CHAPTER 9

ON SOVIET SPOKEN CINEMA

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On a hot July evening in 1965, M. U. Livshits took his wife to the
movies. He later described his experience in a letter to the chairman of the
State Committee for Cinematography of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Re-
public.[1] Livshits introduced himself as "not an art worker, but an ordinary
Soviet person."[2] The couple bought tickets at more than double the regular
price, not knowing the film titles—only that they were "prize-winning pic-
tures from the latest Moscow film festival." They saw the double feature in
a Palace of Sports, together with ten thousand Kiev residents. Livshits did
not enjoy the screening. In the British comedy *A Stitch in Time* (dir. Robert
Asher, 1963), the slapstick was clumsy, the plot unbelievable, and the trans-
lator from English, who was interpreting via loudspeaker over the origin-
al soundtrack, "kept mixing up the dialogue" (the picture was bought for
distribution in 1964 but had not yet been dubbed). Livshits was equally
shocked by the Italian melodrama *Time of Indifference* (*Gli indifferenti*, dir.
Francesco Maselli, 1964). Its "dirty" love affairs could "elicit nothing but dis-
gust from a Soviet person." The film was never purchased for distribution
and thus was not dubbed either. Livshits pronounced both films lacking in
"proper ideology" ("*bezydeinyi*") and useful "content" ("*nesoderzhatel'nyi*").
He blamed film exhibitors' greed. "In our country, business profits matter
least of all. But here the opposite was true," he argued. "The administration

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of the Palace of Sports took from me, and tens of thousands of workers like me, one ruble twenty kopeks for this: my wife and I sat for more than three hours high up near the dome roof, without any air circulation, and did not get any moral pleasure."

This delightful denunciation points to an alternative distribution circuit for foreign cinema in the Soviet Union. Foreign films considered for purchase were vetted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR in the 1950s and a committee of political and cultural experts in the 1960s and 1970s. Sovexportfilm, the state film import and export organization, then bought approved films for distribution. Censors cut objectionable scenes, and actors dubbed each picture in a way that omitted suspect dialogue. A specific number of copies, depending on the film's political value and its potential audience, went into theaters.[3] Yet Livshits describes a public screening outside of Moscow or Leningrad, where several thousand ordinary spectators saw two foreign films uncut, with only a translator's voice coming through the loudspeaker over the original dialogue. This popular and profitable practice persisted in the Soviet Union until the late 1980s.

Throughout the Soviet Union, millions of people saw uncensored foreign films through this alternative film distribution network, which simultaneous film translation made possible. This network encompassed international film festivals, various public theaters, closed picture shows at cultural and scientific institutions and the dachas of the party elite, and provincial cineclubs and pirate screenings at makeshift venues. Each show incorporated a translator, who provided simultaneous Russian voice-over via a microphone from a special booth or from a jury-rigged station at the back of the room.[4] This exhibition format promoted a particular mode of spectatorship, where each film screening became a unique event because of the translator's live performance. Silent film historian Alain Boillat calls this practice "spoken cinema," to distinguish from "talking movies" with a recorded vocal track.[5] As Thai film scholar May Adadol Ingawanij and others have shown, spoken cinema survived beyond the silent era, in some regions into the 1980s, both in the socialist Second World and in the nonaligned Third World.[6]

Audiovisual translation theory focused on dubbing and subtitles cannot fully account for spoken cinema, a model associated with silent film commentators, from *benshi* in Japan to *bonimenteurs* in Québec. Theoretical critiques of translation in sound cinema—Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's Eurocentric "grafting" of translation, John Mowitt's "bilingual enunciation," and Abé Mark Nornes's "abusive subtitling," for example—focus on the film

as a text and assume the finality of translation burned into the filmstrip as subtitles or an overdubbed soundtrack.[7] But spoken cinema was a live performance that precluded a stable text. The proper object for a history of cinema in live translation is not the film as a text but the encounter between the film and its audience during projection—or, as Tom Gunning puts it, "the place of the local in the history of a medium that aspires to the international, and indeed, the universal."[8] Live translation, in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, denaturalized the dominant modes of foreign sound-film exhibition.

This chapter addresses the crucial role of imperfect translation in the reception of foreign cinema in the USSR and of Soviet cinema at European festivals. It focuses on the Moscow International Film Festival (biannual after 1959) and the Tashkent Festival for Asian, African, and—eventually—Latin American Cinema (biannual after 1968, including Latin America after 1976), both of which aimed to one-up major European festivals by serving as the gateway to film cultures of socialist Eastern Europe and postcolonial Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Rossen Djagalov and Masha Salazkina propose that the Tashkent festival should be understood as a "contact zone," Mary Louise Pratt's term for colonial border zones where cultural and linguistic exchanges take place in the context of radical inequality.[9] Pratt borrows her term from linguistics, "where the term *contact language* refers to an improvised language that develops among speakers of different tongues who need to communicate with each other consistently, usually in the context of trade. Such languages begin as pidgins, and are called creoles when they come to have native speakers of their own. Like the societies of the contact zone, such languages are commonly regarded as chaotic, barbarous and lacking in structure."[10]

Much in this description applies to Soviet live film translation—it was also improvised, chaotic, and often criticized. Some foreign visitors cited loudspeaker translation as one of the major shortcomings of Soviet festivals, somewhere in between substandard competition lineups and abrasive toilet paper. Yet other spectators found it pleasurable and revealing. As a performance, simultaneous film translation foregrounded makeshift and fleeting ways of understanding another language. Arguing against "homolingual" linguistic transparency, theorist Naoki Sakai proposes a notion of "heterolingual address" that "does not abide by normalcy of reciprocal and transparent communication, but instead assumes that every utterance can fail to communicate because heterogeneity is inherent in any medium, linguistic or otherwise."[11] This chapter argues that improvised heterolingual Soviet film translation enabled transnational cinematic connections in the

Soviet Union and beyond, transgressing Soviet officials' original vision for live translation as an ideological weapon.

Official Soviet Film Translation at European Festivals

The Soviet Union used live film translation to compete for primacy on the European film festival scene. This translation method had both plebeian and elite local precedents. In the 1920s, trained lectors combined political education and translation when they explained silent films from abroad and from various Soviet republics to multilingual worker and peasant audiences. In the Stalinist 1930s, the few foreign films in Soviet theaters were dubbed. But domestic and foreign films with Russian-language dialogue circulated in remote areas of Soviet republics without dubbing or subtitling in the local languages. In these regions, a 1938 note to party leadership complained, "unvetted, ignorant translators explain the dialogue during screenings, often distorting the meaning of the film."[12] On the elite end, Joseph Stalin and his circle watched foreign films regularly but banned professional interpreters from screenings. Instead, Minister of Cinema Ivan Bolshakov recited from memory the Russian lines for foreign dialogue, translated beforehand by professionals. Stalin preferred mysteries and Westerns and especially enjoyed onscreen brawls.[13]

These ad hoc domestic practices informed the Soviet policy for screening films in live translation at European film festivals. Benito Mussolini inaugurated the first international film festival in Venice in 1932. The Soviet Union countered in 1935 with a festival in Moscow, and France launched the Cannes film festival in 1939, though it was aborted by the Nazi invasion. After World War II, major European film festivals became Cold War battlegrounds, and in 1946, the USSR sent delegations to three such festivals: Cannes, Venice, and Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia. That year, the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of July 22, 1946, cosigned by Stalin, proclaimed the most important goal of Soviet festival participation to be "the all-out popularization and promotion of Soviet films abroad, and before all, in the host festival countries."[14]

The Soviet leadership considered film translation indispensable for these promotional efforts. At the Venice festival, from August 31 to September 15, 1946, regulations required films to be shown entirely without translation, in their "original versions." That would not do for the Soviets. Sergei Budaev, head of the Soviet delegation at Venice, reported, "Italian spectators could understand an English, American, or French picture, because they more or less knew English and French. But most Italians do not speak Russian, and one cannot properly understand a film about life in the Soviet

Union without knowing Russian."[15] Overcoming the resistance of Venice festival organizers, the Soviet delegation brought professional announcers from Rome to translate all Soviet documentary and feature films. Thanks in part to this live commentary, Budaev claimed, Italian audiences loved the features *Chapaev* (dir. Sergei and Georgi Vasiliev, 1934), about a popular hero of the Russian Civil War, and *The Vow* (*Kliatva*, dir. Mikhail Chiaureli, 1946), a Stalin biopic, and responded well to documentary films on sports, parades, Central Asia, and other propagandist themes. Budaev reported that spectators applauded every time Stalin spoke, his words translated into Italian. "Our decision to show films with announcers' help completely justified itself," he concluded.[16]

At Cannes, from September 20 to October 5 of the same year, all films also played in their national, untranslated versions. Only the festival jury got special synopses explaining the plot. Again, the Soviets demurred. Soviet films, delegation head Mikhail Kalatozov argued, were different from others presented at the festival: "They possess ideological saturation and content and require detailed elucidation of the meaning and text of the picture."[17] Festival organizers and jury members from Great Britain, Egypt, Sweden, and the United States argued that showing a picture with translation using a microphone and a loudspeaker would give Soviets an unfair advantage over other countries, who did not prepare translations for their films. After six hours of wrangling, the Soviets were permitted to organize one experimental screening of the Soviet World War II documentary *Berlin* (dir. Yuli Raizman and Elizaveta Svilova, 1946). The Soviet delegation had invited, in advance, a qualified translator from Paris who had been recommended by the Central Committee of the French Communist Party. He had viewed the films and been trained especially for the job. "The demonstration of the picture 'Berlin' with translation completely justified itself," Kalatozov concluded after the screening. "The film was able to reach viewers not only via images, but the audience also understood the deep meaning of the text. For example, the words of comrade Stalin translated into French inspired ovations."[18]

During these 1946 screenings at Venice and Cannes, Russian voice-over also gave the Soviet Union an advantage over its main rival, the United States. The French newspaper *Laurent du Sud-Ouest* reported on September 20: "There is nothing more exhausting than spending several hours in a row in screenings where you don't understand a single word. The Russians perceived this from the first day, and they were the only ones who invited an announcer to translate their films. They couldn't have done anything better."[19] Because of such positive responses, midway through the festival the organizers allowed live commentary for all films. But other delegations could

not conjure dialogue lists and find interpreters to read them on such short notice. The French *L'Avenir* and American *Variety* cited a US representative who complained, "Russian films are now accompanied with French commentary. On the other hand, we had been formally forbidden to add subtitles because the films had to be projected in their original version. We do not understand how, in such an important event as the Cannes Festival, the conditions of the competition can be thus modified in the midst of things."[20] In short, American and Soviet observers agreed that film translation had become a useful weapon in the cultural Cold War.

Eventually, major European festivals adopted a combination of subtitles for attendees and live translation via earphone for juries. Loudspeaker translation appeared only in an emergency—for example, at the 1968 Venice festival for John Cassavetes's *Faces* (1968), which was completed too soon before the festival to be subtitled.[21] Nevertheless, the Soviet Union used announcers for Soviet screenings at these same festivals into the 1970s. Kalatozov's report on Cannes in 1946 suggested that a subtitling studio be set up in Paris for all films competing at the festival. It was never built. And as late as 1973, film critic Rostislav Yurenev lauded the careful megaphone translation of Soviet films presented at the Italian Days of Cinema, a replacement for then-suspended Venice Mostra. The interpreter, a first-year Moscow State University philology student, received Russian dialogue lists in time to prepare and read her own literary translations into Italian during all screenings of *That Sweet Word: Liberty!* (*Eto sladkoe slovo—svoboda!*, dir. Vytautas Žalakevičius, 1973), a documentary about Chile before the 1973 coup, and *The Saplings* (*Nergebi*, dir. Rezo Chkheidze, 1972), a Georgian comedy. "This organizational trifle—a timely delivery of dialogue lists—contributed to the complete understanding and positive reception of Soviet films," Yurenev concluded.[22]

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, festival guests often panned Soviet-style simultaneous translation. Indian critic Devendra Kumar, for instance, thought the Italian voice-over for Marlen Khutsiev's *I Am Twenty* (*Mne dvadtsat' let*, 1965) at the 1965 Venice festival "marred the charm of the film."[23] Yet Soviet officials valued live translation because it promised full control of the ideological message, total legibility, and maximum political effect—what Sakai would define as "homolingual address." Indeed, throughout the Cold War, these officials thought of international film festivals as an extension of Soviet diplomatic efforts, even if after 1953, diplomatic success was no longer gauged by spectators' applause at Stalin's translated words. The Moscow and Tashkent film festivals employed scores of simultaneous film translators working in dozens of languages, more than any other

international cinema showcase. Each film was first translated into Russian, played through the theater's loudspeakers, and then translated into the languages of the various foreign guests, who listened through transistor headphones. This two-tier relay film interpretation system ensured that visitors from dozens of countries could see any film in their own language, and it improved on the simultaneous translation method developed during the Nuremberg Trials.[24] But this live translation system could not be controlled as easily as interpretation at an international summit—and informal practices at Soviet spoken cinema venues contradicted the government's political project.

<h3>CINEMA IN LIVE TRANSLATION IN THE SOVIET UNION</h3>

Films in live translation were shown throughout the Soviet Union, beyond the official screenings during the Moscow and Tashkent festivals. The Filmmakers' Union (founded in 1957) and one of its arms, the Propaganda Bureau (founded in 1959), organized the films' distribution and collected the proceeds. Often, these public screenings took place following festivals, when foreign films, and often their filmmakers, traveled to at least four to six major cities around the country (including Leningrad, republican capitals like Kiev or Baku, major urban centers like Novosibirsk, and resort towns like Sochi). Half of the proceeds went to the host city, the other half to recoup the festival's expenses. In addition, every year from 1954, several national cinema weeks—for example, Indian, Polish, French, Syrian, and Senegalese—opened in Moscow and then traveled through the same network of major cities. Post-festival and film-week screenings usually took place in a House of Cinema (which were built for the local Filmmakers' Union chapters in every republican capital) or local movie theaters. Beginning in 1966, the Soviet State Film Repository, or Gosfil'mofond, also showed foreign movies from its vast collection in six to eight public screenings at each of its four theaters: Illuzion (opened in 1966) and its satellite, Red Textile Workers Club (1967) in Moscow, Kinematograf in Leningrad (1967), and Gazapkhuli in Tbilisi (1970).[25] Each theater employed a stable of interpreters, many of them famous among spectators as artists in their own right. To convey regional accents in Italian films, for example, celebrated Gazapkhuli interpreter Giovanni Vepkhvadze used a Mingrelian (a Kartvelian language spoken in Western Georgia) accent in contrast with standard Georgian. Once, he had a film character ask about local soccer results and gave the latest score in the response; the audience applauded.[26] Such heterolingual spoken cinema screenings blended multiple local and foreign languages and contexts.

In addition, from 1959, the Propaganda Bureau's traveling lecture program took excerpts from and entire foreign films to Houses of Cinema, cine-clubs, workers' clubhouses, and other venues around the country, including, in the 1980s, high-security prisons.[27] The film lecture program became a significant alternative supplement to official film distribution—one that, among other things, financed the activities of the Filmmakers' Union; in 1964, most of the union's budget, over six million rubles, came from the bureau's profits from print publications and public lectures accompanied by Soviet and foreign films.[28] At these, the lecturer or a local interpreter translated foreign films and excerpts into Russian. Before going out on a lecture tour about Ingmar Bergman, for instance, film historian Naum Kleiman—who did not know Swedish—studied the translation for the excerpts of Bergman's films, so as to be able to recite the dialogue from memory.[29]

Public screenings at these venues transgressed the general censorship standards for foreign film distribution; indeed, Soviet functionaries often berated Illuzion for showing forbidden or suspect movies during foreign film retrospectives. The Italian film week in December 1967 showed films by Guiseppe de Santis, Lucino Visconti, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Federico Fellini, including *8 1/2* (1963), which had won the top prize at Moscow in 1963 against the wishes of party officials and was never purchased for distribution. The program opened at Illuzion, the House of Cinema, and other Moscow venues and afterward traveled to Kiev. De Santis, who opened the retrospective, later published an article in the Italian Communist paper *Paese sera* praising Illuzion as an "oppositional" theater. As a result, the Moscow Communist Party Committee's film department, which was responsible for the political oversight of the city's film industry, summoned Illuzion programmers to inquire why an Italian director was praising the theater for showing the best Italian films despite Soviet censorship. In 1969, a Polish film retrospective at Illuzion showed over one hundred Polish films in a month and a half, many of them censored from general distribution.[30]

In addition to public events, closed film screenings served the creative, intellectual, and party elite, as well as their families, friends, and acquaintances. Filmmakers' Union chapters in Moscow, Leningrad, and republican capitals set up closed screenings for union members at Houses of Cinema. The All-Union State Film School (VGIK), the Higher Courses for Directors, and the Higher Courses for Screenwriters in Moscow, as well as film schools in Leningrad and other Soviet republics, showed foreign movies to their students, as Moscow, Leningrad, and republican film studios did for their employees. Film journal offices—from those of the premier cinema journal *Iskusstvo kino* (*Cinema Art*) to the popular magazine *Sovetskii ekran*

(*Soviet Screen*)—organized screenings for staff writers. Houses for other art workers—including writers, journalists, painters, and composers—borrowed 35mm reels from Gosfil'mofond or Sovexportfilm to show to their members, and scientific institutes did the same for their researchers. A special section of Gosfil'mofond served *sharashki* (closed research facilities) and the Communist Party leadership, who saw foreign films at their offices and their dachas. Most closed screenings were only nominally restricted to the elite: dentists, manicurists, hairdressers, and car mechanics could count on passes as thank-yous from authorized spectators.[31]

In addition to legitimate foreign film shows outside of general distribution, unsanctioned screenings took place. The first pirate shows used "trophy" musicals, comedies, and dramas seized in Germany at the end of the war and put into circulation between 1948 and 1953.[32] According to a 1957 investigation, a group of Moscow university students, all children of privileged parents, purchased retired trophy reels from projectionists and then circulated over two hundred different films in scientific and educational institutions in the city, preceded by live jazz performances.[33] In Moscow in the 1960s, at least until the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, foreign films circulated through a similar network. The trophy films were dubbed or subtitled, but for all other films, an interpreter came in to provide a Russian voice-over. In 1967, a cine-club at Moscow State University was shut down the day after one such unauthorized spoken cinema screening: university administration clamped down on the "Maoist" propaganda of Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967).[34]

Some evidence suggests that the provinces had their own illicit distribution systems. In 1966, for instance, A. V. Zagorsky, director of the Moldovan Propaganda Bureau, revived the pirate spoken cinema tradition. The Moscow Bureau had sent two Italian films to accompany local lectures: the raunchy omnibus picture *Boccaccio-70* (dir. Mario Monicelli, Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, and Vittorio De Sica, 1962) and the comedy *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (*Ieri, oggi, domani*, dir. Vittorio De Sica, 1963). After four authorized lectures at the House of the Moldovan Filmmakers' Union, Zagorsky took these films with him on his vacation to the Odessa district. He gave several lectures accompanied by the two films at four seaside resorts in exchange for free room and board. The pictures played to packed theaters, until an ill-wisher denounced the unauthorized screenings to the authorities. As one Moscow official later dryly remarked, "An event cannot remain secret when the lecture attracts a thousand people." The Moscow Filmmakers Union summoned Zagorsky and fired him after a brutal official reprimand. Committee members were particularly upset because Zagorsky's

case laid bare an unofficial practice, common across Filmmakers' Union and Propaganda Bureau chapters in other Soviet republics. "We had already suffered because of this," admitted Aleksandr Karaganov, a Filmmakers' Union official.[35]

<center>Live Film Translation at Soviet Festivals</center>

The frequency of unsanctioned screenings is difficult to gauge, but interviews and archival records suggest that they constituted a steady stream of events, rather than an occasional transgression. These semiofficial and illicit nationwide spoken cinema practices in turn formed the larger context for authorized international screenings at the Moscow and Tashkent festivals. Simultaneous translation at these festivals was a difficult job that began months before and continued weeks after a festival officially took place.

Festival translation involved multilingual publics and often more than two languages, a feature of its heterolingual address. At the Tashkent festival around 1976, a Hindi film could play with English subtitles, Russian loudspeaker voice-over, and earphone translation into French, English, Spanish, and Arabic. According to an internal report, fifty-eight simultaneous translators worked at the second Moscow festival in 1961. Out of 160 applications, twenty people were selected to translate into the official languages of the festival and thirty-eight to translate into Russian. Unique linguistic skills could overcome suspect politics: only thirty-one of the fifty-eight translators were Komsomol or Communist Party members. The translators' work began during the vetting period, when translators into Russian interpreted submitted films for the organizers and the commissions of the Ministry of Culture. That year, 263 films played at the festival, but written "dialogue lists" were provided for only twenty-seven of the thirty-three competition pictures. Of these, fifteen "particularly difficult ones" were translated into Russian.[36] But many films, in competition and out, arrived after the beginning of the festival. Most of the time, translators had to interpret extemporaneously by ear.

The translators who took this job came from all walks of life. Some had connections to the Communist Party elite, the KGB, or Sovexportfilm. Aleksei Mikhalev, who interpreted from Persian for Leonid Brezhnev, became known in Moscow art film circles in the 1970s as a translator from English and nationally in the 1980s as a translator's voice in pirated American blockbusters on video. But most translators had no connections to power. They could be college students studying linguistics, language, literature, or the history of a foreign country, or they could be students in an unrelated field whose parents had spent some time in a foreign country. Aleksandr Bondarev, who translated from Polish, was a graduate student in theoretical

physics when he began working with films. Despite their proximity with foreign culture, film translators had a measure of political freedom. The interpreters who worked with delegations were specifically requested from foreign language institutes and VGIK and vetted by the KGB for political loyalty. Yet a dissident who knew a foreign language well could still get a job as a film translator.[37]

Since most festival films were shown with no Russian subtitles, film translators made the mass audiences at Soviet festivals possible. In 1959, the Moscow festival's more than half a million spectators brought in around five million rubles, and from then on, the festival was a profitable enterprise. "The organizing committee aimed not to imitate other festivals, but, using their experience, to conduct the Moscow festival as an open mass event," stated the final report for that year. "We succeeded. The participants and guests of the Moscow festival, and the press, noted the mass, popular character of the Moscow festival among the main differences from festivals in Cannes, Venice, and others."[38] In July 1961, at the Palace of Sports alone, 217,678 people attended forty-two screenings in twenty-one days, and 8,005 people showed up for the opening-night screening on July 9. Both attendance and earnings surpassed the plan.[39] In addition, throughout its history, the festival organized massive out-of-competition programs and sold tickets at double the regular price to increase profits. "Moscow Fans Finance Film Festival," *Variety* reported in 1975.[40] This ability to attract popular crowds distinguished Moscow from its major European counterparts—including the Karlovy Vary festival in socialist Czechoslovakia—all of which were closed to the general public.

Out-of-competition screenings, most of which were translated live, provided unique opportunities for both entertainment and art-film spectatorship at the Moscow festival. Many films were shown with the filmmakers present. The main draw for the general public was the screenings' range of entertainment films, shown for their popular appeal rather than their educational or ideological value. In 1965, these included the musicals *Mary Poppins* (dir. Robert Stevenson, 1964) and *My Fair Lady* (dir. George Cukor, 1964), the American comedy *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (dir. Stanley Kramer, 1963), the French historical romance *Angélique, the Marquise of the Angels* (*Angélique, marquise des anges*, dir. Bernard Borderie, 1964), swashbuckler *Black Tulip* (*La Tulipe noire*, dir. Christian-Jaque, 1964), and the British World War II epic *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (dir. David Lean, 1957).[41] Several of these films are considered classics today, but for many Moscow spectators, their genre attractions outweighed any artistic value. At the *My Fair Lady* screening at the Palace of Sports, when the translator tried

to speak during musical numbers, ten thousand spectators stomped their feet and chanted "No translation!"[42] The tickets for the out-of-competition screenings sold out so quickly that the delegations that brought these films routinely complained that they received half or none of the complimentary tickets promised to them.[43]

The program also offered much for the art-film lover and the film critic, which meant thousands of cine-club movie buffs across geographic and class lines. During the 1965 Moscow festival, world-renowned art-film directors leaned on their producers to send their latest films. Michelangelo Antonioni came with *Red Desert* (*Il deserto rosso*, 1964). Jean-Luc Godard sent *Alphaville* (1965). Akira Kurosawa opened his *Red Beard* (*Akahige*, 1965) in Moscow before competing at Venice, where Toshiro Mifune subsequently won the award for the best performance.[44] Indeed, because very few foreign films were dubbed for general distribution, Soviet critical writing on foreign cinema largely drew on the films shown with live translation at festivals and foreign film weeks. A 1967 journal article on Antonioni focusing on *Red Desert* noted that it was shown at the 1965 festival and also analyzed his *Story of a Love Affair* (*Cronaca di un amore*, 1950), which had been shown during an Italian film week in Moscow in 1955.[45] While critics also analyzed films they saw at Gosfil'mofond, at foreign festivals, and during professional trips abroad, focusing on cinema from Soviet international festivals and film weeks allowed them to address a wider national community of art-film lovers and festivalgoers. And if out-of-town Soviet cinephiles timed their vacations to see Italian and French festival films unavailable in their local Soviet theaters, foreign guests came to see films they could not view in the West, both foreign and Soviet.

Live Translation and the Transnational Circulation of Cinema

Foreign guests suffered live translation together with millions of Soviet cinephiles. At all festival theaters in Moscow and Tashkent, an English-speaking guest would not hear the original soundtrack of an English-language picture, but rather an English translation of a Russian translation, which came half a minute after the original dialogue.[46] Occasionally, such free-form relay interpretation added humor to the film. One foreign journalist reported that he had heard, at a Soviet festival, "the English language expression, 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak' translated into a foreign language and then back into English as 'The drinks are pretty good, but the meat is lousy.'"[47] Yet this system also provided unique opportunities to see rare films, both Soviet and international. Writing in the 1970s, American filmmaker and critic

Gordon Hitchens, a representative of the Berlin and Leipzig festivals in the United States, recommended both Moscow and Tashkent as festivals where one could see films from Asia, Africa, and Latin America that were unavailable in the West.[48]

Because interpreters often had to work by ear, without preparation, they made errors that infuriated foreign participants. At the 1965 Moscow festival, Polish director Czesław Petelski complained that vocally challenged Soviet film translators "have jarring timbre, imprecise intonation, and don't always convey the meaning of the dialogue."[49] As a result, at a screening of Polish picture *Three Steps on Earth* (*Trzy kroki po ziemi*, dir. Jerzy Hoffman and Edward Skórzewski, 1965), the contrast between expository voice-over and the jocular vernacular dialogues—a central aesthetic device of the film—was completely lost. Petelski thought the botched delivery ruined his country's chances for a prize. Bad translation remained a typical foreign complaint at Soviet festivals into the 1980s.

At the same time, skilled translators from Russian into foreign languages could add their own slant to the dialogue. Hitchens witnessed such artistry at a screening of the Uzbek film *Riders of Revolution* (*Vsadniki revolutsii*, dir. Kamil Iarmatov, 1968) at the 1968 Tashkent festival. As Hitchens describes it, "The English language ear-phone translation of the Uzbek original was often very ironic." When a wounded Red Army scout escapes from the enemy lines and "collapses at the feet of the Bolshevik leaders, riddled with bullets and gasping out his last breath, the leader bends down to speak to him, and the voice on the earphones says, 'Well, now, what's the matter' in a rather petulant, irritated voice."[50] Such vocal interpretation exemplifies a unique heterolingual feature of multichannel live translation at festivals—only English-speaking guests got a shade of irony during this screening.

Simultaneous translation also helped dissident directors show their banned films to European festival programmers. In a notorious case from the 1975 Moscow festival, an ultimatum from Michelangelo Antonioni, who had threatened to leave the festival, forced officials to organize two last-minute special screenings of Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* (*Zerkalo*, 1975). The film was originally shelved as confusing and unpatriotic, so no subtitled copy existed.[51] The coveted screening, according to one participant, "was jammed with just about every delegation, whose various interpreters turned the theater into a horrifying Babel of translations."[52] Glowing reports of the two live-translated shows in the international press contributed to *The Mirror*'s prized place in film history, as cinematic art and as a political statement.[53]

Such informal screenings relied on the established channels of the Soviet alternative distribution system for films in live translation. Jay Leyda,

an American film historian and an expert on Sergei Eisenstein, wrote to a friend in 1979 that Georgian director Otar Iosseliani, who was forbidden to show his films officially at the Moscow festival, each year "brings his own prints of his newest film, rents a small theater and a bus, [and] carts his foreign fans to a secret screening."[54] What Leyda perceived as a revolutionary activity was just an ordinary unofficial practice for Iosseliani and others, among them Naum Kleiman. Kleiman recalls how, during the 1975 Moscow festival, Iosseliani called him at home to invite him to an impromptu projection of his new film, *Pastorale* (*Pastorali*, 1975), at the offices of the magazine *Sovetskii ekran*. Leyda had just stopped by Kleiman's apartment, along with Ulrich Gregor, a cofounder of the Forum for Young Cinema at the Berlin International Film Festival. Kleiman took his visitors to see Iosseliani's film. Leyda understood Russian, but Gregor relied on Kleiman's extemporaneous whisper translation into German.[55] Impressed by the film, Gregor invited Iosseliani to the forum—although the director was only permitted to come in 1982, when *Pastorale* received a FIPRESCI (International Federation of Film Critics) prize. In these ways, underground screening practices and the unique live translation skills developed on the Soviet spoken cinema circuit enhanced and transformed foreign viewers' experience of Soviet festivals, contributing to the circulation of Soviet films at festivals in Europe and beyond.

Conclusion

The Soviet translation project aimed to produce transparent communication within a stable geopolitical hierarchy, enshrining differences between languages, cultures, and the "three worlds"—capitalist, socialist, and nonaligned. The project succeeded only in part. Artisanal and inexact practices of live interpreting made assembly-line approaches impossible, and ambiguities in delivery and meaning invited spectators' critical attention.[56] Those who expected homolingual transparency left disappointed. Those who adopted a heterolingual approach to the rampant inefficiencies of the project made discoveries, aesthetic and political.

The Soviet case invites historians to reconsider the role of spoken cinema in the socialist world at large. Similar live translation practices took place across Eastern Europe, at festivals and elsewhere. Archival retrospectives and festival screenings in Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Albania, and East Germany, for instance, were accompanied by live translation, while pirate video translation in the Soviet Union, Romania, and Bulgaria in the 1980s owed much to the translation styles developed in 35mm and 16mm spoken cinema in the preceding decades.[57] The transnational connections

enabled by Soviet spoken cinema force us to reconsider these translation practices in a different light. We might ask, for example, why Roman Polanski was miffed about the simultaneous translation of his film *Tessa* (1979) at the Belgrade FEST. Was it simply a case of failure to "meet even basic screening standards," as one historian argued?[58] Or, perhaps, the film translator added another layer of meaning, humorous or critical, to the film screening as a unique spoken cinema event.

Notes

I cite Russian archival documents according to their location as follows: fond/opis/ed.khr./page numbers. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

1. The letter only lists the last name of the addressee, Ivanov. This letter was forwarded to the national State Committee for Cinematography (Goskino).

2. All quotes in this paragraph come from Livshits's letter; Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow (RGALI), 2944/24/58/17–18.

3. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*; and Zezina, "Kinoprokat i massovyi zritel' v gody ottepeli." On film dubbing, see Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die.*

4. For more on such screenings, see Razlogova, "Listening to the Inaudible Foreign"; Razlogova, "The Politics of Translation"; Razlogova, "The Liberation Politics of Live Translation"; and Hoffmann, "Soviet Estonian Cinema Clubs." Some examples in this essay also appear in my previous publications.

5. Boillat, "The Lecturer, the Image, the Machine and the Audio-Spectator."

6. Ingawanij, "Mother India in Six Voices" and "Itinerant Cinematic Practices." Other examples include Crowley, "Echo Translation" (Poland); Dwyer and Uricaru, "Slashings and Subtitles" (Romania); Li, "Cinematic Guerrillas in Mao's China"; and Srinivas, "Is There a Public in the Cinema Hall?" (India).

7. Shohat and Stam, "The Cinema After Babel" and *Unthinking Eurocentrism*; Mowitt, *Re-Takes*; and Nornes, *Cinema Babel.*

8. Gunning, "The Scene of Speaking," 68. For an excellent overview of film translation history, see Zanotti, "Historical Approaches to AVT Reception."

9. Djagalov and Salazkina, "Tashkent '68."

10. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 8.

11. Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 8; and Sakai and Solomon, *Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference.*

12. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) 17/114/956/209-212; reprinted in Maksimenkov et al., eds., *Kremlevskii kinoteatr, 1928–1953*, 504.

13. Mariamov, *Kremlevskii tzenzor*, 11.

14. de Valck, *Film Festivals*; Kötzing and Moine, *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts*; and RGALI 2456/4/103/3.

15. RGALI 2456/4/103/9.

16. RGALI 2456/4/103/9. On the Soviets at Venice in 1946, see Pisu, "The USSR and East-Central European Countries."

17. RGALI 2456/4/103/33.

18. RGALI 2456/4/103/33. On the 1946 Cannes festival, see Pozner, "Les 'Clefs de la propagande cinématographique en Europe.'"

19. *Laurent du Sud-Ouest* quoted in RGALI 2456/4/103/33-34.

20. Thierry, "Un Petard Sovietique," quoted in Pozner, "Les 'Clefs,'" 181; "Power Politics, Spearheaded by USSR, Marred Int'l Film Festival at Cannes," 12.

21. Moskowitz, "Boxoffice, Art, Politics."

22. Yurenev, "Festival' umer," 174.

23. Kumar, *World Cinema '65.*

24. Gofman, "K istorii sinkhronnogo perevoda"; and Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation.*

25. Fomin, *Istoriia kinootrasli v Rossii*; and Solov'ev, *Kinoteatr Gosfil'mofonda Rossii "Illuzion."*

26. Vepkhvadze, "Sinkhronist"; and Sherouse, "Russian Presence in Georgian Film Dubbing," 216.

27. A thank-you note with a poem from prisoners of OV156/3 to a translator, in author's possession.

28. Fomin, *Istoriia kinootrasli v Rossii*, 1073, 1138.

29. Kleiman, interview, September 10, 2018. On Estonian cine-club screenings with live translation, see Hoffman, "Soviet Estonian Cinema Clubs and Interpreting of Foreign Movies."

30. RGALI 2944/13/1078; Soloviev, *Kinoteatr Gosfil'mofonda Rossii "Illuzion,"* 44-45; and Golubev, *Professia—kinoman*, 41.

31. Fomin, *Istoriia kinootrasli v Rossii*; and Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die.*

32. Knight, "Enemy Films on Soviet Screens."

33. RGALI 2329/2/557; Zezina, "Kinoprokat i massovyi zritel v gody ottepeli."

34. Knight, "Enemy Films on Soviet Screens"; and Hoffman, "Soviet Estonian Cinema Clubs and Interpreting of Foreign Movies."

35. RGALI 2936/4/46/10.

36. RGALI 2936/1/1502/50–52.

37. YouTube, "Aleksei Mikhalev"; and Solov'ev, *Kinoteatr Gosfilmofonda Rossii "Illuzion."*

38. RGALI 2936/1/1324/9, 17.

39. RGALI 2936/1/1502/52d.

40. Zorkaya, "'Vchera' i 'segodnia' moskovskogo kinofestivalya"; and Werba, "Moscow Fans Finance Film Festival."

41. RGALI 2936/1/2059/6.

42. Golubev, *Professiia—kinoman*, 30–31.

43. RGALI 2936/1/1502/8.

44. RGALI 2936/1/2059/6.

45. Rubanova, "Posle 'Krasnoi pustyni.'"

46. This practice still survives at some festivals in Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics.

47. Unknown foreign journalist quoted in Hitchens, "Tashkent Festival" (typescript, 1968), box 1, folder 5, Papers of Gordon Hitchens, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

48. Hitchens, "Mind-Bending, Discomforts at USSR's Fest for Asia, Africa" and "Festival Report—Moscow."

49. RGALI 2936/1/2058/154.

50. Hitchens, "Tashkent Festival."

51. "Glavnaya tema—sovremennost."

52. Johnson, "Trends of Soviet Directors," 33.

53. Gillett, "Festivals 1975—Locarno, Berlin, Moscow"; Marshall, "Andrei Tarkovsky's 'The Mirror'"; and Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time*, 115.

54. Jay Leyda, draft of letter to an unknown recipient (1979), box 11, folder 5, Jay and Si-Lan Chen Leyda Papers, Tamiment Library and Robert Wagner Archives, New York University.

55. Kleiman, interview, September 10, 2018.

56. Soviet spoken cinema shared its politics of ambiguity and liveness with other socialist art practices. In this volume, Katie Trumpener argues that panoramic photography's "bends and distortions" produced a critique of socialist architecture in Czechoslovakia; see chapter 2. Likewise, Marie Cronqvist shows how international audiences shaped state-controlled East German broadcasting in 1989; see chapter 8.

57. On Romania, see Dwyer and Uricaru, "Slashings and Subtitles," 223. On the GDR, see Shtaier, "O mekhanizme sinkhronnogo perevoda."

58. Batančev, "The Belgrade FEST," 161.

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