

Fear and safety in contemporary Russian cinema

A transcultural perspective

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Andrei Zvyagintsev, one of the most recognized contemporary Russian film directors, said in an interview held in February 2020 that fear is ‘the language of the devil’ which can be very easily spread to the younger generations, turning them into slaves. To prevent the epidemic of the virus – another name for fear in Zvyagintsev’s interview – Russians as a nation should acknowledge their history, recognize their traumas and blame, and start a new chapter of their lives as the one united nation breathing freely in fresh air. Zvyagintsev’s opinion could be associated with the statement posted by Paula Risikko, the Interior Minister of Finland, after the 2017 asylum seeker’s

attack in Turku. It was at this time that she emphasised – as the Introduction to this volume reminds us – of the need for the collective tolerance and trust of the Finnish society in order to stay strong and not to be defeated by fear or hatred. These both appeals show that the safety and stability of today’s world is linked to a mutual understanding of historical relationships, mental openness and the readiness to accept cultural differences as well as the permanent redefinition of one’s own collective and individual identity. The problems of today connected with the continuously increasing mobility and globalization imposing social and political changes similar to the ones described, were predicted many years ago in Samuel Huntington’s theory of the ‘clash of civilizations’:

The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural ... Civilizational identity will be increasingly important in the future ... The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating [these] civilizations from one another ... In class and ideological conflicts, the key question was “Which side are you on?” and people could and did choose sides and changed sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is “What are you?” That is a given that cannot be changed. (Huntington 2003.)

Being aware of the aforementioned situation and in a way developing Huntington’s observations, Mikhail Epstein, the Russian and Anglo-American literary theorist and critical thinker, has come up with the theory of transculture, which could be helpful in the understanding and prevention of the potential conflicts between parties representing oppositional cultural and religious identities. Having himself the experience of being an immigrant, a Russian-Jewish one, in the United States, in

his concept he focuses, first of all, on going beyond one's own culture towards the logic of transculture, which – according to Epstein – is an open Continuum aimed at the transcendence into 'no-culture' (2009). It could be said that the crucial steps on this path are two factors: difference and distance, or in K.A. Appiah's words 'universality plus difference' (2006).

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of recent tendencies noticeable in contemporary Russian films by the widely acclaimed and still very active directors, Vera Storozheva (born 1958), Pavel Lungin (born 1949) and Andrei Zvyagintsev (born 1964), in which the problem of fear and safety is emphasised in many different ways, from the perspective of the individual character reflecting upon his or her own life, as well as from the angle of the representation of the collective memory of the Russian nation. The selected films are interpreted from the point of view of Epstein's concept of transculture, so, consequently, I am interested in examining universal aspects of the films – by going beyond the Russian culture, exposing the artistic strategies used by the directors to touch upon the problem of fear. Generally, it could be noted in this context that Zvyagintsev's leitmotiv is that of an apocalyptic vision of our world devoid of moral values, which can be linked to the breakdown of the family and the disintegration of cultural tradition (Waligórska-Olejniczak 2015). Storozheva is known for her visualizations of women fighting for their independence and inner freedom, which stand in opposition to the overwhelming and limiting power of the patriarchal system, whereas Lungin turns attention to the elements of tradition, history and cultural memory in relation to the fate of the individual. In the majority of contemporary Russian films, the condition of the human body, which is very often degraded or mutilated, serves as a kind of litmus paper, a text in which various aspects of Russian reality are written,

exposed and discussed. Treating Epstein's theory of transculture as a reference point in this article, I will first analyse Storozheva's *Travelling with Pets*, then I will move on to Lungin's *Taxi Blues* and finally I will focus on Zvyagintsev's *Elena* before presenting these works in a more general perspective in the concluding part.

Transculture as a way of liberation

It is important to realize that Epstein's theory is based on the rejection of both 'leveling globalism' and 'isolating pluralism' (2009). The first phenomenon is understood by Epstein as the canonization of one globally homogenous culture over many, which in practice means Pan-Americanism. The latter, in turn, is viewed as the process of the cocoonization of each culture within itself, which become self-sufficient and often incomprehensible for others. This may lead to living in cultural ghettos full of self-pride minorities or such phenomena as reverse racism, among other things. The third alternative – according to Epstein – is transculture, which is viewed as the way of liberation from 'the prison of language', a hope for lasting peace, achieved by the individual's gradual learning about the inborn culture in order to gain an appropriate distance to penetrate it and truly understand, and finally abandon it. '*Transculture* is a new sphere of cultural development that transcends the borders of traditional cultures (ethnic, national, racial, religious, gender, sexual, and professional) ... a description of Soviet culture involves the act of self-withdrawal from it, which presumes an exit into "trans-Soviet" cultural space' (Epstein 2009). In this context it is worth noting that further methodological studies should be conducted to research the relationship between the concept of transculture and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of exotopy (*vnenachodimost*) as

well as Jurij Lotman's concept of *semiosphere* because there are clearly areas where these theories overlap, cross or create parallel variants of the existing cultural phenomena. As Bakhtin pointed out 'In the realm of culture, outsidership is a most important factor in understanding' (1986). This assumption could be the starting point for the discussion about those three concepts, i.e. Epstein's transculture, Bakhtin's exotopy and Lotman's semiosphere.

In Epstein's vision, *transculture*, lying both inside and outside of all existing cultures, can free people from any genetic definitions, and liberate them from their/any social and cultural identity or any determinations of nature to allow real understanding and sharing of the experience of the Other. 'A transcultural personality fully recognizes hu's roots', though he does not 'want to cling to them' (Epstein 2009). Epstein says: 'I am willing to accept my identity at the beginning of my journey, but I do not agree to remain with it until the end of my life, to be an animal representing the tag on its cage', 'culture is metempsychosis – reincarnation during one's lifetime' (2009). It could be concluded at this point that reaching the stage of transculture involves the continuous diffusion of cultures, which can take place only if a human being is ready for their constant cultural transformation, being on the way mentally and intellectually changed, a neo-nomadism which – in a sense – seems to be deeply enrooted in both Russian and American history (e.g. in the belief in the American Dream or in the idea of the Russian permanent striving for the unity of the individual and the collective).

Vera Storozheva is the only female director selected to discuss the problem of transculture from the angle of the representation of contemporary women's fears. Her film *Travelling with Pets* (*Путешествие с домашними животными* 2007) from the point of view of its plot is a very simple story about a young

woman, Natalia, living near a railway line with her mature husband, who suddenly dies of a heart attack. On the way to the nearby city to dispose of his dead body, she meets a divorced guy, Sergiei, who, after a couple of dates, comes up with the idea of starting a new life with Natalia. Surprisingly and irrationally, as it may seem, she turns down his offer and after some time travels to the orphanage where she spent her childhood, adopts a boy, and comes back home happy to start a new life with her son and a faithful dog. Most of the reviewers look at the movie as a story about personal freedom, traditional role models in Russia and the life choices of women (Monastireva-Ansdell 2008). This sociologically profiled approach remains in agreement with other interpretations whose authors consider the film a manifesto of feminism, in which we can see an active and determined woman, devoid of sentimentalism, who is not upset over her husband's death and not afraid of the hardships of being a single mother. It could be said that in some respects Natalia is perceived as the anti-Russian heroine because she rejects the patriarchal system of values and the expectations of the outside world in order to implement her own business plan, which is aimed mainly at self-fulfillment through the adoption of the child. The director shows the process of Natalia's gradual abandoning of her old habits and culture. The death of her mature husband marks the turning point in her life; it can be treated as the symbol of the liberation from the toxic family relationships and the passage to the new beginning of her life in which she is free. The silent and slow contemplation of nature as well as the discovery of her own female sexuality gives her the strength to take socially unpopular decisions and change her life completely.

In the visual images of the final part of the film, we can see Natalia's representation as Mother Earth, a woman who leaves her own house and overcomes her individual needs and instincts

to share her love with the world, namely with the boy who had been abandoned in the orphanage. Storozheva creates this new image of Natalia referring to the symbolic nature of the journey, which is seen as the opportunity for her personal development and the participation in the ritual of creation. Natalia has the nature of a nomad – the condition of her house and the decision to reject the prospect of a comfortable and financially safe life with Sergei prove not only that she does not care about material values but also that she has abandoned the culture of gender and cultural requirements. She has found a way and the ability to transform the world, which in her case means the transgression of herself, the adopted boy and even the stray dog, as she gives them a new status, the status of a family member who belongs to a group. What she fears most is the stability of being the slave in her own house, isolation, and assigning to her only the role of a servant – whom she in fact was all the time she was functioning as the wife of her dead husband.

Travelling to the orphanage takes up a lot of time in the film. Long shots of Natalia, dressed in blue and visually resembling the Mother of God, allow us also to treat the journey as the way of overcoming her childhood trauma. Coming to terms with her early suffering, she mentally reconstructs the place and changes it into the home which she has never had. Love for the adopted son transforms the orphanage into a utopian space existing only in her memory. This mental activity of the familiarization and domestication of space, which could be treated as a kind of universal gesture, enables her to create her own pre-history and simultaneously see her life from the necessary distance. The behaviour of her new son, who immediately knows how to build the relationship with Natalia's dog on their way home, can be perceived as the proof that she has moved from the artificial and isolating reality of her marriage into the space of peaceful

contemplation and mutual understanding (in Epstein's words *no-culture*), the space she has created herself fighting with the stereotype of being a Russian woman, and broadening her spiritual and intellectual opportunities. In her behavioral sphere she finds new means of interacting with the outside world and crosses the established codes of communicating between men and women in order to experience new modes of expression, which is characteristic for the transcultural perspective (Pennycook 2007).

It is interesting to note that this final rebirth of the heroine is preceded by a series of stages of Natalia's theatricalized gestures. Looking for the meaning of her future life, she takes part in a masquerade of female roles, puts on provocative and surprising costumes and make-up as if she was testing herself in a role of a lover, bride or actress. Storozheva as a director seems to imply that womanhood is a kind of performance, which can be noticed and tested in various acts and actions. Besides, this kind of behavior brings to mind the associations with the concept of *ersatz nostalgia*, longing – as Arjun Appadurai points out – for something which did not exist before, a reality which was created as a result of contact with mass culture (1996). In the film *Travelling with Pets* this need can be enrooted in Natalia's contact with the outside world, which brings about the desire to provoke and to leave behind the rural life.

The sequence of shots presenting her getting on and off the train shows that she eventually rejects the mirage of the worldly life and comes back to the everyday activities of her domestic life. Natalia's attempt to join the passengers of the train can be perceived not only as the spectacle of checking out potential female identity opportunities but also as the act of trying to become a part of a group, a participant belonging to the party on the move. Apart from that, the train in this particular sequence

of the film seems to be a symbol of the Soviet Russia, a reality which no longer exists. Its emergence and disappearance may be interpreted as the visualization of the collective nostalgia for the past, which is still present among the average members of the Russian society (Alexievich 2016). The impulsive behaviour of the heroine suddenly getting on the train is the act of momentary desperation performed to retain the past, which can be associated with something known, safe and permanent. On the other hand, the artificiality of Natalia's exaggerated outfit and manners prove that her place is somewhere else, in the reality which may be less stable and predictable but is not forced on her as it is the matter of her own choice. As a result, Natalia's liberation could be perceived as the embodiment of cultural liberation:

For Epstein (2009) "transculture" represents above all a mode of identity building, an existential dimension beyond any given culture, a way of being at the "crossroads of cultures". He has defined it as "a model of cultural development" that liberates the individual from the tyranny of one's own culture, from "the prison house of the language", from unconscious predispositions and prejudices of the "native", naturalized cultures. ... transculture liberates us ... from the conditioning effects of culture, with its set of prefixed, imposed habits, customs, assumptions and dynamics of group identity formation. (Dagnino 2012.)

Natalia represents in the Russian cinema the rare epitomization of a female individual who is able to overcome the fear of living on her own or being ostracized by the society used to traditional cultural and social expectations. It could be said that her existence is stable because she decides to distance herself from culture and tradition, or 'deterritorialize' – if we describe the situation using Epstein's terminology based on Deleuze and Guattari's concept.

Being financially self-sufficient, she reduces her life in a sense to the closed capsule of her relationships within the triad: she – her adopted son – and her adopted dog, which is the family unit she has chosen and created herself. The scene showing the train's arrival brings to mind also the history of the Soviet cinema, in which the railway always used to symbolise the idea of modernisation and industrial progress. The pictures of the train in *Travelling with Pets* allow us to associate the proposed visual message with the movie *Little Vera* (*Маленькая Вера*, 1988) by Vasili Pichul, in which this means of public transport, pulled into a siding, serves as the metaphor of the anticipation of the world's destruction, the signal of inevitable changes which will take place following the collapse of the Soviet Union – the events which are also emphasised in Lungin's film *Taxi Blues*.

The way of the interpretation of the film *Travelling with Pets* presented above could lead to noting some similarities between the discussed movie and Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Nostalgia* (*Ностальгия* 1983). Tarkovsky's text also emphasises the role of the mother as the guarantee of safety, emotional stability and authenticity, which is encoded in the visual symbol of the Russian *dacha*. Slavoj Žižek in his comments on the film even calls Eugenia, the provocative heroine who is deliberately contrasted with the image of the mother, 'the incomplete being', a 'hysterical and artificial' creature (Žižek 2011). Both films, Storozheva's and Tarkovsky's, are dominated by long and static shots, which allow only for very slow movement of the objects. The pictures to a great degree focus on the reunion of the main characters with the world, and their submission to the power of inertia. The activity of travelling in the outside world in both cases means in fact the externalization of the inner journey, resembling the initiatory descent into the mystery of one's own psyche.

Lungin's promised land

Pavel Lungin seems to build up his movie *Taxi Blues* (*Tакси-блюз* 1990) on two fundamental sets of oppositions: *individual-group* and *past-present*, which may constitute the foundation of the traditional thinking about Russian orthodox culture and religion. The film is often considered as an example of the nostalgic cinema and is perceived as a story about Russian identity which is deeply enrooted in Russian history and ideology (Seckler 2009). Researchers treat the film as the Russian version of a buddy movie, whose main theme is a strange and changing relationship between two heroes: a taxi driver, Shlykov, and a saxophonist, Lyosha (Seckler 2009). *Taxi Blues*, which was made in 1990, shows the picture of Russian life at the end of the Soviet times, when the West was associated with a rather blurred mythical concept, some kind of an alien reality, not available to an average person.

The film's plot is similarly as uncomplicated as Storozheva's movie: Shlykov, who wasn't paid for his New Year's Eve drive, wants to teach a lesson to his debtor, Lyosha. The taxi driver, who is a brutal but hard-working man, truly believing in the mirage of the Russian imperium, surprisingly, after at first making Lyosha his servant and slave, starts to be totally dependent on him emotionally, and he can't live without the musician, who – out of the blue – becomes a very famous artist all over the world. It could be said that Lyosha re-enters the Russian reality as a different man in a different political system, when his face appears on a large outdoor billboard announcing his concerts and marking a new era. His sudden, colourful and even a bit aggressive presence on the screen visibly contrasts with the surrounding mundane post-Soviet reality; his behaviour, however, contradicts these associations because it turns out that it is Shlykov who does

not match, as he cannot understand the changing world and is not able to define his new identity. It is worth mentioning that the role of Lyosha is played by Pyotr Mamonov, the legendary founder of the rock group *Zvuki Mu*. This fact makes the hero more credible and in a natural way brings about the associations with the myth of the famous artist, the icon of the musical world. Consequently, the world of the commercial success represented by the saxophonist in Shlykov's eyes gains the status of a utopia, a mirage of the promised land, which was once approachable and attainable but does not function in this way any longer. Shlykov is not able to recognize and comprehend the change, which corresponds to his position of being mentally lost in the post-Soviet Russia.

In order to point out the potential spaces of transculture in Lungin's film, I would like to turn attention to one of the most emblematic scenes, in which we can see the main character Shlykov in a long shot, standing in front of a skyscraper from the Stalinist era and waiting all night for Lyosha to pay him for a ride. The small figure of the hero, which is contrasted with the monumental building representing the old political system, shows – with the use of irony – that his faith and determination are of no value. The skyscraper brings to mind associations with a Colossus on clay legs, which feels its inevitable fall. Shlykov, a man of athletic build and rigid physical routine, who in the shot is visually compared to this unstable construction, seems to lose his life battle with Lyosha, a thin alcoholic, who sometimes sleeps in the street and does not possess anything apart from his musical talent, his passport to a better future. Lyosha represents both the distinctive features of the eternal Russian fatalism and the American optimism, which finds its manifestation in his inborn longing for freedom and his continuous striving toward self-destruction through alcohol. Lungin, in his creation of

Lyosha, shows almost literally that the virtual reality, the sphere of the imagination, should be treated not only as dominant in life but also as the only opportunity to abandon the limitations of the outside world and build relationships with other human beings. Shlykov's attachment to the physical space and his utopian vision of Russia makes it impossible to understand Lyosha's world. It's worth mentioning that in Storozheva's film the way to reach the level of *no-culture* was to respect one's own body and use it as a means to gain insight into the spiritual, to find one's place in the universe. Lungin, in opposition to Storozheva's approach, seems to keep a distance to the vulnerability of the physical and the material, and he focuses on the imagined world, the virtual space which is generated by emotions such as, among other things, fear and the feeling of being unable to adapt to the outside reality.

The final scene of the long-awaited visit of Lyosha to Shlykov's flat shows that the imagined worlds of both protagonists do not overlap. The promised land of transculture, which would require from him abandoning the old beliefs in the Soviet system of values with its strong hierarchy and social class differences, is not attainable to the taxi driver. The imperial myth is destroyed as well as Shlykov's dreams of a happy return to the known and domestic reality connected with Lyosha's presence and emotional dependence on him. The jazz and blues music, usually associated with free spirit and improvisation, in the film becomes the audial symbol of nostalgic thinking, which mentally may lead the viewers to the associations with Svetlana Boym's remarks expressed in her monograph *Future of nostalgia* (2001). Turning attention to the origin of the phenomenon, Boym points at the power of ritual and memories, which can distract us from the inevitable flow of time, as well as at the potential of popular culture evoking the nostalgic theatricalisation of everyday life (2001). Memory seems to be the essential element of nostalgia

when it is defined as the escape from the present through the return to the idealized past and projecting a better future based on the selected aspects of the past (Pickering 2006; Keightley 2006). Such understanding of nostalgia can be associated with the quest for ontological security which is derived from the past events (Zamarajewa 2014). Lungin by exposing Shlykov's emotional instability seems to reflect upon the phenomenon of longing for one's past and for the culture which does not change. The end of *Taxi blues* featuring the counterproductive car chase shows that there is no opportunity of fulfilling this dream or reconstructing the once destroyed culture and relationships.

Zvyagintsev's symmetry as a sign of human degradation

Andrei Zvyagintsev, whose film *Elena* (Елена 2011) is often compared to Michael Haneke's *Amour* (2012) or Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), seems to encode the meaning of his works first of all in spatial relationships. Creating a simple everyday life story of an elderly couple, he provocatively shows that good and evil can have the same motivation, which in consequence may lead to the moral justification of wrongdoing. One of the most meaningful sequences of frames in *Elena* is the part which takes place in the orthodox church. The main female character, who clearly did not visit the place for ages, goes there to pray for the health of her husband who had a heart attack. The director takes advantage of the idea of the holy orthodox icon to expose Elena's inadequate behavior and her ambiguous emotions towards her partner. Using close-ups of the icon and Elena, he degrades its status to the function of a mirror, in which the protagonist watches herself. Instead of contemplating the mystery

of God, she focuses on looking at her own facial expression. It could be said that in this act she stays on the surface level of the activity of contemplation, the level of human egoism and pride derived from the self-admiration of one's own behaviour. She is pictured not only as the trader doing business with God but also as a person who is not able to go beyond the service function of her marriage. Consequently, reaching the universal space of transculture in the way Natalia did in *Travelling with Pets* is not possible to her, and Zvyagintsev clearly shows that her marriage is her cocoon in the same way as religion can be the cocoon for the whole nation. This very idea is further developed in his subsequent film *Leviathan* (*Левиафан* 2014), in which it constitutes the main theme. In *Elena* the problem is worked out in the order of the changing frames leading us from the sacral space of the orthodox church to the falsehood of the heroine's expectations and fears for her own family's material stability. Such a turn of the protagonist's emotions can be suggested by Zvyagintsev's replacement of the shots happening in the church with the pictures of Vladimir, Elena's husband, lying in a hospital bed after a heart attack which he suffered in a swimming pool. As a result, the clash of the sacred and the profane allows us to recognize the affective space which is generated by the unleashing of emotions following Vladimir's accident.

The image of the church which is usually associated with life giving water is merged with that of the water of the swimming pool bringing about death, which, in turn, allows us to connect it with the history of Russia. In this context it is worth noting that the Soviet times were shaped by the ideology according to which most of the orthodox churches were routinely turned into warehouses. Consequently, it can be said that the profanation of the place is shown both from the individual and collective points of view, which can be interpreted as a metaphor of the

eradication of the Russian religious culture, emphasised in the film also by Elena's and Vladimir's typical *homo sovieticus* mentality. Zvyagintsev's film seems to show the world of the ethical emptiness of ordinary people. Elena and Vladimir as well as the young generation of their children and grandchildren have no goals or moral rules other than those inspired by financial motivation. Consequently, *Elena* confirms that if there are no values and traditions to abandon, to build on or aspire towards, there is also no path to transculture understood as the next level of cultural awareness and transformation, which in such a case has to stay unrecognized and undiscovered.

This message seems to be encoded also visually by Zvyagintsev's use of symmetry, which is easily noticeable in the film, in particular in carefully planned shots presenting various kinds of mirrors and geometrically matching mirror reflections. These mirror-like objects and shapes are either literally present on the screen or mentally suggested as a metaphor. They help to recognize, for example, the quality of the relationship between Elena, her husband and her stepdaughter, or to project the future of her grandson by the visual emphasis of the fact that he physically takes after his lazy, unemployed father. *Elena* shows the Russian reality as an apocalyptic and degrading isolation resulting first of all from the negligence of the collective and cultural memory, both being the foundation and the starting point – following Epstein's views – of building up the ethical and historical continuum.

The visual compatibility of the pictures of the orthodox church and the swimming pool allows us also to point out that Zvyagintsev's protagonists, Elena and Vladimir, are an elderly couple, undoubtedly brought up by the traditional Soviet ideology, who pass down their atheist philosophy onto their children. The chlorinated liquid in the swimming pool, which can be read as

both the opposite and the replacement of the life giving water of the religious faith, in the long run brings about the death of Vladimir and, as a consequence, triggers the spiritual decline of Elena, who turns out to be a canny murderer. In this way the simple everyday life story serves in the film as the impulse to show the universal process of suppressing the fears of losing power in the family and the society, and creating a fake existence which lacks stable values guaranteeing the future development of the individual and the collective.

Conclusion

Summing up, it could be said that the selected films by the acclaimed directors Vera Storozheva, Pavel Lungin and Andrei Zvyagintsev show that one of the most important problems in contemporary Russian cinema is the search for stability, understood as a kind of historical and moral continuum, which can build up the foundation of everyday existence, the basis which stays put independently of geopolitical changes. The characters of the movies chosen for interpretation are often forced to live in a hybrid reality, at the crossroads of the old and the new systems of values. Disintegration of the outside world accompanies the nostalgic need to retrieve what is gone (Lungin) or to build up a new identity, which can be created after abandoning the world of gender, religious or social constraints (Storozheva). Zvyagintsev, on the contrary, shows that both the state-regulated reality of the Soviet past and the new Russia are the worlds of moral barbarism marking the behaviour of subsequent generations. In all film narratives discussed in this article fear remains the core emotion which accompanies the protagonists, and therefore – as it was mentioned in Elise Nykänen and Hanna Samola's Introduction

– it can be considered as universal and ‘distinguished on the basis of facial expressions and other physiological, bodily responses’. Lungin’s creation of Shlykov’s character proves that fear and the striving for psychological stability can remain pre-intentional and non-conscious although they strongly influence the protagonists’ actions and decisions, which could be linked to Sedwick and Frank’s and Ratcliffe’s findings (1995; 2015) in further discussions. Lungin turns attention to the mechanisms linking fear and other emotions; first of all he is interested in nostalgia, melancholy and anger, trying to make us aware that the liberating power of imagination and music, which is shown as the universal language, and which can be experienced only after understanding the need of cultural and historical transformation. This process will take place over many years and will be connected with the painful marginalization of the people who are not ready for change. The historical and cultural issues constitute also the core problem of Zvyagintsev’s movie although at first sight the theme of the individual dilemmas may seem central in his film. *Elena* demonstrates fear and egoism as the elementary instinct and drive of people’s decisions in the societies which lost their moral directions. Consequently, Zvyagintsev’s narrative requires the ethical engagement of the audience, which stays in contrast to Storozheva’s work showing the protagonist who found the way to suppress and overcome the sources of social or personal limitations. As a result, Natalia’s approach to life could be seen as the manifestation of liberation and the attempt of at least a partial realization of Epstein’s concept of *transculture*. The new model of the relationship with time, history and memory seems to define the dilemmas of today’s world, at the same time motivating humanity to continuous intellectual and emotional development, going beyond the limitations of the individual’s culture and personality.

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