the loss of the young lives of fellow soldiers. As in *Ballad of a Soldier*, the parallel plot ties the small episode not to the larger course of the war but to the future.

Like *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) has a wartime narrative fractured by dreams, flashbacks and the subtle insertion of a postwar present. The subject of this film is a young boy, who serves as a scout at the battle of Stalingrad. His task is to survey German troops on the outskirts of the city. Trauma has robbed him of his childhood. Having witnessed the murder of his mother and sister in the early days of the war, he is obsessed by the desire for revenge. In his dreams, vividly depicted by the filmmaker, he returns to life before the war and a childlike state in which he experiences the range of emotions that one might expect from a boy of his age. One of Ivan's military handlers, Lieutenant Galtsev, worried that the missions assigned to Ivan are inappropriate for a child, wants them to stop immediately. Captain Kholin, although genuinely concerned about Ivan's welfare, believes that the desperate situation on the front combined with Ivan's determination to fight make the risk acceptable. Beyond this, there is little plot. Most of the film centers on the emotional state of Galtsev, Kholin and Ivan as they prepare for what turns out to be Ivan's last mission.

Ivan's Childhood begins with one of Ivan's haunting dreams, signaling from its opening moments, that what is important about the war in this film is not its objective reality (which, in the official history, highlights a sequence of battles culminating in victory) but its emotional impact. In contrast to "The Ballad of a Soldier" and "The Dawns Here Are Quiet", which begin and end in the present, the post-war memory work in this film is made apparent only in its final minutes. In the last wartime scene, Galtsev and Kholin take Ivan in a small rowboat to a drop-off point on the far (Western) bank of the Volga. They return to their temporary quarters in the basement of a bombed-out church oppressed by their concern for Ivan's safety. The transition to a later present is enacted through an auditory rather than a visual cue. To break the unbearable silence of a stalled battle, Kholin strikes a note on the church bell. The scene suddenly shifts to Berlin, where tolling bells announce the Soviet victory.

Documentary footage of the victory inserted into the film shows Russian troops in Berlin celebrating, Russian investigators inspecting the houses of Reich leaders who have committed suicide, and a German officer signing the surrender agreement. Galtsev walks the halls of a bombed-out building where Nazis once interrogated Soviet prisoners of war. Soviet troops are sorting through thousands of files of the prisoners who died there. Papers have been scattered haphazardly throughout the building. We don't see Galtsev but his thoughts are audible.

"Won't this be the last war on Earth?" He asks himself.

Kholin's voice responds, "You're a neurotic (Neurasthenic) Galtsev, you need to be treated."

Galtsev answers, "You were killed and I'm still alive. I must think about it."

The imagined conversation is one that Galtsev had with Kholin on several occasions while the captain was still alive. In these conversations, Kholin would tell Galtsev to resist his impulse to control people (Ivan and a young nurse) in order to protect them. It was beyond his power to save them from the war. Here it is an implicit commentary on the rigidity of postwar politics and culture and its relationship to the country's wartime

experiences. Galtsev then wanders towards a subordinate who is leafing through the scattered files and commenting on the fate of the individual prisoners described in them. All of the prisoners have been executed. Some shot. Others hanged. The subordinate tosses a folder that Galtsev recognizes as Ivan's into a pile. As Galtsev reaches for the file, it slides through a large hole in the building's shattered floor. Galtsev follows it through the hole and jumps into the basement.

As Galtsev examines the contents of the file, we see his face for the first time in this scene (and, consequently, for the first time since Stalingrad). There are deep scars on his left cheek and on the right side of his chin. The striking physical wounds appear emblematic of psychic wounds, also inflicted by the war, that are deeper still. He stares at a photograph of Ivan's face, presumably taken by the Germans at some point in his interrogation, perhaps in the moments preceding his death. There is not a trace of fear or regret. The un-child-like child looks disconcertingly fierce and determined, his face scarred (a slash on the cheek) in a manner similar to Galtsev's. The close resemblance suggests a close connection between the two. Ivan's story is his own but, in retrospect, it is also as a projection of Galtsev's apprehensions.

In the final sequence in the film, Galtsev, having examined Ivan's file, explores the basement, wandering through the rubble in the building's underground corridors. As he passes through collapsed stairwells and glances into holding cells and interrogation rooms, he begins to hallucinate. Apart from the Russian soldiers, the building is empty but, in his hallucination, he hears the voices of German interrogators looking for a small boy and then, for an instant, he sees Ivan spinning in circles as he dangles upside down from a wire. We then move from Galtsev's vision of Ivan to a dream. The dream appears to reflect Ivan's inner world in the moments preceding his death but, based on the circumstances (Ivan is long dead) the dream must instead be Galtsev's. In it, he is imagining Ivan's final thoughts, an extension of his hallucinations.

The imagery of this segment of Galtsev's hallucination is taken from the vocabulary that Tarkovsky had established for Ivan's dream world earlier in the film – a beautiful young mother, a happy childlike Ivan kneeling beside her as he drinks from a pail of fresh

water, a riverside beach, a playful young girl that seems like a sister, a circle game with other children, and, finally, Ivan winning a race. After speeding along the sandy shore past the other children and then past a threatening-looking dead tree, (which, elsewhere in the film, appears on the banks of the Volga with dead soldiers hanging from its limbs) he reaches the shoreline. He approaches the water and then keeps running. His movements are energetic and purposeful. It is though he is preparing to cross the Volga on yet another mission. He does not look back at the other children, the normal children, who he leaves far behind.

The final image, while jarring, is also ambivalent. There are both celebratory and ominous elements. The running is a liberating escape but, at the same time, Ivan appears to be heading yet again towards capture and death on the opposite shore. Like all of Ivan's dreams, it begins in the imagined Eden of his life before the war and ends with its disruption by the war itself and the saturation of more positive images by fear. The dream, of course, is imagined in the sense that it is not actually Ivan's dream but Galtsev's attempt to reconstruct Ivan's inner life during his final moments, just as *Ballad of a Soldier* and *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* reconstructed the final moments of its heroes and heroines for the benefit of survivors. In this imagined dream, Galtsev, who sought to protect Ivan but failed, seeks a normal ending for Ivan's life, one in which Ivan's childhood is somehow returned to him. But, even in this hallucination, Galtsev cannot really protect Ivan or reconcile Ivan's childhood with normalcy. The dream (and with it the film) offers insight into the extent that after the war the survivor remains troubled by Ivan's death but it offers no closure, concluding the film instead on a disturbing note.

Without the memory work in the final scene and the obvious imagined reconstruction of the hero's final moments, *Ivan's Childhood* is simply a tragic account of wartime heroism. Galtsev's hallucination pierces through the myth of the war's satisfactory ending by raising, at the very moment of the capture of Berlin, the theme of the psychic after-effects of the war in a post-war present. As the ghost of Kholin tells Galtsev, "you need treatment." The film's memory work serves if not as a treatment at least as a diagnosis.

3. Social Tensions (vs Reaffirmation of the Social Order)

The Stalinist war narrative mythologizes the social order, presenting society as unified in its support of the war effort and justifying the social hierarchy through idealized representations of leaders and their relationships with both regular soldiers and civilians. The Humanist narrative undermines these myths in some subtle and not so subtle ways, in part by part by diminishing the place of Germans in the storyline (a unifying theme) in favor of tensions within Russian society, in part by keeping the Soviet leadership outside of the story of the war, and in part by unpacking war time ideals.

For the most part, in the humanist films, leaders are left out of the representation of the war. Plots focus instead on small units of soldiers and/or small groups of civilians, who are largely on their own in the fight against the Germans. For example, in *The Ballad of a Soldier,* the only high ranking officer to appear does so at the beginning of the film, when he offers Alesha a medal for bravery. While in this scene, the relationship between General and soldier follows the ideal of Stalinist films in which there is familial affection and jovial informality, the general appears only briefly. In the battlefield scene in which Alesha acts as a hero, he acts spontaneously and on his own initiative. He finds himself in an impossible situation and his impromptu response, in the midst of a rapid retreat, leads to the destruction of two enemy tanks. No officers are present. Neither do any high-ranking figures appear during the rest of the film, which follows Alesha's journey home.

In the single battlefield scene in *The Cranes Are Flying*, Boris, the hero, is in a small detachment separated from the body of the army and acting on its own as it attempts to escape catastrophe in the early days of the war. Likewise, the highest-ranking officer encountered by the three main characters in *Ivan's Childhood* is a lieutenant colonel. Kholin, Galtsev and Ivan, while part of the Stalingrad front and somehow integrated into its movements, seem to operate on their own, removed physically from other units. The separation of ordinary people from leaders (and from large groups of soldiers, the main body of the army) is spatial and visual as well as causal. The films' ordinary-person heroes act independently. They are physically removed from the leaders but also, from the most part, from large-scale battlefield scenes with their collections of thousands of men following battle plans that have been carefully choreographed by leaders. Thus, in the humanist narrative, the close causal connections between the actions of the leaders and the

actions of ordinary people so central to the myth of the all-powerful leader and his circle within the Stalinist narrative disappear.

To say that the myth of the unity of society engaged in fighting the Germans is called into question in humanist film is not to say that the image of society that emerges from the humanist narrative is one riven with conflict. Rather certain social fissures are mentioned just as some of the ideals for social conduct regarded as heroic and undergirding the war effort are called into question. This can happen in part because the plots in this narrative subordinate the conflict with the Germans to the conflicts that emerge among Russians as they fight the Germans. The Germans are presented neutrally, as enemies, rather than as demons. Moreover, they move from the center stage of the Stalinist narrative to the periphery of the Humanist narrative.

Perhaps the most important wartime social divide examined by films with the humanist narrative is the gulf between those on the frontlines and those on the home front. This politically sensitive theme is touched on briefly and delicately in *Ballad of a Soldier*. In one scene, Aleksei Skvortsev heads East on a train full of refugees from the Western borders of the USSR. They are civilian families fleeing the Nazis. After an aerial bombing the train derails and is engulfed in flames. Alesha spends an entire night rescuing passengers and hauling bodies from the inferno. When a crew of uniformed middle-aged rescue workers arrives the next morning, they treat Alesha in his Red Army uniform with unconcealed contempt. The gesture is small but given what we know about the hero's service and the myth of public support for the troops, the instance, nevertheless, makes a strong impression.

Perhaps the most explicit representation of this gulf between soldiers and civilians is in Aleksei German's *20 Days Without War* (1977). Major Lopatin, a journalist serving in the Red Army, is given leave and, like Alesha Skvortsev, departs by train for points east. His destination is Tashkent, where he has some business with his ex-wife and with a director who is making a film out of one of his war stories. While in Tashkent, the director asks his advice about the set and the script. They want to hear what war is like from someone who has experienced it himself. Lopatin is critical of the tone and setting of the film, which, to

his mind, do not accurately depict the war. Initially the director and his cast humor Lopatin and agree to some minor changes. However, when Lopatin continues to explain the gaps between their production and the reality of war, they insist that he must be mistaken. Sensing that the friendly disagreement was turning into a more serious quarrel, Lopatin leaves the studio.

On another occasion, a theater director asks Lopatin to discuss his personal experiences of war with her cast in order to help it prepare for an upcoming play. She is equally put off by Lopatin's observations. In Tashkent, Lopatin is surrounded by civilians who, on the one hand, want desperately to know about the war but, on the other, are incapable of accepting an honest eyewitness account. The war he knows does not correspond to their expectations. Consequently, Lopatin tries to avoid talking about the war altogether. At one point he finds it impossible to decline an invitation to address the workers of an armament factory about life at the front. When he appears before them in a large hall, he is at a complete loss for words. Momentarily unable to describe his own feelings and experiences, he resorts to the mechanical declaration of official clichés. Nonetheless, the crowd, eager to show support for soldiers on the front, responds with great enthusiasm. This is a stark contrast to the other points in the film, when Lopatin speaks honestly his attempts to communicate his own experience of the war and the conversation invariably ends in awkwardness and misunderstanding.

Sometimes the conflict between civilians on the home front and soldiers on the front is explored through gender. Several episodes from *Ballad of Soldier* use relations between men and women to cast light on the rift between the home-front and front lines. In one scene, Alyosha accompanies a handsome young soldier who has lost a leg home to his young wife. The soldier, who has not seen his wife for months if not years, is afraid either of being rejected by her as a result of his physical condition or, alternately, is worried that he will be a burden to her. He considers simply abandoning her in order to free her from any obligation to him. Alyosha convinces him not to flee. Ultimately, the solider overcomes his fears and is welcomed home by his wife. The reunion is successful beyond expectation. Nonetheless, the tension in the scene casts doubt on the Stalinist mythology of war simply by raising the issue of the impact of fighting and separation on families and the potential

gap between the ideal of the patiently waiting wife and the reality of the impact of wartime stress, distance, loneliness and material deprivation on families. Another scene from the film pokes a hole in the myth more directly. Alyosha stops to deliver a present, a bar of soap, to a fellow soldier's fiancée, only to discover that in his friend's absence she has taken a husband. Disgusted, he leaves the apartment. Moments later, Alyosha reconsiders and returns to take back the soap, which he brings instead to the soldier's elderly father.

The Cranes Are Flying explores the same set of issues regarding the myth of the patient lover from a different angle. The young heroine Veronica is separated from her fiancé Boris in the early days of the war. Shortly, thereafter, her home is destroyed and her parents killed in a bombing raid. The orphaned, homeless Veronica moves into Boris's family's apartment. There, she is raped and then pressured into marriage by Boris's cousin Mark. It is unclear why Veronica agrees to marry Mark, but we are left with the impression that despair has weakened her ability to resist his imprecations. Mark and Veronica continue to live with Boris's family, although in uncomfortable circumstances. The family tolerates the couple's presence although they despise them, Veronica in particular, for her betrayal of Boris.

Veronica, meanwhile, loathes the unfaithful and abusive Mark almost as much as she loathes herself for what she imagines is her disloyalty. She is ashamed to the point of desperation, living from day to day in an unhappy marriage, despised by those around her for a decision that the filmmaker shows us was made under circumstances beyond her control. Unable to forgive herself or to reconcile herself to the terms of her existence, she is sustained only by the hope that Boris would soon return and that somehow, in spite of her marriage to Mark, they would be reunited. While *Ballad of a Soldier* interrogates the ideal of the steadfast woman waiting for her lover by looking at the strains wartime realities placed on relationships, *The Cranes Are Flying* does so by humanizing a woman who fails to live up to the ideal. Veronica is imperfect, a victim of the war and not a traitor. By showing her strengths as well as weaknesses, the film calls into question the demonization of women in Veronica's position and, consequently, the rigidity of wartime ideals and morality more generally.

Other movies that share the humanist narrative likewise call into question wartime ideals by their attempts to understand and humanize characters that have violated them. For example, Sergei Bondarchuk's *Destiny of a Man* (1959) and Grigorii Chukhrai's *Clear Skies* (1961) tell exculpatory stories of Soviet Soldiers who, rather than fighting to the death, allowed themselves to be taken prisoner by the Germans, an act deemed treasonous in the infamous Order 270. Alexander Stolper's *The Living and the Dead* (1964) examines the extreme suspicion with which those Soviet soldiers who escaped German encirclement on the Western frontier in the early days of the war were received after they had escaped. The film's hero, Ivan Sinzov, is doubly cursed as, in the course of his harrowing escape, he loses consciousness and, consequently, loses contact with his unit and also loses his papers and his party card, rendering him an outlaw and a traitor.

Films with the humanist narrative from the late sixties and seventies continue to employ this theme of humanizing heroes and heroines who have violated wartime social ideals. Aleksei German's *Trial on the Road* (1971) looks at the life of a Red Army soldier, Alexander Lazarev, who, captured by the Nazis in the early days of the war, fights briefly with the *Hiwis* ("Volunteers" -- Units comprised of collaborators from local population, who fight in militias alongside units from the regular German army) in exchange for his life. After escaping, he surrenders himself to pro-Soviet partisans. The partisans want to execute him immediately. His life is saved by a humanistic squad leader who, acting against the judgment of his men, decides to use Lazarev on a suicide mission. In exchange for his life, Lazarev is given the opportunity to redeem himself, a deal that he willingly accepts.[24]

Larisa Shepitko's *The Ascent* (1977) also uses the representation of partisans to treat the theme of soldiers given a choice between their lives and collaboration. Lieutenants Sotnikov and Rybak are both captured while attempting to find food for a band of partisans in which they serve. In theSotnikov chooses to die rather than collaborate. Rybak makes the opposite decision. He believes that he can escape and undo his choice. The film judges Lieutenant Rybak harshly but rather than demonizing him, it places his

[24] Mikhail Iampolskii reads this film in order to show more precisely how deeply and subtly German uses history to exculpate Lazarev. Mikhail Iampol'skii to SEANS, 22 February 2013, 2013, http://seance.ru/blog/chtenie/german_yampolsky/.

actions within the context of his history of bravery in battle (which we witness earlier in the film, when he saves Sotnikov) and the agonizing choice of a young man between death and treachery. Where Lazarev dies having redeemed himself, Rybak, by his decision, condemns himself to what Shepitko depicts in the final minutes of the film as a living hell. The emphasis, however, is on Rybak's decision-making process and his internal torment rather than his intrinsic odiousness.

The Ascent does not exonerate Rybak. However, by humanizing ostensibly treasonous protagonists, films such as *The Ascent* interrogate widely held ideals regarding upstanding conduct in wartime and suggests the intolerance of a society that adheres to them uncritically.

4. Depictions of Love and Death As Tools for the Individualization of Characters

At the core of the humanist idea as embodied in Soviet films about World War II is the development of the story of the war at the level of individual human beings and the creation within films of personal narratives that compete with the national narratives central to the Stalinist approach. Depictions of love and death in humanist films often act as the foundation of those personal narratives, establishing the individuality of characters that are paradoxically typical. By typical, I mean to say that while their stories are individualized, they are representative of larger groups. This process of individualization establishes a space for reflection on personal loss and the actual experience of the war that is not eclipsed by the Victory.

One of the most memorable romantic sequences in all of Soviet film takes place in Chukhrai's *Ballad of a Soldier*. The soldier, Aleksei, appears to be eighteen or nineteen at most. Having destroyed two German tanks, he is declared a hero and awarded a brief home leave. To reach his destination on time, he stows away on a freight train heading east. At one stop, another stowaway, a young woman his own age, sneaks onto the car. As the train leaves the station, Shura notices Aleksei watching her. Fearing theft or assault from a strange man, she throws the small bundle of her possessions out of the rapidly moving car

and prepares to follow it. Aleksei, worried that she will hurt herself, succeeds in stopping her. However, it takes some time to convince the frightened Shura that she has nothing to fear from him.

Shura explains to Alesha that she is travelling to visit her fiancé, a wounded pilot. Following their comically awkward introduction, the two rapidly grow close, drawn together by their youth, loneliness, the strangeness of their situation and personal chemistry. Aleksei and Shura spend a day together on the train, experiencing a series of adventures, including several hours of an unexpected separation followed by a joyful but equally unexpected reunion. At the end of the day, their routes diverge. Just before they part, Shura confides in Alesha that there is no fiancé. She had told him that to protect herself. Actually, she is visiting an aunt, presumably because, like so many displaced by the war, she is alone with nowhere else to go.

At that moment, perhaps because he is overwhelmed by emotions, Aleksei doesn't fully understand either what Shura is telling him or his own feelings. He is at a loss for words. They embrace and he boards a train. Sasha runs alongside the train waving and shouting as it leaves the station. Aleksei yells to her, explaining how she can reach him, but the roar of the crowd and the engine drown out his words. On board the train Aleksei reflects on his experience. Recalling the elation of his day with Shura, he tries unsuccessfully to exit the train. Afterwards, he resigns himself to completing his journey without Shura. The story quickly leaves Shura behind, as Aleksei endures additional challenges on the last leg of his trip home. Nonetheless, the episode is the film's longest and remains its centerpiece.

This episode, like those in other films that focus on love during the war, helps to turn Alesha from a fatality statistic into a human being, someone whose loss we can actually feel. The story of the romance engages the audience and thereby heightens that sense of loss on two contradictory levels. On one level, we know from the film's opening moments that Alesha will die at the front having barely reached manhood. In this he is representative of millions of Soviet soldiers of his generation. This brief romance calls attention to the fact that his early death deprived him (and millions like him) of love, family

and so much that is considered central to a full life. The physical and emotional closeness of the two draws us in (and away from the heroic narrative of the war) in part because it seems so real and in part because we are aware that for this very decent person, this will be his first and last love. The single day of romance must count for a lifetime. The episode is also reassuring for a contrary reason. The film represents Alesha's final days before he heads back to the front and to what we know will be his death. But, having seen his romance with Shura, we have the sense that although he died young, he had experienced love, a fact in which the mother, who appears at the beginning and end of the film presumably wondering about her son's final days, might have taken a small degree of comfort.

In *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, five young women soldiers and their male sergeant, having set out on a short mission in pursuit of two German scouts, find themselves in a conflict with a much larger and better-armed contingent of German soldiers. The Sargent survives but the women perish. As with *Ballad of a Soldier's* Alesha, their lives are individualized in order to make their loss meaningful. Their individualization is to a large degree achieved by the insertion of love stories. Chronologically, these take place before the women's military service and are injected into the narrative in the form of flashbacks. In contrast to the black and white naturalism of the main storyline, the flashbacks (like the inserted present at the beginning and end of each of the film's two parts) are highly stylized and in color. In Zhenya Komelkova's flashback, we witness her romance with an older married man, a high-ranking officer who was a colleague of her officer father. From Rita's flashback, we learn that before the war broke out, she was newly married to a soldier, a border guard, who served on the frontier with Poland. He was killed by the Germans in the first days of the war. After his death, she left their infant son with her mother and enlisted so that she could avenge her husband's death. In Liza Brichkina's flashback, we learn that before the war, she had lived in a log cabin in a remote rural area with her forester-father. The region was sparsely populated with few marriageable young men. As a schoolgirl, she fell hopelessly in love with a handsome young colleague of her fathers. His rejection of her advances, either from principle or disinterest, broke her heart. Sofia from Minsk had a romance with a fellow student in Moscow. Their relationship ended in the early days of the

war, when he enlisted and left her with a declaration of love and a volume of poetry. Galina, had grown up in an orphanage with few social contacts of any kind. Consequently, her in-color "flashback" was pure fantasy. In it, she pictured herself as a double of the Stalin-era starlet Liubov Orlova and imagined herself carried away by a handsome prince.

Romance likewise plays a role in defining and individualizing the heroine in Larissa Shepitko's *Wings* (1966). As in *The Dawns Here Are Quiet,* the film contains flashbacks from the romantic life of its warrior heroine. In contrast to *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* in which the film is set in the war and the flashbacks from a period that predates it, *Wings* is set in the postwar period with flashbacks from the war. The heroine, Nadezhda Petrukhina, was a decorated fighter pilot during the war and in the film's present is an important official in an unnamed provincial city. A party member, she sits on the city soviet and acts as the headmistress of a school. She takes her duties very seriously but is deeply dissatisfied with her life following the war. She is particularly resentful of the fact that in the aftermath of the war male pilots with less distinguished wartime records than her own continue to fly, while women pilots have been excluded from military aviation. She is regarded by most of her colleagues as well as friends and her adopted daughter as decent but emotionally cold, sometimes mean and often unfeeling. Throughout the film, her mind wanders from her uninspiring life in the present and exhilarating experiences during the war. In several flashbacks we see her enjoying the freedom of flight.

Toward the end of the film, a series of romantic flashbacks illustrate another side of this superficially dry and unfeeling woman's personality, revealing a passionate romance with a male pilot and hero of the Soviet Union, Mitya Grachov. The flashbacks begin with their liaison at a hospital as both recover from injuries. They end when the two fly a mission together. Mitya is shot down. Like a bird circling her wounded mate, Nadezhda hovers around Mitya's shattered plane, a smoky plume shooting from its tail. She risks her life to take a single pass directly over it and witnesses a final explosion. The romantic sequence is the key to the heroine's personality, revealing a side of her that those who met her after the war could not understand and the toll the war has taken on her life. Here too, love individualizes and humanizes the central character in a way by pointing to the extent

of wartime losses. In this film, that loss is not the premature death of the heroine, but the layers of feeling and personality of a survivor.

Death – or more accurately the way that characters meet their own death, is the other experience that like representations of love humanizes the characters and calls attention to the cost of the war on individuals in a way that is foreign to in the Stalinist narrative. Typical representations of death are closely related to the theme of love; in part because every representation of love in wartime is accompanied by the sense that death is nearby and in part because, reciprocally, the ability of the representations of death to evoke an emotional response is frequently contingent on the character's romantic history.

The most important cinematic representation of death in this regard is that of Boris in *The Crane's Are Flying*. Early in the war, Boris's unit is encircled somewhere in the Western Soviet Union. Boris and and Volodya, another soldier in his unit, are sent ahead to determine the best place to break through the German position. When Volodya is wounded, Boris hoists him on his back and carries him deeper into the forest for safety. Boris puts the discouraged Volodya down and comforts him, assuring him that he'll live to dance at his own wedding. At that very moment, a sniper's lone shot rings out. Boris begins to keel over. The film draws out his final moments, alternating three perspectives: a view of Boris, his body reeling; a view of the world through Boris' eyes (the sun, passing behind clouds, followed by the canopy of the forest spinning as he falls backwards); and a fantasy that occupies the final moments of his consciousness. In that fantasy, Boris does not see his entire life pass before his eyes but rather a glimpse of what his life might have been.

Dressed as a soldier in his worn uniform, Boris rushes up the stairs to his family's Moscow apartment. We sense that he is late for some important event. At the same time, a wedding party that includes Boris himself descends the same staircase. In contrast to Boris's urgency, the members of the wedding party move at a leisurely pace. They raise their glasses high and sway rhythmically to a joyful yet somehow grotesque dance. His family looks overjoyed. Veronica is radiant in her white wedding dress. The fantasy ends as Boris hits the ground, mutters some meaningless final words and dies. The implications of

his death for Veronica, who will not know what happened to Boris for years, amplifies the scene's emotional resonance.

The Dawns Here Are Quiet also pays close attention to the deaths of its five heroines. Liza Brichkina drowns in a swamp as she attempts to return to the base for reinforcements. Sonya Gurvich is the first to be killed by a German soldier. While running a routine errand, she is ambushed and stabbed. She dies almost instantly, her scream alerting the rest of her unit to its immediate danger. Sergeant Vaskov recovers the body and performs a short funeral lamenting a life cut short. He observes that "She read poetry and most important, she could have had children, and grandchildren, too. Then her line wouldn't have been broken. But they broke the line with a knife." As the Germans approach, Galina Chetvertak, frozen by fear, is too frightened either to fight or to hide. She abandons her concealed position and is gunned down instantly. Zhenya Komelkova sacrifices herself for the others. She runs out into the open in an effort to divert the Germans away from the rest of the group. Rita Osyanina is mortally wounded providing cover for Zhenya and Vaskov. After a long conversation with Vaskov about how she and the other girls would like to be remembered, she loses consciousness. Vaskov covers her in a blanket of pines as though returning her to the soil.

In The Dawns Here Are Quiet," the individual death scenes are long and melodramatic. From a critical perspective, they are over-scripted and over-acted. More important, the representation of death pushes viewers to look more carefully at the dimensions of wartime loss. As with the representation of love, the representation of life's final moments is integral to an image of the war in which suffering competes with the final triumph.

5. The Nature of Combat (Combat and Landscape)

At the center of the Stalinist narrative is the military defeat of the Germans. Consequently, the focal point of these films visually and in terms of narrative is combat. The films themselves tend to examine battles that took place late in the war, battles that the Soviets won decisively. The examination of combat within the context of these battles begins with their planning by Stalin and his generals and ends with the execution of their

plans on the battlefield. Usually this culmination offers the viewer a spectacle that highlights the effectiveness of the leaders' battle plan but also the bravery of Soviet/Russian soldiers and their superiority to their German counterparts. As a spectacle it typically includes enormous columns of men and an array of advanced weapons displayed on a vast field in a manner designed to entertain with a spectacle and, simultaneously, to elicit patriotism and respect for state power.

While they do not eschew patriotism or even criticize the Soviet war effort, for the most part the Humanist films lack displays of military power designed to elicit patriotic feelings. Rather, they focus on wartime losses suffered by individuals and communities. As a result of this shift in emphasis, combat plays a very different role in the films and is depicted in a very different manner. The fighting explored in these films, moreover, is not connected to the great victories beginning with Stalingrad but represented as part of small lesser known (or even imagined) battles and campaigns. These are often at the beginning of the war (up to the early months of Stalingrad), when victory was not yet on the horizon, when the strategic errors of the leadership were readily apparent and when demoralized troops, separated from large formations and dispersed along the Western boundary of the USSR, were often left to their own devices in forests and swamplands.

Within the humanist narratives, Soviet soldiers are still lauded for their patriotism and their fighting ability and there is still the occasional "entertaining" depiction of combat or Soviet military success. For the most part, however, the films put forward an image of combat that is neither aestheticized nor made glamorous. Fighting at close quarters is represented as awkward, clumsy and dehumanizing. Gone are the large battlefields with their depiction of enormous formations of men and hardware along with representations of meticulous planning by Stalin and his marshals, followed by the skillful implementation of those plans.

Battles in humanist narratives take place without a script (that is without clearly defined orders from above) in natural settings on "battlefields" that lack clearly delineated boundaries. They involve small groups of men or women, who, because they are geographically removed from the main theaters of military operations and are distant from

the military leadership, make decisions on their own. Moreover, their conduct in combat is not compared with that of German soldiers. Germans not only appear less frequently than in Stalinist narrative films, but are represented differently. They are enemies engaged in criminal acts but, for the most part, not caricatures of villains. While they are not humanized or individualized, neither are they demonized or made the objects of ridicule. Consequently, the emphasis is on the importance of the decisions that the Soviet characters make for themselves and the consequences, to a larger degree, their own responsibility.

The subject of these films are sometimes Soviet partisans (or regular troops fighting in partisan units) rather than detachments of regular Red Army soldiers, not simply because partisans are an interesting theme, but in part because they represent a dimension of the war with less connection to state and in which local leaders were likely to make their own decisions and in part because partisan warfare often took place within the forest rather than on the types of large open battlefield favored in Stalinist films.

The attempt by directors to transform the representation of combat can already be seen in films made as early as *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957) and the *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959). In the single combat scene in *Ballad of a Soldier*, in order to convey the hero's disorientation and panic, the director turns the battlefield upside down. Alesha performs his act of heroism, the destruction of two tanks, not as part of an organized clash of troops or on the orders of his superior. Rather, after the death of a single fellow soldier, he is alone and destroys the tank in the midst of an attempt to flee an onslaught that he cannot. His heroism is genuine but accidental.

Much of Aleksei German's *20 Days Without War* (1976), is an attempt to unpack cliché's about the representation of war. In the opening scene, the hero, the military journalist Major Lopatin, walks across a sandy beach with the soldiers in the unit that he is accompanying. The soldiers are relaxing in the sand. It is early in the war, before Stalingrad. Lopatin and the other men have just completed a dangerous landing somewhere on the Black Sea coast. Lopatin is accompanied by a photographer and a veteran sergeant. He keeps his thoughts to himself while the sergeant and photographer chatter. The sergeant asks Lopatin what he was thinking about before the landing. When Lopatin doesn't answer,

the sergeant answers for himself. “It’s either him or me. Not everyone is going to come out of this alive.” Lopatin remains silent but muses to himself about the unreliability of anyone’s memories of battle and the apparent randomness of what one can actually recall later.

We learn from Lopatin’s stream of consciousness, verbalized by a narrator, that the very scene that we are witnessing is not taking place in the present moment but in Lopatin’s memory and that Lopatin is himself unsure of why that moment on the beach has stuck. He notes that there were other moments, more dramatic moments and moments from more significant battles that he has forgotten entirely. He wonders if it is not because at the moment of the sergeant’s observations about life and death, the photographer (Pavel Rubtsov) accompanying him was still alive. And, consequently, when the photographer dies some months later, Lopatin returns in his own mind to the beach with an even greater appreciation of the old sergeant’s words. This scene, which introduces the film, is interesting because it raises the question of what is remembered and calls the objectivity of all memories of the war, cinematic and otherwise, into question.

The film itself contains an ongoing analysis of the representation of the war that is conveyed in part within the context of discussions that Lopatin has with civilians about the nature of the war (discussed above within the context of the rift between soldiers at the front and civilians and authorities in the rear). Simply put the notions held by those on the home front about how soldiers live and what they must go through in battle bears little relation to what Lopatin has actually experienced. His attempts to explain those experiences in confident but undogmatic terms results in significant frustration both for Lopatin and his various interlocutors. In several scenes, the film also calls into question the visual representation of war by giving us images of war in which there is no conventional battlefield and death is arbitrary and meaningless because it bears no relation either to the kind of fighting that civilians might imagine (i.e. conventional cinematic representations of battle) or is senseless because it bears no relation to the actual outcome of the war. The death of soldiers appears to be the product of chance rather than error or calculation.

In the first scene of the film, which, as mentioned, takes place on a beach somewhere on the Black Sea coast, it is unclear how the men sprawled across the sand, some walking, others relaxing and sitting by fires in small groups, fit into any larger battle. Is this really war? Where exactly are they? Why are they there? Where is the fighting? German further disorients through unexpected modulations of the soundtrack. There are disconcerting moments of silence as well as a host of inexplicable highly disorienting noises at variable volumes for which there are no visible sources. The sounds come from all directions and are punctuated by unexpected and inexplicable silences.

Suddenly, as though from nowhere, a squadron of German planes appears. At first the planes are silent. The roaring of engines is heard only when they are directly overhead. The soldiers spring to action. They disperse -- not to fight back but to somehow protect themselves on the open space of the sand. The planes strafe the beach. Just a few moments later, when the attack is over, the men stand up, dust themselves off and having assured themselves that they are alive, laugh nervously. Then, having identified and disposed of the single casualty, they move on. An establishing shot, one of the film's first, looks out over the sea toward the horizon and shows fighting raging in the distance, a naval battle. Yes, there is a battle going on. The men on the beach are somehow part of it. But their location and relation to the fighting are difficult to fathom jus as the relationship of their activity to the larger war is never explained. German is conveying to his audience the same message that Lopatin conveys to civilians in Tashkent; the war as experienced by soldiers is not as you imagine it.

Later in the film, Lopatin has a flashback and returns to the scene of his photographer Rubtsov's death. At that moment, once again, soldiers are not in position or even readying themselves for combat. There is no battlefield. Troops doze in the sun in the presence of picturesque historical ruins. Rubtsov hands Lopatin his camera and asks him to take his picture in front of the ruins in the company of a family of local herdsmen with their goats. As Lopatin snaps the picture, there is the sudden sound of shelling followed by a series of explosions. Rubtsov unsuccessfully attempts to carry the small children away from the blast just as an enormous monumental wall collapses on top of them. The scene is shrouded in smoke and sand. When the dust settles, the soldiers try unsuccessfully to lift

the wall and rescue those buried under it. Lopatin, his face spattered with his own blood and noticeably marked by grief, shock and exhaustion, sobs uncontrollably.

In the final minutes of the film, Lopatin receives an order to return immediately to his unit. A new campaign is about to begin. In a matter of seconds, the filmmaker takes us from a railroad station in Central Asia westward to the front. Lopatin passes through several time zones and through railroad yards filled with troop transports and trains laden with heavy weaponry. He makes his final approach to the front in an open truck. It passes by long columns of men trudging through mud with their artillery pieces. The few tanks fire aimlessly into the distance as they roll forward. Lopatin is met by the old sergeant at an agreed upon point in the middle of rolling steppe. They are joined by a young lieutenant carrying a suitcase. He too is looking for the front and is making his way to a battlefield for the first time. Like the audience he is not sure what to expect and is late to recognize that he is in the middle of a battle. Together the soldiers walk with their bags through scruffy open fields scarred by shells and the treads of heavy equipment. They are in the midst of the fighting but the war is somehow invisible. Both the Soviet unit they seek to join and the German front lines remain unseen. The men are fired upon. They hit the dirt. The shells come closer and closer until they finally subside. The men then dust themselves off. They revive the young lieutenant, who is in shock. Moments later, they resume their trek toward the horizon, happy to be alive.

. This depiction of war questions cinematic conventions for depicting battle and offers an empty, desolate unremarkable field as an alternative to one teeming with masses of weapons and troops engaged in purposeful activity. But beyond this attempt to interrogate the conventional, the image of war in this film is not typical of the humanist narrative. What will become a more typical image of war in the humanist narrative is introduced in 1957 in Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying* in the scene of Boris's death that we have already examined. A small group of soldiers, separated from the main body of the army and acting on their own, wanders through the forest. The setting and situation are repeated in many variations in numerous films including, among others, Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood*, German's *Trial on the Road*, Aleksander Stolper's *The Living and the Dead*,

Shepitko's *The Ascent*, Rostotsky's *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, and Elem Klimov's *Come and See*.

In his essay, "Landscape With Hero," Evgenii Margolit talks about a dynamic depiction of nature as a feature of Thaw-era film that distinguishes it from Stalinist films in which nature is depicted in static, abstract terms and, ideologically, treated as a negative, to be subordinated to and domesticated by humans. This manifests itself in Stalinist war films in that nature is seldom seen or is staged in a clearly artificial manner. Combat and nature do not go together.

For Margolit, the exceptional feature in Kalatozov's representation of Boris' death is the employment of the kind of subjective camera angles typically used to call attention to the point of view of individual characters to represent nature's perspective. He sees in high treetop angles, for example, a perspective that couldn't possibly represent a human point of view. The human perspective and natural perspective meet in the swirl of vantage points included in the montage of Boris's final seconds – an alternation between close-ups and long shots and between Boris's wedding fantasy, the vantage points of Boris himself, his wounded colleague (lying on the ground) and long shots from the forest canopy. Here, Margolit sees, "The microcosm of an individual human life colliding with nature's microcosm, an instant collides with eternity. This view from above, as if from another world—from divine heights—is the point of view of eternity, which belongs to nature. " On a conventional depiction of the battlefield, in which two armies clearly oppose each other on some kind of open field, the meaning of Boris's life (and death) would be situated in relation to his impact on the battle and perhaps in relation to the battle's impact on the overall course of the war. Instead, the natural setting places Boris's life in relation to something much larger. From nature's vantage point, the instant of Boris's suffering and the war itself are insignificant. [25]

Like the *Cranes Are Flying*, Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* is a war movie with very little actual combat in which Germans (for the most part) do not appear and wartime

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[25] Evgenii Margolit, "Landscape with Hero," in *Springtime for Soviet Cinema: Re/Viewing the 1960s*, ed. Alexander Prokhorov (Pittsburgh: 2001), 38-40. See also Emma Widdis, "'One Foot in the Air?': Landscape in the Soviet and Russian Road Movie," in *Cinema and Landscape*, ed. Graeme Harper and Johnathan Rayner (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), 78, 83.

activities (here, the prelude to combat) are often depicted as enveloped in nature. The most arresting images of nature in Tarkovsky's film are of farmland scarred by war, of a grove of birches and of the forested swampland along the banks of the Volga in which Ivan begins and ends his missions. In this film, according to Margolit, human alienation from nature (a building block of thaw era individuality), is represented in Ivan's alienation from childhood, the despoliation of the landscape by war, and in Ivan's haunting dreams in which, in contrast to reality, there are glimpses of nature in its ideal form as nourishing and comforting.[26]

The image of war imbedded in nature continues to be central to humanist narratives of the war through the 1970s. In Stanislav Rostotsky's *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (1972), the landscape is once again the visual dominant, dwarfing human activity. The vast northern forest plays multiple roles. As an identifiably Russian landscape with a history of representations in art, it signifies Russianness or home. Sergeant Vaskov's familiarity with the forest and his knowledge of folk traditions for surviving in it, gives his outgunned unit some advantages vis-à-vis the Germans. It allows them effectively to use the forest as a shelter and hiding place. The forest also provides a kind of solace. When Rita Osyanina, one of the women soldiers, is mortally wounded, Vaskov drapes her in evergreen fronds under which she rests peacefully as though returning to the earth. However, nature also has another side. It is difficult to traverse and makes communication all but impossible. It is indifferent to the young soldiers' deaths in ways that at times appear cruel and unforgiving as when Lisa Brichkina drowns as she is swallowed in the muck of a bog. The landscape also contains the memory of the war. In the film's opening and closing scenes, it introduces characters from the post-war generation to history and the experience of the war. In this way, nature links the past with the present. Finally, as Margolit suggest of earlier films, nature represents eternity. The war is transient in comparison with the forest, which will survive the war and (as it could still be imagined when the film was made) survive for centuries after that. In the film's panoramic shots, a church steeple shoots out from a grove of tall trees emphasizing the connection between the landscape, eternity and life beyond the war.

[26] Margolit, "Landscape with Hero," 42.

The events of Larissa Shepitko's *The Ascent* (1977) are also enveloped in a vast, beautiful if unforgiving nature. In this instance, it is the forests of Belorussia and, as in *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, the forest landscape is symbolically polyvalent. The film is shot in winter and the snow-covered landscape is bleak and unforgiving, beautiful but less sheltering than the forest in *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*. The members of the forest-dwelling partisan band that Rybak and Sotnikov have joined live like nomads, moving from place to place for fear of capture by the Germans and in search of food. They live in a state of desperation, on the brink of starvation, as do the farmers in surrounding villages. War has made life in already impoverished region unbearable. Rybak and Sotnikov are captured in a quest for food and, when Sotnikov is shot in a skirmish with a small detachment of Germans, the severe cold and snow make their escape all the more difficult. However, nature is once again more than just cruel or indifferent. In multiple landscapes, many vast with no human presence, Shepitko also provides a sense of nature's expanse and contrasts its eternal character with the finiteness of human life and the war. Sotnikov, while lying in the snow wounded, appears to have an out-of-body experience in communion with nature. A series of images in which Shepitko depicts the forest canopy and the cosmos as viewed from Sotnikov's position on the forest floor are perhaps the most striking images in a film that is from the first shot visually arresting. The interlacing branches of trees glazed in ice form geometric patterns. A perfectly round sun passes behind the clouds. In spite of his own closeness to death, Sotnikov appears to take comfort in its vastness. This cosmic experience allows him later in the film to accept torture and martyrdom at the hands of the Nazis, which the stronger equally patriotic Rybak is unable to bear. As in *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, images of a church alongside the vast natural landscape emphasize the association between nature and eternity. Together they frame the action in the film and suggest a flow of time that moves to a different rhythm than the war.

Conclusions

This paper began with a discussion of recent research by Seth Bernstein, Lev Gudkov and Stephen Norris that examines contemporary commemorations of the Great Patriotic War and raises the question of continuity between current and Soviet memory

practices. It suggested that a model for Soviet memory of the war on film that might make it easier to compare contemporary films about the war with Soviet era films and thereby to assess that continuity with precision. The body of this paper attempted to provide the beginnings of such a framework by breaking down the two principal Soviet film narratives about the war, a Stalinist narrative and a Humanist narrative, into their chief components. While Bernstein, Gudkov and Norris seem to judge continuity based on the existence of essential myths to be exploded or reaffirmed, this paper conceptualizes them in terms of metanarratives that are the matrix of these myths and are themselves complex categories with multiple components.

Within the context of the films examined these components of the two narratives shape views of history that are anchored in culture and continue to play themselves out in the present in new representations of the war. The Stalinist metanarrative presents itself as an objective view of history. In it, the character of the leaders and the willingness of the people to obey and to fight determine the course of the war. History moves forward on the basis of what occurs on the battlefield. It does so as the leaders' make decisions and their plans are executed by the people. This narrative culminates in the victory. In the Humanist metanarrative the history of the war is subjective, presented as memory. Its chief interest is not the nation and its struggle but the existential concerns of individuals and small groups during wartime. Victory and the larger struggle with the Germans are in sight but not in focus, while the decisions of Stalin and other leaders have little demonstrable bearing on the events depicted. Moreover, the backdrop (or principal topos) for understanding the war is not the battlefield. Neither is it the Kremlin or General Staff headquarters, where decisions are made and executed. Frequently, the backdrop is nature, which envelopes the main characters and separates them from leaders, large bodies of soldiers and the main current of the war. (There are some other topoi in this metanarrative, such as the home, which could require further analysis). History in this context is moved forward not by "big" decisions made by leaders but by small decisions made by ordinary people. Moreover, the time frame is longer. The small decisions of little people have an impact on human lives that extend beyond the Victory to the post-war period. The backdrop (the natural landscape) contextualizes the war from an even broader time frame, that of eternity, which

dwarfs the victory and the conceits of leaders, allowing some of these other concerns to come into focus.

One would need to go beyond the materials presented here to draw conclusions about continuity or lack thereof in the present, although one could use the model to make some informed comparisons. A more definitive assessment would involve an examination of how the Stalinist model evolves in the 1970s and eighties and then consideration of post-Soviet Russian films. However, for the sake of discussion, I will put forward a few provisional (and conditional) observations. While interest in the war may wax and wane (as it did in the 1990s), it seems unlikely that contemporary directors have been or will be able to escape entirely the influence of the old narratives on which they were raised and that thanks to new media and current television programming still remain ubiquitous. While structural changes (including political and social developments as well as shifts in media-related economics and technology) foster cultural change, culture has semi-autonomous processes and genre (here the war film genre and, in particular, the subgenre of the Russian World War II film) has a memory, traceable through its components.

After Khrushchev was removed from power, the Stalinist model returned to the mainstream of representations of the war on film. This development was part of deliberate policy. While Humanist films such as those of Aleksei German and Larisa Shepitko continued to be made, the humanist narrative was pushed to the margins of popular culture. As mentioned several times in this paper, the most important work in the category of Brezhnev-era Stalinist narratives was Yuri Ozerov's multi-episode *Liberation* (1970-1971). *Liberation* maintained the principal components of the Stalinist narrative with some modifications. The cult of personality was replaced by a more neutral view of Stalin as a masterful statesman and first among peers rather than the only hero of the war. Moreover, the neo-Stalinist view of a collective leadership was grafted onto the memory of the war. Leading generals play a bigger role in decision-making.

Still it is worth noting that some elements of the Humanist narrative were incorporated into the Stalinist narrative; these are perhaps most evident in Ozerov's attempts to include the perspective of an officer and his love interest and in his effort to

treat the lives and deaths of individual soldiers with greater attention. In this case, a Stalinist narrative assimilates components of the Humanist narrative without compromising its ideological tenor. In short, already in the late-Soviet period one can observe a process of hybridization of the narratives, which is what may be happening in the present. For example two highly prominent contemporary works, Fedor Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad* (2013) and Renat Davlyetarov's remake, *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (2015), employ Thaw era-stories with humanistic implications[27] to reassert patriotic myths previously more akin to the Stalinist narrative. Furthermore, in these and other Putin-era films, one can begin to perceive a modified Stalinist myth for a post-Stalinist era, one in which the glaring imperfections of the Russian leadership are duly noted in a distinctly un-Stalinist manner but, at the same time, the unconditional obligation of the people to obey and to serve in the face of existential threats to the homeland is reaffirmed.

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[27] Vasily Grossman's novel *Life and Fate* in the case of the former and the original film of the same name, in the case of the latter.

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