

### **Soviet and Russian Blockbusters: A Question of Genre?**

BIRGIT BEUMERS

In this introduction, Birgit Beumers explains the concept of the blockbuster, examining its emergence within the context of political upheavals in Soviet history. She then discusses the relation of the blockbuster to the question of genre and defines the blockbuster as a genre film, which follows certain conventions and thereby cradles the spectator in a (false) security. Beumers closes with a chronological survey of popular Soviet films that provides the context for the remaining articles in this forum.

### **Cinema of Attractions versus Narrative Cinema: Leonid Gaidai's Comedies and El'dar Riazanov's Satires of the 1960s**

ALEXANDER PROKHOROV

Leonid Gaidai's comedies of the 1960s owed their phenomenal success to Gaidai's visual style of humor, which starkly contrasted to verbal instantiations of official Soviet ideology within narrative-driven Soviet cinema. An attentive comparison between Gaidai's comedies and the satirical films of El'dar Riazanov accounts for the outstanding popularity of the former and the more modest success of the latter. What makes Gaidai unique is his interest in visual, especially physical, humor. Gaidai privileged key elements of physical comedy, such as the primacy of visual over verbal humor, an exhibitionistic enlargement of the human body as a comic attraction, the transition from a still image to a moving picture as a visual attraction, and, most important, a chain of loosely connected sight gags (which became his signature structure) over a coherent and cohesive narrative. By contrast, Riazanov's satires tended to mock social vices and therefore relied heavily on a goal-oriented ideological narrative.

### **The Sounds of Music: Soundtrack and Song in Soviet Film**

DAVID C. GILLESPIE

In this article, David C. Gillespie explores the deliberate foregrounding of music and song in Soviet film. He begins with a discussion of the structural and organizing roles of music and song in early Soviet sound films, including those by Sergei Eizenshtein, Grigorii Aleksandrov, Ivan Pyr'ev, and Aleksandr Ivanovskii. Gillespie then focuses on the emphasis on urban song in some of the most popular films of the stagnation years, such as *The White Sun of the Desert* (1969) and *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1979), adding considerably to the appreciation of these films. To conclude, he analyzes folk music in films about village life, especially those directed by Vasilii Shukshin, and explores the role of music in constructing a mythical and nationalistic discourse.

## **National Identity, Cultural Authority, and the Post-Soviet Blockbuster: Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksei Balabanov**

SUSAN LARSEN

In this article, Susan Larsen argues that the plot lines, aesthetic choices and marketing strategies of the four most commercially successful Russian films of the last decade—Nikita Mikhalkov's *Burnt by the Sun* and *Barber of Siberia* and Aleksei Balabanov's *Brother* and *Brother-2*—are shaped by anxieties about Russian national identity and cultural authority that these films articulate in gendered terms as threats to paternal bonds and fraternal communities. Aiming both to emulate and to displace the Hollywood films that dominate the Russian film market, Mikhalkov and Balabanov exploit the conventions of the historical melodrama and the crime thriller to construct an explicitly Russian and emphatically masculine heroism in stories of charismatic, vanished fathers and dangerous, but irresistible brothers who defy the moral decay, crass materialism, economic imperialism and cultural solipsism that all four films associate with the west and, in particular, the United States.

## **Can the Meeting Place Be Changed? Crime and Identity Discourse in Russian Television Series of the 1990s**

ELENA PROKHOROVA

Since the mid-1990s, crime drama has been the leading genre of post-Soviet television. In this article, Elena Prokhorova discusses various genres of recent crime series, both within the historical context and as coherent discourse (specifically, identity discourse). Her analysis draws narrative and ideological parallels between recent Russian productions and Brezhnev-era television mini-series, especially as an attempt to reconceptualize national mythology. The flourishing of popularized “narratives of control”—spy thrillers and police series—in the 1970s signaled both the crisis of Soviet identity and an attempt to give a boost to the waning ideology by mixing popular culture formulas with ideology. Likewise, recent Russian crime dramas use Soviet and prerevolutionary popular culture formulae as a testing ground for new social models. Prokhorova explores the attributes of crime series as artistic texts, such as genre conventions, choice of plots and heroes, visual representation, as well as broader cultural values that underlie those choices.

## **Ukraine in Blackface: Performance and Representation in Gogol's *Dikan'ka Tales*, Book 1**

ROMAN KOROPECKYJ and ROBERT ROMANCHUK

In this article, Roman Koropeckyj and Robert Romanchuk present a Lacanian reading of the preface and “The Fair at Sorochintsy” from Nikolai Gogol's *Evenings on a Farm near Dikan'ka*, vol. 1 (1831), viewed through the prism of American blackface minstrelsy. They trace representations of

ethnicity and class in Gogol's "performance" of Ukraine. Their analysis of the preface demonstrates how Pan'ko's Ukraine reaches a Russian lower-class audience through the intervention of the gaze of an Other, an elite nonreader. The self-absenting of this Other opens a space for the audience's imaginary identification with the Ukrainian minstrel, while structuring this space symbolically. Their analysis of "The Fair" demonstrates how this "opening" creates a fantasy of Ukraine as a world of unbridled sexuality, simultaneously repressed and re-presented by the story's Russian-language fabula and elegiac "bookends." The repressed Ukrainian content irrupts, symptomatically, in the story's epigraphs. Akin to minstrelsy's "blackening" of American popular culture, the tension between the repressed and the expressed adumbrates the "Ukrainianization" of Russian national culture.

### **Explaining the 2000 Lithuanian Parliamentary Elections: An Application of Contextual and New Institutional Approaches**

TERRY D. CLARK and NERIJUS PREKEVIČIUS

Lithuania's 2000 parliamentary elections were the first in the post-Soviet era to fail to produce a majority government. Further, neither the Homeland Union nor the Democratic Labor Party entered into the ruling coalition. In this article, Terry D. Clark and Nerijus Prekevičius explore two different ways of explaining why this occurred. To answer the broader question, the first approach focuses on the particular events that occurred in the run-up to the elections. To consider why particular parties fared better or worse than expected, the second approach evaluates a set of rational choice approaches, including spatial analysis. Neither approach is preferable to the other; instead, they are complementary, each helping to resolve certain questions that are appropriate to the particular approach. To conclude, they consider the implications of their findings for the consolidation of Lithuania's party system.