

The Moral Vertical in Russian Cinema

Female Pilots, Flight Attendants, Cosmonauts and Aliens

—
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The front page illustration is a collage of film posters: *Aelita* (Protazanov 1924) design by Israil' Bograd (1927), *Letchiki* (unknown designer, film directed by Raizman 1935), *Eshche raz pro liubov'* (Natanson 1968) design by Miron Luk'ianov, *Belka i Strelka. Zvezdnye sobaki* (unknown designer, film directed by Evlannikova and Ushakov 2010).

“... every valorization is a verticalization...”

Gaston Bachelard (1988: 11)

Note on transliteration and translation.

When transliterating Russian names and words in the dissertation I have used ALA-LC Romanization tables for Slavic Alphabets, without the two-letter tie characters (so that ц = ts, ю = iu, я = ia) and some of the diacritics (so that ё = e, й = i, э = e). Exceptions are made in the cases where there are other established ways of transliterating a Russian name, such as ‘Leo Tolstoy’, rather than ‘Lev Tolstoi’.

Names and words are transliterated from Cyrillic to Latin in the text, while the Cyrillic alphabet is used in the footnotes. The original quotation is referred to in the footnotes in the cases where I have translated quotations from Russian language into English in the text.

Note on illustrations.

All the illustrations are screenshots from the respective films, taken from online streaming sites.

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1 Introduction

In this dissertation I present, analyse and discuss Soviet and Russian films featuring female pilots, flight attendants, cosmonauts and aliens. The aim is to enquire into the particular *cinematic* narratives regarding women in Soviet and Russian culture. The emphasis lies in how the spatial notion of verticality acts together with character and plot development in creating, sustaining and negotiating narratives. The 32 films selected were released between 1924 and 2017, thus enabling an examination of the historical evolution of these female characters and the motifs surrounding them. Based on the premise that cultural products, such as films, can be used to understand the culture in which they were made, I investigate what narrative function cinematic airborne female characters have through thematic film readings. I then use academic publications to account for how this function relates to other narratives about women in Russian culture; and to women in Russia's own experience of their function in society.

My theoretical and methodical approach is rooted in Russian Studies, Gender/Women's Studies and Film Studies. Russian Studies help to culturally and historically contextualise the films. Gender and Women's Studies provide a framework for analysing the aspect of gender, while Film Studies is necessary for understanding the media specific. The first part of this chapter is dedicated to a summary of women's history in the Soviet Union and Russia from the 1917 February Revolution until 2018, women's function in Russian culture, and a discussion of gender theory. The second part of this chapter is a discussion of space – verticality in particular, vertical imagery in film and chronotopes. Lastly, I elaborate on the relationship between gender and space.

From an outsider's perspective, women's status in Russian society and culture may seem paradoxical. On the one hand, more women take up higher education and women have a longer life expectancy than men.¹ Women are prominent and outspoken in the media,

¹ In 2017, 37% of Russian women had a higher education, compared to 29% of men. However, the average salary of women is 73% of men's average salary (Astapkovich 2017). In Norway 37.4% of women have a higher education, compared to 29.6% of men (2017 figures), women earn on average 87.6% of men's average salary (2016 figures, *Befolkningens utdanningsnivå 2018; Fakta om likestilling*). In the USA 34.6% of women have four years of college or more (33.7% of men) and earn

NGOs and civil society.² Over the last century, there are examples of Russian and Soviet women who pushed into male-dominated spheres, including the military and astronautics. However, on the other hand, traditional gender stereotypes about how men and women are supposed to look and behave prevail. In 2000, President Putin signed a law forbidding women to enter into 456 professions, in what is recognised as heavy labour and high risk occupations (for example, as mechanics, professional fishermen, etc.) (Pravitel'stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii 2000). Domestic violence is a massive problem, and primarily affects women and children – as many as 14,000 women are killed by husbands or partners every year ("Bez sovesti kak bez ruk" 2017).³ Because of the pay gap, it is more difficult for women to be financially independent than it is for men. According to the "Women, Peace and Security Index", Russia ranks as number 55 of 153 countries surveyed (Georgetown Institute for Women 2017). In the 2016 Human Development Report, Russia is ranked 53 out of 188 in terms of gender inequality (the US ranked 41, China 36, the UK 25, Norway 5, and Switzerland ranked number 1), placing them in the lower part of the group "very high human development" (*Human Development Reports* 2016). What these reports suggest is that in some respects Russia is a fairly good place for women to live, while in other respects the country is facing some real challenges. Although women have access to most spheres of society, they

80.5% of men's average income (Sheth 2017; *Percentage of the U.S. Population Who Have Completed Four Years of College or More From 1940 to 2017, by Gender* 2017). According to the World Health Organisation, of children born in 2016 in Russia, women are expected to live 11 years longer than men (77 years vs. 66 years) (*Country Profile: Russia*). The corresponding numbers for Norway: 84 vs. 81; UK: 83 vs. 80; USA: 81 vs. 76; China: 78 vs. 75.

² The International Women's Media Foundation published a report in 2011 where part of the summary about Russia states: "In Russia's news profession, as represented in the companies participating in this study, women's progress can be seen in their overall numbers as well as dominance across occupational levels. [...] In general [...] this pattern provides an exemplary case of egalitarianism in the journalism profession – both within the Eastern European region and across other regions of the study [Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania, Nordic Europe, Western Europe]" (Byerly 2011: 300).

³ Comparable statistics show that 928 homicide victims in the US in 2015 were women murdered by their partner or an intimate acquaintance; 78 women in 2016 in the UK; 8 women in 2017 in Norway (Nichols 2018; Brenna et al. 2018; Brennan 2017). There are no comparable statistics available for China, however, the reported total number of murder victims in 2014 was 10,083 (*Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data* 2014).

seldom hold positions at the very top in politics or business, and it seems clear that, for women, certain areas of occupation and engagement are more (or less) attractive than others. For example, it seems women with strong social engagements in general are drawn towards journalism and not politics. According to the Russian journalist and human rights activist Nadezhda Azhgikhina, the reason why so many women turn to journalism is because of the media's agenda to expose those in power, to be the voice of ordinary people, and to protect ordinary people's interests.⁴ Of course, Azhgikhina's explanation as to why women choose journalism as a strategy for acting out their societal awareness and engagement is anecdotal. Yet it seems to reflect other studies presented in this chapter on the motifs and stereotypes connected to women's function in Russian culture.

This dissertation is idiographic. My field of study does not behave as an object, independent of me as a researcher (in the way that researchers in natural sciences relate to their objects). Rather,

a hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's quality of newness. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' in the matter of the object nor the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings. (Gadamer 1979: 238)⁵

The conclusions presented in this dissertation are based on carefully selected material, analysed in accordance with a specially designed method and relevant theories.

The main material of the dissertation consists of 32 Soviet and Russian films released between 1924 and 2017. Female pilots, flight attendants, cosmonauts and aliens play central parts in all the films – in terms of either screen time or plot significance. This

⁴ Azhgikhina is currently vice president of the European Federation of Journalists, and a member of the Gender Council of the International Federation of Journalists. Azhgikhina mentioned low wages as a reason why relatively few men choose a career in the media. Azhgikhina answered my direct questions about the gender balance in the Russian media at an open meeting organised by Amnesty International Tromsø on 15.10.2015.

⁵ Fore-meaning, a concept coined by Gadamer, refers to all the knowledge that someone possesses and uses to understand, attribute and interpret something new. Fore-meanings, as opposed to prejudice, do not involve passing arbitrary judgement in advance. Rather, this is a way of describing the hermeneutical process in which everything one has so far encountered, experienced and read (in the broad sense of the term) is used to negotiate the meaning of new experiences and texts.

relatively large body of material opens up for discussions concerning the development of motifs involving women in air and cosmos, and gender aspects in sky and space over time – providing a complex picture and mapping out a subgenre in (post-) Soviet cinema. Rather than restrict the selection to one or at most two films per decade or defined period I have chosen to include the majority of films that fit the selection criteria outlined above. Typically, when an exclusive selection of material is made, the discussion centres on the more complex and innovative examples. Such a selection allows for more detailed and closer readings of each film. By including films of less significance in terms of audience/critic/academic attention, the focus is turned towards the complexity and development of the cultural discourse on a larger scale and over time. A substantial number of the films is unknown to Western audiences and seldom watched outside the circle of dedicated academics and fans. More often than not, these films are not available with subtitles in any language and come in substandard quality (low definition and poor sound). Hence, I have included rather detailed summaries of each film, as well as the coverage in the main Soviet and Russian film magazines (such as *Sovetskii ekran*, *Soviet Film* and *Iskusstvo kino*), and of other forms of film analyses and discussions by audiences and critics. I have not carried out any large studies of the films' reception, involving audience interviews or box office numbers. However, as a way of getting an impression of a film's reception, I will refer to film critiques written around the time of release, where these are available.

This dissertation will primarily be a contribution to the studies of women in Russian cinema, a field that has hitherto received only limited academic attention. It will also widen the perspectives on women in Russian culture across various cultural expressions, as well as contribute with new perspectives on women globally. The films selected represent both culturally specific and intercultural aspects of women's history in the USSR and Russia.

1.1 Women's history and feminism in the USSR and Russia

Gender studies, as studies of how gender influences one's function and opportunities in culture and society, do not hold a strong position in Russia. This is partly rooted in women's history and how feminism has been regarded in the USSR and the Russian Federation (RF) throughout the last century. Women and women's movements played

a crucial role at the initial stages of the 1917 February Revolution: The uprising originated in the celebration of the International Women's Day on 23 February 1917⁶. Their demands included peace and food. During the summer of 1917, the Provisional Government granted women political rights, such as the right to vote, and extended their property rights. Still, women were seen as a potentially revolutionary group because of the hard living and working conditions they endured, and the Bolsheviks actively tried to mobilise them (Engel 2004: 146).⁷ Yet the women fighting for gender equality during the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and immediately after did not identify themselves as feminists. Feminists and feminism were regarded as bourgeois phenomena: Feminism did not consider the wider picture of the class struggle as society's principal force the way Marxist ideology did. In the 1920s, despite the decade's turbulence, women enjoyed extended political and social rights (such as easier access to divorce and abortion, as well as wider recognition of children born outside wedlock): "For all the problems of the early years [of the 1920s], and the gender bias both implicit and explicit, the revolution nevertheless offered unprecedented opportunities to lower-class women" (Engel 2004: 164). The 1920s was also marked by artistic exploration of the new regime's possibilities for development, often with an emphasis on the collective as protagonist. How this affected the presentation of women will be discussed in particular in section 3.8.1 regarding the film *Aelita* (Protazanov 1924).

The 1930s saw a shift towards focusing on the individual (the new Soviet (wo)man) and cementing socialist realism as the only officially sanctioned genre. This turn to individualism is evident in the films of the era. Still, the individual worked for the collective, not for themselves, as Bridger argues in her chapter on Soviet women tractor drivers: "As the need for machine operators increased, it was the patriotic rather than

⁶ Until February 1918, Russia still used the Julian calendar, thus in 1917, 23 February coincided with 8 March, the International Women's Day in the Gregorian calendar.

⁷ The famous Bolshevik Aleksandra Kollontai (1872–1952) was the only female member of the first Council of People's Commissars, the Soviet Government, as People's Commissar for Social Welfare. During the revolution she traveled as an orator, addressing, in particular, female workers. In 1919 she founded the department *Zhenotdel*, or Women's Department, together with Inessa Armand (1874–1920). The department worked for the enhancement of women's living conditions throughout the USSR. Kollontai was, however, soon deemed too radical, partly because of her opposition to the nuclear family as a bourgeois construct.

the potentially emancipatory aspects of the work which provided the justification for the training and employment of women” (Bridger 2001: 195). The Soviet Constitution of 1936 declared that men and women in the USSR were equal. Nonetheless, the 1930s brought about a contradictory policy towards women. On the one hand, women were encouraged to take part in the massive industrialisation of the country. This included heavy labour at collective farms and factories. On the other hand, women were still expected to take care of their homes and families – and, in practice, little was done to accommodate for women’s needs at their places of work, where men often constituted the majority (Bridger 2001: 196-197). The new Soviet woman was a superworker (highly educated and productive) and a supermother (bearing and rearing as many children as possible). Yet, according to Barbara Alpern Engel, “the Stalinist revolution was inflected by gender throughout” (Engel 2004: 184). Engel suggests that women in 1930’s official propaganda were first and foremost representatives of their gender, and only secondly of their occupation (Engel 2004: 184). The generation of women who had had their formative years in the 1930s came to play a special role in the 1940s.

The wartime generation was tested in ways that alienated them from parts of society and later generations. Soviet women (like women in many Western countries) had to carry an even larger burden of the industrial and agricultural production, and a large number of them also joined the military during the war (Bridger 2001: 197-200).⁸ The USSR authorities often used women’s war effort for propaganda purposes: “As stars of the home front, women such as [tractor driver Dar’ia] Garmash became the focus of attention in morale-boosting efforts to stress the unity of the nation in repelling the enemy” (Bridger 2001: 198). After the Great Patriotic War, however, there was a backlash in gender equality in the Soviet Union – just as in the West (Engel 2004: 229). Historian Anna Krylova argues, in her book about the Soviet women soldiers of the

⁸ Officially, all women soldiers in the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War were volunteers. In reality, historical sources suggest that many women did not see it as a choice, but were forced to join. This will be further discussed in section 2.1.

Great Patriotic War, that gender roles in the 1930s were more fluid than in the post-war decades⁹:

[...] the Stalinist totalitarian regime of the 1930s, despite its characteristic punitive treatment of its citizens, enabled more varied popular ways of viewing and expressing gender than the more liberal Soviet postwar and post-Stalinist era. [...] prewar official culture, institutional terrains, and gender policies promoted and operated with varied, ambiguous, and often blatantly contradictory notions of gender. (Krylova 2010a: 20)

Among other things, after the war women were no longer encouraged in the same way to enter into the traditional male spheres of work, and Sue Bridger also points to women's dwindling motivation to undertake strenuous work that kept them away from their families (2001: 200). Those few women who did enter male spheres, such as the first female cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, were highly feminised in their official presentation: As a rule, Tereshkova appears in a dress suit, while her male cosmonaut colleagues are dressed in uniform. In part because of demographics in the USSR – the massive loss of life in the Great Patriotic War and low birth rates – women became subjected to an intense pronatalist campaign: “Pronatalist propaganda and woman-blaming essentialized women's maternal and feminine qualities and, in a most un-Marxist fashion, treated women's biology as if it were their destiny” (Engel 2004: 248). When the feminist wave swept over the West in the 1970s, it did not have much impact on the Soviet Union: There women were equal by law and the ‘woman question’ was considered solved. The feminist ideology about gender stereotypes was still deemed Western and bourgeois, and thus irrelevant for the communist nation. Rather, it seemed that “more often the promotion of [gender] difference was used to reinforce the existing gender hierarchy, even in an era when women's equality was intrinsic to the ideology of the state” (Edmondson 2001: xiv). Moreover, “believing their government's propaganda, they [women in the USSR] became convinced that their difficult lives were the result not of incomplete emancipation but of the much-vaunted emancipation itself” (Engel 2004: 249). Similar attitudes are found in cosmonaut candidate Valentina Ponomareva's book *The Womanly Face of Cosmos* (Zhenskoe litso kosmosa, 2002): “Regardless of the fact that it goes against all my personal experience, I still believe that

⁹ Krylova does not study men's gender roles, thus her statement should primarily be read in connection with women's gender roles.

women's purpose is to keep house and raise children" (Ponomareva 2002).¹⁰ Ponomareva was among the five female cosmonaut candidates, in the early 1960s, a group that included Tereshkova. Even towards the end of the 1980s the discussion of women's participation in the workforce was dominated by questions regarding women's reproductive health and abilities (cf. Bridger 2001: 207).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, people in the new Russian Federation embraced both hyper-liberal economic policies and traditional (e.g. Russian Orthodox) values, marking a clear distance from previous ideals. "The archetypal figurehead [the female tractor driver] of the Soviet road to sexual equality went down with the ship, and by this time [the late 1980s], few either noticed or mourned her passing" (Bridger 2001: 194). The view that feminism is a Western phenomenon not applicable to the Russian reality still prevails (c.f. *Russia Beyond the Headlines* 2018). "In the post-Soviet era, the more successful women's organizations often had little in common with feminism" (Engel 2004: 267). Although there are individuals and groups who argue for the need for feminist thinking in Russia, these do not seem to gain traction in the current political and societal situation.¹¹ Instead, there is an increasingly hostile policy towards LGBTQI+ people, women and children.¹² On the other hand, the images of women in the Russian public are more diverse than they used to be in the USSR, creating more room for defining what it means to be a 'woman' (see Engel 2004: 267-268). The development in women's position in society serves as a backdrop for the representations of women on screen in the discussions over the following chapter. The impression I get from discussing gender and feminism with many Russians today is that the topic is seen

¹⁰ «И, хоть это и противоречит всему опыту моей жизни, я все-таки думаю, что назначение женщины – вести Дом и растить детей». My copy of the book is found online, thus I do not have the correct page numbers. This quote is from the chapter "A Woman in a Man's Profession" (*Zhenshchina v muzhskoj professii*).

¹¹ In the search for individuals or groups who label themselves 'feminists' in Russia one often ends up in various internet forums. In one such page, thequestion.ru, users can ask any question, and answer questions posted by other users. A question posted in November 2015 by Alyena Merkur'yeva enquires about visible representatives for feminism in Russia. Of the names mentioned in the replies, it is sometimes added that the individuals themselves do not identify as feminist (*Kto v Rossii iavliaetsia iarkim predstavitelem feminizma?* 2015).

¹² Examples of such policies include the so-called gay propaganda laws of 2013 and the 2017 decriminalisation of first-offence domestic violence that does not cause serious injury.

as irrelevant for Russia as a society and for Russian women. This impression should be taken seriously as a way to critically map out my fore-meanings about feminism and Russian culture, without losing sight of the target: Women's function and status in Russian culture. Questions that can help in this process include: In what way does gender seem relevant to Russian culture? Which parts of what we consider to be markers of gender are presented in this culture as important and/or essential?

Even though it is widely recognised that women in Russia and women in the West through history – including recent history – have different experiences based on their gender, the scholarly literature connected to gender and gender practice in Russian culture is not extensive. The emphasis on what may be termed 'feminist Slavistics' has been in evidence within the field of literature over the last three decades. Published titles dealing with literary representations of women and women writers in Russia and the USSR have dominated the research field of women in Russian culture.¹³ In the field of cinema, there are far fewer works on female characters and women in the film industry. In her editorial introduction to *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* (SRSC)'s special issue on women in cinema, Birgit Beumers comments: "It would appear [...] that there is scope for further work in the area of women's cinema, women in cinema and women filmmakers, which is very good" (Beumers 2017a: 1). There is, among other things, a lack of works that attempt to draw lines between different works and make comparisons across time and between different film directors, or to establish new genres and theories with a gender perspective. The majority of specialist literature in this field focuses on one or several films, the exception being Lynne Attwood's *Red Women on the Silver*

¹³ Cf. *Terrible Perfection* edited by Barbara Heldt (1987); *Women Writers in Russian Literature* edited by Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene (1994); *A Plot of Her Own: The Female Protagonist in Russian Literature* by Sona Stephan Hoisington (1995); *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-perceptions* edited by Rosalind J. Marsh (1998); *Narrative, Space and Gender in Russian Fiction: 1846–1903* by Joe Andrew (2007). The volumes *Russia – Women – Culture* edited by Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren (1996), *Gender in Russian History and Culture* edited by Linda Edmondson (2001), and *Mapping the Feminine: Russian Women and Cultural Difference* edited by Hilde Hoogenboom, Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy and Irina Reyfman (2008) have wider perspectives, focusing on women's history and citing sources including literature, theatre, cinema, newspapers and statistics.

Screen (1993).¹⁴ With a reference to a paper presented by Lilya Kaganovsky, Beumers points out another shortcoming of Women's Studies in Soviet cinema: the recognition "[...] that the role of women in Soviet culture and Soviet cinema has indeed been quite different from that of women in Western cinema" (Beumers 2017a: 1). The special issue of SRSC seems well timed, as part of the (moderate) upsurge in publications on Russian and Soviet women's cinema in recent years.

1.1.1 The woman myth in Russian literature

A good place to start our discussion of the academic treatment of women in Russian culture is *Terrible Perfection* by Barbara Heldt (1987). In this volume Heldt analyses images of women in nineteenth century Russian literature, making it one of the earliest studies to adopt a feminist approach to such material. One part of the book is dedicated to how famous male writers, such as Tolstoy and Chekhov, present and shape their female characters, another part looks at women's autobiographies, and yet another examines women's poetry. Heldt's conclusion about women in prose can be seen in the title of the book and is exemplified in this quote:

There is no novel of gradual female development, of rebirth or transformation as we find in Austen or Eliot; while some male characters learn and grow through intellect or experience, the changes in women are mysterious givens of nature, of Womanhood. The heroines of male fiction serve a purpose that ultimately has little to do with women: these heroines are used lavishly in a discourse of male self-definition. (Heldt 1987: 2)

This quote together with Heldt's conclusions about women in Russian literature as being terribly perfect – and therefore as impossible role models – is repeated by other academics. However, Mary Zirin uses examples of heroines by women writers of

¹⁴ Cf. "The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Cinema" by Françoise Navailh (1992); "Down to Earth: *Aelita* Relocated" by Ian Christie (1994); "Women as Princesses or Comrades: Ambivalence in Yakov Protazanov's *Aelita* (1924)" by Peter G. Christensen (2000); "Birth Equals Rebirth? Space, Narrative, and Gender in *The Commissar*" by Joe Andrew (2006); "Ways of Seeing: On Kira Muratova's *Brief Encounters* and Larisa Shepit'ko's *Wings*" by Lilya Kaganovsky (2012); "Affective Machines or the Inner Self? Drawing the Boundaries of the Female Body in the Socialist Romantic Imagination" by Alexey Golubev (2016); *Performing Femininity: Women as Performers in Early Russian Cinema* by Rachel Morley (2017). In 2017 *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* devoted a special issue to women in cinema, featuring the articles "Difficult Cases: Communist Morality, Gender and Embodiment in Thaw Cinema" by Olena Dmytryk, "Renata Litvinova's Star Persona" by Olga Mukhortova, "Female Agency in Svetlana Proskurina's *Remote Access* (2004) and Vera Storozheva's *Travelling With Pets* (2007)" by Irina Makoveeva. My own published articles can also be added to this list: "Minnet om ein soldat" ("Memory of a Soldier", 2016), "And Up She Went – the Moral Vertical in *Wings* (1966)" (2017), and "Female Aliens in (Post-) Soviet Sci-Fi Cinema" (2018).

Russian realism to show that women could successfully resist the terrible perfection “stigma”:

Younger women in the female fiction of Russian realism are much more varied in character and fate [than described by Barbara Heldt in *Terrible Perfection*] [...] women writers resisted categorization fiercely to draw their own attractively individual female protagonists. In fiction no less than in autobiography and poetry, they created a gallery of gallant women who struggle to find spiritual and physical autonomy within the constrictive logic of patriarchal society. They wrote their own plots. (1994: 79)

Zirin represents the development of Women’s Studies as applied to Russian literature since the 1990s. More scholars showed interest in the field, resulting in a larger and more complex discussion. Rosalind Marsh addresses this development in the introduction to her anthology *Women and Russian Culture* (1998). Marsh points to the pitfalls of a feminist reading that denounces the classics in Russian literature based on the evident misogyny displayed in their texts; the sole search for stereotypes; or a reading where the obvious problematic portrayal of women and women authors is not met by a critical discussion (Marsh 1998: 29-32). Marsh provides guidelines to avoid such pitfalls: “What is desirable, however, is to confront the Russian literary canon as a rich source of motifs and myths about the two sexes, not in order to label and dismiss even the most misogynistic literary classics, but to apprehend them in all their human dimensions” (Marsh 1998: 32). She proposes the use of theories developed within cultural studies alongside theories of critical feminism when approaching the study of women in Russian culture in order to provide the necessary nuance and complexity (Marsh 1998: 29-32). I find this a fruitful approach for my thesis, too, in agreement with Gadamer’s aforementioned discussion on hermeneutical method and how to use and tackle one’s own fore-meanings.

When it comes to male authors’ idealisation of women (including women’s moral supremacy over men), the contributors to *Women and Russian Culture* do not seem to agree. Female critics are more negative towards this idealisation, while several male critics view it more favourably. I will not bring this particular discussion any further, but this is an intriguing observation. However, there appears to be a general consensus amongst the contributors that women writers allowed their female characters to exhibit more complexity, agency and depth (Marsh 1998: xv). With *Narrative, Space and Gender in Russian Fiction* (2007), Joe Andrew provides a thorough addition to the study

of women in Russian culture by combining Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of chronotope with feminist analyses of nineteenth century Russian literature. Andrew's perspective has been important for me in working out the method for this dissertation. In his review of this research field, Andrew points to a peak of academic publications in the mid- to late 1990s, with a slight decline in the 2000s (2007: 6). Based on my literature research it seems this decline of academic attention has lingered on into the 2010s. However, the development has moved on from "surveys, compilations of more facts" (Andrew 2007: 5-6) – necessary at an early stage in the life of a research field – to richer analyses, of which Andrew's book is an example.

In contrast to Andrew's research concerning women's function in the nineteenth century, I conduct a similar rich analysis of women by looking at the aforementioned moral superiority of women's function in twentieth and twenty-first century Soviet and Russian film. The important discussion, outlined above, of the idealisation of women in Russian literature, has only to a limited extent mapped out which values and ideals have been subject to idealisation. Do the female characters in question promote the same (high) moral values? Is it possible for a woman in fiction to be morally superior and have agency at the same time? Can morally superior women be rich and complex characters? These questions play an important role in mapping out the function of the female characters discussed over the following chapters.

1.1.2 Women on screen

While the above paragraphs describe the field of studies of women in Russian *literature*, the field of women in Russian *cinema* is not yet past the stage of providing large surveys and compilations. Still, Rachel Morley's book on women in Russian cinema *Performing Femininity: Women as Performers in Early Russian Cinema* (2017) is a good example of the next stage in the academic study of women in Russian and Soviet cinema. In this volume, Morley conducts an assiduous examination of the much-portrayed female performer in pre-revolutionary Russian cinema.

However, David Gillespie did not have many sources on the roles of women in Russian cinema to draw upon in his book *Russian Cinema* (2003). This might be part of the reason why he used Heldt's quote from above when commenting on women in Russian

cinema, adding that “women [in the twentieth century] remain unthreatening, subservient, domesticated, returning to the fold or doomed to a life of loneliness” (Gillespie 2003: 99). He takes the notion of women’s function further, by stating that the terribly perfect woman is not only a literary figure particular to the nineteenth century, but also one found in films. It is not clear whether Gillespie holds this to be the case for films directed by women as well as men. Yet he explicitly mentions Kira Muratova’s female characters to be “an obvious and important exception” from the terribly perfect stereotype (Gillespie 2003: 99).

The single volume purely dedicated to women’s cinema in the entire Soviet period is Lynne Attwood’s *Red Women on the Silver Screen* (1993). Attwood frames the motivation for the book in her introduction: “For all the interest shown by Western scholars in the Soviet cinema, there has been remarkably little discussion about its relationship to women” (1993: 10). The book consists of two parts. In the first, Lynne Attwood presents a history of women in Soviet cinema, while the second provides essays and articles by female Russian film critics and film professionals in translation. The renowned film critic Maya Turovskaya wrote about how female filmmakers approached the “woman question”, and included her own take on the dominating function of women in Russian culture:

She [the Russian woman] performed the function, primarily of a moral standard. The 'Russian at the *rendez-vous*' – that is, the man – was generally portrayed as her inferior in this sense. If one does not bear in mind this female halo, this idealization of the women, it is impossible to understand the image of the Russian woman which is part of our national heritage. (Turovskaya 1993: 135)

Turovskaya does not seem to be critical of this presentation, suggesting that she might not see it as problematic in the way Heldt, Zirin, Marsh and Gillespie perceive it. However, whether one interprets such a representation as essentialising and a patriarchal construction suppressing women, it is indicative of the same trope about women that Heldt and others have pointed to: women’s close connection to questions of morality and their function as morally superior in fiction. Attwood makes the same observation of women’s function through most of the Soviet era. In her conclusion, she describes the Perestroika period’s tendency to depict (sexualised) violence against women (1993: 38-39, 45, 67-68, 129). Attwood does not make the connection herself, but the depicted violence might be a symbol of the moral crisis in the late 1980s–1990s: the moral ideal

under violent attack. What Turovskaya is expressing in the quote above is that anyone wishing to approach the question of women's status and function in Russian culture has to consider this dominating presentation. This assumption is indicative of the mark that the religious thinker and poet Vladimir Solov'ev (1853–1900) has left on Russian culture – more specifically his ideas about the Divine Wisdom in the form of “Sophia”. According to Judith Deutsch Kornblatt (2009: 4), the influence of Solov'ev's Sophia on Russian philosophy and culture up until this day cannot be overestimated: “Even the Marxist-Leninist materialism of the Soviet period did not uproot her entirely, and her branches continue to grow now, over a century after Solov'yov's death” (Kornblatt 2009: 9-10). Sophia in Solovi'ev's texts is a multifaceted and complex idea, difficult to explain succinctly. Still, Sophia is often referred to as a mediator between the divine and humanity, and an ideal – and this image has significantly shaped how a certain type of woman, the morally superior one, has been represented in Russian culture.¹⁵ Based on this discussion, the trope of morally superior women will be thoroughly examined over the following chapters.

Similar to how Zirin and Marsh have presented alternative trends to Heldt in analyses of nineteenth century Russian literature, there are examples that seem to both confirm and argue against the view communicated by Gillespie on women in cinema. These are examples of films written and directed by men, in which women undergo a gradual development based on intellect and experience, and films directed by women where the female protagonist is not doomed to a life of loneliness even if she chooses not to return to the fold.¹⁶ This is an example showing how the theoretical background and specific method used when reading a film are evidently important for the interpretation and conclusions presented.

¹⁵ I will expand on Solov'ev's ideas about Sophia in chapter 3.

¹⁶ Thus, *The Dawns Here are Quiet* (*A zori zdes' tikhie*, 1972) is a war film portraying five female anti-aircraft soldiers, where the notion of growing up through experience and intellect is an important part. The film is written by Stanislav Rostotskii and Boris Vasil'ev, and directed by Stanislav Rostotskii. *Wings* (*Kryl'ia*, 1966) is a film about a veteran female pilot of the Second World War, and how she struggles to find her place in post-war Soviet society. The film is directed by Larisa Shepit'ko and will be discussed in part 2.1.3.

1.1.3 The (gender) role of the film director

Within literature studies there is a scholarly consensus that women writers as a rule create more complex female characters than male writers. While most film productions are a result of a larger creative team, the director is seen as the most important single person with regard to the final product. Still, screenwriters, producers, composers, costume and set designers, actors, and all the other workers of a film production, are all influential in the process of making a film – not to mention funders and distributors. Thus, a film is a product of a complex and rich negotiating process even before it reaches the audience. Still, with regard to the key role attributed to the director, does their gender influence how female characters are presented?

In Russian literature (and in many other cultural forms), male authors tend to shape women as The Other: Men are the norm and women are the exception. Based on this, one can expect the same perspective and framing in (post-) Soviet cinema with women characters directed by men. It is also to be expected that women directors are interested in more complex female characters who have more agency.

Larisa Shepit'ko, labelled by Lynne Attwood as “one of the most celebrated Soviet directors of the 1970s” (Attwood 1993: 82), argues that there is a difference between men and women in how they approach life and make film: “Men, too, can do perfectly well the ladies’ sentimental needlework. But a woman, as one half of the origins of humankind, can tell the world, reveal to the world some amazing things. No man can so intuitively discern some phenomena in human psyche, in nature as a woman can” (Larisa Shepit'ko in Klimov 1981). Although Shepit'ko's statement seems essentialising, it serves as an example of what a Russian female director saw as her own, and other female directors', strength. However, Shepit'ko does not explicitly connect this to how women directors present women characters on screen.

The main concern of this dissertation is not the difference in how female and male directors engage with motifs and narratives of women's function. Such an approach would require a more balanced selection of material in terms of the director's gender. Only four films that fit the selection criteria of this study (feature films with airborne or space-travelling women in lead or important roles) have women directors: *Wings*

(Kryl'ia, Shepit'ko 1966), *There Are Night Witches in the Sky* (V nebe "Nochnye ved'my", Evgeniia Zhigulenko 1981), *Sky. Airplane. Girl* (Nebo. Samolet. Devushka, Vera Storozheva 2002), and *Star Dogs* (Belka i Strelka. Zvezdnye sobaki, Inna Evlannikova and Sviatoslav Ushakov 2010).¹⁷ There are at least two possible explanations as to why there are not more films like this. Overall, there is a smaller number of female directors. Thus, when a selection is made based on a genre or a topic, there will in many cases be a smaller number of films made by women. Secondly, it is possible that the motifs surrounding women in aviation and astronautics (such as the idealisation of female characters) are less appealing to explore for women. The first reason does not rule out the second. Whether or not it seems plausible that the motifs sketched out over the following chapters might seem less interesting for women filmmakers will be discussed in section 4.5.

1.1.4 Soviet and Russian women directors

It was during the 1960s that a generation of newly educated women directors really made their mark on Soviet cinema. The most renowned directors from this period are Kira Muratova, Larisa Shepit'ko and Lana Gogoberidze. Still, women had also made important contributions as film directors in the previous decades. Iulia Solntseva started out as an actress but went on to become a successful director – in fact, the first female director to win the Best Film with her *Chronicle of Flaming Years* (Povest' plamennykh let, 1961) at the Cannes Film Festival in 1961.¹⁸ By 2017 there had been several women directors able to forge a career for themselves in the USSR and Russia. However, according to Irina Makoveeva, there was a marked shift after the dissolution of the USSR: "One of the most striking outcomes of the collapse of the USSR was the gender-marked replenishment of the ranks of directors in the Russian film industry. [...] the sweeping range of this [female] influx in Russian cinema is unparalleled" (Makoveeva 2017: 38) Although this shift saw a massive increase in the sheer number of women in the film industry, I agree with Makoveeva in that this has not clearly manifested itself in the presentation of 'women's issues': "Paradoxically, it is easier for Russian women

¹⁷ Discussed in section 2.1.3, 2.1.5, 2.4.4.1 and 3.5.2 respectively.

¹⁸ To date, the only other woman to have won this prize is Sofia Coppola in 2017.

filmmakers to surmount the impediments in their purportedly male profession than to discredit culturally prescribed notions ingrained in the collective consciousness” (Makoveeva 2017: 38-39). Of the contemporary female directors worthy of note, Storozheva, Avdot’ia Smirnova, Anna Melikian, Anna Parmas and Aksin’ia Gog stand out. In the festival programme of Kinotavr¹⁹ 2016, programme director Sitara Alieva makes several interesting comments about the number of women directors, and compares their activity with a wider international (at least Western) practice.²⁰

In our age of political correctness some women directors possess above all the gift of successfully «selling» their gender status. You may be sure that such brisk young ladies are not represented in our competition. Kinotavr shows that women in cinema are engaged in problems and experiments, they are both traditionalists and followers of new forms. And above all, they have no complexes. They distinctly and confidently work in documentary, art house, and mainstream cinema. Blockbusters, true, they don’t make – but they produce them! (Sitara Alieva in Govorova 2016: 6)

The attitude towards gender issues and political correctness presented by Alieva seems indicative of the aforementioned more general attitudes towards feminist ideas in today’s Russia: the female Russian directors chosen for Kinotavr will not degrade themselves, like some ‘brisk young ladies’ apparently do by “‘selling” their gender status’ for the sake of ‘political correctness’ (a concept that in this setting seems to point at Western political feminism). Still, Alieva praises the diversity of the female directors and the projects they are involved in.

1.1.5 The need for a culturally specific framework

In the quote earlier in this chapter, Heldt uses the examples of Austen and Eliot in comparison with Russian authors. A weakness in her argument and analysis might be connected to how she transfers the ideas of gender and women in Western literature to Russian literature (cf. Beumers pointing this out in her quote above as a shortcoming in the research of women in Russian culture). Heldt does this without making the necessary critical assessment of whether this is a just and purposeful approach. This can be seen

¹⁹ Kinotavr is an annual Russian film festival screening new Russian full-length and short films.

²⁰ For the 2016 Kinotavr, 75 full-length films were considered for the main programme. Of these, 25% were directed by women. For the final programme 14 were selected, five of which were directed by women. The winner of the Grand Prix was *The Good Boy* (2016) directed by Oksana Karas. In the short film programme 26 films competed, nine of which directed by women. As seen in Birgit Beumers’ editorial introduction to the aforementioned issue of *SRSC* (2017a), the Kinotavr of 2015 shows the same tendency of women’s prominent participation in contemporary Russian cinema.

as a sign of what Gadamer terms “arbitrary fore-meanings” (Gadamer 1979: 237). However, my purpose is not to provide a critique of Heldt’s work. Rather, the development in the studies of women in Russian literature – from Heldt to Andrew – serves as a relevant example of the theoretical and methodological development of a research field. In the current thesis I am indebted to this development and see the thesis as an advancement of the established research.

Because the literature on women in Western, and especially Hollywood, productions is large (compared to the literature on Soviet and Russian cinema) and accessible, it cannot be ignored. However, the challenge with using theories primarily based on the analysis of female characters in Hollywood productions is twofold. Firstly, the *narratives* shaping the female characters have evolved in different historical and cultural contexts. Thus, their function could be rather different in Hollywood vs. (post-) Soviet output. Secondly, the *theories* used to analyse the narratives and function of female characters in Western and Hollywood productions are historically, societally and culturally specific. Nonetheless, academic research on Western and Hollywood productions can be useful as an inspiration for the development of theory and method, and as a comparison with the presentation of women in other cultures. In the cases where there is a significant difference between the conclusions about women’s function and narratives in Western and (post-) Soviet productions, the questions of why and how there is such a difference emerge. Or, similarly, the question of why the female characters’ representations and functions might resemble each other appears. A more thorough discussion comparing the different traditions is not the aim of this dissertation – this would require a deeper analysis of the Western cinematic tradition. Still, selected Western films and their academic analysis will be presented and brought into the discussion of the main material of this dissertation.

The need to develop culturally specific theories for analysing gender stems from feminist ideas that there is no universally shared female experience (this is also in agreement with a hermeneutical approach to texts). Consequently, it is hard to provide one single definition as to what feminism is, can or should be in terms of concrete political structures or analytical tools. The problem with arguing that there is a universally shared experience of what it means to be a woman, is that this is a way of

essentialising gender – by stating that, based on certain biological factors, one group of human species has an identical experience of the world and life. In practice, the experience of primarily white, heterosexual, middle class, Western women has dominated feminist scholarship until the 1980s. In the 1980s, academics such as Angela Davis, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, Barbara Smith, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Judith Butler and Donna Haraway voiced a critique of feminism essentialising gender, and instead argued that feminism should look beyond binarisms, and acknowledge that factors other than gender influence identity, social hierarchies and experience, coined with the term ‘intersectionality’ by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Davis 1982; Hull et al. 1982; Butler 1988; Butler 1986; Crenshaw 1989; Haraway 1991). Such factors include, but are not restricted to, on the individual level: skin colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and physical and mental disabilities. Societal factors, such as public welfare institutions, educational system, employment policies, and economic policies, also play a role in our experience of self and society. This turn in feminist thinking was heavily influenced by black women’s movements in the US, but the core argument that several factors contribute to our understanding of self and society can be transferred to other cultures. Thus cultures, including political culture, social structure and history shape our experiences. Hence, the agenda of feminism as an analytical tool should in my view be about increasing the awareness of how notions of gender influence our lives and cultures, and to develop strategies for exposing, and dealing with, unjust systemic discrimination and oppression. By adopting this strategy, it is possible to avoid the pitfall of essentialising gender and alienating the group in question – Russian women.

1.2 Space and spatial notions

The process in which a space gains a meaning is rooted in the way this space is experienced and used, physically and narratively. A space is produced in its physical construction, be it through architecture, human planning, or natural development with no, or only limited, human interference. Furthermore, a space is produced by interaction and narratives. “Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial.* In each particular case, the connection between this underpinning and the relations it supports calls for analysis.”

(Lefebvre 1991: 404) This provides a motivation for spatial analysis – because spaces are a mandatory part of social relations.

A space is not an objective precondition of any experience, but is itself subject to change and manipulation by us ascribing meaning to space:

The point [...] is not to deny the objective materiality of the physical environment, with its real-existing mountains, fields, lakes, and forests, but rather to emphasize that these real-existing features often become imbued with highly emotive meanings and values which can strongly affect social attitudes and even behavior. (Bassin et al. 2010: 8)

To this end, I would like to add that not only do the ‘real-existing features’ gain meaning, but the point of view, the perspective, will also hold a potential meaning. A mountain does not evoke the same reactions from an aerial perspective – flattened, its height difficult to measure – as it does from a frog’s perspective at the foot of the mountain – towering and monumental. Equally, the moon seen from the earth with a naked eye is not necessarily the same as the moon through a telescope, or indeed from the moon itself. The ‘real-existing’ moon can be the same in all three instances, but its function as a meaningful marker may vary. The moon, as it has been observed by mankind through millennia, with its shifting phases, has a rich lore connected to it (cf. Little 2013). In this, the moon is seen to represent change, cycles, and – as a celestial body – divinity. Here, the moon is often attributed feminine traits, through the faces of various goddesses, and as a ruler (or influence) over women’s fertility cycle. When observed through a telescope, the physical, rational and scientific aspects of the moon are added to the already existing lore – thus the moon enters into a more masculine sphere. And, lastly, the moon as seen from the moon’s desert surface shows the moon as a place of human activity and technological progress, but also often of displacement and loneliness. Hence, our experience of the moon has several perspectives impacting on the meaning-making process of the moon as space.

1.2.1 Russian space

Although the spatial turn in history is a relatively new academic development, Mark Bassin, Christopher Ely and Melissa Stockdale point to a certain centuries-old spatial tradition within Russian historiography:

[...] historians in Russia have typically included a geographical perspective in their analyses, with a very clear appreciation of space and territory as significant historical factors. Indeed, Russian

historiography has been exceptionally attentive to precisely these factors, often identifying them as important agents in the making of Russian history. (Bassin et al. 2010: 4)

In addition to geographical factors such as terrain, topography, climate and size, studies on the spatial aspects of Russian history and society tend to focus on the relationship between centre and periphery, frontiers and colonisation. Still, Bassin, Ely and Stockdale make a distinction between the tradition of “geographical history” and “new spatial history”: “Most fundamentally, scholars now appreciate that, along with its objectivity, there is also a critical subjectivity to the spatial and geographical dimension” (Bassin et al. 2010: 7).

Examples of a new spatial history approach to Soviet history are found in Cynthia A. Ruder’s *Building Stalinism: The Moscow Canal and the Creation of Soviet Space* (2017) and Emma Widdis’s *Visions of a New Land* (2003). Ruder argues that, during the Stalinist period, the state’s interest in geographical, physical space was extremely high: “Indeed, in building the empire of Stalinism, geographical concepts and images were woven into the physical and metaphorical fabric of the empire [...] Places – be they natural or manmade – served as emblems of ideology, contemporary aesthetic practice, political decision making and cultural production” (Ruder 2017: 8). Although Ruder makes this statement based on a particular case, i.e. Stalinism, it seems transferable to other epochs and political systems – in accordance with Henri Lefebvre’s thoughts on how hegemonies manifest themselves physically in the production of space (Lefebvre 1991: 10-11). In Widdis’s search for Sovietness she argues: “Understanding Sovietness, I suggest, means understanding the space of Sovietness” (2003: 2). Her main material in this search consists of Soviet feature and documentary films from 1917-1940. The ideas presented by Bassin, Ely and Stockdale, as well as Ruder and Widdis, with regard to the spatial influence of culture and history form the basis of my argument of how the vertical can be seen as one such spatial dimension.

Several analyses of outer space in Russian culture draw on the aforementioned particular perspectives of periphery and centre. Typically, outer space is framed as another frontier or periphery, and space exploration, as conquest and colonisation (Majsova 2016; Sputnitskaia 2017). Thus, outer space has been treated as an extension of the horizontal in terms of spatial dimensions. However, the relation between the earth and outer space

can also be recognised as a vertical relation – with the sky and outer space above the earth. Rather than interpreting the sky and outer space as a place for conquest, conquering, and ‘virgin lands’ – a prolonging of the horizontal, I choose to analyse it as a place of progress, transcendence, divinity, power and hierarchy – in other words, vertical aspects.

1.2.2 What is verticality?

Verticality as a spatial aspect can refer to a direction of both movement and position. The adjectives ‘high’ and ‘low’, and prepositions ‘up’ and ‘down’ are used to navigate along the vertical. For there to be a vertical, there needs to be a point of perception from which high, low, up, and down become meaningful descriptors and points of departure. Some of these points of perception are highly constructed and cultural – such as the idea that the latitude ‘north’ as a rule is up on a map, in turn shaping our understanding that ‘north’ is up and ‘south’ is down (as in the expressions ‘up north’, ‘down south’). Still, our understanding of verticality cannot be detached from the physical force of gravity. This is the force that pulls matter towards its centre – or down, making possible the movement away – or up. Again, the idea that the direction towards the gravitational centre is downward, and the opposite direction is upward is a constructed one – for example, by the experience of things being pulled towards the centre when falling, tripping etc., and of things ‘defying gravity’, i.e. flying.

1.2.3 Verticality as a metaphor

Experiences with gravity and our constructed perception of verticality have inspired a variety of beliefs and metaphors, ranging from almost unnoticeable manners of speech to fundamental parts of religions, belief systems and social structures. This process is what George Lakoff describes as the “experiential bases” of metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 19-21). One can feel ‘high’, meaning euphoric, sometimes also intoxicated, or ‘low’, meaning depressed. In his elaborate work *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, Iurii Lotman writes about how spatiality is a fundamental part of making meaning through language: “Even on the level of supra-textual, purely ideational modelling, the language of spatial relations turns out to be one of the basic means for

comprehending meaning”²¹ (Lotman 1977: 218). The first example of such spatial relations that Lotman uses is high vs. low, and then he proceeds to analyse how this relation is used by the Russian poets Fedor Tiutchev and Nikolai Zabolotskii.

Along with gravity as a force, the experience of cosmos (the sun, the moon and stars etc.) and the sky (e.g. weather), has had a tremendous impact on human life and imagination. In terms of religion and spirituality, the divine is often located above the material world of humans. “The sky has never been just the sky. It has also—always already—been the heavens, according to the vertical axis extending into the firmament that universally structures metaphysical thought” (Strukov and Goscilo 2017: 1). Good forces are generally believed to be above us, while bad forces are below us. In other words, the vertical is often used as a metaphor for hierarchical structures, with ‘up’ meaning better and ‘down’ meaning worse. Still, these hierarchical structures are challenged from time to time, through expressions and motifs presenting alternative narratives. However, bad things may still be above us and might come from above – either in the shape of evil, such as witches and flying demons, or as a sort of righteous punishment for disobedience against the gods or the divine. Although ‘high’ is often connected to something positive, it can also be associated with arrogance, because being high up means that one does not necessarily know or understand what it is like being down on the ground. This is exemplified in expressions such as ‘stuck up’ and ‘sitting on a high horse’. In addition to the spatial locality, the latter expression also evokes notions of class with its reference to horses and riding. Similarly, being down is not always negative. The expressions ‘feet on the ground’ and ‘down to earth’ means having a practical, rational, realistic, sober and modest approach to something. The examples used here are from the English language, yet there are similar expressions in other languages, such as Russian: ‘stoiat’ obeimi nogami na zemle’ (‘feet on the ground’); ‘vysokii’ (‘high’) is often used to describe something or someone who is important,

²¹ «Уже на уровне сверткестового, чисто идеологического моделирования язык пространственных отношений оказывается одним из основных средств осмысления действительности» (Lotman: 138). My copy of the original Russian text is downloaded from the webpage knigosite.ru.

superior; 'podavlenie' ('suppression'); 'byt' na verkhu blazhenstva' ('to be on top of bliss', feeling euphoric, similar to being 'on cloud nine').

Perhaps a less obvious use of vertical metaphors is a vertical understanding of natural history. Here, however, 'up' is not so firmly connected to good, and 'down', to evil. Still, to a geologist or an archaeologist, the idea of time as a vertical is not simply metaphorical but material. The history of the geological development of our planet, as well as human history, are (often) located under our feet. Human civilisation continues to build on top of what remains from our ancestors. 'Down' is thus associated with 'history', 'ancestry', 'something outdated', even 'death' (e.g. in burial practices), while 'up', with 'future', 'potential', 'progress' and 'life'.

Returning to Lotman's analysis of Tiutchev and Zabolotskii, there is a similar pattern. In what Lotman calls "Zabolotskii's general system", 'top' is associated with "far, spacious, movement, metamorphosis, freedom, information, thought (culture), creation (the creation of new forms), harmony"; and 'bottom', with "something that is near, cramped; immobility, mechanical movement, slavery, redundancy, nature, absence of creation (petrified forms), absence of harmony" (Lotman 1977: 227). However, the system is not completely rigid, and there are examples where Zabolotskii opposes it. Lotman holds that these "departures from the system become particularly meaningful" (Lotman 1977: 227). A departure from the system (often in the form of a contradiction) serves as an unexpected element, thus highlighting the text's message in an unanticipated way, and making the system perceptible. An increase in one's awareness of one's own expectations of the text makes such expectations more tangible. Or, as Lotman puts it, the language is "de-automatized":

As we can see, when the spatial structure of a text actualizes spatial models of the more general type (the works of a certain writer, of some literary school, the context of some national or regional culture) it always represents not only a variant of the general system, but also conflicts in some way with the system by de-automatizing its language.²² (Lotman 1977: 229)

²² «Как видим, пространственная структура того или иного текста, реализуя пространственные модели более общего типа (творчества определенного писателя, того или иного литературного направления, той или иной национальной или региональной культуры), представляет всегда не только вариант общей системы, но и определенным образом конфликтует с ней, деавтоматизируя ее язык» (Lotman: 144).

Although Lotman writes about the “Zabolotskii’s general system”, he still suggests that the overreaching idea of ‘top’ = ‘good’ vs. ‘bottom’ = ‘bad’, is basic to human understanding, and I agree with this statement. In spatial terms, this creates a hierarchical vertical axis. Andrew refers to and agrees with Lotman in his *Narrative Space and Gender in Russian Fiction – 1846–1903*, where he writes that the vertical hierarchy is “another fundamental point of entry into the semiotics of space [...] These concepts are self-evidently central to human culture” (2007: 9). Similarly, in his exploration of the psychology of aerial imagery and ‘ascensional psychology’ *Air and Dreams: And Essay On the Imagination of Movement*, Gaston Bachelard asserts that “verticality is no empty metaphor; it is a principle of order, a law governing filiation, a scale along which someone can experience the different degrees of a special sensibility” (1988: 10). In *Romantic Geography*, Yi-Fu Tuan describes how the vertical informs social structures: “Culture may be deemed ‘low’ or ‘high.’ ‘Low’ is of the body and the earth, ‘high’ is of the mind and the sky; the one associated with the common people, the other with the elite, a distinction that the elite make to which the common people acquiesce” (2013: 17). In the later analyses, I rely on this understanding of the hierarchically organised vertical as a crucial part of the language and meaning in the films.

An example of how the ‘vertical’ works as a theoretical framework is found in one of the more influential theories about political power relations in Russia in the last decade or so, namely the so-called Power Vertical.²³ This concept is a metaphor of how political power is distributed: with a strong leader on top, looking down. It is partly based on the current president Vladimir Putin’s political programme of creating and strengthening a Power Vertical (Shirayev 2010: 112), i.e. a chain of command from a superior to a subordinate. Meanwhile, taking in a gendered perspective on the concept, men dominate the political system in Russia, and politics is often associated with corruption, nepotism and even violence. That political power, in the sense of electoral governmental

²³ See, for example, the article *How upright is the Vertical*. The journalist Brian Whitmore at Radio Free Europe also has a blog on Russian politics named The Power Vertical (Ryazanova-Clarke 2009; Whitmore).

structures in charge of national or regional budgets, security etc., is so closely connected to traditional masculine values, suggests another reason why so few women in Russia seek out to be, or are, elected to positions within these structures. Thus, being located high on the Power Vertical may not signal moral superiority. Still, the vertical represents a hierarchy, where 'up' means more power and influence. According to Roberto Da Matta, the vertical as a metaphor for power is a marker of a complex society, i.e. a society with hierarchical structures and differences: "It is not accidental that nearly all of these symbols [of domination and power] are objects that, in their original domains, are associated with altitude and elevated things" (Da Matta in MacAloon. 1984: 215). Salvation and harmony, argues Da Matta, are thought to be bestowed upon us from on high (MacAloon 1984: 215). I do not aim to analyse whether the USSR and today's RF are complex societies or not. Still, Da Matta's conclusions appear to fit, in that both the USSR and the RF are hierarchical societies with great differences between its inhabitants. Thus, my understanding of verticality in Russia is also influenced by Da Matta.

This dissertation analyses hierarchical structures expressed through notions of verticality in Soviet and post-Soviet cinema. The emphasis will be on the relation between the ground and what is above it, in the sky and cosmos. The assumption is that these spaces are meant as symbols of something superior. The details of this superiority might not be the same throughout films selected for analysis. This suggests that these spaces are in constant negotiation, albeit simultaneously referring to established or authoritative motifs and narratives. Or, to refer to another of Bakhtin's concepts, there is a dialogical relationship between the films discussed.

Still, verticality is not a space with defined boundaries, but rather a spatial concept. The concept of chronotope (to which I return later) will be useful for my analysis of sky and cosmos in the films, but the chronotope is not readily transferable to a spatial notion, such as verticality. Verticality is not a chronotope, but chronotopes can have vertical notions. As referred to earlier, the understanding of the vertical as an expression of hierarchy is fundamental. Therefore, a cinematic analysis focusing on chronotopes, and other spatial concepts including movement, will add to an understanding of the richness of spatial language in cinema.

1.2.4 The Moral Vertical

The Moral Vertical is a concept describing the moral hierarchy and its spatial dimension encountered in various cultural expressions. The concept is derived from the aforementioned notion of verticals used to express hierarchies (Lotman 1977; Da Matta in MacAloon 1984; Andrew 2007), and the motif of the morally superior woman in Russian culture (Heldt 1987; Marsh 1998; Zirin 1994; Turovskaya 1993). Lakoff noted that “virtue is up; depravity is down”, and continued (with using the term “society/person” with reference to the metaphor of society as a person):

To be virtuous is to act in accordance with the standards set by the society/person to maintain its well-being. VIRTUE IS UP because virtuous actions correlate with social well-being from the society/person’s point of view. Since socially based metaphors are part of the culture, it’s the society/person’s point of view that counts. (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 17)

Here, Lakoff provided us with a non-spiritual basis for the understanding of a Moral Vertical, with virtue and morality rooted in society and culture (not in some divine authority). A similar notion is formulated by Bachelard, based on the assumption of how certain emotions make us feel lighter or heavier: “Vertical valorization is so essential, so sure—its superiority is so indisputable—that the mind cannot turn away from it once it had recognized its immediate and direct meaning. It is impossible to express moral values without reference to the vertical axis” (1988: 10). Hence, the suggestion is that the Moral Vertical as a concept is not dependant on religious or spiritual metaphors for its existence. However, I would argue that, in the cases of Soviet and post-Soviet culture, the Moral Vertical is established by way of spiritual and non-spiritual metaphors alike. The hypothesis is that cinematic women with a strong spatial connection to the sky and cosmos thematise questions of ethics and morals and are themselves morally superior to men, to other women or to society in general.

1.2.5 The vertical screen

Cinema is visually a 2D medium, the two dimensions being horizontal and vertical. Hence, the perceived depth in the image projected on a flat screen is merely manipulation. The two dimensions have not only been an aspect of the viewing experience, but their interaction and interdependence also extend into production. “With few exceptions (VistaVision, the Prevost and Steenbeck flatbed viewers), cinema since

the days of Edison and Lumière has been a machine that transported its horizontal images along a steep vertical path” (Bordwell 2009).

The legendary and innovative Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein wrote an article insisting on more verticality in the presentation of film – opposing the “pacifying horizontality” of the 4:3 and other more horizontal formats (Eisenstein and Leyda 1982: 49).²⁴ Eisenstein employs poetic language and rich imagery to show the importance of the vertical as a sign of progress and future: “It is my desire to chant the hymn of the male [sic!], the strong, the virile, active *vertical* composition! [...] He [man] marked in vertical milestones each achievement of his progress to a higher level of social, cultural or intellectual development” (Eisenstein and Leyda 1982: 49-50). He does not deny the validity of the horizontal, but sees it as an expression of human nostalgia (Eisenstein and Leyda 1982: 49-51). This view of historical development is a variation of vertical history, with ‘up’ signifying the future and ‘ground’ signifying the past. Eisenstein concludes that the ideal format for cinema is the square – because it combines the two spatial directions. This would enable blocking the screen in either direction, whether the director preferred a more vertical or horizontal frame, thus making it the dynamic square.

The one and only form [the square] equally fit by alternate suppression of right and left, or of up and down, to embrace all the multitude of expressive rectangles of the world. Or used as a whole to engrave itself by the “cosmic” imperturbability of its *squareness* in the psychology of the audience. (Eisenstein and Leyda 1982: 52)

Alas, the cinematic screen still largely favours the horizontal. The first Soviet widescreen film, *Il’ia Muromets* (Ptushko) was released in 1956. Over the following years the Research Institute for Cinema and Photography (Nauchno-issledovatel’skii kino i foto institut) in collaboration with the film studio Mosfil’m developed 70 mm cameras and negatives called SOVSCOPE (Baidan 2017).²⁵

²⁴ The article was written and published in *Close Up* after a meeting organised by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in the US on September 17, 1930. The agenda of the meeting was to establish a standard format for cinema. The sources for the article used here have been found in *Film essays and a lecture*, edited and commented by Jay Leyda.

²⁵ See, for example, Iuliia Solntseva’s aforementioned *Chronicle of Flaming Years* (1961) and Sergei Bondarchuk’s legendary cinema adaptation of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (Bondarchuk 1965–1967), which won the Oscar for best foreign film in 1969, both shot in SOVSCOPE.

In part due to the explosion in the use of smartphones in recent years, the vertical rectangle is experiencing a renaissance in film making and distribution. Two examples of this are The Vertical Film Festival, arranged biannually since 2014 in Australia, and the experimental project Vertical Cinema. In a lecture given by Noam Elcott, he traces the use of vertical screens through numerous pieces of art and experimental cinema, especially in the last four decades (Elcott 2017).

The material selected in the dissertation does not explore the possibilities of different formats. Still, the abovementioned discussions of vertical cinema serve as concrete examples of filmmakers' awareness of the possibilities of different dimensions for creating meaning. Having gone through the Soviet/Russian film schooling, the filmmakers behind the material discussed at length over the following chapters seem largely to agree with Eisenstein in the meaning of the vertical, as they deploy this agreement through imagery and metaphors (but not necessarily in the same format as Eisenstein). Curiously, Eisenstein clearly sees the vertical as masculine, an aspect contested by Elcott in his lecture, and in this dissertation over the following chapters.

1.2.6 Types of vertical imagery

Vertical imagery as discussed in the dissertation can be split into four different representations. Firstly, there is the 'strict vertical', either through movement straight up or down, or fixed vertical constructions. Some examples of this include jumping and falling, ascent or descent, tall buildings or other forms of architecture. Secondly, there is the 'horizontal vertical', i.e. horizontal movement in a space that is located above or below. Although the movement is horizontal it alludes to the vertical by virtue of its presence in the sky or ground. Airplanes in the air (not ascending or descending), spaceships in space, and underground trains in tunnels all allude to this notion of verticality. Thirdly, 'diagonal vertical' representations also contribute to the overall language of verticality. Often ascent and descent are not strictly presented vertically, but rather diagonally, i.e. the take-off and landing of airplanes, and climbing up and down staircases. Lines also become longer when presented diagonally from top to bottom, or vice versa, enhancing height. Such lines can be found in abundance in my material, in both architecture and in nature as they appear on screen. The fourth type comprises notions that are not vertical per se but still emphasise verticality, and will be named

‘allegorical verticality’. This category includes sitting vs. standing up; the placing of people and objects in relation to each other – where the (morally) superior person often looks higher than the rest; tall persons in charge; upside-down imagery; dream sequences (including flying in slumber) – either during sleep or as a daydream. In cartoons, dreams are often placed above someone’s head, and a common metaphor for someone who daydreams is that they have their head in the clouds. The fourth category also includes other symbols with vertical notions attached to them, i.e. paintings, photographs and models of airplanes, rockets, angels, but also long objects such as swords, spears and rifles. In addition to vertical imagery, there are also vertical notions in the spoken language, often through established linguistic metaphors (e.g. virtuous people being referred to as angels, a pilot who is grounded having ‘lost their wings’). In total, the varied and complex use of vertical language through image and spoken word foregrounds motifs and narratives of hierarchies. The vertical language draws on a rich tradition of the semiotics of verticality that stretches from miniscule linguistic phrases to fundamental and overreaching religious motifs. Parts of human culture are enmeshed in vertical language, making it hard to comprehend that it is even there, because it is so completely naturalised.

1.2.7 The horizontal in Russian culture

In his “Dynamic Square” Eisenstein labelled the horizontal pacifying, and expressing nostalgia “of fields, of planes and deserts” (Eisenstein and Leyda 1982: 51), and the past. In the history of the Russian empire, and the USSR, the horizontal represented the dimension of expansion. By the 1950s, the vast expansions belonged to the past. Still, the horizontal can just as easily signify the future, through the metaphor of time moving forward along a horizontal line.

However, the horizontal is not embedded with the hierarchical notion in the same manner as the vertical is. On the contrary, the horizontal dimension represents egalitarianism. This is evident in the chronotope of the road, where people across different classes and milieus meet. Such encounters may be harmonious (e.g. create an understanding between different people) or filled with conflict (e.g. criminal activities such as robbery). The road as a spatial concept of horizontal movement can take different shapes, including rivers and railroads. The early Soviet propaganda employed

various symbols of technology and industrialisation, including water canals, trains and airplanes.

In the abovementioned volume on the Moscow canal, Ruder motivates her choice of the canal as an object of study by referring to certain aspects of Stalinism:

Indeed, one of the most pervasive tropes of the era holds that the creation of the Soviet state was foremost a program of capturing space, taming nature and making it all Soviet, regardless of region, nationality, or geography. One efficient and highly visible way to achieve this goal privileges construction projects and their physical presence. (Ruder 2017: 11)

The Moscow Canal represents the horizontal dimension in the “taming of nature”. Although the idea of construction often holds a vertical notion of building something *up*, nonetheless, the canal space is a closed one, in the sense that it has clear borders, and stretches *across* the landscape. Ruder does not reflect upon the horizontal (nor possible vertical) aspects of her case. She emphasises the brutality of the project (ecologically, in reshaping the landscape, and socially, through the establishment of a Gulag camp to build the Canal); and the long-term effects in enabling and sustaining the metropole of Moscow (Ruder 2017: 3-4).

In Russian and Soviet tradition, the myths of the railroad have played important roles. “The train was made use of by early Soviet filmmakers as a multifaceted emblem of revolution itself, both for its function as an instrument of dynamic, mobile vision and for its usefulness as a means of exploring new Soviet space and integrating or appropriating it” (Kleespies 2018: 366). Because of the railroad’s technological aspect, it is comparable to the technology of flight as a vehicle of progress. Locomotives are massive, pushing forward with brutal force. Yet locomotives and trains require a laid, fixed railroad, they cannot wander off the carefully planned route. The beginning and end station of a railroad are set, thus constituting a materialisation of a plan. Although the train carriages are split into different classes, they are all on the same level, driven by the same locomotive. The train is a place for unexpected meetings across different cultural backgrounds and social strata, in the carriages and on the platforms. Ingrid Kleespies emphasises how the train in the film *Turksib* (Turin 1929) is a symbol of egalitarianism (Kleespies 2018: 366). Collective effort, rather than individual heroics and clear hierarchical structures, is foregrounded in the train myth.

In a juxtaposition to canals and trains, airplanes and flight seem to express the creative direction towards dreams and ideals, as well as goals that might not yet be entirely clear or known. In the sky, the airplane is unrestricted with regards to tracks and routes, enjoying infinite possibilities of where to go. (At least such is the myth associated with flight; in reality airplanes are restricted by the size of the fuel tank, weather conditions and the length and quality of landing strips.) Yet the airplane also signifies mastery and conquest. Widdis compares the horizontal and the vertical mode of travel, concluding that “in film, changing modes of transport—the train, the plane, the boat—and their changing representations, echoed shifts in ways of looking at the territory, offering different relationships with the space” (2003: 141). The train and the boat both emphasise collective effort, Widdis writes, while the airplane foregrounds the individual heroics of the pilot (2003: 121, 130, 134, 135, 138, 141). Thus, the shift in the 1930s towards the valorisation of the exceptional individual rather than the collective can be seen in the shift in cinematic representations of trains and airplanes: “The predominance of the train in film of the 1920s and early 1930s contrasts with the cinematic adulation of the airplane that can be discerned in Soviet film from the mid-1930s onward” (Widdis 2003: 122). Besides the idea of the pilot, the idea of airplanes as a way of transport, and of being an airplane passenger, is still loaded with importance and glamour – although in reality this is not necessarily the case any longer with today’s mass tourism and budget airlines. In any case, the understanding of verticality and vertical movement as a hierarchical one is still potent, and the technology of modern aviation and space flight provides us with a familiar setting for telling new stories using the old motifs and narratives. The horizontal dimension appears more embedded with a realisation, while the vertical is embedded with ambition and potential.

1.2.8 The chronotope

The concept of the chronotope, as introduced by Bakhtin in his seminal essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (Bakhtin 1981) has proven itself to be a productive tool within several academic traditions. However, Bakhtin himself formulated it, and used it in analysis of the literary novel. Presumably, the dissemination of this concept is because it provides us with a language to describe the particularities of time and space merged, and how this time-space creates meaning. Still, Bakhtin did

not provide us with a set definition of what a chronotope is and how it can be used. On the contrary, Bakhtin seems to value the flexibility of the concept: “Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships” (1981: 252). This flexibility might also explain the concept’s apparent popularity. Bakhtin sees chronotopes as “the organizing centres for the fundamental narrative events of the novel” (Bakhtin 1981: 250). However, he recognises that other art forms also have chronotopic elements: “In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values. [...] Art and literature are shot through with chronotopic values of varying degree and scope. Each motif, each separate aspect of artistic work bears value” (Bakhtin 1981: 243). The chronotope’s potential for value is a major concern for Bakhtin.

In the anthology *Bakhtin and His Others* (Steinby and Klapuri 2013) Liisa Steinby and Tintti Klapuri present an interpretation of Bakhtin’s chronotope through a reading of his early works, as well as connecting his thinking to earlier German thinkers. The claim is made that Bakhtin first and foremost focused on ethics throughout his authorship: “The subject in which Bakhtin is primarily interested is thus not the socially (or ‘sociologically’) determined subject but the individual as an ethical subject in a concrete human situation” (Steinby and Klapuri 2013: xvi). Yet Steinby and Klapuri recognise that Bakhtin himself used the term ‘chronotope’ in different ways throughout his scholarship, thus making it difficult to provide a clear-cut definition (Steinby and Klapuri 2013: 105). Furthermore, Steinby and Klapuri argue that Bakhtin – in his search for concrete, acting individuals in a given context – turned to art: “In turning to a theorization of art, particularly the novel, Bakhtin has thus not given up on his primary interest in ethics: he does so because the ethically acting concrete individual is most completely presented in the arts” (Steinby and Klapuri 2013: xvii). In art, the setting of time and place provides possible actions, and the individual subject makes the choice between these possibilities. In turn, the subject’s ethics are judged on the basis of the choices made. “Chronotopes open up to the characters a certain time-space of possible action, which is conditioned by a locality or a social situation but still leaves the

individual the freedom of ethical choice. Thus chronotopes are primarily not categories of cognition but of the possibilities of human actions” (Steinby and Klapuri 2013: 122). This interpretation of the chronotope does not emphasise the cognition of time-space, but how time-space affect a subject’s choices. It is this interpretation of the chronotope that will be the focus over the following chapters.

It has been argued that the chronotope is a well-suited analytical concept for films (cf. Stam 1989; Montgomery 1993; Flanagan 2009; Keunen 2010). Martin Flanagan states that “Bakhtin’s term ‘chronotope’ translates as ‘time-space’, and taking the concept at this literal level, it may be suggested that film is the artform which most thoroughly expresses chronotopic activity” (2009: 56). I do not aim to follow up Flanagan with a discussion of how the chronotope can be used in discussions of various art forms, but will use it in relation to film. The way I see it, film captures space in time.

1.2.9 The chronotope and gender

Although Bakhtin himself did not write about gender, his concepts are still applicable for gendered perspectives. As Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow formulate, “Perhaps a more pertinent question than whether Bakhtin is, as a male thinker, worth using is whether Bakhtin’s philosophy has anything to contribute to feminism” (Hohne and Wussow 1994: ix). There are several examples of how Bakhtin’s ideas can contribute to feminist thinking, as seen in the volume edited by Hohne and Wussow, and in *Bakhtin: Carnival and Other Subjects* edited by David Shepherd (1993). For my analysis, the ethical aspect of the chronotope is of particular interest: How does a gendered aspect in the chronotope function and what does it look like? Do certain time-spaces provide female characters in cinema with a set of possible actions? Andrew uses a gendered perspective on the chronotope in his analyses of women in Russian nineteenth century literature – *Narrative space and gender in Russian fiction: 1846-1903* (2007). In the introduction he writes: “an examination of the constraints, and opportunities, afforded by certain spaces, or chronotopes, helps to illuminate the ways in which women (and men) were ‘determined’ to certain destinies at given moments” (Andrew 2007: 7). Mary Zirin goes even further in connecting Bakhtin’s chronotope to Russian women: “For Russian women, denied by law and custom the basic freedom to organize their life as they chose, setting and circumstance – the Bakhtinian chronotope – determined their

fate” (Zirin 1994: 87). This implies that the chronotope is a productive tool for an analysis of women in Russian and Soviet culture.

In her theory on gender performativity Butler suggests the performance, the continuous acting, as the site of the production and reproduction of gender:

In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration. (Butler 2006: xv)

Thus, our understandings of gender lie in the performance, the ways we enact gender towards each other in concrete situations of place and time. If we want to change our understandings of gender, we have to do this through action and active choice. Both Bakhtin and Butler place the possibility for agency in the action, while at the same time recognising the influence time and place – the chronotope – have on what presents itself as available options for action. Bakhtin is focused on the ethical side of agency, while Butler uses agency to discuss and dissect the production of gender. Clive Thomson reaches a similar conclusion in his comparison of the two: “For both, the process of constituting one’s identity is precisely that – a process” (Thomson in Shepherd 1993: 221).

This use of chronotope, focusing on choice and gender, connected to Butler’s theory of gender performativity, creates a methodology that allows me to analyse and discuss female characters and their moral function in aviation and space travel cinema. This methodology helps me identify the ways in which space-time and gender in (post-) Soviet films are configured along the moral vertical. In focusing on how the female aviators, flight attendants, cosmonauts and aliens perform gender, what ethical problems are presented to them and how they act in these situations, the aim is to map out the gendered Russian/Soviet chronotope(s) of the sky and cosmos along the moral vertical. Based on Bakhtin’s insistence on the complexity and multitude of the chronotope in the literary novel, there is every reason to believe that the same richness in chronotopes can be found in the material upon which this dissertation is based.

I use the concept of the chronotope to map out generic similarities between the films discussed – in line with Bakhtin’s idea of chronotope as the defining aspect of a genre

(Bakhtin 1981: 84). By establishing key chronotopes in and among the films, it will be possible to gain a deeper understanding of the development of these films' recurring motifs and values. Still, chronotope will not only be used as a way of dealing with genre, but also as an approach to questions regarding moral and gender.

1.2.10 The chronotope and verticality

As mentioned earlier, verticality does not constitute a chronotope in itself, but chronotopes can be filled with notions of verticality. Verticality is one of several possible spatial notions and dimensions encountered in chronotopes (horizontality may be another). The aforementioned four types of verticality are fundamental for my analysis of the chronotopes in this dissertation. By exploring verticality in the films, I establish and discuss the thematically relevant chronotopes. Strict, diagonal and horizontal verticals can come in the shape of movement through the cinematic frame and chronotope (e.g. an airplane, a spaceship or a bird flying through the sky or in outer space), or shapes in architecture, nature, design or objects included in the frame. The importance and centrality of the chronotopes of sky and outer space are often cemented through the use of allegorical verticality, both visual (e.g. models of airplanes) and abstract (e.g. dream sequences and spoken language).

1.3 Flying women

The flying women of this thesis have strong connections to technology and contemporary times or the future. However, the motifs and narratives surrounding and inspiring these characters are also part of a long and rich tradition of flying women. In the introduction to her book *Women Who Fly: Goddesses, Witches, Mystics, and Other Airborne Females* (2017), Serinity Young presents a history of flying women spanning millennia and various human civilisations. She argues that throughout this history “it is women who possess knowledge of dreams and of realms beyond the earthly experience” (Young 2017: 19). With the advent of actual human flight, the aviatrixes came to embody the mythical female flying predecessors: at the same time a patriarchal fantasy of the mysterious, possibly dangerous, other, and a freedom fantasy for women (Young 2017: 250-255). “This book has told the story of a single motif or trope in the human imagination—that of women not defined by the restrictive gravity of men’s wishes or desires, but women whose ability to fly empowered them to impose conditions on men,

or to escape roles they found constricting” (Young 2017: 254). Which part of the fantasy is stronger will often depend on the reader or the interpreter, not only the creator – as will be exemplified in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. Young devotes a chapter to aviatrixes (not including flight attendants), with a strong emphasis on US and UK women pioneers. Russian and Soviet women are mentioned in connection to their wartime effort, and of course pioneer cosmonaut Tereshkova is named (Young 2017: 247). Still, already in Russian and Slavic mythology, there have been flying women or female-like creatures: spirits, divine messengers, witches and angels. The Soviet female fighter pilots did not simply emerge in the wake of shortages of male recruits, as Young, among others, claims (Young 2017: 247). Instead, the airborne women of the Soviet and post-Soviet era appeared as the result and symptom of collective ideology and individual ambition. The myths spun around the flying women in cultural forms of expression such as cinema share certain similarities with male aviators and cosmonauts. Nonetheless, gender is a recurring factor shaping the character’s specific motivations, ambitions, development and possibilities.

Cinematic presentations of women pilots and flight attendants comprise the main material of Chapter 2. The first representations of the female pilot begin at an important point in Soviet history, the mid-1930s. Subsequently, the same generation of young women is portrayed over the following decades, making out the dominant image of the aviatrix. It is not until the 2010s that a new generation of female pilots, a contemporary one, is shown. Based on the selection of films, a certain pilot identity can be recognised. This pilot identity shares some commonalities with cinematic male pilot identities. Yet, because of the historical context and myths, the female pilot identity has her own specificities. Female flight attendants have quickly monopolised their profession, and still to a large degree embody the public perception of what the flight attendant should be like. Thus, the cinematic identity of the flight attendant is primarily female or feminine. And, although the spatial aspects bring the pilots and flight attendants together in their workplace in the airplane and sky, the motifs surrounding the two professions are often strikingly different. However, one question is whether the chronotope of the sky and airplane give them both similar moral dilemmas and possibilities for action. The

films in this chapter span across genres such as light-hearted (war) comedies, dramas and disaster films.

In Chapter 3 female cosmonauts and aliens are the main characters of interest. Both the cosmonaut and the alien primarily belong to films within the sci-fi genre. The female cosmonauts and aliens have fewer leading roles compared to the pilots and flight attendants, yet, they appear in important supporting roles in a larger number of films. Because the cosmonauts and aliens spatial origins are different, they have different functions and motifs than the pilots and flight attendants. Again, the function of the chronotope, moral dilemmas and agency are central for the analyses. The majority of the films in this chapter are broadly situated within the science fiction (sci-fi) genre: exploring the possibilities of advanced (future) technologies. Although the approach to technology in this material is manifold, including comedy, romantic comedy, adventure, existentialist and tech-noir. The one film in this chapter that cannot be counted as a sci-fi is the animated, family-friendly, “biopic” about the space dogs Belka and Strelka, *Star Dogs*. This film is instead part of a wave of post-Soviet nostalgic space travel-themed films, as will be discussed more closely in section 3.5.2.

The four types – the pilot, the flight attendant, the cosmonaut and the alien – make up the most significant presentations of women in the sky and cosmos in (post-) Soviet cinema. Analysing them across time and genres provides us with a complex picture of the “exceptional women, almost beyond mere mortals in their outstanding characteristics or abilities”, to borrow Young’s description of airborne women (2017: 253) – in (post-) Soviet culture. These cinematic images cannot be isolated from the culture in which they were created. Consequently, they also provide us with motifs and narratives, useful for understanding women’s status, and the expectations women are met with, in Russian society.

2 Women in aviation

This chapter will deal with the airspace, for millennia the home of birds, as well as religious and folkloric creatures, such as emissaries of gods, angels, demons and witches. Yet at the end of the nineteenth century a technology that allowed humans to enter, or, in contrast to hot air balloons, where flight is passive, actively conquer (as it has often been phrased), the airspace had successfully been developed after decades of futile attempts. The technology of moving pictures was developed at the same time, and this new medium was important for how human flight was presented to the audience.

Even though the technologies of heavier-than-air human flight and film were new, the representation of the airspace followed the well-established traditions. When dealing with the airspace and movements within it, hierarchy is a central structure, incorporating the ideas of superior divine powers that reside above us, earthly and mortal, and the mysticism of how communication is transmitted between the upper and lower spaces. The realisation of this structure in airspace comes through verticality, stretching from the ground, through the airspace, to the outer space.

How the technology of airplanes changed society and culture has been the topic of several scholarly works, with Scott Palmer's *Dictatorship of the Air* (Palmer 2006) being the first major study of aviation history in the Russian/Soviet context between the end of the nineteenth century and the end of the Second World War. The term "air-mindedness" is used by Palmer to describe how the idea of aviation mutates in a nation's cultural environment, making it possible to distinguish the Russian air-mindedness from, say, the French or American air-mindedness (Palmer 2006: 2-3). Palmer also published an article on the symbolic meaning of flight in Russian tradition, "Icarus, East" (2005). In this article, the airspace in the Russian tradition, as expressed through folkloric tales, is presented as the space shared by both good and evil powers. Yet, owing to the Orthodox Christian influence, the Russian airspace has also been treated as the realm separating humans from God:

[...] the Russian tradition largely resisted these innovations [of European Renaissance art that humanised God], retaining instead narrative structures, and visual images that clearly demarcated the divine from the temporal while focusing attention on the mediating function of hierarchic authority in facilitating man's ascension into the heavens. (Palmer 2005: 30)

Verticality is the central structure of the hierarchical relationship between God and believers. Palmer argues that while humans do not belong in airspace they can enter it, which, in some cases, gives them the opportunity of transcendence – if the supreme divine force allows it. As the Soviet leaders chose the airplane as their marker of transformation and industrialisation, they drew upon the already existing notions in communicating the importance of hierarchy, obedience and collectivism (Palmer 2005: 38).

The idea, presented by Palmer as air-mindedness, is a premise for the contributions to the anthology *Russian Aviation, Space Flight, and Visual Culture*, edited by Vlad Strukov and Helena Goscilo (2017). These contributions present aviation and space through art, films, and digital games over the last century, providing a broad foundation for the understanding of how important aviation and space have been for the Russian culture of this period. In the introduction, this is brought into a historical tradition of the understanding of flying and airspace in the Russian (and more global) context dating back to ancient times. The myth and iconography of Icarus are mentioned by Palmer, as well as Strukov and Goscilo. In Greek mythology, Icarus was the inventor Daedalus's son, who flew too close to the sun on the wings his father had made, merely to plummet to his death.²⁶ Icarus was the original aviator, but Palmer argues that there is a uniquely Russian and Soviet interpretation of him that distinguishes itself from Western interpretations (Palmer 2005: 19). Strukov and Goscilo formulate “Russia's version of the Icarus myth, popularized in the twentieth century [...] [as something that] abjures individualism for official paternalism, reminiscent of the medieval reading of Icarus” (Strukov and Goscilo 2017: 5). This interpretation highlights how Icarus defied Daedalus's warnings, and how he was then punished for this. “[The Russian Icarus] speaks to the virtue of individual obedience and the role of state authority in facilitating transcendence” (Palmer 2005: 21). This is then echoed in Russian and Soviet artistic

²⁶ According to the myth, Daedalus was kept captive in a tower on Crete by King Minos. Daedalus has constructed a labyrinth for Minos, and the King did not wish for the knowledge of this labyrinth to spread. To escape, Daedalus constructed wings of feathers and wax, for himself and his son Icarus. He warned Icarus not to fly either too low (for fear of the sea foam soaking the feathers) or too high (where the sun would melt the wax).

representations of aviators. In accordance with the theme of Icarus challenging the established hierarchy and hierarchy expressed through verticality, it is his temptation to go higher (not lower) than he should that provides his downfall. The examples provided by Strukov and Goscilo in their book all concern male aviators (with the exception of the two female dogs, Belka and Strelka, who were shot into space and can hardly qualify as aviators owing to the passivity of their agency²⁷). There is no investigation of how and why Icarus is a male representation in the air. In focusing overwhelmingly on the male experiences of aviation, the works of Palmer and the book *Russian Aviation, Space Flight, and Visual Culture* leave open the question of a gendered, and particularly female, experience. Through making the female experience of aviation the focal point of my study, new perspectives emerge on the chronotope of airspace, the pilot, and the flight attendant, as well as women's function and significance in Russian culture. What characterises the narratives that are driven by female pilots and flight attendants, what are the airborne women's range of possibilities for action, and which ideas is the chronotope of airspace used to communicate? In folklore and religion, the angel and the witch in particular represent the female experience of the airspace, and will therefore provide a framework for a discussion about the cinematic presentations of female pilots and flight attendants. An analysis of women in aviation in Soviet and Russian films gives us an opportunity to explore and discuss the Moral Vertical – the intersection between gender and verticality as a metaphor for moral and spiritual hierarchies.

In several films, the female pilots and flight attendants are referred to as being witches and/or angels, thus exemplifying a similar development as the one described by Young: from mythical airborne women to modern day pilots and flight attendants (Young 2017). While the angel is primarily a morally superior religious or spiritual creature, the morally ambiguous witch has been both a folklore character and a concept used to describe real women. Thus, the two concepts provide me with two different tools for analysing the airborne women discussed in this chapter.

²⁷ The relevant full-length animation film *Star Dogs* (Evlannikova and Ushakov 2010) will be discussed in the next chapter in section 3.5.2.

The all-women night bomber regiment was nicknamed Night Witches, drawing on the folkloric tales of creatures that are often evil and can fly. The witch is also a character most often presented as a woman, and it is not likely that a men's regiment would be given a similar nickname (as male air force pilots were the general norm, and as men have had a different folkloric connection to the metaphysical). The nickname given by the Germans, and the remark made by Bulochkin in *Heavenly Slug* (about abstinent pilots being angels), establishes a connection between the actual flying women and the fantastical ones, and thus establishes a link between the technological aspect of flying and the folkloric and spiritual venture of flying. This shows that even after the airspace was conquered, and no credible source could testify to the existence of either witches or angels in this space, these categories of flying female creatures still held meaning that could be applied to actual flying women. As already argued in this chapter, I see a link between several women presented in the films and angelic creatures. In everyday language the terms 'witch' and 'angel' are both commonly used to refer to a person, 'a witch' typically being a negative description (someone sly with cruel intentions), and 'an angel' a positive one (someone morally impeccable, bordering on naïve or even self-sacrificial). In order to strengthen my argument and underscore the importance of morality in my discussion, it is necessary to include some paragraphs on what angels and witches are believed to be, and what they have come to symbolise.

Neither witches nor angels are exclusively female. In fact, in Christianity, Judaism and Islam the angels referred to in sacral literature are either male or genderless (for more see Young 2017: 95-114). Yet, when looking for female creatures that traditionally can fly, the witch and the angel are the two prominent representations of flying women.

There is a substantial amount of scholarly work on witches and witchcraft in the context of the witch trials of early modern European and American history. The academic field has been dominated by historians, but has developed into a more interdisciplinary field branching out into, for example, religious and folklore studies, as well as anthropology. The characteristics ascribed to the individuals accused of witchcraft and the folkloristic stereotypes are closely interwoven. As Brian P. Levack writes: "It is, of course, impossible to separate the trials themselves from the beliefs upon which prosecutions were based" (Levack 2013: 3). Further, based on the historical material available,

Levack concludes that “[t]he witch beliefs that inspired the trials and were enshrined in the demonological literature were far from homogenous” (Levack 2013: 3). In other words, the witch is a complex character who changed depending on the time and place where she was described.

According to Valerie Kivelson the history of witchcraft, witches and witch trials is an understudied field in Russian history (Kivelson 2013: 372). In 17th century Muscovy and 18th century early imperial Russia, there are only limited records of witch trials (there are records for about 230 trials, involving 490 individuals in the 17th century, Kivelson 2013: 358), and there are important differences between the phenomena as we know them from Western Europe, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other.²⁸ One such important difference is that there was no inquisition in Russia. Furthermore,

Russian witchcraft trials were characterized by a high percentage of men among the accused, relatively infrequent discussion of diabolism, and harsh inquisitorial legal procedures. The distinctive political, religious and social history of Russia in the early modern period, its relative cultural isolation, the teachings of Orthodox Christianity, the inescapable pressures of social hierarchy, bondage, and dependency, all left their imprint on the trials. (Kivelson 2013: 356)

Kivelson argues that the reason why men were more frequently accused of witchcraft was because they were more often in conflict with the authorities, not because women were not seen as practitioners of witchcraft. As a matter of fact, Kivelson claims that witchcraft was not associated with any one gender in Russia: “That witchcraft should be a female crime, or, indeed, that it should be in any way associated with one particular gender, are presuppositions derived from the familiar patterns” (Kivelson 2016: 83). Based on this, it seems that the connection between the early modern witch trials and the folklore about witches might not be as strong in the Russian context as in the Western European tradition. Instead, the perceptions of witches and witchcraft in Russia originated and were reinforced outside the legal system.

Central for the discussions in this chapter is that the stereotypical folklore-like witch can be a normal woman who has attained certain powers (in the Russian context, such

²⁸ In the European witchcraft persecutions from 1450-1750 (the 17th century as its peak period), around 100,000 people were accused, with 40,000-50,000 people executed. In the Northern-Norwegian region of Finnmark, one of the places with the most intense levels of witchcraft trials, 135 people were accused of practising witchcraft in the 17th century, 91 of whom were sentenced to death (Willumsen).

powers were less often connected to the devil (Kivelson 2013: 356)). These powers allow her to perform sorcery and often to fly (typically on a broomstick). There are both good and evil witches, but the evil witch is the one who comes to mind first, suggesting the evil witch is the prevalent stereotype. Whether good or bad, she is a powerful woman whom one does not want to cross. The witch can also be a sort of trickster figure (i.e. an intelligent character who plays tricks on others, and disobeys or challenges established rules and conventions). She tests the moral judgements of humans without taking a clear stand herself – but rather presenting a balance between good and evil. In Russian folklore, this is the role of the witch Baba Yaga, and in the introduction to a collection of translated Baba Yaga tales Sibelan Forrester writes:

[T]he most distinguishable feature of Russian wonder tales, in my opinion, is Baba Yaga. [...] I know of no other witch/wise woman character in European folklore who is so amply described and given such unusual paraphernalia as Baba Yaga. (Forrester, et al. 2013: x-xi)

Although she is often thought of as a specific character, with her name usually capitalised in English translations, in the original Russian (and other Slavic) language tales Baba Yaga is written in lower case, and there can be more than one Baba Yaga, suggesting that she is more of a type than a specific character (Forrester, et al. 2013: xxiv). And like the complex witches introduced by Levack, Baba Yaga is also a complex character type: “Baba Yaga transcends definition because she is an amalgamation of deities mixed with a dose of sorcery” (Forrester, et al. 2013: vii). Yet one of her most prominent features is that she travels through the air riding a pestle and mortar. Two crucial points, drawn from the discussion of witches in general and Baba Yaga in particular, are that the witch is essentially an earthly creature and her powers are just as strong on the ground, as they might be in the airspace, and she is not necessarily a morally superior creature.

Angels are creatures superior to humans but inferior to God (or the most supreme divinity). Representing a connection between humans and heaven, angels are able to travel – fly – between the realm of humans and the divine (e.g. carrying messages). The word ‘angel’ comes from the Greek ‘angelos’ meaning a ‘messenger’. Angels are kind and gentle defenders of good, and are morally superior. Whilst they can visit earth, they belong in heaven. At least this is the image that most readily comes to mind when trying to define the contemporary image of angels. However, when looking into the scholarly

investigations of angels, it soon becomes evident that this image is a simplification of various traditions spanning over thousands of years of humanoid winged creatures. As noted by Young in *Women Who Fly* and Valery Rees in the introduction to her book *From Gabriel to Lucifer*, our contemporary understanding of angels is rooted not only in the Semitic religions but also in other religious traditions, for instance from Ancient Egypt, and Zoroastrianism (Rees 2013: 1-2; Young 2017: 96). The female angel of the Christian tradition is a more recent addition dating to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, although she became the dominant representation of the angel in nineteenth century (Young 2017: 100-101). Both Rees and David A. Jones argue that the image of the female angel was influenced by the Greek goddess of victory, Nike, and other pagan, often winged, female creatures (Jones 2011: 29-31; Rees 2013: 15-16). Yet Jones and Young also see the nineteenth century gradual feminisation of the angel in the Christian tradition and beyond it, as a process where the angel loses its relevance (Young 2017: 101-104). In this Jones is drawing a line between femininity, Romantic ideals of imagination, rather than intellect (and, dare I add, emotions), and the loss of influence and power (Jones 2011: 31). It seems clear that the angel in the nineteenth century goes through a transformation from representing intellect in the image of a man, to representing imagination and emotion in the image of a woman, in accordance with the romantic ideals. However, judging by the presence of angels in our contemporary culture and religious practices, as Rees explores throughout her book, it is not obvious that angels have lost their influence. Rather, their influence has morphed into a softer, more compassionate and emotional function. Young describes this as the domesticated angel, whose primary realm and function is connected to the household (Young 2017: 101-104). However, Young's analysis is largely based on Victorian, i.e. English-language sources for this interpretation, which might not always be transferable to (post-)Soviet culture. The popular image of the angel is undeniably seen as a guide in moral dilemmas. This image is based on the idea of the guardian angel, who could not interfere with a person's free will (as that would be a violation of the principle of free will), but could influence a person through senses and imagination: "The focus of their [the guardian angels'] operation was to support the rational mind, especially at times of wavering and temptation. The angel, he [St Thomas Aquinas] thought, was with us from

birth, to watch over the welfare of our soul” (Rees 2013: 180). However, the female angel appears to be non-threatening, asexual, too pure and fragile to engage in e.g. public life, and above trivial matters such as politics. These stereotypes connected to ideals of femininity have in turn limited women’s possibilities of having their voices heard and of participation outside their homes. For my further discussion, the spatial location of angels in heaven, their ability to fly, their moral superiority, and their predominantly feminine image over the last two centuries, are the qualities of particular importance.

The feature films discussed in this chapter are selected on the basis of a set of criteria, which, in addition, lead to the selection of a few additional films for their relevance to the themes established by the films that fit such criteria. The first criterion is that the chosen films have to involve flying in airplanes. Journeys, or flights, to outer space belong to a different category and will be discussed separately in the next chapter. The second criterion is the presence of women in primarily leading roles on screen. The third criterion is that these women should have a close connection with flying, flight cabins being their workspace. Seven of the films discussed in this chapter fit these criteria, presenting female air force pilots, commercial pilots, student pilots and flight attendants.

In order to nuance and place these films in a broader context in terms of gender, as well as other central themes brought up in these seven films, I will also discuss aviation films with men in the lead, yet still with women in important supporting roles as either pilots or flight attendants. A further four Soviet/Russian films were chosen for this reason.²⁹ The films represent various genres, from accessible tongue-in-cheek romantic comedies, war dramas, romantic melodramas and psychological dramas, to disaster films. I will also make some comparisons to selected Western films either for the sake of contrast or to provide some examples more available to readers who might be better familiar with these than with (post-) Soviet cinema.

²⁹ The non-Russian films mentioned in this chapter do not have women in leading roles, and have been chosen because their stories and themes are relevant for this thesis. There are a few Western and Asian films about women pilots, e.g. the biopics of women pioneers, such as the Korean film *Blue Swallow* (Yoon Jong-chan 2005) and the American *Amelia* (Mira Nair 2009). Yet, as my focus is on Russian films and there has not been any biopic of a Russian female aviation pioneer so far, I have chosen to include some non-Russian films that are more pertinent to the discussions I bring up, in particular *Airplane!* (Jim Abrahams et al. 1980) and *Flight* (Robert Zemeckis 2012).

In the first part of this chapter, I will take a closer look at women pilots in Soviet and Russian cinema. Of the seven films discussed in this part, three tell stories of an all-women night bomber regiment: *Heavenly Slug* (Nebesnyi tikhokhod, Semyon Timoshenko 1945), *Only Old Men Go to Battle* (V boi idut odni stariki, hereafter *Only Old Men*, Leonid Bykov 1973) and *There Are “Night Witches” in the Sky* (V nebe “nochnye ved’m’y”, hereafter *Night Witches*, Evgeniia Zhigulenko 1981). Rather than exploring a character, the focus in these films is on a group and on the events in which it is involved. Two further films are closer examinations of female representatives of the wartime generation, the generation of Soviet women who took up arms, before and after the Second World War: *Pilots* (Letchiki, Iulii Raizman 1935) and *Wings* (Kryl’ia, Larisa Shepi’tko 1966). The last two films present passenger airline pilots: *The Flight Crew* (Ekipazh, Aleksandr Mitta 1979) and *The Flight Crew* (Ekipazh, Nikolai Lebedev 2016), although only in *The Flight Crew* of 2016 there is a female pilot. These two films are an original and a remake. While it is clear that some of the differences between the original and the remake concern how the filmmakers think their stories are best communicated, other differences point towards broader changes in society occurring between the late 1970s and the mid-2010s. These changes will also be discussed. At the end of this part, questions will be raised about the pilot’s identity, how it is presented, and how certain narratives connected to the pilot’s identity (e.g. becoming a pilot, a grounded pilot and a pilot’s sacrifice) are reoccurring in the films. A discussion of the particularity of the female pilots is included towards the end of the chapter’s first part.

In the second part, films with female flight attendants in lead roles will be analysed. There are four films in this part. The first two films present characters that initially did not wish to work as flight attendants, yet somehow ended up in this profession: *The Stewardess* (Stiuardessa, Vladimir Krasnopol’skii and Valerii Uskov 1967) and *The School-leaver* (Abiturientka, Aleksei Mishurin 1973). The last two are an original and a remake about a flight attendant and her attempt to get the person she loves: *Once Again about Love* (Eshche raz pro liubov’, hereafter *Once Again*, Georgii Natanson 1968) and *Sky. Airplane. Girl* (Nebo. Samolet. Devushka, Vera Storozheva 2002). In the discussion of what it means to be a flight attendant, the four protagonists in these films will be discussed, as well as one of the female flight attendants in a supporting role in *The Flight*

Crew (1979) presented in the first part, and two male flight attendants appearing in *Sky. Airplane. Girl* and *The Flight Crew* (2016) in smaller parts. This section will also include a discussion of whether the reluctant stewardesses are marking a distance from certain stereotypes about stewardesses, and if being a stewardess highlights the female sexuality.

To round up the chapter, attention will be given to the chronotope of airspace, and what pilots and/or flight attendants mean in these films, as well as which vertical notions and images can be found in them. The female pilots and flight attendants will be analysed on the basis of their gender, agency, moral function and spatial location, and compared to two traditional images of female creatures defined by their morality and spatial presence in the airspace: witches and angels.

2.1 The war and the women

Soviet and post-Soviet feature films with female pilots are typically about female air force troops, the exceptions being the female civilian pilots in *Pilots* and *The Flight Crew*. As the main character in *Pilots* is of the same generation as those women who went to war, the film will be included in this section. The two feature films *Night Witches* and *Wings* represent two cases where the female military pilot is the central character. However, aside from this characteristic, the two films are quite different, serving as examples of the diversity in how the stories of the female military pilots have been told. *Night Witches* tells the story of an all-female night bomber regiment over a period of time, most likely a few weeks or months during the summer of 1943, while *Wings* is a drama about an air force veteran and her everyday struggles in the post-war Soviet society. The film *Heavenly Slug* is not easy to categorise, as the lead male role in this romantic comedy is a pilot and the lead female is a journalist, yet there are several female pilots who are given substantial screen time and are important to the plot. While the films *Heavenly Slug*, *Night Witches* and *Only Old Men* present collective portraits of these women during the war, the films *Pilots* and *Wings* feature more individual representations of this generation pre- and post-war.

There are a few more films featuring female pilots, in smaller supporting roles, with a very clear function related to a love story, to showcase gender diversity, or to highlight

the cruelty of war. The still highly popular *Only Old Men* fits in the first category and will be discussed in section 2.1.4. In *The Cuckoo* (Kukushka, Aleksandr Rogozhkin 2002), there is a scene when the protagonists find a crashed Soviet airplane with both pilots dead. The pilots turn out to be women, and one protagonist makes a remark about how awful this war is when young women are sent out to die. However, because this is the only relevant scene, the film will not receive the same attention in my thesis as the aforementioned *Wings*, *Night Witches*, and *Only Old Men*. Both *Only Old Men* and *Night Witches* use fictional names for their characters, yet the characters of the Captain Evdokiia Boguslavskaja in *Night Witches* and Captain Zoia in *Only Old Men* bear a striking resemblance to the Soviet pioneer aviator Marina Raskova.

In the 1920s, the Soviet authorities experimented with policy not only in areas connected to gender and equality, but also to economy and organisation of the workplace, whereas the 1930s were a period of tighter control, e.g. stricter censorship of artists³⁰, the introduction of five-year plans, forced collectivisation and the growing brutality of the Stalinist era (for more, see Shearer 2006). Yet, when examining policies about women, gender and equality, an incoherent and inconsistent picture emerges. On the one hand, the constitution of 1936 stated that women and men were equal – with seemingly no more discussion needed. Women were encouraged to take jobs of all kinds, outside their home, to study, and to participate in leisure activities (like the paramilitary ones), as well as keeping fit through regular physical exercise (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: Chapter 1). Flying was one of the leisure activities promoted as suitable for all genders, as shown in the film *Pilots*.³¹ Therefore women took to the wings. In 1938, a trio of women (Marina Raskova, Valentina Grizodubova and Polina Osipenko) made a record-breaking flight, named *Rodina*, from Moscow to Komsomolsk in the Far East. However, on the other hand, access to divorce and abortion became extremely limited by the mid-1930s, and there were very few measurements taken to lighten the workload

³⁰ The establishment of unified associations of creative professions in 1932 and the official adoption of the Socialist Realist doctrine in 1934 effectively led to massive state control over who were able to work as artists and what was produced, written, composed, published, screened, showed, played, etc.

³¹ Flying was not the only paramilitary activity in which women were encouraged to participate: firearms training also became popular for both genders to take part in during the 1930s.

women experienced in the household, the effect being that women were supposed to be both superworkers and superhousewives simultaneously.

In the autumn of 1941, Stalin gave orders to establish three women's flying regiments in the Red Army. The task of organising this was entrusted to the already well-decorated Marina Raskova (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 86-87). This was the first call for women to armed military duty, and it was to be kept a secret.

In fact, a large number of women tried to enlist as soldiers from the point where the Second World War had moved to the Soviet territory, with Nazi Germany breaking the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact on 22 June, 1941. Some of them were able to join the ranks of snipers, machine gunners, etc., but most women who enlisted in the first couple of months were sent to serve in a more conventionally feminine role as medics and field nurses (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 58-60). The Soviet authorities were reluctant to accept women into the armed services, and it seems that the eagerness showed by a large number of young, educated Soviet women to serve their country as combat soldiers (including in military aviation) came as a surprise to the authorities. Looking back at how the Soviet authorities and society had actively shaped the upbringing and identity of these young women, perhaps they should have seen it coming.

When the Soviet Union was finally drawn into the war, a large number of the young women shaped by the ambiguous 1930's policy towards women and gender norms felt that it was just as much their own as their brothers' right and duty to serve and protect their Motherland. Considerably helped by the petition of the Komsomol Central Committee, and the lobbying of Marina Raskova, then an NKVD major, Stalin and the authorities agreed to the formation of three all-women air force regiments. Yet only the night bombers' regiment was able to form as an entirely all-women's regiment in which everyone, from mechanics to pilots, was female. The initial recruitment was organised by the Komsomol in the capital, and targeted women with experience as pilots, women with relevant higher education for the tasks of navigators, and factory workers for ground staff duties (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 84-89). The night bombers' regiment became the most famous, nicknamed "The Night Witches" by the Germans, a

name that Soviet soldiers and Soviet society took as a compliment and started using themselves. Those serving in this unit received a total of 23 of the 84 Hero of the Soviet Union medals that were awarded to women during the Second World War.

Recent estimates suggest that throughout the war, approximately one million women served in the Red Army, and almost half of them served on, or immediately behind, the frontlines, in divisions of all kinds (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 149-150; Krivosheev, et al. 2010: 37-38).³² Officially these women were volunteers, as there was never a draft for women. In reality, however, it is clear that at least some women felt they had no choice but to volunteer (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 155, 158-162). The first large-scale mobilisation decree of March 1942 required that all women recruits should be between 19-25 years old, and had completed a basic education. In addition, at least 40% should have at least 'middle' schooling. These requirements were to become a sort of template for all the following mobilisation campaigns aimed at women. Although the serving women were a diverse group, demographically speaking, Markwick and Charon Cardona emphasise: "[...] the core of keen recruits tended to come from the more educated, urbanized young women" (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 180). Within the first week of secret mobilisation for the three women's air force regiments as many as 300-400 willing women were recruited (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 88). Throughout the war, 261 women served in the "Night Witches" regiment. Even though the highest proportion of fighting women were field nurses and medics (who perhaps did not intend to actively engage in combat but still ended up fighting) and anti-aircraft personnel (Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 58, 67, 83, 164), the iconic images of female Red Army soldiers were often those in the air force. Three of the films presented in this part all deal with air force pilots during the war in a somewhat entertaining and light-hearted way: A big difference between *Heavenly Slug*, on the one hand, and *Only Old Men* and *Night Witches*, on the other, is how *Heavenly Slug* does not aim to educate a generation who themselves did not experience the war. This is possibly the reason why death is not an important part of

³² As mobilisation was carried out through a complex network of various organisations, it has been, and still is, challenging to establish the exact numbers of mobilised women.

Heavenly Slug. Instead of presenting the horrors of war in a heroic way, the war mostly serves as a backdrop for a romantic comedy.

After the war women were demobilised. Pursuing a military career for them became close to impossible, even if they wanted to. As seen in Western post-war societies, the Soviet post-war society also experienced a backlash in women's rights and equality:

Exhorted to work hard, to make a home, to comfort their shell-shocked husband, to bear children, and to be feminine, in the postwar period women were expected to be all things to all people and to enjoy it. Reflected in these contradictory demands was a genuine shift in the balance between work and home and in the rhetoric of women's emancipation. Although the Soviet government continued to proclaim the equality of men and women, women were now asked to accept the "Orwellian doctrine" that men were the more equal. (Engel 2004: 229)

The effect of this backlash, the war experiences and the pre-war ambiguous gender policy all come together to shape the protagonist of the film *Wings*.

In the following subsections, the films will be presented chronologically, by their year of release, in order to trace how the concept of the female pilot has developed in fiction over time.

2.1.1 *Pilots* (1935)

In the film *Pilots* the viewers are introduced to life and training in air clubs. The film is divided into seven parts with respective titles, and the story is relatively straightforward. The director of the film was the already established Iulii Raizman (1903–1994), who throughout his career would receive several Stalin Prizes and medals as official recognition for his work (e.g. Hero of Socialist Labour (1973); Order of Lenin (1967, 1973), etc.).

Sergei Beliaev (Ivan Koval-Samborskii) is a pilot and instructor at an aviation school, where Galia Bystrova (Evgeniia Mel'nikova) is among the students. They seem equally passionate about flying, and have a keen eye for each other too. Rogachev (Boris Shchukin) is the fatherly head of the aviation school. During a performance of a daredevil trick Beliaev loses control, falls to the ground and is severely injured. He was warned beforehand not to act recklessly. Upon his return to the school after convalescence, he is not welcomed as the hero he used to be. In fact, he is dismissed from the school staff for irresponsibility. Even Bystrova is ambivalent in her attitude to him. Yet Bystrova chooses to take off and perform some daring stunts of her own,

creating quite a bit of a chaos on the ground. Rogachev reprimands Bystrova in a stern, paternalistic and instructive way. When Beliaev later suggests to Bystrova that they should just run away together, Bystrova refuses, stating she would like to stay to become a pilot. Together with Rogachev, Bystrova confronts Beliaev, who is contemplating suicide. Rogachev offers to help Beliaev by asking him to take care of an airplane that Rogachev has designed. However, Beliaev seems ashamed and unwilling to accept his offer. Bystrova seems to have lost her infatuation with Beliaev, as she mocks him towards the end of the sequence. When Rogachev has to go to a hospital for an operation, his devoted students follow him there, and he takes the opportunity to have an additional chat with his favourite Bystrova. Beliaev, freshly appointed as a chief test pilot with the responsibility for Rogachev's airplane, also shows up, but Bystrova coolly brushes him off as he tries to talk to her. Even with Rogachev still in recovery, the students have to perform in an air parade, with Bystrova carrying out an impressive solo display of audacious stunts in Rogachev's airplane. Beliaev rushes to a telephone and calls the hospital to describe to Rogachev Bystrova's manoeuvres. Rogachev becomes so excited, he runs up onto the hospital roof, together with a large crowd of patients and staff, to watch Bystrova and the rest of the air parade from there. In the end, Bystrova and Rogachev are dispatched to different corners of the Soviet Union (Pamir and Sakhalin). On the way to the airplanes taking them to their new destinations, Rogachev and Bystrova have a conversation, where Bystrova explains to Rogachev that she has learnt how to fly his airplane thanks to Beliaev. She continues on talking about how she and 'him' should become one body, Rogachev thinks she is talking about Beliaev, but they both laugh as they realise the misunderstanding: Bystrova meant the whimsical engine of the flying machine.

There are only good people in *Pilots*. Some are not particularly clever, or even fully understand their role in Soviet society (e.g. Beliaev), but none are evil. Life is good, the atmosphere is positive, not even crashing an airplane is lethal or results in long-term physical injuries. The film is a product of the 1930s with its positive outlook on the future and overtly pedagogical story with caricatured characters. Beliaev and Rogachev seem, respectively, like caricatures of a reckless son and a concerned father. Bystrova is less of a caricature, not only because she is a woman in the predominantly masculine

milieu of aviation, but also in that she seems to have the character that develops most throughout the film. The moral of the story is that the new Soviet generation should be proud of what they do, be willing to sacrifice personal aspirations for the sake of the nation, and to understand that one should always listen to the advice given by one's elders and superiors.

Notions of strict, diagonal and horizontal verticality are shown in sequences with flying, containing airplanes, and people and places at the aviation school (an allegorical vertical notion as a reminder of flying). Even when an airplane is shown flying horizontally through air it is still a reminder of verticality, as the aircraft is located above the earth. This is emphasised in the scenes on the hospital roof where the shadow of an airplane is passing across the face of a person. There are several sequences involving stairs: a hall being decorated for a party is filmed from the top of the stairs, looking down; descending and ascending the stairs (most notably in the scene when hospital patients are rushing to the roof to observe the air parade); Bystrova and Beliaev talking next to the stairs; a longer shot of Beliaev's feet as he is slowly walking up the stairs. Twice during the film a strong wind causes paper and other light objects to flutter away. The first time this is caused by Bystrova flying close to an open window.

The airspace is a place for skilled professionals. However, as this is pre-war, and pre-large-scale aviation transport, the airspace in *Pilots* is connected neither to war nor occupation. Rather it is a place for the collective Soviet society to showcase its progress and superiority as a civilisation, and part of that superiority is expressed by presenting women pilots as a completely natural and uncontroversial segment of society and the airspace.



Illustration 1 The audience never doubts Galia's skills as a pilot. Screenshot Pilots (1935)

The pilots in *Pilots* are mostly energetic, confident, young, beautiful and healthy. They are also highly skilled, capable of performing impressive stunts with the airplane.

However, they must also understand and respect the limits of individualistic self-expression – as this can potentially be dangerous – and therefore the requirement to obey the orders of their superiors. No one questions the fact that a woman can be a pilot, not to mention performing dangerous stunts in an airplane. By becoming a pilot Bystrova learns to not be blinded and charmed by impulsive and dangerous individualistic behaviour, but rather to see that there is a time and a place for stunts, and that virtues such as obedience and loyalty are worth more than one's superior virtuosity as a pilot. An important part of learning to be a pilot is, in other words, to learn how to make mature judgements for yourself, judgements that often have a moral side to them (e.g. should one listen to one's heart or one's head?). Moreover, love for the flying machine seems to take priority over loving a fellow human, as the episode about forming a union with an airplane engine demonstrates. This anticipates the refrain from Fatianov and Solov'ev-Sedoi's song in *Heavenly Slug*, quoted in 2.1.2.

2.1.2 *Heavenly Slug* (1945)

The story of the 1945 romantic comedy *Heavenly Slug* directed by Semyon Timoshenko takes place towards the end of the war. This is evident from the amount of experience the soldiers have, and the general mood of victory and joy. The war seems neither scary nor horrible in this film, as the soldiers carry out their missions with a smile on their face. No Soviet soldiers die, their uniforms are clean, there is food and drink for everyone, even the hospital seems a tranquil place without undue illness or suffering.

Major Bulochkin (Nikolai Kriuchkov) is at the film's centre of attention. He was shot down, and fell 4,000 meters to the ground as his parachute did not open, yet nonetheless survived by some miracle. However, the female professor physician (Faina Ranevskaja) explains that, owing to his injuries, his heart cannot take heights above 1,000 meters (or romance, flirting and family issues). Bulochkin is therefore transferred to an all-woman unit, as they use U-2 airplanes flying at low altitudes only. Serving with all these women is something of a challenge, as Bulochkin together with his friends and brothers-in-arms Lieutenant Tucha (Vasilii Merkuriev) and Captain Kaiserov (Vasilii Neshchiplenko) have formed a pact not to marry until the war is over. They call the pact the "Holy Union of Men" (Sviatoi muzhskoi soiuz), Tucha raises a toast to misogyny and the two others join in and sing "As we are pilots, the sky is our home, airplanes are our first priority

and girls aren't"³³. The female soldiers, led by Senior Lieutenant Kutuzova (Liudmila Glazova), seem to be accustomed to men underestimating them, and rather use the opportunity to show what they are good for, and deliver tongue-in-cheek jokes. Bulochkin quickly adapts to the situation, though, and learns to respect the women as soldiers. Tucha, on the other hand, as an outspoken misogynist, does not seem comfortable with the female soldiers, and especially so as Kaisarov betrays the Holy Union by instantly falling in love with, and secretly marrying, the aviatrix Svetlova (Tamara Aleshina). Although Bulochkin flies missions with Kutuzova, it is early established that there will be no romance between the two, as Kutuzova also believes in a strict no romance-policy until the war is over. Of course, it is Tucha and Kutuzova who find each other in the end to form a new alliance, as Tucha suggests. Instead, Bulochkin falls in love with the enthusiastic correspondent from the newspaper *Pionerskaia Pravda* (aimed at a younger readership), Valia Petrova (Alla Parfaniak). As the daughter of a major general of the air force, she has an impressive knowledge of airplanes, and is very critical of the effectiveness of the U-2. In the end a German bunker is destroyed by the U-2, and after the mandatory confusions and misunderstandings, Valia and Bulochkin become a couple.

The film's main aim seems to be to entertain; it is light-hearted and the story is predictable and easy to follow. There is never much doubt that the sworn bachelors will in fact end up falling in love. However, it is entertaining to watch how it all unfolds with witty jokes, catchy tunes and a dancing performance in between thrilling mission in the U-2. The U-2 plays a central role in the film, as the male pilots and the journalist Valia see it as inferior: it is slow and cannot reach high altitudes.³⁴ Yet the moral of the story is that the U-2 is a decent airplane, as is its crew, Bulochkin and Kutuzova, who in the end manage to destroy the German bunker and its powerful anti-air guns. The film

³³ Потому что мы пилоты / небо наш родимый дом/ первым делом самолеты/ ну а девушки потом (Fatianov and Solov'ev-Sedoi 1945).

³⁴ It was built of wood, and would catch fire easily. Due to its limited mobility and fragile construction it was relatively easy prey for the enemy. Before the war it was an aircraft used for training purposes, but during the war it was equipped in particular to carry out night bombings, because its engines did not make much noise and were hard to detect.

magazine *Iskusstvo kino* chose to publish a highly critical review of *Heavenly Slug* written by R. Iurenev (1946). His main critique of the film is its lack of authenticity when dealing with war and pilots, not to mention the mockery of the U-2: “[...] at different frontlines they had different jokes, but everywhere the small and heroic airplane [the U-2] was loved and respected”³⁵ (Iurenev 1946: 20). There can hardly be any denial of the film’s lack of authenticity, with its parodic light-hearted take on the dreadful war that had only just ended, its wounds still feeling fresh. Yet the film remains a point of reference, with its tunes still being heard and sung.

The verticality in the film is primarily linked to airplanes and flying employing all four notions of verticality (strict, diagonal, horizontal and allegorical, described in 1.3.6), as there are several sequences with airplanes in the frame, whilst flying, or emphasising flying and pilots (e.g. the sequence at the sanatorium where Tucha and Kaiserov visit Bulochkin and sing their signature song about flying, as well as talk about how Bulochkin will be back in the air soon). There are a handful of shots made from the ground upwards, where the U-2 flies over its targets (in fact, the same footage is used a few times in different sequences). With the flying comes the verticality of bombing, of flares that fall to the ground, and of the anti-aircraft guns. Notions of strict, diagonal and allegorical verticality are also found in parts of the film that are less directly connected to airplanes and flying. The Germans are using a bunker, underground, where the ceiling is low, and they are shown climbing stairs to get out, which further enhances the feeling of (a lack of) height, and that the Germans are underground, i.e. evil, stygian creatures. There are sequences with staircases, most notably in the house where all the female soldiers live together. At the beginning of a celebration of a successful mission three women come walking down the stairs with trays of pancakes in their hands. At the sanatorium Kaiserov and Tucha try to convince a nurse that Bulochkin is an eagle, and therefore needs no medicine. When Tucha realises that he is falling in love with Kutuzova, he makes a movement downwards, almost falling, as he stands tall, and then slides down into a chair. The falling movement is particularly associated with Major

³⁵ ”[...] на разных фронтах шутили по-разному, но всюду любили и уважали маленькие героические самолеты.”

Bulochkin: as has already been mentioned, he starts out by falling from an incredible height and surviving it. Then, as he walks with Valia, they are balancing on planks across a brook and both struggle with their balance, but Bulochkin is the one who has to step down into the water. A few moments later, as Valia and Bulochkin are sitting on a bench together, talking, Valia gets up and the bench becomes too heavy on Bulochkin's side, loses its equilibrium and he falls to the ground. Lastly, as he is flying Valia home, Bulochkin is forced to make an emergency landing because of a pursuing German airplane. It is during their night in the woods, while trapped on the enemy territory, that Bulochkin develops strong feelings for Valia. The downward movement seems significant for Bulochkin. He is an excellent pilot, yet it is when he is forced to the ground that he develops his character in that his prejudice towards women is confronted, and he has to change his opinions about women and romance. That Bulochkin finds love when being closer to the ground confirms what the three bachelors sing in their song about them being in the sky, where no wives are to be found.³⁶

The airspace in *Heavenly Slug* is very much a gendered space, as the three men, from the outset, establish the sky as a place with no wives (quite possibly implying “no women” in general). This is, however, contested by the women's division fronted by Kutuzova. Yet women seem to be restricted to the lower altitudes, as they can only fly the U-2, so men are still above them physically. Aside from this, the sky is a place of warfare, showing off skills, cooperation and heroism. The warfare includes bombing, shooting and chasing, yet this is not portrayed as particularly stressful (Bulochkin



Illustration 2 With the Heavenly Slug in the background, in clean uniforms and with smiles on their faces Bulochkin and his 'angels' discuss strategy. Screenshot Heavenly Slug (1945).

³⁶ “Yet in heaven you find no wife” (А на небе жены не найдешь!) (Fatianov and Solov'ev-Sedoi 1945)

and Kutuzova even sing a ballad in a duet as they bomb a target on their first mission together) and no one loses their calm or ability to crack a joke over this.

The pilot is a heroic figure, skilled, daring, quick-thinking and with a sense of humour. These traits are shared equally by Bulochkin, Kaisarov, Tucha, Svetlova and Kutuzova (Kutuzova is not actually a pilot but a navigator, yet she is included in this section as part of the flight crew). A German pilot, whose face and character are shown to the viewer, is from a different category than the good Soviet pilots, as he is old, hunched, with a grimace on his face, and even an evil smile, as he watches Bulochkin being forced to the ground. In other words, he is an archetypical villain. The sky does not reject him, but he meets his end in the underground bunker. Interestingly, Bulochkin, immediately before he is introduced to the women's division, comments that air force personnel who neither drink nor smoke are not pilots but angels. This establishes angels to be purer than the regular pilot with his sinful habits of smoking and drinking, and labels non-smoking and non-drinking flying women to be angels rather than pilots. As angelic creatures, women are superior beings, even if they cannot fly any higher than men. When it comes to actual scenes of flying, however, the pilots depicted are all men. Kutuzova is just a navigator – she has to explain to Bulochkin, and therefore the audience, that she had three years of experience and is fully qualified to navigate the airplane. To sum up, men are pilots and fly airplanes, while women are angels who are never shown to be flying an airplane (although we are told they can do it).

2.1.3 *Wings* (1966)

The film *Wings* tells the story of a war veteran and her life in 1960's Soviet society.³⁷ Therefore, memories are not mediated directly through the film, but instead a story about how memories affect contemporary society is presented. Larisa Shepit'ko (1938–1979) had already directed one full-length feature film, *Heat* (*Znoi*, 1963), as part of her graduation from the Moscow Institute for Cinematography, but it was *Wings* that really established her as a film director. In *Wings*, Shepit'ko showed depth and maturity,

³⁷ The analyses and discussion of *Wings* has in part been published in the article “And Up She Went – the Moral Vertical in *Wings*” (Høgetveit 2017).

remarkable for someone who was only 28, and this added to the film's success. *Wings* gave her an important position as a film director in the 1960's and 1970's Soviet Union. The story of the film is about a school principal, city council member and war veteran, Nadezhda Stepanovna Petrukhina (played by Maiia Bulgakova). She struggles to find her place both professionally and socially, instead returning to the daydream of flying among the clouds. During the course of the film she is shown in dialogue with co-workers, students, acquaintances, fellow veterans, a romantic interest and her adopted daughter (Zhanna Bolotova) – all in a contemporary setting. But she is also shown together with the love of her life in two flashbacks that take place during the Second World War. The film is not so much driven by action: in the beginning, Nadezhda Stepanovna is not given an obvious challenge to which she needs to find some sort of solution. Instead, this is a story driven by characters, or rather one character – Nadezhda Stepanovna herself. It shows a series of events from Nadezhda Stepanovna's life, representing her ordinary existence, filled with the everyday challenges to which Nadezhda Stepanovna is already accustomed. Still, these events build up to a dramatic climax when Nadezhda Stepanovna needs to make a decision whether to adapt to the standards of contemporary society or to continue living the way she believes to be the best and truest to herself. In a long and intense sequence Nadezhda Stepanovna ends up hijacking a small airplane (she is the only person in it), and taking off into the mist. The very last scenes in the film are shot from a pilot's perspective, tumbling in the sky, before the screen is whited out and the text "The End" ("Konets") appears.

Images of verticality here are primarily connected to flying with the use of diagonal and horizontal notions of verticality: in the daydream sequences (here allegorical verticality is also implied); in the flashbacks from an air raid, with anti-aircraft guns and crashing airplanes; at the beach with the airplane soaring above, inspiring Nadezhda Stepanovna to



Illustration 3 Nadezhda Stepanovna caresses the airplane's wing, before she returns to the skies. Screenshot Wings (1966)

visit the airfield; at the airfield, with many airplanes and the sound of airplane engines; and, of course, in the denouement. Thus flying and the airspace are connected to several important concepts, such as memory, trauma, love, liberation, identity, self-expression and dreams. Verticality is also evident in scenes with staircases, e.g. when Nadezhda Stepanovna ignores a girl who is sitting and crying under a staircase; in several shots of high-rise buildings, and of the interior in the flats that presumably are inside these buildings; of streets going uphill or downhill; and of the rain falling.

Even if throughout most of the film Nadezhda Stepanovna is depicted as a woman capable of smiling and laughing, it is evident that the place she is longing for is the air, and the cockpit of an airplane. Twice in the film Nadezhda Stepanovna is shown daydreaming: she is looking up at the sky – and then we see scenes of flying. These seem to be moments of daydreaming, rather than recollections of the past, as there is no real story or context around – it is simply flying from a pilot’s perspective. There is a third sequence that is similar to the first two, but this is more clearly an act of reminiscence. Here we see how her beloved Mitia is shot down during an air raid in which they both participate. The camera focuses either on the faces of the pilots or outside, looking at the two airplanes. The finale, where Nadezhda Stepanovna has taken off, is closer to the first two daydreaming sequences in perspective, and this leads me to think that the thematic context should also be linked more closely to daydreaming than to traumatic memories. Of course, these two types of mind casting are not completely separate from each other, as daydreaming also contains nostalgia and parts of the trauma, but I still claim that *Wings*’ ending has more in common with daydreams and escapes from everyday existence than with a desire to reunite with Nadezhda Stepanovna’s true love in death. Some support for this reading can be found in Denise J. Youngblood’s observation: “Regardless of her intentions, she [Nadezhda Stepanovna] is beaming with happiness as she ascends into the clouds (heavens)” (Youngblood 2007: 180). Yet the most common interpretation is that the finale implies a suicide, linking it to the trauma of war and the death of Nadezhda Stepanovna’s beloved, rather than the daydream of self-realisation: “Shepit’ko chose to leave it to the audience to decide whether she [Nadezhda Stepanovna] would kill herself [...] The film narrative, however, leaves little doubt concerning the end of Petrukhina’s cinematic ‘road to life’” (Kiziria 1990: 143).

A similar thought is even stronger formulated by Tatiana Mikhailova and Mark Lipovetsky:

Shepit'ko clearly implies the suicide of the former 'warrior' woman unable to find her place in 'normal' Soviet culture, for her identity has been formed by the discourses and practices of extraordinary mobilization. Unwilling to break herself to fulfil the constrictive gender demands of peacetime, Petrukhina simply leaves for the only freedom she knows – one secured by her wartime connection to death. (2012: 102)

However, the air is not a space exclusively linked to trauma, nostalgia, war and death for Nadezhda Stepanovna. The only time we see combat action is when Mitia is shot down, and this is obviously highly dramatic and traumatic. Yet her daydreams are also filled with seemingly harmonic escapes into the clouds, leaving Nadezhda Stepanovna with a smile on her face when she returns from the daydream. Thus the airspace also seems to be filled with liberation from society's double standards towards women, and with the opportunity for self-expression, showing strength and competence. The airplane allows Nadezhda Stepanovna, who is already established as someone having a moral upper hand, e.g. in the sequences with her daughter, to position herself physically above the rest of society. Therefore, the film's end, when we see her taking off but not landing (or crashing), lets her forever stay above the rest, not only metaphorically, but also physically. This is a powerful way of emphasising Nadezhda Stepanovna's position in relation to the people and society around her. This is an interpretation the director herself also presented in an interview with a Bavarian TV channel a decade after *Wings* came out:

The question is not what happens after the flight, but rather how hard it is for a middle-aged person to change one's life, or even to get a new perspective on one's life. [...] Yet Petrukhina is a strong, intelligent and brave person, so in the end she is able to return to herself. [...] with the flight [in the ending sequence] she returned to the sky/heaven [*nebo*], where she belonged with her talents.³⁸ (Shepit'ko in Khrenova, et al. 1999: 27:30)

Initially Nadezhda Stepanovna may seem to have little choice in the society that so forcefully constricts and limits her both professionally (she is not allowed to pursue a military career) and socially (through social norms and codes, limiting her freedom of movement and expression, such as her skirt inhibiting her when climbing the airplane,

³⁸ The interview with the Bavarian TV channel was shown as part of a Russian TV production about Larisa Shepit'ko in 1999, therefore it is the 1999 programme that is credited here.

and when she is being refused entry at a restaurant without a male companion), leading to a tragic ending. But it is also possible to think that she chooses a different ending. That she is not a victim in the sense that society dooms her, but that she breaks out and establishes herself above the strict confines of what it means to be a woman and a war veteran. Throughout the last scene, there are many close-ups of Nadezhda Stepanovna's facial expressions as they change from nostalgic to insecure, determined, bold, nostalgic again, happy, sad, melancholic, rebellious and victorious – quite an emotional rollercoaster! She does not seem like a defeated woman as she fires up the engine and takes off in an unfamiliar aircraft and in what has to be difficult flying conditions, keeping in mind the fog on the airfield.

Nadezhda Stepanovna's identity is that of a pilot. She sees it as her duty to serve her country, to work as a school principal and to be a member of the city's Soviet Council. Yet she daydreams about flying, sings songs about flying, and visits the airstrip to talk about flying and airplanes. It also becomes obvious by the way she relates to her other functions, at work and personally: she does not seem to fully understand how to be a lover, a mother, a school principal or even a citizen in the way that society expects her to be. Instead she ends up in unpleasant confrontations, with her daughter, Pasha the museum director, and the students.

Parts of the symbolism of the sky, Nadezhda Stepanovna's character, and the story in *Wings*, seem to bear clear spiritual connotations. Shepit'ko uses spiritual or, more precisely, Christian metaphors in other works too, most famously in *The Ascent* (*Voskhozhdenie*, 1976), where the story of a Second World War partisan mirrors the passions of Christ. Many critics, and initially censors too, deemed *The Ascent* to be too spiritual. A spiritual symbol in *Wings* is Nadezhda's name, as 'nadezhda' in Russian means 'hope'. This is not an uncommon name in Russia, and therefore is a symbol that to a Russian viewer might not seem as obvious as when it is pointed out to a non-Russian speaker. Even more importantly, Nadezhda Stepanovna in *Wings* can be seen as a modern-day saint or divine creature that ultimately finds herself where she truly belongs, i.e. in the sky or heaven.

If Nadezhda Stepanovna can be seen as a saint-like or even angelic creature, does she personify a moral standard and authority, and if so, how and to whom is she morally superior? It is clear that viewers are supposed to sympathise with Nadezhda Stepanovna: she is shown as a humorous woman who cares for people around her but is a little clumsy in certain situations. Her clumsiness manifests itself in such a way that she ends up acting in an authoritarian manner, pushing people away. Through her, and her encounters with people around her, Soviet society is portrayed as rather unwelcoming of people like her, i.e. female war veterans, who are not trying to hide their past (even though they are representatives of a more progressive, yet outmoded, equality policy). Rather, society is shown as having double standards and being hypocritical: Nadezhda Stepanovna's portrait hangs in the museum together with those of other war heroes, but she cannot eat dinner without a male companion in a restaurant after 6 pm on Sundays. And of course there is the scene when Nadezhda Stepanovna explains to her daughter how people of her generation feel the responsibility to serve their country, implicitly saying that her daughter's generation does not share this code of ethics but is instead somewhat selfish. On the whole, Nadezhda Stepanovna is shown as a woman who is true to herself, acts selflessly and has integrity. She is a role model, which also includes a moral aspect. Her superiority seems to be in relation to society as a whole, presented through other characters, such as her daughter, the school children, and the man refusing her entry to the restaurant.

2.1.4 *Only Old Men Go to Battle* (1973)

The story and events in *Only Old Men* centres on a squadron of male Second World War fighter pilots in summertime, and was directed and co-written by Leonid Bykov, who even played the main role. The specific dates of the events in the film are not made explicit, but when taking into consideration the advance of the Red Army on the Eastern Front into Soviet Ukraine – the Soviet reconquest of Ukrainian territory from Nazi Germany is mentioned overtly – it makes sense to establish the action as unfolding in 1943. Rather than the actual war, *Only Old Men* focuses on the brotherhood and harmonious coexistence among the different ethnic groups comprising the Soviet Union, seasoned with the trauma of the Second World War. This is not an uncommon focus for

war films, perhaps even the norm and a reason why this genre is so popular among film audiences.

The film tells us how, supervised by the caring and charming father figure and role model Captain Aleksei Titarenko (Bykov), “young men” (inexperienced fighter pilots) are introduced to the realities of war, and mature into “old men” (experienced fighter pilots) – if they survive long enough. The plot is not very clear. The pilots do not have to carry out a specific mission, but there is a certain progress in three of the characters’ stories. There is the story of a fresh recruit, Lieutenant “Grasshopper” Aleksandrov (Sergei Ivanov), who has to prove his worth. He starts out quite arrogantly as he has received excellent results from his military school, and the captain decides to make him work hard to gain recognition: the rookie needs to understand that they are there as part of a team, not as individuals. In the end Aleksandrov gets to use his impressive flying skills to save the day. Then there is the story of a shy and romantic Uzbek lieutenant, known as “Romeo” (Rustam Sagdullaev). He meets the pilot Masha (Evgeniia Simyonova), from Moscow, and theirs is the story of young love. In the end they both die, with Romeo living up to the sad fate suggested by his nickname. The third character is a Ukrainian pilot, Lieutenant Sergei Skvortsov (Vladimir Talashko), who suddenly cannot deal with the raids and combat situations. He begs the captain to send him away but the captain refuses. In the end Skvortsov overcomes his fear and dies a heroic death in the heat of combat. In addition to these stories, the film portrays the captain and includes shorter stories about other characters. Ultimately they serve to show a highly sterilised picture of soldiers, the war, and ultimately Soviet society in microcosm. The war, where boys become men, is astoundingly clean, in pleasant and warm summer weather and almost without enemies – even though heroic deaths do occur every now and then.

The clichéd and predictable story of *Only Old Men* was rightly criticised in *Sovetskii ekran*, but the reviewer Runin (1974) also added: “L. Bykov cunningly lingers on the short, rapid shifts between the state of peace and the state of war in the human soul.”³⁹

³⁹ «Л. Быков смело протягивает короткие, быстрые связи между состоянием мира и состоянием войны в душе человека.»

Runin gives Bykov the credit for saving the film, and adds how scenes of seemingly carefree everyday behaviour correspond to what he experienced as a reporter visiting an airfield during the war. In the two-page review in *Soviet Film* the focus was on the patriotic and heroic wartime film, free from any critical remarks (Kosnichuk 1974). This suggests that glossy yet emotional representations of the war by the 1970s were welcomed even by the critics— somewhat in contrast to the critical reception of *Heavenly Slug* three decades earlier.

An uncommon trait of this film, though, is how the softer sides of these male soldiers play a large role: the squadron is famous for being the “singing squadron”. In addition to pilot qualifications, to become a member of the squadron one has to be able to play an instrument and to sing. Singing and playing is pilots’ temporary respite and refuge from the war, and it of course contributes to the fraternisation among them. The songs and music played are romantic and patriotic. With the benefit of hindsight, it is hard not to see, and therefore not to mention, how these softer sides and the relationship between the men in the film at times borders on the homoerotic. One pilot is given a feminine nickname, “Smuglianka” (Sergei Podgorny); a mechanic tells a newly arrived pilot, whom he is supposed to team up with: “You are my fifth”; another mechanic kisses a pilot on the lips for shooting down a German airplane; and the squadron’s captain, who went into the air at extremely short notice, after an emergency alarm, is said to have scared the Germans away by the sight of his underwear. This feminisation obviously softens the film, and to a large extent shows the men as emotional characters. This can in turn be seen as a way of building characters better suited for communicating the emotional experiences of war (normally, this function in Soviet and post-Soviet films about the Second World War seems to be fulfilled by female soldiers (see Høgetveit 2016). The popularity *Only Old Men* has enjoyed since the 1970s up until today is possibly due not only to its light-heartedness and almost harmonious presentation of a microcosm of Soviet society , but also to how the male characters are feminised by providing them with gestures, such as kissing, and emotional complexity (in both *Romeo and Titarenko*) to give a wide audience characters to relate to and to feel sympathy with, as well as creating a film where this audience can utilise a broad

emotional spectrum (although the spirits are high through the film, the deaths of Romeo, Skvortsov, Masha and Zoia (Ol'ga Mateshko) are presented as tragic).

There is a great deal of imagery and plot detail containing strict, diagonal and horizontal notions of verticality: of airplanes, combat scenes with shooting, signal flares, anti-aircraft guns, as well as the allegorical vertical notion of the hierarchical structures of the military. Moreover, vertical notions are found, for instance in a scene where a pilot is climbing up a ladder to perform a practical joke on a fellow soldier in the shower; a low-angle shot depicting a group of local children taken up a hill and over a ridge by a pilot (to the canteen to be fed); towards the end of the film, after Romeo's death, it starts to rain, and this sequence is shot in a birch forest, the picture of raindrops and trees enhancing the vertical dimension; when the commander learns the Romeo has died he looks up at the sky; and at the end, by the obelisk-shaped tomb of Masha and her colleague Zoia, the commander and a mechanic kneel down, becoming shorter than the tomb, and also look up at the sky. As in *Night Witches* (which will be discussed in the following section), the sky is a place for proving one's worth as a member of the flying collective, but the collective here does not only represent the Soviet society. Rather, the collective here is made up of the brightest, most talented, prettiest young men – and some women – with the highest moral valour. Although the spiritual connotations in this film are far fewer and less explicit than, in particular, *Night Witches* and *Wings*, it can still be found in how the soldiers react to the news of fallen fellow soldiers: by looking up at the sky. I interpret this gesture as

a way of suggesting a belief (somewhat unexpected of Soviet atheists but nonetheless patently obvious), if not in God then at least in a spiritual idea that the dead souls of good people, especially those in aviation, rise up to heaven, or the sky being somehow linked to peaceful contemplation and remembrance. Captain Titarenko and the mechanic



Illustration 4 Masha stretches her arms out after the flight, resembling Christ on the cross. Screenshot Only Old Men Go to Battle (1973)

look up at the sky next to the tomb of Masha and Zoia, not at the ground where their bodies lie. The sky is then also closely linked to death, both through the gestures of remembrance, but also as all the characters who die during the film (Smuglianka, Skvortsov, Romeo, Masha and Zoia) are pilots and are killed while flying.

The pilots in *Only Old Men* are representatives of the great, if not to say superior, Soviet Union. They are diverse in ethnicity and gender, yet unified by youth, beauty, art, skills and virtues, such as brotherhood, empathy, compassion, bravery, selflessness and loyalty. “A war-time film, it shows the stark realities, death and hardship that it [the war] brings in its wake. Yet none of these seems to tell on the souls of these people who remain as pure and noble, and as receptive to beauty and love as ever” (Kosnichuk 1974). In this quote Emilia Kosnichuk perhaps points to another virtue: the absence of hate and bloodthirst. Even when the enemies shoot down their comrades, the survivors do not talk of vengeance. There is shame in Skvortsov, as he is embarrassed because of his condition, yet this is overcome by his self-sacrifice. His shame and fear is, in other words, not connected to the horrors of killing an enemy (the enemy is practically non-existent for Skvortsov), it is connected to his own fear of death. Captain Titarenko helps him overcome this fear by explaining how Skvortsov belongs in the air, not on the ground. This is again confirming that the pilots’ natural habitat is the airspace, where they always must return, even when this means it is the last thing they will do in their lives.

2.1.5 *There Are “Night Witches” in the Sky* (1981)

The action in the feature film *Night Witches* is set during the war, in a few summer months in 1943. This is not explicitly explained in the film, but it is mentioned that its characters have been fighting over a year. The film is based on the true story of the all-female 588th Night Bomber Regiment, whose formation took place in late autumn 1941, and first combat action in spring 1942. In one film sequence, the regiment is honoured with the Guards’ title, which the actual regiment also received (cf. the 46th “Taman” Guards Night Bomber Aviation Regiment). The director of the film, Evgeniia Zhigulenko (1920–1994) was herself a member of the regiment, serving as a wing

commander.⁴⁰ After the war Zhigulenko continued to serve in the Red Army as a pilot in the Russian Far East. In 1955 she retired from the army, holding the rank of major. Only in 1976, at the age of 56, did she enrol at the prestigious Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (Vserossiiskii gosudarstvennyi institut kinematografii, VGIK) to become a film director. In addition to *Night Witches*, she completed one more feature film as a director, *No Right to Fail* (Bez prava na proval, 1984), which is also a Second World War film.

Night Witches centres on the air flight crew of Galia (Iana Druz) and Oksana (Valentina Grushina), and how a young boy who is adopted by the regiment puts their relationship to the test. The regiment's Captain Evdokiia Boguslavskaia (Valeriia Zaklonnaia) and Commissar Maria Ivanovna (Nina Men'shikova) are also important characters in the story. Galia is presented as a witty, independent and at times reckless person. With her impressive flying skills and high self-esteem, she fits into the stereotype of a military pilot.⁴¹ Perhaps just as importantly, the reckless pilot is reminiscent of the Soviet pilot hero Valery Pavlovich Chkalov (1904–38) (O'Mahony 2017: 38-39). She not only acts upon orders from her superiors but also her own judgement. She can even break rules if she believes they are wrong, and accepts her punishment with a certain pride. Oksana, on the other hand, is presented as more cautious in her actions. She firmly believes in the virtue of following orders and regulations, and is very sensitive to the feelings of people around her. In many ways she mirrors Galia. When on air raids, the two make a good team, but their personalities collide when the well-being of the young boy Fedor (Dimitrii Zamulin), a war orphan, becomes an issue. While Oksana thinks that Fedor should be spared the gruesomeness of the war, and in the end supports the decision to send him to an orphanage, Galia sees no problem in teaching the clearly curious Fedor about pistols, airplanes and military drills. Fedor favours the cool Galia, and this hits Oksana very hard. Towards the end Galia and Oksana's airplane is shot down and Oksana dies tragically. But the war goes on and Galia continues flying. In the end, Galia

⁴⁰ командир звена.

⁴¹ The stereotype of the military pilot is presented not only in (post-) Soviet cinema, but in Hollywood films, too, such as *Top Gun* (Tony Scott 1986) and *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich 1996).

takes off after an intimate conversation with Fedor, and goes missing. It seems as if people on the ground expect the worse, but in the last sequence Galia is shown flying, looking down at the beautiful landscape with a serene smile on her lips.

In a notice in *Soviet Film* the director herself has put into words what she sees as the main message of *Night Witches*: “to show the high moral qualities of the Soviet man, his patriotism, comradeship and friendship. Everyone wants to be happy” (Zhigulenko 1980). Interestingly, Zhigulenko writes about “the Soviet man”, when her film is mainly about *women*. In this piece, Zhigulenko also reveals the main story of Oksana, Fedor and Galia. She describes not only how Oksana dies but also that Galia dies in battle and does not live to experience the peace. This is a somewhat curious choice, as in the film Oksana’s death is shown in a brutal way, involving neither symbolism nor metaphors. Yet the last shot of Galia shows her in flight, seemingly happy. Either the ending is meant to be symbolic, possibly a supernatural after-death moment, or it could be that the ending was changed after the notice had been written (it was published before the film’s release). The more ambiguous ending, regarding Galia’s fate, might have been more acceptable to the authorities because it appears less tragic and violent.

Although *Night Witches* clearly exploits real-life events⁴², all the characters’ names are fictional. This way the fictional aspect of the events presented in the film is underscored. Characters may seem to operate within the same frames as actual historical persons, but they are not actually them. The accuracy of the film is apparently limited to the timeline of the war, the geographical location of the events, and the costumes. As the characters are fictional, and as I have found no source that claims the story to be true, I must assume that the story is pure fiction. It is of course possible that certain sequences could be based on actual events but all in all I do not find this very likely as it seems that the director and filmmakers tried to tell an authentic story, not an accurate one. In the end, the story does not really feel authentic enough, partly owing to a simplistic plot and unconvincing

⁴² According to a notice about the making of the film in *Sovetskii ekran*, Evgeniia Zhigulenko herself found an orphan that she brought back to the airbase. He returned to his native village after it was liberated. Zhigulenko unsuccessfully tried to find him after the war (Mumdzhan 1980).

acting. But this is not my main concern, as the pronounced presence of verticality makes the film a very interesting case for this thesis.

As is to be expected from a film about an air force regiment, there are quite a few shots of airplanes and flying, and it follows that a great deal of strict, diagonal and horizontal vertical imagery can be connected to this. Yet flying is not only shown in combat situations. First, Galia has to fly to get back to the regiment from a hospital; Oksana and Galia are shown having frank conversations while flying; pilots help



Illustration 5 Galia and Oksana bonding while flying. Screenshot There Are "Night Witches" in the Sky (1981)

soldiers and civilians, dropping supplies from the sky and making an unscheduled landing to save lives; and in the final sequence Galia is seen in flight, beaming with happiness. Also connected to flying and combat scenes is the notion of verticality expressed by means of searchlights against a night sky; signal flares; the pilots discarding their parachutes to carry more bombs (which leads to Oksana's death); the regiment struggling in the mud to get their airplanes to take off; and the sleeping bodies of soldiers filmed from above as a comrade comes to wake them up during a raid.

As this is a war film about the military, the hierarchical military structure with its ranks and chains of command in itself also represents the allegorical notion of verticality. This is explicitly thematised through characters of different ranks, and how they relate to different situations. The captain and the commissar have to make tactical decisions based on an overall assessment of the situation, while it is tolerated that the lower ranks do not always see the bigger picture and therefore react to events more emotionally. An example of this is the decision to send Fedor away from the regiment to an orphanage. This is done to protect him (and to elicit additional emotions from the viewer), but also to stop the conflict among the women (especially Oksana and Galia), yet this decision is highly unpopular among the lower ranks.

Throughout the film, and even in the title, women are directly connected to the airspace in a spiritual way and the higher planes are a space that can also accommodate femininity. The nickname “Nachthexen” (night witches), given to Soviet female war pilots by the Germans, was not meant as a compliment, but the Soviet soldiers and society saw this as an honorary title and used it themselves, in Russian translation: “nochnye ved'my”. Witches may often be depicted as evil, but they are certainly strong, empowered and possibly dangerous. If an enemy calls you a witch, it might be something to be proud about. This is only one of a few examples of the Moral Vertical in the film, presenting metaphors drawing on the sky as a spiritually superior space, and specifically connecting women to this space. In the title song with lyrics written by Evgenii Evtushenko, the connection is clear: “Those who die in the sky for the Motherland, form the sky above the Motherland [...] You think the stars are watching you, but it is us who watch over you from on high”.⁴³ There is also an interesting sequence when Galia is showing her drawing book to Fedor. The drawing receiving extra attention is a self-portrait of Galia as a magician or a fairy with a telescope, standing on a cloud among stars. Moreover, at one point the pilots find what looks like an abandoned mansion, go upstairs and gather in a luxurious room where they drape themselves in delicate white fabrics, at the end of the sequence descending down the stairs. This highlights their femininity, first and foremost, but also places this femininity on a higher plane, as the movement up and then down the stairs makes explicit.

The airspace in *Night Witches* is a complex space. It brings life and joy, as Galia in particular is shown to cherish flying, and as the soldiers drop supplies from the airplane down to soldiers on the ground. The airspace is also liberating and a place for cooperation as the regiment participate in a war where the goal is to liberate the Soviet Union from the Nazi German invaders; for Galia, when she runs away from the hospital at the beginning of the film; and as Galia and Oksana are able to carry through their missions despite their earthly conflicts. However, the airspace is also filled with the terrors of war and death, as it is here their role as an air force regiment is realised, and

⁴³ Погибшие в небе за Родину / Становятся небом над ней. [...] Вам кажется, что с неба смотрят звёзды, / А это мы с небес глядим на вас (Evtushenko)

death is never far away. The airspace demands the skills, bravery and creativity of those who wish to experience its liberating and joyful sides, and yet it is merciless.

The pilots in *Night Witches* have to live up to the demands of the airspace, like Galia, or else they die, like Oksana. It is possible to imagine that they both die in accordance with how Zhigulenko herself presented the story in *Soviet Film*. It is still significant, then, how Oksana is shown dying in a collision with the ground, while Galia is not explicitly shown in her moment of death, but as continuing to fly over a beautiful landscape. However, both Galia, Oksana, and the rest of the female regiment are shown to be extremely positive, hardworking and idealistic in that they never seem to doubt or question the meaning of what they are doing. On the contrary, they seem to find meaning in their war effort, as they carry out their missions with pride. They have warmth and love for each other, a sort of sisterhood, and also for the young Fedor, as a sort of motherhood. Their air raids physically exhaust them. However, in contrast, their psychological exhaustion is connected not to killing enemies but rather to the death of their sisters in arms (cf. the sequence when Oksana dies and Galia has a very strong emotional reaction). As courageous, professional soldiers, emphatic liberators and as defenders of everything that is good, they are morally superior. They are seen as powerful women, whose anger should only be provoked at one's peril. Yet it is possible that 'witches' is not the most suitable nickname for these women, as will be discussed towards the end of the chapter in section 2.6.

2.1.6 "A generation not of this universe"

In the introduction to her book *Soviet Women in Combat*, the historian Anna Krylova included a quote by the former pilot Major Irina Rakobol'skaia: "We were a generation not of this universe" (Krylova 2010a: 12). This is how Rakobol'skaia chose to sum up and explain her generation of young, educated women ready to take up arms in defence of their Motherland, who ended up alienated from not only their mothers, but also their daughters. This generation was the result of the ambiguous policy towards women and their gender identity in the 1920s and 1930s. Through an analysis of the discussion concerning abortion in *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* in the 1930s, Anna Krylova concludes: "the young woman no longer subjected her life to her innate maternal urges but expected her maternal obligations to adjust to her life beyond motherhood" (2010a: 74). Krylova

also suggests that this generation of young women saw themselves as more equal and independent than the government had intended them to be (2010a: 15). However, the images of women and femininity in connection with the war that proliferated in official culture were that of a woman waiting at home, motivating male soldiers to do their duty, as well as depictions of the violated Motherland, personified by a woman.⁴⁴ Both these images illustrate how war was perceived as a threat to femininity (at least to femininity in a stereotypical sense). Still, the impression left by the works of Krylova (2010a and 2010b) and Markwick and Charon Cardona (2012), is not that the female soldiers themselves necessarily experienced a conflict between their gender identity and their soldier identity. Similarly, Galia in *Pilots* and the female soldiers in *Heavenly Slug* do not seem troubled by any such conflict of identities. This is not to say that the female soldiers did not meet any difficulties or challenges on the basis of their gender during the war. Such problems came both from fellow male soldiers and superiors in the military system (see Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 102, 132, 147, 154, 164, 172, 218, 221), from the system (e.g. there were initially no military equipment, such as uniforms, made for women, for more see Markwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 100-101), and from the enemy (e.g. Nazi Germany did not recognise female soldiers as soldiers in the legal sense of the word, and their orders were to kill any fighting women, see von Reichenau 1941 and Marwick and Charon Cardona 2012: 153-154).

It appears that the identity conflict between femininity and soldiership was a post-war rather than a war-time phenomenon. As mentioned in 2.1, there was a backlash in gender equality in the USSR after the war, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Effectively, female soldiers' unique war effort was either not discussed or feminised.⁴⁵ This development can be seen in *Wings* and Nadezhda Stepanovna's struggle for acceptance

⁴⁴ The highly popular song *Katiusha* is an example of the image of the waiting woman, and there is a myriad of posters showing women on the home front, and as representation of the violated Motherland (see *Plakaty Velikoi otechestvennoi voiny 1941-1945 godov; Katiusha*).

⁴⁵ Krylova (2010a: 81-85) provides an example of the story of a female medical orderly, Valeriia Gnarovskaia, who was gradually gendered and feminised in the media between 1950 and 1970. The Nobel prize winner Svetlana Aleksievich's interviews with Soviet female veterans in the late 1970s and early 1980s, published in *The Unwomanly Face of War* (U voiny ne zhenskoe litso, Aleksievich 2008), including the author's questionably essentialising view of gender, serve as yet another testament to this development.

and recognition. The female soldiers in *Only Old Men* are never shown in combat and play only small parts. Still, they are there. Their function in the film appears primarily to show the diversity of the Red Army, and to facilitate a love story – the story of the female soldiers *per se* is not told. In *Night Witches*, female soldiers during the war *are* portrayed, but this time the characters are presented with traces of conflicting identities: in particular, the conflict between motherhood and soldiership.

Curiously, Rakobol'skaia chooses the metaphor of space rather than time when she expresses the uniqueness of her generation. This suggests that women of her generation were not out of their time, but out of their space. It even connects these women to outer space, and the idea of another universe where these women fit it.

2.2 Airplane disaster films, Soviet- and post-Soviet style.

For decades there was only one airline disaster film in the Soviet/Russian context, *The Flight Crew*. *Soviet Film* quoted the review of the film in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* where the reviewer was impressed by the special effects and stated that the film could compete with Hollywood productions ("Soviet Films on the World Screens" 1980). In 2016 a remake of this legendary Soviet film appeared, with the same title.

In his contribution to the book *Russian Aviation, Space Flight and Visual Culture* (2017), Julian Graffy examines aviation and space travel in early Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet cinema, with an emphasis on the films of the 2000s. While not dealing with either *The Flight Crew* films or remakes in general, Graffy's reading of aviation in films of the 2000s concludes:

Flight imagery in films of the Soviet years was mainly associated with the achievements of the present and hopes for the future. [...] Though a preoccupation with flying will remain, cinema in the subsequent decade, by contrast associated flight imagery predominantly with the Soviet past. (Graffy 2017: 194)

As will become evident in this section, the 2016 remake of *The Flight Crew* has only a few things in common with the 1979 original, but by marketing it as a remake, the nostalgia connected to the original is played up, supporting Graffy's claim that in the RF of the new millennium, aviation and space travel are the themes evoking the past rather than present.

In this section, these two films will be analysed, and particular attention will be given to an important difference between the 1979 and 2016 versions: the romantic interest of one of the male pilots has been “upgraded” so to speak, from a stewardess (1979) to a female pilot (2016).

2.2.1 *The Flight Crew* (1979)

When *The Flight Crew* was released, it was branded the first disaster film in the Soviet Union. The film is split into two parts, where the first part is more of a soap opera, while the second is when the disaster hits and develops. The second part holds most elements of a disaster film, with all its impressive special effects that one could have wished for in the Soviet film industry at the time.

The first part presents the stories of three pilots forming the crew of the title: the seasoned old airplane captain Andrei Timchenko (Georgii Zhzhenov), with a loving wife (Ekaterina Vasil’eva), and an adolescent daughter (Galina Gladkova) who is pregnant but refuses to marry; the second pilot Valentin Nenarokov (Anatolii Vasil’ev), who has for a time sacrificed his career to be with his attention-seeking wife (Irina Akylova) and tightly controlled son (Roma Monin), flying a helicopter in rural Russia rather than glamorous (and better paid) routes abroad; and the bachelor womaniser flight engineer Igor Skvortsov (Leonid Filatov), who tries to convince his girlfriends, including the new stewardess of the flight crew Tamara (Aleksandra Iakovleva), that it is in their interest not to marry.

The focus is on how these different characters deal with their relationship issues. Timchenko needs to find a way of reconnecting with his daughter, to see that she is old enough to make decisions for herself, but also that she needs his support and advice, not judgement. Nenarokov’s wife is very unhappy and emotionally unstable, often jealous of the bond between her husband and their small son. In the end she throws her husband out of the house, divorces him, and, after a court trial where Nenarokov (rather untypically) sues her for paternal rights, gets full custody of their son (even though no one can truly believe the accusations of child abuse she throws at her ex-husband). The womaniser Igor establishes yet another temporary sexual relationship with the new stewardess in their crew, Tamara. When it becomes clear that she, despite all her

statements to the contrary, wishes to commit to their relationship, they break up. Then Igor realises that he loves Tamara. She, however, refuses to get back together with him on the grounds of their personal differences.

The second part of the film is dedicated to the disaster (a volcano erupting in the fictional foreign town of Bidri), and to the aftermath of the disaster and the miraculous escape of the flight crew with their (and their passengers') lives. The crew, including Timchenko, Nenarokov, Skvortsov and Tamara, are sent to Bidri on a rescue mission. The situation is chaotic, and it is only through skill and courage that they are able to leave the airstrip with an airplane full of scared passengers of various nationalities. The flight home is not a smooth one, as the airplane has been damaged, but in the end they manage to land. In the aftermath, a health check concludes that Timchenko is no longer fit for flying. This hits him hard, and shortly afterwards he suffers a heart attack. A while later the rest of the crew comes to visit Timchenko at a sanatorium: Nenarokov and his new wife, Skvortsov now married to Tamara (who changed her mind after being suitably impressed with his heroic behaviour during the rescue mission). As the rest of the crew crosses a bridge, Timchenko is left looking up at them leaving.

The approach of the critic G. Maslovskii in *Sovetskii ekran* is that Mitta and the crew behind the film wished to explore what makes a hero: who are the people ending up as heroes in extreme circumstances? While the critic seems to think this is an admirable goal, he is more critical of the result. Maslovskii does not seem to think the characters are believable (Maslovskii 1980). This shows that he recognises that the pilot, even in civil duty, is a hero and an ideal. That Maslovskii does not believe in the characters and their stories, might be a way of delegitimising the problematic, possibly critical, parts of the film connected to e.g. law enforcement and sexual behaviour.

Just as can be expected, there are a great deal of strict, diagonal and horizontal notions of verticality in the imagery here, connected to flying and wings. In addition to the customary scenes of flying, airports and airplanes, certain scenes where flying and wings are shown or mentioned (as examples of allegorical verticality) deserve special attention. Timchenko is asked by a friend to take his granddaughter, Tamara, under his wing as a stewardess. Nenarokov and his son Alik, in several scenes, pretend while

playing that they are flying. Alik also plays with a toy airplane on the floor outside the courtroom where his parents are fighting over his custody. Nenarokov sits in a helicopter when he is thinking back at the time he fell in love with, and proposed to, his wife. Nenarokov's helicopter picks up a cosmonaut who has just landed. Timchenko and Skvortsov are standing under the wing of an airplane when Timchenko explains that he does not wish to fly with Skvortsov any more (because Skvortsov messed up with Tamara). Other forms of verticality include high-rise buildings, especially the one where the Timchenkos live. Here the father and daughter have an important conversation about her pregnancy on the balcony overlooking the courtyard and other high-rise blocks of flats: her pregnancy is proving difficult, but finally her father encourages her to go through with it with his support – a clear moral stance, symbolically taken well above ground. In Timchenko's bedroom hang photos of their daughter, the oldest, when their daughter is still a child, above the newer ones. Timchenko is looking at them starting with the latest ones and working his way upwards to the old photos. Trees are another recurrent image of verticality, as Timchenko is shown among trees several times, sometimes with his daughter, sometimes with his wife, and, at the end, with his former colleagues. There are also scenes when the characters engage in an upward or downward movement, most notably when Nenarokov kidnaps his son, leading him up a hill; and Skvortsov asking Timchenko to help Nenarokov while they are standing in an escalator that is going up. Rain and some other natural phenomena should also be counted as vertical imagery. Needless to say, this applies to the volcano eruption and the earthquakes that follow, with flowing lava, floods, buildings falling down and huge gaps appearing in the ground. Rain is shown in two scenes, when Skvortsov proposes to Tamara and she turns him down, and after the airplane has landed and the people on it are finally safe. During the rescue flight there are also a handful of scenes worth mentioning. There is damage to the airplane, a hole, through which a large quantity of paper money is sucked up. This is commented upon with a pun about ending up in prison and landing safely.⁴⁶ Then follows a sequence when the crew has to mend the hole from

⁴⁶ “Ia siadu!” (literally: “I’ll sit”, i.e. will end up in jail for this), the bookkeeper in charge of safeguarding the money says. Her injured boss replies: “Davaite my snachala vse siadem” (literally: “Let us all sit first”, i.e. let us land safely).

the outside of the airplane whilst flying. In this sequence, Nenarokov changes outfit, looking like either a diver or a cosmonaut – both of which imply verticality. In this sequence the camera angle is also used to enhance the verticality. During the rescue one of the passengers asks the person next to him whether or not he believes in God before he starts praying (a risqué scene for a film director to include in the context of a militantly atheist society that the USSR seemingly was). When the airplane finally lands safely on the ground, one of the passengers, a woman, lies down flat on the ground, splashing water in her face, and Tamara's tears stream down her face. And when visiting Timchenko at the sanatorium, Tamara likens the rowanberries to (fallen) droplets of blood. All in all, the sanatorium is a serene, clean and peaceful place. The white winter landscape, Tamara's comment about blood, and the emotional scene where Timchenko is left behind under the bridge while his colleagues cross over it, suggest that the sanatorium is a metaphor for the Underworld. Timchenko's friends and colleagues could visit to say their last goodbyes, but Timchenko himself can no longer cross the bridge over to the realm of the living. A crucial part of this reading is exactly how Timchenko is standing below the bridge, as the realm of the dead is typically thought to be below the realm of the living.

The sky in *The Flight Crew* appears to be a place of opportunity. Tamara gets an opportunity to work as a flight attendant while waiting for her career as an actress to potentially take off. Nenarokov first gets an opportunity to meet his wife, and later to fly for a living (even though he does not get to work the glamorous international routes), and in the end to reunite with his former colleagues and fly the big airplanes again. Yet most importantly, perhaps, the sky is a liberating space, as it is through the air that the poor people at Bidri are saved. Through the rescue flight it also becomes obvious that the airspace is a place for competence and professionalism.

The role of the stewardess Tamara is significant enough to make *The Flight Crew* relevant for this chapter, and it therefore seems pertinent to spend a few more words analysing her. She is first introduced as a very intelligent and ambitious woman, and her knowledge of English makes her qualified for work as a stewardess on international flights, a job she seems to carry out very well. However, Tamara herself dreamt of working not as a stewardess but an actress, so she is a little reluctant at first. In the beginning of her relationship with Skvortsov, Tamara appears to agree with him regarding the meaninglessness of marriage, and opts for an open relationship. It turns out that she had hoped he would change, and realise he wanted to marry her,



Illustration 6 Tamara is notifying the cockpit of the damages to the airplane's cabin. Note the camera angle and composition of the frame, enhancing Tamara's height. Screenshot The Flight Crew (1979)

after all, even though Timchenko tried to warn her that many women before her had tried this strategy and failed. In the end Timchenko proves to be wrong, and Tamara right: as a result of her expressing her true needs and feelings, Skvortsov changes his mind, and with the help of the trauma created by the disaster, Tamara and Skvortsov end up marrying. It is only through staying true to herself, and expressing this to Skvortsov, that Tamara actually enables Skvortsov to get over his immature and selfish behaviour and realise that he loves Tamara and wishes to commit to her. Thus Tamara shows a moral superiority that not only has consequences for herself but also for the people around her.

As for the pilots Timchenko and Nenarokov, they can both be seen as morally superior in their respectful manner. Nenarokov seems, by contemporary standards, to be more fitting as a parent than his wife, and in the court case he is telling the truth, whilst she is lying about how Nenarokov has supposedly been beating and abusing their son. The outcome of the case, deciding against him, might suggest that he was in the wrong, and, anyway, that the mother is still the best parent of the two, and that it was the nature of their relationship that made her unfit for her parental role. So, although Nenarokov

might seem morally superior from a contemporary perspective, this might not have been necessarily the case in 1979. As for Timchenko, he starts out acting very harshly and judgementally towards his daughter, yet through conversations with her, his wife, and the child's father, he softens up towards her, making the right moral decision. It seems that while the men in *The Flight Crew* are faced with moral dilemmas, the women have to defend their professional and private choices and moral integrity.

2.2.2 *The Flight Crew* (2016)

Bearing the same title as the 1979 film, *The Flight Crew* of 2016, directed by the established blockbuster filmmaker Nikolai Lebedev, should be seen as homage to the former, rather than a remake. There are several important similarities between the two, and also some direct connections and quotes, but the characters and the story itself are different. *The Flight Crew* of 2016 is made for a contemporary audience, thus demanding a different approach to an airplane disaster film.

The lead character of the film is the young, handsome pilot Aleksei Gushchin (Danila Kozlovskii). He starts out as a military pilot but loses his job for insubordination, as he would rather help orphanage children than his corrupt bosses. With the help of his father (Sergei Shakurov), who is an airplane designer, he manages to find a job in a commercial airline, teamed with the older pilot Leonid Zinchenko (Vladimir Mashkov). Zinchenko takes pride in doing things by the book but is impressed with Gushchin's flying skills if not his personality: Gushchin continues to act following his moral judgements in meeting with authorities such as an obnoxious VIP passenger; and when he wishes to help local people, not only foreigners, in an unnamed (fictional) African country during a coup d'état.

At home Zinchenko has a loving, obedient wife (Elena Iakovleva) and an adolescent son (Sergei Romanovich) with whom he has trouble connecting. Gushchin quickly falls in love with Aleksandra Kuz'mina (Agne Grudite), who turns out to be somewhat of an anomaly for peacetime Russia as a female pilot. The two develop an unstable romantic relationship, which is at a low point when the flight crew heads for the disaster area. Gushchin and Zinchenko have not been flying in the same crew as Kuz'mina, but Zinchenko has specifically asked for Kuz'mina for this flight. The flight crew also

includes the female flight attendant Viktoriia (Vika in short, played by Ekaterina Shpitsa), who has a crush on Gushchin; and the male flight attendant Andrei (Sergei Kempo), who has a crush on Vika. When the crew heads off to the fictional volcanic island of Kanwoo in the non-fictional Aleutian archipelago⁴⁷ to help evacuate people there, the crew's skills, values and feelings are put to the test. Due to a range of unforeseen circumstances and events, the crew ends up in two airplanes, with Zinchenko and Gushchin acting as the two flight captains. Zinchenko's airplane is low on fuel, and the only option is a hazardous in-air passenger decanting from one airplane to the other. There are a handful of casualties, but in the end they manage to land the surviving airplane, saving most of the people on board. The crew lose their jobs at the airline, but instead they get to work for the much bigger competitor, Aeroflot. The final shot is of the three pilots climbing ropes in an Aeroflot training facility. Gushchin and Kuz'mina get married; Gushchin's father is proud of him; Andrei and Vika are together as a couple; and Zinchenko, his wife and son become a family of harmony and love.

The message of the film ends up being very traditional, highlighting family values and an essentialist understanding of gender. In this context it might almost be slightly curious that there is a lack of religious or spiritual connotations, as these conservative values make up an important part of Orthodox Christian values, currently promoted in the RF. One explanation for this might be that, through the character of Gushchin, the film is fostering and encouraging insubordination and defiance of rules and regulations if they undermine the common good. This kind of individualist thinking is not in line with Orthodox Christian theology. Like the original film of 1979, the 2016 remake was reviewed in *Iskusstvo kino*. Lidiia Kuz'mina notes how highly nostalgic the film is (even though the narrative has been adapted to a 2016 setting): "Partly the author lives within the limits of his memories, among heroes promoting the values of a bygone era. He builds his characters using Soviet cinema clichés"⁴⁸ (Kuz'mina 2016). This strong

⁴⁷ An archipelago of volcanic islands located in the Bering Strait between Alaska and Russia, belonging to both Russia and the USA.

⁴⁸ «Отчасти автор живет в пространстве своих воспоминаний, среди героев ушедшей эпохи, характерных для нее ценностей. Создает своих персонажей, пользуясь клише советского кино.»

connection to the Soviet legacy suggests another possible explanation for the lack of religiosity. Kuz'mina's review supports Graffy's argument about the deeply nostalgic motif of aviation in post-Soviet Russian culture.

Scenes and sequences featuring strict, diagonal and horizontal verticality centre around the usual shots of airplanes and flying, and characters are placed in lifts, on stairs and escalators even more often than in most other similar films. A sequence that also includes allegorical verticality takes place on the staircase of a high-rise building, where Gushchin's father lives, one of the so-called Seven Sisters in Moscow. This scene is repeated twice. First, when Gushchin comes to see his father to ask for help at the beginning of the film. The father walks out of the lift, while Gushchin is sitting on the stairs leading up to the lift, and has to get up to follow his father to the flat. Second, at the end of the film, the father comes out of the lift, like the first time, while Gushchin is sitting on the same step, but this time his father walks over to him and sits down next to him. Another repeated sequence using stairs and escalators involves Gushchin and Kuz'mina. Gushchin comes down an escalator in a hall, looking out of the window at Kuz'mina who is walking up the stairs to board an airplane. Gushchin is obviously flirting with Kuz'mina, and, as the scene is repeated, Kuz'mina moves up the stairs and into the cockpit. At the fourth repetition the two have had a row, Kuz'mina is standing right outside the airplane and Gushchin walks through the hall without greeting Kuz'mina. In a later sequence, they are both standing in the hall, Gushchin tries to tell her that he feels miserable without her, but she leaves him behind regardless.

Zinchenko's son keeps experimenting with verticality and gravity as he climbs up into their second-floor flat, does chin-ups (more or less each time his parents try to talk to him), and shows off with back somersaults. When Zinchenko has a heated discussion with his boss Shestakov (Sergei Gazarov), they stand in a lift going up and down, the location for the talk seems to be carefully chosen by the boss, so that no one else is allowed to enter the lift to witness the heated exchange. In the scene where Gushchin confronts the VIP passenger (Dmitrii Zolotukhin), who turns out to be a major shareholder in the airline company yet is still not allowed to smoke or to drink alcohol before the take-off, Gushchin puts out the passenger's lit cigarette in that same passenger's drink. The scene where the cigarette is drowned is shot at an unusual angle

from below. In the natural disaster scenes at Kanwoo, a mining settlement, the floor in the airport falls through; a mining facility building in the mountains falls apart; the lava flows downhill; a water tower collapses; a passenger's back is injured so that he cannot assume an upright position; Andrei has to climb up onto a car roof and jump over to another car roof to save himself; and Gushchin and Andrei, with a group of people accompanying them, have to climb down and up from a ravine. In the airplane disaster sequences, the turbulence increases the perception of verticality; oxygen masks drop down; hands are raised when passengers are voting about the hazardous sky-walk rescue; Kuz'mina has her hair down when giving orders – she wore it differently before; and it is raining when the airplane lands. And of course, the final scene deserves mentioning once more, shot from below as the three pilots are climbing ropes, and an airplane soars above them, visible through the ceiling windows.

In addition to the consistent visual use of the four notions of verticality, there are a few verbal allegorical ones deserving attention. The restaurant where Gushchin repeatedly invites Kuz'mina is called *The Crane (Zhuravl')*. The flight attendant Andrei invites the flight attendant Vika to climb a wall, on a Sunday (*voskresenie* in Russian, meaning resurrection). Zinchenko says that Gushchin has wings for arms. A miner on the endangered airplane repeats several times that “it is scarier in a mine”. The play on words “I'll sit” (“Ia siadu”, as in “I'll end up in prison”) vs. “Let us all sit first” (“Davaite my snachala vse siadem”, as in “let us all land safely first”) is repeated from the 1979 film, although in a different situation: The boss on the ground decides that he would not allow the risky in-air passenger decanting proposed by Gushchin by saying that they would end up in jail if they perform it. Gushchin replies, as he tears off his headset: “Let us all land first”.

The sky in *The Flight Crew* is filled with competence and demands for professionalism. It also seems to be a place where status gained through money and materialism is frowned upon, as Gushchin in the beginning dumps the expensive bribe cars from his military transport airplane, and later on gets the fat cat airline shareholder thrown off the civil airplane. This highlights the fact that on board the airplane and in the air Gushchin is in charge, because of who he is. This is not the case outside of these spaces, as is evident in his meetings with his superiors on the ground.

The pilot in *The Flight Crew* is professional, skilled and ambitious. Interestingly, Gushchin differentiates between being a pilot and simply flying an airplane in the sequence when he accuses Kuz'mina of being a 'cow at the helm' during their argument about the moral question of whether Gushchin was right or not when he wished to help the civilian victims of a military coup. Thus Gushchin explicitly links the discussion of moral dilemmas to being a pilot, and establishes himself as morally superior – an observation helpful for this thesis. In Gushchin's eyes, not only does a pilot need to be able to fly an airplane, but also to make decisions, based on their moral and intellectual judgements. This is precisely what is demanded of the pilots during the disaster at Kanwoo and during the in-air decanting of passengers. During this sequence, Gushchin and Zinchenko are the ones making the calls, while Kuz'mina is simply following orders. This suggests that it is Gushchin and Zinchenko who are the true pilots, while Kuz'mina is yet to become one of these. The ending, with Kuz'mina also present at the training facility, now as Gushchina (Gushchin's wife), points towards a possibility that she might yet become a true pilot. (The presence of Gushchin and Zinchenko at the training, too, merely re-establishes what was also shown at the beginning of the film in the simulator, i.e. that training is important for maintaining the pilot's skills.)



Illustration 7 Kuz'mina is shown at the helm in a short sequence when she is co-piloting, tearing up listening to the conversation between father and son Zinchenko, and Gushchin. Screenshot The Flight Crew (2016)

The fact that Gushchin's love interest Kuz'mina is a female pilot, rather than a stewardess (like Skvortsov's love interest in the original), is a very interesting choice on

the filmmakers' part. Female civil pilots are not common in either Russia or the West.⁴⁹ According to an interview with the Aeroflot pilot Mariia Uvarovskaia, there were 13 women pilots (three of whom were captains) in the company in 2014 (Onufrieva 2014). In conversation with Gushchin, Kuz'mina explains that in order to be able to become a female pilot you need to be "two heads above everyone else to be taken as an equal", meaning she has got to be exceptional. Zinchenko confirms this later. Yet, when we see Kuz'mina in action as part of the flight crew, she does not get to show the audience how skilled she is. This is left to Zinchenko and Gushchin. Even when Zinchenko is badly hurt, bleeding from the head and unable to use his right arm, Kuz'mina does not get to act as a pilot and is even told to leave the cockpit (a few minutes later she returns, but sits quietly and lets the men handle the situation). This might be interpreted as giving the audience mixed signals. The standard Kuz'mina claims to have met is not confirmed, as both Zinchenko and Gushchin are more suitable for the task of handling disasters. Or else it might just show that even if she is two heads above everyone else, she still gets surpassed by men with overinflated beliefs about themselves and their skills.

The male flight attendant Andrei is another sign of progressive contemporary Russia, where heterosexual men can work as flight attendants. When Vika initially prefers the pilot Gushchin to the steward Andrei, it seems to be an example of her bias towards gender stereotypes, labelling Gushchin as more of a man. Gushchin himself jokes about Andrei's career choice, stating that it is women's work. Here Zinchenko defends Andrei by stating that any job in flight is a male job. During the evacuation at Kanwo, and between the two flying airplanes, Andrei proves himself as a courageous hero, and Vika finally finds him interesting. The lesson that can be drawn from these examples of the female pilot Kuz'mina and the male flight attendant Andrei is that it is noble and takes a great deal of work to make untraditional career choices based on gender, but that in the end men will be men (saving people, making tough decisions, taking charge), and women will be women (looking after people and comforting them, but also organising

⁴⁹ According to the numbers provided by an NGO called The International Society of Women Airline Pilots, there were 590,039 pilots worldwide in 2015, 39,287 (6.66%) of which were women. In total, 101,164 pilots are categorised as commercial, 6,587 (6.5%) of whom were women (*Women Airline Pilot Numbers Worldwide 2016* 2016).

them in the event of a catastrophe). The exception from this pattern is the only woman, Tamara Igorevna (Aleksandra Iakovleva), who sits at the table during the crisis meeting when the experts are discussing the different possible outcomes of the rescue flight. As a company official, she is listened to as she suggests which airport should prepare for the emergency landing, and when she argues that there is no other alternative to the risky in-air decanting plan if the crisis board members still wish to be able to look each other in the eye.⁵⁰

2.3 The identity of a pilot

What does it mean to have an identity of a pilot? In all the films where pilots have an important role (*Pilots*, *Heavenly Slug*, *Wings*, *Only Old Men*, *The Flight Crew* (1979), *Night Witches*, and *The Flight Crew* (2016)), there seems to lie an interesting discussion of what makes a true pilot – that of having a true pilot identity. Pilots in these films share some important characteristics. The pilot obviously belongs in the air, but this entails something more than simply physically being there. The airspace is a natural place for a pilot, where she or he gets to use their abilities to a full extent. The pilot is also very professional, even if they can act a little recklessly or perform daring stunts. To do this in a true pilot fashion, she or he needs to have the ability to assess the situation to figure out when and how to act out. Yet mastering the technical skills of flying is not enough to become a true pilot. Just as important is that one has to be capable of reflecting upon moral dilemmas.

To fly and to be a pilot is a powerful drive that is seen strongly in Nadezhda Stepanovna in *Wings*, where this is almost like a core of her identity. Similarly, Galia Bystrova in *Pilots* chooses to be a pilot rather than a lover (when she talks about becoming one with ‘him’, she implies the flying machine, not the fellow pilot Beliaev, as the jealous Rogachev suspects). Aleksandra Kuz’mina also explains that it was not easy for her to become a pilot, implying that it took a great deal of determination on her side to achieve something in this profession.

⁵⁰Actress Aleksandra Iakovleva also played the flight attendant Tamara in the 1979 *Flight Crew*.

These three pilots each represent three important facets that can be found in many other on-screen pilots. Nadezhda Stepanovna problematizes what happens to a pilot who cannot fly anymore. Similar themes are found in Beliaev in *Pilots*, Bulochkin in *Heavenly Slug*, Skvortsov in *Only Old Men*, Timchenko and Nenarokov in *The Flight Crew* (1979), Galia in *Night Witches*, and Gushchin in *The Flight Crew* (2016).⁵¹ Bulochkin is forced to fly the less prestigious U-2 after an accident. He is not grounded completely but cannot venture into higher altitudes with his friends anymore. At first he expresses great disappointment in this, and wonders how he will manage: he is a pilot, so he needs to fly! In the course of the film, he learns that the U-2 has its advantages and he is able to maintain and develop his identity as a pilot, after all.

Galia Bystrova sacrifices all other things in order to be a pilot. This theme is not a significant part of most of the films under examination, as there are not too many cases when a pilot has to choose between his or her profession and everything else. Apart from Bystrova, it is perhaps most prominent in Bulochkin and his friends in *Heavenly Slug*, Nadezhda Stepanovna in *Wings*, and Galia in *Night Witches*. Bulochkin and his friends start out in the film being very vocal about how flying and airplanes are their first priority, while everything else is secondary. During the film, though, they all learn that it is possible to combine being a pilot and being in love. Initially they were more than willing to make a sacrifice in favour of flying. In the end, they see that love and piloting are not mutually exclusive. As for Nadezhda Stepanovna, she is unwilling to give up her identity as a pilot, even though this seems to alienate her from her surroundings. In

⁵¹ This is also an important theme for one of the many Western aviation films, *Flight* (Zemeckis 2012), about the pilot Whip Whitaker (Denzel Washington) who miraculously lands an airplane with a busted engine. In addition to the story of a grounded pilot, the film is loaded with religious connotations, moral questions and vertical imagery, which relates this film to the other films presented in this chapter. In a verticality-rich sequence at a hospital, while recovering after the flight accident, Whip walks out to the staircase to have a smoke, where he meets with Nicole, who is in the hospital because of a drug overdose and stays in a ward one floor above. From a floor below, a male cancer patient (James Badge Dale) emerges, and the three smoke together and talk about life and death, and whether God exists. The cancer patient does not believe in God and has a negative perspective on life. At the end of the conversation Nicole walks up the stairs, and the cancer patient back down again, while Whip is left on his floor. In this particular sequence verticality can be linked both to the physical surroundings of the characters and their movements in this space: the staircase; their smoking (the cigarette smoke rises up); and their topic of conversation about life, death and God. It can be assumed that a higher floor implies salvation (for Nicole), a lower floor indicates a kind of hell (for the cancer patient) and the floor in between (where Whip is), a purgatory.

Wings, there is a contradiction between being a (female) pilot and fitting into society's expectations. Based on the film's open ending, the conclusion is ambiguous: it is not clear whether Nadezhda Stepanovna sacrifices all else to remain a pilot, but she definitely does not sacrifice being a pilot in order to better fit into society. In *Night Witches*, Galia expresses happiness about being able to be a pilot. In the beginning she jeopardises her health by running from the hospital in order to get back to the front as soon as possible. And towards the end she seems to sacrifice the opportunity of spending more time with Fedor and the male soldier who seems to have a crush on her, suggesting that she is sacrificing a traditional family life for the opportunity to be a pilot.

As for Kuz'mina and her strenuous efforts to become a pilot, this is a less important theme, but it can still be found in Galia Bystrova in *Pilots* and the rather effeminate "Grasshopper" Aleksandrov in *Only Old Men*. As discussed in the section about *The Flight Crew* (2016), the representation of Kuz'mina as a pilot is somewhat ambiguous: everyone agrees that she is an excellent pilot, yet she is never shown at the helm, and during her argument with Gushchin he says that she is not a pilot as she, in his view, lacks the moral approach to their profession and to the orders they are given by their superiors. In other words, Kuz'mina may be a pilot in that she has mastered the technical side of flying an airplane, but she is still a novice when it comes to attaining the identity of a true pilot, which demands a more philosophical and moral approach. Through the latter part of the film, the disaster, she is schooled in this too, and the conclusion is that towards the end of the film, if not yet fully a true pilot, she now has an idea of what it takes to be one. Galia Bystrova is also shown mastering the technical side of flying early on, while the central story of the film is her gradual development towards becoming a true pilot in the sense of understanding the philosophical and moral sides to it. Similarly, "Grasshopper" Aleksandrov excelled at his aviation school, but has to work hard regardless, to prove himself in the field upon graduation. Aleksandrov's story serves the purpose of educating the viewer that doing well in aviation school is not sufficient to be a true pilot.

2.3.1 Can a female pilot actually fly?

In the films presented in this chapter it seems just as easy to find similarities of how the different pilot characters are built not thinking about gender: the general ideas of what

it means to be a pilot are shared by both women and men, as are some other themes problematized as shown above. However, it is still necessary to take a more thorough look at the specificities of women pilots. All the female pilots in one way or another are confronted and challenged to prove that they are actually pilots. One of the male pilots, “Grasshopper” Aleksandrov is confronted with something similar. Although no one doubts his abilities to fly, it is his ability to think of the collective and respect the hierarchy that is challenged. Curiously, it seems to be Galia Bystrova in *Pilots* who is the least challenged: there is an element of surprise when Bystrova is revealed as the reckless pilot creating havoc in the air and at the airfield, but it is unclear if this has anything to do with her gender; she might be imitating Beliaev’s behaviour in flight because she feels attracted to him and subconsciously adopts him as a role model – but this in theory could be done by an inexperienced male aviator too. However, from the women pilots in *Heavenly Slug*, Nadezhda Stepanovna in *Wings*, the women pilots in *Night Witches*, and all the way up to Kuz’mina in *The Flight Crew* (2016), the flying women on the Russian/Soviet screen have to convince the bemused men that they are pilots. Inherently, the films thus thematise what it means to be a woman, how women often struggle to prove their worth in male-dominated spheres of society, and restate again and again that women can indeed be pilots. Yet after over a hundred years of aviation history female pilots are still rare creatures. In fact, *Pilots* from 1935 appears extremely progressive in the way that the gender issues of who constitutes a pilot are only lightly touched upon, whilst *The Flight Crew* of 2016 – 80 years later! – presents a much more traditional view, where the spectators in the end may still not be fully convinced that Kuz’mina actually is a pilot. This is reflecting the respective zeitgeists of the Soviet society of the 1930s and modern-day Russia: in the 1930s, it was important to show, and give a voice to, women as part of the ideological struggle and total mobilisation in the process of building and defending socialism, whilst in the 2010s women may well formally have equal rights with men, yet society is skewed in favour of men nonetheless (for examples of the number of women representatives in ruling institutions, see Kochkina; and Johnson 2016). The image might still not be as negative if one looks at the generations presented in the films. Up until the mid-2010s, the women capable of being pilots almost exclusively belonged to the pre-war and war generation,

but Kuz'mina represents an entirely new generation of women pilots, engaged in civil aviation. The daughters of the 1930's and 1940's pilots did not follow in their mothers' footsteps, but their granddaughters might.

2.4 The stewardess, or the flight attendant – a heavenly creature?

Not all the Russian films to do with women in flight deal with female pilots, however. There are also films featuring stewardesses in leading or important supporting roles. To the best of my knowledge, there are at least four such films that will be presented and analysed in this section.

The flight attendant's job is to make passengers feel comfortable and safe: serving food and beverages and being ready to handle unforeseen circumstances and dangerous situations. The stereotypical flight attendant is a young, attractive woman. However, the first flight attendants were men, and, according to an article in *Time* magazine, it took a nurse, Ellen Church (1904–1965), to open up the profession to women (Latson 2015). Ellen Church was not only a nurse, but also a licensed pilot, even though no airlines were interested in hiring female pilots in the USA in the early 1930s. Instead, Church was able to convince the executives at Boeing Air Transport that it would be a good idea for nurses to work in the cabin. In addition to being qualified nurses, the first women recruited for the job as stewardesses had to be in their early 20s, unmarried and meet physical criteria regarding height and weight (Latson 2015). This set a standard for who were employable as flight attendants that still exists in several airline companies. In April 2017, the Russian flight attendant Irina Ierusalimskaia successfully sued her employer Aeroflot for excluding her from the better paid international routes because of her age and size (Kurilova 2017). Elza E. Gorodetskaia (1919–) is credited with being the first female flight attendant in the USSR, as her first flight working for Aeroflot took place on May 5, 1939 (Skorobutov 2013).

Commercial passenger flying started to become commonplace in the USSR during the 1960s, and this probably explains why the film *The Stewardess* came about, and thus this film will be analysed first. The second film of this section, *The School-leaver*, is based on the real-life events of the first successful airplane hijacking in Soviet history. The two last films, *Once Again about Love* and *Sky. Airplane. Girl*, are an original and

a remake of a story about the conditions for love in a relationship between a female flight attendant and an intellectual man. The 35 years that separate the release of these two latter films provide a curious reflection of love and gender stereotypes in their respective societies.

2.4.1 *The Stewardess* (1967)

The Stewardess is a 35-minute-long feature made for television, and seems to aim at teaching Soviet audiences how to behave as passengers aboard an airplane.⁵² The instruction is given through a story starring Alla Demidova in the role of a stewardess called Ol'ga, on a flight in northern rural parts of Russia, between Tiumen and Salekhard. Ol'ga handles challenging weather conditions and passengers with different needs and demands, some of them bothersome and even rude.

The story starts with passengers climbing up the small stairs onto the aircraft. It quickly becomes obvious that this is a very mixed crowd, ethnically and socially. There are a few female passengers, but the majority are male, and most of them seem to be more preoccupied with the looks of the flight attendant than with what she is saying, as she politely and professionally performs the safety instructions. During the flight she is constantly tending to the customers' comfort: serving food and beverages; calming people down when they encounter turbulence; explaining what is happening in flight; and helping passengers pick out the appropriate reading material. Moreover, she has to deal with a man a good deal older than her (Arkadii Tolbuzin), who keeps making a pass at her. She rejects him as politely as she can. Most passengers represent a type of some kind. The overconfident older man has just been mentioned. There is also a loud, illiterate Caucasian (Vladimir Etush), who laughs all the time; a sour Russian lady in a fur coat (Valentina Vladimirova), who is never satisfied with anything; a drunk (Evgenii Evstigneiev), who at one point, when the aircraft is still in flight, tries to open an

⁵² Despite the number of famous Soviet actors contributing (such as the aforementioned Demidova, Georgii Zhzhenov and Vladimir Etush), the short film did not seem to receive any reviews in any of the high-profile film industry magazines, such as *Iskusstvo kino*, *Sovetskii ekran* and *Soviet Film*. This is likely due to its format as a short film produced for television. Demidova mentions the film and her role in it in an interview for *Sovetskii ekran* two years later, in which she explains that she enjoyed playing Ol'ga and saw her as a feminine, somewhat weak person (Zorkii 1969).

emergency exit; and an old Nenets (most likely), who speaks poor Russian and keeps singing to himself how reindeer are better than airplanes. There is also a young mother with a child, looking as if they were ethnic Asians, and a few less important passengers. During the flight Ol'ga finds a conversation companion in the back row, a man who is arguably the most likeable of the characters (Georgii Zhzhenov). Ol'ga addresses the audience through telling her story to this man, a journalist. As it turns out, Ol'ga never wished to be a flight attendant. She had worked as a librarian (which explains her detailed knowledge of the printed matter available for in-flight reading). First, she tries to say that it was better pay that encouraged her to change profession, but then she admits she changed it in the name of love. Her boyfriend (Stanislav Borodkin) is a geologist searching for oil along the route of the flight. In order to spend some time with him she defies her airsickness and fondness for reading and inspiring others to read good literature. Still, even though the role of flight attendant was not her preferred occupation, she acts very professionally and carries out her work as best she can. The film shows a sequence of Ol'ga meeting her boyfriend, as they get some 15 minutes together in a car at a remote airstrip. He does not seem as interested in her as she is in him. She confesses to her conversation companion in the airplane that "he is searching for oil, and I am searching for him. That's life".

The film is rather compact. In addition to the scenes and stories described above, there are several sequences and dialogues that contain all four notions of verticality: the recurring image of a doll hanging from a shelf in a net, as a kind of metaphor for Ol'ga and her situation (hanging on, at times experiencing turbulence, at times hanging quietly, but always trapped in the net); clouds shot from a moving airplane; passengers ascending the steps to board (one person holds a large chandelier); an airplane in flight, taking off or descending (several times); Ol'ga's lower part of the body is shown (as a sexual object, even though fully clothed); oil prospecting is mentioned; aerial shots are present; a book is turned upside down; and the recurring Northern dimension (north traditionally being on top of a map) as the passengers – some of whom are northern ethnic people – are flying north in the stereotypical northern weather of a snowstorm. There is even a conversation about the polar explorer Roald Amundsen's meteorologist Finn Malmgren, who continued with his Arctic travels regardless of his seasickness (this

seasick “Viking” is likened to Ol’ga, whose airsickness serves to highlight the sacrifices she makes in the line of her duty as a stewardess).

The sky in *The Stewardess* is not a comfortable place. Both passengers and Ol’ga herself experience discomfort. Although there are a few breaks where things are calm, and people seem content, for the most time the air is not a liberating place in the sense that it was in, for example, *Wings*. For the stewardess Ol’ga in particular, the air is ambiguous. On the one hand, she did not wish to work here, it even makes her physically ill, but on the other, the airspace gives her an opportunity to spend time with the love of her life.

Ol’ga’s story and behaviour presents the occupation of flight attendant as a highly professional and demanding line of work. You need a certain kind of self-esteem and self-assuredness to deal with the situations that occur due to unpredictable weather and passengers, especially with men who might mistake your service-minded attitude as an invitation to flirt. Ol’ga did not plan to work as a stewardess.



Illustration 8 Ol'ga gracefully attends to the various needs of her passengers. Screenshot The Stewardess (1967)

Her choice was made out of love for a man. But it was still her decision to make, and she seems to be taking full responsibility for her own choices. In a way, she is willing to sacrifice her own dreams for the well-being of others – passengers and her boyfriend – by entering the airspace and only briefly visiting earth to see her boyfriend. This establishes Ol’ga as a morally superior and even (in a sense) angelic figure, which is additionally emphasised by the fact that she is doing whatever she has to do while being a flight attendant, that is high above the ground, thus resembling a heavenly creature, all in a highly stereotypical female way.

2.4.2 *The School-leaver* (1973)

The School-leaver directed by Aleksei Mishurin, is a curious case, as the film is based on true events, which many people knew about at the time, even though this is not explicitly mentioned in the credits. The film tells the story of the school-leaver and flight attendant Galia Gritsenko (played by Iuliia Shumeiko as a child, Valia Iakobenko as a girl, and Irina Shevchuk as a teenager). She is shot during an airplane hijacking at the film's start, and then her life's story is told in a flashback. The film portrayed the first successful airplane hijacking carried out in the Soviet Union in 1970 by the father and son Brazinskases, when the young flight attendant Nadezhda Kurchenko was killed. After her death, Kurchenko was turned into a hero, having monuments erected in her name, as well as streets and even a mountain peak in Pamir named after her (Shariia 2010). In 1971, a book was published (Cherashniaia 1971) consisting partly of newspaper excerpts about the death of Kurchenko, partly of words of memory written by friends and family, and partly of letters and notes by Kurchenko herself; two years later, *The School-leaver* film was made.

A significant discrepancy can be observed when comparing the film version of the story with the actual events. It seems the filmmakers made a careful selection which details to make use of in order to tell a specific story that in the end is not so much about Nadezhda Kurchenko, but about creating a Soviet hero to evoke patriotism and sacrifice in the Brezhnev era drawing on hagiographical elements.⁵³ I will return to this point

⁵³ Hagiography is one of the oldest genres of Russian literature. The life stories of saints would be written to highlight their extraordinary deeds, while their actual life events would be of less importance: "The hagiography of some of the most famous saints is sometimes so fabulous that it cannot even be taken as evidence for their existence, much less for details of the society in which they lived" (Monica M. White in *Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity* 2010: 293) The literary genre of hagiography has continued to influence and inspire authors also after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917: "In transmogrified form, hagiography continues to thrive at the very heart of official Soviet culture" (Ziolkowski 1988: 253) Ziolkowski argues that Russian writers have found the genre useful: "Russian authors' intentions in reworking hagiography were often unabashedly didactic, regardless of whether their focus was primarily civic or private. [...] Russian writers used saints' lives in order to edify" (1988: 250). In post-Soviet Russia, the genre has not been abandoned either, cf. for example Liudmila Petrushevskaia's short story "Zaveshchanie starogo monakha" ("The Old Monk's Last Will", 2000) and Evgenii Vodolazkin's novel *Lavr* (2012), as well as Pavel Lungin's feature film *Ostrov* (The Island, 2006).

after my description of the film, and a summary of the actual events and the discussions concerning them.

The story begins at an airport. Galia, a stewardess, is presented as she is talking about how she will soon get married and begin her studies at a university. Viktor (Sergei Martynov), her fiancé and a member of a pilot crew, confesses to her that he feels sad, because from now on they will only meet on the ground, as this is Galia's last flight. In this first part, there is also a sequence with two suspicious looking men: The older and seemingly confident one (Aleksandr Movchan) might be in his late 40s or early 50s, judging by his looks, while the younger (Vladimir Kislenko), possibly in his mid-20s, seems nervous. When boarding the airplane, Galia is helping the passengers, among them the suspicious looking older man who is using a cane. Once in the air, the two men hijack the airplane and Galia is shot while heroically trying to stop them from reaching the cockpit. At this point the action shifts back in time to a young Galia in a flower field in Ukraine. This sequence with the smiling Galia in a white dress, running happily through a field of poppies, is subsequently repeated several times and creates a frame and a summary of Galia's



Illustration 9 Galia guarding the door to the cockpit, while her life flashes before her eyes. Screenshot from The School-leaver (1973)

childhood and entire life. She grows up in a village, with loving and healthy parents (agricultural workers). Everyone there loves their work and the people around them. Preferably, work is carried out while singing. An important part of Galia's life is her education, and there are several sequences showing Galia and her peers being taught by their wise and sympathetic reclusive teacher Nikolai Vasil'evich (Nikolai Merzlikin). When asked what dreams she has for her future, Galia answers that she wishes to be a lark, so that she can fly and sing all day. Another repeated sequence is Galia bringing milk to her teacher: as he lives alone and has no animals, Galia's mother (Natal'ia Naum) makes sure that he gets fresh milk. As she is getting older, Galia and her teacher also engage in philosophical discussions about what is good and what is bad, specifically

connected to wartime ethics. As a school-leaver, Galia wishes to become a teacher, following in her favourite teacher's footsteps, but she fails the university entrance examination. She meets a young pilot, Viktor, who falls in love with her, and convinces her to come and work as a stewardess for a year before retaking the entrance examination. A year later she passes the exams and is ready to start her university education – and to marry Viktor. However, instead, Galia sacrifices herself while trying to prevent the hijacking. In the end, male members of the crew and passengers succeed in stopping the hijackers.

The film is rich in vertical images. There are the, by now, familiar shots involving strict, diagonal and horizontal verticality of airplanes, flying, landscape shots from above, accompanied by melancholic music. The landscape in this film is presented even more emphatically than in any other film discussed in this chapter. This suggests that the nation, in the form of the generous land, deserves love, loyalty and sacrifice. Shots and scenes are often made from either below or above, in addition to sequences with close-ups of faces looking up at the sky, and then pictures of the sky. Galia's father (Les' Serdiuk) sits high up on his combine harvester and lifts her up to him; Galia's teacher prefers to sit up on a small ladder when reading, climbing down as Galia brings him milk; Viktor is a pilot and encourages Galia to come and work with him in aviation. There is also a repeated sequence where Galia's mother is pouring milk in a jug for Galia's teacher, and one of Galia running down and then up the stairs after failing her exam. Even the most evil-looking hijacker needs a cane to walk upright. There is also a sequence with a Second World War commemoration ceremony with pioneers saluting a towering statue of a war hero, and a scene where the school children are painting a wall in up and down movements (while singing).

The message of the film could hardly be spelled out any more clearly: the war is over but it is still one's duty and virtue to sacrifice oneself for the Motherland. Galia is brought up in an environment where this is repeated over and over again, through education, war commemorations and life in a working collective. In her moment of death this is what she is thinking about. There are obvious Christian connotations, in particular made explicit in a sequence when Galia is taking her first entrance exams. She chooses to recite an excerpt from a play in verse by the Ukrainian author Lesia Ukrainka

(1871–1913), *In the Catacombs* (note the notion of verticality in the title! V Katakombakh, 1906). In the excerpt chosen by Galia, the difference between a sacrifice in the name of Jesus and a sacrifice in the name of the people is discussed, with the latter pronounced as the superior kind of sacrifice. In the chronology of the film this is pointing back to the sacrifice made by Galia in the death scene from the film's opening; in Galia's life this is, of course, foreshadowing her future death.⁵⁴

As already mentioned above, the events of the first successful airplane hijacking in the Soviet Union on 15 October, 1970, when the young flight attendant Nadezhda Kurchenko died, were somewhat different. The two hijackers were Pranas Brazinskas, then in his mid-40s, and his 15-year old son Algirdas, from Lithuania. They hijacked the Aeroflot flight 244 on its way from Batumi, Georgian SSR, to Krasnodar in the RSFSR. On board the flight was the 19-year-old flight attendant Nadezhda Kurchenko, who was shot and killed. The hijacking was successful and the airplane landed in Turkey, where the father and son were captured, tried and sentenced – but *not* returned to the Soviet Union. Instead, they were amnestied in 1974, and able to travel to the USA through Venezuela. Initially they were arrested in the USA, but then given the right to apply for asylum. Eventually, the Brazinskases were allowed to remain in the USA. Apparently, the American Lithuanian community, among which the hijackers lived, were ambiguous as to whether they should be regarded as heroes or villains. In 2002 the son, by now known as Albert, shot his father to death in their home, according to news reports. No details about a possible motive were given (Malnic 2002). To this day, it is not clear what actually happened on board the Aeroflot flight 244 either. Who shot Nadezhda Kurchenko? Was anybody else killed? The Brazinskases claimed that the armed government agents on board the flight killed Kurchenko in a shootout, while the Soviet authorities claimed that there were no such guards on board and that the hijackers shot Nadezhda Kurchenko as she tried to warn the pilots about the hijacking.

Considering the very unsubtle moralistic message of the film, it seems clear that the alterations have principally been introduced to make the message of the country

⁵⁴ The same play by Ukrainka contains a line about gods “ascending to the sky”.

deserving sacrifice, and the wholesome youth willing to deliver this sacrifice, even clearer to the audience. The actual hijacking was successful in that the hijackers gained control over the airplane and forced the crew to fly them to their desired destination. In the film, the hijackers were overpowered. Moreover, Algirdas (Albert) Brazinskas was 15 at the time, while the younger, unnamed, hijacker in the film looks as if he is at least 25. And of course it is difficult to claim that Galia in the film and the real-life Nadia are the same person. The age, the gender, and a few details in their biography match, but a large part is different. In the film Galia wishes to study to become a teacher, while Nadezhda dreamed of becoming an engineer. Perhaps most striking is the fact that Nadezhda, even though ethnically Ukrainian, grew up in the Altai region, just east of the current Russian Federation border with Kazakhstan, while Galia grew up in Ukraine. As much of the film is indeed about her (heavily fictionalised) childhood and upbringing, this is a significant difference: the film creates a bond between Galia and Ukraine, linking Galia's identity strongly to the landscape and culture, a connection which Nadezhda most likely did not have. Another point worth mentioning is that the film was released in 1973, before the Brazinskases were given amnesty by the Turkish authorities in 1974. So, although Soviet authorities wanted Turkey to extradite the Brazinskases, at least they had gone through a trial and served part of their sentence at the time when *The School-leaver* was released. This means that the end of *The School-leaver*, when the hijackers are overpowered, was not that far from the truth, as the hijackers were at least convicted and incarcerated at the time. This lends a little more legitimacy to the film's interpretation of the real life-story.

Throughout the film the sky is a place of opportunities. School children lie in the hay looking up at the sky, the sequence shifts between the close-ups of the children's calm and harmonious facial expressions and the blue sky with white clouds drifting by. This seems to signal the children's hopes but also assuredness for the bright future of their lives and the nation at large. Galia's wish to be a lark also brings together the opportunities for self-fulfilment, dreams, the sky and flying. When Galia fails her entrance exams – possibly not because she was not good enough, but because the teacher assessing the exams disagreed with her – it is in the air she finds a refuge. By working for a year as a stewardess, spending a great deal of time in the air, she becomes more

mature, and is subsequently accepted to university. Yet in the end the airspace also becomes a space of death and loss, as Galia is shot on her last trip. On the one hand, this can be seen as the airspace demanding the ultimate sacrifice, but on the other, as the airspace hindering Galia's abandonment of the space where she belongs.

As a character, Galia is as close to perfection as one can get. This also applies to her capacity as a stewardess: she is kind, loves to work and to learn, and honours war heroes. Her only flaw is being immature when she first tries to take the entrance exam, but this disappears after working as a stewardess for a year. Being a stewardess, in other words, makes her complete and helps her reach her highest potential. When Galia is shown at work as a stewardess, she is professional, helpful towards the passengers, in control and attentive (she quickly understands the dangerous situation with the hijackers). Last but not least, she is willing to sacrifice herself. This establishes Galia as a morally superior creature. Yet because of the flat character and overtly moralistic message, she appears to be somewhat of a caricature of an angel or a saint, tying into the notion of the terribly perfect heroine described by Heldt.

2.4.3 The love life of an air hostess in the 1960s and the 2000s

The two films analysed below are portraits of a stewardess in love. In fact, they are the original film and its remake, shot 34 years later. The central theme in both films is the same, but the dissimilarities between the films push us towards a discussion of how and why they are different. The obvious, and short, answer to this might be that in almost 40 years Russian society has changed – yet how exactly?

2.4.3.1 *Once Again about Love* (1968)

Based on a stage play by Edvard Radzinskii, the film *Once Again about Love* is a sophisticated drama directed by Georgii Natason about the conditions for true love in the contemporary (post-Stalin and pre-Czechoslovak invasion) Soviet society. Even now, 50 years later, the film still feels relevant.

Natasha (Tat'iana Doronina) the stewardess, or rather flight attendant, as she herself prefers to be called, is intelligent and modern.⁵⁵ She is the kind of woman who feels comfortable going to a restaurant on her own; stating her opinions in front of a crowd, even if the crowd disagrees; sharing a couple of bottles of wine with a male stranger, and insisting on splitting the bill; coming to the stranger's place and having casual sex; expressing that she loves him even though they have just met – after all, the first thing they agreed on was to always tell each other the truth. Yet it soon becomes obvious that it is not so simple to tell the truth and to avoid the power struggle often connected to flirting and romantic relations, especially not when the two people involved both have strong personalities and separate successful careers that regularly take them away from each other. Natasha's stranger, a scientist called Elektron (nicknamed Ela) (played by Aleksandr Lazarev), learns that Natasha used to date a friend of his, Vladik (Vladimir Komratov), who does his best at presenting Natasha as an unstable flirt. Natasha refuses to make any excuses for her life choices. The pilot in Natasha's flight crew (Oleg Efremov) confesses his love for Natasha, too, and she agrees to kiss him when he asks her to. Yet by now she knows whom she really wants, and that is Ela. It seems that Natasha and Ela are trying to make things work between them, that they see each other as the love of their lives, but they encounter too many obstacles. Towards the end of the film it looks as if they are both committed to each other, but as Ela is waiting for Natasha at their usual meeting point in the stairs next to the Dynamo sports stadium, he is approached instead by Natasha's colleague Ira, nicknamed Myshka (Elena Koroleva). She brings him the terrible news of Natasha's death during an airplane crash. The message of the film seems to be that even in the modern liberal post-Stalinist Soviet society of the 1960s, where its inhabitants enjoy many previously unavailable opportunities, true love is not obtainable.

An obvious trait of the film is the partial reversal of gender stereotypes in many situations. Ela is the only one we see at home, Natasha's flat is never shown; Natasha

⁵⁵ With this statement the character Natasha is possibly ahead of her time, at least by Western standards: the historian Kathleen M. Barry, who has studied the history of flight attendants in the USA, marks 1979 as the year when, following the feminist current of the 1970s, stewardesses demanded to be called flight attendants (Barry 2006).

gives Elektron the nickname Ela, sounding a lot like the female name Ella; and Natasha's attitudes to sex and relationships are more in line with traditional male, rather than female stereotypes. On the other hand, Natasha is well aware of her own feelings and needs, and good at expressing these. In several scenes she cries. These are traits more often connected to traditional female stereotypes.

The film had a large audience when it was released. In 1968, 85% of the respondents of the film magazine *Sovetskii ekran*'s poll claimed they had seen the film. However, only half of the respondents who saw the film reported that they liked it, and 8% reported that they did not like it ("Konkurs-68. Itogi" 1969). Tat'iana Doronina was voted the best actress of the year, receiving 50% of the vote – in addition to *Once Again*, she starred in the film *Three Poplars on Pliushchikha* (Tat'iana Lioznova 1967; a film that, according to the same poll, was just about as popular as *Once Again*). The review of *Once Again* in *Sovetskii ekran*, by Andrei Zorkii, was harsh. Zorkii describes Ela as a caricature, not deserving of love, and therefore Natasha's motivation seems unrealistic: "Yes, we feel sorry for Natasha. Yet even more sorry for not getting a proper story about love"⁵⁶ (Zorkii 1968). The review seems to defend Soviet society against its systemic critique in *Once Again* for insufficient conditions for love and personal happiness, by describing its plot as unrealistic and its characters as unbelievable. Judging by the above-cited poll, Soviet audiences did not fully agree with Zorkii that the film was bad, as the film and its leading actress seemed quite popular with filmgoers. Some 40 million viewers watched it in the first year after release.

As for the vertical notions, there are scenes and sequences containing airplanes and airports, but they do not dominate the film. Instead, the couple is shown meeting on the stairs by the Dynamo sports stadium in Moscow, and in Ela's flat several times,

⁵⁶ «Да, нам очень жалко Наташу. И жалко еще, что не получился настоящий рассказ о любви.»

employing more of the allegorical vertical notion than other films. The verticality in the film is often connected to architecture and buildings, verbal metaphors, and how people stand or sit in relation to each other. In the first sequence at a restaurant, the restaurant itself is situated at an upper



Illustration 10 Ela is running up the stairs to meet with Natasha who is waiting at the top. Screenshot Once Again about Love (1968)

floor of a high-rise building and there is an amateur poet performing a reading about a motorcyclist trying to reach for the stars via the vertical Wall of Death. The two lovers often meet on or close to stairs – in Ela’s block of flats or at the airport, for example – and have important conversations there. The couple’s last kiss takes place in what looks like an underground passage with the supporting pillars dominating the sequence visually with strict verticality. As for Natasha, she adds to her height both by wearing high heels (at one point her less popular colleague Myshka says that if Natasha only took off her high heels everyone would see that she’s no taller than Myshka) and a bouffant hairdo. The morning after their first night together Natasha is standing next to the window as Ela wakes up, making an observation of how clear the sky looks. Later in the film Ela shows Natasha a drawing of her descending from the sky, head first and arms stretched out, almost like an inverted cross, with a big smile on her face, a halo above her head and with a sceptre and an orb in her hands. Down below are five men, representing (former) lovers/admirers. In Ela’s flat, there is a polar bear skin rug on the floor, drawing the thoughts northwards, which is up on most maps. Natasha, who flies different routes, is at one point said to have flown to where the polar bears live. A model airplane attached to the airport ceiling might suggest that Natasha is not so free, after all, just like the animals at the zoo that the couple visits may suggest the same.

The sky in *Once Again* is once again a place for professionals. It also seems to be a place for independence, as Natasha is a very independent person. However, both her colleague Myshka and the pilot of the crew appear to be less independent. More importantly, the

sky is a dividing space, and a space of mobility. While Ela is almost permanently situated in Moscow, Natasha is transported through the air to locations far away.

The stewardess as personified by Natasha has a great deal of integrity as she sticks to her values, is honest with the people around her, and rises above people's attempts to shame her or judge her. She is very professional in her job (dying in the line of duty as it happens), and the fact that she actively takes a stand on what she thinks the profession should be called (flight attendant rather than stewardess) suggests that this is a significant part of her identity. Through her integrity she shows a moral authority, and the drawing Ela has of her as an angelic character also supports my claim that there is a divine aspect to her. Natasha is likened to an angel by the filmmakers by virtue of her spatial occupation in the sky, her moral integrity and actions. In addition, Ela's interpretation of her in his drawing makes it clear that her angelic features are recognised by the characters around her. Even though Natasha seems to enjoy the independence and mobility provided for her by the sky, this is an obstacle in her relationship with Ela. In the end, she gets killed in an accident where an airplane, a flying body, collides with the earth, suggesting that it is impossible to keep one's mobility and independence *and* be in a committed romantic relationship – not as a woman, at least. It looks as if Natasha was not made for this earth.

2.4.3.2 *Sky. Airplane. Girl* (2002)

Sky. Airplane. Girl is a remake of *Once Again about Love*, directed by Vera Storozheva. According to the review in *Iskusstvo kino* by Elena Kutlovskaja, it was the actress Renata Litvinova's⁵⁷ idea of producing a remake, as she was a huge fan of the original (Kutlovskaja 2003). All in all, the remake follows the story of the original to a large extent, but with a few variations. Perhaps the most striking difference between the 1968 and the 2002 version is the personality of the main character. As was the case with the original and the remake of *The Flight Crew*, discussed in 2.2.2, Graffy's claim about the

⁵⁷ Renata Litvinova is one of the most prominent Russian actresses over the last 20 years. She has also worked as a director and screenwriter. Her characters are often seen as hyper-feminine, strange and distanced.

nostalgic connotation of aviation in the 2000's films is relevant for *Sky. Airplane. Girl* and also its original version, *Once Again*.

The stewardess Lara is the main character, and she works different routes for an airline company. The story is about her and her love interest, Georgii, who works as a journalist reporting from conflict zones. Maksim, Lara's ex-lover, also works in the same media company. It is difficult for Lara and Georgii to find time for each other in their busy schedule, but after working through their feelings of jealousy and misunderstandings they decide they still want to give it a try. As in the first film, Lara also has to deal with a pilot's crush on her.⁵⁸ Lara confides in her colleague Masha, who is more pragmatic and materialistic when it comes to what she wants in life and her expectations of love. But just like in the original, Lara dies in an airplane accident, so she and Georgii do not get to live happily ever after in 2002 either.

While the Natasha of the 1968 original for the most part seems calm and stable, Lara is the opposite. This does not necessarily mean that Lara is less in control of herself than Natasha, but she is more confusing and seems more confused. While Natasha, as well as all the other previously discussed stewardesses, seem to be very professional and good at their job, Lara comes across slightly differently: when performing the safety instructions (something she must have gone through thousands of times), she becomes uncertain of what is going on, until one of the passengers gets up and takes over the instructions, doing them in sign language. Lara quietly backs away. As for the divine aspect, Georgii has a dream about him and Lara sitting alone in an aircraft cabin (as he actually sleeps in a full cabin). This happens shortly before she dies (and Georgii faints). Just before she dies, Lara has (or gets) the ability to show herself to Georgii one last time. Lara is not the only woman with supernatural powers. As her colleague Masha explains when crying, she only cries when someone is about to die (in this case that person is Lara). This spiritual, supernatural dimension is a new addition to the story, and is typical of the differences between the two versions. The 2002 version seems less concerned with the gender and moral issues that were addressed in the original, as this

⁵⁸ In the 2002 film, the pilot is played by Mikhail Efremov, the son of Oleg Efremov, who played the pilot in the 1967 original.

is a more straightforward tragic love story. The gender stereotypes are less challenged, even though in the 2002 version there is a male flight attendant (he is never seen, but mentioned as someone who often comes to work late and hungover). We might still only see the male protagonist's flat, but the female protagonist hardly takes any initiative. Where Natasha flirted and seemed quite straightforward about what she wanted, Lara does not flirt much and seems rather aloof and unsure about what she wants. Lara says she loves Georgii before they even have sex, and they do not sleep together until the second date. The reporter Kutlovskaja in the overall positive review in *Iskusstvo kino* in fact praises what she sees as the extremely masculine Georgii and the elegantly weak femininity of Lara, as signs of the filmmakers' critique against homosexuality and feminism (Kutlovskaja 2003).⁵⁹ Whereas I do not see the film as an attack on homosexuality or feminism, I do see it as an expression of traditional gender stereotypes. In the same sentence, Kutlovskaja also argues that this weakness was the main trait of Doronina's character in the original film. This seems curious as Natasha, in the way she relates to society, comes across as strong – in touch with her emotions, yes, but strong nonetheless, as she fights for her love and for her integrity. Lara's strategy, on the other hand, seems to be to avoid confrontation, and just stay quiet in the hope that the conflict will simply pass.

Many sequences take place in an empty, or nearly empty, airport and inside an airplane cabin. This way there are more scenes including airplanes, and aviation becomes a larger part of the 2002 context and the vertical notions included in the film. There are several sequences including staircases (much like in



Illustration 11 Georgii rushes up the stairs to meet Lara. Screenshot Girl. Airplane. Sky (2002)

⁵⁹ Cf.: «И как в случае с Дорониной, эпатирующая необычность парадоксальным образом обнажает слабость как главную составляющую Женщины (как бы назло унисексу, продиктованному агрессией феминизма)» (Kutlovskaja 2003).

the original) but also different levels become involved: e.g. in the café at the airport where Lara and Georgii meet for the first time, there is an upper level looking down at the lower (Lara goes to sit at the upper level and Georgii joins her). At Georgii's flat there is another open two-level solution, where Lara at a party is standing on the upper level singing for the crowd at the lower. When Lara leaves Georgii's flat, she pushes the button for the lift, but then walks down the stairs instead of getting into it. The moment Lara dies (presumably), Georgii faints at the bottom of the airplane steps. In one of the more dramatic sequences, Lara is sitting alone in a room in a small town. She is ready to cut the inside of her palm with a knife (as a form of self-harm, not a suicide attempt), but at the same moment a gust of wind blows in through an open window, lifting the curtains so that they catch fire from a candle Lara has lit. As this scene evolves, the camera moves upwards ending up looking at the scene from above.

Unlike most films discussed in this chapter, the airspace is *not* clearly linked to professionalism, as Lara does not seem either very professional or at times even comfortable in her job (sitting in an empty cabin wearing a life vest). Rather, the sky seems to primarily create a distance between people. And unlike the original film where Natasha was the mobile one and Ela was the stable one, both Lara and Georgii in part use and in part are affected by this dividing space. Looking past the praise of an essentialist view on traditional gender stereotypes, Kutlovskaja has made an interesting observation of how the sky shown in the picture seems to reflect or enhance Lara's mood: blue skies when falling in love, grey and turbulent when in disarray (Kutlovskaja 2003). This suggests a deeper metaphysical connection between the sky and Lara.

As stated above, the principal stewardess in *Sky. Airplane. Girl* is not particularly professional, as it does not seem as if Lara is motivated to carry out the job at the peak of her abilities. Yet she seems to be attracted to the sky. Lara seems to be exploiting the division created by the sky to distance her from the emotional stress and complications of the earthly life. She seems a tender and fragile person, almost naïve in how she approaches the psychological struggle that dating often entails. Thanks to her occupation as a stewardess, she is able to flee from unpleasant situations, and create some (or rather a great deal) of physical space around her to gather her thoughts. It looks as if Georgii also partly uses his travels to distance himself from an emotional commitment (cf. how

he deals with Lara saying she loves him, and with feelings of treachery after hearing stories about Lara from his friend, Lara's ex). The principal stewardess in *Sky. Airplane. Girl* is a delicate figure, whose integrity is less connected to how she carries out her job. Instead, her integrity is linked to her approach to her own emotions, and the emotions of the people around her. She is open and non-judgemental, and is capable of expressing her feelings and needs – when it counts, anyway, if not all the time. Her integrity is where her moral superiority lies.

2.4.4 What makes a stewardess?

Based on recurrent scenes from the films of this chapter with female flight attendants in leading or important roles (*Once Again, The Stewardess, The School-leaver, The Flight Crew* (1979), and *Sky. Airplane. Girl*), it is clear that performing the safety instructions is a crucial part of what it means to be a flight attendant. Through this, it is suggested that the flight attendants are professional, and, more importantly, responsible for the passengers' safety. In addition, it shows the aircraft hierarchy: pilots may be at the top of it as they manoeuvre the airplane, and the passengers know this. Yet pilots are seldom seen by passengers, only heard through an announcement, usually in the form of a greeting, updates on weather conditions and flight schedule. In the cabin, the real authority is the flight attendants. And the safety instructions are an important part for the flight attendants to take control and assert authority, not to be someone who only serves food and beverages. For the flight attendants in the above-named films, the scene where they perform their safety instructions goes to build their characters as professional, in control, caring and attentive. However, as described in the analysis of *Sky. Airplane. Girl*, this is not necessarily the case for Lara, as she seems confused, and backs out of her own instruction routine, letting a volunteer sign-language interpreter take over. Lara does not seem in control in this scene: instead of going through the motions, she lets someone else, an unqualified passenger (for all we know) take over a situation in which Lara, in fact, looks embarrassed. In itself, this gesture might seem like a fair judgement, as Lara understands that she is not able to communicate an important message to the passengers, and therefore lets someone else do it, who clearly is more able. Yet the way she does it, slowly backing away with a shy smile, rather than actively inviting the interpreter to take over from her, suggests a loss of control and

authority, and that Lara possibly does not fit in. In general, though, the stewardesses are presented in the films as authoritative, attentive and caring figures in the cabin, oozing professional integrity.

A curious question that emerges after analysing these films is: why do stewardesses often end up in this profession if this is not what they wanted in the first place? This is clearly the case for Ol'ga in *The Stewardess*, Galia in *The School-leaver*, and Tamara in *The Flight Crew* (1979). Galia and Tamara seem to have similar reasons for going into the profession: they wish to pursue other careers (as a teacher and an actress respectively), and working as flight attendants come as their back-up solutions. This back up was not even a plan they themselves thought of, but was presented to them by other individuals. This suggests at least four things about the profession: that it requires little formal training; it is easier than getting into a university or an acting career; it is a convenient option; and it is not a dream job for a young woman. This recurrent image of a 'reluctant stewardess' demonstrates that many young women do not fit certain stereotypes about stewardesses. Such stereotypes are traditionally associated with sexually liberated, or easy, or less intelligent girls but also with glamour, luxury and wealth – in the USSR and the West alike. An example of a Western play on these stereotypes is seen in *Airplane!* (Jim Abrahams, et al. 1980)⁶⁰. By contrast to the cinematic Western stewardesses, the young stewardesses in Soviet/Russian films are intelligent, ambitious and permeated with high moral integrity.

Lara of *Sky. Airplane. Girl* and Natasha in *Once Again* make up the exceptions, in that their stories do not include motivations as to why they choose to become flight attendants. This does not necessarily mean that it was a dream profession for them, but

⁶⁰ In the comedy *Airplane!*, the stewardess Elaine Dickinson (Julie Hagerty) is unintelligent, pretty and sexually liberated. This film in general exploits stereotypes to generate a humorous reaction. In e.g. the film *High Rise* (Ben Wheatley 2015), the main character Dr Robert Laing (Tom Hiddleston) is shown dancing in the hallway with a group of stewardesses to demonstrate how happy he is about moving into a high-rise building. The stewardesses have nothing to do with the film, apart from this scene. They seem to underscore the main character's elevated feelings of happiness and success. In the American context, stereotypes of promiscuous stewardesses were exploited and enhanced by a series of semi-pornographic, as well as soft- and hard-core pornographic, films in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. *The Stewardesses*, Al Silliman Jr. 1969; *The Naughty Stewardesses*, Al Adamson 1974; *Blazing Stewardesses*, Al Adamson 1975; for more about stewardesses in American popular culture, see Barry 2006).

because they are not presented as ‘reluctant stewardesses’; they do not explicitly distance themselves from the stewardess stereotype. Instead, they both seem sexually liberated, and therefore confirm parts of that stereotype. This does not mean that they do not have moral integrity, as argued above. Of all five female flight attendants, Natasha in *Once Again* is the one who truly seems to have a passion for the profession. Although this is never brought up in the film, her character is presented as confident and strong-willed, which suggests that her choice of career was an active one.

The sexually aware stewardess is an important narrative in *Once Again*, *The Flight Crew* (1979), and *Sky. Airplane. Girl*, which all include explicit references to Natasha, Tamara and Lara having sex (if not the actual sexual scenes), and that sexual relationships are important to them. They also all encounter commitment issues and jealousy in their relationships. They all seem to believe in love and monogamy, but where Tamara first hides her need for commitment, playing a game with Skvortsov while hoping he will eventually realise the commitment is also something that he deep down longs for, Natasha and Lara refuse to play games and try to always tell the truth to their partners about their feelings and needs (of course, both Natasha and Lara experience how this is easier said than done).

As for Tamara of *Flight Crew* (1979), she starts out not being capable of clearly expressing her needs in relation to Skvortsov. Instead, she makes a compromise in a hope that Skvortsov will change his mind about commitment. She learns, however, that this is not the case, and then forces a change in Skvortsov by expressing her needs clearly. Ol’ga in *The Stewardess* and Galia in *The School-leaver* also seem to have difficulties expressing their needs. Ol’ga sacrifices herself to be with a boyfriend who might not seem as committed to her as she is to him. This does not seem to cover her needs, either for a relationship or for working environment. Throughout *The School-leaver*, Galia does not express any needs on behalf of herself (except for when, as a child, she wishes to become a lark, so that she can fly and sing all day; and later wants to study for a teaching profession). She rather tends to sacrifice her own dreams and ambitions for the sake of the collective, in line with the Ukrainka poem she recites. Her change of mind regarding adult life and career choice serves as an example of this sacrifice, in addition to how she sacrifices her life not only for her colleagues and

passengers but, as we understand through the film, for the Soviet society and values. Her character is equipped with precious little beyond a sense of duty and self-sacrifice. Compared to pilots – who seem to have a stronger drive to be just that, and seem to have a larger part of their identity shaped by that – stewardesses seem to be more pragmatic, and identify with their profession less. What happens to a flight attendant if she cannot fly anymore is barely thematised – and so is the process of becoming a true stewardess. Instead, themes such as women’s sexuality and sexual integrity and the dilemmas of a modern woman working away from home are thematised (in *Once Again* and *Sky. Airplane. Girl* discussed earlier in this chapter), as well as the ways in which women (are expected to) sacrifice themselves for the well-being – and even lives – of others.⁶¹

2.4.4.1 Male flight attendants

There are two male flight attendants in the selection of films discussed in this chapter, one in *Sky. Airplane. Girl* and another (Andrei) in *The Flight Crew* (2016). The one in *Sky. Airplane. Girl* is never shown, he is only talked about. He always comes in late and is said to often suffer from hangovers. He does not play a big role in any way, but is still important as a character that cares even less about his job and has an even lower sense of responsibility than the principal female flight attendant Lara. Conversely, Andrei in *The Flight Crew* (2016) shares many traits with his female colleagues in that he acts professionally and seems to care for people around him. However, because of his

⁶¹ In 2017 aired *The Girl Whose Eyes Were the Same Colour as the Sky* (*Devushka s glazami tsveta neba*, Sorokin 2017), a mini-series produced for television. The protagonist of the series is the flight attendant Angelina (note the verticality and kinship with angels referred to in her name; the role is played by Mariia Dunaevskaia). Unfortunately, I only came upon this series a month before handing in this thesis, therefore it will not be discussed or analysed at length. The series confirms several of the tropes and stereotypes discussed in this chapter, including the pragmatic flight attendant, who is likened to an angel; the moral requirements needed to become a true pilot; the persistent use of the four notions of verticality; the nostalgic nature of post-2000 aviation films (e.g. heavily romanticising simple, rural life and landscapes, Golden and Silver Age poetry, and old-fashioned courting; the apparent lack of internet and social media – which seems unrealistic, especially given that their use could probably have sorted out a few of the misunderstandings and problems; and Angelina’s wishes to be a flight attendant rather than a pilot, to honour her unknown pilot father). Still, the ending is different, in that Angelina decides not to return to the air as a flight attendant, and rather dedicates her life to helping others, fighting discrimination against women at the workplace. Thus, discrimination against women is recognised as a real problem that needs to be addressed in today’s Russia. This suggests that, similar to *The Flight Crew* (2016), the most recent years has seen a slight change in how gender is thematised and women are portrayed.

profession as a male flight attendant (as opposed to a pilot), he is presented as less attractive to women. His profession seems to communicate that he is less of a man. Yet he is able to prove his masculinity during the evacuation, and this gets him the girl (a colleague). She finally realises that it is possible to be a proper man as well as a flight attendant. Being a proper man means jumping out of cars, closely avoiding being caught in lava and risking your life, and getting physically hurt, while saving other people. Both examples suggest that over the last two decades in the RF, a less gender-rigid understanding of who can work as a flight attendant has emerged. It suggests a change in the understanding of masculinity, too. Although men still prove their worth as men through physical prowess in action-loaded sequences, they can hold occupations that were previously reserved for women. Together with the pilot Kuz'mina, the flight attendant Andrei shows that gender is expressed not necessarily by the occupation or occupational title they hold, but through the way they execute, or perform their work.

2.5 Women and the airspace: A chronotope of progress and liberation?

In a gendered understanding, the chronotope of the airspace has often been perceived as a masculine space, bearing strong links to technology, strength, philosophy, ambition, aspiration and progression (this is suggested by both Palmer (2006), and Strukov and Goscilo (2017), where the male experience of aviation is the focal point; see also Graffy 2017: 189-190). However, in the fledgling Soviet society of the 1920s and 1930s, a great deal of effort was put into showing that the Soviet system was superior in giving equal opportunities to men and women alike. An important symbol of this was how women pilots contested the airspace as a pure masculine space. This is obvious in the films discussed in this chapter.

The chronotope of airspace appears to be relatively consistent throughout the films, starting with *Pilots* (1935) and ending with *The Flight Crew* (2016). It is a space of opportunity that demands skills, competence and ambition, even if the ambition might not be directly connected to flying, as in the case of Ol'ga in *The Stewardess*, who has an ambition for a romantic relationship; Galia in *The School-leaver*, who actually wants to be a teacher; and Tamara of *The Flight Crew* (1979), who has an ambition of becoming an actress. For these young women the airspace is more a symbol of

opportunity in general, rather than a fulfilment of their personal ambition to fly or be flown.

In *Pilots*, *Wings*, *Only Old Men*, *The Flight Crew* (1979), *Night Witches* and *The Flight Crew* (2016), the sky appears to be a liberating place for the characters. This is a space where they get to express themselves, and get closer to their true selves. In the films *Once Again*, *The Stewardess*, *The School-leaver* and *Sky. Airplane. Girl* the characters do not explicitly find liberation in the sky. However, their connection to the sky and to flight signify that they have had opportunities which they were free to take (this seems to be the case for all the stewardesses, in particular for Ol'ga in *The Stewardess* and Galia in *The School-leaver*), or that they are liberated as persons – from society's expectations of women (particularly Natasha in *Once Again* and Lara in *Sky. Airplane. Girl*). Either the airspace is a place where one can liberate oneself or a connection to the airspace signifies a liberated person. In both cases the airspace is strongly connected to liberty. This liberation is clearly connected to gender and gender norms for female characters in the films *Heavenly Slug*, *Wings*, *Once Again*, *The Flight Crew* (1979), *Night Witches*, *Sky. Airplane. Girl* and *The Flight Crew* (2016). Thus this theme ties into the freedom fantasy connected to flying women as described by Young (2017: 250-255). As for male characters, the airspace does not liberate them from stereotypical masculine gender norms. Rather, these norms are reinforced by their interactions with the airspace. Liberation in the airspace for men is connected to self-expression and liberation from their superiors on the ground (like Beliaev in *Pilots*, Bulochkin in *Heavenly Slug*, Skvortsov in *The Flight Crew* (1979) and Gushchin in *The Flight Crew* (2016), in line with the important features of the Icarus myth.

Women's introduction to the airspace in the 1930s was used as a sign of progress of the Soviet Union, as gender equality was an important part of the Bolshevik ideology. Before the Second World War, the airspace was connected to the military, but also to a purposeful leisure activity for both men and women. During the war, the airspace was first and foremost a battlefield. In the post-war era the airspace gradually developed as a civil workspace, accompanied by a kind of cementation of the divide between the genders, with men as pilots and women as flight attendants. The development from *Pilots* to *Wings* serves as a clear example of how the progress of gender equality seemed

to not only halt, but reverse, in the post-war era, most notably during and after the 1960s: from Galia not having to prove herself much as a female pilot in *Pilots*, through the women in *Heavenly Slug* having to endure surprise, scepticism and mockery, to Nadezhda Stepanovna in *Wings*, who experience alienation and discrimination, and to Kuz'mina in *The Flight Crew* (2016), branded 'a cow at the helm'. However, it would be too simple to say that progress is no longer part of the airspace. Even if the young Soviet women in the 1960s and the next four decades did not have the opportunity to see women of their own generation as pilots on film, there was still a certain progress to be found in the airspace in terms of gender equality.⁶² In the characters of female flight attendants, young women could find those women who knew or learnt how to take control of their own lives and assert their opinions (except for Galia in *The School-leaver*), with Natasha in *Once Again* as the most complex and engaging one. In 2016 women could again be pilots, as Kuz'mina proves in *The Flight Crew* (2016), but this necessitates a dialogue about her motivation and struggle for acceptance. This demonstrates that the progress in the airspace does exist but is not linear or consistent in terms of the chronology of the release of the films discussed, which can be read both as a symptom of a society whose development is not linear, and as an example of how films can be used to present different approaches to the discussion of gender (in this case).

With the airspace so strongly connected to competence, skills, courage and integrity it points towards the airspace as a space for the superior. That the airspace is so often connected to warfare and the military enhances this, as being superior is an important part of not only actual warfare, but also security policy – the idea that a superior military (including in the airspace) will lower the chances of armed attacks in a conflict situation. However, the hierarchy of the airspace is strongly connected to religious and mythological understandings of the sky and heaven too, where the more elevated a person's position, the more powerful and superior they are. Religious and mythological power often translates into moral power (institutionalised e.g. in the church, or the moral

⁶² However, there were several cinematic female cosmonauts for women to relate to, these characters will be discussed in the next chapter, in sections 3.1 through 3.6.

power that pious and/or spiritual people might have), as opposed to political, economic or military power (e.g. the temporal power of governments and businesses). Notwithstanding that religious authorities often might have had substantial political, economic and military power, a primary power of religion and belief systems is to set certain rules and distinguish between the good and the bad in matters of ethics. There is a recurring perception in religions and myths that the higher up one is, the higher one's moral integrity is, and often so is the right to judge other peoples' morals. In all the films analysed in this chapter, the main characters' – the pilots' and the stewardesses' – sense of morality, moral judgements, and moral behaviour are crucial. The possible exception is *Heavenly Slug*, but here morality is introduced in particular with regard to the women pilots' smoking and drinking habits: since they neither smoke nor drink, they are not pilots, but someone morally superior to pilots; in other words, they are angels, as Bulochkin suggests. This does not mean 'angels' in the sense of biblical figures with bird wings, but angels in the sense of morally superior (feminine) creatures located in heaven. In *Heavenly Slug* the characters' morals are not tested to the same extent as in other films. However, there is no doubt that the characters in *Heavenly Slug* are of high moral fibre, as they are, after all, courageous defenders of the Motherland. The airspace is thus a space for morally superior creatures. To be able to master this space completely, one has to be ready to make tough and correct moral decisions.

In three of the films, *Once Again*, *The School-leaver* and *Sky. Airplane. Girl*, the main character dies, and there is no ambiguity about it. In *Wings* and *Night Witches* the ending is more open as to what happens to the main character (both Nadezhda Stepanovna and Galia are suspended in the air at the end). In *The Flight Crew* (1979), the death of Timchenko is suggested symbolically (he is definitely banned from the airspace as a pilot, for health reasons). In *Wings*, *Only Old Men*, *Night Witches* and *The Flight Crew* (2016), there are flight-related deaths. In *The Flight Crew* (2016), these deaths are generally of the episodic extras. Therefore, they serve more to conjure the general feeling of hazard, perhaps making the risky in-air decanting more believable than evoking feelings of tragedy and loss. There is also a boy who has lost his mother in the catastrophe; a fellow passenger has to bring him the terrible news, but again the build-up of this situation does not evoke strong feelings of empathy. In other films, the deaths

of the main character and other significant characters have a stronger effect. Apart from Timchenko in *The Flight Crew* (1979), the deaths are connected to flying. Galia of *The School-leaver* is not killed in an airplane accident, but tragically shot in the air during a hijacking. All the characters that are seen dying, or who we are told have died, in addition to Nadezhda Stepanovna in *Wings* and Galia in *Night Witches*, essentially left hanging in the air. This could suggest that the airspace is, in many instances, a space of death. Yet drawing on the traditional notions of the sky being a place of transcendence, this might also be a way of understanding the deaths and the fates of all these characters. In the sky, they transcend from life towards afterlife, or return to their natural state of heavenly, angelic creatures.

There seems to be a difference between what the airspace is for a pilot and for a flight attendant. While the pilots seem to have a more active relation to the airspace and the airspace directly influences them, for the flight attendants the airspace seems to be a space that enhances their moral superiority by means of the vertical imagery and notions.

An important function of the airspace that has only briefly been addressed in the analysis of each film, but which deserves attention, is how being up in the air allows us to see the ground and landscape differently. Aerial shots of the ground play a large part in *Wings*, *The School-leaver* and *Night Witches*, yet such shots are also included in several others films discussed here. From this follows that the airspace gives us an opportunity to view the ground, human activity and society from a distance. In the imagery of *The School-leaver*, *Night Witches*, and also in the way Titarenko in *Only Old Men* talks about landscape, this is used to evoke feelings of patriotism and pride in the grand and beautiful Motherland. Seeing the land from above and at a distance means seeing how society and geography are interconnected in a way that is impossible to grasp from the ground.

2.6 Up and above, the flying women: angels or witches?

All the women pilots and flight attendants discussed in this chapter clearly have more in common with angels than witches. This is particularly due to how the airspace is presented as their natural habitat, how they seem weaker and less powerful on the ground, but also because they are defined by their moral superiority. It is interesting how

so many of these women die – as deceased people, or rather the souls of good people, are said to become angels – or are shown returning to the airspace in the end in ambiguous or open endings (such as Nadezhda Stepanovna in *Wings* and Galia in *Night Witches*). These fates, death or return to airspace, suggest a transcendental state between life and death, and between the human realm and heaven (the space and state of angels). Yet in the films that do not have such a dramatic ending (*Pilots*, *Heavenly Slug*, *The Stewardess*, *The Flight Crew* (1979) and *The Flight Crew* (2016)) the women pilots and flight attendants are still defined by their moral superiority and by the airspace which seems like their natural habitat (even though Ol'ga in *The Stewardess* gets airsick, she is presented as a good flight attendant who is perfectly capable of handling her challenging job). The self-sacrificing flight attendants Ol'ga in *The Stewardess*, Galia in *The School-leaver* and Tamara in *The Flight Crew*, can be interpreted as domesticated, non-threatening, confined angels. However, they appear to reach their decisions themselves. Still, the female military pilots are a threat against men, hence their nickname as witches, and neither the female pilots nor the flight attendants are as a rule asexual. There are no tricksters among the women, and none of them are presented with a dubious agenda in the way they relate to people around them – which excludes them from the category of witches. Rather than representing variations of the Icarus myth, the women represent another important strand in the mythology of the airspace as angelic creatures. In my view, this tradition of (post-) Soviet cinematic airborne females, largely fits in with the analyses made by Young: the pilots and the flight attendants can at the same time be patriarchal fantasies and freedom fantasies for women. In part, the final verdict of whether the first or the latter motif is the dominant one in each particular film, depends on the audience. This shows that there is a gendered experience of aviation as it is presented on film.

2.7 The role of verticality in aviation films

To a certain degree, it is possible to argue that verticality is an unavoidable part of an aviation film, as aviation *per se* involves a movement upward. The films discussed in this chapter are all closely linked to aviation, without it necessarily involving many sequences shot in the air, or images of flying. This suggests that even in those films where flying and aviation form only the background, it is still loaded with meanings that

are an important part of what the filmmakers wish to communicate to the audience. These meanings tap into traditional understandings of the airspace, flying, and vertical movement upwards, connected to religion, myths and folklore, as well as the more contemporary understandings of a technologically superior airspace. The films also contain a richer use of the four vertical notions; physically with the use of staircases, lifts, and positioning of characters; in production, with the use of camera angles enhancing verticality; metaphorically with the use of certain words and phrases. Together with how strongly moral superiority is linked to characters who are either pilots or flight attendants and how strong moral superiority is connected to women, it suggests that the filmmakers knowingly use the language of verticality to communicate their ideas.

3 Spacefaring women

In this chapter, the focus will be on outer space – beyond the Earth’s atmosphere, and its relation to Earth. Where the sky is the space of transcendence, representing the border between the Earth and the celestial, then outer space is the space of the transcended, the home of the celestial. The sky was conquered relatively quickly in the twentieth century. Flying is now a mundane and commonplace activity. The outer space, though, is nowhere near conquered, it is infinitely vast, and the technology required advanced and expensive. Still, the idea of space travel has intrigued filmmakers almost since the beginning of film: In 1902 came the first cinematic presentation of a lunar expedition in the seminal *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le Voyage dans la Lune*), directed by the French Georges Méliès. Matthew Solomon writes about the legacy of the film: “*A Trip to the Moon* has also been claimed as a foundational entry in the history of several long-standing film genres, including science fiction, fantasy, and even the road movie” (Solomon 2011: 1-2). As will be presented in this chapter, the sci-fi genre and theme of space travel was picked up in Russia and the Soviet Union too.

The topic of space travel is most often encountered in sci-fi films – films that in one way or another present and/or discuss advanced, future technologies and the impact of technology on humans and society. However, far from all sci-fi films are about outer space, such films tend to center on technological development on Earth. Some space films have more in common with pure fantasy or adventure films (e.g. *Star Wars* from the Hollywood catalogue. Soviet and Russian examples will be presented in due course): the story unfolds in space or another planet, but technology is not necessarily a central topic. Yet other films are based on historical events connected to space travel rather than future fantasies. Such films are more nostalgic, patriotic, heroic, or critical of the past rather than the future. Thus the focus of this chapter is not on one established genre (e.g. sci-fi), but on the chronotope of outer space as it is presented in various films.

In Russian language, outer space is commonly referred to as ‘kosmos’ (cosmos). This suggests an ingrained cultural understanding of what the universe is – a well ordered

whole, as opposed to chaos.⁶³ The late 1950s and 1960s in Soviet culture were in particular marked by what Eva Maurer, Julia Richers, Monica Rütters and Carmen Scheide, the editors of *Soviet Space Culture*, call “cosmic enthusiasm” (Maurer et al. 2011: 4). The optimism communicated through sci-fi cinema is unequivocally connected to the space race, the Thaw, and Khrushchev’s statement in 1961 that communism would be fully realised within the next two decades. “The leap into space was, indeed, the perfect symbol for a nation in a phase of transition” (Maurer et al. 2011: 4). The framing of space built upon established notions of verticality, space as the home of divinity and moral superiority of Soviet ideology. For example, the space race between the USSR and USA was marked in Soviet official discourse with “peaceful coexistence” and the cosmonauts were “ambassadors of peace” (Maurer et al. 2011: 5-6). Maurer et al. argue that “the societal impact, the utopian aspects and the cosmic enthusiasm of the populace about the Soviet successes in space have, to a large extent, gone unnoticed. (...) A powerful utopia, capable of exciting the masses, developed out of this phenomenon – perhaps because it provided an escape and an alternative to the burdensome and colourless daily life” (Maurer et al. 2011: 10). In essence, space in the Soviet context represented the promised utopia of peace, prosperity, freedom and communism, much like the qualities and function of paradise, or heaven, in Christian faith. The Christian heaven is not communist in nature, still, egalitarianism, in the sense that all are equal before God, is a central part of Christianity. Theologian Alan G. Padgett describes biblical egalitarianism as: “the belief that all people are equal before God and in Christ. All have equal responsibility to use their gifts and obey their calling to the glory of God. God freely calls believers to roles and ministries without regard to class, gender, or race” (Padgett 2002). This idea of egalitarianism – that all is equal in subordination to the supreme authority – is reminiscent of Soviet ideology. However, being equal before God does not necessarily propose egalitarian policies among people in the temporal world (Padgett 2002). A promise, though, in Christian belief is that the righteous believer will be rewarded with a place in heaven in the afterlife. Heaven has

⁶³ The English term ‘outer space’ is suggestive of the relationship between an inner space, i.e the earth, and an outer space, i.e what lies beyond the earth’s atmosphere.

been commonly perceived as a utopia located above us, in what we now term outer space. Thus, it was possible for Soviet propaganda to exploit and built upon already existing metaphors connected to outer space in the construction of the idea of a Soviet utopia as part of the space race discourse.

In outer space, without gravity and magnetic poles, it becomes clear just how constructed our language for perception and navigation is: there are no fixed points of reference from which ‘north’, ‘south’, ‘up’ or ‘down’ make much sense. There is no falling down in space. Rather movement is either ‘away from’ or ‘towards’. As a continuation of the metaphor of verticality and hierarchies, one could argue that the weightless status in outer space symbolises the completely transcended being, where hierarchies no longer exist. To reach this place, however, involves ascension from Earth. Thus, from the surface of the Earth, outer space is upwards. Although there is no gravity to create up and down in space, for humans, space is still up there – physically and metaphorically. If something comes from outer space to Earth it descends.

All but one of the films selected for this chapter feature female cosmonauts or aliens in leading or central roles in terms of screen time or plot significance. These represent the two most prominent categories of women in space, as seen in (post-) Soviet sci-fi and space films spanning almost a century. Other, less frequent, presentations of human women in space include passengers or non-professionals. Space travel is another criterion for selection. While the actual travel through space may not be shown or take up substantial screen time in all the films, it is an undisputable premise of the plot. To be regarded as a female cosmonaut the character needs to travel in space as part of her professional occupation on a mission, or be part of a programme preparing her for such travel. To be regarded as a female alien the character needs to originate from beyond the Earth, be humanoid and display female-like looks and behaviour. In all the female alien films, women are playing the female aliens. The one exception from this dominant representation is found in the relatively new film *Attraction* (Fedor Bondarchuk 2017), where the gender roles are reversed – with the male alien Hakon.

The cosmonauts’ and aliens’ functions in the films are different, thus they will be treated separately in order to map out who could be considered ‘the female cosmonaut’ and who

‘the female alien’ is. Because of their connection in terms of spatial presence and gender, it makes sense to compare the two categories within the scope of this thesis. They share the defining elements of space and gender, yet a major difference between the female cosmonaut and the female alien is of course in the element of fiction. While there have been 60 female space travellers over the last five decades, contact with alien humanoid species is a mere invention (we do not even know whether there is life anywhere else in the universe). Based on this, one can assume that there is a difference in how the entirely thought-up, fantastical character of the alien and the more concrete character of the female cosmonaut are created and presented.

Even before Tereshkova’s flight in 1963, or manned space flight at all, the idea of humans in space would be more tangible than fantasising about what otherworldly creatures would be like. An expectation derived from this would be that the technological aspects of space flight would be more prominent in the cosmonaut films, while there might be more existential questions discussed in the alien films. Thus, the cosmonaut and the alien ultimately serve different functions in the films in which they appear. The female cosmonauts draw attention to topics regarding technology, women in the workplace and women in science, with an emphasis on what the (Soviet) world will be like for women in the future. The female aliens, on the other hand, contribute to an existentialist discussion of what it entails to be human and female, and the relationship between technology and morality.

The aliens appear closer to ideas and ideals of womanhood and femininity, rather than images and models for real women. The aliens often have superhuman abilities, such as long or eternal lives, incredible healing abilities, teleportation, telepathy and psychokinesis. The origin of these abilities is as a rule not explored in the films, thus it remains unclear whether they are the result of technological development or biological evolution. The female aliens function as ideal beings in terms of morality, their spatial origin, and their gender and their superhuman abilities lead one’s thoughts to the concept of the Eternal Feminine⁶⁴. The term was first used by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in

⁶⁴ I am grateful to Professor Emerita Randi Rønning Balsvik for introducing me to the concept.

the final lines of the second part of *Faust* (1832): “The Eternal Feminine // Beckons Us Upward”⁶⁵. The idea of the feminine as something eternal and morally superior became a cultural archetype in Europe in the nineteenth century. It is not unlikely, then, that the classical works analysed by Heldt in *Terrible Perfection* were in part inspired by, as well as contributed to, contemporary ideas of femininity. However, it was Solov’ev who most explicitly took inspiration from the Eternal Feminine and developed the idea of Sophia.⁶⁶ He was “informed by a host of earlier religious and literary traditions, including the biblical ones he cites here [in his *Lectures on Divine Humanity* 1878–1880], as well as by Neoplatonism, early Christian Gnosticism, Russian and Byzantine iconography and liturgy, the Jewish Kabbalah, various medieval and later Protestant mystical seers” (Kornblatt 2009: 11). Although hard to pin down, Solov’ev’s Sophia represents Divine Wisdom in a highly personified incarnation, a combination of ideals of the divine and the human. Sophia, a grammatically feminine word, has throughout history been depicted as both male, female and androgynous. Kornblatt argues that Solov’ev’s Sophia is gender-inclusive, on the spectrum between the androgynous and the female (2009: 28). Still, it appears that later incarnations of Sophia in Russian culture have primarily been female, in agreement with the Eternal Feminine. Solov’ev’s ideas greatly influenced religious philosophy in Russia, and also Symbolist poets, such as Alexander Blok (Kornblatt 2009; Gutova 2016): “The theory of the Eternal Femininity, which was developed in Russian sophiology, determined femininity to be something ideal. The metaphysic of femininity [...] originated in V. Solovyov’s teaching about Sophia-Wisdom, Theo-Anthropos, Christian unity; it was developed to give answers to many topical philosophical issues of that epoch” (Gutova 2016: 176). It seems clear that Sophia and the Eternal Feminine are somewhat overlapping concepts in their representation of the ideal, gender and mediation between humanity and the divine. However, Sophia is harder to define as an analytical tool due to her inherent complexity,

⁶⁵ “Das Ewig-Weibliche // Zieht Uns Hinan”. In the English translation reference to the spatial movement upward is stronger than in the original. In the Russian translation by Boris Pasternak, the direction of the spatial movement is not made explicit in the last phrases: «Вечная женственность // Тянет нас к ней.» Still, in the context of the work it suggests that the movement is upwards.

⁶⁶ A Greek word meaning ‘wisdom’.

in terms of gender and function. Neither does she have as clear a spatial connection in the way the Eternal Feminine has. Therefore, I will primarily use the concept of the Eternal Feminine, bearing in mind its close connection to Sophia.

The concept of the Eternal Feminine was also discussed by the pioneering feminist thinker Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, who notes:

Man feminizes the ideal he sets up before him as the essential Other, because woman is the material representation of alterity; that is why almost all allegories, in language as in pictorial representation, are women. Woman is Soul and Idea, but she is also a mediatrix between them: she is the divine Grace, leading Christian towards God, she is Beatrice guiding Dante in the beyond, Laura summoning Petrarch to the lofty summits of poetry. In all the doctrines that unify Nature and Spirit she appears as Harmony, Reason, Truth. (Beauvoir 1972: 211)

Beauvoir's text was not readily available in the USSR, but her analyses of women's cultural function are still of value for the discussion of women in (post-)Soviet culture. The 'Us' in Goethe's quote refers to men, and the Eternal Feminine is the ideal Other – or, in Heldt's words, “the heroines of male fiction serve a purpose that ultimately has little to do with women: these heroines are used lavishly in a discourse of male self-definition” (Heldt 1987: 2). Because of the female aliens' superhuman qualities (often granting them eternal or exceptionally long lives), spatial origin, gender and function, the Eternal Feminine is a particularly apt concept in the analysis of their function.

The female cosmonauts will be treated first in this chapter. Although the first prominent depiction of a female cosmonaut was presented after the first prominent female alien (1936 and 1924 respectively), the cosmonaut will be discussed first. In this part of the chapter important events of Soviet and Russian space history will make up parts of the context, which in turn are also important for understanding the alien films. Therefore, the cosmonaut will be presented first. Beginning with the innovative sci-fi *Cosmic Voyage* (*Kosmicheskii reis*, 1936), directed by Vasilii Zhuravlev, the cosmonaut Marina is of the same calibre as the pilot Galia of *Pilots* (discussed in section 2.1.1). However, it was not until the space race and the 1960s that the sci-fi milieu, including female cosmonauts, became staple genres and characters. The films discussed from this period are *Planet of Storms* (*Planeta bur'*, 1961), directed by Pavel Klushantsev; *Towards a Dream* (*Mechte navstrechu*, 1963), directed by Mikhail Kariukov and Otar Koberidze; and *The Andromeda Nebula* (*Tumannost' Andromedy*, 1967), directed by Evgenii Sherstobitov. All these films feature both female cosmonauts and aliens, but the

cosmonaut is the more prominent of the two. Hence, they will be primarily treated as cosmonaut films. This is also founded in the overall message of the film: bringing more attention to technology and future societies, rather than introspective existentialism. The cinematic female cosmonaut of the 1970s is a young teenager, as envisaged in *Moscow-Cassiopeia* (*Moskva-Kassiopeia*, 1973) and the sequel *Teens in Space* (*Otroki vo vselenoi*, 1974), both directed by Richard Viktorov; and *A Great Cosmic Voyage* (*Bol'shoe kosmicheskoe puteshestvie*, 1974), directed by Valentin Selivanov. The spacefaring girl Alisa made a massive impact on children's culture, particularly in the 1980s. Yet she is not a cosmonaut by profession or training, thus she will only briefly be mentioned, principally in relation to the animation *The Secret of the Third Planet* (*Taina tret'ei planety*, 1981) directed by Roman Kachanov, and TV series *Guests From the Future* (*Gost'ia iz budushchego*, 1984), directed by Pavel Arsenov, where she features. The other cinematic female cosmonaut of this decade is found in *Orion's Loop* (*Petl'ia Oriona*, 1980) directed by Vasili Levina. After the collapse of the USSR the female cosmonaut did not return until 2005, in the ingenious mockumentary *First on the Moon* (*Pervye na lune 2005*), directed by Aleksei Fedorchenko. In 2010 the first "biopic" about "female cosmonauts" was released as an animated film version of (female) space dogs' Belka and Strelka's story (*Belka i Strelka. Zvezdnye sobaki 2010*), directed by Inna Evlannikova and Sviatoslav Ushakov.

The female aliens will be presented and discussed in the second part of the chapter. Beginning with the seminal *Aelita* (1924) directed by Iakov Protazanov, where the female alien motif is first established. Although female aliens played small, symbolic roles in 1960s' sci-fi films, it was only in the 1970s that they returned with full force. *Solaris* (*Soliaris*, 1972) directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, *Dr Ivens's Silence* (*Molchanie doktora Ivensa*, 1973) directed by Budimir Metal'nikov and *This Merry Planet* (*Eta veselaia planeta*, 1973) directed by Iurii Saakov and Iurii Tsvetkov all feature female aliens in important roles. In *Directory of World Cinema: Russia 2* Peter Rollberg describes the development of sci-fi: "In the 1970s, the erstwhile blossoming of science-fiction cinema subsided, and the genre underwent a split between a serious philosophical trend and a trend of youthful entertainment" (Peter Rollberg in Beumers 2015: 129). *Solaris* and *Dr Ivens's Silence* both belong to the 'philosophical turn', while *This Merry*

Planet fit the description of ‘youthful entertainment’. Still, I argue that even *This Merry Planet*, being a female alien-film, is more oriented towards existentialism than the entertaining female cosmonaut films of this decade. Existential questions and entertainment seem to merge together in the wave of female alien films in the 1980s: *Per Aspera ad Astra* (Cherez ternii k zvezdam, 1980) directed by Richard Viktorov; *The Star Inspector* (Zvezdnyi inspektor, 1980) directed by Mark Kovalev and Vladimir Polin; *The Alien Woman* (Inoplanetianka, 1984) directed by Iakov Segel; and *Seven Elements* (Sem’ stikhii, 1984) directed by Gennadii Ivanov. In the post-Soviet film *Are We Going Crazy?* (S uma soiti! 1994) directed by Sergei Kuchkov, the female alien is again relegated to a smaller role, but she still holds a key function. Then she would not reappear until 15 years later in the highly satirical *Star Worms* (Zvezdnyi vors, 2011) directed by Andrei Kagadeev and Nikolai Kopeikin. The last film presented in this part, *Attraction* (Pritiazhenie, 2017) directed by Fedor Bondarchuk, the gender roles are changed, with a male alien and a female earthling falling for each other. This last film is included as a new take on the established motif of the alien-earthling relationship.

The third part of this chapter consists of a consideration of the motifs surrounding the space-travelling female characters, the chronotope of outer space and how the notions of verticality function in the films presented. In relation to the female characters, questions of agency, moral function and motivation are central aspects of the discussion. This will be linked to the chronotope of outer space, in an examination of which opportunities female characters working in, or originating from, outer space are granted.

3.1 Representation of female cosmonauts and astronauts

It was an extraordinary propaganda victory for the USSR when the Soviet citizen Tereshkova (1937–) on 16 June, 1963 became the first woman in space – a little over two years after the Soviet citizen Iurii Gagarin (1934–1968), on 12 April, 1961, became the first man in space. Tereshkova’s flight on Vostok 6 cemented the USSR’s position ahead of the US in the space race. Still, it would be unjust to simply see Tereshkova’s achievement as pure propaganda for the superiority of communism over capitalism. It was an important milestone for women and for the idea that women belong in every sphere of society. Tereshkova became a role model for women everywhere. At the time of Tereshkova’s flight there had been a programme for female astronauts in the US,

known as Mercury 13. It was, however, not part of the NASA astronaut programme. The testing of the Mercury candidates ended in 1962, and they never flew in space (Sington and Walsh 2018). Later, one of the members, Gene Nora Jessen (1937–), expressed her joy at Tereshkova's achievement. Jessen was a little disappointed that it was not an American woman, and that Tereshkova, as merely a hobby parachutist, not a pilot, was chosen to become the first woman in space (Sington and Walsh 2018). As of January 2018 there have been 60 female space travellers (out of a total of 556). It was only in 1982, 19 years after Tereshkova, that Svetlana Savitskaia (1948–) became the second woman in space, and 1983 marked the year when finally Sally Ride (1951–2012) became the third, and first US, woman in space.

In the Soviet context, there had been opposition to the women's cosmonaut programme, and the decision to send a woman, and specifically Tereshkova, out on the Vostok 6. According to Boris Chertok, engineer and close collaborator of chief designer Sergei Korolev⁶⁷, several of the main figures of the space programme were opposed to sending a woman at this juncture. They believed that more knowledge of the effects of sending a woman into space was needed before this could be done. However, "the memory of our sensational space feats was fading, and rather than a routine project, political considerations demanded a new space sensation. The flight of a woman might be just that" (Chertok 2009: 217). Unfortunately, this opposition did not die out after Tereshkova's flight, indeed, it seemed strengthened by it (Siddiqi 2009: 67-68). Tereshkova was afflicted by Space Adaption Syndrome, so-called space sickness, during the second half of the mission.⁶⁸ This probably affected her ability to carry out some of the planned operations. Still, the main task of the mission, testing out equipment and gaining knowledge about the female body's response to conditions in space, was not a failure (Siddiqi 2009: 70-71). Tereshkova was glorified as a hero, and there was

⁶⁷ Sergei Korolev (1907–1966) was a Soviet rocket engineer and director of the Soviet space programme in the 1950s and 1960s, until his death. He is nicknamed 'the father of practical astronautics'.

⁶⁸ Space Adaptation Syndrome (SAS) causes motion sickness, visual hallucinations and disorientation. As many as half of all astronauts are afflicted by SAS during their first flight (Delft University of Technology 2008).

no mention of any conflicts or trouble at the press conference about the mission. Nonetheless, there are small hints to be found about the imperfect performance in the official report (Siddiqi 2009: 67). Internally, in the space programme, it was not a secret. Chertok gives an account of the Vostok 5 and 6 missions in the third volume, *Hot Days of the Cold War* (Goriachie dni kholodnoi voiny 1997), of his series *Rockets and People*. Here the discussions prior to the missions are presented, and a post-mission briefing of Tereshkova. Chertok claims that Korolev brought Tereshkova out of the meeting before she could say anything, and upon her return she was red-eyed – as if she had been crying – and seemed fragile. The briefing was ended quickly after this, and Chertok never got the opportunity to have a “serious conversation” with Tereshkova (Chertok 1997)⁶⁹.

Asif Siddiqi argues that gender stereotypes overshadowed the individual performance of Tereshkova: “Negative reactions to Tereshkova’s less-than-perfect performance were severely exacerbated by considerations about her gender” (Siddiqi 2009: 71). In other words, Tereshkova’s flight did not immediately open the door for women into space travel, and there is still an overwhelming majority of male astronauts and cosmonauts. In 2002, Ponomareva, one of the five Soviet women recruited to the space programme in 1962, published a book describing the inside of the programme from her perspective, *The Womanly Face of Cosmos* (Ponomareva 2002). One of the chapters, “Women in Male Professions” is dedicated to Ponomareva’s thoughts connected to gender and work: “For us, the first female ‘cosmic’ quintet, there was no fight, the opportunity to become cosmonaut candidates came to us, one could say, like snow falling on our heads. Afterwards the situation changed...” (Ponomareva 2002)⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ My copy of the Russian version of *Hot Days of the Cold War* was found online, without page numbers. And English version was published by NASA in 2009. Both versions are listed in the List of references. The description of the missions, including the section referred to above, is found in section 3.3 “Muzhchina i Zhenshchina” (Man and Woman). The URL is listed in the bibliography.

⁷⁰ My copy of *The Womanly Face of Cosmos* was found online, without page numbers. The quote is found in the chapter “A Woman in a Man’s profession” (Zhenshchina v muzhskoi profesiii): «Нам, первой женской ‘космической’ пятерке, пробиваться не пришлось, предложение стать кандидатом в космонавты свалилось на нас, можно сказать, как снег на голову. Потом ситуация изменилась...». The URL is listed in the bibliography.

The cinematic female cosmonaut was introduced in the USSR relatively early. If one discounts the crossdressing male soldier Gusev accompanying the Martian expedition in the 1924 *Aelita*, the first significant female cosmonaut can be seen in the 1936 *Cosmic Voyage*. In the latter the cosmonaut Marina is clever, charming and righteous. In *Aelita*, the soldier, who has to dress up in his wife's clothes in order to get on board the space rocket, is a source of comic relief: a courageous soldier dressing up as an old lady, complete with a headscarf. However, the comic aspect of crossdressing might spill over into how female presence in a space rocket is perceived: in women's attire, Gusev is an absurd and silly character. As an audience we see that Gusev tries to pass himself off as a woman, we recognise the feminine markers of the long skirt, blouse and headscarf. The effect might then be that the audience connects feminine markers to be an absurd and silly element in a space rocket. On the other hand, it can be argued that it was only through using feminine markers that Gusev was able to get on board, suggesting that there is nothing strange about feminine presence in space expeditions, on the contrary.⁷¹

Twelve years after *Aelita*, in 1936, the positive cosmonaut Marina leaves no doubt as to whether or not there is a place in space exploration for women: she performs with excellence. There are no explicit discussions about her gender (whether she is fit for the task or not), suggesting that there is nothing unnatural about her presence. Interestingly, the question of nature as biology was an important topic in the US when the capability of female astronauts was discussed around the time of the first manned space expeditions in the 1960s: was it more unnatural for women to go to space than for men? (Sington and Walsh 2018). The cinematic evolution of the representations of female cosmonauts in Soviet cinema suggests that she went from being a competent and ambitious woman, with an unquestionable place in space exploration in the not too distant future in the 1930s, to be pushed further into the future in the 1960s. Then, through the 1970s and 1980s, she became younger, a teenager, in an even more distant future, until after 1990, when she became a nostalgic symbol of the naïve and ambitious Soviet project of the 1930s. And while neither the biology nor the gender roles of women

⁷¹ The dominant representation of a woman in Space in *Aelita* is not the cross-dressing Gusev but the Martian queen Aelita, therefore the film will be analysed in the section about female aliens.

are presented as a fundamental hindrance for these cinematic female cosmonauts, there are traces of this discussion elsewhere.

An example of a discussion of women's (un)natural belonging in space is the documentary *Zhenskii kosmos* (Female Cosmos, Kitaitsev 2013b) produced for the Russian television channel *Kul'tura*. The audience is introduced to what one has to assume the director believes to be key aspects of being a female cosmonaut. It starts with a discussion of how to balance motherhood and family life; continues to look at how the equipment is not customised for women's physiology; then follows a section about how male cosmonauts celebrate 8 March on the international space station; an essentialist explanation of the difference between men and women in general and as cosmonauts (men focusing on the larger issues, women fussing over cooking and details); and then wraps it up in a montage with different female cosmonauts and astronauts expressing their femininity (yes, they cry sometimes when they get frustrated over work, they like wearing heels, etc.) (Kitaitsev 2013b). The director Aleksei Kitaitsev has made documentaries about the female Soviet soldiers of the Second World War and Tereshkova, with similar gender-essentialising views (see Kitaitsev 2008; Kitaitsev 2013a). While it is possible to claim that the essentialist view of women is an expression of Kitaitsev's own attitude, the documentaries are not made in a vacuum, and there are traces of similar attitudes in other films (see e.g. *Sky. Airplane. Girl.* in section 2.4.3.2), as well as other parts of society.⁷²

3.1.1 *Cosmic Voyage* (1936)

Even though *Aelita* came out over a decade before *Cosmic Voyage*, some argue that *Cosmic Voyage* was the first true science fiction movie (see Banerjee 2013; Burnett 2014). The argument is that the focus on scientific detail and accuracy makes *Cosmic Voyage* not simply a fantasy about going to outer space (like *Aelita*), but also an

⁷² In a blog about Soviet and Russian female cosmonauts, they are referred to as “representatives of the fairer sex” (*predstavitel'nitsi prekrasnogo pola*) (Sinefilov 2015). In cosmonaut Elena Serova's interview with the conservative, orthodox Tsar'grad TV, the second question is: “Is it difficult to be a female cosmonaut?” Elena replies that gender is not an important issue when working as a cosmonaut – but the skill is, and that she has been chosen for her competence, not as part of a diversification strategy (Trifonova 2018).

exploration of the existing knowledge and future expectations of technology, pedagogical and entertaining at the same time. The director, Vasilii Zhuravlev, had Eisenstein as a mentor at the studios, and the Russian rocket scientist pioneer Konstantin Tsiolkovskii (1857–1935) as an attentive advisor and consultant.

The film takes place 10 years into the future, in 1946, at the Institute for Interplanetary Contact (*Institut mezhplanetnykh soobshchenii*), where the brilliant scientist Sedykh (Sergei Komarov) prepares an expedition to the moon, the first ever. The necessary technology is in place, more or less thoroughly tested: the rabbit sent out in space dies of a heart attack, yet Sedykh opposes waiting for the newly sent out cat to return safely before moving forward with the project. Head of the institute, Professor Karin (Vasilii Kovrigin) picks out the young and handsome Viktor Orlov (played by Nikolai Feoktistov, the character's surname befittingly meaning "eagle") to head the expedition. Both Sedykh himself, and Viktor's younger brother, the inventive and industrious Andriusha (Vasilii Gaponenko), find this extremely unfair: Sedykh made the expedition possible, so he should have the honour of going first. Together with Andriusha and the clever Marina (Karin's assistant and Viktor's girlfriend, played by Ksenia Moskalenko), Sedykh goes on to coordinate an operation to circumvent Karin's plans. The evening before the planned launch, the trio create enough havoc at the institute so that Sedykh and Marina are able to hijack the prepared spaceship, called Iosif Stalin. Andriusha initially was not meant to come along, but he manages to sneak on board at the last moment. The actual flight runs relatively smoothly, with the three astronauts (as they are called in the film) enjoying the weightlessness. Unfortunately, they land on the dark side of the moon, meaning that they do not have radio contact with Earth. Yet this does not deter the intrepid heroes, they are after all on an important mission. They need to get to the other side of the moon in order to set up contact, so off they go, traversing the rugged and challenging moon surface. At some point, the ground under Sedykh collapses, and he falls into a hole, trapped beneath a rock. When Andriusha and Marina notice his absence, they go back to search for him. Not only do they find and rescue Sedykh, they even find the rocket with the cat, sent up earlier. The cat is still alive, and, naturally, saved. Then the crew manage to get back to the spaceship safely, take off,

and, with the help of parachutes, land on Earth. They are met with great celebrations at the Institute.

Cosmic Voyage is often praised for its technological accuracy in presenting, for example, multi-stage rockets, all based on Tsiolkovskii's work (Beumers 2017b: 175). As for notions of verticality, there is an abundance of these. The architecture of the Institute, including the rocket launch rollercoaster, enhances the verticality, with both 'strict vertical' and 'diagonal vertical'. The planned (but never



Illustration 12 The institute and the rocket launching ramp. The Palace of the Soviets in the background. Screenshot Cosmic Voyage (1936)

realised) Palace of the Soviets⁷³ is prominent in several scenes, with its tower and gigantic statue of Lenin at the top. Inside the Institute there are several staircases, including a prominent staircase in the hall, and in the hangar of the spaceships there are also lifts, and different levels heavily feature in the film. Andriusha is hiding behind a pillar as he eavesdrops on Karin and Viktor. A telescope is used both before and during the expedition. Much of the dialogue involves people on different levels, or in the middle of staircases. The tanks filled with liquid meant to protect the astronauts during the take-off bring the vertical downward at the same time as the spaceship is going up. The weightlessness and the weak gravity of the moon means that the crew fly about in the spaceship and make huge leaps on the moon. There are also many scenes with close ups of shoes and conversations about shoes, another example of 'allegorical verticality': Sedykh's wife is worried because he did not pack his valenki (felt boots), as the temperature on the moon is below -200 degrees C°, so she rushes after him with the

⁷³ The Palace of the Soviets (Dvoretz Sovetov) was a never realised administrative centre and congress hall in Moscow, designed by Boris Iofan. The construction began in 1937 but was terminated in 1941 due to the Second World War. The Palace would replace the tsarist and religious landmark of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (built 1839-1883, demolished in 1931). In 1990 the rebuilding of the church began, and the reconstructed Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was consecrated in 2000.

boots. On the moon, there is a close-up shot of Sedykh's boots as he takes off their heavy soles, preparing to make use of the weak gravity. This seemingly trivial detail is repeated in several later sci-fi films, to which I will return in due course. When the rocket lands with the help of a parachute, the cosmonauts almost end up in a large fountain, and after the landing a crowd carries Sedykh to the car. Camera angles are also used to enhance the feeling of verticality, for instance when the spaceship is leaving the moon, it is shot from below.

The composition of the expedition crew is of course not accidental. There are a wizened old man and a Red Army veteran, an ambitious young member of the youth organisation, and an intelligent, working woman. Together they form a team of perfect Stalinist heroes. Marina is attractive in every way, she is beautiful, smart, funny and competent. She signals to women that in 1946 it will be the most natural thing in the world to invite a woman to be the co-pilot of the first expedition to the moon. Marina is not shown as someone who takes charge and actually has ideas. Still, she knows right from wrong, picks the good side, and makes no mistakes. As for her intellect and competence, these are the sides that do not really play a big role. Rather, we trust that the brilliant Sedykh knows what he is doing when he chooses her. Thus, we rely on a man's assessment of the female cosmonaut, and she does not get to show us for herself how skilled she is. There are no questions as to whether or not Marina is fit for space travel because of her gender. Neither does it seem too difficult for her to choose ambition, career and following her moral instinct rather than supporting her lover. The way the potential dilemma of choosing between work and personal life is barely addressed in the case of Marina, as well as Andriusha (who goes against his older brother), suggests that the message is for people not to let personal matters weaken their moral judgements and professional ambitions. Because Marina is a grown-up employee of the institute, one can argue that her decision to follow her moral instinct is a more difficult one than those made by Sedykh and Andriusha. Andriusha is still a child, consequently his actions and poor judgements can be excused and permitted. Sedykh is an authority, with most of his life and career arguably behind him. He is taking less of a personal risk than Marina. Marina is still young, in the beginning of her career, and chooses to go against her boss and her lover. Hers is the greater risk, thus for her to follow her moral instinct takes a

greater conviction. In this light, Marina can be seen as morally superior to the other characters. While on the mission there are no major challenges or dilemmas testing Marina or the two other crew members that cannot be easily resolved. When Sedykh is trapped under a rock, Marina and Andriusha quickly find him, and rescue him. Thus, outer space itself is not a threatening or testing environment – it is open for exploration. Skilled people with the right technology will not experience undue stress or anxiety there.

3.2 1960s

The production of space-travel-related films picked up again in the late 1950s, as a part of the cosmic enthusiasm that defined the era. Alexey Golubev connects this to the post-Stalinist era and the concept of socialist Romanticism: “Gradually, forms of spatial imagination oriented outwards, outside of the socialist realist hierarchy of Soviet space, became visible in domestic cultural production” (Golubev 2016: 144). The hierarchy Golubev refers to places Moscow at the top, metaphorically speaking. However, my analysis focuses on spatial verticality as a metaphor for hierarchies, and I argue that there is a hierarchical relation between the Earth and space.

The sci-fi films of the late 1950s often combined elements of both documentary and fiction – presenting current technologies, its history, and possible future projects. One of the most important films of this period and genre is *Road to the Stars* (Klushantsev 1957), in which the female cosmonauts are heavily represented in a part exploring future technologies. Unlike the majority of the female cosmonauts analysed in this chapter, the female cosmonauts in *Road to the Stars* are merely dramatisation of an ideal; they do not play a part in the plot. Therefore, *Road to the Stars* will not be given the same attention as the feature films. Still, there are interesting aspects with the female cosmonauts in *Road to the Stars* that are worth mentioning. Women account for the majority of the crew at a space station, where they are presented both in professional and private settings. Golubev argues that the role of the largely female crew:

[...] was to domesticate the cosmos and transform it from a strange and alien space, where only men could venture, into the comfort and culture of the socialist modern. The narrator’s text in this episode states: “Humankind adapts fast to new conditions of life. Even here, to the black abyss, it has brought a bit of customary terrestrial comfort.” “Humankind” here, of course, is embodied by the women, since domestic comfort had never been considered an attribute of Soviet masculinity. (Golubev 2016: 145)

Women's place in space in *Road to the Stars* is highly gendered, as Golubev sees it. In a world that understands gender as binary, women and femininity function as markers of, among other things, domesticity. The female cosmonauts are still mothers in *Road to the Stars*, yet their daughters are looking up at them from Earth. Tania Zimmerman makes an interesting observation on the same topic: "There [on the future space station], the Soviet woman was no longer an overburdened mother, but a self-sufficient scientist, not obliged to bring up the child and serve her husband" (Zimmermann 2018: 320). Zimmerman thus suggests a somewhat progressive image of the future in terms of gender equality. The presentation of mothers and children being separated from each other might stem from the promoted ideal of putting the collective in front of the individual: rather than caring for their own family, mothers would serve the collective through their engagement in the workforce, in turn the collective took care of the children. However, it is not necessarily the case that a preoccupation with career and profession at the expense of caring for children and home, involves a suppression of individual needs – certainly not in a society where most women were subjected to the double burden of motherhood and career.

The 1960s saw the return of the adventure sci-fi cinema. In line with earlier representations in both *Cosmic Voyage* and *Road to the Stars*, the female cosmonaut had a natural place in the outer space.

3.2.1 *Planet of Storms* (1961)

Planet of Storms (1961), directed by Pavel Klushantsev, tells the story of humanity's first expedition to the planet Venus. The story is set in an undated future, obviously more technologically advanced than the USSR in 1961.⁷⁴ Much like the other sci-fi films of the 1960s, the optimistic view of the future of the country, space exploration and technological development is extreme, in hindsight, even naïve and ironic.

⁷⁴ *Planet of Storms* was exported to the US where Curtis Harrington and Peter Bogdanovich partly edited and directed it into two new films for television: *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (Harrington 1965) and *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women* (Bogdanovich 1968). The films consisted of edited footage and special effects from *Planet of Storms*, as well as the original footage directed by Harrington and Bogdanovich respectively.

The attention to science is evident from the very outset, as the first scene is a moving shot of the inside of a spaceship, focusing on the scientific instruments and keyboards. By ending the scene with a view of the starry sky outside the round window, there is no doubt what sort of ship this is. The familiar announcement of Radio Moscow declares that the cosmonaut mission to Venus is running as planned. However, only moments later one of the three spaceships is hit by a meteor and explodes. This jeopardises the expedition, as all three ships are needed. Now the crew of the two remaining ships, Il'ia Vershinin (Vladimir Emel'ianov), Roman Bobrov (Georgii Zhzhenov) and Alesha (Gennadii Vernov) on the Sirius spacecraft, and Ivan Shcherba (Iurii Sarantsev), Masha Ivanova (Kiunna Ignatova) and Allan Kern (played by Georgii Teikh; the character's English-sounding name hints at cooperation with the US) on the Vega spacecraft, have to decide whether to wait over 4 months until the reinforcements from Earth can reach them, or to go down to Venus anyway. The common agreement between the cosmonauts seems to be that it is up to themselves to decide whether or not they are willing to give their lives for their mission – and they all are. Masha expresses a wish to go down to the planet together with the men, yet, since she is the only one who can operate the communication between the spaceship, Earth and the expedition, she has to stay in orbit. The rest of the crew go down, in two separate teams. Shcherba and Kern also bring with them Kern's humanoid robot John. The two teams set out to explore the planet, and then meet up to try and get back to Vega together. From the very first moments on Venus the two teams make note of a distorted woman's voice, whose origin they are unable to locate. This voice is heard several times during their stay. The Vega team walk into a bog where they are attacked by human-sized lizard-like creatures walking on their hind legs. The cosmonauts and the robot easily fend them off by shooting them. The team continue traversing a challenging rocky landscape, but suddenly Shcherba and Kern become ill and take shelter in a cave. It is only when the other team are able to contact John that John manages to save the two cosmonauts by giving them the necessary medical help. The team then carry on to the next challenge, a volcano erupting and streams of lava coming in their direction. John lifts the crew up and carries them, but eventually his mechanisms are damaged by the heat. Still, the Sirius team are able to pick them up at the last moment. John is, however, left behind and melts in the lava.

Meanwhile, the Sirius team has a different adventure in their multi-purpose hover vehicle. While crossing an ocean, a large pterodactyl-like creature comes flying into view, its tail brushes over the hovercraft. The Sirius team shoot at it and have to dive into the ocean in order to get away. On the seabed, they find what looks like ruins of an ancient civilisation. Alesha takes back with him a rock from the ruins. After leaving the ocean, the Sirius team goes to rescue the Vega team before they return to the landing craft that will take them back up to Vega. Due to heavy rain, a stream eroding the ground under the landing craft, and the crew is in a hurry to take off. Alesha uses the rock he collected at the underwater ruin to smash open the door to a machine. The rock then breaks and reveals a relief of a female-looking figure (similar to ancient Egyptian aesthetics). He then runs back to the rest of the crew shouting “They are like us!”, referring to the civilisation they have stumbled upon. After the rocket has taken off, the woman’s voice is heard again, and in a pond a reflection of a woman in white is seen. She walks closer, and then stretches her arms towards the sky. Back on the Vega, Masha is worried, and debates whether she should stay or go down to try and rescue the crew, as they have been forced into the water. She has lost contact with the expedition, but her orders from Earth were clear: stay put. In the end, she abides by the orders, the crew gets back up safely, and they can return to Earth with all their interesting findings.

The vertical imagery is interesting. With Masha in orbit around Venus and the two teams on the planet, the ‘strict vertical’ relation between them is maintained throughout the film. When Masha hears that the crew has landed safely, she even lets herself float up in a weightless state, smiling. This is reminiscent of Bachelard’s description of how positive emotions make us feel lighter (1988: 10). This scene is an

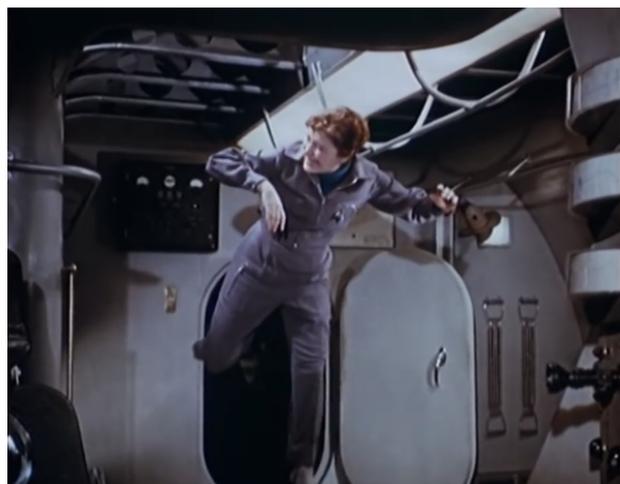


Illustration 13 Masha floats up, when she learns that the ground team is ok. Screenshot Planet of Storm (1961)

example of Klushantsev and his team’s ground-breaking work in imitating weightlessness on screen. These techniques and special effects allowed the actors to

move, or float, in a more realistic manner (Barker and Skotak 1994). On Venus, the landscape and nature are filled with verticality ('strict', 'diagonal' and 'allegorical', such as cliffs, mountains and the volcano; tall trees and other vegetation; lizards walking on their hind legs and dinosaur-like creatures flying overhead; there is also the rain, waterfalls, and streams of water and lava. Camera angles are also used to enhance verticality, e.g. with shots underneath the Vega team as they use a tree trunk as a bridge to cross a gorge. The final scene shows a starry sky with the spaceship moving diagonally up over the screen.

The feminine presence is important, even though neither Masha nor the representative of the Venusian civilisation are given much screen time. Masha is an essential part of the expedition, with skills no one else can offer. Her role in charge of communications is a somewhat traditional woman's job (the male members of the crew are either professors, engineers or geologists). Still, she makes it clear this expedition has been a dream of hers, and she is sad that she does not get to visit Venus herself. She also has to make a difficult decision when she thinks the Sirius crew is in danger, and she imagines that Shcherba, her love interest, might die on Venus. Should she follow orders and stay in orbit, trusting the teams to help themselves, and make sure they can get back to Earth, or should she go down to try and rescue them, knowing they will not be able to take off from Venus with Vega and will thus be stuck there? Of course, she makes the right decision, and all ends well. Unlike the two teams on Venus, Masha is alone in the spaceship, and in practice she has no one with which to discuss her dilemma. She is ultimately alone when deciding what to do and in the execution of the activity. Interestingly, Masha also comments on the importance of humans performing the explorations, not merely sending down robots: machines cannot fully understand what life is like on a strange planet. To Masha, life is more than just samples and data than can be collected and analysed, it is about experiences that require a human body. I do not think it a stretch to interpret this to be linked to emotional and sensory experiences – experiences traditionally thought of as more accessible to women.

The Venusian woman's function is to represent the mysterious, other civilisation. Not much is known about it, but the aliens seem to possess other abilities than those of earthlings. At least the strange singing, that can be heard across great distances without

the apparent use of technology, points towards this. It is unclear what sort of technology they possess, or even what their existence is like at this point: their ruins and the minimal evidence of their contemporary presence make their civilisation very mysterious indeed. However, this part of the film, similar to other female aliens' brief appearances throughout the 1960s, hints at the more prominent role they would play in the sci-fi of subsequent decades.

In a piece in *Soviet Film*, the author of *Planet of Storms*' script, Alexander Kazantsev, explains his motivation and vision for the film. He emphasises contemporary theories about life on other planets, and our knowledge of Venus – a planet he sees as Earth's "little sister" (Kazantsev 1962: 15). While science obviously plays an important role for Kazantsev, he also reflects on the role of fiction: "Fantasy is not prophecy, it is channelled desire, reflecting present-day aspirations. This is how we would like Venus to be, how we would like to see outer space" (1962: 15-16). *Planet of Storms* is not only an adventure film, or an elaboration of science, it also has an element of mystery, Kazantsev argues. This supports the hypothesis of the function of both Masha, who discusses the importance of human experience in scientific explorations, and the Venusian woman, who represents the mysterious, yet attractive, unknown.

3.2.2 *Towards a Dream* (1963)

Towards a Dream was directed by Mikhail Kariukov and Otar Koberidze, and takes place in a more technologically advanced future where contact with intelligent life from other planets is about to take place.⁷⁵ The film begins with an introduction given by a

⁷⁵ There are no substantial reviews of the film, but it is mentioned together with other sci-fi titles of the 1960s in essays discussing the contemporary situation of sci-fi cinema (see Gurevich 1964; Chernenko 1968). One essay is signed G. Gurevich; this is most likely the sci-fi author Georgii Iosifovich Gurevich. He argues that there are not enough sci-fi films made, especially compared to the number of literary titles within the genre (more than 800 according to Gurevich!). Furthermore, he does not agree with the message of most sci-fi films: they are simply not enthusiastic enough about the bright communist future: В книге "Основы марксизма-ленинизма" написано: «Рождение этого нового, самого высокого строя - дело не такого уж далекого будущего. Вот почему вопрос о том, что такое коммунизм, приобретает в наше время большой практический интерес для миллионов трудящихся. Они хотят и должны знать, какое общество вырастет в результате их усилий, их повседневных дел - больших и маленьких, героических и будничных. Ответило кино на это желание? Поставило перед собой такую задачу? Пробовало изобразить общество будущего?» (Gurevich 1964: 67). Chernenko mentions *Towards a Dream* in a review about *The Andromeda Nebula*, as one example of previous sci-fi cinema efforts.

voice-over narrator reminding the viewers of space rockets but also general aspects of life, and then the characters Andrei (Boris Borisenok) and Tania (Larisa Gordeichik) are introduced. The narrator returns on a few more occasions, but for the main part of the film people and events are presented through action and dialogue. Tania is a radio astronomer who has detected a strange signal from space.

The technologically advanced planet Centaurus is also introduced. Its inhabitants have received signals from Earth, in the form of music, and decided to make contact with earthlings by paying them a visit. Unfortunately, the Centaurian spaceship has an accident whereby some of the ship's fragments end up on the planet Mars and some on Mars' satellite Phobos. After a discussion at a high political level on Earth, it is decided to send two spaceships to Mars to look for the visitors. Tania is a member of the three-person crew on the Ocean spacecraft, together with two male cosmonauts, and Andrei is a member of the two-person male crew on board the second spaceship. On Mars and Phobos, it becomes clear that neither of the spaceships have enough fuel to get both crews, including the one female alien they find alive, back to the human space station on the moon. Before they left Earth, Andrei and Tania shared an intimate moment, so she gets very upset when she realises that Andrei is about to sacrifice himself in order to save the rest of the crew. At the height of the drama, the voice-over narrator returns to reveal that this has all been part of Andrei's dream. However, the spaceship Ocean is indeed on its way to Mars.

In addition to the space-travel-related strict vertical imagery of space rockets taking off, and the diagonal and horizontal vertical imagery of celestial bodies in space, there are frames of parachutists descending; divers in the sea; airplanes taking off; helicopters flying; high-rise buildings; and two massive statues depicting a man and a woman standing up, holding a replica of Sputnik 1 in their hands. There is



Illustration 14 A massive statue of a woman holding a Sputnik 1 model, towering over the city. Screenshot Towards a Dream (1963)

also a great deal of movement between different levels using stairs and ladders. This is further enhanced by the camera angles chosen in different settings. On top of this, there are movements between the states of consciousness and unconsciousness: allegorical verticality. That the story largely turns out to be a man's daydream is part of this. Tania's crew all lose consciousness during their landing on Mars. The cosmonaut carrying the wounded alien also falls over in the sand due to exhaustion, but is subsequently rescued.

The female alien named Etania (Tat'iana Pochepa) is the sole survivor of the alien expedition, but she is not given that much screen time. As a character she is not developed, yet the discussion of the aliens' aims is a driving part of the plot. It is thus significant that Etania is established as having peaceful intentions and not posing a threat. She has no apparent influence over this decision and is not left with much agency. Rather, she represents the unknown, yet bright and peaceful future. Tania as a cosmonaut is professional, cooperative and sociable. She seems confident and knows what she wants. She has strong feelings for Andrei. Still, this does not stop her from fulfilling her important duties as a proud member of the collective. However, she does not seem to have any real agency, and does not drive the story. Her function is primarily as Andrei's love interest, but also as a representation of the ideal Soviet utopia where women are a natural part of space exploration. Because the narrator interrupts the story at the height of the drama, Tania's other potential functions with regard to morality are unrealised and unresolved. She is not posed with any large challenges or dilemmas: only with the helpless situation of having to witness her lover's self-sacrifice while not being able to rescue him.

It is reasonable to interpret most of the film's story as a figment of Andrei's imagination. When it is revealed at the end that it all has been a dream, we are returned to the sequence of the beginning where Tania stands on the dock – significantly – above Andrei in the boat and is telling him about the strange signal. This suggests that the story is not really about encounters with aliens but rather about Andrei's attraction to Tania: he fantasises about them sharing intimate moments together; about her in the company of other men, suggesting he is jealous; and about sacrificing himself in order to save others, and how this will cause Tania pain and suffering. In this respect *Towards a Dream* shares similarities with *Aelita*. In both cases the effect of the dream motif might be that it is

unclear whether the viewers should take the questions and discussions brought up in the dream seriously or not, as this part of the film loses legitimacy once it is revealed to be simply a dream.

3.2.3 *The Andromeda Nebula* (1967)

The Andromeda Nebula (1967) was directed by Evgenii Sherstobitov, and based on the eponymous novel by Ivan Efremov. The film was supposed to be the first of two instalments. However, the sequel was never realised. As such, the story of *The Andromeda Nebula* comes across as unresolved and somewhat stumped.

The story is set in a distant communist future, the spaceship Tantra is on its way back to Earth after an expedition to a now-dead planet. The Tantra becomes drawn into the massive gravity of an iron star and is forced to land on a planet in the iron star's orbit. While landing, a navigator, Niza Krit (Tat'iana Voloshina), spots an alien spaceship, unknown to the interplanetary cooperation the Big Circle. The Tantra's main problem is that it does not have enough fuel to leave the planet because of the heavy gravity. The only alternative seems to be to sit and wait for reinforcements from Earth. Considering the theory of gravitational time dilation, they will have to spend decades on the planet while awaiting rescue.⁷⁶ However, the captain Erg Noor (Nikolai Kriukov) comes up with the plan to see whether or not the alien spaceship might have fuel they could use. They send out a small expedition including Noor himself, Krit, and a few more members. The expedition proves to be a failure. They are not able to get any fuel. Instead, they get attacked by some invisible force that immobilises members of the crew, killing one of them. Back on Earth, the leadership of the Big Circle is changing while the government simultaneously try to figure out what to do with Tantra. As it turns out there is yet another abandoned spaceship on the planet, similar to Tantra. Through discussion, Noor and the leaders on Earth conclude that this might be Parus, a lost spaceship from an early expedition. There is a new expedition to get to this spaceship, which is able to retrieve the spaceship's log. Still, there are no living creatures left in the

⁷⁶ The gravitational time dilation explains how time passes quicker the higher the gravitational potential, i.e. time will go quicker in the proximity of the iron star compared to open space and the Earth.

mysterious spaceship. Before leaving on this expedition, Krit declares her warm feelings towards Noor, seemingly without much hope of reciprocity (he has a significant other back on Earth), promises to never talk about it again, and gives him Shakespeare's sonnets as a token of her love. Meanwhile, the dark alien forces strike the expedition again, this time knocking out Noor and Krit as she runs to his rescue. The crew are able to escape, and they all survive, and at the end it is announced that Tantra will return to Earth.

As frustrating as the unresolved story of *The Andromeda Nebula* might seem, it is still possible to make an analysis of the elements of verticality and feminine presence. In addition to scenes of starry skies and cigar-shaped spaceships crossing over (horizontal vertical), there is a clear strict and diagonal vertical emphasis in Earth's architectural (e.g. high ceilings, flagpoles, stairs) and topographical (e.g. mountains and cliffs) features. Particularly noticeable is the recurrent shot of a statue of a massive hand with its palm open towards the sky, as well as a fire burning in the hand at a place where important ceremonies are held. On the alien planet, the high gravity especially draws on notions of verticality, pulling objects downwards. Inside Tantra, there is a gym with an often shown and used trampoline. The alien planet's landscape is rather flat, with small hills. However, in the expedition to the disc-shaped alien spaceship, for example, both the camera angle (looking down at people looking up at the spaceship) and distance (people appearing small or medium sized in wide space) are used to enhance the vertical dimension.

To a large extent, women in *Andromeda* seem to be fairly equal to men. Women are present and participate in all the important scenes and decisions made, even though they do not appear to hold any senior positions. On the alien planet, there are scenes where silhouettes of female bodies are dancing across the screen. It is never



Illustration 15 The world's leaders sit under a starry sky. Screenshot *The Andromeda Nebula* (1967)

explicitly made clear what they are, yet they seem to symbolise the mystery of the planet and possibly the unknown force at work there. Niza Krit is one of the most important women of the film. She is the first to spot the alien spaceship on the lonely planet, the first to feel the threatening presence of the dark force, and she sacrifices herself to save her true love, Erg Noor. Thus, it appears Krit is both sensitive and emotional. She uses these qualities to navigate her own feelings and when making professional assessments. Krit's challenge is how to manage her strong romantic feelings in a setting that requires professionalism, something she seems to handle well. Later, she needs to prove herself when Noor is in a critical situation, and here she shows her willingness for self-sacrifice. It is her ability to not let her feelings cloud her professionalism, and this act of self-sacrifice, which make her stand out as morally superior. Both Krit and the historian Veda Kong (Viia Artmane) also have important functions in the portrayal of romantic relationships of the future. Kong and Noor are officially an item, but the long time they have been apart from each other has changed this. Still, Kong is not sure if she can enter into a new relationship, although this is what she wishes for. Krit, on the other hand, does not seem to expect Noor to return the strong feelings she holds for him. Noor has feelings for Krit, but he does not want to act on them. Towards the end, Noor even goes through a form of electric shock treatment to get rid of these feelings, a treatment he reacts badly to, becoming agitated and confused.

The film received a somewhat brutal assessment by Miron Chernenko in *Iskusstvo kino* entitled "Fantasy without Imagination" (*Fantastika bez fantazii*), with criticism of the adaptation, arguing that the characters are completely unbelievable, the film has an odd focus and has poorly chosen actors (Chernenko 1968). This apparent lack of success might suggest why the sequel was never made (another reason is the death, in 1969, of Sergei Stoliarov, who played Dar Veter (sic!), Kong's new love interest and sometime leader of the Big Circle). Still, the film is another example of how vertical imagery is used to represent hierarchical structures and how women and femininity are portrayed in Soviet sci-fi cinema.

3.3 1970s

Things had to change after Sergei Korolev's death in 1966, Gagarin's death in 1968 and the USA's successful Apollo 11 expedition to the moon in 1969. "Arguably, these three

events marked the end of Soviet supremacy in space. However, that decade had seen human space exploration become a reality and at the same time [...] had left a lasting impact on Soviet society” (Maurer et al. 2011: 3). The almost frenetic belief in future space exploration and life no longer inspired serious films for adult audiences. However, at the beginning of the decade, there seems to be a launch aimed at the next generation. Picking up the tradition of *Andriusha* in *Cosmic Voyage*, it was again time to send teenagers on adventurous space expeditions. This might have been motivated as a way of targeting younger audiences. However, the lack of adult protagonists in entertainment space adventure films (not counting Tarkovsky’s auteur film *Soliaris*) suggests that there was a shift after 1969. The dream of the utopian communist space age was pushed further into the future and further into the realm of fiction.

3.3.1 *Moscow-Cassiopeia* (1973)

The theory of gravitational time dilation is one of the important aspects of *Moscow-Cassiopeia* (1973), a sci-fi film directed by Richard Viktorov. Because an expedition to Cassiopeia will take so many years, even with the advanced technology available, a crew of teenagers are chosen, and while friends, family and the scientists grow old on Earth, the teenagers still remain teenagers. *Moscow-Cassiopeia* is the first film of a sequel, with the second part released in 1974 as *Teens in Space*. Later the director continued to work within the genre and made the successful *Per Aspera ad Astra*, which will be analysed in section 3.10.1.

The film begins with a man, the mysterious I.O.O. (Ispolniaiushchii Osobyie Obiazannosti, or ‘Executor of Particular Duties’, played by Innokentii Smoktunovskii) leaning over a large model of what looks like the moon. He is giving a general introduction to the film. Then we are brought into a young pioneers’ meeting, where one of those present, a teenager called Vitalii Sereda (Mikhail Ershov), is giving a technologically advanced talk on interplanetary travel. Towards the end, a girl called Varvara Kuteishchikova (Ol’ga Bitiukova) stands up and confronts the presenter with a question of whether or not the moral obligation of humans is to take care of the environment on Earth, rather than venturing out into space. The grown-up supervisor of the session pedagogically ends the discussion by explaining that there is no contradiction between the two: space exploration and concern for our own planet. In the midst of this

a boy, Fedor Lobanov (Vladimir Basov), creates a chaotic situation by splashing water over the crowd. The further events circle around Vitalii and his search for the girl who sent him a secret note of admiration. Then Vitalii and his friend Pavel Kozelkov (Aleksandr Grigor'ev) hear a radio message announcing the plan to send off a group of 14- and 15-year-olds to Cassiopeia to investigate the radio message received (echoing *Aelita*). Vitalii and Pavel are first told, by another boy at the cosmonaut training facility, Mikhail Kopanygin (Vladimir Savin) that the crew has already been chosen. But then, as if by magic, I.O.O shows up, and suddenly Vitalii and Pavel are picked for the expedition. In addition to the three boys, three girls are picked: Varvara, Iulia Sorokina (Nadezhda Ovcharova) and Ekaterina Panferova (Ira Popova). A press conference is held with a guided tour of the spaceship and an introduction to the team. The unfortunate Fedor sneaks his way in and ends up becoming the seventh member of the crew. After being launched, the teenagers familiarise themselves with weightlessness and try out the special imaging chamber developed to ameliorate feelings of alienation – they can choose from a large selection of different interiors (including their families' apartments) and landscapes and the room will then set this up. Inevitably, Fedor gets on Misha's nerves, and Fedor ends up being shot into space in a self-destructing capsule through the waste chute. Fortunately, Vitalii is able to go out there and rescue him. The teenagers continue to explore the spaceship and the group dynamics. By accident, the spaceship speeds up, and they arrive much earlier than expected to the Cassiopeia constellation. The scientists in charge of sending them up are still alive (something no one expected); still, they have aged greatly. Not even a year has passed on the spaceship, but back on Earth 27 years have passed, due to the speed of the spaceship and gravitational time dilation. During their radio contact, the crew is briefed about the recent developments. There has been some sort of catastrophe on Cassiopeia. The first film ends with the young team approaching the planet.

Various forms of verticality are heavily used in humorous situations, such as Fedor playing a prank by splashing water; Varvara trying to save a goldfish when they first experience weightlessness; Fedor gluing himself by the shoes to the ceiling in the high-tech room, and then falling down into a bathtub and dragging most of the remaining

crew with him. Strict and diagonal verticality is also prominent in several scenes on Earth:



Illustration 16 Inside the Imaging room. Fedor hangs above the large hand figure pointing up. Note the camera angle. Screenshot Moscow-Cassiopeia (1973)

Vitalii almost surrounded by flip-overs in classroom, swings and gymnastic equipment both inside and outside; the small staircase and pillars inside the meeting room where the scientists decide who will become a crew member. Inside the spaceship, it all seems to be on one level, with a clear distinction between up and down. The shape of the exterior, however, is cigar-shaped, and inside the high-tech room, the room where we find Fedor, looks like a desert landscape with a figure of a large white hand pointing upwards (it is this hand that is turned into a bathtub as Fedor falls down). When listening to radio messages or intercom, people in general look up. The camera angle is also used, e.g. when Fedor is freaked out by the mouse, the perspective is changed to the mouse looking up at Fedor as he runs around. The aquarium aboard the spaceship is another allegorical vertical notion, but one suggesting the direction 'down' rather than 'up'. This is implying that the planet they are heading for is not morally superior. And, of course, the gravitational time dilation emphasised the connection between time and verticality: the higher up, the less gravity, and the slower the time moves.

Although there seems to be no discussion regarding whether the crew should consist of both boys and girls, the girls are not the central characters. We do not learn about their friends and family before they leave. Ekaterina is even chosen because she is in love with Mikhail. The heads of the expedition seem to think that is a good idea (!), in order

to create a group dynamic – presumably to manifest healthy heterosexual behaviour. Vitalii is also obsessing over who sent him the flattering note, hoping the one who did is part of the expedition (she is not). The girls are shown socialising in a bedroom, while the boys often occupy the control room. It is Iulia who looks after Fedor after his spacewalk. Ekaterina and Iulia are also shown in frank conversation while they braid and fix each other's hair and Ekaterina reveals to Iulia how she feels about Mikhail. This signifies that a main task for the girls is to be girls, so that the boys can be boys. Being a girl means discussing emotions, feelings towards boys, making sure their appearance confirms their gender, and enabling the boys to be heroes. In the end, the girls are left with limited agency, yet they are a natural part of the expedition as contributors, if not leaders.

In a piece in *Iskusstvo kino*, Viktorov reminds the reader how fantastical the feat of Sputnik 1 seemed 17 years earlier, in 1957. Why then should it seem fantastical if in some future a group of teenagers would volunteer to come to the rescue after receiving emergency signals from an unknown civilisation on a far-off planet? (Viktorov 1974). The argument presented in both this piece and in the film is that the crew will only be about 40 years old when they arrive at the planet of the planned destination. Why they have to be 40, and not, say, 50 is never discussed. The motivation for sending teenagers, and not a crew in their early 20s, seems to be to reach the film's target audience, i.e. teenagers. While the effect, on the one hand, is that the teenagers can easily relate to the characters, on the other, it sends a message that this is not going to happen to the audience themselves, the technology is not there yet, it is all just fantasy. And in case someone would believe it could happen in a not-too-distant future, the adult man I.O.O. is there to make sure no one will get any such ideas. I.O.O. can transgress any of the physical or technological laws set up by the film as if by magic, as he pops up at any place, any time. He suddenly, without any other explanation, shows up at the distant planet in the end of the film, and brings the teenagers back to Earth with him in the blink of an eye. This is a massive contradiction of the premise of the film: that it would take at least a year and a special spaceship to traverse the distance between the two planets.

3.3.2 *Teens in Space* (1974)

Teens in Space is the sequel to *Moscow-Cassiopeia*, released the following year, and made by the same crew. Where *Moscow-Cassiopeia* focused on the teenagers before leaving Earth, as well as their adaption to life on the spaceship, *Teens in Space* is filled with action in a fight for saving intelligent life on another planet.

This film begins back on Earth, where Pavel's family is celebrating what would have been his 40th birthday without him there. Nothing has changed in the flat, and all his things are presumably right where he left them. I.O.O., in his by now familiar manner, shows up from nowhere and says strange things, explaining how Pavel is not 40, he is 15, because of the theory of gravitational time dilation. Meanwhile, on the spaceship, the other teens are preparing Pavel's 15th birthday celebration. They discuss which setup in the imaging chamber would be best and decide to recreate Pavel's family's flat. As one might suspect this makes Pavel feel homesick and even sad. Varvara suggests that they should never again remind each other of Earth and their lives there. Initially, the others agree, except for Vitalii, who says it is not possible to forget Earth, and they should not even try to do so. Back on Earth, the research institute holds a press conference where the public is informed of the expedition's progress so far, and about what is known of the emergency on the distant planet. Vitalii is in charge of putting together the expedition crew, bound for the initial contact with the planet. Varvara argues that she should go first, as she is a biologist. Her argument is presented in a serious and convincing manner. Fedor also wishes to go down, and, typical of him, he is full of humour.

Vitalii picks out Varvara, Pavel and Fedor to go down together in a small landing craft. Down on the planet the expedition team notes how it all seems deserted, and desert-like. Yet, soon enough, humanoid-looking creatures emerge from teleportation portals placed in the landscape. The aliens' language sound like whistling, though they are still able to communicate through a universal communication mechanism. The aliens are dressed in similar uniforms, are very pale and strange looking, and bounce when they walk. Their costumes and buildings are reminiscent of the Martians in *Aelita*, in particular the Martian guards. The aliens take the expedition team with them through the doorway, leading them to an indoor underground base. Back on the orbiting spaceship, the

remaining four teens spot a large spaceship coming towards them. The two spaceships make contact and it turns out the alien spaceship is occupied by the last living creatures, humanoids, from the planet. Ekaterina says she has always expected that if there were representatives of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, they would look like humans. Mikhail tries to argue, but Ekaterina laconically replies that he always tries to argue against proven facts. Vitalii invites the alien leaders, who do indeed look human enough, to their imaging chamber, setting up a typical earthly landscape of a green, blossoming orchard. There the alien leader (Igor Ledogorov) tells the teens the tragic story of their planet.

Some 250 years ago, they developed advanced artificial intelligent robots. One of the types, called rulers, soon turned against their creators in order to achieve a more stable civilisation. Because the robots saw emotional, living creatures a threat to happiness, they developed a process of removing emotions from the humanoid aliens. This also involved removing love, causing lower reproduction rates, and enforcing that parents no longer took care of their children. Eventually, a war broke out between the robots and the humanoids, of which the humanoids on the spaceship were the sole living survivors. The alien explained that if the robots took the expedition team, they had most likely perished. Because the expedition team was taken underground, the spaceship no longer has any radio contact with them, and thus is unable to warn them of the dangerous situation they are in. Instead, the expedition team is laughing hysterically and have been dazed by some sort of drink. It seems they have forgotten why they are on the planet, and they are not worried by their hosts insisting that they had never sent any emergency call to Earth. It is only when Vitalii, through hacking the communications system, is able to warn them that Pavel is worried, he manages to convince the two others to travel back to the landing craft.

However, when they get there, Varvara refuses to get in, as she does not believe the story about the robots – it all seems fine. Yet when she tries to use the doorway again, a cohort of robots march through it and surround the three. They are taken against their will back to the cell, and the landing craft is blown up. They are no longer guests, they are captives. On the spaceship, the boys and the aliens agree on a plan of action: Vitalii, Iulia and Agapit, the alien leader's son (Vadim Ledogorov) travel down to the planet.

In an attempt to get out of the cell, Varvara asks the robots a riddle, causing them to short-circuit and collapse. However, the expedition team are still unable to flee, as they need a special remote control. Luckily, the rescue team find them, and now the team of five teenagers are trying to find a way to overthrow the robot civilisation. In a chaotic sequence Agapit, Fedor, Iulia and Varvara are taken by the robots. Varvara and Iulia get fastened to a table where the “oschastlivlivanie” (robotisation; literally, “happiness infusion”) will take place. Vitalii and Pavel are able to overcome two robots and steal their uniforms. Yet, somehow, Vitalii, Pavel and Agapit are able to get into some sort of control room with an important energy source, shut it off and save the day. All the evil robots are destroyed, only the two helpful nanny robots survive. Varvara and Vitalii kiss, Iulia smilingly tends to Pavel’s wound in the forehead, Mikhail and Ekaterina find each other, while poor Pavel is followed around by the nanny robots. Then, out of thin air, I.O.O. shows up again, and delivers the message that the team can go back to Earth.



Illustration 17 The spaceship is gliding through space. The apparent flow of gas or matter to the right enhances verticality and depth in this shot. Screenshot Teens in Space (1974)

The forms of verticality are even more present in *Teens in Space* than in *Moscow-Cassiopeia*. There is verticality in the alien planet’s landscape (with hills, cliffs and an ocean) and architecture (with the tall teleportation doorways, buildings of upside-down cones, underground bases, tubes of bubbling liquid and pillars inside the base, sloping floors, and high ceilings), and even technology (the remote control that is placed vertically in a section of a column in order to be activated; two robots realising they have each other’s heads, so they simply screw them off and exchange; the table where the process of happiness infusion (ochastlivlivanie) takes place is first vertical, then

tipped over horizontally before the process starts, and during the process a lid is lowered over the table). The relation between the spaceships in orbit and the planet also brings in the notion of verticality. In several scenes people fall over or are pushed to the ground. When Agapit gets to visit his home planet for the first time, he is shown in close-up, from a partly low angle. He holds his hands up to his face, looking at the dirt in his hands, then lets the dirt fall to the ground and looks up. When the viewpoint is changed, we see that Agapit is kneeling down while he performs this greeting to his planet. When destroying the energy source, a sort of vertical capsule opens and a strong light shines through the opening, melting the remote control. Pavel then comes to the rescue by getting out a long nail and using it instead of using the melted remote control. The nails are also shown at the beginning of the film, as part of the items representing Pavel's hobbies.

Overall, the teens adhere to somewhat traditional gender roles. Even though the girls are part of the expedition, they hardly make any decisions. When the alien leader discusses what to do with Vitalii and Mikhail, Iulia and Ekaterina are shown in the background kissing each other goodbye. The girls do not take part in any strategic planning, although their contribution to the mission is important. It is also Iulia and Varvara who get completely pacified and need to be rescued from the robots. However, Varvara is the one who comes up with the riddle trick to short-circuit the robots. In the end, this does not save her, as the most intelligent robots understand the riddle. Iulia is not completely lost, either, as she comes up with the idea of masking the robot surveillance system with bandages, presumably causing its collapse. The girls are intelligent and capable, but this only gets them so far – at some point, the boys and men need to step in. There are scenes where the girls' gender roles are very explicitly shown, such as the aforementioned kissing scene; the hair-combing in *Moscow-Cassiopeia*; and when Iulia fixes Varvara's hair before Varvara is about to become the first human on the alien planet (saying she needs to look pretty). The challenges the girls have to overcome are typically of the ad hoc variety, which require thinking on their feet in order to save themselves and their fellow crew members. The only scene where the boys are shown in a particularly gendered ritual of bonding is when they stand together in a circle, arms on each other's shoulders, singing. As for the aliens, there are no prominent females. Among the robots

there are characters with both male and female appearances. Interestingly, the robot in charge of the happiness infusion appears to be female (it is obviously a female actor). The nanny robots, however, seem more male, with deep voices and shapeless bodies. These apparently reversed gender roles suggest that the entire robot civilisation is upside down compared to our own.

The reason for the catastrophe for the original humanoid population on the planet is the mechanical robots' resistance to emotions. They make living creatures apathetic by stimulating them to be extremely happy and forgetting everything else. In other words, unlimited, everlasting happiness is not a good thing. Emotion is essential for morals. The robot civilisation tries to eradicate all pain and evil by turning people into robots, so that there can be only happiness. This can be seen as a critique of communism the way it was portrayed in the USSR: under communism everyone would be happy, or possibly robotic in their relation to each other and their environment.

Yet Soviet censors must have overlooked the film's possible anti-communist stance. Both *Moscow-Cassiopeia* and *Teens in Space* were, in general, well received, winning prizes at several film festivals, nationally and internationally.⁷⁷ Still, the reviewer Natal'ia Zelenko of *Sovetskii ekran* was critical of what she recognised as an ambitious film project. Zelenko points at the existential questions posed by the film – of what happiness is, and what role unpleasant feeling and experiences, such as suffering and pain, play in our lives – and how these important questions remain largely unanswered. In her opinion, this is partly due to the young age of the actors and characters of the film: they are simply unable to understand, discuss and embody these serious questions. Instead the ZARIA crew are presented as a homogenic group, as if “the authors are joking, and all the characters of the film are one single robot!”⁷⁸ (Zelenko 1975: 2) The closing line of Zelenko's review is symptomatic of the general feeling about the role of

⁷⁷ *Moscow-Cassiopeia* won, among others, the Best Film for Children prize at the 7th All-Union Film Festival in 1974, and the jury's special prize at the 13th International Science Fiction Film Festival in Trieste, Italy 1975. *Teens in Space* won, among others, the Best Film for Children prize at the 8th All-Union Film Festival in 1975, and The Silver Asteroid at the 14th International Science Fiction Film Festival in Trieste, Italy, 1976 (*Fil'mograficheskie spravki*).

⁷⁸ «Может быть, авторы шутят, и все герои картины сплошь одни роботы!»

sci-fi at the time: “Sci-fi, even the most courageous, the most cosmic, the most unearthly, must always be illuminated by humanity” (1975: 2). In Zelenko’s view, it was not enough to make an action-driven space adventure aimed at teenagers to reach its full potential, as sci-fi should not only pose existential questions, but also provide some answers. As has been shown above, the existential questions of the role of happiness might be interpreted as a subversive critique of communism. Thus, Zelenko’s review might be an attempt to detract from such interpretations, simply concluding that the film does not provide any substantial answers to the questions raised, and that the actors were given too large a task for them to handle.

3.3.3 *A Great Cosmic Voyage* (1974)

Compared to the contemporary films *Moscow-Cassiopeia* and *Teens in Space*, *A Great Cosmic Voyage* seems less ambitious and less impressive. The film, directed by Valentin Selivanov, is very pedagogical, bordering on the tedious in how the plot develops and the characters act and react.

The 13-year-olds Fedor (Sergei Obrazov), Svetlana (Liudmila Berlinskaia) and Aleksandr (Igor’ Sakharov) have been chosen to be the first teenage cosmonauts. Before leaving they go through training at a research institute of sorts. Together with their captain Egor Kalinovskii (Pavel Ivanov, an adult) and a stowaway kitten, they will travel on a spaceship called Astra to a space station. On their way they write letters to friends and family, narrated in voice-over, steer the ship, and have flashbacks to their lives back home. Two weeks into the expedition the captain falls ill and needs to be quarantined. This leaves the three teenagers more or less to themselves, Fedor being promoted to their leader. During the next 30 days or so, the teens almost seem to forget that Egor is just a door away, as they generally sort out the occurring problems by themselves. These problems include a gas leak, where Fedor decides that he and Aleksandr should go and check, leaving Svetlana on the bridge. Svetlana, thinking on her feet, shuts down most of the ship’s mechanisms as a safety measure (effectively trapping Fedor and Aleksandr in a lift), climbs down to the room with the leakage, and sorts it out. She thinks she sees a strange shadow down there, as if there are other people on the ship, but Fedor cuts her off by saying that girls tend to hallucinate.

The next critical situation occurs as the spaceship finds itself in a meteor shower. The temperature inside the spaceship rises, and they need to find a way of controlling it. Fedor loses his cool and resigns. After a few moments he gets a grip on himself and instructs the two others on what to do. In the end, Aleksandr finds a solution. By way of celebration, Svetlana teaches the boys to dance. Finally, they approach the space station. Fedor calmly leads the docking process, and the two others follow his orders to the letter. Then Fedor enters the station and finds the tubes he is supposed to connect. However, on his way back Svetlana and Aleksandr lose contact with him. Aleksandr goes back for Fedor. Svetlana hears a scream and radio contact with Aleksandr is also lost. Svetlana is clearly scared. She contacts ground control, who tell her not to go after the boys. Then she discusses the matter with the captain, who tells her that the most important thing for a cosmonaut is to always follow orders from Earth, and that she is now the commander. Svetlana replies that as a cosmonaut she is also responsible for her fellow cosmonauts. Conquering her own fear, Svetlana returns for the boys. She has to quarrel with a robot on board the station but is able to fix its circuits and get it to do as she wishes. Then she crawls into the tube where the boys presumably went missing. At one point she falls through a trapdoor and ends up in a freezer together with the boys, the floor being covered with cold mist. Both boys seem hopeless as they have not found a way out. Again, Svetlana gets the boys to join her in dancing, to keep warm. Then, sweaty after the dancing, they continue to talk about how to get out of there. Aleksandr suggests one of them has to go into space, and somehow rescue the others, but Fedor explains why that is a stupid idea – to get into a vacuum without oxygen. In the end, Svetlana searches the floor and finds a hatch. They open it, and find a kitten (!), the very same one they had on the spaceship. They start to wonder how this could happen. However, it is not until they climb down the hatch, through a pipe, and come out through a hole in the lawn in front of the research facility that they realise that this has all been a pre-designed experiment. Actually, Fedor admits that he knew this since right before the take-off, but he decided not to tell the others in order not to sabotage the experiment. A few moments after, the workers of the institute pour out of the building to celebrate the success of the teens' training mission. Svetlana ends by exclaiming that one day they will fly to the outer space for real.

Vertical imagery is found in shots of outer space with a black starry sky, and the spaceship gliding through it (horizontal vertical); strict and diagonal vertical inside the spaceship, with its multiple floors, pillars and ladders; inside the space station, where the crew has to get down and crawl, and eventually fall through a hatch. In the sequences shot on Earth (before the mission) and in flashbacks the crew has while on board the ship, there are landscapes with rivers, lakes and hills. Svetlana remembers balancing on a log over a small river, while balancing on a pipe during the gas-leak incident.



Illustration 18 Svetlana is balancing on a pipe during the gas leak-incident onboard the spaceship. Note the angle. Screenshot A Great Cosmic Voyage (1974)

Svetlana is presented as a serious and ambitious young lady, a candidate fit to become a teenage cosmonaut. The audience never get the impression that she is chosen for anything other than her own abilities. Through the flashbacks Sveta and Sasha are shown flirting, and running hand-in-hand in a green meadow with summer rain pouring down. Yet on board the spaceship they act remarkably professionally. Compared to the girls in *Moscow-Cassiopeia* Sveta has more agency, and less time is spent gendering her: She does start crying in a stressful situation, but there are no scenes where she is, for example, fussing over her looks. The three teens all get to prove their worth, but Sveta is faced with the most difficult dilemmas: Both during the gas leak and in the final test she has to think for herself. She is even brought to tears when trying to fix a malfunctioning robot that will help her find the boys. Still, it is not in these situations that she shows her moral superiority: When her fellow crew members lose faith, Sveta steps up. She takes charge and lifts the morale and spirits of the entire crew through dance. She always has the welfare of the group in mind, seemingly never putting herself before the collective. The two boys are never put in any situations where they

singlehandedly have to save the day. Another sign of her moral superiority is how Sveta made the discovery of the hatch, in the end exposing the experiment – thus, revealing the truth.

It is interesting that Svetlana almost exposed the deception when she saw the shadows while closing off the gas leak. However, Fedor, who knew about the plan, discredited her in front of both her and Aleksandr, by referring to her gender: girls easily hallucinate. Svetlana was on the brink of revealing the truth, but she was denied the possibility to do so by Fedor. Still, Svetlana seems to be the most ambitious of the young crew when she is the one who in the end states that they will eventually fly for real. Because of her gender, Svetlana can be seen as a symbol of the truth-seeker on behalf of ordinary people, and Fedor as a symbol of the dishonest state power. This is in line with the idea of Sophia, the feminine incarnation of Divine Wisdom (whose mission is to guide humanity towards sagacity and truth), but also with journalist Nadezhda Azhgikhina's statements (presented in chapter 1) on journalism's role of being the voice of the people and exposing the power, and how women with civil engagement appear to seek out journalism rather than politics. Fedor knows about the deceit, yet he purportedly hides it from Svetlana. However, when the experiment is exposed, Svetlana, judging by her final statement, still clearly believes in the future. She seems to accept the need for the experiment and the deceit as the only way to get to the future: the authorities know what is best for the people and act accordingly. It is not for her to question the rights and wrongs of the authorities' actions, but to do what is expected of her.

There were pieces in both *Sovetskii ekran* and *Soviet Film* reporting from the film set, however, the film did not receive any reviews or was discussed any further after its release. In *Soviet Film* the director Selivanov gets to say something about his motivation for making the film:

Our future film is a lyrical modern tale. We would like the youthful audience to believe that it will not be long before children will go up into outer space. This is a view, incidentally, shared by Soviet Cosmonaut Alexei Leonov, our chief consultant. (Selivanov in Rubetskaya 1975: 22)

The somewhat strange and unbelievable plot of the film might explain its apparent failure to attract the same attention as the similar *Moscow-Cassiopeia/Teens in Space* did. Whereas *Moscow-Cassiopeia* tries to explain and motivate both the expedition and

the fantastical events taking place, *A Great Cosmic Voyage* appears to aim at a more sober and realistic plot. However, *A Great Cosmic Voyage* fails to hit its target. *Moscow-Cassiopeia* reveals its fiction to the viewer from the very outset, yet at the same time refers to actual science and posits interesting existential questions. In *A Great Cosmic Voyage* it seems odd that the initial captain of the expedition cannot uphold frequent communication with the rest of the crew because he is in isolation behind a door – despite the advanced technology at hand. This simply seems like poor design. Yet the most troubling aspect of *A Great Cosmic Voyage* is of course the deceit. Whichever way one tries to frame it, it seems highly unethical to expose anyone, not the least three teenagers, to a 45-day subterfuge such as this. How Selianov thinks this will inspire the young generation is unclear. One could see this as a way of educating the next generation in patriotism and seeing themselves as ready tools for whatever the Motherland needs, or accepting that grown-ups know what is best for you. Still, the question remains, because the teenagers are unaware of the true purpose of their long mission: are the filmmakers trying to say that Soviet teenagers should accept that they live in a country whose authorities might at any given point involve them in deceitful experiments? Is this the ideal future, is this what is already going on? This problematic issue might be another reason why the film did not receive broad attention. It is also possible that it was exactly this subversive message that the filmmakers wished to present. However, compared to, for example, *Moscow-Cassiopeia*, the subversiveness does not seem subtle enough and lacks conviction.

3.4 1980s

With the gradual decline of the USSR in the 1980s, there seems to have been less room for and interest in making sci-fi films with an emphasis on the natural sciences. Instead, the fantastical elements become even more prominent.

Symbolic of Soviet decline were the few films made during the 1980s that continued the earlier narrative of earnest space exploration. While often strikingly odd and entertaining, latterday Soviet pop-space films such as *To the Stars by Hard Ways* [*Per Aspera ad Astra*], *Orion's Loop* and *Moon Rainbow* [Lunnaia raduga, Karpichev and Etushev: 1983] are characterised by primeval scripts and outmoded special effects.⁷⁹ (Blackford 2011)

⁷⁹ *Per Aspera ad Astra* will be analysed in 3.9.1 in connection with female aliens. *Moon Rainbow* does not include any significant spacefaring female characters and will not be included in this thesis.

Female cosmonauts are still part of male-dominated crews, but the female alien becomes a more central character – unlike in the 1960s films. This is suggestive of the different attitudes in the two decades. The presence of the alien is symptomatic of more existential questioning in the 1980s compared to the 1960s. Still, the cosmonauts bring out questions of the practical organisation of society. This supports the claim that the two principal female avatars in this chapter, the cosmonaut and the alien, have inherently different functions.

3.4.1 *Orion's Loop* (1980)

Orion's Loop (1980) is directed by Vasilii Levin and tells the story of a team of cosmonauts travelling to a mysterious emission nebula on the outer edge of our solar system.⁸⁰ Of the five-member crew, there is one female cosmonaut, the physician Mariia (Masha) Dement'eva (Liudmila Smorodina).

The film starts with a prologue consisting of interviews with a small number of unnamed men, presumably famous scientists, experts and cosmonauts (including Aleksei Leonov) giving their thoughts on intelligent life in space. Then the story begins with the crew of a spaceship going mad, for some strange reason. The spaceship Phaeton is sent out on a mission initiated by the United Nations (UN) to investigate a mysterious emission nebula. On board the Phaeton is a crew of five humans, along with their “cyborg” (kibery) duplicates. The cyborgs are to serve the same function as their human originals when the humans need to rest. The cyborgs do not seem to have any will of their own, do not display any emotions and simply follow orders they are given. It was this incident that sets the agenda for a UN meeting where the Phaeton expedition had been initiated. As the Phaeton approaches the nebula, two of the crew members are visited by three alien apparitions, two women and a man (Eia, played by Elena Kokalevskaia, the unnamed woman played by Liia Eliava, and the unnamed man, played by Givi Tokhadze), in the shape of the crew member's loved ones. Navigator Avgust Goris (Gennadii Skuratov) is the first to make contact with one of the apparitions, Eia, as he

⁸⁰ *Orion's Loop* was not reviewed or discussed extensively, yet it was mentioned in a list of the most recent sci-fi films in a piece discussing the genre by Vsevolod Revich in *Iskusstvo kino* in 1985 (Revich, 1985). This suggests that the film did not enjoy the same popularity as, for example, *Per Aspera ad Astra*.

first sees her outside the spaceship, floating towards him. The alien apparitions explain themselves to be the remnants of a civilisation that lived on the tenth planet of the solar system a thousand years ago. Now they are there to warn the Earth against the threat of the RZ virus, and tell them that the aliens have made a protective shield, the Orion's Loop, to go around Earth. However, the apparitions also pose a threat as the human brain may be seriously damaged by the communication. Two of the cyborgs are destroyed, and Avgust takes it upon himself to go on a spacewalk in order to repair the ship's defence system. While in open space, Avgust is exposed to a large dose of radiation and has to be treated by Mariia. During the treatment, Avgust has dream-like visions of Earth, and afterwards erratically draws pictures based on other visions. Still, the programmer Aleksandr Saganskii (Vitalii Doroshenko) does not trust the aliens and tries to sabotage the rescue operation, shooting and wounding the commander Pavel Belov (Leonid Bakshtaev) and changing the course of the spaceship. Luckily, the doctor cyborg is able to stop him, but both of them are vanquished by some mysterious light in the computer room. Then the wounded commander is sent into space to find out whether the alien apparitions are speaking the truth or not. Upon his return, his wound and broken bone are healed. However, the spaceship's troubles are not yet over, as it is hit by a meteor. The window in engineer Mitia Tamarkin's (Anatolii Mateshko) cabin is damaged. Cyborg Engineer 2 comes to the rescue, but Mitia realises that he cannot be saved. Rather, if he tries to escape his cabin, he will jeopardise the entire crew. He has to switch off the cyborg in order to stop the catastrophe. When the window shatters, Mitia is suffocated and floats into space. The rest of the crew hear his last message, but there is nothing they could do to save him. Instead, they meet the three apparitions. The two female aliens explain how they have come in peace to save Earth, and they have also managed to save Mitia, through using the protective shield. Finally the male apparition tells the crew that now the spaceship can go back to Earth. And so the story ends happily.

There is a great deal of vertical imagery in *Orion's Loop*: In the design and filming of the spaceship, camera angles, staircases, and several levels of the interior of the ship are featured. Moreover, the architecture on Earth enhances strict and diagonal verticality, with scenes of staircases, columns and large parabolic antennas. There are the staple

horizontal vertical scenes of the spaceship gliding through space, against a starry sky, and the Earth is shown from outer space. The main computer server on Phaeton is a large orb suspended in mid-air, with a jungle of thick cables extending from it. There are several scenes with weightless people (and cyborgs) floating either in space or inside spaceships, including upside down and even falling over. In Avgust's dream, itself allegorically vertical, trees are filmed from below, a woman is running downstairs, and there are scenes on a small boat on water, hinting at depth. In Avgust's drawings, verticality is heavily featured, including cosmonauts and spaceships.

The female presence is limited to a few important roles, with correspondingly important functions. Women are not included in the prologue, and none of the delegates in discussion during the UN meeting are women (they make an appearance, however, as interpreters and secretaries). Being the ship's doctor, Masha has little direct influence on the mission, yet she is an important member of the crew, with abilities that none of the others have. Masha and her mother even developed an advanced type of treatment, called "psychocontact" – some sort of



Illustration 19 The doctor Masha performing her «psychocontact» therapy on Avgust. Screenshot Orion's Belt (1980)

advanced psychotherapy where the therapist is able to enter into and mediate the patients' dreams and subconscious. By using it to access Avgust's mind, she is able to save Avgust. A small side story is how Masha's mother, Anna Petrovna (Liia Eliava, who also plays one of the aliens, i.e. this alien looks like Masha's mother), died while developing the treatment. Two of the three apparitions are in female form. The apparitions all represent a more advanced civilisation, and they are also morally advanced in that they have stayed on to help against the deadly virus. The women in *Orion's Loop* are taking moral responsibility and are crucial to the well-being, and even survival, of their fellow crew members and even Planet Earth. The women have the functions of healers and lifesavers, e.g. the physician Masha, Masha's mother (who

sacrifices her life for the development of a medical treatment), Masha's cyborg (who prevents the alternation of the spaceship's position and is vanquished in the process), and the two female alien apparitions are most prominent in the scenes where they heal and save the crew. Masha and her mother are mediators for their patients when they are performing psychocontact, accessing their subconscious and healing them. This establishes a connection between the two women and the Eternal Feminine and Sophia. The female aliens are the more important than the male one in terms of screen time and plot function, as they give the most information about the catastrophe about to happen and seem the most concerned about the humans' survival. The aliens, with the women being in majority and the most prominent, give the humans the means they need for saving the planet and the guidance on how to do it.

The alien civilisation and its existence are not at the core of the film. Thus, none of them are portrayed as blank slates (for more on blank slates, see section 3.12 of this thesis). Rather, it is humans growing paranoid and then trying to use technology against others that is the real threat. However, technology (developed in a good way) either saves the day (in a feminine form through Doctor 2) or can be switched off (like Mitia has to switch off Engineer 2 when Engineer 2 is about to kill the entire crew). This suggests that technology is morally good, and that advanced technology fits together with high morality in saving the planet. This confirms the prevalent trope through this chapter about the relationship between technology and morality.

There are some obvious parallels between *Orion's Loop* and *Solaris* (1973) in how characters are doubled. In *Solaris* the crew aboard the space station are visited by 'guests' conjured by the planet Solaris. The guests resemble people from the crew's life. In *Orion's Loop* the crew are replicated by cyborg copies, and the aliens take the shape of important people from their lives. In *Solaris* the planet accesses the crew's minds in their sleep, and this is how it is able to create the guests. In *Orion's Belt* the psychocontact technique is used to enter the dreams and subconscious, but as a way of healing, not exploiting. These similarities suggest the impact *Solaris* had on later productions, although the films are rather different in tempo and focus. *Solaris* is moving slower, raising existential questions, and is more orientated towards the individual. *Orion's Belt* is moving faster and is more driven by action and adventure,

although orientated towards more ecological and collective challenges (the spreading of a lethal virus).

3.4.2 Alisa (1980s)

The popular TV series about Alisa Selezneva, a space-travelling 12-year-old girl from the future, became somewhat of a phenomenon in children's literature and culture in the USSR. Starting out as a fictional character in the book *The Little Girl to Whom Nothing Happens* (*Devochka, s kotoroi nichego ne sluchitsia*) written by Kir Bulychev and first published in 1965, Alisa appeared in both animation and feature television series in the 1980s: *The Secret of the Third Planet* (hereafter *The Secret...*, Kachanov 1981); *Guests from the Future* (hereafter *Guests...*, Arsenov 1984); *The Lilac Ball* (Arsenov 1987); and *Island of the Rusty General* (Khoventko 1988).⁸¹ To include an analysis and discussion of the entire production of films and series about Alisa would prove too extensive for the purpose of this thesis.

Based on the animation film *The Secret...* and the five-episode feature television series *Guests...*, as well as Judith Inggs's article "Fictional Girls in Transition during Perestroika", the presentation of Alisa is not very complex. Alisa does not bring the story forward in these films, yet she is a much-welcomed assistant to the real protagonists, who are male. Inggs explains Alisa's popularity in terms of "her extraordinary adventures and the strange creatures she encounters" (2015: 64). However, Inggs also notes Alisa's lack of subjectivity in her own story: "Alisa has no direct voice other than through the extensive dialogue in the text and no insight into her thoughts or inner world is provided. As with several of the female characters described below she remains an outline, a silhouette" (2015: 64).⁸² In *The Secret...* Alisa is 9 years old and accompanies her father, Professor Seleznev, and the spaceship captain Zelenogo, on an interplanetary journey. Professor Seleznev works at The Moscow Cosmic Zoo, and has planned a trip to collect species for the park. In addition to the

⁸¹ The Alisa series spans more than 50 book titles, the last one, *Alisa and Alisiia*, was published shortly before Kir Bulychev's death in 2003. Since 1990, another four Russian animation and feature films and series based on the character of Alisa have been made.

⁸² This analysis of Alisa is derived from the first book about her, *The Little Girl to Whom Nothing Happens*.

discovery and collection of species, they crew get entangled in a story of space pirates, explorers and missing professors. Alisa is the only important female character – there are no adult female interplanetary travellers shown. Although her father lets her have the helm on their small spaceship, he makes it clear that she is a child and cannot run around on the moon without supervision. In the end Alisa declares that she would like to accompany her father on further missions, where he looks at her and explains that she has to learn (i.e. go to school). In *Guests...* interplanetary travel is talked about, and there are aliens. Yet neither the protagonist Kolia (Aleksei Fomkin) nor Alisa (Natal'ia Guseva) leave the planet. Rather, they time travel. Alisa is not the protagonist of the story – her function is principally that of Kolia's helper. Together they fight the same two pirates as in *The Secret...* to stop them from getting their hands on a powerful mind-reading tool. The good guys win, and Kolia and Alisa return to their respective times in history.

Thus, Alisa is not a space traveller in the same way as the other female cosmonauts (adults or teenagers) presented in this chapter. She is not a professional, but very much a child, albeit a child in a future where interplanetary travel is common, and children get to fly small vehicles unaccompanied. Her main function appears to be a relatable character for the target audience (children), and a role model for girls in particular as a confident, dutiful and science-loving girl.

There is vertical imagery in both *The Secret...* and *Guests...*. However, not in a way that sets them apart from the other films discussed in this chapter. Although Alisa is a good girl, with a strong sense of justice and morality, she is not presented as a morally superior character. This implies that she does not have the same connection to outer space and does not serve the same function as the cinematic female cosmonauts, and places her adventures in the category of children's fairytales.

3.5 Post-Soviet period

Where the exploration of space and manned space travel were used in discourses on what the future could be during the Soviet era, the opposite is true in the post-Soviet era. And while the feats of Gagarin and Leonov have been celebrated by the production of expensive biopics (*Gagarin. First in Space*, Pavel Parkhomenko 2013; *Spacewalk*,

Dimitrii Kiselev 2017)”), there are still no biopics telling the story of Valentina Tereshkova. With these films, the cosmonauts move away from sci-fi in a narrow sense of the genre, as they do not necessarily explore technology or future societies. Instead, the cosmonauts increasingly become historical characters, telling us something about the past rather than the future. As a contrast, the more typical sci-fi films continue the tendency of the last Soviet decades and stick to the fantastical, with films such as *Are We Going Crazy?*, *Star Worms* and *Attraction*.

3.5.1 *First on the Moon* (2005)

First on the Moon (Fedorchenko 2005) is an interesting case in many respects, such as choice of genre, production and storyline. It is probably the first Russian mockumentary – presenting a fictional pre-WWII Soviet space programme that managed to place the first man, a Soviet man, on the moon. This, naturally, taps into conspiracy theories about the actual Apollo 11 moon landing, but also feeds into the myths concerning the various secret operations of the Soviet authorities. The female cosmonaut in this film, Nadezhda Svetlaia (which literally translates into Beaming Hope, played by Viktoriia Ilinskaia) is never sent into space. However, she is one of the top candidates for the voyage and deserves to be analysed in the light of previous cinematic female cosmonauts, in particular Marina of *Cosmic Voyage* (Marina being the original fictional and Nadezhda being the fictional original female cosmonaut of the 1930s).⁸³

Combining the use of voiceover narrator, talking heads, fake and actual archival footage, the shocking story of the 1930’s secret Soviet space programme, its successful moon landing, the mysterious fate of the first moonwalker and government cover up, is told. The first shot shows the ground from a vertical angle, looking straight down at it. Being black and white, and showing rubble, rocks, and uneven ground, it is evocative of how we tend to imagine seeing the surface of the moon. Already here the filmmakers are shown to play with familiar concepts and images, and we are warned not to trust what we see. By zooming out and changing the camera angle, it is revealed that the shot is not of the moon’s surface but actually of the Chilean mountains. Supposedly a large

⁸³ There is a direct reference to *Cosmic Voyage* in *First on the Moon*, when the outside of a movie theatre is seen showing the film and the narrator comments on it.

meteor landed in these mountains in the late 1930s. Then the narrator gives a chronological history of the space rocket design, tracing it from ancient Chinese drawings to the 1930s and Tsiolkovskii's work. The narrator then claims that an extraordinary archival film material has been found pertaining to the 1930s and documenting the selection and training of a crew, one of whom should be sent to the moon. The most prominent crew members consists of three members, the charming Ivan Kharlamov (Boris Vlasov), the person of short stature. Mikhail Roshchin (Viktor Kotov) and of course the aforementioned Nadezhda. The investigation into what happened in 1938 is accompanied by clips of a professor working with some students to test the science behind the 1938 rocket by building a small model and trying it out. In the end Ivan Kharlamov passes all the tests and is chosen to undergo the expedition. It is unclear what exactly happened as the contact with the space capsule is lost. However, Kharlamov ends up in the Chilean mountains. The rest of the film centres on the fate of Kharlamov and the space programme. Kharlamov is able to make his way back to the USSR by travelling through China. Back in his Motherland he was not celebrated as any kind of hero. Instead, helped by his wife, he goes into hiding, to dodge the purges and other possible threats from the authorities. There have been a few reports of his whereabouts, but no one knows for certain where he is. In the end, the student rocket project fails and Kharlamov is not found. However, from archives in Chile there are photos from Kharlamov inside the capsule, as he is landing on the moon, and

horizontally looking over at the capsule standing on the moon's surface. The final scene shows four of the would-be cosmonauts (our three heroes and a fourth candidate who is presented as an eye-witness source) and the chief constructor Fedor Suprun (Andrei Osipov) walking towards and looking at something the audience do not get to see. Thus leaving the audiences to



Illustration 20 The team of cosmonauts and their leader. Note the person of short stature and their long shadows. Screenshot First on the Moon (2005)

speculate for themselves what really happened, what might have happened and what the film is actually about.

First on the Moon uses all the four forms of verticality in familiar ways, when presenting the cosmonaut-training facilities, the construction hall and space rocket, as well as including shots of aeronautics, swimming competitions and diving. The camera angle often accentuates verticality. The alleged surveillance footage is often filmed from up under the ceiling, from an oblique point of view. The person's location in the shots also seems to enhance this. A childhood photo of Kharlamov shows a boy of around 2-3 years standing on a chair. Later, he is shown riding a camel in the Mongolian desert, and performing in the circus as Aleksandr Nevskii – fighting short-statured people dressed up as Teutonic knights. One of the first scenes with Svetlaia shows her standing in front of a panel of doctors, who are all sitting down, the top of her head (just below the eyes) being cut from the frame. This cut is explained in one of the first frames of the film to be the result of the substandard quality and format of the archival footage. The inclusion of the short-statured person as a possible candidate makes the accentuation of allegorical verticality almost too obvious, as the spectators are made extra aware of the characters' heights. At the same time, the inclusion of a man, a woman and a disabled person also ties into the political ideas of the time, where everyone had to pull their weight. Possibly, Kotov's presence is also a humorous comment on the Soviet sci-fi film tradition of sending children into space – including Alesha in *Cosmic Voyage*. A fourth veteran is now working in a museum constructing large models of beetles and insects.

The role of the female cosmonaut candidate Nadezhda seems primarily to be a marker of 1930's ideology with regard to Stalinist heroines. Her character, full of charm and attitude, is similar to that of Marina in *Cosmic Voyage*. Like the other cosmonaut candidates, she does not get to tell her own story. This strengthens the impression that she is primarily a stereotype, or even a parody of a stereotype. The elements of parody expose the features that are perceived as essential to the female cosmonaut: young, physically fit, ambitious, and possibly somewhat naïve in her faith in the authorities. This character is not only the legacy of Marina of *Cosmic Voyage* (who is actually critical of her boss), but of the cohort of Soviet cinematic female cosmonauts. Nadezhda's moral conviction is not tested by any serious dilemmas or challenges.

Another female character in *First on the Moon* is an academic in charge of a science project aiming to test out the technology used in the alleged 1930's experiment. Her character is not central to the story. The science project fails, initially seeming like an experiment with insufficient resources or talent. However, as the experiment did not take place, this science project can be interpreted as one of the truer parts of the film, making the female academic a character who tells us the only truthful story among all the fictional ones. Although Fedorchenko's film appears to mock and play with established Soviet sci-fi and space-age tropes, it is interesting how the female remains strongly tied to the notion of "truth". This is not the typical morally superior cosmonaut – after all, the audience is repeatedly told not to trust what they see or are presented with. Instead, it is through the female scientist, who conducts a failed experiment, or rather falsifies the scientific premise of a moon exploration in 1938, that we get the most truthful information in the film. One way of reading this is that the moral hierarchy is not as easily recognisable as it used to be in Soviet official culture and sci-fi, but women are still truth-seekers and keepers of morality.

First on the Moon was a success at several film festivals. It even won the Venice Horizon Documentary Award, normally given to actual documentaries. Thus it has been questioned whether or not the organisers and audiences understood that this was a feature film (Prokhorov 2006; Willems 2016: 162). However, both Alexander Prokhorov and Graffy suggest the stories of the film being taken at face value are rather unlikely:

Seductive though probably exaggerated stories quickly grew up about the film's reception, as audiences and critics vied with one another to boast of the time it took them to realize that they were being tricked and thus to reveal the extent of their ignorance and gullibility. (Graffy 2017: 205)

At the Russian film festival KinoTavr 2005, *First on the Moon* won the best debut and the critics' award, and Prokhorov named it "one of the most important films of the year in Russia" in his review in *KinoKultura* (Prokhorov 2006). The film has also been analysed in several academic texts on post-Soviet sci-fi (see Rogatchevski 2011; Siddiqi 2011; Majsova 2016; Willems 2016; Graffy 2017). The centre of the academic discussion is the tension between the mockumentary genre, alternative history and present-day memory. Natalija Majsova makes an interesting note about the characters: "The film deconstructs a myth about a myth. The deconstruction is humorous, but allows

for no empathy whatsoever, because all of the characters are elevated to the level of a myth and therefore deprived of everything human” (Majsova 2016: 230-231). Neither Majsova nor any of the other abovementioned academics look specifically at gender in their analysis of *First on the Moon*. Yet Majsova’s observation about the film’s unhuman characters supports the claim that Svetlaia is a caricature. However, it is not Svetlaia’s gender which is the source of ridicule, as the male characters are also presented as caricatures. Instead, they all repeat narratives and behaviour established in part by earlier sci-fi films in the way they are presented as stereotypical female and male cosmonaut pioneers.

3.5.2 *Space Dogs* (2010)

The animated film *Space Dogs* aims to engage children and their parents in remembering early Soviet space history, by telling the story of the two famous dogs Belka (‘Squirrel’ or ‘Whitey’) and Strelka (‘Little Arrow’). The story is very loosely based on actual events, Belka and Strelka being the first two dogs that were shot into space – and brought back alive and safe after being in orbit. The Sputnik 5 was shot into space 19 August, 1960, carrying two dogs, two rats, and 40 mice, along with plants and fungi, and orbiting for a little over 90 minutes before returning to Earth with its entire crew. In his review of the film for *KinoKultura*, Strukov writes: “The film creatively combines elements of Soviet and American tradition of animation and works at the intersections of genres, producing a film that is fun for all” (2010).

The film starts off with the credits being shown against the background of a starry sky. Then the picture changes to what one obviously is supposed to interpret as being the surface of the moon, only to reveal, when the frame is zoomed out, to be a piece of cheese in the claws of a ravenous crow – a pun on the old joke about the moon being made out of cheese. This also suggests a slightly subversive warning not to accept any image or story presented to the viewer at face value. The *Space Dogs* opening sequence appears to be mimicking *First on the Moon*, whose first frames were a close up of a rocky ground, reminiscent of typical shots of the moon’s surface but turning out to be rocks on a Chilean mountainside. The crow keeps losing the piece of cheese, having to dive down after it, chasing it high and low throughout the film as an additional comic aspect. After the introduction of the crow and cheese follows the introduction of the

puppy Pushok (voiced by Ruslan Kuleshov), with his impressive journey from the USSR to the White House in Washington DC as a present from the First CPSU Secretary Khrushchev to Caroline Kennedy, the daughter of the US president, John F. Kennedy. Upon his meeting with his new family – the other pets (dogs and a cat) in the White House – Pushok tells them the story of his impressive cosmonaut ancestry. He is the son of the space dog Belka (voiced by Anna Bol'shova). Neither Belka, nor her companion on the space trip, Strelka (voiced by Elena Iakovleva), were bred to become space dogs. Instead, Pushok retells how the circus diva Belka, the homeless, streetwise Strelka, and the rat Venia (voiced by Evgenii Mironov), Strelka's friend and advisor, ended up at the training facility at Baikonur. Eventually they were chosen for the demanding mission of going into space. Before this, though, the two dogs with radically different perspectives on life (Belka epitomising the one for all, and all for one slogan, while Strelka believing in the idea of everyone for themselves), have to get past their differences and work together to overcome numerous obstacles: bullying dogs; dog catchers; tough trainers, training conditions and tests; and their own doubts and fears. After the initial shock of finding themselves forced to train for a mission they did not sign up for, both dogs find a personal motivation: Belka wants fame and glory, while Strelka wants to meet her father (!). As a puppy, Strelka was told that her father was up among the stars. Now, as a grown dog, Strelka still clings to this story. First this motivates her to endure the tough training. However, during the space flight this creates a dangerous situation. After completing the main part of the mission – changing the battery of a satellite in orbit – Strelka takes the helm and steers the spaceship out of its planned route. She takes the spaceship further away from Earth, to find her father. Then the strict trainer dog, Kazbek, who has developed a soft spot for Belka, comes out of his hiding place to stop Strelka. The situation turns even more chaotic, as Strelka has flown the spaceship into a meteor shower. The spaceship is hit, a fire breaks out, and Strelka is thrown out of her seat to the back of the spaceship. Belka faces her fear of fire, reaching the helm and regaining control, while Strelka and Kazbek manage to stop the fire. They then land back on Earth to a hero's welcome. Strelka is returned to her family, Belka returns to the circus as a star, accompanied by the supportive Kazbek, and the satellite remains in orbit.

The images of *Space Dogs* are saturated with strict, diagonal and horizontal verticality. Sequences typically open with an aerial shot looking down and then focusing in on the characters, as Strukov also notes: “Visually, *B&S* [i.e. *Space Dogs*] combines two preferred types of shot, the aerial and the



Illustration 21 Strelka and Belka by the feet of Moscow landmark "Worker and Kolkhoz Woman". Note the perspective. Screenshot Star Dogs (2010)

low angle, the constant switch between them functioning as a means of transition from one emotional tonality to another, and also as a source of the film’s humor” (2017: 229). What the two angles referred to by Strukov also enhance is the notion of verticality. In terms of spatial hierarchy, the verticality reflects the classical trope of high as good and low as bad. Both Belka and Strelka continuously strive upwards. Belka is flying a small airplane in the circus and the flight Pushok is taking between the USSR and USA is explicitly covered. In the city sequences there are tall buildings, statues, ladders and stairs. At the training facility, there are more stairs, parachute jumping and diving. Both Belka and Strelka reach their potential and find closure when they are up in space. Belka faces her fear of fire, expresses her love and saves the mission. Strelka finally overcomes her childhood trauma of an absent father and running away from home. There are two side stories: that of the crow and the cheese, along with the story of two fleas living on Strelka’s back, accentuating both flying and height, on the one hand, and the notions of ground and gravity, on the other.

There are several noteworthy gender aspects found throughout the film. Firstly, it is interesting to note how Belka and Strelka are presented as feminine. In a typical animated manner, the animals are anthropomorphised – and also gendered in the process. Their exterior is rather neutrally dog-like, yet with clearly feminine names. At the circus Belka wears a suit, anthropomorphising her further, and at the Baikonur training facility all the animals wear not particularly feminine tracksuits. However, in between the dogs look and behave in a very dog-like manner. Belka has large blue eyes, with black edges as if wearing eyeliner make-up, giving her face a more feminine look.

Strelka has a large snout, making her less pretty in a feminine way, but she is also given feminine drawings around her eyes resembling eyeliner make-up. The two female dogs are in other words not equally attractive in a feminine way, as far as their looks are concerned. At the training facility all the trainers, both human and animal, are men, while all the cadets are meant to be women. One of the dogs brought in insists that he is male, only to be brushed off explaining that if he is here that means he is a female. The function of this gender confusion is in the first instance comedy; however, it can also function as a way of showing how authorities control the individual, and gender identity. The dog in question identifies as a male, the way he behaves and looks is quite gender-neutral – he does not seem very macho, although he is a bully (but so is his female bully and bossy friend). Thus, one way to interpret him can be as a transgendered dog. Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering this is a children's film, none of the dogs are featured with visible genitalia, so their gendering is based on voice, behaviour, names and their own explicit identification. In response to Belka's complaints over the conditions at the facility, Kazbek keeps repeating that this is no International Women's Day celebration.⁸⁴ Compared to the actual story, another two important questions arise in relation to gender: why have the filmmakers changed the gender of the puppy given to Kennedy, who is also the narrator of the story? And why have they changed the mother of the puppy from Strelka (in real life) to Belka (in the film)? Pushok is presented as the pup of Belka and Kazbek, while in reality he was a she named Pushinka and was the pup of Strelka and another male dog, named Pushok, who participated in ground-based space experiments (*Pets*). This suggests even more strongly that it is Belka who is the real woman of the two, the one capable of bearing offspring. However, it is also possible to see how Kazbek in this story only plays a minor, instrumental role in fathering Pushok. Instead it is Belka and Strelka who are Pushok's real origin. It is Belka and Strelka's relationship that is the focal point of the film. This relationship is not a romantic or sexual one, but rather one of friendship and sisterhood. The two female dogs learn about each other's strong and weak sides, develop themselves, and depend on one another in

⁸⁴ The International Women's Day on 8 March has been celebrated in the USSR and contemporary Russia with men and boys giving flowers and compliments to the girls and women around them. It does not hold any particular political feminist meaning.

crucial situations where one comes through for the other. This presentation of female bonding is something of a novelty in films with female cosmonauts. Although there was bonding between the girls in *Moscow-Cassiopeia*, they did not get to rely on each other and come through for one another in the way Belka and Strelka do. Strelka is presented as immature, believing in fantastical stories about her father and being more selfish. On the other hand, Belka is presented as clearly feminine, although a little vain, yet she still comes through in the tough situations both on Earth and in space. The tight situations may not involve complex moral decisions. Still, Belka in particular, with her ‘one for all, and all for one’ attitude, appears to be the morally superior.

The audience is told the story through Pushok’s narrative addressed to other, rather arrogant, pets of President Kennedy, possibly in an attempt to make friends and impress them at the same time. The audience is reminded of this a few times throughout the film. Thus, we are not to understand the presentation of the story as strictly true, but partly as a young pup’s social strategy. The Belka and Strelka we are presented are Pushok’s images. We do not get to meet them outside of his retelling. This is thus another example of male control over female existence. However, in this instance, it is not a man presenting his object of a romantic, heterosexual fantasy (which is the case in *Towards a Dream* and often the case in the female alien films, as will be discussed in sections 3.6 through 3.15), but a son who exerts this control over his mother(s).

Space Dogs has developed into a franchise with an animated TV series; a sequel film, *Space Dogs. Moon Adventures* (Evlannikova and Aleksandr Khramtsov 2014)⁸⁵; a theatrical musical; and a video game. There are numerous viewers’ reviews online, but somewhat few Russian film critics have written about it. However, the critic Sergei Mezenov wrote a thorough review where he praises the technical aspects of the film, yet is still ambivalent about the final product: “Following the formal structure [of the animated adventure genre] and beautifully technically executed, *Space Dogs* lacks the

⁸⁵ Unlike *Space Dogs*, the sequel *Space Dogs. Moon Adventures* is not based on actual events, but is pure fiction depicting the two dogs flying to the moon. It also includes other fantastical elements. In this film, the story is not presented through Pushok. Thus, Belka and Strelka are not framed within the same fantasy as in the original film. The sequel will not be analysed in this thesis, because it does not represent any novelty as such.

honest inspirational genius, from which truly magnificent things elevate [...] into cosmos”⁸⁶ (Mezenov 2010). The way Mezenov describes *Space Dogs* fulfils the expectations established within the genre. Still, in the critic’s opinion, the film misses the target of being truly creative. True, the story is fairly predictable, and follows the genre conventions, but this appears to be the case for the majority of family friendly animation films. Strukov has used the example of *Space Dogs* to explore the current state of the animation film industry in Russia and how cultural myths and memories are presented in animated film, concluding that “*B&S* [i.e. *Space Dogs*] marks a peculiar tendency of contemporary Russian culture – its infatuation with the past and (government-sponsored) revision of Soviet, and for that matter, Tsarist imperial grandeur” (Strukov 2017: 239). At the same time, Strukov acknowledges the obvious impact that successful animated films from studios such as Pixar have had on *Space Dogs* in terms of visual language (Strukov 2017: 241). Like many other post-Soviet films about space travel, *Space Dogs* turns to the past. Space exploration is a reminder of previous aspirations rather than fantasies about the future.

3.6 The female cosmonaut – ever younger, ever more unreal...

When looking at the development of the cinematic image of the female cosmonaut – beginning with Marina in *Cosmic Voyage*, through Varvara in *Moscow-Cassiopeia* and *Teens in Space*, to, ultimately, Belka and Strelka in *Space Dogs* – it is striking how she seems to have grown younger, less realistic and even less human over the course of eight decades. Marina in *Cosmic Voyage* is a young woman in her mid-20s. The story is set in 1946 – 10 years after the release of the film – meaning that Marina in theory could have been around 15 years old when the film was made. She is presented very much in line with the Stalinist ideal for women at the time: courageous, educated, working outside of home, and of course beautiful and compassionate. Although one could argue that this highly promoted ideal was not very realistic: with the expectation of working both outside and inside home, women were essentially working twice as much. On top

⁸⁶ «При формальной правильности и красоте устройства «Белке и Стрелке» не хватает какой-то истинной вдохновенной гениальности, от которой по-настоящему прекрасные вещи взмывают [...] в космос».

of the expectations for women to contribute with their labour came the expectation to bear and bring up children. Still, Marina presumably does not have any children to take care of; in fact, there is little gendered motivation attributed to her character. She does flirt with the pilot Orlov. However, this does not conflict with her professional ambitions. She does not think twice when given the opportunity to circumvent her love interest, robbing him of the feat of being the first human in space. In so doing, she also goes directly against the orders of the head of her institute. She seems to send a message for women that it is okay to be ambitious, stand up for what they think is right, take independent choices, and not be controlled by flirts and boyfriends.

The female cosmonauts of the 1960s follow up parts of Marina's legacy. They are professional and ambitious in executing their jobs. Still, they are much more dependent on their romantic feelings to men, and the stories are set in an undated future. Masha in *Planet of Storms* is divided between a desperate attempt to rescue her lover, risking the entire expedition, and following the central orders to wait the situation out. In the end she makes the right choice, which in this case means following order and reason, not impulse and emotion. Tania in *Towards a Dream* seems to have a great deal in common with Marina, being professional, ambitious and seemingly not so dependent on her lover Andrei. However, the major part of the story is revealed to be Andrei's dream, thus making the interpretation more complex. It does not seem too difficult for Tania to leave Andrei when they go on the expedition, and she flirts with other male crew members on her spaceship. Yet, because this is Andrei's dream, Tania's representation is bound to his imagination. He has a fear that his love interest does not care about him as much as he would like. In the end, though, Tania mourns his self-sacrifice. For Andrei, the independent and ambitious Tania is a sort of nightmare. In his dream he dies a hero, leaving Tania to her grief. Andrei punishes Tania emotionally for her imagined behaviour and comforts himself by thinking she would suffer if he died.

In *The Andromeda Nebula*, the unfamiliar and strange-sounding names of the characters contribute to the feeling of fiction. The female cosmonaut navigator Niza takes her job seriously, yet her romantic feelings towards the expedition leader Erg take their toll. She has a hard time ignoring her feelings, and they make her take significant risks, such as when she rescues Erg. In a way, Niza does the opposite of Maria in *Planet of Storms*,

when she jeopardises the lives of both herself and the commander. Niza is seriously injured, but Erg recovers in only a few moments. It is suggested that Erg would not have survived if it was not for Niza, but this is unclear. What is shown is a dangerous situation where Niza sacrifices herself to rescue Erg. This dilemma of choosing between their own and the life of their lover was not presented to the earlier female cosmonauts. This heightens the drama in the relationship between Niza and Erg, making it more central to the existence of both of them and nearly costing Niza her life.

By the 1970s, the female cosmonauts were suddenly teenagers, rather than young women. Although explained by their own inner logic in the films under discussion, it suggests that the idea of female cosmonauts became less realistic. This might seem strange considering the existence of actual female cosmonauts. However, there had been no female cosmonauts in space from Tereshkova in 1963 until Savitskaia in 1982. Tereshkova's feat was celebrated, but her flight was more of a propaganda stunt, not a result of a scientific policy. The fact that Tereshkova's mission was not seen as a scientific success might provide an explanation as to why there is still no biopic telling the story. The fictional aspect is prominent in both the *Moscow-Cassiopeia/Teens in Space* and *A Great Cosmic Voyage*, albeit differently. In *Moscow-Cassiopeia/Teens in Space*, there is a seeming conflict between the elaborate scientific presentation of the theory of gravitational time dilation and the fantastical aspects, most prominently presented through the character of I.O.O., who does not seem to be governed by any physical law. This conflict seriously undermines any realism one might attribute the other aspects of the film, such as the technology, intelligent life on other planets, and the project of sending teens into space. As for the female cosmonauts, they are selected for the mission based on how well they match – intellectually, practically and socially/romantically – with the already selected male members. The selection of the girls is made in relation to the pre-chosen boys, whose selection is seemingly natural (or actually one of I.O.O.'s fantastical efforts). The story primarily follows Vitalii and the other boys, who actively volunteer, and are selected on the basis of performance and competence. The girls, on the other hand, are presented more at a distance, and someone else – namely the old men in charge of the expedition – explain their selection. While the girls each contribute to the mission in important ways, their gendering – shown

through scenes of caring for their looks, giggling and kissing – make them seem less professional. Perhaps they are just acting their age. Still, the boys are as a rule acting more professionally. Compared to their predecessors, the female cosmonauts in *Moscow-Cassiopeia* seem competent – and, much like the 1960's characters, they seem quite dependent on the men around them. However, the highly fantastical aspects of the films make them altogether less believable. In a way, *A Great Cosmic Voyage* might seem more believable because it all turns out to be a controlled simulation. However, this is only revealed towards the end of the film, adding a subversive message of not believing everything you see or are told. The 13-year-old Svetlana exclaims in the end that this was a simulation, but there will be a real mission. However, this real mission is not what is shown, thus remaining completely hypothetical to the viewer. Svetlana and the others are not actually shown going into outer space. It is also striking how much more child-like the expedition members of *A Great Cosmic Voyage* seem in comparison to the teens in *Moscow-Cassiopeia*, although they are only separated by a year or so in age. On the expedition in *A Great Cosmic Voyage*, an adult is even accompanying the teens on the mission. Svetlana does not seem so dependent on a man or boy in her actions, yet she is discredited by them on the basis of her gender. The end, where it is revealed that the expedition could not happen even in fiction, again leaves the teenage cosmonauts as highly unbelievable characters.

One could argue that the female and male teenage cosmonauts seem equally unbelievable. However, while in the 1970s there were several other examples of male cosmonauts (e.g. *Solaris*, *How the Legend Began* (Tak nachinalas' legenda , Boris Grigor'ev 1976), *Inquest of Pilot Pirx* (Doznanie pilota Pirksa, Marek Pestrak 1978)), there were no other female cosmonauts except for the teens. In the 1980s, there again appeared a woman cosmonaut, the physician Mariia in *Orion's Loop*; however, in terms of space-travelling women, the decade was dominated by the girl Alisa. Alisa is even younger than the 1970's female cosmonauts. She is presented as a schoolgirl and not actually a cosmonaut (she travels in space when she accompanies her biologist father). Mariia in *Orion's Loop*, similarly to the 1960's female cosmonauts, is a character in a distant future. She is professional and skilled and fairly independent. There is a romantic involvement between Mariia and Avgust, but it is never developed beyond creating an

extra layer of drama when Avgust is injured and Mariia helps to heal him. As a cosmonaut she might be a more believable than the teens of the 1970s and 1980s – being an adult. Still, *Orion's Belt* is even less concerned with science than with fiction compared to *Moscow-Cassiopeia* and *A Great Cosmic Voyage*, and it did not attract a large audience in the way the teen films did. This suggests that although the character Mariia, as an adult cosmonaut, is more believable, the film did not appeal much to the audience.

After Mariia of *Orion's Belt* there would not be another female cosmonaut on the Soviet/Russian screen for 25 years, until Nadezhda in *First on the Moon* in 2005. However, while all female cosmonauts up until this point have existed in the near or distant future, Nadezhda is situated in the past, in 1938. In addition, like Svetlana in *A Great Cosmic Voyage*, she does not actually travel to space. Apart from this, Nadezhda seems to be modelled on Marina of *Cosmic Voyage*, as a Stalinist era cliché character. Due to its engagements with conspiracy theories of state secrets and space travel, and genre as a mockumentary, *First on the Moon* very actively provokes its viewers to not only question this particular film, but the realism of film and even what we consider to be true. In the 2000s, the female cosmonaut represents not the distant and possibly unbelievable future, but rather the unbelievable past. Where she began as a possible contemporary teenager in 1936, she had perhaps not even been born by the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In 2005 she never existed in the first place, questioning the idea of a female cosmonaut altogether. With *Space Dogs* came the first Russian-language female cosmonaut biopic – not about any of the Soviet or Russian *human* female cosmonauts, but about the two female dogs, Belka and Strelka. With the perspective of the development of the female cosmonaut character in (post-) Soviet cinema, Belka and Strelka seem to represent a de-humanisation. And although Belka and Strelka are shown through the most part of the film as independent – e.g. when they experience the streets of Moscow together – they are seldom themselves in control of the major events in their lives. At a time where the feats of cosmonauts Gagarin and Leonov, and rocket scientist Korolev, are presented in expensive biopics, and the space dogs Belka and Strelka receive a successful, full-length animation, there is still no popularised cinematic presentation of real-life female cosmonauts. A possible explanation might be because

film studios do not expect biopics about women cosmonauts to have a sufficient audience appeal and financial potential in comparison with the male cosmonauts' stories. However, considering the success of the Hollywood production *Hidden Figures* (Theodore Melfi 2016), it is not impossible to think a Russian film studio would attempt to make a similar production, e.g. on real-life female contribution to space exploration. *Hidden Figures* does not tell a story about female astronauts, though, but about black female mathematicians at NASA in 1961. In Hollywood, much like in the USSR and Russia, the majority of female astronaut characters are found in sci-fi. The scholarly literature on spacefaring women in Western and Hollywood productions tends not to differentiate between human astronauts/space travellers, aliens, cyborgs, or even female characters that do not even leave the planet. Rather, it appears that the genre sci-fi and gender are used as the main points of comparison – not the characters' occupation or involvement in different spaces (Faithful 2016; Conrad 2011). In his article “Femmes Futures: One Hundred Years of Female Representation in SF Cinema” Dean Conrad discusses the various female characters in sci-fi, with an emphasis on US and Western productions: “While female roles in sf cinema have developed considerably since the 1950s, the last decade or so has seen a fall in the number of major roles for women. They have remained visible – even prominent – but their importance to individual narratives has reverted to an earlier state” (2011: 80). Retired astronaut Marsha Ivins wrote a comment in TIME entitled “What Hollywood Gets Wrong About Female Astronauts and the Reality of Space” (Ivins 2017). In the comment, Ivins is primarily making a comment about an upcoming film called *Pale Blue Dot*, about a female astronaut.⁸⁷ However, the title suggests that Ivins thinks that misconceptions about female astronaut are not limited to this single project. She does not elaborate on what these misconceptions are, but hints at them when she writes: “I hope the filmmakers will take this into account: Astronauts are, at the end of the day, just regular people, subject

⁸⁷ *Pale Blue Dot* is loosely based on the true story of astronaut Lisa Nowak. Nowak hit the headlines in 2007 when she attempted to kidnap Colleen Shipman – the new girlfriend of a former love interest, astronaut William Oefelein. With romantic intrigues (e.g. adultery), evidence suggesting Nowak had carefully planned the kidnapping, and the all-American heroic figures of astronauts being exposed as less-than heroic (to put it mildly), director Noah Hawley should have what he needs to make a film.

to the same personal, family and work-related issues everyone faces” (2017). Ivins resists the idea of presenting astronauts as either more-than human, or less-than human, and also the idea of gender-essentialising cinematic presentations: “Were women returning from spaceflights supposed to be different in some way from men returning from similar spaceflights? Another office memo I apparently never read” (2017).

The motivation to become a cosmonaut is not a defining trait for the female cosmonauts discussed in this chapter. Unlike the romantic pilot identity, there is no apparent similar cosmonaut identity. Neither of the female cosmonauts seem troubled by what they might have to give up in order to carry out their profession; whether this is the right occupation for them is never questioned. The female cosmonaut characters are not used to thematise or discuss women’s identities – in the workplace or in terms of gender. This is a contrast to the women in aviation discussed in the previous chapter. One interpretation of this is that the female cosmonaut and female presence in outer space are naturalised. No further motivation to include female cosmonauts in films about exploration of outer space is required, because women’s participation goes without saying. The girls and women cosmonauts in these films are highly intelligent, educated and professional. Being on a mission in outer space may not require a passion for space travel, but it does require courage and hard work. The character of the female cosmonaut is not presented as particularly complex. Except for Belka and Strelka, she does not appear to inspire any in-depth considerations of the individual’s choice of life or ways to self-fulfilment. Incidentally, Belka and Strelka are two of three leading-role female cosmonauts (Svetlana in *A Great Cosmic Voyage* is the third) – the rest play supporting roles. This is likely part of the reason why the majority of female cosmonaut characters are not very complex, as supporting characters are often less developed. Rather, the female cosmonauts appear to be an important part of legitimising the collective fantasy of the communist future – in more and less subversive ways, and in Soviet and post-Soviet films alike. Verticality as a sign of progress seems fundamental for this fantasy, thus narratives about space travel and (naturalised) female cosmonauts are particularly fitting.

3.7 Aliens

The female alien as an otherworldly humanoid creature has been part of Soviet and Russian sci-fi cinema from the very outset. Before women were presented on the screen as cosmonauts, they had been presented as aliens. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, there are significant differences between the female cosmonauts and the female aliens. Ultimately, they serve different functions, based on their spatial origin. The cosmonauts are human, travelling from Earth, exploring the cosmos. The aliens' origin is often an unknown and unfamiliar place, where either their technological advancement or ecology has provided the aliens with extraordinary abilities, such as exceptionally fast healing, respawning after dying, teleporting, telepathy, psychokinesis (moving objects by mind power), and eternal or exceptionally long lives. Thus, the female aliens in Soviet and post-Soviet cinema can be described as superhuman. The Soviet superhuman is predominately a female character, still, there are male superhumans too (e.g. in *Dr Ivens*, *Orion's Loop*, *The Alien Woman* and in *Attraction*).⁸⁸

Based on the superhumans' gender, spatial origin, plot function and abilities, they seem to embody the concept of the Eternal Feminine as described by Goethe and Beauvoir. This concept will be an important aspect of the analysis in this part, and a central question is how the female aliens embody the concept, and what purpose such an embodiment serves.

3.8 The 1920s

The first part of this decade was dominated by civil war and chaos, as the fledgling Soviet regime consolidated its power and laid the directions for future development. In the early Soviet Union, the discussion of what art and its function was in the changing society acquired an importance of hitherto unknown proportions. Increasingly towards the end of the decade, artists had to adapt their works to the rapid changes in the official policy in order not to end up on the losing side of some political controversy. The revolution meant that existing norms and narratives were challenged by art. It was a productive period for artists, who experimented with various styles and expressions,

⁸⁸ This section, about the female aliens, is in part based on the article "Female Aliens in (Post-) Soviet Sci-Fi Cinema: Technology, Sacrifice and Morality Feminism" (Høgetveit 2018).

often challenging existing norms and values. This led to, among other things, the ground-breaking work of directors Eisenstein (1898–1948) and Oleksandr Dovzhenko (1894–1956). The Bolshevik authorities also recognised and actively used the relatively new medium of cinema in distributing and conveying their political message. *Aelita*, the first ever Russian-language sci-fi film (based on the eponymous 1923 novel by Aleksei Tolstoi), is an excellent example of a cinematic attempt to challenge existing norms and values:

Aelita can surely lay claim to being *the* key film of the early NEP period, born of a unique moment in post-Revolutionary Soviet society, reflecting its realities as well as its aspirations in a complex and original form, and linking its hitherto isolated cinema with important currents in world cinema. (Christie 1994: 102)

This is also the decade when the first initiative for a Soviet space programme was established, through the Laboratory of Gas Dynamics (Gazodinamicheskaia Laboratoriia) in 1921. However, the opening of the institute did not mean that space exploration was high on the agenda, as the message of the film *Aelita* will show.

3.8.1 *Aelita* (1924)

The sci-fi film *Aelita* (1924) by the already experienced silent film director Iakov Protazanov offered something that was then entirely novel to the Russian and world audiences with its futuristic presentation of the planet Mars and the Martian inhabitants. The author of the film's literary source, Aleksei Tolstoi, like Protazanov himself, returned to the USSR after initially immigrating to Paris. It was important for both Tolstoy and Protazanov to prove their loyalty to the Soviet project in order to be able to work. *Aelita* seems to have been created in order to serve this purpose.

The film's plotline is complex, following several characters with more or less interconnected stories. The main story revolves around the engineer Los (Nikolai Tseretelli), who is obsessed with interplanetary travel and gets so caught up in a mysterious radio message from Mars (and his jealousy towards his wife, whom he apparently murders) that he builds a space rocket and travels to Mars. There he gets to meet Aelita, the Queen of Mars (Iulia Solntseva). Aelita does not possess any obvious superhuman abilities. However, her access to advanced technology, her political influence and power, her function in the story, and *Aelita*'s position as the original Soviet sci-fi film, necessitate the following analysis and discussion.

The film is composed of scenes and stories from early 1920's Moscow, during the chaos of the Civil War and NEP, and sequences set on Mars, where Aelita circumvents her father Tuskub by using the telescope technology to spy on Earth. More specifically, she spies on Los, with whom she falls in love. After Los's arrival, the oppressed slaves of Mars revolt against their rulers. In the ensuing turmoil Aelita attempts a coup, but in the end Los kills her. At this point it is revealed that Los has been dreaming it all, although it is unclear what else exactly has and has not been a dream, apart from the events on Mars. Los is able to return to his wife (whom he did not kill, after all). In the end, he throws his sketches of a rocket on the fire and declares: 'Enough daydreaming! We have different work to worry about', suggesting that one should put one's talents to the implementation of more practical Soviet construction projects, rather than fantasies about interplanetary travel.

The year 1924 when the film was released marks the beginning of the period in which the Soviet film production really kicked off, both in terms of quantity and quality (for details see Youngblood 1993: 94). *Aelita* obviously tries to present an ideologically acceptable story, by making villains of speculators, people nostalgic for pre-revolutionary times and of course dictators oppressing the masses. However, its message concerning the spreading of the revolution to other civilisations is more ambiguous: "The question of *Aelita's* ideological conformity has been a vexing one, and there has been no agreement about its political implications" (Christensen 2000: 109). This ambiguity can be seen as a symptom of the political situation at the time, when the official policy was transitioning from the idea that the Bolshevik revolution should be spread throughout the world, to a policy of communism in one country.⁸⁹ Neither was it unproblematic to present everyday life in the Soviet Union as something from which one would wish to escape. The film is often remembered because of its legendary visual presentation of Mars (the futuristic sets and costumes were designed by Isaak Rabinovich and Aleksandra Ekster), and for its on-location footage of the Moscow of the early 1920s. However, the film, and in particular the character of Aelita, makes for

⁸⁹ The Soviet policy of building communism in one country was officially adopted in late 1925, but had already been considered by 1924.

interesting discussions about genders and relationships between them: “*Aelita: Queen of Mars* is the prototype film of the relationship between human male and alien female, that is, of first contact” (Lathers 2010: 198). Aelita is an Other, who at first resembles an embodiment the Eternal Feminine, drawing Los upward. However, Los is tricked by her spatial and cultural placement, as she turns out to be far from the idealised Other.

In his Aesopian interpretation of *Aelita* Peter G. Christensen reads Mars as being a metaphor for Soviet Russia, concluding that a political revolution will fail without a cultural revolution, in line with the thoughts of Alexander Bogdanov⁹⁰. Thus, *Aelita* is seen as entering the relevant and potent discussion of what was to follow the New Economic Policy (NEP), and how to deal with cultural influences of the bourgeois past (Christensen 2000: 110-111). These questions remain unresolved in the film, partly because Los leaves Mars before the revolt is concluded, and, of course, because it is all revealed to be a daydream. Los’s way of dealing with it is simply to say that such a flight of fancy will no longer happen, and he will put himself to more useful work.

Furthermore, Christensen argues that “Protazanov's Mars has absolutely nothing to teach Earth. Not only does it stand for the rule of the aristocracy, it does not look comfortable. The famous costumes and sets which may have been alluring to Soviet audiences in the 1920s really have only a stylistic novelty value rather than a value related to comfort or use” (2000: 115). The Martian aesthetic accentuates verticality almost to the extreme with its columns, stairs, straight lines, spirals and lighting. This extreme verticality underscores the hierarchical structure of Martian society. Whether the Martian architecture and costumes are comfortable or useful is of little relevance to my analysis. Rather, they suggest that the society of Los’s daydreams is hierarchical to its very core, and cannot simply be changed. It is possible that he imagines this strict authoritarian society because it seems easier to navigate in comparison to his confusing

⁹⁰ Alexander Bogdanov (1873-1928) was a prominent Bolshevik, openly opposed to Lenin and Leninist doctrines. After the 1917 revolution he co-founded the proletarian art movement *Proletkult*, where he functioned as a lead theorist. *Proletkult*'s agenda was to be a vehicle for the development of the new proletarian culture because the new political and economic order demanded, as described by Marx, a new class-specific culture. However, the Bolshevik Central Committee denounced the organisation on 1 December, 1920, on the basis of promoting bourgeois culture.

everyday earthly surroundings: Los is “a ‘bourgeois specialist’ ostensibly committed to building communism, but still emotionally – perhaps unconsciously – unadjusted to the new order” (Christie 1994: 92). The film’s lesson, however, seems to be that such hierarchical societies are fragile, and just as easily thrown into turmoil. Los has to wholeheartedly reject the idea of such a society, and rather put his energy into constructing a new Soviet society.

The vertical imagery does not limit itself to the strict and diagonal verticals of Martian aesthetics, although there it is most prominent. Los’s study is located at the top floor, where he gazes out the window both down on the street and up in the sky. The hall with the staircase is the location for several dramatic sequences (when Los thinks he exposes his wife’s adultery, and when he shoots her, to mention but two). The location for the illegal party, attended by Los’s wife, the swindlers and other bourgeois elements, is down in some basement. In addition, there are several shots taken from a high vantage point or from a bridge or otherwise including perspectives of height and depth.

This interpretation of the vertical aesthetics of the film’s underscoring hierarchical structures (a recurrent device in sci-fi dystopia, found in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang 1927) and *High Rise* (Wheatley 2015), to mention just two) also has implications for the understanding of *Aelita*: it is not the society per se that is the subject of Los’s daydreams, it is *Aelita*, yet *Aelita* does not exist



Illustration 22 Typical Martian architecture, with staircases, pillars and arches. Screenshot Aelita (1924)

without the Martian society. Not only is she part of the hierarchical Martian society, she is also in a hierarchical relation to Los. She is looking down at him from Mars, and, when they finally meet, he throws himself at her feet. *Aelita* is superior to Los in terms of class and by virtue of belonging to a technologically more advanced civilisation. However, she is not morally superior, thus challenging the nineteenth century trope of the terrible perfect female character described by Heldt. *Aelita* suggests that the

important question of gender roles in the new Soviet society was also discussed cinematically (in particular, women's moral function, but also their sexuality).

The advanced technology in *Aelita* does not seem to play a great role in its own right. There is little focus on Los's space rocket, for instance. It is more or less explained as a result of his ingenuity as an engineer. As for the advanced Martian technology, it seems to fulfil the function of presenting the Martian civilisation as superior, as well as providing a communication link between Aelita and Los. In *Aelita*, unlike in most Soviet sci-fi, technological superiority does not equal moral superiority.

Aelita can briefly be summed up as a powerful, sexual, evil, technologically advanced, female alien. She fights for herself, and her death is not a tragedy – on the contrary, Los's murder of her appears justified. Throughout the film, Aelita and Los's wife Natasha mirror each other. When Los becomes jealous towards his wife, he turns to Aelita. First, (he imagines) he kills his wife. Then he kills Aelita. While he is killing Aelita, he sees his wife in her place, highlighting the connection. Both murders are justified as necessary steps towards a new and better society: "Killing the fantasy of Aelita, as well as his distorted image of Natasha [...], is the necessary prelude to her 'rebirth' as a true Soviet woman and to Los's regeneration as a 'good' Soviet engineer" (Christie 1994: 100). *Aelita* suggests that the important questions of gender roles in the new Soviet society were engaged cinematically (especially women's moral function, but also their sexuality). Aelita's ultimate failure to reaffirm the Eternal Feminine trope may also explain why she is not a true superhuman, in that she does not possess any superhuman abilities.

Subsequent Soviet presentations of female superhumans confirm the exceptionality of Aelita and her murder, as she does not seem to have any direct descendants in later films. Even though *Aelita* greatly influenced Soviet sci-fi cinema visually, structurally (i.e. the dream structure) and thematically (i.e. the romance between a human male and an alien female), the challenge to the gender stereotype gained less traction. As such, Aelita seems to be one of the mothers of later Hollywood and non-Russian presentations of female aliens, as well as female aliens in post-Soviet sci-fi cinema.

3.9 The 1970s

By the 1960s, space travel was no longer a figment of a daydreamer's imagination or simply dismissed as escapism. The future had become a reality. Whereas *Aelita's* moral lesson had been to stop dreaming about somewhere other than the USSR, by the 1960s space travel and contact with alien civilisations was presented in a different light. In most sci-fi films of this period, both the high-tech future and high-tech aliens represent a communist ideal worth striving for. However, as mentioned in the introduction, there is a transition after the 1969 US moon landing by the Apollo 11 expedition, with a turn towards more existential topics. And with this turn, the female superhuman returned to the screen with a larger presence than she had in the 1950s and 1960s. This is exemplified by one of the best-known Soviet sci-fi films, *Solaris*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky and based on the eponymous novel written by the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem.

However, two lesser known films, with similarities both to *Solaris* and relevance to the topics of verticality and female aliens will also be presented. These are the 1973 *Dr Ivens's Silence* (Metal'nikov 1973) and *This Merry Planet* (Saakov and Tsvetkov 1973).

3.9.1 *Solaris* (1972)

Solaris received substantial attention both in the Soviet Union and internationally.⁹¹ The superhuman Hari (Natal'ia Bondarchuk) plays a vital role in this deeply philosophical drama set in an unspecified future, where human scientists have been preoccupied with exploring a mysterious planet called Solaris. The psychotherapist Kris Kelvin (Donatas Banionis) is sent to the space station orbiting Solaris. There he learns for himself what the mysterious events are that the other scientists at the station do not like to talk about with outsiders: the humans there receive 'guests'. Solaris, an oceanic planet with no known landmass, somehow produces humanoid beings – 'guests'. The most prominent of these guests is Hari, Kris's ex-wife, who killed herself years ago. Hari and the other humanoid aliens on the space station are the planet's materialised version of the

⁹¹ *Solaris* was covered in several articles in the Soviet film magazines *Sovetskii ekran* and *Soviet Film*. It also won the Grand Prix Spécial du Jury at the 1972 Cannes film festival (see "Prognozy khudozhnika – Soliaris" 1971; "Zagadka 'Soliarisa'" 1973; Revich 1971; Sheetova 1973; Smelkov 1973; Yurenev 1973; Zorkaia 1973).

traumatic memories of the humans on that station. The guests seem to be organic creatures, as they do not fit the description of cyborgs. Yet they do share a great deal of similarity with artificial intelligence, cyborgs and androids in the way humans relate to them: they are treated as objects without agency or intrinsic value. This raises practical questions concerning how the scientists are to interact with their guests, and philosophical questions regarding humanity and how to deal with traumas. It also invites discussion on the clearly gendered presentation of these topics, with all the scientists being adult men, and the guests are women, girls and short-statured people (a minority, stigmatised group in society, certainly an Other in this setting). The most important guest is a woman.

Different possible answers to these questions are represented in different ways the researchers treat their guests. On the one hand, there is the researcher Sartorius, who has no sympathy for the guests and who conducts grotesque vivisection experiments on them. However, on the other, there is Kris, who cannot get past the obvious display of emotions by the aliens and therefore thinks they should be treated like humans.

The scholar Vladimir Tumanov (2016: 368, 372) argues that Sartorius represents a reductionist understanding of humanity and the mind (based on biology), while Kris displays a functionalist approach (based on human function and experience). Kris's position is partly explained by the fact that his alien guest is his deceased wife. For Hari, her own existence is a source of confusion and trauma, as she has a clear idea of herself as Kris's wife while at the same time being aware that she is not human. This identity crisis is convincingly portrayed. There are things she cannot remember, because they did not happen to her, at least not in corporeal terms. This raises questions of where a person begins and ends, both spatially and temporally. In the case of Hari, one also gets the feeling that this is what she was like when she was human, i.e. confused by her own existence, with symptoms of depression, ultimately leading her to the decision to end her life. The same decision is taken by Hari the superhuman (Sartorius destroys her at her own request). When she convinces Sartorius to destroy her, she does this behind Kris's back, which suggests that this might be a self-sacrifice for moral reasons. Hari's sense of empathy makes her feel guilty for Kris's suffering. Tumanov reaches a similar conclusion: "That Christ-like act [of self-sacrifice] paradoxically seals Hari's status as

unambiguously human and resolves the question of her personhood. Tarkovsky's final answer to the film's central question [of what humanity is] is tragically uplifting" (2016: 374).

Notions of strict and diagonal verticality are not as present in the architecture and design as they are in some of the other films (e.g. in *Cosmic Voyage* or *Per Aspera ad Astra*). The earthly metropolis, with its tall buildings and multilevel highways, is an exception to the rest of the film. Still, in the scenes showing the space station from the outside, the perspective emphasises verticality. There is also use of allegorical verticality: In Kris's father's house there are birdcages and drawings of hot-air balloons on the wall, and talk of floors in the house. When the scientists and experts are discussing their knowledge of Solaris the metaphor of a mountain is used (immediately after a man says they have a moral obligation to continue the research). The guests are created on the basis of the dreaming/subconscious humans. The camera angles, and zooming in and out, are also used in a way that enhances verticality.



Illustration 23 Kris kneels down and puts his head in Hari's lap. Note the camera angle. Screenshot Solaris (1973)

Hari's development throughout the film, where she connects with Kris on an emotional level, and makes difficult decisions related to morality (based on how she feels for Kris and how he feels for her), underscores her humanness despite her unhuman origin. Hari's gestures and facial expressions, and her display of emotions, play an important role in convincing us, or at least strongly suggesting, that she deserves to be treated as a human. Based on Hilary Putnam's functionalist ideas and the 'duck test' of inductive

reasoning,⁹² Tumanov argues that Hari's material composition of unstable neutrons (that is definitely non-human) is not as important as her humanoid exterior and emotional capacity. As a viewer, it is more or less impossible not to see her humanity, Tumanov argues, because of *our* human reaction to other humans. We know the actor Natal'ia Bondarchuk is human, and this also transfers to the character she plays (Tumanov 2016: 370, 372). Interestingly, this could be seen as a confirmation of Butler's theory of gender performativity: it is not sex as biology that is the foundation of Hari's womanliness, but her "sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler 2006: xv).

The superhumans' bodies in *Solaris* heal quickly, they respawn if destroyed, yet they seem to have the same experience of pain and other impulses as ordinary humans. Although this healing and respawning could be seen as a powerful ability, Hari seems troubled by it, and has no apparent control over it. It is unclear how much the memory of the prototype person shapes their version of an alien. Probably, Hari is particularly complex because Kris knew her so well and therefore has a very complex memory of her, and because of his own confusion as to why she chose to commit suicide. Hari is reminiscent of Aelita in that they both are products of a man's mind. Even though Hari is based upon a real human, the Hari we meet in *Solaris* is an alien, based on Kris's memory of her. Both Aelita and Hari owe their existence to men (fashioned not from their rib, but from their mind), but neither of the men seem in total control of their fantasy. Los kills his Aelita, while Kris's Hari runs away from him by having herself destroyed. This suggests that even though the two female characters are subordinate to their male creators, they cannot always be manipulated by them. In Hari's case, it perhaps also suggests a refusal to be limited to the status of Object and idealised Other.

The destruction of Hari, like that of Aelita, could be seen as a Soviet version of the destruction of the cyborg presented by Albert Anthony: "The three films discussed above [*Eve of Destruction*, Duncan Gibbins, 1991; *Metropolis*; and *Star Trek First Contact*, Jonathan Frakes 1996] demonstrate that sci-fi cinema tends to resolve historical

⁹² 'If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.' Some attribute this aphorism to the poet James Withcomb Riley, but the origin is disputed.

crises involving the relationship between humanity and technology through the creation and destruction of the female cyborg” (2004: 8). However, Hari does not fit the description of a female sexual predator or a cyborg. When she is destroyed in the end, this is presented not as a victory but rather as a tragedy. Instead of being a critique of technology, *Solaris* seems to be more involved with the psychological questions of self, what makes a human and the limitations of scientific research (not to mention how humans can become extremely violent and aggressive when the satisfying answers to these questions cannot be found). The gender aspect is not discussed by Tumanov. He considers Hari a manifestation of Kris’s moral superiority over Sartorius but does not offer a definite conclusion to this discussion (Tumanov 2016: 366). Thus, the discussion centres on the two men, leaving Hari with little, if any, agency.

As a superhuman, Hari is not without powers, yet she is tied to Kris and his emotions, and through him to his dead wife. She is constantly confronted with her own strange existence – strange to the people around her, and especially strange to herself. Her character comes close to the so-called ‘blank slate’ trope of television: “A Blank Slate is an empty character with absolutely no beliefs, no opinions and no experience, ready to be shaped by the outside world” (*Blank Slate*)⁹³. The TV trope is related to the concept of ‘tabula rasa’, which refers to the idea that humans are born as blank slates, without preconceptions, and all knowledge therefore is based on experience. Hari does seem to know certain key facts, e.g. she knows that she was Kris’s wife. Still, her overall memory is very limited, and, most importantly, so is her agency. Hari’s self-annihilation can therefore be interpreted as an agency-regaining attempt to break free from this unfulfilling existence, and gain integrity: she cannot become a complete human because she is based on Kris’s memory and depends on him, and she rejects the incomplete existence of serving Kris’s emotional needs.

Iulii Smelkov and Neia Zorkaia discuss *Solaris* in *Sovetskii ekran*. Smelkov is critical of the adaptation for not staying true to the book and Zorkaia defends it as an independent work of art (Smelkov 1973; Zorkaia 1973). The core of the discussion is

⁹³ I am grateful to Dr Holger Pötzsch for pointing out the term ‘blank slate’ to me in relation to the material presented.

concerned with how Tarkovsky presented the theme of the film, i.e. humanity's encounter with the unknown. "The earth in space, the melody of the earth, are the main themes in the picture *Solaris*; this, of course, is typical for Tarkovsky" (Zorkaia 1973). Zorkaia attributes the particular philosophical discussions of *Solaris* to Tarkovsky's trademark style and concerns. In his adaptation, Tarkovsky was more preoccupied with human psychology and identity than Lem's epistemological discussions and astrobiological theories – to Lem's, and apparently Smelkov's, frustration (Bereś 1987).⁹⁴ Tarkovsky's choice of thematic focus in his adaptation strengthens the theory of the function of the female superhuman as a vehicle for existential self-reflection in Soviet sci-fi cinema.

3.9.2 *Dr Ivens's Silence* (1973)

Released the year after *Solaris*, *Dr Ivens's Silence* (1973) is a lesser known film for non-Russian-speaking audiences. The story is a philosophical allegory of human morality and identity. The human-alien encounter, however, is set not in outer space or a Warsaw Pact country but in the contemporary capitalist West. The female alien Orante (Zhanna Bolotova) is a member of a larger alien crew in search of intelligent companionship on other planets. She establishes a particularly strong relationship with Dr Ivens (Sergei Bondarchuk), a researcher of life prolongation. Part of the aliens' advanced technology gives them precisely the possibility to do so. The film presents a rather simplified message of how the (capitalist) world, divided by borders and competing states, is morally underdeveloped, and that advanced technology should go hand-in-hand with (communist) moral superiority. The director Budimir Metal'nikov (1925–2001) also wrote the screenplay (throughout his career he primarily worked as a screenwriter).

The film starts with what looks like an unknown planet, as the screen is filled with purple and red hues, and a futuristic-looking rocket is taking off. As the space rocket approaches Earth, a sequence inside an airplane begins. One of the airplane's engines catches fire and the airplane plunges down towards the sea. Some of the passengers

⁹⁴ Two sections from Bereś's book with Lem's thoughts on Tarkovsky's adaptation are translated into English and available on the official webpage of Stanislaw Lem (<https://english.lem.pl/around-lem/adaptations/qsolarisq-by-tarkovsky/176-lem-about-the-tarkovskys-adaptation>). This webpage, accessed 14.05.2018, is the source used in this thesis.

wake up in a wrecked part of the airplane. There is an older couple among them, Dr Ivens and his wife. A female voice is heard, greeting the earthlings and announcing that it speaks on behalf of the aliens, who have come in peace. The voice asks Dr Ivens to come and talk to the aliens. Thus, Ivens establishes a contact with the superhuman Orante of the planet Orania. She communicates through telepathy and tells him about their civilisation: that they are like earthly humans, but also that they are lonely and wish to make contact with the other lifeforms of the universe. Theirs is a peaceful culture, where the development and use of technology has prolonged their lives by decades. This is done through the collaboration of other aliens who are intelligent but not visually attractive (and therefore only visualised as three eyeballs in the sky). Life-prolonging technology happens to be the research interest of Ivens. Orante tells Ivens that she can feel his emotions, and that they are stronger than usual, suggesting that this is what attracts her to him. It soon turns out that the superhumans are surprised and frightened by violence, borders, and the absence of universal law on Earth – military forces shoot down a spaceship with one of the superhumans on board, thinking it was a (Soviet) threat. The aliens are not open about their presence, and Ivens does not even tell his wife about his meetings and conversations with Orante. Yet Ivens announces that he is ending his research into life-prolonging technologies because humans are not morally ready for it. In the end, Orante's father, and a fellow explorer on this expedition, decides the aliens are not safe on Earth, that earthlings are not ready for their technology, and that they should return to their planet Orania. Orante refuses to leave. She would rather stay close to Ivens and try to make humans change their ways. Unspecified special military forces are tracking Orante, and Ivens and Orante get in a car. In the end the car spins off the road, Ivens presumably dies in the crash, and Orante is shot dead.

Orante's fate in *Dr Ivens's Silence* is tragic, as she chooses to part with her kin to stay on Earth, to be near Dr Ivens and try to help humanity develop their backwards society, but is hunted down by (paranoid) intelligence services and killed. Ivens keeps his contact with Orante secret from the world, including his wife. In one scene, his wife confronts Ivens about talking to someone in a room in the family household – something Ivens denies. The relationship between Ivens and Orante reminds us of the one between Aelita and Los, and Hari and Kris, with the woman being highly dependent on the man for her

very existence. Ivens sees Orante for who she is, peaceful and generous. In contrast, other humans who know of her existence think of her as a threat and eliminate her. Just as Sartorius is suspicious of Hari, the capitalist authorities are suspicious of Orante. However, the audience understands the tragedy of their deaths. Like Aelita, Orante also has an important father, but they are not enemies. Still, the presence of a father figure, and not a mother, further establishes male authority. The tragic denouement of *Dr Ivens's Silence* takes place in the capitalist West, hence the resemblance with Anthony's point about the necessary destruction of the female cyborg because she is a threat. We know little of how Orante came to be, other than that her society is peaceful and communist, and that it has technology allowing for a prolonged life, telepathy and teleportation, to mention a few advantages of benefit to the earth. They too appear to have a binary gender system. Orante embodies the Eternal Feminine (as this concept is described earlier in this chapter), through her virtues, gender and spatial origin, and promotes peace and prosperity that are too utopian for the capitalist West. She is also a blank slate, and relies on Ivens to understand the earthly world. Yet, where Hari seems troubled by this dependency and revolts against it, there does not seem to be any such urge to resist in Orante. This is explained in part by the film's rather different ideological emphasis.

There is considerable use of strict, diagonal and horizontal vertical imagery surrounding the aliens and their technology, with the spaceship, the lights used and how their bodies are filmed – often seemingly floating in the air. The crash of the airplane into the ocean and the small island with the tall cliffs also add to the prominence of the vertical



Illustration 24 Orante has made her hairdo more feminine for Dr Ivens. Note the cherub. Screenshot Dr Ivens's Silence (1973)

dimension. Next, the interior of Ivens's house, with a cherub figure hanging in a conspicuous position, and swords and spears decorating the wall, again bring in allegorical notions of verticality. Moreover, Ivens gives his speech about how he will abandon his research in a great hall in gothic-style architecture that accentuates verticality.

As a superhuman, Orante has the ability to teleport and communicate through telepathy. She is also highly sensitive to human emotions. When she communicates, she does not make any facial expressions. She makes it clear that advanced technology requires high morals, and high morals entails not using violence or threats of violence, but rather understanding and compassion. Although one might say it is irrational to think that one (or two) person(s) can make a difference in such matters, Orante chooses to stay on Earth to help Ivens change the world.

In an uncommon publication in *Sovetskii ekran*, the journal printed letters from readers about *Dr Ivens*. Opinions varied. Some criticised the pessimistic message of the film, writing that this is not how sci-fi is supposed to be. A longer reader's review was written by a certain A. Vladimov, who states: "Sci-fi always discusses the challenges of contact between humans and other worlds"⁹⁵ ("Gotovy li my?" 1974). He continues to describe how the film, by highlighting moral issues, places itself in a tradition of social-philosophical sci-fi. Vladimov does not mention gender explicitly, nor the challenges and problems associated with advanced technology. This suggests that the existential theme of Soviet sci-fi was recognised and discussed by its primary audience. However, gender was not a topic for discussion.

3.9.3 *This Merry Planet* (1973)

This New Year's film, directed by Iurii Saakov and Iurii Tsvetkov, is a light-hearted musical comedy about an alien crew visiting a fancy-dress New Year's Eve party in the

⁹⁵ «Научная фантастика всегда задумывалась над проблемой контакта человека с иными мирами.»

USSR. The message of the film seems to be to let go of inhibitions, value emotional reactions, and to enjoy oneself.⁹⁶

The alien crew consists of three members, the woman Z (Zet, Ekaterina Vasil'eva) and the two men, X (Iks, Viktor Sergachev) and Y (Igrek, Leonid Kuravlev). Their flying saucer is spotted by Valerik (Vladimir Nosik), through his telescope, as they land in a clearance of a small forest outside a Soviet town on New Year's Eve. Valerik does not see the aliens leaving the spacecraft, and thus spends the good part of the film convinced it is Prokhor (Savelii Kramarov) who is the alien, because he is dressed up for the party as a sort of home-made perpetual motion device. In the meantime, the aliens are curious about Earth and soon discover a large building with strangely dressed people walking in and out. The aliens go in one at a time, first Y, then X and lastly Z. It turns out there is a huge fancy dress party inside what turns out to be a community culture house, where the staff of a scientific research institute are celebrating the arrival of the New Year together. The mood is truly festive and musical, acrobatic and dance performances follow one another. The aliens waiting on the outside are worried about the scout they send in, but on the inside these scouts are struck by the festive feeling and join in this curious ritual as best they can. X is flirting with the cute Little Red Riding Hood (Larisa Barabanova), while Prokhor just cannot resist the exotic Z. After a long evening of singing, dancing, laughing and flirting, the aliens decide to reveal their identity. Of course, everyone assumes it is just another joke, so the aliens see no other alternative than to kidnap one of the participants, the one they figure is the boss, to prove their identity. They take him back to the flying saucer. However, in the end he gets to stay on Earth, bearing witness as they take off and leave the planet. The rest of the party follow him, and meet him alone, in the clearance, surrounded by the beautiful flowers blossoming in the snow where the saucer has departed.

Vertical imagery of all four types is prominent enough in the film, but, as this is a carnivalesque comedy, it seems less directly connected to morality. There are customary shots of a starry sky with the Earth in it. To enter or leave the flying saucer, a ladder

⁹⁶ I have not been able to find any printed reviews of the film upon its release.

needs to be climbed. At the party, there are repeated movements up- and downstairs. The camera angle is often used in a way that enhances verticality, and also glides up or down, from head to toe, when showing a new carnival costume. Among the costumes there are many tall hats, hairdos and wigs, and even helmets and spears. When first leaving their saucer, the aliens address an owl on a tree branch. Later, when hiding in a telephone booth and the New Year tree, they stack their heads above each other's, increasing the sense of verticality. In the dance sequences, there is lifting, jumping and zooming in on feet, as well as dancing on multiple levels in the same scene. A violin bow goes up. The party lift their glasses in a toast to the New Year. As the aliens reveal their identity, they raise their hand, and point an index finger upwards. There is little sense of hierarchies, and this fits into the idea of the carnival as an unpredictable, often rather anarchistic event, with hierarchy either eliminated or entirely reversed. There is a policeman out on the street, but there is not much work for him to do, so he does not have to press his authority on anyone. Rather, he observes the festivities with a smile.

Z, who is apparently the alien leader, is not as easily convinced as X and Y to shed all her inhibitions and join the party, she has a stern face and keeps threatening everyone with violence (“Shall I kill someone, just to be sure?”), pointing her phaser when approached by someone or seemingly stressed out by something (the two male aliens are not seen with such weapons). She repeatedly turns down Prokhor’s advances, often in a rude manner, e.g. when Prokhor kisses her hand, she turns to X with a contemptuous look on her face. She asks X what to do, and he suggests she might have to amputate her hand. When she is referred to by one earthling as a ‘dame’, she feels offended: “What does it mean? Who’s a dame here?” However, through her exposure to music, the tipping point being a mesmerising gypsy



Illustration 25 Z kicks open the tall door and marches in, pointing her phaser at the dancing crowd. Her body language is aggressive and masculine. Screenshot This Merry Planet (1973)

song and dance, Z's heart and face dissolve into love and laughter and she breaks into song. In the end, she is voted the queen of the ball, which moves her to tears, making her feel happy inside and with no desire to commit acts of violence. Y sums it up: "It looks as if in 7,000 light-years spent together in a spaceship we didn't notice she was a woman". When the aliens find out that no one believes them, Z says to X and Y: "Think of something, I am a mere woman, after all". Before leaving, Z thanks Prokhor for making her feel like a woman. Z's development through the film is by far the most radical one: where X and Y only gained new knowledge and perspective on Planet Earth and life, Z has changed her personality and identity. Comedy often makes use of genre tropes (often exaggerating them or turning them upside down). The tropes are thus exposed, and become a source of comedy for the audience who recognise the trope. Z's emotional development through the film is an example of a genre trope that is exposed through exaggeration: the female alien starts out less emotional and sentimental than men, yet by the end of the film she surpasses the men in emotional and sentimental capacity. The message conveyed is that in the sci-fi genre, women are presented as unhappy or unfulfilled until they accept their gender and understand that being a woman means being feminine and emotional. And if a woman turns down a man's approaches, he should continue trying, for in the end she will thank him for them. The exaggeration of this development, Z moving from one extreme to another, leaves the interpretation of the source of the comedy somewhat open. Either one can see it as a parody of the genre trope, and not as a statement of the true nature (essence) of what it means to be a woman. Alternatively, one can read it as an exaggeration, but with its comedy based on a 'true' experience of what it is to be a woman.

There are no substantial reviews of the film in either *Sovetskii ekran*, *Soviet Film* or *Iskusstvo kino*. This might be because the film was produced for television, not for theatrical release. However, the user-generated reviews posted on *Kinopoisk* emphasise the quality of the film as an entertaining New Year's show, suggesting that it still has some audience appeal (*Eta veselaia planeta*). The user-generated reviews support my claim that this film exploits sci-fi genre conventions familiar to the audience, in order to create an entertaining, light-hearted New Year's film.

3.10 1980s

By the 1980s, it was clear to all that the Soviet Union was lagging behind in the space race, and political currents in society were changing dramatically. “Viewed alongside the dystopian pictures [e.g. *Kin-dza-dza*, Georgii Daneliia 1986], these later space films [e.g. *Per Aspera* and *Seven Elements*] tell a similar story of decline, signposting the road to perestroika and a new era of capitalist democracy” (Blackford 2011: 48). This is particularly evident in the ecological theme of *Per Aspera* (Sal’nikova 2017). Still, the presentations of the female alien in the Soviet sci-fi films of the 1980s – *Per Aspera ad Astra*, *The Star Inspector*, *The Alien Woman* and *Seven Elements* – seem to be in line with the dominant tendency of the previous decades. The four films represent a breadth in subgenre, from tech-noir (*The Star Inspector*) to mystery (*Seven Elements*), adventure (*Per Aspera*) and romantic comedy (*The Alien Woman*), suggesting that sci-fi and alien women as motifs appealed to various filmmakers with different stories to tell.

3.10.1 *Per Aspera ad Astra* (1980)

Prior to *Per Aspera ad Astra* (1980), the director Richard Viktorov had already made two successful sci-fi films, *Moscow-Cassiopeia* and *Teens in Space* (discussed in 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 respectively). *Per Aspera ad Astra* is split in two parts (‘Niia the Artificial Human’ and ‘Angels of Cosmos’) where the majority of the first part is set on Earth and the majority of the second is set on the planet Dessa.

Set in the year 2222, when humans have access to advanced technology that allows for efficient space travel and exploration and contact with other planets and species, the film begins with a spaceship coming across an abandoned spaceship. Aboard the abandoned ship there are humanoid corpses, soon established to be aliens with artificial intelligence, one of them is still alive. The humanoid alien Niia (played by Elena Metelkina) cannot communicate with the humans and seems disoriented and frightened. There is a heated discussion of how best to deal with the situation: she might pose a threat and should therefore be put in quarantine, or she might simply lack human contact and need socialising. In the end, the researcher, Sergei Lebedev (Uldis Lieldidzh), is allowed to take her to his house on Earth, under the strict supervision of the scientist Nadezhda Ivanova (Nadezhda Sementsova). Through socialising with the mother of Sergei, Mariia (Elena Fadeeva), a gynaecologist and midwife by profession, and Sergei’s son, the

student Stepan (Vadim Ledogorov), Niia learns to speak Russian and understand the basics of interaction (feeling a mutual attraction for Stepan in the process). The earthlings also learn about Niia's abilities, which include hovering, psychokinesis, and teleporting. Niia remembers very little of her past, but in certain situations she has brief flashbacks to what looks like a toxic and hazardous place, and an old man talking about sacrifice to a group of children, all looking like Niia. Niia and Nadezhda Ivanova are still sceptical of each other, and Nadezhda Ivanova carries out tests on Niia. The tests reveal that she has a structure in her brain that allows someone with the right equipment to take over her body and remotely control her. This worries Nadezhda, who interprets it to mean that Niia was not created simply as a force for good, and Niia becomes upset because she understands how she can be used as a vehicle for evil deeds against her will.

One day Niia sees on television that visitors from a planet called Dessa have come to Earth to learn about protecting the environment and managing pollution. Dessa is the planet from Niia's memories, and she decides that she has to return there. Niia sneaks on board the spaceship that is about to go on a rescue mission to Dessa, but makes her presence known to the crew soon after they leave Earth. This spaceship just happens to be the ship where Stepan, as a newly graduated cosmonaut, is doing his internship, and Nadezhda is one of the crew members. Another crew member explains to Stepan that they are known as both the angels of the universe, because they rescue planets and creatures, and as the sewer workers of the universe, because their work is often dirty and not very glamorous.

On the way to Dessa it becomes clear that the planet is threatened not only by ecological problems, there are also political and economic implications. The planet was already dying when a scientist called Glan (Gleb Strizhenov), who was experimenting with creating perfect humans, had to escape into space in order to continue his research. Niia is the only survivor from this experiment, as the spaceship they escaped in was bombed. Although the supporters of Glan were able to seize control over the political institutions on Dessa, they were not able to control the evil Turanchoks (Vladimir Fedorov), who makes a profit by selling gas masks and clean air, and thus has no interest in cleaning up the planet. By the time the rescue mission arrives at Dessa, large parts of the planet are uninhabitable and the air is so toxic that gas masks are required to go outside. People

are living underground in caves, and, according to the Dessa ambassador, all children are born with physical impairments. The earthlings then become caught up in a power struggle on Dessa, involving several casualties (Nadezhda Ivanova among them). Yet, in the end, Niia manages to withstand the thought-control mechanism, save the rescue team, and subsequently the planet, as it is restored to a bucolic Earth-like utopia with green meadows and blue skies. Niia chooses to stay on the recovering Dessa, while Stepan leaves. Instead of following Stepan to continue their relationship, Niia commits herself to saving the planet of her origin – sacrificing her own personal happiness for the greater good.

Per Aspera was covered in various Soviet media outlets in the years following its release (“Rezhisser predstavliaet fil’m: ‘Cherez Ternii k Zvezdam’” 1981; Abdrashitov 1982; Istratova 1983; Kichin 1981; Kuznetsov 1984; Pavlenok 1980; Plakhov 1981; Revich 1985; Zlotnik 1980). Both Istratova and Revich note the theme of ‘coming of age’ and connect it to patriotism – how cinema is important for educating the younger generation in moral and patriotic issues. Andrei Plakhov in *Sovetskii ekran* writes of Niia as a humanoid, artificial creature: “The problem of the artificial humanoid creature is embodied in her adaptation to various everyday details”⁹⁷ (Plakhov 1981). Plakhov does not connect this to technology, however. Instead, he continues to describe the film’s exploration of what the future will look like. This suggests that Plakhov rather sees the ‘artificial humanoid’ Niia fulfilling a pedagogical function of presenting the future to the viewers. It is through Niia that the communist ideal is presented. She is beckoning us upward. However, in this context ‘us’ refers to society at large, not exclusively to men. Through her mediating function, Niia transcends the temporal division between the viewers and the future utopia, thus, in a sense, becoming eternal.

There are several strict and diagonal vertical images and references to moving both upwards and downwards. In connection to space, there is the taking off of spaceships, travelling through space (horizontal vertical), weightlessness and the operation of telescopes and platforms that move up and down. The octopus-like alien and its oceanic

⁹⁷ «Проблема искусственного человекоподобного существа воплощена с привлечением множества бытовых, житейских подробностей.»

home planet seem to principally function as a comic relief, as an example of diversity in space, and of the downward movement. On Earth, there are elements of architecture shown that enhance verticality through the use of stairs,



Illustration 26 Niia is standing above Turanchok's underground facilities on the planet Dessa. Screenshot Per Aspera ad Astra (1980)

lifts, ladders and open floors. On the planet Dessa, people live underground, mainly in cave-like structures with low ceilings, because of the toxic environment on the surface. There are often height differences between the people that are seen in communication, and camera angles are effectively used to enhance this. On Earth, Niia goes with Mariia to an archaeological excavation site where they look at an underground hole that was used for human sacrifice. There are also several mentions of the ocean on Earth, both by characters visiting the seaside, and by the grandfather in the Lebedev household, who is an oceanographer. Niia jumps off a tall cliff into the sea when she is frustrated and jealous over Andrei's clingy friend Selena, but also frustrated with herself. Andrei jumps in after her. There are allegorical verticals too. The evil Turanchok is a short-statured person, and he uses a periscope to spy on the rescue crew. The rescue crew, known as the 'angels of the universe', clean Dessa by the use of a purifying rain. Afterwards they are likened to gods by one of the locals. After Nadezhda Ivanova dies, the camera is moving upwards, evoking the familiar trope of how the soul leaves the body and ascends. The villains are submerged in an aggressive biomass. The final sequence leaves Niia on a green meadow, camera slowly moving upwards while she raises her hands.

Through Niia, the potential threat of technology is introduced. Her origin is traced back to the experiment of the Dessian scientist Glan (Gleb Strizhenov). Whether the scientist found, grew or created the children he experimented upon is unknown. Once again, the creator of the female superhuman is a man. As has already been mentioned, Nadezhda Ivanova is able to locate a technological device inside Niia's brain that allows someone

with the right tools to remotely control Niia. Niia also has powers of her own: the ability to acquire knowledge incredibly quickly, hover and fly over short distances, teleportation and psychokinesis. The threat remains that advanced technology in the wrong hands can be used against the common good, but there is no suggestion (common to many Western sci-fi films) that technology can go astray by itself. Niia's development, principally through socialising, shows that high moral standards and confidence will check any potential threat posed by technology getting into the wrong hands. From the very outset (when she hesitates stepping onto the grass for fear of crushing a beetle), Niia is presented as having high emotional sensitivity, but she is otherwise a blank slate and needs to learn social norms (such as not being naked in front of people) and to regulate her emotional impulses. As long as she is ready to learn these skills, the environment around her is ready to accept her as a creature entitled to respect from other intelligent creatures (including humans). The way in which the Lebedevs teach Niia self-control bears similarity to the way Kris tries to teach Hari the same ability in *Solaris* – however, with a different result, as Niia's self-sacrifice does not seem like an attempt to break free of a man's control and does not involve self-destruction. While Niia's decision to stay on Dessa and not pursue a further relationship with Stepan could be seen as a way of liberating herself from his possible control over her, Niia is not primarily Stepan's fantasy. Rather, Niia embodies the struggle between Turanchoks and Glan: Glan created her to help save Dessa, while Turanchoks wishes to use her as a powerful weapon. Her choice to stay on Dessa to further its recovery is in line with Glan's intention of creating her in the first place. Thus it is not an attempt to break free from a man's fantasy, but rather to adhere to it. The possible threat of Niia being controlled from the outside is seen as something she deserves to be protected from, rather than making Niia herself a threat. Through her careful upbringing by the Lebedevs, Niia reaches her potential, which is that of the Eternal Feminine. When she decides to stay on Dessa, she is also signalling to Stepan – as a representative of earthly teenagers – that sacrificing one's own happiness for the greater good is the right choice.

3.10.2 *The Star Inspector* (1980)

The Star Inspector is clearly an attempt to make a *tech-noir* film – a sci-fi film in which typical narrative and visual elements of the *noir* genre are included. “Tech-noir films

are about technology perceived as a destructive and dystopian force that threatens every aspect of our reality” (Auger 2011: 21). The film depicts an investigation of an unprovoked attack on a space station, leading to some suspiciously behaving scientists on a desert planet, somewhere in outer space. Admittedly, the female presence in this film is not that noteworthy. However, the healing physician with the American-sounding name Marjorie Hume (spelled Hewm in the film and played by Valentina Titova) makes for an interesting case in the context of this thesis. I will return to this after presenting a short synopsis.

The film’s protagonist Sergei Lazarev (Vladimir Ivashov) is the inspector leading the investigation into the attack of an unknown spaceship on an international space station. Following this, the director of a large Western company called Mainhaus commits suicide, and later it turns out that the two incidents are connected. In a typical *noir* style, Lazarev tells part of the story in retrospect through a voice-over. Together with the crew members Gleb Skliarevskii (Iurii Gusev) and Karel Zdenek (Timofei Spivak) on the spaceship Vaigach, Lazarev finds the pirate spaceship Antares, belonging to Mainhaus, on Planet 7. The company Mainhaus had been developing an artificial brain that turned on its creators, with aspirations for world domination. On Planet 7, the brain has essentially turned three Western scientists, Douglas Cober (Emmanuil Vitorgan), Steve Wilkins (Vilnis Bekeris) and Marjorie Hume, into mere automata unable to resist its will. The mind-controlled scientists try to make Lazarev’s crew leave the planet, before its members find out about the brain’s presence. Marjorie is even sent up to the spaceship to convince the investigators that nothing is wrong. Here it seems as if she recovers her consciousness despite the hypnosis. Still, the brain has the ultimate upper hand over Marjorie: it has her believing she is the mother of two small children, and she is willing to do just about anything to protect them. However, the clever inspector Lazarev, of course, understands what is going on. This happens more or less simultaneously as one of the brain’s hapless stooges, Wilkins, manages to break free from the brain’s control through accessing memories about his wife and child. He then gets shot by Douglas, who is still under the brain’s spell, in a chaotic sequence when Lazarev is also running around the space station, trying to avoid those who remain under its control while getting to the controlling brain. In the end, Lazarev shoots the brain, and Douglas and Marjorie

are released from its malign influence. The film ends back on Earth, where Lazarev offers some closing remarks as he is shown walking down a green hill in a forest clearance to greet Marjorie and Douglas, with love and happiness all around.

The filmmakers do not seem very interested in vertical imagery, although it can still occasionally be found. There are scenes in space, with movements up and down in the frame (either straight or diagonal). The good guys for the main part stay above ground in their spaceship, while the brain and its unwitting slaves are in a laboratory partly underground. The laboratory also has a large tower-shaped antenna. There are shots with staircases, and movement on them. There are recurrent shots of feet walking, and some people falling over. One of Wilkins' flashbacks of his family is caused by an orb falling to the floor. Towards the end of the film, Marjorie changes her wig from a short-haired one to a long-haired one. These verticality-enhancing images do not seem very prominent, e.g. the recurrent filming of feet seems more like a *noir* genre technique, employed to disorientate the viewer. Rather, the film seems more preoccupied with contrasting the Planet 7 and outer space at large to our own green planet.

The several scenes on Earth always take place in a forest, surrounded by greenery, producing the image of a clean, harmonious existence. It is possible to read a slightly subversive message in the film. In 1961 Khrushchev had announced that by 1980 the USSR should live under communism, yet this did not happen. By portraying a capitalist presence in the future (something that was uncommon until the 1980s), the film's message can be interpreted in such a way that its makers no longer believed in the Marxist theory of communism being the ultimate stage in human development. Still, in the denouement, we see the green Earth, presumably in the USSR, that is a happy place, not the desert Planet 7, where the capitalist-developed artificial intelligence takes over human brains and exploits them to its own ends.

The female presence in the film is not overwhelming. The always helpful and constructive supercomputer in the inspectors' spaceship speaks with a female voice, and a woman in a boardroom



demands that the Mainhaus Company takes responsibility

Illustration 27 In the nursery, Marjorie as a rule uses a long-haired wig. Whereas her hair is kept short in other sequences. Screenshot Star Inspector (1980)

for the terrorist attack conducted by Antares and its crew. However, the only woman with a prominent role is Marjorie Hume. It is not entirely straightforward whether or not she fits into the 'alien' category. She has an English-sounding name and is never explicitly described as anything other than human. Yet she possesses some superhuman abilities: she can heal and conjure explosive energy with her bare hands. There is no discussion of where these abilities come from, be it human technology or alien biology. Still, no one else in *The Star Inspector* is shown to have superhuman abilities. The conclusion, then, is that Marjorie might not be an alien, in the sense that she might not come from another planet, but she is still a superhuman. Furthermore, an important motivation for her, and the one that the brain is able to exploit, is her maternal instincts. Compared to other (post-) Soviet female superhumans, this represents an anomaly. However, according to Mary Ann Doane, the fetishisation of reproduction and motherhood constitutes a fixation in, notably, Hollywood sci-fi (Doane 2000). What probably allows for the manifestation of this particular fixation in *The Star Inspector* is Marjorie Hume's presumed American citizenship. Hume is not recognised as having any obvious moral superiority. This said, her motivation for evil-doing stems from manipulation and her instincts as a mother to protect her (imagined) children. Hume's lack of moral superiority can be connected to her American/capitalist affiliation, and to the fact that she is not actually an alien. In this film it is possible to be a non-alien superhuman without moral superiority.

The Star Inspector demonstrates that by the 1980s it became possible to make sci-fi in the USSR under a Hollywood genre influence (the *noir*),⁹⁸ and using tropes more common in Hollywood sci-fi (the mother figure). These choices were mostly possibilities, however, since they were not common, and it is questionable how attractive they were to the majority of Soviet filmmakers. The film did not receive reviews in either *Sovetskii ekran* or *Iskusstvo kino*, but *Soviet Film* gave it a three-page coverage. This indicates that *The Star Inspector* was seen as a possible export opportunity. The reviewer Andrei Mityushin notes how “certain earthly problems have yet to be solved, and the unsolved ones have assumed an unprecedented scope. For example, private companies have become a sinister phenomenon” (Mityushin 1980: 25). Towards the end he also mentions the possible conflict between humans and their technology as an important topic raised by the film: “the plot is based on ideas popular in today’s science fiction” (Mityushin 1980: 29). Curiously, few other Soviet sci-fi films appear to explore the possible threat of technology, and even in *The Star Inspector* one could wonder whether it is the reckless private company or the technology itself that was at fault.

3.10.3 *The Alien Woman* (1984)

The Alien Woman is more of a rom-com than a spectacular sci-fi film in terms of special effects and action, as it focuses on the love story between the alien O (Liliana Aleshnikova) and Igor Blinkov (Vladimir Nosik). The story is rather incoherent, in particular the build-up to how O and Igor meet.⁹⁹

The alien O is sent to Earth from her home planet to capture a fellow alien who has integrated himself as an earthling with a wife and children and does not wish to leave. Their home planet and civilisation are highly advanced technologically, and they send out scouts to different planets in the universe to monitor and discover potential threats against their civilisation – but defecting is forbidden. In addition to having teleportation

⁹⁸ See Eva Näripea and Henriette Cederlöf 2015 on the *noir* influence on the 1979 Soviet (Estonian) sci-fi film *The Dead Mountaineer’s Hotel* (Hukkunud Alpinisti hotell, Kromanov 1979).

⁹⁹ The film was not covered in either *Sovetskii ekran* or *Soviet Film*, and there are, to the best of my knowledge, no substantial readings of the film available.

skills, they live exceptionally long lives, can fly or hover in the air and communicate through telepathy. However, their civilisation does not value emotion, be it sadness because of a loss or love between friends and family.

On Earth, O meets the attractive bachelor, Igor, who has been dreaming of a woman who looks like O, saving himself for her and not attaching himself to any other woman in the meantime (again reminding us of the fantasy trope in *Aelita*, *Solaris*, and *Dr Ivens*). Igor is popular with the women at his workplace, but lives a rather quiet life, being doted upon by his mother and spending time with (and helping) his friend, a disabled war veteran (Viktor Shul'gin). It is unclear why, but for some reason O enters the flat of the war veteran disguised as a nurse, giving him an injection. The veteran remarks that she has no accent and that she never smiles. Later, in the middle of the night, O comes to Igor's flat by floating down, as if walking on invisible stairs, onto the balcony. Igor is asleep, but at one moment he opens his eyes. O waves her arm slowly over his face and he goes back to sleep. O looks at Igor's drawings, which all picture the woman of Igor's dreams. One of the drawings is sketched onto the surface of a mirror. When O looks into the mirror, the effect is doubled: not only does she see her own reflection, but her face is also reflected upon the face of the dream woman.

In daytime, Igor sees O on the street, and starts following her – presumably he has recognised the woman from his dreams. The encounter does not last, and Igor gets to his office. When he returns to his flat, he finds that all the drawings have been taken down, and O is sitting in a chair. From this point their relationship develops, and O is introduced to the veteran and to Igor's mother. Typical of the genre, the encounters are not without friction, but through Igor's patient guidance O is integrated into earthly ways over the course of a few days. Her hunt for the defector alien seems less important now and poorly connects to the main story. However, towards the end the two storylines are tied together when O realises just how terrible it would be for the defector to leave his wife and children. Therefore, she returns to her home planet, alone.

In regard to vertical imagery, there is plenty of strict and diagonal verticality. In direct connection to O, there are her abilities to fly and hover above the ground. Moreover, she leaves for her home planet by walking into a lift. There is repeated running up and down

on the staircases and people falling over (including a scene where Igor ties his shoelaces incorrectly, and thus trips up, adding to the recurrent imagery of shoes and ground). O's flying is shown several times, including an intimate moment by Igor's bookshelf where she teaches Igor how to fly, and they meet in a kiss holding a small Earth model globe in their hands. In addition, O has a vision that is provoked by a melon rolling down a street. In this vision, the melon turns into the Earth and explodes (the sensation of verticality being enhanced by the fact that the Earth shrinks in size as a result of being seen from a distant high angle).

Although intrinsic to the male fantasy trope, the male gaze becomes very explicit, as Igor's idea of the ideal woman is based on his vision – in his own dreams and drawings by his hand. When O arrives, she is a blank slate onto whom Igor can continue to draw his vision. O fits the description of a blank slate, and her emotional and moral growth is visible through her interactions with her new environment,



Illustration 28 O is looking at a sketch of her face in Igor's mirror. Screenshot The Alien Woman (1984)

including her emotional involvement with Igor, and to a large extent through her facial expressions. At the beginning, her face is mainly static, as the veteran remarks, but, as she learns empathy, this manifests itself in smiles, laughter and sadness. O's flying also seems to be connected to an exaltation of her feelings, such as the kissing by the bookshelf, in the park with Igor, and after watching an odd couple doing gymnastics on their balcony. The consequence of this emotional awakening is O's self-sacrifice, as she tells her fellow alien that he can stay with his family and she will return without him. Before she leaves, she interrupts a TV programme to give a public anti-war message of love and compassion, in which she also insists on being a woman (despite not being human). Then she gives an emotional farewell to Igor. Her actions seem to indicate that once she understands the sheer intensity of her feelings towards Igor that have developed

in only a few days, she gets an idea of just how strong the emotional bonds can be that the other alien harbours towards his family after years of being together.

The motivation for the self-sacrifice is not entirely convincing. It could be a wish to provoke certain reactions in the audience: by not letting O and Igor get each other in the end, her moral message to the world is enhanced by the feelings of tragedy. If it had been a happy ending, this might have overshadowed the anti-war message. Her moral superiority lies in her (emotional) reaction to human pain, suffering and conflict. This has a massive impact on her, and she refuses not to address these issues. She also sacrifices herself for the happiness of what is essentially a stranger: the fellow alien who has established himself with a family.

However, in the light of Hari's attempt to gain agency through escaping Kris's control, could it be that O runs away from Igor because she sees the possibility that Igor would limit her to his fantasy? When she explains to Igor her reasons for leaving, O emphasises how unbearable it would be for her to live to not only see Igor die, but also their grandchildren, great grandchildren and so on (O's life expectancy exceeds the human one by a long stretch). She is not willing to sacrifice herself for Igor's happiness for a few decades at best, when it involves subsequent centuries of grief and loneliness on her part. Igor's fantasy of his life together with O is sweet, but it is based on his own needs, desires and existence. O's interests are, in the end, different. Exactly what O might want for herself is not clear, however.

3.10.4 *Seven Elements* (1984)

This sci-fi was released in 1984, directed by Gennadii Ivanov, and based on the eponymous novel by Vladimir Shcherbakov. Just like *The Alien Woman*, it did not receive any degree of attention in the media. The story is set in an unspecified future, when humans have developed advanced technology enabling them to travel more easily to other planets, yet there are still borders and nations on Earth, similar to those in 1984. The different nations on Earth seems to coexist with each other in relative harmony. There are references to both an extinct alien civilisation and a nearly extinct one. The alien Aira (Hanna Dunovska) has been in a sort of hibernating stage as an underwater flower for a very long time. She comes back to her humanoid form after human scientists

have brought the flower into a lab. Then she goes undercover, in order to help their genetics research, but rumour spreads that she is not who she is pretending to be.

Unlike most other sci-fi films presented in this chapter, this film does not begin with frames of a starry sky (e.g. *The Alien Woman*), on another planet (e.g. *Dr Ivens*), shots of Earth taken from outer space (e.g. *Are We Going Crazy?*) or even a cloudy sky (like in *Aelita*). Instead, *Seven Elements* begins with a sequence of a boy about to drown in a bog (the vertical dimension is still engaged, however). A woman clad in white comes to his rescue. Thanks to unknown powers resulting from her gaze and the raising of her arms, the boy is lifted out of the water and onto the ground. This sequence turns out to be a flashback memory of Gleb (Igor Starygin), who is now a grown man working as a journalist. Gleb visits a human expedition on a dying planet, Timatiu, in the Centaurus constellation, where the highly skilled geneticist Valentina (Irina Alferova) is manoeuvring a small submersible craft while exploring the seabed (the downward vertical dimension again!). Valentina finds what looks like a flower and brings it back to a laboratory. The archaeological findings on the planet reveal a story about humanoid aliens who used to inhabit it and tried to save it from overheating but, in the end, failed. The aliens were women, one of whom was called Aira, and they could only create one flower each.

Soon after the findings are revealed, the flower disappears, and a mysterious woman starts lurking in the forest outside the laboratory. Valentina chases after her, but she vanishes, and there is no trace of the flower. Meanwhile, Gleb meets with the alien, who turns out to be the same woman who saved his life many years ago. She explains that she has been waiting for him, that her civilisation tried to save the dying planet Timatiu, but failed, and that only the civilisations that are equally developed can help each other. The mysterious woman, who is obviously the alien Aira, returns to the laboratory and starts working there as a physicist called Steklova. She soon becomes a favourite of the boss, Olmin (Oldis Nurenbergs). With the help of Aira, Olmin and his team of researchers are able to finalise their plan for sustainable energy harvested from the sun, which also entails the possible revitalisation of the Centaurian planet. Gleb suspects the new employee of being the mysterious alien, and an Australian magazine outs her as an alien or a “biorobot”. Aira goes missing. A typhoon hits the Earth in the Pacific Ocean,

and, against his better judgement, Gleb jumps in a chopper and flies off to a research station on the USSR shore, where Olmin is monitoring solar activity. The typhoon is jeopardising an experiment connected to the revitalisation plan, and Gleb has to try and rescue both the experiment and Olmin. There he finds Aira, who is upset: she admits that she cares very much for Olmin – who is injured but will live, and begins crying. When Gleb remarks that she acts like an ordinary woman, she replies: “I *am* an ordinary woman”.¹⁰⁰ Aira offers to help Gleb find Valentina, who is out in the submersible vehicle in these difficult conditions. Gleb refuses, but in the end he is able to find and save Valentina nonetheless. The ending is seemingly happy, as both Gleb and Valentina, and Aira and Olmin, get each other.

The seven elements referred to in the title are (the classical four) air, earth, fire, and water, in addition to life, reason and love. As noted by Young, one traditional understanding of what angels are made of suggests they are elemental: “This makes them mostly invisible, except when becoming visible is necessary” (Young 2017: 96). Thus, an allegorical notion of verticality is implied in the title, and the elemental angel ‘becoming visible’ when necessary seems to apply to how Aira transforms from a flower to a humanoid. The notions of verticality in *Seven Elements* are interesting as the alien planet is oceanic, thus there are several underwater scenes and a focus on underwater technology rather than space technology (this might be a result of a limited access to impressive special effects depicting space technology). Furthermore, the flower from which Aira emerged grew underwater. Aira’s relation to Earth is in other words not as simple to define as a strict vertical from a planet above down to Earth. The alien woman saving Gleb in the beginning, and guiding him throughout, is from a more advanced civilisation. Her lifting Gleb out of the bog can thus be interpreted as a symbolic scene, where she helps lifting a less advanced civilisation to a higher level, thereby saving it. Yet the main rescue in the film, Earth rescuing Timatiu, is that of the alleged equal civilisations. Aira herself states that only equal civilisations can help each other out. Still, in practice the guidance and enabling of a more advanced being is needed.

¹⁰⁰ «Я есть обыкновенная женщина.»

Architecture, interior and laboratory instruments add to the strict and diagonal vertical imagery with, for example, tall buildings, columns, stairs, and glass tubes.

Aira actively defines herself as a woman when Gleb suggests that she looks like one. This is also done in a scene when it is her emotional capacity that is presented. This seems like a confirmation of the ideas of what it means to be a woman as described in *Solaris* and *The Alien Woman*. Being a woman means looking in a certain way, being highly sensitive to emotions and concerned with ethical questions. And even though there is no scene of active insistence on womanhood in *Dr Ivens* and *Per Aspera*, both Orante and Niia try to look like earthly women. Olmin also comments upon Aira's appearance when saying that she is "cleverer than is permissible for such a beautiful woman". Here Olmin points out at a seeming contradiction between female beauty and intellect – hardly a new joke – but, once again, this puts further emphasis on the importance of Aira's emotional capacity. Her obvious display of emotions is what makes her relatable, i.e. human. If Aira was nothing but super-intelligent and beautiful she would come across as a machine and possibly threatening. Another curious feminisation of the aliens is manifested in the bracelet Aira carries, which is actually a very advanced technological device. Aira and her planet Timatiu are not in an obvious vertical relation to Earth, thus Aira is not seen as morally superior. However, Gleb's mysterious alien rescuer appears both morally superior (in her effort to help out other civilisations), more strongly linked to verticality: The aforementioned lifting scene, and when she later reappears in almost a dream-like, allegorical vertical, scene.



Illustration 29 Gleb flies the helicopter and sees the reflection of the unnamed alien who saved him. Screenshot Seven Elements (1984)

All the alien women discussed seem interested in vain in a heteronormative relationship with a man. In *Seven Elements*, however, the ending is a happy one, as the alien woman is united with her coveted male earthling. In the alien world, there were errors made in the past, when the alien planet and the alien civilisation were lost. Still, the survivors made it through, and, at this point, thanks to the advanced situation on presumably communist Earth, there exists harmony and a utopian society. This could be explained by a comment made by Aira, stating that only civilisations at an equal developmental stage can help each other. Still, this could be interpreted as somewhat subversive: the egalitarian ideal is in practice depending on the interference of the superior.

3.11 Post-Soviet period

With the abrupt dissolution of the Soviet Union, the sci-fi genre had to change. In the Soviet times, the genre largely functioned as a way of imagining an idealised communist future, where advances in technology and moral development were indelibly linked. In the 1990s, communism no longer served as an ideal, and the relatively low-tech state of (post-) Soviet society was evident to everyone. Film production plummeted both in quantity and quality (as the low budget sci-fi *Are We Going Crazy?* illustrates in the section below) and a satirical and parodic treatment of everything Soviet flourished. However, the character of the female superhuman does not seem to have gone through any radical changes in the post-Soviet period, even with the film production picking up again, steadily, over the last two decades. The 2017 introduction of a male superhuman in the blockbuster *Attraction* might promise an interesting future for the superhuman trope. The satirical aspect of post-Soviet sci-fi does present interesting cases for challenging some parts of the female superhuman stereotype while confirming others. There are far fewer cinematic representations of the female superhuman, however, just as there are fewer sci-fi films involving interplanetary travel and contact. The space-related films of the post-Soviet era primarily concern the Soviet space programmes, depicting either purely fictional stories (e.g. *First on the Moon*, Fedorchenko 2005) or those based on historical events (e.g. *Gagarin. First in Space*, Parkhomenko 2013). From this perspective, *Are We Going Crazy?* more aptly fits a description of a late Soviet sci-fi film rather than early post-Soviet sci-fi. Nevertheless, the film pokes gentle fun at the idea of space travel, thus placing itself within an emerging post-Soviet cultural

context, wherein it becomes possible to laugh at heroes and heroic endeavours.¹⁰¹ *Star Worms* (2011) is a confirmation of both the Soviet sci-fi tropes and the post-Soviet nostalgic treatment of the Soviet era, evidently exploiting both for satirical purposes. Such an obvious ridicule of space travel places *Star Worms* firmly within a post-Soviet paradigm.

3.11.1 *Are We Going Crazy?* (1994)

The low-budget sci-fi *Are We Going Crazy?* directed by Sergei Kuchkov features a female alien (Marina Kuchkova) whose name we never learn. The alien arrives at a Russian secondary school from a planet in the Centaurus constellation. She is on this expedition to Earth to gather pieces of a crystal necessary for solving her planet's energy problems. Her fellow aliens dropped pieces of an energy crystal during their last visit to Earth, and they are scattered all over the planet's time and space. She would travel to find these pieces herself, had it not been for her own low energy levels: they will only allow her to go back to the planet, not to journey through the Earth's time and space. So she asks three members of the school staff, the female history teacher (Ella Safari), the male chemistry teacher (Georgii Nikolaenko) and the male school director (Boris Shcherbakov), to help her procure the crystal. The rescue crew get to use a device that looks like an old cassette recorder but is actually a time machine and universal language adapter. Then they travel through time and space to a prehistoric environment (possibly the Stone Age), a Middle Eastern harem, and lastly to Western Europe during the Holy Inquisition, where they get into all sorts of ridiculous situations. Thankfully, everyone can understand Russian because of the language adapter. The three school staff members are, of course, able to retrieve the crystal pieces and return to contemporary Moscow. While waiting for her rescue crew, the alien gets to enjoy leisure time activities in a snowy Moscow park, playing with dogs, smiling and laughing. The alien is grateful to

¹⁰¹ A second film from the early 1990s also feature female aliens: *The Witches Cave* (Podzemel'e ved'm, Iurii Moroz 1990), written by Kir Bulychev. Albeit, in this film the alien civilisation is low-tech (with traits of late neolithic to iron age) and organised in tribes. The humans visit from space and try to preserve the alien civilisation. It can be interpreted as yet another example of how the identity crisis of that period manifested itself in sci-fi. The film will not be discussed in length because it appears to be less related to the other films in this dissertation, and rather have more in common with time-traveling adventure films.

the staff members and leaves contentedly for her home planet, while the staff members are left to deal with vengeful guests from the different epochs they visited.

This film is likely the least impressive of all those discussed so far in terms of special effects: there are no rockets or spectacular sets, yet there are notions of strict, diagonal and allegorical verticality, and playful ones at that. In one of the first scenes a young man on a skateboard is hit by an opening door, but instead of ending up on the floor, he ends up clinging to the top of the door. The alien woman travels by flying in a silver ball the size of a large gymnastics ball. It is shown flying down a flight of stairs and through windows. The alien lands in a swimming pool, where she then walks on the water's surface. After the alien has found an earthly outfit, the camera slowly moves upwards beginning at her high heels, accentuating her long legs. This camera movement is repeated once the teachers have dressed themselves in alien outfits to get ready for their journey. In a third instance, the camera movement is reversed, moving from top to bottom, on soldiers with tall spears – again accentuating verticality. Throughout the film, verticality can also be found in nature (tall trees), in architecture (columns and staircases), and in movement through space (climbing and falling, walking and running up and down the stairs). To crown it all, the credits are shown the opposite way around, moving from the top down.

The film primarily seems intended as light-hearted entertainment. However, judging by the lack of reviews, either in print or online, the film has not attracted a large audience or fan base. The way the alien learns about human interactions and emotions indicates a development of her emotional intelligence – starting out as a blank slate – and communicates a message of standing up for what is right, and taking care of each other. The female teacher also concludes towards the end that humans' emotional abilities are our greatest advantage. The alien's emotional development manifests itself, again, in her facial expressions, whereby she goes from a solemn look in the beginning to laughing and smiling towards the end. This is not unlike how her predecessors Orante, Niia and O are shown to have learnt human values. However, the alien does not get involved with a human man, and does not seem to be directly under a man's control. This is possibly because she is not a central character in the film – she is not even named!

The film is hardly philosophical or deep, which might provide an explanation as to why there is no prominent superhuman.

As with the previous aliens discussed, the origin of the alien in *Are We Going Crazy?* is unclear. She uses multilingual communication, advanced technology to travel in time and space, and is capable of psychokinesis (she uses powers implied by her gaze to stop some bullies at school, making one of them wet himself). This places the female alien from *Are We Going Crazy?* in the Soviet superhuman



Illustration 30 The unnamed alien walks on the surface of the pool, displaying one of her superhuman powers. Screenshot Are We Going Crazy? (1994)

tradition, even though by 1994 Russian filmmakers must have already had easy access to Western and Hollywood representations of cyborgs. This suggests that the superhuman remained more readily at hand for an early post-Soviet director than the cyborg. The nameless superhuman's ability to transcend temporality, her spatial origin above Earth (from a geocentric perspective where the ground is below us, and the sky, and as such the universe as a whole, is above us), as well as her moral superiority continue to tie the superhuman to the Eternal Feminine. Her moral superiority is found in how she risks her life travelling to Earth on her own in order to save her planet. Interestingly, there is no mention of the female superhuman's romantic relations with men, a father figure, or other connections to the male fantasy motif. However, this might be explained by her limited screen time and underdeveloped character. Considering that *Are We Going Crazy?* seems restricted in terms of both resources and plot development, it is possible that the filmmakers drew upon the established trope of the female superhuman as an easily recognisable cliché, without exploring it in depth. Yet this could also be explained by the lack of clear moral ideals in Russia in the 1990s: it was uncertain what sort of ideal society the female alien was supposed to represent, now that communism had been abandoned. Thus, the ideal society motif was left out of the film, and the female alien remained largely an opaque character.

3.11.2 *Star Worms* (2011)

The sci-fi comedy *Star Worms*¹⁰² was made by the Russian music band NOM, known for their elaborate use of irony and humour. The film looks as if it was made by amateurs, and there is no reason to believe that this was not intended as a comment on both the Soviet low-tech space effort and the correspondingly low-tech sci-fi films.¹⁰³ The most prominent of the two female alien characters in the film is Iadviga Barsukova (Svetlana Gumanovskaia), the doctor of a crew from Earth bound for an Odyssey-like expedition in the year 2221. The other is an unnamed female alien guiding the expedition crew on a tour around her home planet. The entire plot of the film is reminiscent of Faddei Bulgarin's 1825 short story *Unbelievable Fibs or the Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (*Neveroiatnye nebylitsy, ili puteshestvie k sredotochiiu Zemli*), a story of a concave hollow earth expedition into the ground, visiting three alien planets under the Earth's crust. Iadviga reads about the planned expedition in a newspaper and infiltrates the crew, posing as a human doctor. It is not until Iadviga has led the expedition to her home planet, Atit, populated by looting space gypsies, that we understand that she is not actually an earthling but an alien. The expedition is led by the scientist Chashcharskii (Andrei Kagadeev), who has a theory about the universe, based on the idea that the sun is located at the centre of the Earth.¹⁰⁴ His motivation for the expedition is purely scientific, but the rich German Riap (Nikolai Kopeikin) sees the commercial opportunity in mining meteors from other planets and therefore joins and supports the mission. They

¹⁰² The original title of the film is *Zeždnyi vors*, literally translated into *Star Fluff*. However, the title is supposed to be a pun on *Star Wars*, hence the filmmakers themselves advertise the film under the English translation *Star Worms* in order to try to preserve the pun.

¹⁰³ Aside from user-generated online reviews, *Star Worms* has not received any critical attention. Due to the general interest in NOM's activities, the film is mentioned in interviews, including a 15-minute conversation with directors Kagadeev and Kopeikin on the TV show *Magiia Kino* ("V Barnaule dala kontsert legendarnaia gruppa 'NOM'" 2011; *Kh/f «Zeždnyi vors» v peredache Magiia Kino* 2012). In the interview with *Magiia Kino* Kagadeev and Kopeikin are asked about the inspiration for the plot. They name earlier sci-fi and adventure classics such as *Flash Gordon* (Frederick Stephani 1936; the outfits in *Flash Gordon*, with their shorts and hotpants, are mentioned as a specific inspiration) and Jules Verne, and how what we consider to be scientific truths about the universe has changed through time. Thus, in two or three centuries from now the basic knowledge about universe may be very different. Apart from this question, the interview focuses on how the directors managed to get so many celebrities to participate. There is no thorough discussion of the film in either of the interviews.

¹⁰⁴ This theory also exists outside the film and is called 'concave hollow earth'.

gather a motley crew and dig into the ground with a specially designed spaceship called the Scarab. On their adventure, they visit the home planet of another crew member, the alien Mozg ('mozg' meaning 'brain' in Russian), a creature who looks like a human head (Mozg is played by the leader of the *Leningrad* band Sergei Shnurov). On his planet (called Kolobok), a female alien, Judith (Tat'iana Kolganova), of the same species as Mozg, gives the crew a tour and tells them the history of the planet's civilisation. The founder of the civilisation, a disembodied head called Tsefion, managed to instruct the gorilla-like species of the planet to build everything based on his inventions, including robotic humanoid bodies to fit the disembodied heads. Kolobok is strictly hierarchical, with the heads enslaving the gorillas. The guide, in the function of being a talking head upon a humanoid body, represents the authoritarian, rational, exploiting civilisation.



Illustration 31 On Mozg's home planet, with vertical architecture in Stalinist style. The statue of the founder of the civilisation Screenshot Star Worms (2011)

All four notions of verticality are found throughout the film, from the premise of the plot (the hollow earth theory), to architecture and landscape (the tall buildings and monuments on Kolobok and the low sheds on the planet of the space gypsies). On Kolobok, there is a strict social hierarchy between the heads and the gorillas, and there is also a hierarchy between the different planets. Kolobok is the most technologically advanced society, with extreme verticality at the top of the hierarchy, Earth is in the

middle, and Atit is at the bottom. However, neither of the planets seem to be morally superior.

The established sci-fi tropes, including verticality, and even science itself, are entirely subverted in *Star Worms*. It is therefore hardly surprising that the two female aliens turn out to be bad role models compared to their predecessors. Neither do they show any superhuman abilities. The guide is probably the only character described in this article that fits the description of a cyborg, with her organic brain and synthetic body. However, she can scarcely be seen to invite any critical discussions of what that entails. Rather than problematizing technology, this part of the film problematizes the exploitation of one type of creature by another. Much like the Martian society in *Aelita* (which, in line with many other sci-fi films, is referred to in *Space Worms*), the Kolobok society is technologically advanced but not morally superior. As for Doctor Iadviga, forget about superhuman abilities altogether: she is barely capable of helping patients by conventional medical means. Most of the time it is the guard Volchestai (Sergei Kagadeev) who rescues those in trouble and supplies urgent medical help to the rest of the crew. By posing as a doctor, Iadviga draws on the established role of the female (alien) as a caretaker and healer with selfless intentions (similar to, for instance, Niia in *Per Aspera* and the female doctor in the expedition portrayed in *Orion's Loop*), yet none of this turns out to be true.¹⁰⁵ Neither is Iadviga working for herself. She is merely a tool for her husband and his (male) gang of bandits. In this manner she can be distinguished from *Aelita*, who acted on her own behalf with her own agenda. The other important thing that separates the two is that Iadviga is not tied to a man's imagination the same way as *Aelita*. Towards the end of *Star Worms*, the spaceship, excluding Iadviga, is sneezed out of God's nose (God is pictured as a bearded old man, played by the prominent musical critic Artemii Troitskii), suggesting the whole universe is situated inside his body. As such, Iadviga is just a small particle within a man, but so is the rest of the universe. A similarity between *Aelita* and Iadviga, in addition to their lack of

¹⁰⁵ Iadviga harbours feelings for the crew member, Bogdan Sherstiuk (the *Liapis Trubetskoi* band leader Sergei Mikhalok), and cares for him when he falls into a coma. Yet all of this is promptly forgotten when she returns home to her planet and her husband, the leader of the gypsy gang.

morals, is that neither of them display superhuman abilities, and thus they are not true superhumans. The guide also takes on an established role of female aliens, that of a representative of a superior civilisation. Yet in contrast to the majority of civilisations presented by female aliens in earlier (post-) Soviet films, this one, as has already been mentioned, is not morally superior. Instead, she looks like a parody of the trope of female aliens with a utopian origin.

3.11.3 *Attraction* (2017)

A recent contribution to the collection of Russian language sci-fi cinema is the director Fedor Bondarchuk's *Attraction* (2017). Particularly interesting for this thesis is the swapped gender roles in the human-alien romance: in *Attraction* the humanoid blank slate alien is a man, while the teacher of human values is a woman. A central question in the discussion of this film will then be how it relates to the films about aliens presented in this chapter thus far.¹⁰⁶

Unusually, the film opens with a black screen, accompanied by a female voiceover. Iuliia (Irina Starshenbaum) talks about how she used to love watching the sky together with her mother when she was little and how she would think that the stars were the eyes of angels. Then the screen fades into a shot of a teenage girl sitting on a small hill together with a dog, with tall building blocks in the background, and a cloudy grey sky, partly lit up by the sunset. The voiceover continues to tell us about the mother's sickness, how the angels did not help, and how Iuliia lost her belief that there is anything other than a cold, empty silence out in space. The sequence ends with the camera moving upwards, showing the sky, breaking through the clouds to see the stars, and then, with credits running on the screen, an alien spaceship gliding through space, with Earth reflected in its shiny exterior. The eventual crash landing of this spaceship in a Moscow suburb, Chertanovo, is partly an accident (the spaceship was hit by a meteor), and partly a result of human security measures (Russian anti-air guns shooting it down). Because there is no protocol for what to do when an alien spaceship lands in a suburb, the authorities are somewhat perplexed. There is a large military presence at the first

¹⁰⁶ In the summer of 2018 the filming of a sequel called *Attraction 2* (*Pritiazhenie 2*) begun, with scheduled premier 26 December 2019 (Chachelov 2018).

encounter between the authorities and the aliens. One alien, in a high-tech exoskeleton of sorts, comes out to meet the Earth representatives. The alien seemingly communicates through a digital panel in front of the suit, lighting up pixels in different colours. The effect is a telepathic message understandable to those standing close. The aliens seem benign, but can they be trusted? People are angry and despairing for those who were injured or killed during the crash landing, and also at the curfew and restrictions now in place in Chertanovo. Iuliia lost her best friend, so she helps to rouse her street-smart, tough boyfriend Artem (Aleksandr Petrov) and his three pals against the aliens. It so happens that Iuliia's father, Colonel Valentin Lebedev (Oleg Men'shikov), is in charge of the security operation regarding the alien spaceship. Naturally, the stage is then set for drama, action and emotion, as Iuliia ends up being saved from falling down a tall building by the alien, and instantly realises that the alien is peaceful and kind. Then, in turn, Iuliia saves the alien, hiding him from Artem's vengeful crew, sneaking him into a hospital and giving him a transfusion of her own blood. Underneath the unfamiliar alien exoskeleton the alien is not only humanoid – they and we are close relatives, close enough to share blood, explains the alien Hakon (Rinal' Mukhametov). Artem, hurt by Iuliia apparently dumping him for some other guy and criticising his violent behaviour, becomes even more violent in his agitation against the aliens, stirring up a mob. Colonel Lebedev tries to tackle the situation, mitigating between hot-headed politicians, the mob and others rushing for action before they learn more about the visitors from outer space. Iuliia helps Hakon in retrieving a crucial part of the spaceship that was lost, now in a military laboratory in Moscow, and getting both of them back to the spaceship before the mob gets out of control. Of course, in the mission to assist Hakon, Iuliia cannot help but fall in love with this kind, intelligent, respectful and beautiful male alien. The two find time to talk about emotions and share intimate moments, such as when Iuliia teaches Hakon about important human gestures (such as smiling and crying). For his part, Hakon tells Iulia about his home planet and civilisation, that aliens there are peaceful and live forever. Later the artificial intelligence in the spaceship explains that the aliens have decided to stay away from Earth because humans are too violent, and that Hakon came alone (the other aliens in exoskeletons were actually robots). The film builds up to a final race for the spaceship, where Artem and Hakon finally meet in a fight. Hakon

refuses to fight back until Artem turns on Iuliia. Colonel Lebedev is concerned about the consequences of a clash between the mob and the highly superior alien technology, so he puts his forces into action to try and stop the clash. After being humiliated by Hakon, Artem finds an alien exoskeleton and chases after Hakon and Iuliia, but it is not until he is harmed and released from the suit that he finds a gun and shoots the embracing couple. Artem is quickly dealt with (but not killed) by Lebedev's forces. Hakon and Iulia are carried inside the spaceship. By transferring his high-tech bracelet to Iulia at the beginning of the film, Hakon gives his life for her, so that she can be saved, while he dies. In perfect Russian, yet stating that the translations are not entirely accurate, the AI of the spaceship explains that Iuliia's selflessness in her meetings with Hakon has proved to the aliens that there is hope for humanity, which can evolve and achieve the aliens' moral standards.

The reviews of *Attraction* were generally favourable, and it became a box office hit in Russia. Both Igor Savel'ev in *Iskusstvo kino* and Andrew Chapman at *KinoKultura* mention the nationalist uprising in the Moscow suburb Biriulevo in October 2013 as an inspiration for the film (Chapman 2017; Savel'ev 2017). Savel'ev further discusses the Russian take on how to seemingly join two mutually exclusive ideas of nationalism and multiculturalism, and how Bondarchuk uses this in *Attraction*:

Where are the borders between two positions? They do not exist. We – the audience – are predetermined to support both the heroes, who are going to destroy the flying saucer, and the message of the film (guys, let us live like friends, no need to destroy anything). All of it is sincere, yet naïve in parts.¹⁰⁷ (Savel'ev 2017: 32)

It remains unclear to me why the consistently violent, super-macho character of Artem evokes Savel'ev's sympathy, or why he thinks the audience is 'predetermined' to support him. This statement seems evident of the current legitimising of violent nationalism and racism in today's Russia. Still, the frustration of the inhabitants in Chertanovo is understandable: they are hit by a flying saucer, their homes are destroyed, many are dead, the survivors are isolated, the water is gone, they do not know the agenda of the aliens and the authorities are doing next to nothing to resolve the situation. This

¹⁰⁷ «Где границы между двумя позициями? А их нет. Условные мы - зрители - должны быть согласны и с героями, которые идут крушить летающую тарелку, и с пафосом фильма (ребята, давайте жить дружно, не надо крушить). Все искренне, местами наивно.»

partly echoes the current frustration people all over the world have towards migration and multiculturalism: the transformation of neighbourhoods and societal norms; the authorities' neglect of problems regarding poverty, housing and welfare; polarising discussions; the uncertainty of the newcomers' agenda. Still, as suggested by Fedorchenko too, the answer to these frustrations should not lie in nationalism and xenophobia.

Both Chapman and Savel'ev also point to *Attraction*'s place in a tradition of sci-fi cinema, but where the latter simply refers to non-specified films of the 1980s and 1990s, Chapman mentions only *Attraction*'s non-Russian/non-Soviet legacy: “Bondarchuk liberally, and at times sloppily, borrows plots and motifs from several well-known alien invasion films [such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, original by Robert Wise 1951, and remake by Scott Derrickson 2008; and *District 9* by Neill Blomkamp 2009]” (2017). This goes to show that film motifs of and plots about aliens on Earth share important similarities (e.g. the existential confusion of meeting The Other), while at the same time they may also display regional and/or national cultural traditions (e.g. in the way the meeting with The Other is handled).

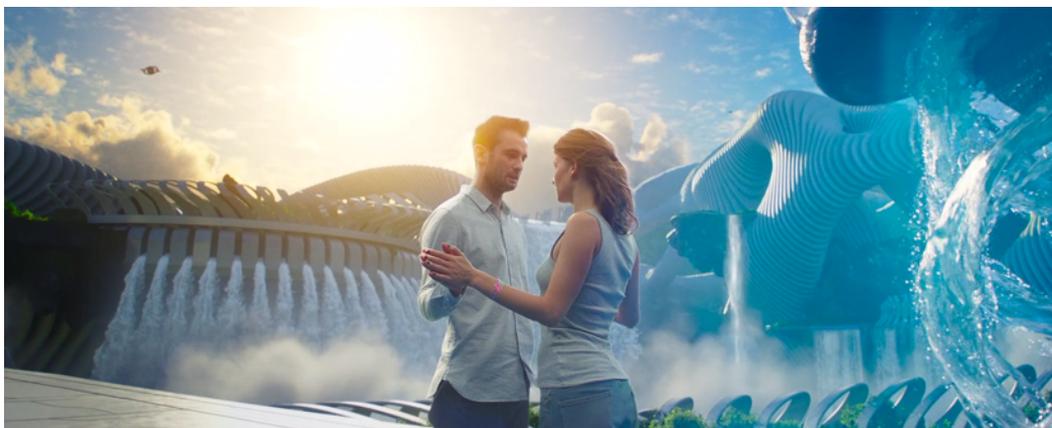


Illustration 32 Hakon shows Iuliia his home planet, with waterfalls, vertical structures and flying saucers. Note the camera angle. Screenshot Attraction (2017)

The vertical imagery of *Attraction* principally manifests itself in strict and diagonal verticality in tall city buildings, and water falling and rising as an effect of the alien technology, such as when Hakon allows Iulia to get a glimpse of his planet. Camera angles are also frequently used to enhance height, depth, and feelings of hierarchical

structures. The recurrent theme of the Soviet era films, where advanced technology goes hand-in-hand with high morality, is constantly present. However, there is no hint of the advanced aliens being communist. Neither are the Russians presented as better or less violent in comparison to other nations, as the alien computer treats Earth as one civilisation – too conflict-ridden for advanced technology that requires higher moral standards.

The similarities between the plots of *Dr Ivens's Silence* and *Attraction* make it almost impossible not to see the latter as a sort of homage to the first. After all, the director and actor Sergei Bondarchuk, who played Dr Ivens, is the director Fedor Bondarchuk's father. It would not be the first time Fedor Bondarchuk moves into this sort of artistic conversation with his father, as his 2013 *Stalingrad* thematically related to Sergei Bondarchuk's *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975). *Attraction* is *Dr Ivens's Silence* updated to our contemporary society, with a much larger budget and more impressive special effects. However, there are references to other Soviet sci-fi films too. The flirtation between Hakon and Iuliia, in particular the scenes in Iuliia's flat, where Hakon learns about human emotional thinking, are reminiscent of *The Alien Woman*. Hakon even asks Iuliia whether it is time for Iulia's grandmother to be put down sometime soon in front of the grandmother (after Iuliia told him that she expected her dog to be euthanized soon because of its old age).¹⁰⁸ The high-tech bracelet Hakon gives Iulia is almost a copy of the bracelet in *Seven Elements*, where Aira is using a similar device.¹⁰⁹ In addition to these, there are other cultural and societal references such as Hakon putting on a t-shirt with Yuri Gagarin's face on it. As Hakon is dependent on Iuliia's help, the trope of low-tech civilisation helping high-tech civilisation is also used. Nonetheless, even though *Attraction* clearly utilises familiar tropes and themes of Soviet sci-fi cinema, it brings in something new by reversing the gender roles in the human-alien romance. Here the stereotypically male-looking Hakon is the blank slate, who needs to be taught about human life and emotion by the stereotypically female-looking

¹⁰⁸ In *The Alien Woman*, O explains to Igor that on her planet they euthanize people who are 'useless', asking him whether she should help deal this way with the war veteran in the wheelchair.

¹⁰⁹ Aira offers Gleb the use of the bracelet in his search for Valentina, but he refuses to do so.

Iuliia. Furthermore, the self-sacrifice is made by Hakon to save Iuliia, whereas generally the opposite is the case (a female sacrifices herself for a male). An important message of the film is that others are not so different from ourselves, and this message might provide a possible explanation for the reversed gender roles. The alien in *Attraction* is a man, because he is less of an Other than a woman would be in his place. Unlike the other blank slates, Hakon does not seem to struggle so much with his identity. Even though Iuliia has to teach him about human gestures, and picks most of his clothes for him, his gender identity is never really questioned. However, the moral hierarchy is not changed in *Attraction*. Even though the alien civilisation as a whole is morally superior to that on Earth, Iuliia is still the most morally superior individual. The alien AI simply cannot understand how Iuliia could even be capable of making such high moral decisions. She defies the culture in which she has been brought up, making better choices than should have been possible. And instead of having to leave Earth or die, like the majority of the other morally superior women described in this chapter, Iuliia gets to live and stay on Earth. This communicates a highly articulated positive ending: the hope for the future still lies in women, but they are human and they get to remain on the planet of their birth – and live on.

3.12 The female alien as the ultimate idealised Other

In several aspects the female alien seems to serve the function of an idealised Other. The other female characters treated in this thesis – the pilot, the stewardess and the cosmonaut – are Others in capacity of their gender and their occupation of the air and space. Yet the alterity of the female alien stems from her origin too. In the majority of the films analysed, her gender, biological and spatial otherness combined with her main function of being morally superior makes her the ultimate idealised Other.

The powerful and morally superior alien women of Soviet sci-fi are not liberated from their roles as objects of male desire. A function the Soviet superhumans do not seem to possess is agency, and they look rather naïve in their interactions with humans. As the agenda for the Eternal Feminine is to ‘beckon us [i.e. men] upward’, the Eternal Feminine does not have agency herself, as she seems to exist primarily vis-a-vis men. This seems to be the case for Orante, Niia and O, who all sacrifice their own happiness for a greater good and adhere to the concept of the Eternal Feminine throughout their

performance. This sacrifice also strengthens their position as morally superior because, as Aleksandr Etkind (2011: 239) notes in his book *Internal Colonization* with regard to the female sacrifice in Russian culture, “sacrifice is neither punishment nor revenge; actually, the least guilty are the better victims for a true sacrifice”. Furthermore, as already discussed in relation to Hari in *Solaris*, her self-annihilation can be interpreted as either a sacrifice or an attempt to escape. Whether the former or the latter is the case, both interpretations relate to the Eternal Feminine, either by conforming to its traits of presenting women as a morally superior idols (repeatedly reproducing them) or subversively challenging them. This challenge – or as Butler might put it, variation – is also where the possibility of agency is to be found: “In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency’, then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition” (Butler 2006: 198). Through the function of beckoning men upwards, described by Goethe, and Beauvoir’s description (“She heals and strengthens; she is intermediary between man and life; life comes from God, therefore she is intermediary between humanity and God” (1972: 212)), the Eternal Feminine is expected to take moral responsibility. As embodiments of this concept the female aliens are also expected to sacrifice themselves. These expectations are created through the repetition of the motif of morally superior female aliens in (post-) Soviet sci-fi cinema. Agency then, for the female aliens, lies in (small) deviations from the expectations. This is what Hari can be said to do, and also O. By acting slightly unexpectedly, characters like Hari and O are, in turn, altering the motif and expanding the possibilities associated with the motif of female aliens.

Up to a point, most female superhumans can be called blank slates. Not only are they created by a largely male cohort of filmmakers, the female superhumans are often dependent on men in their stories – either as mere fantasies (in *Aelita* and *Solaris*), or in order to understand the society they are visiting (in *Dr Ivens’s Silence*, *Per Aspera*, *The Alien Woman* and *Are We Going Crazy?*). They are not completely helpless creatures, they do not necessarily need to be rescued, but they need guidance in order to use their powers correctly – in a morally superior way with an emphasis on emotions. In the majority of the (post-) Soviet films mentioned in this article the female alien represents an Other, embodying the Eternal Feminine, and a blank slate. These blank slates enable

reflections about culture and society, e.g. how to take care of friends and family and live good moral lives. This is realised through the female superhuman's romantic and intimate (but not necessarily sexual) interactions with a man in all the Soviet examples. This might provide an explanation as to why there is no relationship between an earthly woman and an alien man in Soviet cinema: according to its aesthetics, a man cannot be an Other or a blank slate. In *Attraction*, however, it is the male alien Hakon who is the blank slate, while Iuliia is his instructor. An important message of the film is that aliens are not so different from humans (they can even receive blood transfusions from each other), emphasising kinship rather than otherness and suggesting that presenting the alien as a male makes him less of an Other. Iuliia, as a complex protagonist, might also be representing a shift in depicting women with agency in sci-fi cinema. Iuliia acts independently and according to her own beliefs, rebelling against both her father and her initial lover.

The superhuman of (post-) Soviet sci-fi cinema prompts reflections about humanness and identity, not through a constructed binary opposition between human beings and technology, but through an outsider's view and an idealised Other. This outsider is primarily female, reaffirming the traditional roles of men as the norm and women as the exception. Do these superhuman women of (post-) Soviet sci-fi cinema, then, affirm gender roles in the same way as (Anne Balsamo argues) the cyborgs of Western sci-fi do?

Donna Haraway claims [in 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' (1991)] that cyborgs stimulate the feminist imagination by rendering ambiguous the human/machine construct. My reading shows that the dominant representation of cyborgs reinserts us into dominant ideology by reaffirming bourgeois notions of human, machine and femininity. In fact, what look like provocative notions of human identity, are not; they reassert a distinct identity between machine and human in a post-technological world. (Balsamo 2000: 151)

The superhuman women in (post-) Soviet Russian cinema are all presented as feminine and heterosexual in their appearance and behaviour. Neither true nor false superhumans seem to challenge the dominant gender roles. Rather, it seems, Beauvoir unknowingly described them when writing about the Eternal Feminine (1972: 212). Beauvoir refers to the existential aspect of the Eternal Feminine, as well as healing and strengthening, two of the heavily featured superhuman abilities in Soviet examples. However, in the Soviet context the ideal is represented by advanced technology and communism, not

God. The Eternal Feminine thus becomes an intermediary between humanity and the communist utopia. She originates from a technologically and morally advanced civilisation, which, in line with Marxist thinking and the socialist realist doctrine, has to be communist. Further, she attempts to inspire humanity to become more peaceful, non-violent and to take better care of each other and the planet. As for the false superhumans, they do not challenge dominant gender roles, although they do challenge the dominant function of female superhumans. The false superhumans initially appear to embody the Eternal Feminine, but later reveals their true agenda, which is neither peaceful nor non-violent.

Since the female superhuman's origin, biology and possibly technology are unclear, they are still more complex and transgressive characters than they might seem at first glance. In *Seven Elements* the female alien Aira actively defines herself as an ordinary woman. It suggests that being a woman means conforming to a certain type of behaviour, i.e. performing gender. However, becoming a woman is more open in the sense that you do not have to be born a human (organic) woman on Earth in order to identify as a woman, suggesting that biology is not a prerequisite for gender. In the process of becoming womanly, the female superhuman characters are shown to be making an active choice of gender performance, suggesting that traditional gender roles are useful, attractive, and in turn naturalised.¹¹⁰

3.13 Superhumans and posthumanism

In Western sci-fi discourse, the concept of the posthuman has proven fruitful for discussions about humans and technology. As Dónal O'Mathúna notes (2014: 295), "Movies with posthuman(ist) and transhuman(ist) themes raise many issues but are unified in asking questions about human nature and technology. [...] They question the distinctiveness of humans and human value". And while this suggests that there are existential similarities between the various posthuman characters appearing in Western cinema and the (post-) Soviet superhuman, there are also fundamental differences. One of the posthumanist cinematic incarnations is the female cyborg, a combination of

¹¹⁰ The male superhuman Hakon also seems to confirm stereotypical gender roles, as well as insisting, like Aira, on his humanness when confronted about it by Iuliia.

biology and technology in a female form. Scholars discussing the female cyborg's function tend to agree that she is a creature that represents two large threats to masculinity: advanced technology (which may replace most of men's functions) and female sexuality (which simultaneously intimidates and provokes many men and/or triggers in them the urge to drive women into submission). Thus, the femininity of the cyborg presents a dual threat (see Anthony 2004; Doane 2000; Faithful 2016). Another fixation of sci-fi, according to Doane, is the fetishisation of reproduction and motherhood associated with female aliens, cyborgs and androids in Hollywood sci-fi, presenting these women with a very specific function connected to motherhood and often bringing a natalist aspect into the binary theme of biology vs. technology (Doane 2000). According to Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, the posthumanist ideas' function is to challenge the binary mentality in the West: "While there is certainly not one humanism, which could be identified as a common target of posthumanist criticisms, there are persistent concepts and dualities in Western culture, such as nature/culture, man/woman, subject/object, human/animal, or body/mind, which are deeply rooted in the Western tradition and which get challenged by posthumanist thinkers" (Ranisch and Sorgner 2014: 8). In Soviet sci-fi cinema there seems to be less trace of the conflict between humans and technology, the conflict between masculinity and female sexuality, and the fetishisation of reproduction and motherhood. Even a cursory examination of (post-) Soviet sci-fi cinema suggests that the philosophical discussion of the cyborg is different from the West. In fact, there seems to be only one explicit mention of cyborgs, in *Orion's Loop*, no explicit reference to reproduction, no actual mothers, and hardly any characters who match the description of an organic/synthetic creature.

Instead, the female superhuman of (post-) Soviet sci-fi does not challenge either gender binarism or a division between biology and technology. Is it possible that the organic/synthetic divide and the idea of humanness inevitability stemming from biology were less important in the USSR? During the industrialisation of the 1930s in particular, the ideal of the man-machine was communicated through art and political propaganda. This was not merely conveyed through an image of the industrial worker, but to a high degree through that of the industrialised farmer, typically pictured as a woman on a

tractor. The Soviet view of nature was also highly instrumental: nature had a low value in and of itself, and was considered something available for exploitation and human industrialisation.¹¹¹

This view of technology, machine and nature can be traced back to Marxism. For Marx, technology (as a product of human intellectual labour) in itself was neutral, in the sense that it could serve capitalism and socialism equally. Furthermore, machines, as means of production, suppress and alienate the working class under capitalism, but will eventually contribute to liberating workers in a revolution and serve humanity in the classless society. Paradoxically, according to this vision, humanity, and masculinity in particular, is not threatened but enhanced by technology and machines. Within this context, the cyborg emerges as a product of a *natural* development of both technology and the human race.¹¹² So, in Lang's *Metropolis*, near the film's end workers symbolically destroy the machines as part of their anti-capitalist revolt, while in various Soviet films from around this period (e.g. *Man with a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov 1929) the cult of the man-machine is in fact celebrated. Therefore, the function of the cyborg – as a character to test out and confront the perceived threat of advanced technology – has not been dominant in Soviet discourse. One should add that, compared to the US, throughout most of the USSR's history, Soviet society was technologically inferior. This can also provide an explanation as to why, in the Soviet context, a future utopia was primarily represented by technology, the potentially threatening and problematic sides of which were not emphasised because of the lack of relevant experience. The level of technology in the USSR was neither sufficiently advanced, nor

¹¹¹ The most extreme examples of this policy are the virgin lands projects, and the alterations to rivers, in particular those connected to the Aral lake, these days considered to be the world's largest man-made ecological catastrophe.

¹¹² A striking example of this is how one of the important heroes of the Soviet Union, Aleksei Mares'iev (1916–2001), became a kind of cyborg. Mares'iev was a fighter pilot shot down by the Nazis during a raid in 1942. He narrowly escaped captivity, made it back home alive but lost both of his legs. He then received prosthetic legs and was so determined to return to the air that he trained for a year and then resumed active service as a fighter pilot. He was awarded several medals, and became the inspiration for a novel, a film, and an opera (composed by Prokofiev), all named *The Story of a Real Man* (Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke). His prosthetic legs made him no less a real human being. On the contrary, without those legs there would have probably been no 'real man' story.

embedded into different spheres of society sufficiently intimately, for it to pose an obvious threat.

3.14 What does it mean to be a human, and a woman?

An absolutely central question in the alien films is what it constitutes to be a human. More often than not this question is also coloured by the issues of gender identity: what it means to be a woman (or a man); and how gender is performed and naturalised.

The aforementioned ‘duck test’ seems to be the recurrent measurement, with an emphasis on emotions and their forms of expression (such as gestures and facial expressions). Being human means looking like a human and showing the ability to understand and express emotions in a human-like way. Biology is not an important qualifier for humanness. However, gender is an essential part of being human. There are no examples of gender-fluid or gender-neutral humanoid aliens. Although Orante, O and Niia all have short hair when they arrive, and have a rather androgynous look, there is never any doubt as to which gender they are meant to portray. This is in part because the actors playing the aliens are women themselves. Orante and O change their clothes and hair to appear less alien: longer hair, more feminine hairdos, skirts, blouses and other contemporary women’s clothing instead of futuristic, neutral bodysuits. Z in *This Merry Planet* and the unnamed alien of *Are We Going Crazy?* also change their clothes from bodysuits to women’s clothes during the course of the films, but they started out with feminine, long hair. By contrast, Niia keeps her alien look, with super-short white hair and silver bodysuit, throughout the film.

What it means to be human is a crucial part of the alien films because the aliens have limited knowledge of humans when they arrive or interact with humans. Thus, they have to learn it. The female cosmonauts do not need to learn this, and as a consequence the questions of humanness and identity are not cardinal to these films. However, displays of emotion and emotional capacity are gender-defining qualities for both the female cosmonauts and female aliens. For the cosmonauts and aliens alike, being a woman appears to entail an awareness and display of emotions such as grief, sorrow, anxiety, frustration, happiness and love; and empathy and taking care of their surroundings. The men in these films are, as a rule, not defined by these traits to the same extent as the

women. However, agency is not a defining trait for women. While some of them (most notably Marina in *Cosmic Voyage*, Hari in *Solaris*, Svetlana in *A Great Cosmic Voyage*, O in *The Alien Woman*, and Belka and Strelka in *Star Dogs*) seem to have agency, the majority of the girls and women are dependent on men's agenda and agency for their own actions. Even in the cases where the female characters appear to have at least some agency, this is not entirely unambiguous. Thus, cinematic female cosmonauts and aliens are not primarily used in discussions of what possibilities and roles women can have, or which challenges they may encounter in society because of their gender, but rather reaffirms and naturalises the traditional, essentialist understandings of gender: Yes, women have a place in space exploration, they can wield advanced technology and do not need to be biological women, but they have to maintain their femininity in order to fit in, and be valued and accepted. Part of this femininity is about making sure men's masculinity is not threatened, and their authority should not be challenged.

3.15 Women in outer space: Dreams, fantasies and ideals

In a reading emphasising verticality and hierarchy, the female cosmonaut and alien share important qualities: they have a strong connection to space. In addition, as I have shown in this chapter, they have a connection to advanced technology and are an intrinsic part of the future. They both seem to embody an ideal, albeit in slightly different ways. The female cosmonaut features in films more concerned with understanding technology, its possibilities, and its role in the advancement of (communist) society. These films seem less fantastical than the alien films. Partly, this could be because the female cosmonauts are professional women (as with the pilots and the flight attendants in the previous chapter) – they have higher education and are exercising their trained profession. The female aliens, on the other hand, are not trained for a specific role, thus they are not as obvious role models as the cosmonauts are for attracting young women to take up science. The female cosmonauts appear like idealised working women. Thus, their professionalism and ambitions are prominent parts of their characters – they are on a mission. Therefore, they often show more agency than the female aliens. Compared to the male cosmonauts, they might appear to have less agency: the female cosmonauts are for example not in charge of any missions, and it is typically when male colleagues are in perilous situations that they are driven to act and make their own assessments.

In terms of professionalism the alien women are a more heterogeneous group than the cosmonauts. Some are on a mission to Earth (e.g. Orante, Z, O, the nameless alien in *Are We Going Crazy?*, and Iadviga), some are encountered by earthlings in space or on other planets (e.g. Aelita, Hari, Marjorie, Niia and Aira). Their qualities as employees are not a central part of their characters. Rather, they thematise existentialist questions of what it means to be human and a woman. Such considerations are almost non-existent in the films where the female cosmonauts dominate the story. This strengthens the connection between the female aliens and the idea of Sophia. Svetlana Gutova argues that the appeal of the concept of idealised femininity (known as the Eternal Feminine and Sophia) during the Silver Age was a consequence of a spiritual crisis at the time: “The intention to express the integrity of culture, to overcome its ruptures and disintegration was reflected in an attempt to create a specific spiritual synthesis of different cultural branches and assumed a mythological form” (Gutova 2016: 168). However, the 1960s films with both female aliens and cosmonauts hint at such existential questions, but they are not crucial for the film. The answer in the female alien films to what it means to be human generally appears to be empathy and emotional capacity. The exceptions to this presentation are Aelita and Iadviga. Aelita is not defined by her empathy and high morality, on the contrary, she is despotic and egotistical. Similarly, Iadviga is egotistical and deceitful. Still, both *Aelita* and *Star Worms* are films that strive to explore and possibly challenge contemporary questions of identity and self-understanding. The aliens, in the position of being alien, are constantly confronted and defined by their Otherness. The majority of the aliens are tightly connected to men’s imagination and fantasies for their existence, thus it is tempting to use Heldt to describe them as ‘terribly perfect’ and to primarily be objects of male self-definition. Still, I would argue that Young’s assertion of flying women as being simultaneously patriarchal fantasies and freedom fantasies for women, describes the aliens better. This is true in particular for Hari and O, because of their resistance against the male control over their existence, but there is an element of female freedom fantasy in the morally superior and powerful female aliens: they are not helpless, and they take the liberty to trust their own moral convictions.

None of the spacefaring women presented in this chapter are, to the best of my knowledge, based on examples from real life. The closest we come to historical women are the female dogs Belka and Strelka: arguably based on the actual dogs yet heavily anthropomorphised into fictional characters in a highly fictionalised story. Still, the female cosmonauts and aliens in (post-) Soviet sci-fi and space-related films are relevant for our understanding of the attitudes toward women in this culture. Conrad primarily writes about Western films, yet some of the conclusions he draws seem transferable to (post-) Soviet films:

The axiom that a film says as much about the time of its production as about the time of its setting has particular relevance for sf [sci-fi], and nowhere is the genre's function as a barometer for contemporary attitudes better reflected than in the changing roles for women and representations of the female. (2011: 79)

One could, of course, argue that contemporary attitudes toward any underrepresented societal group, or the Other, are reflected in sci-fi and worthy of study. However, I agree with Conrad that sci-fi is a worthy medium for the dissemination of myths and narratives about women.

More to the point, what dilemmas and possibilities face women in space? The main challenge for intergalactic women appears to be how to save or keep safe loved ones. The dilemma is sometimes split between saving loved ones or following orders (e.g. Mariia in *Planet of Storms*, Niza in *The Andromeda Nebula*, Svetlana in *A Great Cosmic Voyage*, and O in *The Alien Woman*). Other times the dilemma is whether to save loved ones while sacrificing one's own (potential) happiness or even life (e.g. Niza in *The Andromeda Nebula*, Hari in *Solaris*, Orante in *Dr Ivens's Silence*, Niia in *Per Aspera*). For Aelita, the challenge is how to meet (and save) her love interest, engineer Los, and how to escape her oppressive father. She attempts to solve the problems by rebelling and seizing power at the opportune moment. Marina in *Cosmic Voyage's* main dilemma, it appears, is whether to follow her moral conviction or follow orders and support her love interest's ambitions. It does not seem too vexing for her, and she goes behind the backs of her boss and her boyfriend. On the moon she does have to save Professor Sedykh when he is trapped in the ravine. However, there was no obvious dilemma posed in the rescue mission. Z in *This Merry Planet* may not herself see that she has a problem, at least not at first. However, the men around her struggle to connect with her. After her

feminine awakening these connections are solved. There is no apparent dilemma for Aira either. She gets to help save two planets and her love interest without any substantial sacrifice. The nameless alien in *Are We Going Crazy?* is not very complex, neither is she presented with much backstory or confronted with any dilemmas. Still, what is known of her is that she has ventured out on a tricky mission in order to save her civilisation. Nadezhda in *First on the Moon* does not face any significant challenges or dilemmas, her character's function in the film does not demand this. Yet her willingness to take part in the dangerous programme, and embodiment of the Stalinist heroic ideal, points to the same will to self-sacrifice for the common good and glory of the Motherland as Marina in *Cosmic Voyage* displays. The space dogs Belka and Strelka face many obstacles in their story, often involving the dilemma of whether to trust each other or trying to go it alone. When Strelka tries the latter, and steers the spaceship towards deep space, against orders and Belka's protests, she jeopardises both their lives (and the lives of the rest of the living creatures on board the spaceship).

The majority of both female cosmonauts and aliens come to the rescue. They care for people around them: family, friends, and society. If they cannot actually save the situation (sometimes the world) alone, then they resort to appealing to people around them to help do the right thing (e.g. Hari and O). Their common strength is their emotional capacity, or "feminine touch", meaning their ability to see and act upon the emotional aspect and dilemmas in a situation. In some cases their emotional sensitivity is there from the outset (e.g. Marina, Mariia, Niza, Orante), in other cases it has to be triggered or developed over time (e.g. Tania, and of course Z and O). Either way, it seems clear that both female cosmonauts and aliens are defined by their emotional capacity, in most cases their emotional instinct will be the 'right' decision (except for Mariia in *Planet of Storms*, who does the right thing when she overcomes her impulse to try and rescue her love interest, and instead follow orders – saving the entire mission). For Hari and O the situation is somewhat more complex, as their decision to leave their men can be seen as an act of self-preservation rather than self-sacrifice. Still, they do not leave until they have made quite powerful statements about morality. In the cases of Aelita, Marjorie and Iadviga, their "feminine touch" makes them less trustworthy and stable. They use their gender, or the expectations for their gender, to lure gullible men

into thinking they are unthreatening and caregiving. Aelita, and Iadviga are dependent on the stereotypes connected to their gender in order for their scheme to work: this is used to trick both the male counterparts in the films and the audiences. The audience are willing to believe that Aelita is a damsel in distress, starved of emotional intimacy. Although the audience know from the beginning that Iadviga is pretending to be a physician, it is only revealed towards the end that she is an alien with evil intentions.

3.16 The chronotope of outer space

Outer space as a chronotope in (post-) Soviet cinema began in *Aelita* as a place for escapism and petty-bourgeois longing for the Russian Empire. It was a place that should be abandoned for the necessary construction of the new nation. Still, the aesthetics and technology of Mars in *Aelita* are not fraught with nostalgia, but rather with futurism – with advanced technological gadgets we do not recognise, geometric shapes, sharp lines and angles in architecture and attire. Space is deceitful: it poses as an ideal with its advanced technology and being ripe for revolution, yet it turns out to be the opposite.

In the 1930s and the 1960s the chronotope changed. It was still technologically advanced, but space travel was no longer brushed off as trivial daydreaming. Instead, space was a place for exploration, showcasing the bright (communist) future. Space in *Cosmic Voyage* is described in a sober, educational and scientific way based on the most realistic extrapolations available at the time. There are no signs or talk of extra-terrestrial life. In the 1960s, after the first manned expeditions to outer space, the element of fantasy and imagination became dominant in films with female cosmonauts and aliens. The physics of space and space exploration are explained and are important in the 1960s and until the mid-1970s, in *Planet of Storms*, *Towards a Dream*, *The Andromeda Nebula*, *Moscow-Cassiopeia*, *Teens in Space*, and *A Great Cosmic Voyage*. Challenges with gravitational time dilation, and fuel and energy sources for space exploration are often mentioned in these films. Still, extra-terrestrial life is a part of the premise and develops the plots. Space has again become a place of fantasy and dreams. The idealised future is brought to us either in the shape of technology enabling extensive space travel, making the Earth a better place, or through contact with aliens who already are at a more advanced stage. The elements of contact with outer space appear to function in a similar way to heaven or paradise in religious thinking – including the fantastical elements. In

the atheist USSR it was not permissible to envisage an afterlife, but idealised visions of the future seem to function in a similar way in official culture – as a way of dreaming of a better place not for oneself but for the coming generations. This hypothesis is strengthened by the continuous use of notions of verticality to emphasise hierarchical structures, more specifically moral hierarchies, in these films. However, this idealisation does not remain unchallenged in the films discussed. Already by the 1960s there are hints of subversiveness, i.e. the revelation that most of the story was a dream in *Towards a Dream*. In the 1970s subversiveness can be traced in the highly fantastical *Moscow-Cassiopeia* series, where the laws of physics are constantly defied and the happiness-seeking robots aim to eradicate the humanoid civilisation that created them; in *A Great Cosmic Voyage* where the expedition was a hoax; and of course in *Solaris*, where the Soviet premise of advanced technology and advanced morality being co-dependent is questioned as the earthly scientists use their advanced technology to perform malicious experiments on a seemingly peaceful, but unknown, being. This ambiguity in what the films communicate, and more specifically the chronotope of outer space implies, is indicative of what Bakhtin notes of the inclusiveness of chronotopes: outer space in these films can both be a vision of the ideal, in societal structure, possibilities and morality, *and* a chronotope in which these ideals are questioned and contested.

This ambiguity seems to linger on into the 1980s, e.g. *Per Aspera ad Astra*, *Star Inspector*, and *The Alien Woman*. In this decade the physics and ecology of space pose a threat. Overheating, pollution and malign viruses threaten planets and civilisations in *Per Aspera ad Astra*, *Orion's Loop*, and *Seven Elements*. The ecological theme is not only found in films with female cosmonauts and aliens of this period, as Ekaterina Sal'nikova highlights in her article “Krisis i katastrofa ekosistemy v sovetskoi kinofantastike”, adding: “in the mid-1980s ecological crises and catastrophes emerge [in sci-fi cinema] as a symbol of the distress in society in general, and morality of the individual” (2017: 70).¹¹³ The threat towards entire planets (sometimes our planet) appears more acute in the 1980s. In a reading of verticality and hierarchy, this can be

¹¹³ «В середине 1980-х годов кризис и катастрофа экосреды выступают как символ неблагополучия соцума в целом и нравственности отдельных индивидов».

read as a symbol of Soviet society. The promises given by the authorities about the future, earlier embodied cinematically in outer space, seemed unbelievable. Instead it became increasingly obvious that the authorities could not be trusted, and even came to be seen as the real threat to people's welfare and the ecology, symbolised cinematically as the threats of overheating, radiation and cosmic viruses. Still, the ambiguity is maintained because the rescue in these films is also often found in outer space, through the help of aliens. This might also suggest that hierarchies per se are not seen as a threat.

The uncertainty of what outer space meant can be seen in the immediate post-Soviet sci-fi *Are We Going Crazy?*. The title seems apt as a comment on the current chaotic societal and cultural situation in Russia and the negotiations of which direction the country should take. Thus, it is unsurprising how little attention is given to outer space and the alien civilisation – suggesting the lack of clear moral ideals and authority. Instead, energy for the future is found in the past. As post-Soviet Russia stabilised during the 1990s the chronotope of outer space appears to have gone through a considerable alteration in sci-fi cinema: From symbolising an ideal future in Soviet sci-fi, through losing its clear connection to some defined ideal, to post-Soviet commenting on and remembering of the Soviet past. In an article about *First on the Moon* by Brian Willems, the author argues that it is through speculating about the past that we can find ways to the future: “the film paradoxically suggests that it is looking into the past which creates alternatives to the present. In fact, this idea will be taken one step further: *First on the Moon* shows that potentiality is only located in the past and never in the future” (Willems 2016: 159). In *First on the Moon* and *Star Worms* the Soviet space enthusiasm, and thus outer space, is a source of satire, irony and ridicule. In *Star Dogs* outer space forms the backdrop for a heavily rewritten, too good to be true, fantastical recollection of past glories. Then in 2017 in *Attraction* outer space is again the origin of encounters with the ideal, enabling us to lift our heads and think about our values once more. Whether the latter example is part of a new trend and direction, or more of an exception depends on future Russian cinematic dealings with outer space.

The dominant presentation of outer space is that of a place for intelligent, attractive, and professional women (and men). It is a place where humans and humanoid aliens encounter stressful situations that challenge their balance between ration and emotion.

As a workplace for female cosmonauts it can provide self-realisation. Masha in *Planet of Storms* explicitly talks about her motivation for doing her job: she would love to visit another planet. For the remaining female cosmonauts their motivation is merely implied: they seem content with their jobs and they perform them with excellence. None of them try to excuse their professional choices, e.g. as a pragmatic career choice or something they do while they are waiting for a better opportunity. In the alien films, outer space is a more mystical and fantastical place, as the home of extra-terrestrial creatures. Still, most of the aliens are on a clearly stated mission as well. The exceptions are Aelita and Hari¹¹⁴. And for the aliens in relation to us, it is primarily a place that separates. It is the place in between that has to be traversed in order to get from them to us, or the other way around. The separating function is also found in the cosmonaut films, but it seems to fill a larger function in the alien films.

3.17 The Vertical in space

The majority of the films discussed in this chapter are fraught with vertical notions and employ verticality as a metaphor for moral hierarchies. There are exceptions, for example *This Merry Planet*, where verticality does not seem connected to hierarchies. However, this comedy is about a carnival, famously an egalitarian event where hierarchies are to be ignored. Another example of an exception is *Star Worms*, where there are hierarchies expressed through verticality in abundance, but there is little trace of moral hierarchies. This film appears to use and invert well-established tropes of verticality to create comedy and surprise the audience. Even in films where there are few shots of space travel or from outer space (*The Alien Woman* and *Seven Elements*), there are vertical notions and references to outer space. There is no obvious vertical in outer space because there is no gravity. Still, the verticality is maintained through perspectives and the four vertical notions (such as outer space above Earth; verticality on Earth or other planets with gravity; references to celestial creatures; architecture and design; and camera angles), and established hierarchical structures.

¹¹⁴ If Hari is in fact on a mission from the planet Solaris, it is not explicitly stated anywhere in the film.

The dominating representation is that of the Moral Vertical. Morality and ideas of the ideal are rudimentary to the plots, and in particular connected to the female cosmonaut and alien characters. The notions of verticality are used to enrich the Moral Vertical, through more or less consistent references to hierarchies. The set of aesthetics and behaviour developed in connection to the female cosmonaut and the female alien provide filmmakers with motifs they can use and creatively develop. I have not found anything suggesting that the key motif of the Moral Vertical has been ignored altogether. However, the various films presented in this chapter show that the use of this concept is complex. It can be tied to either more or less existentialist questions (e.g. the major difference between the cosmonaut and alien films); it can be used to discuss women's agency (e.g. in *Cosmic Voyage*, *Solaris* and *The Alien Woman*); and it can be challenged to create humour and plot twists (e.g. *Aelita*, *This Merry Planet* and *Star Worms*). Altogether, the Moral Vertical appears to be a motif that continues to communicate to both Russian audiences and Russian filmmakers.

4 Conclusion

4.1 The contribution of verticality as an analytical tool

The spatial focus of the dissertation, looking at four defined notions of verticality and how they express hierarchies and the chronotopes of sky and outer space, has unlocked interesting aspects of the films analysed. It has enabled alternative readings of well-known films with established scholarly literature associated with them (such as *Aelita*, *Wings*, *Solaris* and *Per Aspera ad Astra*), and provided a strong connection between these films and lesser known films (for example *Towards a Dream*, *The School-leaver*, *This Merry Planet*, *The Alien Woman* and *Are We Going Crazy?*). These connections manifest themselves in how hierarchical structures are explored and disseminated through various plots, and in the aesthetics presented in architecture, sets, costumes and camera angles. Beumers points to similar aesthetics in *Aelita*, *Cosmic Voyage*, and 1930's Stalinist architecture, exemplifying how *Cosmic Voyage* enters into a discussion with both an earlier film production and contemporary culture:

The launch pad of the rocket is reminiscent of the Constructivist curved slopes leading to elevated tribunes in *Aelita*, while the huge bridge that serves to launch the rocket and the hangar clearly reflect Stalin's Grand Plan for the reconstruction of Moscow and especially designs for the Palace of Soviets. (Beumers 2017b: 174-175)

Based on the films explored in this dissertation, I would argue that this aesthetic has by and large been in continuous development throughout the century.

Notions of verticality are used to reveal and emphasise hierarchies in the majority of films. Still, in some of the films this is not the case. The best example is perhaps *This Merry Planet*, where verticality is less prominent. As the film's plot centres around a New Year's Eve fancy dress-party – or carnival – it is no surprise that there is no clear connection between verticality and hierarchies. The very purpose of the carnival is to blur accepted norms of social status and behaviour, allowing for unexpected events and encounters to take place. The carnival, according to the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque, is a situation where things are turned upside down. However, in the case of *This Merry Planet*, hierarchies are not turned upside down, they are simply erased. In *Star Worms* the vertical is turned upside down for satirical effect, and is, as such, revoking the carnivalesque.

Verticality as a metaphor for hierarchies appears to me to be a natural part of the meaning-making process in the films discussed.

4.2 The contribution of the notion of Moral Vertical

The Moral Vertical highlights a particular motif in (post-) Soviet culture with regard to female pilots, flight attendants, cosmonauts and aliens. With a focus on morality, spatiality (including chronotopes), and the female characters' possibilities for action under given circumstances, the Moral Vertical has provided me with a framework for a meaningful exploration of this set of films.

The Moral Vertical exposes female characters, with a particular spatial location in the sky and cosmos, as having a function of moral superiority. Their position above ground provides them with clarity and an overview in demanding situations. Nonetheless, the Moral Vertical does not necessarily place these characters on a pedestal or deprive them of agency. Instead, I argue that the Moral Vertical can be used to present both morality and agency as complex matters. This latter point partly counters the potential of the Moral Vertical to be yet another tool for an (essentialist) idealisation of women, inasmuch as the female characters have the opportunity to be both imperfect and complex. Nevertheless, the continuous insistence on women's moral responsibility in Soviet and Russian society is not unproblematic – for either women or men.

4.3 Action in the chronotopes of the sky and outer space

With recourse to Steinby and Klapuri's (2013) article on chronotopes as a spatial concept for exploring ethics and agency, throughout this thesis I have been especially interested in the opportunities the female characters are presented with in the sky and outer space. The sky and outer space as chronotopes are defined by their spiritual meaning, as a space for transcendence and ascension. The 'natural inhabitants' of this space, that is, those who work there and originate from these spaces, are in a superior position to those who do not 'naturally' belong there. The sky and outer space are where battles are fought and won, explorations into the unknown take place, and where there are spaces of modernisation, industrialisation and progress.

In the sky and outer space women are, in most cases, able to show their professional capabilities, primarily within the tasks allocated to them. More often than not, their emotional capacity and intuition are valued and important for their work performance – this establishes and confirms their gender. In this regard, I cannot see that there is much diversity in the way gender is performed in the sky and outer space. There are strong elements of self-realisation, albeit not always in the way the characters may initially have thought or planned. Nevertheless, the characters are able to grow and develop in these spaces. The female aviators, flight attendants and space travellers achieve self-realisation through their excellent work in the particular spatial location in the sky or outer space. In several of the films this even involves sacrificing their own lives – often in a patriotic manner, but not always. This suggests that these are places where the female characters are able to transcend themselves and reach their potential. Still, in general, women ultimately have to answer to their male leaders.

As for the female characters' personal and romantic lives, their possibilities for action are more ambiguous. At best, I would argue that it seems challenging for them to have a family or even committed romantic relationships while being so closely attached to the sky and outer space. The challenge for such relationships and constellations originates from the female characters' demanding work tasks and missions, and challenging working conditions (for example long missions and trips away from home). Another reason is, at times, their surroundings' unwillingness or hesitation to adapt their expectations of the female characters for close and intimate relations to function (for example in *Towards a Dream*, *Wings*, *Once Again about Love*, *The Stewardess* and *The Alien Woman*).

The possibilities the female pilots, flight attendants, cosmonauts and aliens are presented within the chronotopes of the sky and outer space tie them closer to this space and anchor them there. These are spaces the female characters are drawn to, more or less willingly, and where they more or less willingly stay.

4.4 Morally superior women with agency

As outlined in the Introduction, the general impression of female characters in male-authored Russian literature is that they have no or only very limited agency. Heldt argued that the terribly perfect woman was primarily a part of “male self-definition” (Heldt 1987: 2). This statement has later been criticised and nuanced. However, it has been unclear whether or not it has been possible for morally superior female characters to have agency. Based on the films discussed over the previous chapters, I would argue that it is possible.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the female pilots in the films directed by women, *Wings* and *There Are Night Witches in the Sky*, show a great deal of agency. However, it appears that the pilot identity, which all the female pilots possess, requires at least a minimum of agency, as they all long for the skies. Although the flight attendants are not defined by a similar stewardess identity, most of them appear as acting, not just reacting, individuals. The least active flight attendant is Lara in *Sky. Airplane. Girl*. One could argue that the pragmatic entrance into the vocation of flight attendants, as seen in *The Stewardess*, *The School-leaver* and *The Flight Crew* (1979), suggests that these women have to give up their own ambitions, and therefore lose agency. However, I claim that this can also be seen as resourcefulness, such as being able to exploit the opportunities you are given and make the most out of the situation. This does not appear to deprive the female flight attendants of agency completely. It does not promote the ideal of “follow your dreams” and “if you work hard enough you will get whatever you want”, in particular associated with the American Dream and Hollywood narratives. Instead, it appears more realistic and achievable.

Additionally, I cannot see that these female characters are victimised by their choices. Yet it would be problematic if this discourse of pragmatic adaptation to situations only involved female characters. This is not the case, however, as seen in, for example, *Heavenly Slug*, *Towards a Dream*, and *The Flight Crew* (both 1979 and 2016 versions). And to whom would such a divide between genders be most unfair: the women who are told to be pragmatic and flexible in their expectations of life, or the men who are told that they can only blame themselves if they do not get exactly what they wished for?

The extremes of either of these narratives are, I would argue, equally unappealing to either gender. Moreover, the pragmatism the female characters display does not seem extreme: they are, after all, not forced into a work or social situation that seems oppressive and impossible to handle.

The cinematic female cosmonauts are also presented with more and less agency. Again, it is suggested, through their apparent competence and professionalism, that their mere presence in this occupation requires some ambition and agency. However, the female characters do not necessarily get to demonstrate this in the films' plots. The heads of expeditions and missions, the ones making plans and giving orders are, as a rule, men. Women do make crucial contributions, however. The teenager Svetlana in *A Great Cosmic Voyage* appears to be one of the female cosmonauts with the most agency, in how she consistently thinks on her feet and helps out her fellow crew members. Curiously, considering their apparent similarity, at the other end of the agency scale are the teenaged girls in *Moscow-Cassiopeia*: They are selected for their mission on the basis of their relation to the chosen boys, and whose contribution to their mission is less significant by comparison with the other female cosmonauts' contributions.

Overall the majority of morally superior female aliens in (post-) Soviet sci-fi appear to have less agency than the other three categories of female characters. This establishes the aliens as fantasies rather than representations of real women. They are powerful, and strongly promote ideals of peace and love. However, they are more dependent on men for their existence and their understanding of our civilisation. As female characters they embody the archetype of the Eternal Feminine, the 'terribly perfect' heroine described by Heldt (1987), and is strongly connected to Solov'ev's idea of Sophia. This said, there are cases where the aliens gain agency towards the end, most notably in *Solaris* and *The Alien Woman*. As for the evil female aliens, it is only Aelita who actually has an agenda of her own. Whereas, in contrast, Iadviga is merely pleasing her gypsy husband.

In particular, the cases of Nadezhda Stepanovna in *Wings*, Natal'ia in *Once Again about Love*, and Hari in *Solaris* clearly demonstrate that it is possible for morally superior women to also be complex and rich characters. Incidentally these films are all released

within a 7-year period, between 1966 and 1973. Elena Prokhorova writes about this period that “many films continued the Thaw ‘trench warfare’ line, focusing on individual fates” (Prokhorova in Salys 2013: 107). This suggests that the interest for cinematic exploration of women’s moral superiority was greater than it had been in earlier and later periods – with the exception of *Aelita* in 1924.

4.5 Female directors and their female characters

In three films (*Wings*, *There Are Night Witches in the Sky*, and *Star Dogs*) motherhood is dealt with in an explicit manner. These are three of the four films under discussion that have been directed by women (the fourth being *Sky. Airplane. Girl*). The tales of motherhood presented in these films are quite unconventional in terms of cinematic presentations: Nadezhda Stepanovna and her adoptive daughter’s strained relationship; the female soldiers’ sorrow over the impossibility of motherhood at the war front; and a young puppy bragging about his origin – making it seem almost as if he has two mothers. Although it can seem refreshing to see cinematic female characters who are not defined by their child-bearing abilities in the many films directed by men, it becomes equally strange that it is completely absent in so many films about professional women – especially since the balance between motherhood and career was a very real and deeply felt dilemma for Soviet women, from tractor drivers to cosmonauts (Ponomareva 2002; Bridger 2001).

Another feature these three films have in common is the representation of female friendship and communication. Women in these films have meaningful conversations about topics that go beyond their relationships to the men around them, or about how they confirm their gender through their looks. An example of the latter is shown in *Moscow-Cassiopeia* and *Teens in Space*, where the three girls are shown socialising, but their conversations centre around their appearances and the boys in the crew. In *Wings* Nadezhda Stepanovna is shown in a close conversation over a beer with another woman of her age, where they talk about their lives. The two women show empathy and understanding for each other that Nadezhda Stepanovna does not share with anyone else in her current surroundings. In *There Are Night Witches in the Sky*, there are only a few male characters. The female soldiers discuss military tactics and strategy; quarrel over

their differences and make up again; share their fears, hopes and dreams. In *Star Dogs* the female dogs are co-dependant for their survival and success, and share a wide range of experiences. As a contrast, it does not seem as if Lara in *Sky. Airplane. Girl* has a similarly strong friendship with her female colleague Mysh.

It is not easy to say why there are not more films directed by women about airborne women. The four films *Wings*, *There Are Night Witches in the Sky*, *Sky. Airplane. Girl* and *Star Dogs* tell quite different stories, highlighting various aspects of the flying women motif, from the complex and serious portrait of the veteran Nadezhda Stepanovna (loaded with social criticism); to the melodramatic and patriotic story about women soldiers; to the tragic romance of a flight attendant in 21st century Russia; and to the family-friendly animated and highly fictionalised story of the space dogs Belka and Strelka. They are all stories that focus on women's lives and experiences. However, none of these are sci-fi films or films with female aliens. This may suggest that the motif of female aliens, and the idealised Other, is either not very appealing for women directors, or that such films have not been prioritised by the studios or film funders. Considering how strong the motifs of the idealised Other, Sophia and Eternal Feminine are in portraying the female alien, I can see how this is not necessarily a very interesting character for female directors to explore. The cinematic women presented by female directors in this dissertation are not Others in the way that the female aliens are.

4.6 Avoiding essentialisation

My aim with the gender perspective has been to see how gender informs certain characters and motifs in a selected number of films. The analyses and conclusions drawn from this provide us with insights into various aspects of Russian culture, but this does not give us a full picture of women's status in Russian culture and society. Neither, for that matter, have I written at length about how these films and the motifs presented in them have been received and viewed by women. To do this, I would have to carry out interviews with Russian women and discuss these films with them. Still, I have shown how complex characters and plots may be interpreted differently, which ultimately delegates the authority to the viewers to judge for themselves. For example, it would be devaluing Russian women to think that they could not recognise the highly fictionalised

alien characters, and think that they would readily accept this as an ideal for how they are supposed to act and behave. Still, when representations of women are portrayed with a limited set of virtues and characteristics, in various media, over time, this has consequences for how women see themselves. By focusing on complexity and diversity in a particular selection of films I wish to provoke reflection and discussion concerning the role of gender in Russian culture. With this approach, I avoid essentialising Russian women.

4.7 The cinematic narratives

The 32 films considered in this thesis span almost a century of film production. Six films feature female pilots; five, female flight attendants; ten, female cosmonauts; and ten more, female aliens (plus one film with a male alien). They represent a great variation in mood and genre – from light-hearted comedies, melodramas, and adventure films, to intense existentialist and psychological dramas, and can all be used in a fruitful discussion of gender norms and society in a (post-) Soviet context. Like most cinematic narratives, the narratives in these films are shaped to communicate with a contemporary audience in each particular case. Still, the cultural motifs of the morally superior woman and the Moral Vertical are important commonalities throughout, whatever the time period and genre.

The flight attendants and cosmonauts are all professionals at work. With the exception of *Star Dogs*, these narratives concentrate on working women's challenges (*Star Dogs* is more focused on the fairy-tale narrative of overcoming obstacles, rather than career choices and professionalism). Facing these challenges are children with fantastical and idealised hopes for their future career (for example in *The School-leaver*), eager and ambitious teenage cosmonauts (for example in *Moscow-Cassiopeia*, *Teens in Space* and *A Great Cosmic Voyage*) and young adults who pragmatically turn away from idealised dreams and instead focus on getting the job done (for example in *Planet of Storms*, *Towards a Dream*, *The Stewardess*, *The School-leaver*, *The Flight Crew* (1979)).

In most of the films, the flight attendants or cosmonauts are passionate about their work. The exceptions are the flight attendants in *The Stewardess*, *The School-leaver*, *The*

Flight Crew (1979) and *Sky. Airplane. Girl*. However, the flight attendants in *The School-leaver* and *The Flight Crew* (1979) learn to appreciate their jobs in a way that cannot be seen with those in *The Stewardess* and *Sky. Airplane. Girl*. Some of the challenges they encounter are internal: conflicts between work and personal life, often involving a romantic relationship; conflicts between professional ambitions and circumstances. A conflict that is not thematised is motherhood, as none of the characters are presented as mothers. External challenges are primarily (unforeseen) stressful events on the job, and living up to others' (often their family's and romantic interest's) expectations of them.

Their performance of gender is situated in their visual appearance, with feminine hairstyles, make-up and fitted clothes. Personal qualities often associated with femininity – such as empathy, intuition, eye for detail and emotional awareness – characterise the cosmonauts and flight attendants. Their work tasks emphasise these qualities as these individuals take care of and heal people, assist and support male co-workers and bosses, and organise various activities. They are also defined as heterosexual, as they all are in some kind of romantic involvement with a man.

Although the majority of the female pilots and aliens share certain qualities (for example emotional capacity and moral superiority) and markers of identity (such as gender performance) with the flight attendants and the cosmonauts, they are somewhat different. The primary difference is that the pilots and aliens are not associated with a “normal” workplace in the way the flight attendants and cosmonauts are. Of course, for most people these days being a pilot is a normal job, just like being a flight attendant. However, judging by the majority of films with female pilots in them, it has not been a normal workplace for women. Most cinematic female pilots have been soldiers during the Second World War, in an extreme situation that required extraordinary sacrifice. Becoming a fighter pilot was not the result of pragmatic career planning or pursuing a lifelong dream, but a call in defence of the Motherland. The problematic sides of this are especially eloquently thematised in *Wings*. The exceptions to this presentation are the civil female pilots in *Pilots* and *The Flight Crew* (2016). These two pilots have more in common with the flight attendants and cosmonauts in the way how they relate to and

perform their work. Nonetheless, there is no equivalent to the pilot identity (discussed in 2.3) connected to either flight attendants, cosmonauts or aliens. Although the female fighter pilots responded to a call in defence of the Motherland, they still exhibit an almost spiritual bond to flying, and being a pilot is a defining part of their identity.

Most of the female aliens come to Earth, or come in contact with human civilisation, because of a mission (or they gain a clear mission in the course of the film). This can therefore be seen as work-related. The exceptions are Aelita and Hari in *Solaris*. However, the aliens' missions, or jobs, are quite different. Most of their missions relate to saving planets, lives, civilisations, etc., while cosmonauts' missions are more closely tied to exploration. Thus, the alien narratives are less about how women function in a fictional, idealised work situation in outer space, and more about women as symbolic bearers of life and peace. In *Orion's Loop*, one of the few films with both female aliens and cosmonauts, the human spaceship is on a mission to investigate an unknown phenomenon. The female aliens, on the other hand, are on a mission to warn the humans about a lethal threat against Earth.

Through the characters of the female pilots, flight attendants, cosmonauts and aliens, slightly different narratives of women's lives and cultural stereotypes are accentuated. It appears clear to me that the spatial locations and connections, and vertical notions, are fundamental for understanding the function of different women in a (moral) hierarchy. The dominant image is that of the highly skilled, competent, empathetic and dutiful employee/soldier/alien. She accepts the demands placed on her shoulders by society and authorities, and takes moral responsibility where others do not. She does not suffer from any double burden in choosing between family life and career – motherhood is not an issue. However, there are examples that deviate from the dominant representations, in particular in *Aelita*, with Aelita the rebel; in *Wings*, with the troubled veteran who struggles with both work and motherhood; in *Once Again about Love*, with the flight attendant who, among other things, is not ashamed of her sexuality; in *Solaris*, with the alien who confronts her subordination to a man; and in *There Are Night Witches in the Sky*, with the soldiers who long for motherhood and suffer because they cannot be both mothers and soldiers.

4.8 The historical development of these narratives

Soviet and Russian feature films with airborne and space-travelling women have been made every decade since the 1920s. Each film is not only a representation of contemporary attitudes towards airborne women, but also of more general attitudes in society. This is evident in the sci-fi films discussed, as these futuristic projections inform us about contemporary ideals and hopes for the future. The pilot and flight attendant films also tell us about the times in which they were made. Thus, the narratives described in the previous section have also gone through a historical development.

From the tumultuous 1920s, the narratives under examination explored questions related to society, hierarchies, previous narrative motifs and gender: women are, for example, not necessarily morally superior beings. While no women are seen flying in *Aelita*, there is a feminine presence in the space rocket in the shape of the cross-dressed Gusev. In this scene, Gusev is simultaneously ridiculing and naturalising a feminine presence in a space rocket. Part of the film's message is for the individual to accept their task in the collective project of building communism (in one country).

The films of the 1930s are clearly marked by Stalinist ideology and the paradigm of socialist realism. The individual's feat is valorised, as long as it is on behalf of the collective. The female pilot in *Pilots* and the female cosmonaut in *Cosmic Voyage* are in essence the same character. They are the idealised young, ambitious, new Soviet woman – they are relatable with their charm, yet superior morally and physically (through their spatial location). The narrative emphasises the role of women in untraditional work situations. This said, the gender roles mark a return to a more traditional presentation of women as the morally superior beings.

The following decade, the 1940s, was completely dominated by the Second World War. In a sharp contrast to the seminal *Zoia* (Lev Arnshtam 1944), a harrowing Passion-like film about a female partisan (including the levitation scenes inspired by her hanging at the hands of the Nazis), stands the representation of female pilots in *Heavenly Slug*. The female soldier is a fairly new character, but she is a variation of the Stalinist heroine. She is defending the Motherland, rather than modernising it.

The cinematic airborne woman of the 1950s is only mentioned in this thesis in passing, as she makes but a brief appearance as a cosmonaut in *Road to the Stars*. The 1960s is the decade where she really leaves her mark, featuring in six films (*Planet of Storms*, *Towards a Dream*, *Wings*, *Once Again about Love*, *The Andromeda Nebula* and *The Stewardess*). Only *Wings* deals with the fate of the first generation of female pilots after the war, in showing how their past experiences continued to affect their lives. However, the dominant representation is that of the young, determined, professional woman and how she deals with her relatively true-to-life work situation. Romantic and other social relations are more complex than in the previous films. The female alien is introduced in small parts, hinting at more existential questions.

The cosmic enthusiasm and general uplifting mood stagnated in the 1970s. The narratives become more existentialist, subversive and fantastical. Through the films *The School-leaver* and the teenage cosmonaut films *Moscow-Cassiopeia*, *Teens in Space* and *A Great Cosmic Voyage*, the narrative focuses more on the obligation for self-sacrifice for young women – in addition to education. The female fighter pilot makes a brief return in *Only Old Men Go to Battle*, in a narrative about heroic past and self-sacrifice. In *Solaris* and *Dr Ivens's Silence*, the narrative of the female alien is developed, highlighting questions with regard to human morality and existence. Towards the end of the decade, with *The Flight Crew* (1979), there is once again a more sober story about more complex and relatable heroes. However, the ecological theme, as Sal'nikova (2017) described in relation to 1980s sci-fi, is introduced through the natural disaster in this film. The narratives continue to be rather fantastical in this decade, the airborne women belonging either in the past (in *There Are Night Witches in the Sky*), or in some fantastical (futuristic) universe (for example *Per Aspera ad Astra*, *Orion's Loop*, and *The Alien Woman*).

After the dissolution of the USSR, in the 1990s, the cinematic airborne woman is almost entirely absent, except for a small but important role as an alien in the low-budget *Are We Going Crazy?*. The narrative about the superior female alien is not challenged nor is it developed to any notable extent. All in all, she seems less significant as a cultural motif. Since 2000, the female pilot, flight attendant, cosmonaut and alien have all made

cinematic comebacks. All such films appear to be somewhat nostalgic or preoccupied with past ideals and cultural motifs. Two of these films are remakes (*Sky. Airplane. Girl* and *The Flight Crew* (2016)). While a remake in itself does not have to be nostalgic, nonetheless, as has been pointed out by, for example, Graffy (2017: 194), aviation and space flight films of this period are predominately oriented towards the past, rather than the future. The other three films (*First on the Moon*, *Star Dogs* and *Star Worms*) are comedies or comedic, and strongly related to the Soviet past. The two most recent films discussed, *The Flight Crew* (2016) and *Attraction* stand out and represent a shift in the late 2010s in how gender is treated. In *The Flight Crew* the contemporary, civil, female pilot is portrayed for the first time since *Pilots*, and in *Attraction* the gender roles were swapped in the alien-earth dweller romance with the male alien Hakon and Iuliia. These two last films might signal that there is interest among filmmakers and audiences in seeing new, or at least less stereotypical, narratives in terms of gender. This suggests that (young) women in the RF might feel less restricted by their gender when it comes to choosing a career for themselves, and have different expectations of how they want society to treat them because of their gender. This change in attitude is slightly reminiscent of how the war generation (the current young women's great grandmothers) saw themselves and the society in which they lived. It remains to be seen whether there actually is such a change going on, and how this spills over into cultural representations of women. Reportedly, the Russian Labour Minister Maksim Topilin is looking into changing the list of occupations that women are banned from entering ("Topilin rasskazal ob ismenenii spiska zapreshchennykh dlia zhenshchin professii" 2018). The reasons for this revision mentioned in the news piece in *Vedomosti* are the introduction of technology reducing the physical strain in many of the occupations, and the need to close the pay gap between women and men. There is no mention of the highly essentialist presumption that gender or sex automatically precludes a person from doing a good job, as for example a bus driver (see paragraph 387 in *Pravitel'stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii* 2000). Again, this statement and possible revision of the law suggest a change in attitude towards which professions women can have, and the importance of equal pay, without discussing essentialist understandings of what it means to be a woman or a man. It is not because some women might be attracted to heavy labour and endure it well that

they can get such jobs, it is because the amount of heavy labour is reduced and so it is safe enough for women to have them. Still, like the 1930s' policies towards women, encouraging them to take up traditional male occupations, was as much about the massive need for labour as it was about women's emancipation, the current revision may end up as a variation of the story of the female tractor drivers: women are allowed in, but little to nothing is done to accommodate them (Bridger 2001).

4.9 The female characters and their moral values

As previously stated, the majority of the female characters analysed are presented as morally superior beings. However, this does not imply that they are morally superior in the same way, or that they promote the same values.

They are all marked by integrity and follow their moral convictions. This is not a moral value in itself, but staying true to one's convictions is part of making a character morally superior: they pass the test they are confronted with, and stick to what they believe is right. What the right decision is does, however, vary between the films. This is in turn influenced by how the characters are framed (are they presented as heroes or villains? Do we cheer for their success?). In some films the heroines think for themselves, listen to their intuition and defy authorities (for example in *Cosmic Voyage*, *Towards a Dream*, *Wings*, *A Great Cosmic Voyage*, and *There Are Night Witches in the Sky*), in others they suppress their initial instincts and obey the authorities (for example in *Planet of Storms* and *Star Dogs*). For some cinematic airborne women the right choice is to stay with, and fight for, their romantic interest (for example in *Heavenly Slug*, *Towards a Dream*, *The Stewardess*, *Dr Ivens's Silence*, *Seven Elements*, *Sky. Airplane. Girl*, and *The Flight Crew* (1979 and 2016)), while for others it is right to leave that romantic interest well behind (for example in *Pilots*, *Solaris*, and *The Alien Woman*). The fighter pilots and the morally superior aliens fight for peace. The pilots, flight attendants and cosmonauts promote the inclusion of women in different spheres of work outside the home, such as the financially independent woman figure. The moral superiority always presents cinematic women as something more than mere objects of (male) pleasure and desire, but not necessarily as more than the ideal Other.

Important values in the films include love, friendship, courage and creativity, but also loyalty and honesty.

4.10 The advantages and disadvantages of analysing a large and diverse body of films

The advantage of working with a relatively large and inclusive body of material that spans over a long period of time, and different genres, is that I have been able to map out and compare key aspects that these films have in common. Films that at first glance may not have appeared very complex or deep (for example *The School-leaver*, *A Great Cosmic Voyage* and *Are We Going Crazy?*) have emerged as interesting parts of a wider discussion of the female characters and the Moral Vertical in a number of films. This broader approach does not present us with a neat and straightforward narrative about the female pilots, flight attendants, cosmonauts and aliens. Instead, it highlights the diversity and flexibility of the motifs surrounding these characters, providing us with examples of how different filmmakers, with different ambitions, at different points in time have found these motifs inspiring and fruitful for conveying their story.

The obvious disadvantage of this wide approach is that I have not been able to close-read the films. Thus, I have run the risk of oversimplifying them. However, a narrower approach, with a focus on a handful of films determined by, for example, time period, genre, or artistic quality, would have been a different dissertation altogether. In such a dissertation I would have run the risk of simplifying the diversity and variation of the chief recurrent motifs.

4.11 The transfer to other spheres of Russian society and culture

The conclusions drawn upon the films explored in this dissertation offer a new perspective on how women are presented in Russian culture. Although the conclusions cannot be transferred directly to women's status and position in other spheres of society or culture (including other films), they can serve as starting points for discussions and disseminations. They present one set of possible motifs that previously have not been mapped out in (post-) Soviet cinema studies.

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