



*An Auteur Study of Kira Muratova*  
*Focusing on the Films*  
*Two in One and Melody for a Street Organ*

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*Abstract*

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MASTER OF ARTS IN VISUAL CULTURE

*An Auteur Study of Kira Muratova Focusing on the Films*

*Two in One and Melody for a Street Organ*

by Helena Tomasson

This thesis is dedicated to the cinema art of Kira Muratova with the focus on the theme of grotesque. Kira Muratova shot films of different genres; mixing styles, creating a new reality of cinema, mixing audio-visualization of people with animals, classical literature with slang, including photography and pornography, installation, performance, opera and ballet. Due to this fact, her films provide rich objects of research in Visual Culture Studies. This study is concerned with the audio-visual effects, images and scenes connected to the theme of grotesque in the auteur cinema of Kira Muratova.

Deliberately departing from the possible socio-historical context, the author of the project presents intertextuality of Muratova's film. This thesis includes a detailed analysis of images and shots of several films with a focus on grotesque and along with general description of the director's main devices. It searches for meanings, denotations and connotations in the films' images as the essential elements of the films. In addition to an overview of the whole art of director and auteur features, the project deals in more details with two recent films by Muratova— *Two in One* (2006) and *Melody for a Street Organ* (2009). Both films are examples of post-modern cinema, and represent ironically, controversially, abruptly, painfully, but truthfully, many important cultural and philosophical issues and essences: arts, man and his place in the world, his relation to other living beings. Semiotics, auteur theory, other theories of film studies, linguistics and psychoanalysis in their postmodern appearances have been applied to the analysis of Kira Muratova's film.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research objectives

This project is an auteur study of films by Kira Muratova: actress, scriptwriter and non-mainstream, non-Western director with an intensely eccentric vision and original style. The term 'auteur' was coined by the film theoretician André Bazin and developed by François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Robin Wood, Peter Wollen and some others. Auteur is a director whose creative influence on a film is so great as to be considered its author. 'Auteurism' is a movement and aesthetic ideology,<sup>1</sup> which had a significant impact on film studies theory. This approach is relevant to the study of Muratova's film, whose 'style gives rise to meaning'.<sup>2</sup>

Among the auteur film directors, as among well-known mainstream film-makers whose art is a part of movie history and film studies, there are almost no female names. There was not a single woman on the list of Andrew Sarris, an influential theorist of American film and the authorship studies, which was published in *Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962*.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the twentieth century the situation changed and some women directors were given significance on the film stage. Their filmmaking occurred under the flag of feminism, the struggle for the rights and the theoretical discussions about film and woman's place in it. Laura Mulvey and Agnes Varda are two examples. Kira Muratova, however, is not a feminist film director and not a theorist at all. During the last decades of post-modern time, in the recent lists of auteur film makers, which are still popular in film magazines, at film festivals and in blogs of cinema fans, one can find few female directors. Kira Muratova is one example of this exception.

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1 J.Naremore, 'Authorship', in T.Miller&R.Stam (eds), *A Companion to Film Theory*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, Blackwell Reference online, 2010, p.1-1 2.

2 Op.cit., p.3.

3 A.Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962', in B.K. Gran (ed.), *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, 35-45.

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In spite of the statement by Roland Barthes in 1967 about 'the death of the author'<sup>4</sup> in his post-structuralist text, which turned the stress to the importance of the viewer in cultural and media studies, the discussion on auteur theory and auteurs continues. For instance, during 'Auteurdagen' at the Göteborg Film Festival in 2002 the discussions on auteur urgency took place with different opinions offered by Danish, Swedish and international scholars and critics of contemporary fiction and documentary. Göran Guner and Rebecka Hamberger offered contributions to the book called *Auteuren – återkomst eller farväl? (Auteur – Return or Goodbye)*.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Questions and goals

How one reads media texts, which are often polysemic and open to different interpretations, depends on the cultural, educational and personal skills of the reader. On the other side, texts attempt, especially in mass media, to be 'closed' forms of cinema,<sup>6</sup> constructed by their authors. Similar to how we recognize the work of a painter, a sculptor or an auteur film director by style, it is easy to identify Muratova's films by 'handwriting', even without delving into the essence.

The theme of 'grotesque'<sup>7</sup> is one of the prominent topics, which has created Muratova's cinema world. It is connected with many other themes, such as body, animals, character of 'femme fatale' and death. The objective of this thesis is to conduct a textual analysis of the films by Muratova; to analyse film as film and to investigate a theme of grotesque in recent films. I will use a semiotic approach to examine how the images and signs are organized in the films with the goal of finding possible meanings.

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4 R.Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Richard Kearny& David M. Rasmussen,(eds) *Continental Aesthetics. Romanticism to Postmodernism*, Blackwell, 2001, 363-371.

5 G.Guner&R.Hamburger, *Auteuren – återkomst eller farväl?*, Göteborg, 2002.

6 T.Elsaesser&M.Hagener, *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 16.

7 <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/grotesque?q=grotesque>>

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### 1.3 *Relevance of the work. Previous and Current state of research*

Director from the former Soviet Union, Kira Muratova, who was born in Romania, has received sporadic attention from film critics, but she has not often been a critical favorite. Her films were mostly written about in the Russian language in the post-Soviet countries. She started to work in the 1960s in the Ukrainian city of Odessa, which is known in the cinema world from the classical films by Eisenstein and Vertov in the 1920s. In 1990 she won a Silver Bear in Berlin for her film *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989) and became a filmmaker of the Soviet reality for a Western audience. Since then, the historical and political contexts of Muratova's films have become the main theme of studies on Russian or Soviet cinema in some universities.

Despite the fact that she has been making films for fifty years, since 1962, only one book about her film heritage has been published in English—a monograph by Jane A. Taubman.<sup>8</sup> Taubman's *Kira Muratova* (2005) and some articles, which were written during the 1990s and early 2000s and included in the books on Russian or post-Soviet film history, consists mostly of a general description about the film art of the director, biographical notes and narrative analysis.

In 2008 two books were simultaneously published in Russia on Kira Muratova. One is a volume written in film critical style from the line *Cinema texts* by Zara Abdullaeva - *Kira Muratova*,<sup>9</sup> in which some ideas, images and narrative scenes are analyzed in details. It includes memories and discussions of Muratova's colleagues and collaborators and two of her film scripts. Another book, *Kira Muratova. An Experience of a Cinema-Anthropology*<sup>10</sup> was written by Mikhail Iampolski, a Professor of Comparative Literature, Russian & Slavic Studies at New York University. He argues that Muratova is the only film director in Post-Soviet countries, who is a philosopher and thinker, reflecting on the questions: 'What is

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Taubman, *Kira Muratova*, Kinofile Filmmakers' Companion 4, I.B. Tautis, London, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Zara Abdullaeva, *Kira Muratova*, Iskusstvo kino. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> M. Iampolski, *Kira Muratova. An Experience of a Cinema-Anthropology* (Kira Muratova. Opyt kinoantropologii), Seans, S-Petersburg, 2008.

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man? What is human being essence?'<sup>11</sup> In 2009 Italian film magazine *Moviement*<sup>12</sup> devoted the whole issue to studies, interviews and articles on Muratova.

This project is the first theoretical investigation of Kira Muratova's auteur film in English, which applies the film study theories and stresses on the theme of grotesque in two of her recently shot films: *Two in One* and *Melody for a Street Organ* .

#### 1.4 *Empirical materials and focus*

I am going to investigate the main typical features and its variations of the films by Kira Muratova and the principles, which govern them, as well as differences between early and late films. According to Peter Wollen, 'the great director must be defined in terms of shifting relations, in their singularity and uniformity'.<sup>13</sup> Such devices as intertextuality, references to the theater, literature and other art forms that established her as an auteur film maker and manifested most significantly in the last films. In order to highlight the similarities and common features, I will analyze the scenes and images in two of Muratova's last films: *Two in One* (2007) and *Melody for a Street Organ* (2009). Both films have a complicated construction and controversial polysemic meanings of the scenes and images. The main issues, which I have traced in these films, are violence, power, sexuality, and body. The concept of grotesque, doubling, visualization of twins and prominent linguistic stresses, such as heteroglossia, absurd, swearwords, refrains, are also important elements in Muratova's films, which I ascribe to the characteristics of her style.

The bodies of human beings and animals were the main objects in the films by Muratova from the very beginning of her cinematography career. The body representation in two of the last films by Muratova became a grotesque and shocking depiction, free from moral and cultural stereotypes. By showing reality and hyper-

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11 Kommersant Weekend, №23 (119), 19.06.2009, <<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1187011/print>>.

12 *Moviement*, 03, 2009,

<<http://moviementmagazine.com/magazines/previews/Kira%20Muratova%20-%20Preview.pdf>>.

13 P. Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, London, 1972, p.104.

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reality, by rejecting borders between film and life and referring to a man as a 'feral mammal',<sup>14</sup> Muratova's film raised discussion on two diametrically opposed concepts: 'Tolstoyan moral absolutism'<sup>15</sup>, and the total refusal of morality and 'ethical minimalism'.<sup>16</sup> The relationship with other art forms in films such as painting, still photography, sculpture, theater, literature (poetry) and performance are represented in their symbioses in almost every film by Muratova. Dolls and corpses are the essential beings, and I am going to investigate the meaning of the representation of corpses, dolls, twins and the relation of these images to the concept of grotesque. Similar to Bergman and Fellini, Kira Muratova uses a personally repertory company of actors in her films, but she went further by regularly shooting non-professional 'actors', cranks in her films. It is possible to say about her cinema, as Renoir and Fellini said about themselves, that she is shooting one long film all her life. She breaks the boundaries between filmmaker and film, between film and spectator, between film and life, between the organic and inorganic worlds and creates a new cinematic language.

### 1.5 *Theories and Methods*

The concept of 'grotesque' in visual arts and in auteur cinema of Kira Muratova has encompassed many other important themes and audio visual effects. The semantic meaning of 'grotesque' is loaded, but in the context of Muratova's film it is connected as to the originals: Italian 'grotta', which means cave, 'la grottesca' or 'grottesco' meaning an ancient form of ornamental paintings in caves, distinguished by unnatural images of animals, humans and plants<sup>17</sup> as well as to the modern aesthetics

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14 N. Condee, 'Kira Muratova: Zoological Imperium', in: *The Imperial trace: recent Russian cinema*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 118.

15 Taubman, op.cit., p.368.

16 Condee, op.cit., p.142. "I of course realize that "minimalism" is hardly a descriptor one would normally assign to this director, with her love of ornament and complexity. Here I have in mind not her visual staging of a shot, but rather her civilizational standards."

17 N.Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 'Ugliness' in R.S.Nelson and R.Shiff (ed.), *Critical Terms for Art History*, The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p.282.



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thoughts by Theodoro Adorno<sup>18</sup>, Wolfgang Kayser<sup>19</sup> and Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>20</sup> I will mainly apply the issues of literature theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whose concepts of 'grotesque', 'carnival', 'heteroglossia' are relevant for film and have been provided and assumed by many scholars in modern art and Film Studies, including Robert Stam and Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer.<sup>21</sup> When discussing the concept of 'grotesque' I will apply the ideas of A.D.Coleman on photography.<sup>22</sup>

A text and film as a text in studies of audio-visual media, which has been gathered and developed by Robert Stam is the main methodological basis of my thesis. The correlation between contemporary film semiotics and the concept of auteur, which both have roots in literature and linguistic studies, will provide sufficient ground not to contradict each other when these theoretical ideals are applied to my research. Furthermore, I will employ some ideas from psychoanalytic film theory, in particular Laura Mulvey's notion of the 'male gaze'.<sup>23</sup> As Christian Metz pointed out, psychoanalytic and linguistic studies are sciences of the very fact of meaning, of signification.<sup>24</sup> As base terms I will use 'text', 'reading' and 'meaning' in my analysis. The important sources for my analysis are the ideas of Russian Formalism on mise-en-scène.

In the second chapter I will introduce the director's personality and put out some important biographical notes together with short general information on films produced during the Soviet-era and post-Soviet time. The next two chapters I will devote to a detailed analysis of the films chosen as my empirical material - *Two in One* and *Melody for a Street Organ*.

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<sup>18</sup> T. Adorno, 'Aesthetic Theory', in Kearny, Richard & Rasmussen, David M., (eds), *Continental Aesthetics. Romanticism to Postmodernism*, Blackwell, 2001, pp.242-254.

<sup>19</sup> W.Kayser, *The Grotesque in Arts and Literature*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, op.cit., pp.281-284.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> A.D. Coleman, *The Grotesque in Photography*, The Ridge Press Book, 1977.

<sup>23</sup> L.Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in ed.J.Evans and S.Hall, *Visual Culture: the reader*, Sage, 1999, pp.381-389.

<sup>24</sup> R Stam, R.Burgoyne & S. Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, p. 123.

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## 2. Non conformist director Kira Muratova

### 2.1 *Personality. Biographical notes and early films*

Before I write about film by Muratova, particular scenes or images in the films, I will start with some brief information about the director's personality in the context of cinematic reality. My approach is only partly chronological with some biographical notes. This chapter mainly deals with the films, produced during the Soviet-period (1962-1991), which I have grouped and analyzed based on their most important characteristics and *mise-en-scènes*.

Kira Korotkova was born in 1934 in Romania to a welfare family of communists; her father Georgii was Russian, her mother Natalia was Romanian. Her first language was Russian, but she graduated from school in Romania. Her foreign citizenship, which she kept until the 1970s, led to complications when she crossed the borders of the USSR. Possibly, the roots of her future passion to depict reality in the cinema from two or more different points of view and to use double images and create double meanings lie in her childhood. The existence of these two countries and languages from the very beginning of her life had also a positive influence. As Jane Taubman pointed out, 'this gave her exposure to contemporary West European cinema, which was unavailable to contemporaries in the USSR'.<sup>25</sup> After school she left her family in Romania and decided to move to Moscow to study at the University. Her biography is summarized in Jane Taubman's monograph<sup>26</sup>, which includes many references, quotations of critical publications and interviews translated from Russian and Ukrainian into English. I will highlight some important biographical issues, which relate to the understanding of Kira Muratova as a film director and helps define her position first in Soviet, then in post-Soviet and finally in European cinema.

Russian film critic Andrei Plakhov discerned three periods in Muratova's biography: classical, modernist and postmodernist.<sup>27</sup> Nancy Condee identified four stages in the director's cinematic biography. The first is the early Soviet period (1960s) –

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25 J.Taubman, *Kira Muratova*, Kinofile Filmmakers Companion 4, London, GBR: I.B. Tauris, 2005. p 1.

26 J.Taubman, *Kira Muratova*, Kinofile Filmmakers' Companion 4, London, GBR: I.B. Tauris, 2005.

27 A. Plakhov, *Vsego 33: Zvezdy mirovoi kinorezhissury*, Vinnitsa: Akvilon, 1999, pp. 201-212.

'provincial melodramas' and 'disqualified'. The second one is the late stagnation<sup>28</sup> period in the end of 1970s and beginning of 1980s. The third is the 'significant breakthrough' in Perestroika era, and a 'gentle' fourth stage, which started in the early 1990s after the collapse of Communism.<sup>29</sup> Surprisingly, Condee did not assign any stage to the films shot in the late 1990s and 2000s, although *Two in One* was included to her analysis. Jane Taubman placed the film *Asthenic Syndrome* in the center of Muratova's career and analyzed films before and after 'Soviet Apocalypse', as she called this film. She named the chapters, with reference to the respective first period: 'Provincial Melodramas', 'Unknown Muratova'; and to the second one: 'Crimes without Punishment', 'Muratova as Ukrainian Filmmaker' (1991-2005).<sup>30</sup> My own approach is close to Plakhov's, mostly because I recognize the last films by Muratova as postmodernist cinema.

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, Kira Muratova was involved in the film production not only as a film director, but played other key roles in many of her films, mainly as a screenwriter. In the very beginning of her cinematography career, she collaborated as a screenwriter and director along with her first husband Alexander Muratov. They directed two films together - *By the Steep Ravine* (1961) and *Our Honest Bread* (1964). Since then, she has participated more or less in the screen writing of almost all her feature films. This was comprehensible because she started from language studies and before entering into the Cinematography Institute (VGIK), she studied linguistics at Moscow State University. Another explanation, provided by Muratova herself, was that 'Any time, when I shoot a film, I move aside, everything bothers me and I start to enrich a film in moving to another direction in searching a new form, new level... What else should I do if it is definitely necessary for me? First of all I should please myself, right?'<sup>31</sup>

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28 'stagnation' is a late period of Breznev's government in USSR.

29 N.Condee, op.cit., p. 117.

30 J. Taubman, *Kira Muratova*, Kinofile Filmmakers' Companion 4, London, GBR: I.B. Tauris, 2005, p.1.

31 Kira Muratova, 'I always wanted to make quiet, modest, normal film', *Iskusstvo Kino*, no 11, 1997, p.62.

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After graduating from the Cinematography Institute, the course of Sergei Gerasimov,<sup>32</sup> she was sent to make films at Odessa Film Studio. Her first black-and-white feature films, *Brief Encounters* (1967) and *Long Farwells* (1971), were made very professionally and were at the same time reflexive and realist in the way that they illuminated the everyday life and 'realities of the social conjunctures from which they emerge'.<sup>33</sup> 'Provincial melodramas'<sup>34</sup> displayed simple people in a documentary reality (of Soviet life), based on a clear plot. The relationship between lovers is explored in the first mentioned film; a conversation between an elderly mother and her teenage son and their feelings form the plot in the second one. The main heroines represent Soviet intelligentsia, but they are not happy, instead they are 'reflexive'.<sup>35</sup> Although the narrative lines in these two early films are strong, in the structure there were manifestations of contrapuntal inserts, with many flashbacks and lacking a linear narrative. This was rather experimental for Soviet film of this period (artists of avant-garde were forgotten and shelved). She also mixed styles and used still photography in montage to create stronger feelings. Such kinds of experiments were not welcomed by the censorship of communist cinematography authorities. Moreover, Muratova was criticized for her main female character Zina in *Long Farwells*, because of her egoism, meager, petty-bourgeois ideology.<sup>36</sup> Another element that was new in this film was the language of the actors and actresses – realistic, rigorous and controlled speeches of bureaucrats, soft, with south accent language of Odessa folk, natural language of people from villages. These devices are attractive and intriguing. My suggestion is that it happened accidentally, unconsciously, since the actresses were young girls, students, who were born in the country sides of different provinces within the huge Soviet Union, who only came to Moscow to study. While the high schools struggled to remove this accent, Muratova tried to save it. Nevertheless, later these rich voices became a key peculiarity of

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32 Gerasimov, Sergei (1906–1985), Soviet film director and actor.

33 R.Stam, 'The question on Realism', in R.Stam&T.Miller (eds), *Film and Theory. An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, USA, 2000, p. 226.

34 N.Condee, 'Kira Muratova: The Zoological Imperium', in *The Imperial Trace: resent Russian cinema*, Oxford, 2009, p. 116.

35 Stam, op.cit., p. 227.

36 <M.Maschenko, Return. Notes about dramatical fate of film Long Farwells>  
<[http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/Soc\\_Gum/Ampm/2009\\_2/279-283.pdf](http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/Soc_Gum/Ampm/2009_2/279-283.pdf)>.

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Muratova's style and when answering for miscalculated interviews on questions about language, she explained: 'the fact is that people, whose language is different from the literary language, are more cheerful, than a literary speaking. They first come to the attention and are more often chosen to the character types and they seem to be more truthful.'<sup>37</sup> The result of all these ingenuous experiments and innovations of the young, ambitious director has been a dramatic fate. The films have gained a reputation as the opposition to the leading ideology. It was decided that they would be removed from the box office, 500 copies were destroyed (only 3 were saved),<sup>38</sup> and the director was 'downgraded'.<sup>39</sup> These two early films have also been considered in relation to the then fashionable Western modernism films by Bergman and Antonioni.<sup>40</sup> Within a particular political situation, such criticism has had an extremely negative impact on the reputation of the director. Perhaps because of this Muratova denied the influence of the classics on her cinema. About Bergman she said much later: 'As for me, in Bergman there is not enough of barbarism... Even such a "lovely, wonderful" - in the words of Muratova - film like *Autumn Sonata*, is not without the dictates of "accursed questions": mother and daughter, who is right, the problem of generations, and so on. This inevitably involves some moral judgments and conclusions, and they, according to Muratova, are illegitimate'.<sup>41</sup>

When talking about auteur film theory, and its critics, one of the counterarguments, which is discussed by Peter Wollen and Robert Stam, is that there is always a group of people working on a film; 'the director does not have full control over his work'<sup>42</sup> and the quality depends on cameras, flashes, other technical issues,<sup>43</sup> infrastructure and money. This is even the matter for low-budget pictures. In this case, the figure of Kira Muratova is a controversial example. Her position in the Soviet cinema, whether geographical, social, national, or gender, was a permanent swim against the tide.

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37 Russian Kurier, 2004, September, p.5.

38 Z. Abdullaeva, *Kira Muratova*, Iskustvo kino, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moscow, 2008, 48.

39 Condee, p. 116.

40 Andrei Plakhov, *Vsego 33: Zvezdy mirovoi kinorezhissury*, Vinnitsa: Akvilon, 1999, pp.201-212.

41 Kira Muratova: 'I fell out of love with great cinema', recorded by Andrei Plachov, *Séance*, vol.13, ch.2, 1996.

< <http://seance.ru/n/13/glava2-bergman-vrossii/kira-muratova-yarazlyubila-bolshoe-kino/> >

42 P.Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema*, London, 1972, p.104.

43 R. Stam, *Film Theory. An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publication, 2000, p.90.

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Films which she shot in the Soviet-era, were made in spite of the existing ideology. They were criticized, edited to such an extent that the director had to give up her authorship. Films had extremely limited or banned distribution, lacked financial support and sometimes were even shelved, as was the case with two of the above mentioned first films. Her disqualification, based on ideological reasons, meant no access to shoot the films and since there were only state controlled film production studios, few alternatives existed; it was either leave the country (as Tarkovski and many other artists did) or to do something else. So Muratova stayed in Odessa and worked at the Odessa film studio in the museum and as an engineer of the scientific organization of labor.<sup>44</sup>

During the next twenty years, from 1971 to 1991, Muratova made only four films. All of them are very different in screen writing, plot and theme. *Getting to Know the Big, Wide World* (1978) is her first color film, a challenge to shoot about Soviet reality. The result was the same. Muratova 'rewrote' the short story by Baklanov, originally written in the traditional 'Socialist realism' <sup>45</sup> style and created again an 'incorrect'<sup>46</sup> film with her own poetic, original view on the reality and place of man in the world. Since she was criticized for contraposition of social and private, and stylistic frictions in former films, in the next two films she tried to take the theme as far away from the Soviet reality as possible.

Two films: *Among the Grey Stones* (1983) and *A Change of Fate* (1987) are cinematic adaptations of classical literature. Based on the original text by Russian writer Vladimir Korolenko, written in 1881-1884, the film *Among the Grey Stones* (1983) was edited so much against the wishes of the director that she refused to put her name in the credits. The film was screened under the name Ivan Sodorov.<sup>47</sup>

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44 Z.Abdulaeva, op.cit., p.48.

45 Taubman, op.cit., p.9.

46 Ibid, p.33.

47 Ibid, p.38.

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*A Change of Fate* is a thriller, the third screen version<sup>48</sup> based on the play *The Letter*, written by English writer William Somerset Maugham in 1926.

The plot of *A Change of Fate* almost completely corresponds to the original text by Maugham, with the exception of the final scene. The main character, who is the wife of a rich and respected plantation owner, kills her lover out of jealousy and is committed to prison. According to her explanation and obtained evidence, she killed a man who wanted to rape her. The lawyer and her husband are sure that she is not guilty, but then suddenly emerges a note from the wife to the lover, written the same day when the murder occurred. This turn of events changed a person's fate, but unexpectedly, it was that of her husband's. He paid for the note (letter), read it and during the party celebrating his wife's discharge from prison, committed suicide. The title of the film has some connotations relating to the situation in Soviet society of that time. This film appeared in 1987, when the Soviet Union started to provide many freedoms in society, including 'glasnost'<sup>49</sup> in the arts and press. This period is also known as 'perestroika'.<sup>50</sup> It was definitely the change of fate for the whole country. But what nobody knew was that this period would mark the beginning of the total collapse of the regime. What about the film scenes in connection to this historical context? The main expression of 'a change of fate' was created in the remarkable *mise-en-scène*, which was repeated a couple of times in the film. It shows a horse riding untied and free through the deserted fields. A symbol of freedom of the spirit resonates with the acquisition of freedom in the film's narrative. Apart from the image of a free horse, realistically filmed, in the film appear framed paintings depicting a horse running across the field. It creates a vision of slow motion. I consider the painting of horse as a kind of social report in this context. The imposition of representations of one another was a sign of post-modern cinema in Muratova's art. The setting and costumes are unusual, since it displays oriental Singapore. Because of the exotic places for settings and influence of Armenian-

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48 First directed by J.de Limur(USA) in 1929, then by W.Wyler in 1940(USA).

<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0020092/>, >,< <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0032701/>>

49 Means 'freedom of speeches', in A.H.Karriker, *Woman in Contemporary World Cinema*, 2002, p. 106.

50 Means 'reconstruction', in Karriker, p. 112.

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Georgian film director Sergei Paradjanov on Muratova during this period, Jane Taubman treats all three of these films of Soviet time mentioned above as 'ornamentalism'.<sup>51</sup> Taubman cited Muratova's own words: 'I love the brilliant director Sergei Paradjanov. I consider him my teacher ... He had a great influence on me...'<sup>52</sup>

The element of grotesque, which is a remarkable device of the film, captured the scenes and characters through the whole film. Many dialogues could be called artificial and grotesque, with their many times repetitions. The images of animals are connected to the human characters in such a way, that they create a mixed representation of a 'civilized zoo'<sup>53</sup>, as Zara Abdulaeva noted. One of the *mise-en-scènes* is showing the cell of a tiger located close to Maria's cell. Both of them are growling and yawning in the prison. But in another scene, after the grotesque 'alive attraction' by magicians-prisoners, made for her, Maria said: 'It is funny in prison!' The meaning is not only grotesque but resembles the reality of the society.

Other devices used in the film are: the sudden interruption of the narrative story by off-narrative monologues from another time and space, and two or more diegetic scenes, created from different visual angles and integrated into the different parts of the plot. An instance of this is a description of how the murder happened, which is accompanied by different visual scenes, but maintains the same narrative voice of the heroine. Finally, what is important in this film is an appearance of a 'femme fatale':<sup>54</sup> a woman, who is ruining the men's lives and at the same time 'fully assuming her own fate'.<sup>55</sup> Muratova would explore and develop this figure in the future.

The last film of the Soviet epoch, *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989, but released in 1990), is one of the well-known, described and analyzed in many sources as a crucial product of Soviet cinematography and of Muratova's own career. Some critics, as Plakhov

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51 Taubman, p.35.

52 Taubman, op.cit., p. 9.

53 Abdulaeva, op.cit., 117.

54 S.Zizek, 'Pornography', in R.Stam&T.Miller (eds) *Film&Theory. An Anthology*, p. 535-536.

55 Zizek, op.cit., p. 536.



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and Condee labeled this film as blacking the reality or 'chernukha'.<sup>56</sup> Jane Taubman devoted the chapter 'Soviet Apocalypse: *Asthenic Syndrome*' to describe the film. She emphasizes in details the plot, characters, mise-en-scènes, shots and meanings. She also described the troubles this film went through in making it to the screen, quoting a series of publication from Soviet and foreign press.

This film is an exceptional cinematic text as a work of art in meaning how it is constructed. The social issues are also ambitious and polysemic. I would not downplay its significance. Muratova puts an equal sign between personal and social suffering in this film. In addition, she portrays the last stage of social and moral ugliness and degradation of late Soviet society system. The theme of grotesque is one of the main topics of the film. It corresponds to the term of 'ugly',<sup>57</sup> which has been used often as its synonym. I disagree with the definition of ugliness by Adorno, who considered that the beauty is violent and originated in the free-wheeling ugly meant liberalism and proletariat.<sup>58</sup> While he 'endowed ugliness with moral beauty and humanitarian mission'<sup>59</sup> in his *Aesthetic theory* in 1970, Muratova showed in 1990 that from the ugliness of the so-called proletariat power only disgusting double ugliness has appeared. Muratova was brave to give the country a mark of zero. But later she will give the zero to the planet. In *Asthenic Syndrom* appeared animals, in particular homeless cats, dogs and their fate, which will be in Muratova's focus in the future.

The film consists of two parts: black-and-white and color. These two parts are essentially two separate stories without a common narrative, but are connected by the theme instead. This theme is asthenia<sup>60</sup> or asthenic syndrom. Taubman, when writing about the film did not explain the term itself, although it is coined from the field of medicine and not common to use in cultural or film studies. According to the Oxford

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56 Taubman, p.98.

57 N.Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, op.cit., p. 282.

58 Ibid, p. 283.

59 Ibid.

60 <[http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/asthenia?q=asthenic#asthenia\\_\\_2](http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/asthenia?q=asthenic#asthenia__2)>.

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dictionary 'asthenia' is a disease of physical weakness or lack of energy.<sup>61</sup> Two characters—the female and male—are suffering of this 'diagnoses', which is just another word for strong and deep neurotic depression. What is important is that Muratova changed the traditional stereotypes of gender roles. The female character's depression is aggressive, while the male's is totally weak. He falls asleep in the most inappropriate situations and in the end is admitted to the hospital for the insane. He realizes there that people in the hospital are the same as those outside of it.

The fate of the film was not easy, but this became something of habit for Muratova due to her idealism and non-conformist character. The film received mixed reviews from critics and the party leadership. It was released in limited copies. What is important about *Asthenic Syndrome* and some others films of the Soviet and post-Soviet era is the appearance of the grotesque and the margins of realism - surrealism, hyper realism, yet still like contours to show up, but which will become more clearly and vividly apparent in the last two films.

## 2.2 *Subject matter of late films (1992-2009)*

To shoot new films after the depression, schizophrenic diseases and nihilism of post-modern *Asthenic syndrome*, in spite of new economical possibilities was like, echoing Theodor Adorno, 'to write a poem after Auschwitz'.<sup>62</sup> It is possible to say that after *Asthenic Syndrome*, Muratova has become famous, well known primarily in the former Soviet Union, but abroad too. Interviews in the newspapers and magazines appeared, scripts, invitations to the film festivals, awards, major review, critique – positive and not laudatory, films retrospectives. All films made after 1992, received prizes and participated at the festivals in Sochi, Vyborg, Moscow, Kiev, Berlin, Karlovy Vary. This is despite the fact that after *Asthenic Syndrome* Muratova applied to quiet and 'gentler' themes. In the 1990-s she shot four films. Three full-length: *The Sentimental Policeman* (1992), *Enthusiasms* (1994) and *Three Stories* (1997) and one

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61 Ibid.

62 R. Stam, *Film Theory, An introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publication, 2000, p.302.

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short film *Letter to America* (1999). In this chapter I will highlight several themes in Muratova films of 1990-s and 2000-s and discuss scenes, in which these topics are most clearly displayed. In the 2000-s Muratova directed seven films, included two last films, which I will analyze in the next two parts of the project.

### 2.2.1 *Man and Woman*

It's notable that in the later Muratova's films there is almost no love between characters. If it exists, then it is manifested as something painful. In the film *Getting to Know the Big Wide World* (1978), the heroine declares: 'Nobody loves no one!' In another film - *Chekhov's Motifs* (2002), other heroine, played, incidentally, by the same actress Nina Ruslanova says: 'I love, when someone loves someone else!' Thus, love is depicted as something unachievable.

The most prominent image, which Muratova explores in late films to depict the relationship between man and woman is 'femme fatale' and everything what is connected to this image. 'Femme fatale',<sup>63</sup> which appeared in *A Change of Fate* (1987), explored in several followed films: *Enthusiasms* (1994), *Tree Stories*(1997), *Minor People* (2001), *The Tuner*(2004). The concept of the figure of 'femme fatale' was coined in the classic film noir<sup>64</sup> and translated from French as 'deadly woman'. Film Noir revolved around the recurring story of the private detective – a hero or protagonist. In his surroundings there was often a woman, who was either in search of fortune or own profit, and by using her femininity, helplessness and sexuality she could get what she wanted from the film's hero. My thought when I bring up this particular object is that in the films *A Change of Fate* and *The Tuner* the female characters are typical femme fatale, who are always with the element of grotesque. Lina in *The Turner* can be easily associated with this character. Her partner piano tuner Andrusha fell over her heels and he could even kill to get money for her.

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63 S.Zizek, 'Looking Awry', in R.Stam&T.Miller (ed.) *Film&Theory. An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publication, 2000 p. 535-536.

64 Ibid.

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Femme fatale is connected with the theme of death, which arose often in Muratova's films. In *The Turner* Lina appeared on the screen with a scythe, similar and ironically like they are drawing a death in the books illustrations or cartoons.

Muratova is deconstructing male and female images, eliminating them from the stereotypical readings and creating a new reading instead. For instance, Muratova's women, played by N.Leble, U.Kilter, R.Litvinova and N.Buzko are attractive by their grotesque manners and mysterious charm, but they destroy the orders of patriarchal life: they do not want to be the objects.

### 2.2.2 Violence

An important feature of Muratova's films is that the violence is shown in a peculiar authorial way. Her films give a viewer an unattractive picture of human being. She talks sincerely, open and courageous about violent nature of a man. Her depiction of violence is based on two main themes: power and human nature. Social institutions, such as prisons, schools, police, hospitals are always violent in her films and represent the evil. In Muratova's films the situations of humiliation and suffering, especially of children and animal are connected to violence. Muratova has researched the manifestations of human brutal and aggressive acting in the man's unconsciousness. An explicit violence she depicted in the films, where the murders were shown: *Three Stories*, *Chekhov's Motifes*, *Minor People* and *Two in One*.

### 2.2.3 Body

Body discourse in the film studies necessarily leads to concept of 'the gaze',<sup>65</sup> although concerning more mainstream cinema, what means male cinema at the same time. In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* Laura Mulvey, borrowing the term

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65 L.Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in ed.J.Evans and S.Hall, *Visual Culture:the reader*, Sage, 1999, pp.381-389.

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from psychoanalysis argues that voyeuristic and fetishistic issues determinate Hollywood cinema. According to her, woman is always an object for male gaze.<sup>66</sup> In Muratova's films she shows a male nudity, and men, who are often passive, rather ugly, sometime 'feminized'. Her visual images of the body are grotesque and they are questioning the male model of the audience. Her cinema style could be depicted as deconstruction of dominant cinema codes, but without rejecting them. Showing a nude man as the object violates the usual codes of European cinema and turns gender roles. Mostly in the late cinema Muratova emphasizes an image of a weak man and strong woman. In her late films there are many female characters, which are close to femme-fatale and could continue a discourse on the male gaze. Nancy Condee called Muratova's depicting of the beautiful actress's images, as Renata Litvinova for example, 'discourse on legs'.<sup>67</sup> She connected this character to Freuds 'celebration of the death instinct in all its erotic lubrication'.<sup>68</sup> The female protagonist *Ofelia* in the same titled part of the film *Tree Stories*, played by Litvinova, had an orgasm every time when she killed women, who had abandoned their infants. Here and in many others films, Muratova appeals to irrational issues on psychology of 'the lower bodily stratum', which Mikhail Bakhtin discussed in connection to the concept of carnivalesque.<sup>69</sup>

The basis of this concept is that there are high and low themes in the arts by the analogy with the bourgeois notions of binary races and classes – low-high or by religious hell-paradise. An academic style in the arts before modernism, had served the upper classes and the bourgeoisie. Bakhtin defined that 'the grotesque' is a symbol of protest against the dominant politics and culture, and carnival on the medieval squares, with its colonial masks, ridicule and parody of the upper classes, using a low body physiology in words and gestures is a strategy of critique and protest against dominant ideology. The existence of various deviations, marginalized subjects, mental patients, alcoholics, homeless people and animals, homosexuals,

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66 L.Mulvey, op.cit., pp. 381-390.

67 N.Condee, 'Kira Muratova: The Zoological Imperium', in: *The Imperial trace: recent Russian cinema*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2009, pp.128-130.

68 Ibid, p.130.

69 N.Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, op.cit., p.284.

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prostitutes, twins of all ages and sexes, became common features in Muratova's films. The images of these characters and their bodies could be ascribed as grotesque. The social nature of the grotesque, which is connected to 'ugly' was described in some of Bakhtin's works, first of all in his dissertation on the French satirical writer Rabelias.<sup>70</sup> The nature of the grotesque was described by A.D. Coleman in *The Grotesque in Photography*. His concept of grotesque includes the following basic characteristics: 1) deformity and destruction of physical bodies, which includes a death depiction, 2) uncanny, demonic nature, 3) violation of social order in a certain historical period and geographical place.<sup>71</sup> One can find grotesque images, characters, situations and dialogues in all of the films by Muratova, which she started to shoot from 1992: *The Sentimental Policeman* (1992), *Enthusiasms* (1994), *Three Stories* (1997), *Minor People* (2001), *The Tuner* (2004) *Chekhov's Motifs* (2002). An important notion on grotesque is its historical and geographical conditionality. In other words, what is normal in certain period in one country could be interpreted as grotesque in another place time.

One of the main grotesque images in Muratova's film is twins. Twins represent doubling of the nature and Muratova is continually using these images in her films. Female doubles and male twins are depicted not from the point of view of their similarities, but in finding their differences, uniqueness and asymmetrical issues in human nature. In connection to psychoanalysis the questions of exhibitionism and narcissism might be applied to the twins concept. In this discourse on twins in the cinema, Muratova is perhaps the main specialist, but in the visual arts in general an issue of grotesque images of 'freaks' and twins inspired such photographers as Diana Arbus and Mary Ellen Mark's in their series of twins in the photography art.<sup>72</sup>

### 2.3 *Technical traits*

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70 M.Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1984.

71 A.D. Coleman, *The Grotesque in Photography*, The Ridge Press Book, 1977, p.9, 30, 32.

72 *M.E.Mark by C.Hagen*, Phaidon Press, New York, 2006.

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Kira Muratova has been shooting different cinema - genre films, similar to thriller, one of which *Three Stories* some critics, including Jane Taubman compares with *Pulp Fiction* by Tarantino,<sup>73</sup> melodramas, short films, plotless films and complex cinema constructions, which is often include a documentary, or wedged other genres such as theater or circus. Beautiful narrative films about simple people and their feelings, based on a clear plot, replaced later by innovative combinations of the postmodern era - plotless movies, the marginal, the use of profanity, heteroglossia in languages far from universally accepted norms and rules. Naturally, in the sixties Muratova filmed black-and-white films. But she continued to shoot black-and-white film in the 2000s, combining it with the advent of color or use pieces of black and white film by mounting them in a color picture. In the 1990s and 2000s Muratova stopped to shoot films in pure realism and documentary reality as she did before and turned to the fairy tales and comedies. Although the devices of structure of the film, as flashbacks and lack of linear narrative remained. Certain techniques in films Muratova will occur in the analysis of two recent films: flashbacks, the breaks of the narration by inserts.

According to my auteurist approach to the film study of Muratova, I will put an attention on her distinctive style and language with the focus on 'mise-en-scène'. As pointed by Robert Stam, an expression through mise-en-scène is a most common method used by directors to imprint their stylistic signature.<sup>74</sup> Muratova's mise-en-scène in late film, which includes actors, props and setting are often made in a way to deconstruct the existence norms and rulers. A style of Muratova's cinema has been changed radically, although with saving and developing of some permanent audiovisual elements. Her work is a transition from the classical narrative films to postmodernist cinema. Muratova's auteur film is similar to the conceptual art, when every simple image and combining of images in a certain structure gave a new and often unexpected meaning. Her film art is located between classical canons and aesthetic posture (pose), which is not a stranger to kitsch. I will try to define the main

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73 J. Taubman, *Kira Muratova*. The Filmmaker's Companion 4. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005, p. 77.

74 R.Stam, 'The Author', in R.Stam&T.Miller (ed.) *Film and Theory. An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publication, 2000, p.6.

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traces and components of the style. These traces I will depict in details, when analyzing the films *Two in One* and *Melody for Street-Organ*, but some examples of *mise-en-scène* I will put here as brief illustrations.

Narrative devices: changes in the canons of dramatic art; deformation of the texture and time are common devices in Muratova's film. For example, in the film *Chekhov's Motifs*, there is a scene in a church, it is a wedding, shot in the real time space, which is rather unusual in the cinema and seems as a grotesque setting. The favorite trick of Muratova, when the narratives went to the culminating stage and have got the most significance and pathos, to insert a certain detail, which is destroying the tragedy, sublimity and spirituality of the situation. In film *Two in One* we could see such kind of *mise-en-scène*. The actor, who plays the protagonist in the second part of the film, came behind the stage and saw a corpse on stage. He takes off his hat, as it is a common gesture for men when somebody is dead, but his tragic and pathetic mood is destroyed by the words of the office manager, who asked him to sign the papers for the payment of a wreath at the dead man.

An exalted theatricality, grotesque plastic, decorative images in costumes, expressive performances and carnival are integrated almost in all films by Muratova. Such audio devices as: long monologues, reading poetry, exaggerated confession, overlapping phrases, refrains and heteroglossia I could note as invariable elements in the films. There are not only repeating images, but using in every new film some items from the previous film. For example, in the film *Melody for a Street Organ*, there is a scene in a supermarket with the decorations, depicting the images from the film *Two in One*. Using the unusual places for setting, the connotations of which create certain cultural meanings are common as well. Settings in Muratova's film include all kind of institutions: the school, the hippodrome and circus ring, the hospital, the zoo, the birdcage, the pound, the police station, the court, the prison, the toilet. These places are representing the power and repressing mechanism over the human being.

Muratova is combining stars and masters with amateurs in her castings. She 'creates' stars also, as it happened with Renata Litvinova, who was a script writer before she



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started to play in Muratova's films. An engaging of nonprofessional actors in difference to other auteur directors who have also used this device as for instance Viskonti, Bunuel, Pasolini or Trier, in Muratova's case is connected to heteroglossia and grotesque.

Every element that makes up the style Muratova has its angle of curvature, it does not exist in pure form, and never repeated, each time it produces a new code. Therefore, the devices of Muratava's film can not be copied, although such attempts have been provided. For example the films: *The Goddess: How I Fell in Love*, directed by Renata Litvinova and *Smile* by Sergei Popov. Artificial affectations, narrative failure, resistance to deformation by the paradoxes of perception give rise to a sense of Muratova film of living matter.

### 3. *Two in One* as a meta-theater

*Two in One* is a feature film, shot in 2006, and released in 2007. For the first time in her career, Muratova so explicitly applied to the theater and created two acts of theatrical performance. This film, which was called a 'tragic-comedy' when it was screened at the movie theaters, is terrifying and funny at the same time. The first time I saw the film when it was presented at the exhibition 'After Eisenstein' at Lund's Konsthall in Sweden in the autumn of 2008. Two different authors, Evgenii Golubenko and Renata Litvinova, who both collaborated with Muratova on many projects, wrote the scripts to each part.

#### 3.1 *Structure and narratives*

The film consists of two separate parts—*Stagehands* and *A Woman of Life*. These parts have no common narrative, but as narrative and formalistic approach (fabula, plot), is not a main concern of my analysis, I will investigate them together. In *Two in One* realism, fantasy, comedy, tragedy and farce are combined together and created a grotesque hyper-reality. Moreover, such visual phenomena as performance and circus are also integrated into the film, as well as other art forms: literature, sculpture, painting, photography and music are shown in it.

In the film, which has a complicated construction, some prominent features of Muratova's auteur film appear quite prominently – a non-linear, contrapuntal<sup>75</sup> narrative and displacement of the plot's parts. It means that an introduction, ending and culmination substitute rapidly each other. Structuring the film with embedded narrative, a mechanism which has been used successfully in several films, is one of the favorite devices of the director. One of Muratova's most acknowledged films *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989), was also constructed from two parts without a common narrative. Furthermore, different parts of *Letter to America* (1999), *Chekhov's*

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75 R.Stam, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotic*, op.cit., p. 63.

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*Motifes* (2002) and *Three Stories* (1997) were connected only by the theme or its relation to the literature sources.

The parts of *Two in One*, in spite of the absence of a prevailing narrative, slowly shift from one to the other and are integrated into the whole film. The audience knows the titles of the parts only in the concluding credits at the end of the film. The first part, *Stagehands*, represents the theater behind the stage and another one called *A Woman of Life* is a spectacle in and of itself. If the title of the film could be read with scores of connotations, the chapters' titles denote just exactly what one can imagine when thinking about stagehands and woman of life (dream).

Another feature of the structure is that the action in both parts of the film, after it apparently comes to the climax, goes in an unexpected direction. For example, in the scene in the first part of the film, when the actor Borisov hanged himself on the stage of the theater, everybody waited for the police to arrive. The logical expectations of the events are: police, interrogations and the performance canceled. But neither one nor any of the other expected events happened. Instead, the dead body stayed on the stage and the spectacle was not canceled. "The show must go on!"

On the one hand, the film *Two in One* represents the reality of the theater, namely, a story about the life of the theater behind the scenes. On the other hand, we could see the theatrical performance in the second part. In addition the two parts represent the two worlds, which can roughly be read as the two struggling classes—the owners and the workers (employees). It should be stated that Muratova is not creating sympathy for any of the worlds or classes, because it is difficult to avoid reading almost all the characters projected on the screen as disgusting.

The first scene of the film shows the theater stage, where the stagehand is rehearsing the main theatrical text of all times – Hamlet's monologue 'To be, or not to be'. The action takes place in the early morning, the chairs in the hall are covered by white material and the only viewer who is listening to this monologue is a person who is currently watching a movie. The scene resembles a fragment of the film *Brief*

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*Encounters*, where the heroine, to paraphrase Shakespeare, spoke to a similar lack of the audience in an empty apartment, "To wash, or not to wash" (plates and dishes). Ironically, this joke inserted into a sad, serious, realistic, black-and-white melodrama, holds no comparison with the seriousness of the sacred and grotesque reading of Shakespeare by the stagehand to himself (to moviegoers). The next image of the film is the corpse of the actor Borisov, hanged on the stage. He is visible to the viewer, but the characters will see him only after some time. The death of the actor is not a tragedy for the stagehand. He only says angrily: 'Borisov, bastard, hanged himself, a goat!' And in the future course of events, namely, the preparation for the play, this death will not disturb the work much and no one will be interested in the cause of the actor's suicide. Indifference is the main emotion that is expressed almost without exception by all the characters.

The corpse in the beginning of the film refers again to the *Asthenic syndrome*. But if an action in the former was going on almost in a documentary reality and the death of the female character's husband in the beginning of the film became a crucial power of narration, in *Two in One* the death is at a maximum level of both theatrical and conventional. The destruction of the boundaries of reality and the modality of reality is one of the characteristics of the film. In the next scene, the viewer meets the visualization of the real chickens behind the scenes, accompanied by a chicken's natural clucking sound. Then the horse props also make the appropriate animal sounds. In reality it is not possible for the subject props to make such noise. Thus, the shaken modality of reality has appeared. It then becomes of little important whether or not the horse is real; the chickens are real, because we are in the theater.

But the meaning of the chicken's representation is not so simple and explicit as it might look. The 'chicken scene' has at least two meanings. The denotation of the film in the title *Two in One*, leads to the understanding that everything we are watching has at least two meanings. The fact that there are chickens behind the scenes of the theater may indicate their need for diegetic representation in the spectacle, but also another explanation of the meaning of this scene could be ascertained—chickens are kept for the subsistence needs of the actors or stage workers. An evidence of my

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suggestion is a discussion between the chef of the workers and two stagehands, who staled the cock, killed it and sold it on the market. According to Mikhail Iampolski, this scene is not symbolic at all. He considers and I agree with him, that Muratova is continually desymbolising well known cultural images, in this case a cock, which connotes glory of the sun, the victory of life over death and the guide to the netherworld.<sup>76</sup>

In the first part of the film, two actresses and the actor who will play the protagonist in the second part, appear in some scenes of the narrative. All three play themselves in the first part, or literally to say they play the actors. Then, in the second part, *A Woman of Life*, they play their roles. The hero of the second part, an aging super lover Andrei Andreevich, is looking for the woman of his life. This is announced by a special entertainer (conférencière) before the first theatrical act, and in the film the second story begins.

The second part is set during the night of New Year's in the huge apartment of Andrei Andreevich. From time to time he is trying to persuade his daughter to engage in a sexual relationship, while talking and complaining about his loneliness. Then, the daughter's friend Alice comes to the house. She becomes an object of dream; the woman of life and he starts to prepare a night of love with her on the black-and-black bed. The verbal description of the bed is black, but Alice and the audience can see that the bed is white instead. These two main events—the incest and the sexual intercourse with Alice—have pulled away all time, keeping the audience in suspense, and finally, the climax occurs. The daughter and her friend Alice drown Andrei Andreevich in the bathtub. But, in the tradition of recent films by Muratova, this is not the culmination; the dead man is alive. On the 'Potemkin Stairs', well known by the terrifying scene of the baby carriage rolled down the steps in *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein, Andrei Andreevich, who drowned in the previous scene, is running with a knife, intent on killing Alice. (Figure 1) Then, he falls on the white

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<sup>76</sup> M. Iampolski, 'The puppet became a puppeteer', in K. Donin, *Kadr za kadrom: Kira Muratova. Khronika odnogo filma*, Kiev, Atlant-UMC Ltd, 2007, p. 9.

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snow wearing the white bathrobe, which he called 'black-black'. For the first time the film is transferred from the studio and theater space to the street.



Figure 1

However, the meta theater continues. The action moves to the bathroom. Andrei Andreevich calls Alice by phone. She works as a tram driver. The scenes shift between the bath and the tram, and end in the tram.

### 3.2. *Sounds*

*Two in One* is a movie, which sounds furthest eccentrically, as well as other Muratova's films. The sounds in her films are recognizable, and are central to an understanding of the style of her cinema. One could perceive the sounds as attractive or irritating, but the sounds will never leave the spectator indifferent. This film represents rich, sharp and poignant 'soundscapes',<sup>77</sup> which are created by the different diegetic sounds, voices, various music themes and types, noises, real animal sounds and theirs sounds produced by man. Along with describing the traditional audio-visual signs in this film, such as dialogues and monologues, I will emphasize several particularities, which are the interesting characteristics of Muratova's style—animalistic sounds, refrains and heteroglossia.

Insomuch as *Two in One* is a 'theater film', it is logical to expect the theatralisation of speeches and mannered language in the film. It is correct, but the grotesque manner,

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Elsaesser & Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses*, London, Routledge, 2010, p.131.

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which is one more important characteristic of late Muratova's films of dialogues and monologues moves beyond the necessities of the narratives. Speeches are often non-diegetic. An example of such speech, which is constructed as a separate performance is the scene, when the stagehand Viktor Utkin is reading Hamlet's monologue in the empty theater hall. Possibly the meaning of this speech is to place the audience in the theater atmosphere, or another intention might be Muratova's irony on classical theater or Shakespeare himself. In any case this beautiful scene, in an attractive mimetic combination of image and speech, does not aid the audience in following the narrative. Dialogues and monologues, as well as refrains in the film are structured in a way to show the broken communication, or lack of communication between people. Probably this is one of the meanings of the whole film. Almost all actors while playing the roles do not speak to each other; they do not listen to each other; they do not answer the questions and each of them exists in their own world.

The main characteristic of the language of the characters in the film is heteroglossia. I would like to provide some examples. The stagehands speak definitely different languages, despite the fact that this language is Russian. One could argue that languages of different social classes are represented in the same social group. Victor Utkin is a primitive man; it is hard for him to express his thoughts. Boriska, on the other hand, speaks an archaic language of classical novels and plays of the nineteenth-century. But they both work as stagehands, so they represent the same social class. According to Simon Dentith's interpretation of Bakhtin's definition, heteroglossia forms when many styles of language are used in the same text. He wrote in the book *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* about heteroglossia:

'The language used by characters in the novel, how they speak, is verbally and semantically autonomous; each character's speech possesses its own belief system, since each is the speech of another in another's language.'<sup>78</sup> The theatrical reality behind the scenes represents contrast types of verbal texts. I would divide them into two parts: formal, literature language, which was in use in the beginning of the twentieth century, and is reminiscent of the plays of Anton Chekhov acting by

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<sup>78</sup> S. Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought : An Introductory Reader*, Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1994, p. 226.

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noblemen and merchants who wanted to be like nobles; and the 'working class' language, slang with vernacular and obscene words. Definitely being obsessed with language in her film, Muratova created a sarcastic scene on the controversy of 'pure language'. The actors, who stay near the body of hanged actor Borisov, are talking about how one of them borrowed money from him one day before the self-murder. Then, the discussion moves on in a mannered way about the linguistic nuances between the words 'borrow' or 'lend', and when it is correct to use them.

In this film, as in some other recent films of Muratova, much profanity is used. But if in the film *Asthenic Syndrome*, a scene of abuse diverted from the narrative, in *Two in One*, on the contrary, the use of the obscene words is appropriate in the context of the social categories of people who speak them. The nature of obscene speech, the boundaries of formal and informal speech, the ban on the obscene in literary texts, Mikhail Bakhtin found that everything related to fertilization, pregnancy, childbirth, incompleteness of the human body, were forbidden in official language rules.<sup>79</sup> In this particular film, what is unusual is that Muratova changed the common practice of ascribing to the character the language of his or her social class and mixed different styles together not only in the same group, but also to the same characters in different situations. So, we could hear such words as 'penis' and 'come' said by an 'old rich unlucky lover', by his daughter or by her friend, but structurally as diegetic language figures.

A common practice of Muratova's of using the repetition of words, phrases and sentences can be seen in *Two in One*. The peculiarity of the given film is that there are less repetitions, in comparison to her other films. The nature of repetitions and refrains has been researched by many writers. Zara Abdullaeva has deduced the following reasons: to reflect an illusion of natural language of the people in the streets of the city Odessa (yes, people talk like this there), to connect the film language with poetry and music (opera in particular), and to provoke (as usual till

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79 Ibid, p. 344.



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sickness).<sup>80</sup> Muratova explained that she uses repetitions in film because of her love for opera.<sup>81</sup> I consider that to be only one possible explanation, and I would add that this repetition of sound is similar to the natural language of how a mother talks to her child.

Muratova uses a variety of sound effects from the first scenes of the movie. The external diegetic sound, for example, the thunder that appears in an empty theater hall. Sounds of animals—neighing of horses, birds chirping, chickens clucking—were all included in the unified soundscape. Long sequence captured the attention by the technical sound occurrence, when the telephone of the self-hanged actor rings. Nobody takes the phone out from the pocket of the corpse. In fact, the question of why the actor Borisov hanged himself is never addressed. Moreover, one of the actors says: 'Beautiful Death! To live and die on stage! This is definitely his best role!'

Muratova does not use music in the opening credits, as usual, and this film is no exception. This is hardly some sort of regular feature, but judging from the consistency of the director to use the elements that shaped the trend and style, it may well be a deliberate move. The diegetic music is represented by the aria of Placido Domingo, which was used by Andrei Anreevich as a background for his guests, then by the opera singer disguised as Salvador Dali. All these examples frame time, place and social issues.

An abundance of animal sounds, reproduced by people, are included. One of the stagehands named Jura, growls like a dog and looks like a dog as well. Alice and Andrei meow like cats; then Andrei continues to meow alone. A more detailed discourse of the human-animal relationship will be included in last section of this chapter.

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<sup>80</sup> Abdullaeva, pp. 227-238.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

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In the conclusion of this part, I would like to emphasize a grotesque manner of language of almost all the characters in the film and the nuances of laugh and scream, which are many. Everybody is laughing in the film. Stagehands are laughing aggressively and mad-like. Andrei Andreevich's laugh is infernal; Alica laughs like a fool. And there are laughs of the public in the street in two scenes. In spite of the many laughs, it seems that there is nothing funny for the heroes of the film, nor for the audience. However, the audience is not a homogenous group with the same sense of humor.

### 3.3 *Film and other art forms*

In the very beginning and during the first decades of cinema history, films were considered a form of entertainment or attraction, but not an art. Semiotic theoreticians Saussure, Lacan, Althusser and Barthes (SLAB) write about film definitions and the differences between film and others mediums. Already in 1911 Ricciotto Candudo in the *Birth of Six Arts* suggested that cinema is 'plastic art in motion',<sup>82</sup> which absorbs the other art forms: painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, music and dance.<sup>83</sup> Robert Stam considered that Candudo's theory anticipated Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas on 'carnavalesque'.<sup>84</sup> With regard to carnival, Bakhtin believed that humor and laughter lead to a certain freedom from violence, power and government. A carnival is a historical mechanism of social expression which is opposed to power, according to Bakhtin. Although Bakhtin's ideas originate from linguistics, they are also relevant to film and arts in general. Thus, carnival or carnivalesque is based on humor and laughter not only directed at the others, but also at themselves. Self-reflexivity is also a sign of postmodernism in cinema,<sup>85</sup> as R. Stam has noted.

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82 R. Stam, *Film Theory, An Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2000, p.35.

83 Ibid, p. 28.

84 See p. 21.

85 Stam, p. 303.

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Film in the post-modern time presents first of all 'the recording arts',<sup>86</sup> and secondly, a synthesis of arts. From one side, the film *Two in One* is an example of syntheses in that it takes the formalistic point of view and because it absorbs literature and theater. From another side, the different art forms are shown on the stage through scenes, images and topics. I will discuss, describe and explain these images and topics.

*Two in One* is based on a complex relationship with reality, the transition from film to theater, from theater to painting, sculpture and photography. In this film Kira Muratova applies either explicitly or implicitly each of the art forms - theater, painting, photography, architecture, sculpture and of course music. The main topic and image is a theater, since both parts of the film are theater stories, and theater is depicted in the film from different angles, from both inside and outside. Thus, theater in the film is both the signifier and the signified at the same time. The film might be examined from the point of view of 'intertextuality',<sup>87</sup> since semioticians prefer to use the word 'text' when writing about film. The term 'intertextuality' is just another word for 'dialogism', which was coined by Bakhtin.<sup>88</sup>

### 3.3.1 Theater

The main text depicted in the film is Hamlet's monologue. It represents literature and denotes explicit to the theater. What then does the theater scene connote and what is its meaning? Although one knows this extract has been taken from the Shakespearean tragedy, the question remains, who is reading it and how? The stagehand Viktor Utkin (surname means 'duck's son') who is the weak 'clown' in the stagehand's team, is reading this monologue, expressing the clown's grimaces and inserting his own slang words to the text. Due to this, the scene transforms into a parody, a comical reproduction, grotesque and carnivalesque. A dramatic type of actor, Alexander Bashirov, who always played empathic characters, is an advantage for the perception

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86 J.Monaco, *How to read a film*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 65.

87 See also p.7 in Introduction. Stam, *Vocabularies*, p.203.

88 Stam, *Ibid.*

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of this scene as a parody. Zara Abdullaeva believes that the grotesque and theatricality in Muratova's films relate to the Russian theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold, in the way that the grotesque is tagging and contrast.<sup>89</sup>

In the next scene, stagehand Utkin finds the dead body of the actor. He walks over it and then kills another stagehand, Boriska, who irritated him constantly. A connotation which the viewer could read now is that 'to be, or not to be', which was spoken in the first *mise-en-scène*, means 'to kill or not', which is connected to Dostoevski's dilemma. The stagehands were preparing the 'stage of life' for the theater spectacle, in which the protagonist also placed the dilemma 'to be or not to be'—the first lover, the most sexual man in the world. And finally, the third connotation, perhaps related to the actor, an aged Bogdan Stupka,<sup>90</sup> who was not only the first and main actor of Ukraine, but also the Minister of Culture in 1999-2001. The reality of the film is broken by reality of life, when in response to the outrage of Andrei Andreevich over misplaced decorations, one of the stagehands says sarcastically and cheaply: 'Mediocrity! Nothing interfere with a good actor! What a snob. What a minister of culture!' These words were addressed not to the character but to the real man, whose profession is an actor and who was a minister. The film is constructed in such a way that the actors and their roles are mixed. At the end of the first part of the film, two actresses in the costumes from another play appear on the stage. They will play two characters in the second part of the film, called *A Woman of Life*.

How did Muratova construct a theater stage itself? The first part of the film, where there are no major and minor characters, is far from a classical play. All stagehands are ambivalent, and only a dead body, which appears on the scene, creates a homogeneous pattern. Yet despite this often happening in classical plays, including Shakespeare's, where the dead body is the driving force of the plot, the body in Muratova's film does not arouse any emotion, no response.

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89 Z.Abdullaeva, p. 246.

90 Bogdan Stupka (1941-2012) < <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0836273/>>

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### 3.3.2. *Painting, photography and sculptures*

Parts of the film are also associated with artistic decorations, which consist of paintings and sculptures. Behind the scene in the part *Stagehands*, we can see paintings of naked women (nude). These pictures will appear in the second part of the film again. They turn out to be a part of the fetish collection of copies-paintings of nudes which the main character collects. These copies of famous paintings by Ingres, Cranakh, Russian artists, including Boris Kustodiev (*Nude*) surround Andrei Andreevich's life, instead of human beings, and create the atmosphere in his apartment. In the significant scene he used a knife to make holes for the heads in these copy-paintings which represent female naked bodies. Then, he put heads of the girls and himself inside of the pictures. In this entertainment shooting scene in the copies of paintings, the body is represented by picture, and the face by real face. Thus, the paintings which are the copies (the representations) and the photographs (which are also representations) are depicted in the film together. The second part of the film in general and this scene in particular, is an absolute simulation. In the absence of originals, we are watching representations or 'simulacrum'.<sup>91</sup>

There is another *mise-en-scène* with photography, which demonstrates the substitution of reality for representations. Andrei Andreevich was going to show the pornographic slides to Alice, but when the slide-show starts it is only the viewer who is watching these photographs of the early 20th century. These pornographic photographic images of sex, substitutes the real sex, which never happened on the screen.

In addition, images of sculptures appear several times on the screen. In the first part of the film there are two female stone idols, between which appears a nude property-lady in the clouds of steam. Then in the second part Andrei Andreevich is shown approximately from the same angle; an aged hero located between these stone idols. He is washing up before having intercourse with the woman of his life. But the great

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91 R.Stam, *Vocabularies*, pp. 216-217.

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man and hero becomes a victim. In general, to show a naked man's bodies is a favorite devise of Muratova in many of her films. In *Two in One* she combined real naked bodies with their representations in arts.

### 3.3.3. Performance

In both parts of the film one can note few prominent scenes of nudes. In the first part of the film, it is the exposure of a huge property woman in front of Viktor Utkin. It is shown like a pure act of exhibitionism. Another nude performance directed at the audience is shown in the scene with Andrei Andreevich, when he treats his daughter like a doll as he tries to undress her; neither she nor he has any feelings about it. The difference between real and artificial, between a man and a picture are erased. Later during the film they change roles. The camera depicts an aged actor's back in the bath. Close to one of the final scenes of the second part of the film, the female characters, having got out of the house, turn on the Potemkin Stairs. There they meet half-naked laughing people clothed in the bathing suits celebrating New Year evening. This scene of people on the stairs (in fact it is a public square) is perhaps the most vivid picture of what Bakhtin calls carnival.

The action in the film is interrupted periodically by non-diegetic performances. Actually, the film begins with the performance, when the stagehand reads Hamlet's text. Victor Utkin, 'miserable creature, a veteran of the stage', is hamming when reading Hamlet's monologue, and when listening to Boriska. Some other passages of performances include: Alice, daughter of Andrei Andreevich, performs a ballet number, mimetic digression, which has no relation to the narrative but relates to her character who is a marionette, puppet in the beginning of the story, but then later becomes a puppeteer.

*Two in One* contains a number of representations between mediums—painting, sculpture, photography, literature and music, between reality and fiction, art and nature, time and space. The film is also concerned with ethics, culture and of course

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with aesthetics. Muratova constructs the cinematographic world by forcing it into artificial and pretend categories.

### 3.4 *Grotesque and doubling*

Double images and constructions are stylistic features of Muratova's film in general, and in the film *Two in One* this device has its climax. The film is based on the double poles as its structural pattern. If in the previous films, this doubling was shown as an allusion and trait, in this film, it takes the entire space of the screen. Double optic in *Two in One* is shown directly, it is denoted in the title text and is represented in many images. In addition, the meanings in the film form in pairs as well: love-death, old-young, theater-life, tragedy-comedy, art-life, animal-man, naked man-nude picture, original-copy. The list is endless.

The most intense and prominent example of doubling is depicted in the image of the bed and the audio-visual shifts in the color of the bed. A bed is a sacred place, where intercourse should occur. Andrei Andreevich describes it as an animate (living) object. Moreover, the question of color is important in the interpretation of the bed in the scene. He calls it black, which denotes death and a burial color, but in fact it is a white bed, symbolising the wedding. Zara Abdullaeva noticed in her book that Muratova structured this film on the 'double meanings of perception, on the double optic of recognizing of truth-untruth, theater-life, black-white colors, artist-man'.<sup>92</sup>

What follows are some examples of double images. In the group of workers there are two group namesakes, who hold each other, sometimes they are making a concerted action, such as having stolen a rooster and selling it. The stagehand Boriska, about to die, looks in the mirror and doubles his own image. Two corpses—the hanged actor Borisov and the stagehand Boriska—stay behind the stage in the first part of the film; their similar sounding names reinforce the duality of the situation. Mirror in

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<sup>92</sup> Z.Abdullaeva, p. 312.

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connection to film is an important image in film studies. For instance, Christian Metz elaborates the structural similarity between mirror and cinema, but at the same time the distinctions between them.<sup>93</sup> He points out that, although everything can reflect just as well in the film as in the natural mirror, 'there is one thing that will never find its reflection in film, namely the spectator's body. From this point of view, the mirror becomes opaque'.<sup>94</sup>

The film *Two in One*, in spite of the images of murders, self-murders and rises from the dead, is a comedy and a sort of carnival. A couple of such comical scenes include the hanged actor Borisov (if it might be said about a corpse). Is it possible to find something comical about the dead actor? In the case of Muratova, the answer is 'yes'. He hanged himself in a costume, in which somebody needs to play the morning show in the theater. An art director is angry, the responsible person is crying. Humor in the film is close to grotesque. Muratova creates grotesque images by grotesque characters and mise-en-scène. Her characters are akin to the grotesque, theatrical and picturesque, rather than to photographic and cinematic space.

There are some scenes in the film, which relate to the depiction a man as animal. In the first emergence of the protagonist of the film, Andrei Andreyevich, he is shown as a neighing and prancing horse in front of the mirror (and window, and screen, and stage). In other scenes Andrei Andreevich is represented as his dog: he is sleeping on the floor in the living room of his apartment, and peeing on the door of his daughter when she rejects to open it. All these scenes relate to the Homo sapiens definition in Muratova's version and depiction of humans as animals, which was a characteristic of grotesque from the ancient times.

This film by Kira Muratova, in spite of its complicated structure, broad line of devices, feature codes, interesting stylistic manifestations, murder and resurrections, which appeals to the theater and other art forms, is still a comedy, or rather a fairy

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<sup>93</sup> Th.Elsaesser, and M.Hagener, *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp.64-65.

<sup>94</sup> C.Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1986, p.45.



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tale. By interrupting the narrative with interludes, divertissements, performances, Muratova attracts, arouses an interest, or a deadly hatred. However, this attitude does not mean much for her. Muratova creates a film on the border between pure art and mass entertainment. In her interview she says that she is interested in mass success and distribution, but this can only happen by chance, the coincidence of interests, since she is not ready to change her principles for success.<sup>95</sup> In the Soviet times, absolutely without creating any anti-Soviet messages, she managed somehow to be in a constant 20-year conflict with the cinema authorities and even the government. In the current situation, she did interrupt the relations with private producers and the sources of financial flows when they intervened in the film creating process.

Humorous situations and scenes that continually arise in the film, however, do not create a general impression of the picture as a comedy. Muratova, despite the fact that she does not write theoretical papers (although she might do this), creates a philosophical film, not only in terms of themes and issues in it, but also in terms of composition and visual elements. Muratova's film is something to think about: about the age, the essence of art and the essence of life. Violence begets violence, sexual offenders become the victim, erotic desire leads to death, social duties are in constant conflict with personal wishes, which then leads to conflict. Old issues served on a new dish. If all this is to be treated with humor, as Chaplin and Muratova did, perhaps all is not too scary.

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95 J.Taubman, *op.cit.*, p.88.

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#### 4. Horror tale: *Melody for a Street Organ* (2009)

'O Jesu, parvule!'<sup>96</sup>

*Melody for a Street Organ* is a film with a clear narrative; it is a post-modern fairytale without a happy ending. Some critics, Dmitry Desyaterik, for instance, called the film an 'anti fairytale'.<sup>97</sup> In this film, Kira Muratova, as well as in the film *A Change of Fate*, rewrote the end of the text of the script, written that time by Vladimir Zuev. This film is the cruelest film by Muratova, after *Asthenic Syndrome*. The plot has a clear narrative line. Alena and Nikita are the main characters. They are a brother and sister pair, 9 and 7 years of age (approximately) whose mother has died. They go to search for a father. More precisely, they search for two fathers, since the children have different fathers. Muratova could not make a film without her obsessive duality. The brother and sister love each other and do not want to move to the 'home for abandoned children'. They have a desire to find their fathers. This is the main driving force behind the story, its suspense. The people and situations that the children encounter always promise help and salvation, but in the end all events turn against the children. They are out of luck. Their way through the urban jungle, with all the ordinary urban phenomena—a railway station, a tram, a casino and a supermarket—is a solid misadventure. However, sometimes good wizards and fairies help the children, giving them a chance for salvation; but all is in vain. The film ends tragically. Nikita falls asleep on the bottom floor of an unfinished house. The boy freezes and dies.

##### 4.1 An auteur's handwriting

One of the main objectives of my investigation of Kira Muratova's film as auteur cinema is to determine what components make up the aesthetic, thematic and

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96 'tiny Jesus'.

< <http://www.christmas-carol-music.org/Lyrics/InDulciJubilo.html>>

97 D.Desyaterik. Dolls, *Iskusstvo Kino*, №6, 2009

< <http://kinoart.ru/2009/n6-article7.html>>

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technical characteristics. I will start with the recognizable devices in *Melody for a Street Organ*, which are also common elements of her films in general. Five minutes of watching this film are enough to plunge into the atmosphere of her cinema and recognize familiar characteristics. The film begins with an introduction, in which the photographic quality frames move slowly. Although the characters have not yet said anything, almost all the key visual images of the director are shown. Their technical implementations are also recognizable: a freeze frame, slow motion, a gradual approach (zoom) and close-up, and the straight-on gaze of the characters into the camera. The camera evenly distributes the focus on the characters and what they see. Vladimir Pankov was an operator of the last three films by Muratova, including *Two in One* and *Melody for a Street Organ*. Visual and audio-visual series (sets) are also familiar. First, it is a kaleidoscope of images: female twins, children and freaks, - whether alcoholics, or homeless, pathetic old men and women, black, a policeman, mummers. Later there will be other people of God—the blessed, beggars, gypsies and street musicians. Within five minutes of the film, we not only see these images, but also two theatrical representations of the attraction, which I conventionally called 'performance' in the analysis of the film *Two in One*. The main difference between the performances in *The Melody for a Street Organ* and the former analyzed film, is that these performances are the part of diegesis, tightly integrated into the story.

A distinctive feature of this film is its fairytale form. Although Muratova shot some films which could be called fairytales, for example *Sentimental Policeman's* genre is close to a fairytale; in this film it is more explicit, with the use of such canons as good and bad wizards. According to the canons of fairytales, the characters are carried through time and space. They sit in a tram in one big city, and then leave the tram in another. The film was shot in Kiev (for the first time in her 50 year film-directing career) and Odessa, which is a main setting for many of her films. Together with a fairytale, the film is a realistic drama. The elements of realism, naturalism, and hyper reality are manifested in everything—in almost documentary filming scenes at the railway station, on the street, in the train and tram. Traditionally, Muratova's camera shows a *mise-en-scène* in the city toilet. Oxymoronic impulses, which were so veritable in *The Tuner*, where the main characters in evening dresses with solemn

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hairstyles make business in the toilet, continue in the grotesque scenes of the characters reading poetry without trousers in the toilet cabin.

As for the audio presentation of the film, apart from the usual presence of heteroglossia, polyphony, vibrant street speeches, typical of carnival procession and poetic digressions, this film has few new features. The first element that is unusual is the use of a large amount of the Ukrainian language, represented without irony or meaning constructions, which plays an integrated part of diegesis. Some characters simply speak in Ukrainian, and poems and songs are performed in Ukrainian. Previously, Muratova, a Russian film director who lives in Ukraine, had not included the Ukrainian language in her films in this way. The second sound feature of the film is the soundtrack of the well-known Russian rock singer Zemfira Ramzanova (Zemfira). To combine such different music scores as Ukrainian folk music and modern Russian rock is a new challenge and a new element of the film. Muratova proposes a globalistic leveling of the national, emphasising individual, essentially post-modern aesthetics. Another diegetic sound in the film, which is a Ukrainian Christmas carol, appears in the fifth minute. In the song the refrain repeats, which means: 'Hail the earth, the Son of God was born!' A Christian theme with Christian symbolic is introduced in the film already in the first scenes.

#### 4.2 *Film in a cinema context*

In the five-minute introduction to the film *Melody for a Street Organ* there is an image identical to the image in the introduction to the film by Ingmar Bergman *Persona*. The image is of a boy's hand which touches a projection of the screen. A hand, which also appears in the introduction of *Melody for a Street Organ* is the first shot of the film. Instead of the cinema screen, a frozen frame shows the hand, which lies on the frost-covered window. This image is also tactile, or 'haptic',<sup>98</sup> since the

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<sup>98</sup> Th.Elsaesser, M.Hagener, *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses*, London: Routledge, 2010, p.110.

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frost gradually melts from the warmth of the hand, which the viewer can feel through the sensation of touch. Then, there is much more direct reference to the image of this hand on the frosty window. It is the hand of Alexander in the film *Fanny and Alexander* by Bergman. In Figures 2 and 3 one can see how similar these two hands are.



Fig.2 *Melody for a Street Organ*



Fig.3 *Fanny and Alexander*

The difference is that the hands of the children in the films by Bergman and Muratova are on the opposite sides of the glass (windows). This might mean the two sides of the world - of life and death, two biblical oppositions - paradise and hell. On the hand in *Melody for a Street Organ*, a dark shadow is visible, as if the hand was broken by nail. This image has a denotation of the crucifixion. In a cinematic context, this hand, and the association with a hand from the film by Bergman, might have another connotation, in particular a handshake through the screen. I consider the similarities of images and themes in the films of Bergman and Muratova, which I will emphasize later, through the prism of shaking hands, greeting and dialogue. In regards to the search for God in the trilogy cinema response about the silence of God in Bergman's films *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Winter Light* (1962), *Silence* (1963), the meaning of Muratova's answer is sharp and categorical: There was no

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God, he does not exist and never will. Instead we, people must take full responsibility for everything we do. Nobody will judge us, except ourselves.

The association with Bergman films arises not only in connection with the visualization of the hand. Just as in Bergman's film *Fanny and Alexander*, the main characters of the film *Melody for a Street Organ* are a boy and a girl – a brother and sister. Also, like in the film by Bergman, these children are orphans. Their mother, not their father, has died. In both films children are suffering and humiliated. Also like in the films by Bergman, the film takes place in winter, on Christmas Eve. In both films national Christmas songs are sung. Moreover, the religious theme and religious symbolism in both films are one of the main lines of the narrative.

The title of the film *Melody for a Street Organ* is symbolic and has several interpretations or meanings. The etymology of the film title contains several denotations and connotations. 'Street-Organ'<sup>99</sup> or 'barrel-organ' is a musical instrument, which was an obligatory attraction in many European cities during the 19th century. Using the modern term in art history and criticism, this might be called a street art. Another translation of the word 'barrel-organ' was used by Nancy Condee.<sup>100</sup> Considering the title in regards to the content and narration, which takes place on the street and explicitly describes the lives of street children, it seems to me that 'street organ' is a more coherent word. The meaning of the title in connection to the musical instrument itself is a mechanical repetition of recorded tunes. Connotation in this case, which projects the title of the film for its maintenance, is a repetition of history, the cultural recurrence. A deeper connotation refers to the beginning of the Christian culture. The image of a street-organ as a trope can be found in both films. In *Fanny and Alexander* one of the themes is a puppet theater, which includes music and mechanical dolls.

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99 <http://www.posetiivifestivaalit.net/>

100 N. Condee, *Kinokultura*, 26, 2009,  
<http://www.kinokultura.com/2009/26r-sharmanka.shtml>



Fig.4

In Muratova's film, the image of the street organ appears in the middle of the film as a diegetic part of narration. The characters attend the auction where the street organ is for sale. Furthermore, this mechanical music will be an accompaniment to some scenes of the film, combined with Zemfira's songs.

It is obvious that the film of Kira Muratova has much in common with *Fanny and Alexander* by Bergman. The themes, motifs, characters (both major and minor), images—street-organ, puppet theater, dolls, death (father-mother), orphans, religious images and issues—are all common. Then, what are the differences? Bergman illustrated a strong component of the national Swedish Christmas through depicted traditions – family gatherings, community, gifts, kisses and hugs, a feast, round dance, singing and reading together. In this film, Muratova also tried to show a strong national component of a Slavic, or even more specifically, a Ukrainian Christmas, but it is the whole value of opposition - the separation, loneliness, abandonment, and unnecessary existence. Is the theme of abandonment and uselessness of children realistic or grotesque in the film? Both the first and second states are truthful. The reality of life is that most people keep national, raise children and celebrate Christmas of course. But there is another side of the life, which the most people do not see or does not want to see, because of its ugliness.

In both films, there are the secondary characters, which play the identical roles of good magicians. But if uncle Isaac in *Fanny and Alexander* rescues children by stealing them from the house of a priest in the chest, then in the film by Muratova, a kind millionaire who found the orphan Nikita and wanted to give him to his wife

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who is childless and dreamed of 'a boy as such', could not do it. When referring to the auteur's cinema in the context of globalization, the question about perception of such cinema abroad by other spectators arises. Many directors and Bergman in particular, have received great success among a foreign audience. Birgitta Steen considers that there is a certain stage of reception of the auteur, when his creative person, embedded in the work itself, communicates directly to all humanity.<sup>101</sup> Does *Melody for a Street Organ* represent national cinema? Yes. The action takes place in Kiev and Odessa. The film, which shows the abandoned children, is a miniature reflection of the social ills of the country. The film definitely shows images of their contemporaries in the conditional contrast: beggars, millionaires and attendants. Is this film a cultural product readable by an international audience? Has it the 'assimilation stage'?<sup>102</sup> Yes. How does it work? The film is a Christmas fairytale, which is very understandable. The little heroes of the fairytales and fictions by Andersen, Dickens, Thackeray, Hugo and Dostoevsky are direct literary ancestors, predecessors of the modern Muratova characters Alena and Nikita. In the world of cinema, especially American, there are hundreds of films in which the action takes place on Christmas. But in contrast to them, Muratova is not shooting a film with a happy ending. Her fairy tale story turns out to be an absolute and hopeless tragedy. Comparatively, the ending of the film by Bergman is very optimistic. In the end of the film everybody is happy because of the new born children. Muratova stubbornly continues to show that the world is tragic. In using to go from the modern to historical, from private to general, from film to culture, it will be obvious to link the character of Nikita in Muratova's film with 'jesu parvule'.

The Biblical stories of Christmas joy, when it is not yet known about the future of the crucifixion, death and resurrection, stand in opposition to the alternative history - the murder of Christ in his infancy. Muratova uses images and scenes in a cultural context, which are clear for any thinking viewer. The action takes place on the eve of Christmas and the viewer sees obvious Christmas symbols. In addition to Christmas songs, there are the canonical postcard images, which depict The Magi and the

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101 L.H.Rugg, *Globalization and the Auteur: Ingmar Bergman Projected Internationally*, p. 221.

102 Rugg, *op.cit.*, p. 240.



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shepherds, the Holy Family, The Flight into Egypt and the Massacre of the Innocents King Herod's soldiers. In the beginning of the film Nikita picks up the last named card as he chooses his destiny. The children are looking for Nikita's father, a musician who lives in the street called Assumption Lane - the religious archaic synonym for death.

#### 4.3 *Whose abandoned children?*

Muratova is a director who has a few obsessions, or manias. Two of them, the images of animals and children are carried from one film to the next. Children are the persistent heroes of Muratova's films. In several previous films, children were the main characters, or main theme such as in *Among the Grey Stones* and in the last film of the trilogy *Three Stories - Girl and Death*. Muratova shows the broad picture of children's relationship to other children, parents, other adults, strangers and relatives, with the structures of power and repression, which includes school, hospital and police. In this film, children are the main characters. They are innocent; they suffer because of the mistakes and cruelty, or indifference of adults. The film depicts the tragedy of bleeding family ties in the modern era. Perhaps this theme is something specific to the countries which emerged after Communism; countries which could not build normal economic relations and had a falling institution of family. Perhaps this is a more general family crisis. In the early films by Muratova there were such characters as a lonely mother and son, who took the place of her husband in the film *Long Farwells*, or a son without a mother in the film *Among the Grey Stones*. In *Melody for a Street Organ* nobody wants these kids. They are like homeless dogs or cats. Children are a filter through which the tragedy of the world is exposed, which inevitably leads to death.

In this film there is a grotesque mirror display of this good brother and sister pair—Alena and Nikita. They are pseudo-poor children, who are working as 'poor', like in the *Threepenny Opera* by Brecht. The beggar boy asks for money from the passersby in using a legend of the true story of the main characters. He says: 'Our mother died,

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my father left us, they want to separate me from my sister! Give me money, sir, for bread!' But it turns out that the beggar is part of the gang, which uses the children, teaching and educating them on how to be good actors when begging in public places.

The question arises, where does this obsession with abandoned children come from? Muratova was asked about this in several interviews. From a psychoanalytical point of view, one can infer something in Muratova's personal history. Is it childlessness? No. Muratova had a daughter, who unfortunately died a few years ago, and whose children are now being raised by Muratova. The origin of this maniacal attachment to the child as an object has social roots. In particular, in Ukraine there are many mothers who have abandoned their children. These children live under difficult conditions, due to scarce taxpayer and philanthropic money. In addition, there is even the problem of organ trafficking of children (and adults) from Ukraine and Moldova. The city, where Muratova was born is now a territory of Moldova. In the film *Melody for a Street Organ* there is a remarkable scene as a documentary insert, at the railway station when the camera goes to the wall, where, under a sign that says 'Help to Find Missing Children' we watch the photographs of these children. It is known that well-known directors are also big cinema lovers. Muratova is one of them. Muratova, in this sense has a favorite director, and favorite scene from the film, which explains both her attachment to the subject of children and animals: 'And also Flaherty, his film *Louisiana Story*. There's a shot there with a boy and a little animal, the boy tosses him out of the boat several times, and it keeps crawling back again and again. I could watch that shot, with that boy and the animal, endlessly'.<sup>103</sup>

#### 4.4 *Animals*

Almost in any film of Muratova's, animal sequences have a place. If they do not fit into the narrative, than they are depicted as separate nondiegetic scenes. As for

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103 Taubman, op.cit., p. 9.

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example, in *Asthenic Syndrome*, there is a documentary scene of a knacker's yard. To make this choking scene even more clear and explanatory, Muratova added text to the scene. In the film *Melody for a Street Organ* a common Muratova scene with the homeless animals is part of the narrative. Alena and Nikita meet a bunch of stray dogs; the girl is less afraid of them than a boy. According to French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, in terms of psychological compulsion, through the repetition of scenes with the homeless animals in her films, Muratova expresses how she 'feels responsible for domesticated animals, sensitive about the abandoned animals'. In addition, she suffers from the terror of the knacker's yard, which she had seen once in her life. The subject 'animal-man' in her film has quite a categorical interpretation, which shows up in many scenes, the transition from one state to another: a man is also animal, and an animal is also a man. Jane Taubman found that animal images in Muratova's film are motivated by her passion for self-analysis and studying the human animal.<sup>104</sup>

Animals in the films are an integral part of nature, society, humanity (dog - man's best friend) and art. In the film *Sensitive Policeman*, a character says: 'People have nothing to eat! How could you think to have the dogs!' Muratova returns to this issue in *Melody for a Street Organ* in a more sarcastic scene, which is important for an understanding of how people and animals are presented in her film in general.

At the city railway in a waiting room, a crowd of passengers talking on mobile phones is shown. The camera focuses on one of the passengers. This is a minor character, without a name and without any function in the narrative. This scene is not an explicit part of diegesis, but it depicts something sharp, comical and grotesque—the image of human life—in the railway station. This and similar scenes negate the pathos of Muratova's messages: 'People! Pay attention to the children! Children are abandoned! Children are starving!'

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104 Ibid, p. 72.

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The camera moves from one character to another and then freezes for a while, showing the phone telling tragicomic stories. A foreigner is planning an illegal sale of the apartment of a dead woman. A woman is complaining that her businessman husband is terrifying her by using dead words like 'corporate culture'. The third character that is presented in this polyphony is the most grotesque. The man talks about the conference at the University of Colorado: 'Scientists 'ethologists'<sup>105</sup> who gathered for a conference are investigating the cognitive abilities of animals. Namely: the warriors of European wolves and and nine breeds of dogs, such as poodles, terriers, American Staffordshire terriers, shepherds and Manchester. To systematize howls, barking and whinges are extremely important!' The scene is made in a comical and grotesque manner to show the contrast of the world's science, and the inability of humanity to deal with abandoned children and animals. Muratova proclaims about homeless dogs and cats, through the words of the characters: 'They are homeless, abandoned. Nobody wanted them!' This is a denotation. But the diagnosis of uselessness can be extended to all mankind, abandoned by God. This summary seems to provide a meaning of the animal theme.

#### 4.5 *Poetry of Vertep*

Poetry of a completely different genre and different representations is another essential attribute of Muratova's cinema, which I have not yet mentioned. An exception is perhaps the information in the introduction about one of the first films by Muratova, where the main male character was played by an actor, who was also a poet. Poetry in Muratova's film is associated with the theatrical and the performance. In her films there are a lot of poetic monologues; they are integrated into almost all of her movies. For example, in the first part of *Three Stories (1997)* called *Boiler Number 6*, the protagonist's classmate and friend is a poet who always reads his poetry to his classmate who killed his neighbor. In this case, Muratova separates the so-called figures of speech, since in poetry one can write anything, even about

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105 Ethologists are researching animal's mental skills.  
<<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ethology>>

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killing. The young protagonist in *Long Farewells* was also writing poetry. What poetry means in Muratova's film is shown from two sides. On the one hand, it breaks the routine of life and elevates the characters. On the other hand, she shows that the poet could also be a big swindler. In the film *Dummy* it was a poet who robbed the husband and his wife. In the film *Letter to America* (1999) where poetry is read in front of an amateur camera, the first line of this verse has direct relevance to the theme of the film *Melody for a Street Organ*: 'The donkey cries, the cow lows, they have wakened the Christ child. And is he silent?' The closest poet to Muratova, the director, who is associated with the radical misanthropy, who is interested in lifelong learning, together with the themes of life, children, animals, dolls, or in direct connection with these images—the subject of death—is perhaps Baudelaire and his *Flowers Evil*.

When talking about language, it is worth mentioning that although Muratova lived in Odessa, Ukraine her entire adult life, and filmed mostly in Ukraine, she considers herself a Russian-speaking director, who lives in Ukraine.<sup>106</sup> This is very different from being a Ukrainian film director. However, being a deeply Russian-speaking director, after living for 50 years in polyphonic Ukrainian Odessa, Muratova surrendered and built her last film on the basis of Ukrainian 'Vertep'.<sup>107</sup> Vertep is the puppet folk theater (Figure 5), which had been in circulation in Ukraine in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, partly at the same time as the street-organ. Formally, Vertep is, as well as the street-organ, the box of two levels: temple and tomb, and with place for dolls. A unique essence of Vertep and its main characteristics, unlike other puppet theaters, including the Polish Shopka, is that the performances were divided into two parts: Bible Stories at the top and secular subjects at the bottom.

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106 < <http://www.openspace.ru/cinema/events/details/16058/?expand=yes&attempt=1>>, Taubman, Bykov, interviews.

107 < <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkPath=pages\V\E\VertepIT.htm>>

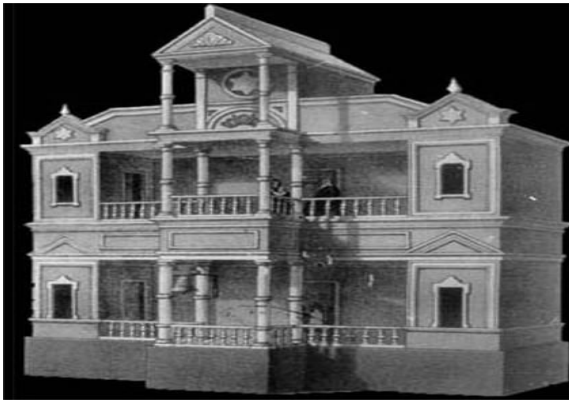


Fig. 5

There were around 40 puppets in the theater, among them Mary, the infant Christ, Gypsies, a Moscow gay and King Herod. Muratova's film structure is similar to the deconstruction of *Vertep*, with the same characters. In the upper level of *Vertep* there was an infant-Christ and Mary. In post-modern *Vertep* by Muratova there was a dying child, whose mother and father left him. At the end of the film, it is clear that the children were not in a fairytale, but in the theater of *Vertep*. At least, Nikita might identify with tiny Jesus (baby-Christ). The other characters in this horror tale are for instance a chorus in the beginning of the film, Savochka-poor, Magi and shepherds.

Muratova does not shoot cinema by the traditional rules; she creates her own rules. She acts coolly, as the surgeon who cuts through the abdomen to improve the patient's condition. Nikita's father - a street violinist—at the end of the film appears in the frame, reminisces about his son while Nikita is very close, within walking distance. But Muratova does not allow them to meet and destroys all expectation of the approaching happy ending. Sometimes, if not always, Muratova's cinema contains complex structures, with many levels, denotations and connotations, a lot of cultural references, which are difficult to read and which contradict the needs of the mass audience. Nevertheless, the film *Melody for a Street Organ* won several prizes at international film festivals in Russia.

## 5. Conclusion

In the 1950-60s, when auteur theory originated in France, the cinema critics and theorists André Bazin and François Truffaut did not have so many films at that time and the names of the directors were widely known to everyone. The development of cinema from its origins to post-modernism made the task of cinema theorists in the 21st century more difficult than before. There was a large production of both films and theories, which needs considerable time to watch and read. Theorists and philosophers wrote about films, included previous theories about the arts, used semiotic and psychoanalytical approaches to film studies, researched women's cinema, third world cinema, queer cinema, analyzed the film as a text, placed the author to the historical context, studied audience and considered the variety of visual and philosophical aspects.

I was inspired and guided by the books and articles on film theory written and gathered by Robert Stam in my researching of Kira Muratova's films. Since the main aspect, which I have assigned in her auteur handwriting is showing the body, sounds and images in doubling and grotesque manner, I have founded the ideas of Allan D. Coleman on the grotesque in photography and Mikhail Bakhtin on heteroglossia and carnivalesque in literature related to these issues, although none of them could be considered to be film studies theorists. In this study I have researched the cinema of Kira Muratova using an auteur theory approach and the methods of semiotic in investigating film as a text, images, scenes and themes in searching the meanings, denotations and connotations.

Consciously or unconsciously, Kira Muratova's film is a dialogue with the cinematography of the last century. I have founded in particular some scenes in her films, which are connected to the films by another auteur - Ingmar Bergman. The topics in her films have no limits—crazy, homeless people, killers, the elderly, children, celebrities, rich people, millionaires – everything is present there. Birth and death, incest, homosexuality, prostitution—all the expressions of human nature are displayed in her films of late period, which I consider as a post modern cinema.

In my researching of Muratova's film I found out that grotesque images and sounds, along with such other devices as: doubling, repetitions, heteroglossia, which are also connected to grotesque more or less, were represented already in the early films by Muratova and in recently *Two in One* and *Melody for a Street Organ* they anchored. In this study I have found out that along with above mentioned devices, which have been discussed in the publications of other authors on Muratova, the concept of grotesque was not researched much, although it is a cue element and the filter, through which I was trying to understand the denotations and connotations, ideas and meanings in the films.

Kira Muratova Muratova is an author who creates the auteur cinema in an era when the authors are the dinosaurs showing up mostly at the festivals. Being an author is hardly possible in the era of overproduction and sophisticated technology. The access of Kira Muratova's film to the audience was complicated, although she does not like to talk about it. 'Real talent will 'out' no matter what the circumstances',<sup>108</sup>Truffaut's words work well in Muratova's case. These circumstances consist of the descent socio-historical situation, complicated relationship with the censors, actors, journalists and producers, and Muratova's personality. All of these elements provide a wide field for the researcher. This project could turn out to be different. It was possible to write an entire thesis about a single topic, such as power, body or grotesque. The main task I confronted was to choose from the available choices. I tried to select and research the most prominent devices: heteroglossia in sounds and grotesque in audio-visual aspects.

I was focusing on two recently produced films, because I found out that *Two in One* and *Melody for a Street Organ* have not been researched much, and at the same time they create an overall picture of Muratova auteur cinema in general. These films are the high-rise constructions—visual, audio-visual, architectural, thematic—which was interesting to investigate. Academic studies of film by Kira Muratova are not

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108 R. Stam, *Film Theory. An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publication, 2000, p. 84.



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represented much in other languages besides Russian. Jane Taubman's monograph in English is a work of 100 pages, which includes a huge amount of referents, but all of them, with the exception of two indirect references to Laura Mulvey and Susan Larsen, refer to the cinematic critical articles and interviews of Muratova, not to any theories or film studies scholars. Her film probably needs much more time for comprehension. I am sure that texts devoted to the film study of Kira Muratova will continue to appear. She has just finished her latest film *Schoolmates. Screen Tests*, which will appear on the screen in 2012.

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## ***Filmography***

### **Kira Muratova:**

*A Change of Fate (Peremena uchasti)*, USSR, 1987

*Among the Grey Stones (Sredi serykh kamnei)*, USSR, 1983

*Asthenic Syndrome (Astenicheskii sindrom)*, USSR, 1989

*Brief Encounters (Korotkie vstrechi)*, USSR, 1967

*By the Steep Ravine (U krutogo iara)*, USSR, 1961

*Chekhov's Motifs (Chekhovskie motivy)*, Russia/Ukraine, 2002

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*Dummi, (Kukla)*, Ukraine, 2006

*Enthusiasms (Uvlechen'ia)*, Russia, 1994

*Getting to Know the Big, Wide World (Poznavaia belyi svet)*, USSR, 1978

*Letter to America* (short) (Pis'mo v Ameriku/List do Ameriky), Ukraine, 1999

*Melody for a Street Organ*, (Melodiya dlya sharmanki), Ukraine 2009

*Minor People (Vtorostepennye liudi)*, Ukraine, 2001

*Our Honest Bread (Nash chestnyi khleb)*, USSR, 1964

*Spravka*, Ukraine, 2005

*The Long Farewell (Dolgie provody)*, USSR, 1971

*The Sentimental Policeman (Chuvstvitel'nyi militsioner)*, France/Ukraine, 1992

*The Tuner (Nastroishchik)*, Russia/Ukraine, 2004

*Three Stories (Tri istorii)*, Russia/Ukraine, 1997

*Two in One, (Dva v Odnom)*, Russian/Ukraine 2006

**Other films:**

*Autumn Sonata (Höstsonaten)*, Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1978

*Battleship Potemkin*, Sergei Eisenstein, USSR, 1925

*Fanny and Alexander*, Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1982

*Louisiana Story*, Flaherty, 1948

*Persona*, Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1966

*Pulp Fiction*, Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1994

*Smile*, Sergei Popov, Ukraine, 1991

*The Goddess: How I Fell in Love*, Renata Litvinova, Russia, 2004

*The Letter*, J.de Limur, USA, 1929

*The Letter*, W.Wyler, USA, 1940