

Oleksandr Dovzhenko, Ivan Kavaleridze, Leonid Skrypnyk: The avant-garde and philosophical explorations of Ukrainian filmmakers of the 1920s

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The filmmakers Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Ivan Kavaleridze created bold avant-garde works at the time when Ukrainian cinema was being established, at the end of the 1920s and early 1930s. In effect, the works of these two directors shaped the defining features of Ukrainian cinema. This article discusses the creative methods used by Dovzhenko in his three films *Zvenyhora* (1927), *Arsenal* (1929) and *Earth* (1930), which clearly depict Ukrainian worldviews and mentality. Kavaleridze's approach is considered in the light of two of his films, *Downpour* (1929) and *Perekop* (1930). Already a recognized sculptor at the time, Kavaleridze sought unique forms of expression in film. The approaches these directors took towards framing scenes, montage, lighting and rhythm underpinned the theoretical propositions of their contemporary, Ukrainian film theorist Leonid Skrypnyk. The author suggests that this testifies to a deliberate and comprehensive search for new means of expression in all phases of filmmaking.

KEYWORDS: Oleksandr Dovzhenko, Ivan Kavaleridze, Leonid Skrypnyk, *Zvenyhora*, *Arsenal*, *Earth*, *Downpour*, *Perekop*, rhythm, frame, frame composition, static frame, lighting

Ukrainian artistic traditions in general and individual explorations of its core concepts remain insufficiently explored to this day and merit further in-depth studies. The 1920s were a foundational stage in the development of Ukrainian cinema, the time when a national cinema was being established and its features taking shape. The most important filmmakers of this period were Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Ivan Kavaleridze. This article looks at the directions their most significant experiments in cinematography took and attempts to identify the features that were characteristic of Ukrainian filmmaking of this period, using their films as a basis. This should, in part, provide an idea about the creative traditions of Ukrainian cinema at this early stage. The exploration of this issue should become a first step on the path to forming a concept of Ukrainian avant-garde cinematography and defining its specific features.

Ukrainian national cinema began to develop during the 1920s. The circumstances under which Ukraine existed at the time greatly influenced this process: the country's tragic experience of World War 1, the

young Ukrainian state attacked on all sides over 1917–1921, the New Economic Policy (NEP), and Ukrainization, the development of socialism, and its consequences for Ukraine. All these factors coincidentally determined the environment in which Ukrainian cinema took shape. As a new technical art form, cinema was naturally associated with technological progress. Indeed, the arrival of machines in a historically agricultural society spurred the search for a worldview reflecting the new cultural situation in Ukraine. The revolutionary whirlwind, the coming of a new form of government and its declarations also affected this search. The traditional component, however, remained dominant, which can be seen in the choice of themes and the worldview the two filmmakers depicted.

Ukrainian cinema in the 1920s was a world of exciting explorations in the language of a new art form that, at the same time, encompassed all the traditional foundations of a Ukrainian worldview. At this time, the All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration (VUFKU) curated the development of Ukrainian cinema and succeeded in doing an enormous amount during its short-lived tenure.[1] Thanks to VUFKU's efforts, Ukrainian films formed a full-fledged, independent, unique national cinema.

For the purpose of this study, the main sources have been contemporaries who wrote about filmmaking processes in Ukraine, such as Leonid Skrypnyk (1927, 1928), contributors to Ukrainian and foreign film journals, and individuals who had actually viewed films that today are lost. The opinions and conclusions expressed here have also been influenced by the writings of leading Ukrainian students of cinema: Serhiy Trymbach's in-depth studies of Dovzhenko's works (2007), Roman Roslyak's hardworking efforts to bring to light and popularize the VUFKU archives (2018), and Oksana Musienko's studies of individual aspects of the works of Dovzhenko and Kavaleridze (2004, 2013). Others who have written about different aspects of Ukrainian cinema of the 1920s include Larysa Bryukhovetska (2008), Iryna Zubavina (2008), Oleksandr Bezruchko (2008), Roman Korohodskiy (2000), Nonna Kapelhorodska and Oleksandra Synko (1995), and Olha Pashkova (1994), as well as Ukrainian researchers of the Soviet era who wrote about the works of Kavaleridze and others: Oleksandr Rutkovskiy (1979), Svitlana Zynych and Nonna Kapelhorodska (1971), and Alla Zhukova and Georgiy Zhurov (1959). Among the few foreign sources about Dovzhenko are articles by Gilberto Perez (1975) and Elizabeth A. Papazian (2003), works by the French scholar of Ukrainian descent Lubomyr Hoseyko (2005, 2019), and especially the research of the Ukrainian-Canadian scholar Bohdan Nebesio (1996), who examined Oleksandr Dovzhenko's practical approaches in the context of Ukrainian cinema theory of the time.

[1] VUFKU functioned from 1922 until 1930. The active and fruitful work of the organization is recorded in the collected archival materials – *Protokoly*

pravlinnia VUFKU (1922–1930 rr.): zb. arkh. Dok., ed. R. Roslyak, Kyiv 2018.

Despite these explorations, the comprehensive study of Ukrainian cinema of the 1920s remains far from exhausted and is very significant today. To date, studies have looked only at certain aspects of the issue, such as the works of an individual director or specific examples of how they expressed their artistic vision. In this article, the author attempts to go somewhat further and establish the main directions these creative experiments took in Ukrainian cinema of the 1920s based on the most distinguished directors of the time, Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Ivan Kavaleridze, and the works of one of the most notable Ukrainian film theorists of the time, Leonid Skrypnyk.

Zvenyhora (1927, VUFKU) was not Oleksandr Dovzhenko's first film as a director, but it was the first one in which he really demonstrated the full range of expressive capabilities of filmmaking. Skrypnyk stated its significance in no uncertain terms: "Dovzhenko directed *Zvenyhora* and launched Ukrainian cinema." [2] For the first time, most of the contemporary Ukrainian intelligentsia saw precisely in *Zvenyhora* the long-awaited, highly artistic national statement that neither historical films nor films about Ukrainian artists had managed to convey until then.

In the explorations undertaken by filmmakers of the early Soviet era, montage had a special place in the director's toolkit. Yet, this topic seems to have been overlooked in discussions of Ukrainian art cinema at the time. With the appearance of *Zvenyhora*, the need for just such a focus became clear.

As Skrypnyk describes it,

Zvenyhora is an example of great mastery in editing, too. Its significance is increased even more by the impressiveness of the rich, varied rhythmic forms to which the film's individual episodes strictly adhere. Each episode has a clearly defined rhythmic form that matches it appropriately, while the overall montage of the film beautifully combines all this variety, blending it into a single monumental, organic whole. At the same time, the incredibly complex rhythmic form of the entire film is very clearly felt yet very simply understood. This is the best proof of its appropriateness, ingenuity and artistry." [3]

Dovzhenko's explorations, starting with *Zvenyhora*, took place at the level of rhythmic development. As Ivan Kavaleridze did later, Dovzhenko chose the epic narrative form and organized it as a complex montaged and rhythmic construction. While each had its own rhythmic features, the individual parts enrich the overall structure rather than clash, the way they do with Sergei Eisenstein. [4] In short, Dovzhenko

Oleksandr Dovzhenko. His philosophy and worldview

[2] L. Skrypnyk, "Zvenyhora" *O. Dovzhenka*, "Nova Generatsiia" 1927, no. 3, p. 56.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 58.

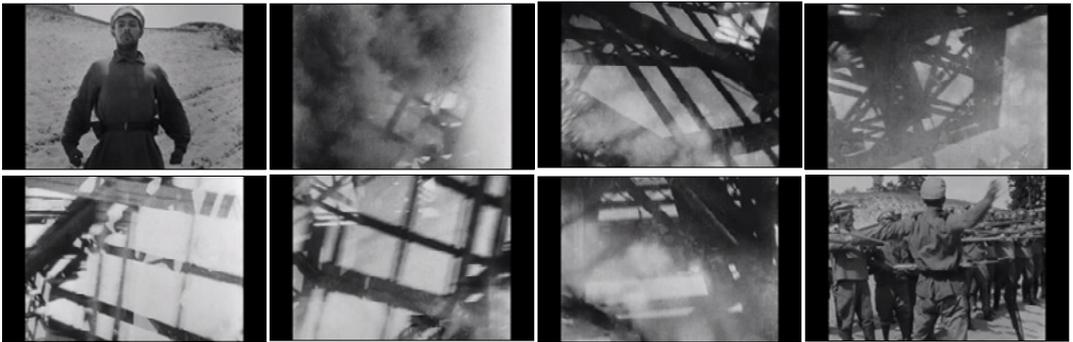
[4] Coming from the "montage of amusements" school in 1923 in S. Eisenstein, *Montazh attrakcionov*, [in:] *idem, Izbrannye proizvedeniya*, v. 6, t. 2, Moskva

1964, pp. 269–273, Eisenstein transferred his theatrical experience to film, initially talking about the montage of juxtaposition in the article, *Biela forgets his scissors*, 1926 (S. Eisenstein, *Bella zabyvaet nozhnitsy*, [in:] *Izbrannye proizvedeniya*..., pp. 274–279), and then about the collision of frames in *Behind the*

worked not in terms of opposition – conflict and “amusements” in the terminology of Russian directors – but rather in terms of amplification and enrichment.

It’s impossible to avoid comparing the methods of Ukrainian and Russian film directors, mainly because of the traditional inclusion of Dovzhenko’s work, both in Soviet and Western European film criticism of those periods, in the study of Soviet Russian avant-garde directors of the 1920s. Even an early Ukrainian film theorist like Leonid Skrypnyk shared this opinion.[5] So far, there has been no study offering a structured, methodical distinction between the working methods of Russian and Ukrainian directors from the 1920s — only specific aspects of these differences have been examined. Moreover, the figure of Dovzhenko was highly mythologized, which muddied the waters further, even for scholars. Lubomyr Hoseiko points out the danger of western film experts mythologizing Oleksandr Dovzhenko, both as an individual and on his artistic merits.[6]

The “amusement” aspect of the way Eisenstein structures his montage[7] is based on an intellectual calculation. In contrast, Dovzhenko’s approach mostly operated on the basis of emotional impulses and states as early as in *Zvenyhora*. In the scene where the main character, Tymish, is shot, the peak of emotional tension is disrupted through emotional, hyper-dynamically montaged short shots, only to return to the usual rhythm of the narration.



Il. 1. Stills from Dovzhenko’s film *Zvenyhora* (1927). The montage of the sequence of shots showing Tymish’s emotional state before being executed

Perhaps, it is no coincidence that Dovzhenko deliberately planned to structure his next film, *Arsenal* (1929, VUFKU), in a fundamentally different manner: “I will direct the film following the principles of amusements that will be linked in a single ultimate structure...

scenes, 1929 (S. Eisenstein, *Za kadrom*, [in:] *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya...*, pp. 283–296). The combination of conflicts is one of the basic principles of the theory montage that he formed during the 1920s.

[5] L. Skrypnyk, “*Zvenyhora*”..., p. 58.

[6] L. Hoseiko, *Slidamy ukrainskykh filmiv chasiv VUFKU u frantsuzkii kinopresi*, [in:] *Istoriia ukrainskoho kino 1920 rr. Khrestomatiia*, Kyiv 1919, p. 287.

[7] “Amusements” are influential elements of “theatrical construction.” S. Eisenstein, *Montazh attrakcionov...*

I want to try to develop my views on the need to expand both subjects and methods in cinema.”[8]

And indeed, Dovzhenko appears to have employed Eisenstein’s method in *Arsenal*. The director was obviously worried about completely different issues. He was more interested in the deeper possibilities of organizing frames, using light and darkness, angle and point-of-view, exploring the texture and plasticity of images. In a film overloaded with imagery and symbolism, static expression gains particular significance in *Arsenal*.

Once again, when faced with a choice between amusements and emotions, Dovzhenko chose emotions. For him, what was important was not emotional impact, as it was for Eisenstein,[9] but emotional expression. Dovzhenko’s priority was conveying emotional states, not manipulating the viewer’s emotions. In the end, *Arsenal*’s structure did not fall in line with the theory of structured amusements, being based on a different handling of the general narrative rhythm—once again on concentration and distillation, and generally amplifying motifs. Dovzhenko focused his efforts, not on the montaged juxtaposition of individual vivid facts and events, but on a maximally expressive presentation and brevity. For him, the presentation of events was actually the emotional experience.[10]

In *Earth* (1930, VUFKU), Dovzhenko continued exploring the capacities of frame structure, paying special attention to expressive static compositions, something contemporary French critic Jean Vidal drew attention to:

[...] Nothing is as dangerous as picturesque frames in which life is frozen, as if on a canvas. The greatest directors know this and avoid it. Dovzhenko, by contrast, has a paradoxical concept of a static camera. Close-ups are a series of great images, but often still. He even forbids his actors the slightest facial expression or involuntary gesture that might disturb the perfect production.[11]

Gilberto Perez also reflected on this issue,[12] coming to the conclusion that the definition of static is not passivity, but a sign of depth, fullness and self-sufficiency[13] in Dovzhenko’s image system



Il. 2. Still from Dovzhenko’s film *Earth* (1930). A static portrait shot

[8] O. Dovzhenko, *Chomu my znimaïemo chotyry misiatsi*, “Teatr – Klub – Kyno” 1928, no. 37, p. 6. Quoted from V. Marochko, *Zacharovanyi Desnoi: Ist. portret Oleksandra Dovzhenka*, Kyiv 2006, p. 109.

[9] S. Eisenstein, *The montage of amusements...*, p. 270.

[10] A. Dovzhenko, *Za bol’shoe kinoiskusstvo*, [in:] *Ya prinadlezhu k lageryu poeticheskomu*, Moskva 1967, p. 7.

[11] J. Vidal, “La terre”, “Pour Vous”, no. 160, December 10, 1931, p. 6.

[12] G. Perez, *All in the Foreground: A Study of Dovzhenko’s “Earth”*, “The Hudson Review” 1975, no. 28(1), pp. 68–86.

[13] *Ibidem*, pp. 76–77.



Il. 3. Still from
Dovzhenko's film *Earth*
(1930). A static portrait
shot

the movement uninterrupted.”[14]

When it came to the art of montage, Oleksandr Dovzhenko was not only on a par with well-known Russian directors, he even surpassed them in the accessibility and simplicity with which he applied this method. So, it remains not entirely obvious that he used the same montage method and belonged to the school of ‘Russian montage.’ This error of assumptions is very obvious in another quote from Roger Régent in a contemporary French publication: “Dovzhenko is Ukrainian. This doesn't get in the way of considering him one of the greatest Russian directors.”[15] Thus, the similarities and stylistic differences in the way that Ukrainian and Russian filmmakers, and Dovzhenko in particular, experimented seriously need more investigation.

Consciously or not, Dovzhenko's films bring the basic features of a Ukrainian worldview to the foreground. The filmmaker chose means of expression that emphasized key markers of a traditional Ukrainian worldview and raised issues of national culture and identity. The Ukrainian philosopher Ada Bychko singles out the most important ones in the Ukrainian mentality: anteism,[16] individualism, and existential cordocentrism, or focus on “heart.”

The *individualism* is inherent in the Ukrainian national character, combined with the notion of equality, respect for the individual and their freedom, and a rejection of despotism and absolute monarchy. At the level of worldviews, this trait is evident in the domination of *existential* motifs in Ukrainian philosophical thought...[17]

[14] R. Gering, *Iz Manchester Gardien* ot 11.IX.1930. Russkij fil'm v sovetskom posol'stve. *Zemlya* Dovzhenki. CDAVO Ukraïni. F. 1238. Op. 1. Spr. 174. Ark. 298. Quoted from O. Bezruchko, *Nevidomyi Dovzhenko*, Kyiv 2008, p. 53.

[15] R.R. (Roger Régent), *With Dovzhenko, painter and mise-en-scener*, “Pour Vous”, no. 90, August 7, 1930.

[16] The term “anteism” comes from a giant in Greek mythology called Antaeus, who drew his strength from constant connection with his mother Gaia, the earth.

[17] A. Bychko, *Ukrainska filosofïia. Doklasychna doba*, [in:] *Filosofïia. Kurs lektsii*, Kyiv 1994, p. 229.

Classical Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda[18] considered reality to be a harmonious interaction among three worlds: the macrocosm in which all existing things live; the microcosm or humanity itself; and the symbolic world or the Bible. The human world, the microcosm, he wrote, “is no less deep than the larger universe, and in some sense even includes the latter.”[19] The roots of this Ukrainian individualism dominated by existential motifs are most fully reflected and embedded in philosophical works, including the classical era of Ukrainian philosophy.

“Cordocentrism” derives from the Latin word “cordis” or heart. The concept of a “philosophy of the heart” was introduced by Dmytro Chyzhevskiy.[20] A kind of existential borderline worldview, it took shape during the prolonged existence of Ukrainians at the edge of a hostile nomadic steppe and brought about “an acute poetic and lyrical perception of the natural and social world, the priority of heart over head.”[21] In the process of exploring the Ukrainian tradition of cordocentrism, Oleksandr Kulchytsky[22] proposed his own concept.[23] It appears that scholars not only agree on the definition of these features as inherent in the Ukrainian mentality, but they also see them as inextricably linked.

These key elements of the Ukrainian mentality are clearly reflected in the films of Oleksandr Dovzhenko. The very name of his classic, *Earth*, speaks for itself, and the theme is presented in all its traditional anteistic[24] fullness. As for the cordocentric and individualist existential mentality, this can be seen in his filming method, in his choice of narrative form, and ultimately in his approach to montage. Reinforcing this view is the fact that the director was distinguished as the founder of the tradition of Ukrainian poetic cinema during his lifetime.[25] One of the series of Dovzhenko’s articles, speeches and notes from his later period has a telling title, devised by the filmmaker himself: “I belong to the poetic camp.”[26]

[18] Hryhorii Skovoroda (1722–1794) Ukrainian philosopher, theologian, poet and pedagogue. One of the most prominent and respected figures in Ukrainian culture.

[19] A. Bychko, *Klasychna doba ukrainskoi filosofii*, [in:] *Filosofia. Kurs lektcii...*, p. 248.

[20] Dmytro Chyzhevskiy (1894–1977), a Ukrainian philosopher, culturologist, historian of philosophy and Slavic literature, literary critic, linguist and publicist, was an active member of the Shevchenko Scientific Society and the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, as well as a member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Sciences in Heidelberg.

[21] A. Bychko, *Ukrainska filosofia...*, p. 230.

[22] Oleksandr Kulchytsky (1985–1980), a Ukrainian psychologist and philosopher, was a member of the International Mediterranean Academy in Palermo, and deputy chairman of the International Academy of Sciences in Paris.

[23] O. Kulchytsky, *The foundation of philosophy and philosophical sciences*, Munich – Lviv 1995.

[24] Contemporaries even noted pantheistic tendencies in Dovzhenko’s films. In particular, G. Sadoul, *První výboje německého filmu*, [in:] *Dějiny filmu. Od Lumiéra až do dob současné*, Orbis – Praha 1958, p. 158.

[25] For more about the poetic nature of Oleksandr Dovzhenko’s work, see, for example: S. Prolietiev, *Nimetskyi kinoekspresionizm 1920-kh ta ukrainskyi kinematohraf*, [in:] *Ukraina – Nimechchyna: kinematohrafichni zviiazky*, Vinnytsia 2009, pp. 77–81; O. Rutkovskiy, *Folklor v systemi zhanrovo-siuzhetnykh zviiazkiv filmu pro suchasnist*, [in:] *Mystetstvo kino: Respublikanskyi mizhvidomchyi naukovyi zbirnyk*, Kyiv 1979, pp. 33–47; I. Briukhovetska, *Kino chasiv svoiei yunosti*, Kyiv 2008; and others.

[26] A. Dovzhenko, *Ya prinadlezhu k lageryu poeticheskomu*, Moskva 1967.

The synthesis of the Ukrainian traditional worldview, which was still natural in the early 20th century, and the bold avant-garde explorations in Dovzhenko's films led to an unexpected result. The same brilliant result can be seen in other arts: the international reaction to Alexander Archipenko in sculpture, Heorhiy Narbut in graphics, Vasyl Yermilov in graphics and painting, and so on.

Oleksandr Dovzhenko's own worldview remains inseparable from Ukrainian culture in his films, even when he was making a film about collectivization or industrialization. In every frame, he broadcast the traditional Ukrainian mentality, while going beyond it, towards larger categories and meanings.

Ivan Kavaleridze. From sculpture to filmmaking

Before turning to filmmaking, Ivan Kavaleridze had produced several significant works as a sculptor. These gave him a reputation as a colorful, avant-garde experimentalist and a representative of the constructivist movement. The sculptor's worldview and his earlier experience as a make-up artist for filmmakers had a fundamental impact on Kavaleridze's formation as a director.

Kavaleridze's debut film *Downpour* (1929, VUFKU) was influenced by the first version of the play *Haidamaky* by the outstanding Ukrainian theater director Les Kurbas in the Berezhil theater. Since no copies of *Downpour* have survived, the only sources we have are the testimonies and assessments of the director's contemporaries.

Kavaleridze himself defined the film's genre in a very idiosyncratic way as "Etchings for a history of the Haidamaky era." As Kapelhorodska and Synko write,

The artist produced the drama of *Downpour* with the help of a free combination of what at first glance appeared to be separate, unrelated episodes and schemes, and demonstrated in this unusual way the potential of associative montage. Each of the six etchings that made up the film was saturated with meaningful content.[27]

Nevertheless, according to Dovzhenko, Kavaleridze "did not take the historical theme in all its real fullness, but rather created a summarized screen equivalent of the 18th century and gave each hero symbolic meaning." [28] Using montage that combines individual "etchings" that become an overview based on their scale, *Downpour* comes close to being an epic. Indeed, individual images in the film are truly epic, deliberately created by the director as highly symbolic in order to offer large-scale philosophical generalizations.

Kavaleridze's next film, *Perekop*[29] (1930, Ukrainfilm, also called *The Song of Perekop*) is a proper film epic. Since an epic involves a maximal generalization, where it is not specific individuals who act, but

[27] N. Kapelhorodska, O. Synko, *Ivan Kavaleridze. Hrani tvorchosti*, Kyiv 1995, p. 19.

[28] S. Zynych, N. Kapelhorodska, *Ivan Kavaleridze*, Kyiv 1971, p. 32.

[29] *Perekop*, meaning excavation, was a historic town in Crimea that was destroyed in 1920 located on one of the two links from Crimea to mainland Ukraine.

universal types, the key to this genre is large-scale scenes in which the role of the masses comes to the fore and the mass becomes the hero, replacing the image of a specific individual character.

In terms of plot structure, Zhukova and Zhurov point out that:

Perekop also had no overall plot or individualized artistic images. It came apart in separate, vividly made episodes that presented different sides of the class struggle during the civil war period, without being woven into a single whole.[30]

Typical of the genre, it thus consisted of broad images without any psychological development.[31] Oksana Musienko notes:

Perekop makes it clear that the director focused on metaphorical montage, combining in his unique style the powerful influences of expressionism while relying on the aesthetics of cubism and constructivism, something that was also seen in his sculptural works at that time.[32]

Kavaleridze's directorial approach to the use of shadows and light is the main basis for the way he structured frames, starting with *Downpour*. Leliukh writes: "The compositional structure of the frame is simple: leave in everything that works and draws the viewer's attention. Shine light on everything that is important and leave everything else into the shadows." [33] Indeed, the director "underscored what was important within the frame, leaving out everything that was redundant and secondary. He did not shine light on his heroes, but rather painted them with light, focusing only on what helped better express the idea underlying the film." [34]

The role of lighting had exceptional meaning in the structuring of frames in the director's later films as well. The starting point for this kind of experimentation was Kavaleridze's original observations when he worked as a make-up artist in the film industry. Even then, he noticed with great interest the way changes in lighting could alter a static object. [35] This revelation gave him the means to convey, with minimal effort, significant changes in an object: lighting made it possible for even an immovable object to move and change states, without actually changing. "Light and shadow on expressive faces and the plasticity of figures created internal movement and added believable dynamic to a frame that at first glance appeared static." [36]

Like Oleksandr Dovzhenko, Kavaleridze explored the compositional potential of the frame and mastered expressive staticity in his own way. In all the descriptions of *Downpour*, its noticeable staticity is compensated for by changes in the lighting. In some cases, lighting

[30] A. Zhukova, H. Zhurov, *Ukrainske radianske kinomystetstvo. Narysy. 1930–1941*, Kyiv 1959, pp. 17–18.

[31] Ibidem, p. 18.

[32] O. Musienko, *Kavaleridze – avanhardyst*, [in:] *Naukovyi visnyk Kyivskoho natsionalnoho universytetu teatru, kino i telebachennia imeni I.K.Karpenka-Karoho*, Kyiv 2013, Vyp. 12, p. 228.

[33] S. Leliukh, *Kinematohrafichnyi poshuk I.P. Kavaleridze u vidtvorenni heroichnoho mynuloho ukrainskoho narodu*, Kyiv 1970, p. 6.

[34] S. Zynych, N. Kapelhorodska, op. cit., p. 48.

[35] N. Kapelhorodska, O. Synko, op. cit., p. 17.

[36] S. Leliukh, op. cit., p. 6.

itself acts as an active force that moves the static object, providing it with the semblance of change and mobility – sometimes referred to as internal expression.

This meticulous work with lighting, in addition to all its other qualities, raised the pictorial quality and general artistry of the film to high art. Kavaleridze's very creative culture and taste is felt in the structure of every frame of the master's films. Hoseyko sums it thus:

Kavaleridze is an esthete who shapes his scenes with spotlights, like a sculptor with a chisel. The ultimate idea behind these technical combinations, the slow-motion filming, and other visual effects is to concentrate the sprawling episodes of the story. In this creative nebulousness, the heroes filmed by cameraman Oleksiy Kaliuzhnyi become monumental and complete unto themselves.”[37]

As a sculptor, Kavaleridze considered the plastic structure of the frame incredibly important. For example, *Downpour* was shot entirely in a pavilion, and for the episode entitled *Earth*, the director

[...] did not hesitate long. He ordered more

than 40 large and small chunks from the workshop made to look like earth. They were attached to the wooden surface in such a way that when the plow dug into them, they fell apart, just like large chunks of soil. As a result, the earth comes across as not just mighty, but actually alive. By changing the light and shadow along the edges of the chunks, Kavaleridze gave the movement of the falling earth, the floating plow and the powerful walk of the ploughman a single rhythm.[38]

Kavaleridze later wrote: “We also modified the horns of our oxen, making them steeper, and darkened the wool on their lower ribs and underbelly. The plow was taken from a museum.”[39] Moreover, Kavaleridze deliberately chose not to shoot outdoors, using instead the walls of a small pavilion as a studio. Inside these walls, another world, a cinematic one, was created in accordance with the director's vision.

Contemporaries Synko and Kapelhorodska describe Kavaleridze's methods:

He skillfully used the expression of convention. Filmed against a background of black velvet, the most standard features of the landowner lifestyle (a luxurious vase, a cozy armchair, an antique mirror, and so on) fail to take attention away from the individual in the frame and, instead, help to focus on the character's actions and concerns.[40]



Il. 4. Still from Ivan Kavaleridze's film, *Perekop* (1930). A frame structure in which the sky dominates

[37] L. Hoseyko, *Istoriia ukrainskoho kinematohrafu*. 1896–1995, Kyiv 2005, p. 49.

[38] S. Leliukh, op. cit., p. 6.

[39] I. Kavaleridze, *Sbornik statej i vospominanij*, Kiev 1988, pp. 91–92.

[40] N. Kapelhorodska, O. Synko, op. cit., p. 17.

In short, Kavaleridze combined a laconic, restrained narrative form with a minimum number of expressive means and a minimum number of objects in the frame. The director rejected a realistic narrative style, focusing instead on conventions, moving away from detailed reality and developing his theme, as much as possible, outside the bounds of a world oversaturated with objectivity.

In *Perekop*, Kavaleridze

no longer films an enlivened sculpture against black velvet, broadly using instead the open air and space, and using standard filming with spotlights for lighting. This emphasizes the movement of shadows and light and shadow even more, turning clouds, the sun and the air into actors in the film. By filming the intensity of movement of these natural spots of color in the frame and lighting the same scene in different ways, Kavaleridze recreates the mood and the atmosphere of plot in a very exciting manner.[41]

Even when he was filming outdoors, the director was not satisfied with the natural state of things. By enhancing shadows and light, he once more created a new reality.

Kavaleridze also explored the texture of the body and the human face as an important element in the plastic structure of the frame. He recalled choosing Stepan Shkurat, the plowman in *Downpour*: "I brought this 'back' specially from Poltava country, rejecting the deserving[42] 'backs' of Odesa. I brought in this ovenmaker from God knows where for the sake of his back, his hands, his soulful simplicity and warmth, and for the sake of his broad 'Mykula Selyanynovych' face." [43] Kavaleridze selected individuals for secondary roles no less meticulously.

Certain episodes in *Downpour* moved into openly avant-garde forms.

A village girl with pails on a cubist machine... On the screen, a collision between the conventional and the real. An accumulation of cubes and the villagers moving in different directions, armed and lit by restless beams of light. Kavaleridze composes all this into the frame, using double and triple exposures.

Suddenly, a whirl of cubes fills the entire screen, the speed of their movement increasing so much that it is possible to montage a transition from aristocratic horse-drawn carriages of the period of uprisings to automobiles



Il. 5. Stills from Ivan Kavaleridze's film *Perekop* (1930). Making use of the movement of artificial lighting outdoors

[41] Ibidem, p. 20.

[42] Meaning merited artists.

[43] I. Kavaleridze, op. cit., p. 91. Mykula Selyanynovych is a good-hearted giant from a peasant (*selianyn*) background, a folk hero similar to Paul Bunyan.



Il. 6. Still from Ivan Kavalieridze's film *Perekop* (1930). An expressive multi-level frame structure

in which the bourgeois flee the revolutionary proletariat.[44]

The elements of cubist aesthetics that were apparently present in *Downpour* were, naturally, close to Kavalieridze as a sculptor, but led to complete incomprehension on the part of viewers.[45] The author used these radical expressive means to illustrate broad historical statements.

Rebellion... a peasant uprising... in that same (30 × 20-meter) pavilion, in the chaos of moving cubes, columns of armed peasants move under spotlight beams that sweep rapidly in different directions. This creates the impression of a powerful flood of insurgents... Changing epochs, revolutionary cataclysm: in the flow of rebels, the surfaces of the cubes suddenly become clearer, spinning the wheels of carts, carriages and the coaches of aristocrats fleeing the uprising... The cubes spin faster and faster, their speed growing so much that it's possible to transition from the coaches rushing in the 18th century, to the cars of the bourgeoisie fleeing the proletarian revolution in the 20th century... Meanwhile, the spotlights by turns illuminate this fast-flowing stream and throw it into deep shadow...[46]

These extensive quotes testify to just how extraordinary *Downpour* was. Kavalieridze never resorted to such radical experimentation again in his later films.

The director's main field for experimentation later became cinematic reality. Transformed compared to actual reality and creatively reinterpreted, it appeared in a form that was familiar to Kavalieridze: sculptural and textured. The director began to work with this form, mainly using lighting to create the form and texture he wanted. The idea of reinterpreting the object being filmed even before the shooting process began was not a random discovery, but a very conscious choice.

Leonid Skrypnyk on the formal composition of frame and rhythm

Among the Ukrainian directors of the 1920s, no one was able to formulate their experimental practices into a theory. However, Leonid Skrypnyk's work makes it possible to understand these artistic cinematic explorations as manifested[47] in the films VUFKU sponsored.[48] His 1928 *Essays on a Theory of Cinema Art* presented a theory of cinema by a Ukrainian scholar for the first time.

[44] S. Leliukh, op. cit., p. 7.

[45] S. Zynych, N. Kapelhorodska, op. cit., p. 51.

[46] I. Kavalieridze, op. cit., p. 93.

[47] B. Nebesio, in *The Silent Films of Oleksandr Dovzhenko: A Historical Poetics*, Ph.D. thesis, the University of Alberta, 1996, compared Dovzhenko's practice to the theoretical research of Leonid Skrypnyk and other Ukrainian scholars, an approach that appears to have been quite justified.

[48] Skrypnyk's theoretical work is clearly connected to the experimental practices undertaken under VUFKU. This studio was essentially a holistic organism that provided a productive environment, a kind of cinematic incubator. For more, see: L. Naumova, *Film M. Shpykovskoho "Khlib". Tendentsii i vplyvy*, "Naukovi visnyk Kyivskoho natsionalnoho universytetu teatru, kino i telebachennia imeni IK Karpenka-Karoho" 2017, no. 20, p. 108.

It makes sense to consider one of the aspects meticulously researched by Skrypnyk: the formal composition of the frame, which clearly occupies a prominent place in the works of both Dovzhenko and Kavaleridze. In films with evident literary content, the composition and montage need to be subordinate to the overall content of the frame and to serve it. When there is no literary content, the composition itself becomes one of the main elements determining the content of the film.

As Skrypnyk writes,

The goal of a film's composition should be to instill in the viewer a sense of understandable and appropriate movement that is in an organic and harmonious relationship with all other movement and with the immutable elements of the composition. This dominant movement must be structured in strict complementarity with the narrative purpose of that particular section of the film and based on a specific established rhythm as well.[49]

When considering composition in art, rhythm can technically be divided into dynamic rhythm and static rhythm. Dynamic rhythm is characteristic of all arts that develop over time. Static rhythm is more typical of easel arts. Although dynamic rhythm is natural for filmmaking, it should still make use of both types of rhythm.

The radical explorations of Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Ivan Kavaleridze bring static rhythm to the foreground. Where dynamic rhythm is a relative concept, static rhythm is essentially a notional concept, because rhythm itself is directly related to time and it's impossible to imagine rhythm existing outside the flow of time. Even so, this cannot be entirely applied to film. By defining cinema as an art that develops over time, Skrypnyk notes that the passage of time is a necessary attribute for cinema. This means that even staticity in a film has a flow.

Skrypnyk himself refers to the theoretical explorations of architect Moisei Ginzburg, a Constructivist theorist and leader, who wrote:

The drawn line is a result of the gradual movement of a point that changes its location in space. But once the line is depicted, the movement has already stopped, and for us who look at the drawn curve, there is no understanding of the achievement of that active motion. And yet, we perceive the familiar feeling of rhythm from this curve in such a way that the element of movement must exist. Indeed, the rhythmic enchantment that appears when the curve is perceived can be explained by the fact that every time when we glance its way, we imaginatively repeat the gradual movement of the point that once really carried out this active movement.[50]

Skrypnyk defines this rhythm as a “conceptually imagined dynamic,” since the dynamism of this rhythm is present in the imagination of the viewer. Moreover, “static” rhythm can also be felt in the process of perceiving an object, due to the impossibility of perceiving in their entirety objects that are very large:

[49] L. Skrypnyk, *Narysy z teorii mystetstva kino*, Kharkiv 1928, p. 50.

[50] M. Ginzburg, *Ritm v arhitekture*, Moskva 1923, p. 13.

As the eye moves along a line consisting of a large number of windows placed next to each other in proper order in a proper line, it creates a dynamic rhythmic impression... I propose calling this 'static rhythm,' since it belongs to a static object or 'perceptually imagined dynamic rhythm.'^[51]

Skrypnyk posits that there are several types of dynamic rhythm, as well as several types of static or "imagined dynamic" rhythm. All these types of rhythms matter in the process of composing a film frame. The most difficult task faced by a filmmaker lies in eventually fusing all the varieties of imagined dynamic rhythms with all the varieties of real dynamic rhythms. Based on Skrypnyk's ideas, rhythm is no longer an abstract concept and becomes a concrete and substantive element of composition. It follows that the further construction of the film depends on it as the most basic and smallest component.

In conclusion, the features of Ukrainian cinema of this early period include conveying emotional states on the screen in parallel with experiments in montage and frame composition, as in Oleksandr Dovzhenko, and experiments with lighting and the plasticity of the frame in Ivan Kavalieridze. Leonid Skrypnyk's theory of cinema at the time treats these experiments and explorations of Ukrainian filmmakers as part of the rhythm-making process in film.

Ultimately, the explorations of these Ukrainian filmmakers and film theorists cover a broad range of issues. The priority in the 1920s was national themes and how to convey them on the screen. Ukrainian directors mastered the epic narrative form, explored the use of lighting and its artistic possibilities, and worked with rhythmic constructions both at the level of the individual frame and at the level of individual scenes. At the same time, Ukrainian film theorists developed a concept of film as a new art.

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[51] L. Skrypnyk, *Narysy z teorii...*, p. 55.