

The Cold War's cultural ecosystem: angry young men in British and Soviet cinema, 1953–1968

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Using examples from postwar British and Soviet cinema, this article interprets European Cold War culture within the framework of a shared cultural ecosystem. The case study of reformist movements in 1950s and 1960s British and Soviet cinema makes clear that analogous sociopolitical and economic developments across postwar Europe inspired film heroes, narratives, and aesthetics that transcended national and ideological borders. The concept of a continent-wide cultural ecosystem elucidates how and why specific cultural phenomena—such as the figure of the “angry young man”—reflect an existence of a dynamic trans-systemic Cold War culture.

A decade after the end of the Second World War, a new kind of film hero attracted millions of British and Soviet moviegoers to the silver screen, astonishing them with his noisy contempt for the established order. The press in the UK and the USSR spilled much ink debating the significance of these scandalous protagonists, recognising in them the intensifying rebelliousness of postwar youth. These celluloid bad boys quickly earned the moniker ‘angry young men’ because they railed furiously against what they perceived to be the authoritarianism of their parents as well as the conformity of their peers.¹ The angry

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¹The term ‘angry young man’ was coined in 1956 when the Royal Court Press Officer noted that John Osborne, the author of the famous play *Look Back in Anger*, was ‘a very angry young man.’ The term was subsequently used in the UK to describe both the authors and protagonists of similar works. Although

young man phenomenon earned overnight fame on both the British and Soviet sides of the Iron Curtain because audiences marvelled at the anti-heroes' open scorn for the much-touted achievements of the postwar period: material abundance, upward mobility, and social harmony. Undercutting the rosier aspects of postwar life, the angry young men film cycle dealt openly with the era's pressing issues, such as premarital sex, abortion, domestic violence, and juvenile delinquency. A 1958 film poster, advertising one of the cycle's most famous features, *Look Back in Anger*, spoke to the effect these movies sought to create: 'The audience was jolted as if they'd been sitting for two hours in an electric chair.' Few could deny the appeal of young men who, inhabiting a bleak world and facing a perspectiveless future, provocatively wrote off all those who viewed the postwar era with a dose of optimism as blind, hoodwinked, or dishonest.

Films featuring angry young men aimed to not only discredit the cheery prognosis for the postwar period but also denigrate the stuffy studio productions that encouraged such a positive outlook. In the UK, these anti-establishment movies became known as the British New Wave or (less charitably) as 'kitchen-sink dramas' while in the USSR they came to be referred to as 'Thaw cinema.'² Notwithstanding the dissimilar labels applied to these movements, British and Soviet cinematographers resembled each other in that they ushered in analogous types of 'new waves' intending to revamp their respective film industries' aesthetic and ideological principles.³ These burgeoning cinematic trends broke with entrenched national artistic traditions – Victorian in the English case and Stalinist in the Russian. The boldness with which the angry young man cycle tackled the era's most pressing social issues made up for the relatively modest number of these features – no more than a dozen in each country.⁴

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specific to the UK cultural scene, the phrase was frequently applied to other national contexts. For instance, the US press referred to poet Evgenii Evtushenko as a 'Soviet Angry Young Man.' See 'Soviet 'Angry Young Man' Raps Stalin,' *St. Petersburg Times*, October 22, 1962, p. 9-A.

²Thaw cinema has thus far been the subject of two monographs: Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000) and Alexander Prokhorov, *Unsledovannyi diskurs: Paradigmy Stalinskoi kul'tury v literature i kino ottepeli* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii Proekt, 2007). The British New Wave has received more extensive scholarly attention than Thaw cinema. Representative examples of this body of scholarship include, among others: Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre, and the "New Look"* (New York: Routledge, 2000); John Hill, *Sex, Class, and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963* (London: BFI Publishing, 1986); B. F. Taylor, *The British New Wave: A Certain Tendency?* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006); Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

³The existing scholarship on the British New Wave and Thaw cinema has accentuated the trends' national specificities. Post-Stalinist Soviet films in particular are rarely compared to contemporaneous Western cinema because British and Soviet New Wave motion pictures differed perceptibly in their 'look.' Without the explicit sex scenes, depictions of violence, and graphic language typical of British angry young men features, the Soviet 'angries' may appear downright Victorian. Nevertheless, Soviet angry young men expressed an unmistakable hostility toward both consumerism and authority figures no less unequivocally (if not as vividly) than their British counterparts.

⁴The most notable examples of the British angry young man trend include: Jack Clayton's *Room at the Top* (1959); Tony Richardson's *Look Back in Anger* (1959) and his *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1962); Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960); Lindsay Anderson's *This Sporting*

These two film trends thus deserve attention not because they were representative of the national film industry as a whole but because they aimed to discredit it by proposing an alternative.⁵ While the British New Wave turned its back on the highly stylised drawing-room dramas featuring leisured upper-class characters engaging in verbal banter, Soviet New Wave productions rejected cheery Stalinist pageantry that revolved around superhuman heroes spreading Marxist political consciousness. Following the example of Italian Neorealism, British and Soviet directors took to the streets with their cameras, choosing ordinary people as their object of study. Unlike the Italian Neorealists, however, they highlighted the plight of young working-class men.⁶

The Soviet and British New Wavers' focus on working-class youth distinguished them not only from Italian Neorealists, but also from worldwide filmic depictions of an alienated postwar generation. Namely, French, Japanese, and US directors focused as often on the criminality of 'the gilded youth' as they did on working-class characters.⁷ British and Soviet filmmakers further differentiated themselves from other international films addressing the issue of a discontented and rebellious postwar youth by locating the roots of the youth's angst specifically in the excesses of postwar mass

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Life (1963); and John Schlesinger's *Billy Liar* (1963). The Soviet New Wave motion pictures starring 'the angries' include: Georgii Natanson, *Noisy Day* (*Shumnyi den'*, 1960); Iulii Raizman, *And If It's Love?* (*A esli eto liubov'?*, 1961); Aleksandr Zarkhi, *My Younger Brother* (*Moi mladshii brat*, 1962); Marlen Khutsiev, *Lenin's Guard* (*Zastava Il'icha*, 1964); Mark Osep'ian's *Three Days in the Life of Viktor Chernyshev* (*Tri dnia Viktora Chernysheva*, 1967); and Igor Shatrov, *Man-to-Man Conversation* (*Muzhskoi razgovor*, 1968).

⁵ The cultural and historical relevance of these film productions is amplified by the fact that both British and Soviet novelists and playwrights spearheaded the cinematic bonanza of the 1950s and 1960s. More importantly, the angry young men's cultural significance is evident in that it operated across artistic genres and thus captured different segments of society.

⁶ For studies analysing the angry young men phenomenon in British cinema see: Susan Brook, "Engendering Rebellion: The Angry Young Man, Class, and Masculinity," in *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature*, eds. Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003); Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 150–160; and Lynne Segal, "Look Back in Anger: Men in the Fifties," in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, eds. Robert Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988).

⁷ For Italian examples see: Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Vanquished* (*I vinti*, 1953), Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* (*Rocco e suoi fratelli*, 1960), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Accatone* (1961) and his *Mamma Roma* (1962). For French instances of this phenomenon see: André Cayatte's *Before the Flood* (*Avant le déluge*, 1954), Marcel Carné's *The Cheaters* (*Les tricheurs*, 1958) and his *Terrain vague* (*Wasteland*, 1960), François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups*, 1959), Jean Delannoy's *Lost Dogs without Collars* (*Chiens perdus sans collier*, 1955) and Julien Duvivier's *Boulevard* (*Boulevard*, 1960). For Czechoslovakia see Štefan Uher's, *The Sun in a Net* (*Slnko v sieti*, 1962) and Miloš Forman, *Black Peter* (*Cerný Petr*, 1964). In Japanese cinema representatives of this trend include: Takumi Furukawa's *Season of the Sun* (*Taiyo no kisetsu*, 1956), Kon Ichikawa's *Punishment Room* (*Shokei no heya*, 1956), Kō Nakahira's *Crazed Fruit* (*Kurutta kajitsu*, 1956), Ōshima Nagisa's *A Town of Love and Hope* (*Ai to kibo no machi*, 1959), Nagisa Oshima's *Cruel Story of Youth* (*Seishun Zankoku Monogatari*, 1960), Koreyoshi Kurahara, *The Warped Ones* (*Kyonetsu no kisetsu*, 1960), and Susumu Hani's *Bad Boys* (*Furyo shonen*, 1961).

consumerism.⁸ As the consumer-driven mentality spread on both sides of the Iron Curtain, British and Soviet New Wave cinematographers declared war on mindless materialism by lauding their working-class heroes' inherent decency and genuineness. The new *enfant terrible* directors coded postwar consumerism and embourgeoisement as malignant, depicting the angry young men as victims of a gentrified culture that lacked authenticity and conscience. While French, Japanese, and US 'rebel films' frequently figured as either cautionary morality tales or illustrations of generalisable moral malaise among postwar youth, New Wavers in the UK and the USSR expressed a concrete fear that the postwar consumer-driven order will lead to the destruction of the working class, and, by relation, the essence of their society's national character. The Soviet and British films thus articulated a unique political statement and ideological perspective, advocating the rehabilitation of not just the youth population but also of a distinct working-class consciousness.

However much British and Soviet New Wavers genuinely aimed to record the lives of working class characters with ethnographic accuracy, they actually presented a nostalgic and romanticised view of blue-collar subcultures. Moreover, the angry young man cycle expressed the protagonists' struggle against embourgeoisement in misogynistic terms. Two popular features of this genre I examine below – one British and one Soviet film – stand in for the misplaced nostalgia and pointed misogyny of the New Wave movement as a whole. I chose to analyse two lesser-known films rather than the (deservedly) oft-cited hallmarks of this cycle – such as K. Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* or M. Khutsiev's *Lenin's Guard* – in order to showcase the breadth and the variety of approaches British and Soviet New Wavers took to express the raw anger they collectively felt about the supposed 'softening' and 'feminisation' of the national body. In Tony Richardson's 1962 film *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, the responsibility for the hero's road to a reformatory is placed squarely on his mother's shoulders and her profligate ways. Similarly, Georgii Natanson's 1960 production *Noisy Day* lays the blame for the protagonist's delinquency at the feet of his sister-in-law and her blind avarice. Natanson and Richardson, much like their New Wave peers, reflected negatively on women's growing economic and social influence.⁹ As increasingly autonomous wage earners and

⁸The most notorious mid-1950s US examples of the rebel genre, such as *The Wild One*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, and *Blackboard Jungle*, made headlines throughout the world. Although James Dean and Marlon Brando, as the embodiments of the rebel trope, reflected an idiosyncratic American experience, they translated exceptionally well across national borders since audiences in Brazil, West Germany, Australia, Japan, Columbia, Holland, and the UK found the rebel without a cause to represent a terrifyingly familiar figure. See Daniel Biltreyst, "American Juvenile Delinquency Movies and the European Censors: The Cross-Cultural Reception and Censorship of *The Wild One*, *Blackboard Jungle*, and *Rebel Without a Cause*," in *Youth Culture in Global Cinema*, eds. Timothy Shary and Alexandra Seibel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 9–26. For an examination of international reactions to US rebel films see, Adam Golub "A Transnational Tale of Teenage Terror: *The Blackboard Jungle* in Global Perspective," *Red Feather: An International Journal of Children's Visual Culture* 3, no.1 (2012): 1–10.

⁹The scholarship on postwar gender constructions emphasises the extent to which women's increasing relevance to postwar socioeconomic order affected both the fate of national politics and

consumers, women in New Wave productions represented a threat to working-class masculinity and the blue-collar way of life. Film historian Samantha Lay eloquently expresses this misogynistic framework: ‘Women . . . often figured as either a threat to masculinity – through their obsession with marriage, motherhood and settling down – or else as agents of consumption and at least partially to blame for the demise of traditional working class culture.’¹⁰ While British and Soviet cinematographers were not unique in registering the angst accompanying the change in postwar class and gender norms, it is historically significant that at the height of the Cold War, members of supposedly incompatible ideological camps exhibited apprehension about these large-scale sociopolitical shifts through equivalent cinematic arch narratives.¹¹

The fact that filmmakers from two distinct national contexts responded to the cardinal reconfiguration of the prewar status quo through analogous gendered tropes helps contextualise Cold War culture as a complex cultural ecosystem in which the Iron Curtain constituted but one element.¹² Historian György Péteri recast Churchill’s ferric partition as a ‘Nylon Curtain,’ arguing that: ‘Nylon rather than Iron Curtain would be the appropriate metaphor to describe what was actually separating the worlds on the two sides of the Cold War front line.’ Péteri asserts that the communist experiment had been embedded in the international system from the very beginning, actively responding to worldwide challenges as it sought to realise its aspirations of ‘global significance and impact.’¹³ Indeed, Europe (and beyond) was abuzz with processes and phenomena that transcended national boundaries and bloc demarcations; intellectual traffic and the resulting cultural

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the trajectory of the Cold War standoff. See, for instance, Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds., *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Christine von Oertzen, *The Pleasure of a Surplus Income: Part-Time Work, Gender Politics, and Social Change in West Germany, 1955–1969* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), and Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP; 2008).

¹⁰ Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit-Grit* (London: Wallflower, 1993), 16.

¹¹ For instance, Geneviève Sellier points out that the French New Wave filmmakers expressed a highly ambivalent, if not misogynistic, attitude toward the new liberated woman. See Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008).

¹² A rich selection of works offers a comprehensive view of Cold War cultural diplomacy although the focus remains almost exclusively on the activities of the US administration. See, for instance, David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004); Yale Richmond, *Practicing Public Diplomacy: A Cold War Odyssey* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008); and Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008).

¹³ György Péteri, “Nylon Curtain: Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe,” *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2004): 113–23. Péteri adapted the term “Nylon Curtain” from David Riesman’s 1951 short story “Nylon Wars,” in which the author depicts a scenario in which the United States “bombs” the USSR with consumer goods under the cover of “Operation Abundance.”

transfer figured as an important element of the Cold War. Despite national differences, the British New Wave mirrored the ideological principles and aesthetics of the Soviet New Wave because the international Cold War order facilitated a circulatory cultural ecosystem. While nations certainly generated specific Cold War cultural idioms, the possibility of shared cultural expressions also became amplified.¹⁴

Because the Cold War is generally defined in terms of borders and partitions, interpretations of cultural interchange during this era can often be restricted to dualistic/binary categories or associations. The concept of an ecosystem allows us to more concretely imagine Cold War cultural interaction in terms of networks that are dynamic, overlapping, multidirectional, and interdependent. Without denying that the Cold War rivalry erected literal and figurative walls that exacted a heavy toll on those involved, it is equally necessary to recognise the Cold War as a global event that generated a shared *sui generis* culture, which was international and collective in its character. Thus the concept of a cultural ecosystem builds on recent scholarship on East–West cultural exchange while accentuating the interconnectedness of seemingly incompatible and opposing Cold War cultures.¹⁵ The comparison between the British and Soviet New Waves shows that the Iron Curtain was not permeable simply because Western culture managed to penetrate it and impress Soviet consumers with blue-jeans, bubble-gum, and the Beatles.¹⁶ Rather, the Iron Curtain was paper (or nylon) thin also because the Soviet Union and the West at times faced similar broad sociopolitical issues and, as a result, occasionally addressed these issues through analogous cinematic heroes, narratives, and imagery. The appearance of angry young men on Soviet and British screens testifies to the fact that the filmmakers of these nations relayed the tensions of the postwar context through similar gendered tropes; they related to, rather than copied, each other. This case study represents one Cold War moment during which two national communities, despite their historical and ideological distinctiveness, produced similar cultural tropes by virtue of undergoing

¹⁴ Several works below astutely comment on the specificity of Cold War experiences in national and regional contexts. See, for instance, Andrew Hammond, ed., *Global Cold War Literature: Western, Eastern, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *Local Consequences of the Global Cold War*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007); and Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter With the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008).

¹⁵ The works below demonstrate the significant impact Western popular and “high” culture exerted on the countries of the Warsaw Pact, illustrating the inter-bloc character of the Cold War ecosystem. See Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990); Tomas Tolvaisas, “Cold War ‘Bridge-Building’: U.S. Exchange Exhibits and Their Reception in the Soviet Union, 1959–1967,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 4 (2010): 3–31; and Sergei Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010).

¹⁶ Many of the essays in the two edited volumes below reflect on the transnational character of postwar and Cold War processes. See Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: A World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) and Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney, eds., *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

comparable sociopolitical transformations. Ultimately, although it cannot be disputed that the Cold War conditioned distinct cultural phenomena on either side of the Iron Curtain, it is equally necessary to recognise a shared, if not unified, Cold War cultural ecosystem.

Implicit here is also an argument about a parallel metamorphosis of British and Soviet film industries. From the mid-1950s to the end of the 1960s, artists succeeded in screening controversial productions because of, rather than in spite of, official regulatory mechanisms, such as the British Board of Film Censorship and the Soviet Ministry of Culture. I would propose that, differing ideological and economic regimes notwithstanding, a sort of symbiotic relationship developed between artists and state officials during this fifteen-year period. In the same way artists accepted a degree of regulation in order to access state-owned studio space and distribution networks, governments funded provocative art projects so as to gain a level of legitimacy in the eyes of the populace and cooperation from the cultural elites. After the events of Prague Spring, however, the Soviet state reversed course and began tightening the noose on its noncompliant filmmakers. Although unencumbered by censors, 1970s British cinema experienced, in the words of film critic John Patterson, a period of ‘internal exile,’ as they fled to Hollywood or the small screen.¹⁷ By the early 1970s, it is safe to say that both industries entered a period of artistic stagnation.

By focusing on a period during which Soviet artists, politicians, and citizens actively plugged themselves into cross-cultural currents, USSR’s postwar film history can also help re-frame postwar European chronology. Comparative transatlantic histories have until now understandably focused on *annus mirabilis* 1968. From the perspective of mass student and worker unrest taking place in 1968 in Western Europe and the US, the Soviet Union appears tertiary to elucidating the era’s radical *Zeitgeist* because of its relative internal stability. As a result, the ‘long 1960s,’ as a time of a continent-wide cultural revolution, remains within the purview of Western democracies – although occasionally Prague Spring or (more rarely) the March 1968 events in Poland enter the picture.¹⁸ However, if 1945 or 1953, rather than 1968, become the starting points for a sociocultural comparative study, then the Soviet Union can more readily be interpreted as a participant of the cultural revolution evolving on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1950s – despite the fact that the 1950s and 1960s Soviet trends never culminated in 1968-

¹⁷ John Patterson, “Films We Forgot to Remember,” *The Guardian*, May 15, 2008, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/may/16/filmandmusic1.filmandmusic3>

¹⁸ The exception to this rule is Jeremi Suri’s monograph, which incorporates the Soviet domestic context to explain 1968 and the eventual rise of Cold War détente. See Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003). For the classic comparative and transnational studies of 1968 in the context of the long 1960s in West Europe and the US see Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of ’68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007) and Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and United States, c. 1958-c. 1974* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

like catharsis.¹⁹ By making Soviet experiences an integral part of postwar continental processes, the 1950s emerge as a decade decisive in the formation of a shared Cold War culture.

Postwar Affluence and Its (Misogynistic) Discontents

By the middle of the 1950s, the leaders of the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union felt increasingly optimistic about their respective countries' prospects. The economies of the two former allies had begun to rebound as the age of postwar austerity and rationing drew to a close. In both countries the distinction between needs and luxuries blurred as material abundance came to be billed as a universal right rather than elite privilege. In 1957, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan famously pronounced: 'Indeed, let us be frank about it, most of our people have never had it so good. Go around the country . . . and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime – nor indeed in the history of this country.' Not to be outdone, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev confidently proclaimed one year later: 'A few years will pass and we shall see which country will produce more consumer goods. We believe that our country will take first place.'²⁰ On either side of the Iron Curtain, leaders of industrialised and industrialising economies promised a robust recovery, encouraging citizens to expect an even more prosperous future for themselves and their progeny.

The postwar economic boom and subsequent rise in living standards did not, however, strike everyone as an unmitigated blessing. In a continent-wide, transatlantic critique of consumerism, a cross-section of artists, journalists, and community leaders publicly fretted that the burgeoning consumer culture corrupted the vibrancy and distinctiveness of homegrown ways of life.²¹ In the UK and the USSR, intellectuals and artists led the charge against the vulgarity of consumer-driven culture. Shaped by de-Stalinisation and the attendant rejection of the personality cult, the New Wavers shared a common desire to break with the traditional Marxist view 'that cultural or family life' represented 'an entertaining sideshow, a secondary expression of human creativity or fulfillment.'²² When British sociologist Richard Hoggart stressed the

¹⁹ Like US historians, who are demonstrating the dynamism of the 1950s, European scholars are also reevaluating the characterisation of the 1950s as conservative and reactionary. See Heiko Feldner, Claire Gorrara, and Kevin Passmore, eds., *The Lost decade?: The 1950s in European History, Politics, Society and Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2011) and Nick Thomas, "Will the Real 1950s Please Stand Up?: Views of A Contradictory Decade," *Cultural and Social History* 5, no. 2 (2008): 227–36.

²⁰ Speech at a Kremlin reception for cotton growers, TASS, February 20, 1958. The quotation is available through the digital *Open Society Archives*: <http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/57-2-227.shtml>. Accessed December 20, 2011.

²¹ For instance, Vance Packard's 1957 best-selling book, *The Hidden Persuaders* and John Galbraith's celebrated 1958 monograph, *The Affluent Society* led the way in lambasting "conspicuous consumption" and served as templates for subsequent critiques of postwar mass consumerism.

²² Dennis L. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), 59.

centrality of the personal and local to understanding the working class in his 1957 classic *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life*, he encapsulated a revision of the Marxist worldview transpiring in both Moscow and London. He noted: ‘The more we look at working class life, the more we try to reach the core of working-class attitudes, the more surely it does appear that that core is a sense of the personal, the concrete, the local: it is embodied in the idea of, first, the family and, second, the neighbourhood.’²³ By placing culture at the centre of their social critique and by ascribing historical agency to individual actors, New Wave filmmakers contended that the embourgeoisement of working-class individuals and (sub-)culture impoverished national popular culture and de-politicised the working class.

The Labour leadership reluctantly agreed with the sober evaluation coming from intellectual and artistic circles, tentatively accepting the triumphalist prognosis of the Tories, who declared the class war over. Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell went as far as to concede: ‘The changing character of labor, full employment, new housing, the new way of life based on the telly, the fridge, the car and the glossy magazines – all have had their effect on our political strength.’²⁴ Likewise, voices far and wide in the Soviet Union warned about the potential ill effects of embourgeoisement on the toiling masses. Soviet writer Vladimir Pomerantsev insisted that while it is necessary to eradicate so-called consumer deficits and provide all workers with homes and refrigerators, there ought to be a level of restraint. He insisted: ‘While working for a prosperous material life, we must remain above material life.’²⁵ For his part, Khrushchev, the champion of increasing consumer goods production, sought to curb the rise of a materialistic way of life through education: ‘It is necessary not only to provide people with good homes, but also to teach them . . . to live correctly, and to observe the rules of socialist communality.’²⁶ Although separated by Cold War borders, the national conversation about affluence in the UK and the USSR displayed analogous anxieties about a shallow materialist ethos devouring a wholesome national culture.

On first glance, it might appear counterintuitive to compare British and Soviet anxieties about the deleterious effect of a consumer culture since the USSR could not, in a strict sense, boast a consumer economy in the 1950s. Whereas the English economy more efficiently delivered high-quality goods to more of its citizens, the Soviet leadership, despite lofty promises, remained constrained by the needs of the military-industrial complex. As historian Aleksandr Pyzhikov notes, while the West was rapidly developing a society in which the satisfaction of people’s needs was the economy’s *raison d’être*, in the Soviet Union consumerism remained but a propaganda

²³ Quoted in Stephen Brooke, ‘Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s,’ *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2001): 787.

²⁴ Quoted in John Hill, *Sex, Class, and Realism*, 6.

²⁵ Pomerantsev’s comments are quoted in Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 176.

²⁶ Quoted in Susan E. Reid, ‘The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 (2005): 295.

goal.²⁷ While true that the Soviet Union could hardly compete with the West in the realm of consumer goods production on the basis of either quality or size, it would be rash to deny that Soviet propaganda successfully fashioned a consumer mentality despite the fact it could rarely live up to the expectations it fabricated. The testimony of St. Petersburg art critic Mikhail Iur'evich German reflects the paradoxical phenomenon of a consumer society starved of consumer goods when he recalls the 1960s fashion of Bolognese raincoats:

They were sold only under the table in special distribution stores, and they were extremely expensive. In the West, they cost a pittance and were made exclusively to keep people dry in the rain. But here, Bologna coats were worn whatever the weather; they cracked, split, and probably looked ridiculous. Yet we were forced to live by our own codes of elegance.²⁸

Thus while the burgeoning British middle class of the 1950s could more easily acquire the materialist trappings of bourgeois existence (even if only on credit), Soviet citizens' cravings often went unsated. Nonetheless, the so-called Soviet economy of deficits did not stymie the formation of a consumerist outlook and sensibilities.

The New Wave cycle and the trope of the angry young man personified the anxieties mass consumerism brought to the fore of national consciousness. British and Soviet filmmakers popularised the idea that a disposable income and access to consumer goods only illusorily create empowerment and emancipation. These motion pictures coded middle-class existence as morally bankrupt, portraying upward social mobility as inexorably linked to profound sociocultural dislocation. The dramatic tension of the New Wave lay in the hero's (doomed) attempt to defend his authenticity and independence against the supposedly feminised and effete culture of a consumer-driven society.

From the start, misogynistic overtones defined the New Wavers' critique of postwar affluence. Natanson's *Noisy Day* and Richardson's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* stand in for a broader trend in which women personify forces bent on castrating working-class men's political and social autonomy. The female mass-consumer is portrayed as co-opted by the governing elites to contain male rebellion and produce a domesticated, ideologically neutered masculine model. In these films wives, mothers, and girlfriends make frequent demands of male wage earners to forsake their opposition to the established order and dedicate themselves to greasing the wheels of the household economy instead. The seminal angry young man, Jimmy Porter, states this dynamic best when he exclaims in *Look Back in Anger*: "Why, why, why, why do we let these women bleed us to death?" Lynne Segal astutely phrases the worldview Jimmy and other angry young men espouse: "Women were never to be trusted but treated as part of the system trying to trap, tame and emasculate men. What was really happening . . . was that class hostility was suppressed and twisted into

²⁷ Aleksandr V. Pyzhikov, "Soviet Postwar Society and the Antecedents of the Khrushchev Reforms," *Russian Studies in History*, 50, no. 3 (2011): 33.

²⁸ M. Iu. German, *Slozhnoe proshedshie* (St. Petersburg, 2000), 436. Quoted in Natal'ia Leбина, "Plus the Chemicalization of the Entire Wardrobe," *Russian Studies in History* 48, no. 1 (2009): 43.

new forms of sexual hostility.²⁹ Instead of battling the foreman on the shop floor, the irate working-class lads bullied their female counterparts at home.

The angry young men cinema cycle can consequently be read as both a reflection of the directors' strong anti-establishment, anti-consumerist sentiment, as well as a testament to the more generalisable anxieties about rapidly changing gender dynamics in the postwar UK and USSR. As femininity became increasingly detached from the experience of motherhood and as sex became as much about (mutual) pleasure as it was about reproduction, the cultural cache of traditional ideas about gender – the 'male breadwinner ideal' and 'the sanctified working-class mother' – lost currency. The cumulative effect of women's postwar socioeconomic emancipation cardinally reconfigured gender relations on either side of the Iron Curtain. Arthur Marwick, in his investigation of a transatlantic cultural revolution in Italy, France, Britain, and the United States concludes: 'There is a valid broad generalization to be made about a trend, dating back well before the sixties and continuing well beyond them, towards a breakdown of the traditional lifelong marriage.'³⁰ Russian sexologist Igor Kon makes a comparable observation regarding the Soviet postwar context, stating that: 'relations between men and women became more democratic and equal' in all areas of social and private life, 'while the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity became less diametrically opposed than they used to be.'³¹

The reconfiguration of gender relations began as British and Soviet women slowly came to exercise a growing level of control over their reproduction. Although Soviet and British governments expanded women's contraceptive options for different reasons – the UK economy suffered a labour shortage while the USSR faced a population crisis – the effects were similar: starting with the early 1950s, women experienced an increased degree of personal agency. In England the demand for female labour intensified with a tight male-labour supply and was sustained by the availability of the birth-control pill and other contraceptives. Consequently, a significant percentage of British women deferred childbirth even once married, producing, as Hera Cook observes, 'a sexual lifestyle in which reproduction was separate from sexual activity and marriage was no longer a marker of either.'³² More to the point, historian Martin Francis notes that 'the needs of the post-war British economy made it ultimately impossible to deny women's aspirations to participate in the world of paid work, even at a time when fears for the integrity of family life and a falling birth rate created space for press hysteria about 'selfish' career women and 'latchkey children.'³³

²⁹ Lynne Segal, "The Silence of Women in the New Left," in *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On*, ed. Robin Archer et al. (London: Verso, 1989), 117.

³⁰ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties*, 381.

³¹ Igor S. Kon, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: From the Age of the Czars to Today* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 88.

³² Hera Cook, "The English Sexual Revolution: Technology and Social Change," *History Workshop Journal* 59 (Fall 2005): 123.

³³ Martin Francis, "A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War," *Gender & History* 19, no.1 (April 2007): 166.

For its part, the Soviet state tolerated, if not encouraged, women's control over their reproduction because of the national population crisis. The death of twenty-six million Soviet citizens spurred the government to, paradoxically, overturn the 1936 ban on abortion in 1955. As Amy E. Randall explains, 'the demographic consequences of dangerous illegal abortions' and the government's pronatalist bend led to the legalisation of abortions – even as the state actively discouraged women from seeking out abortions.³⁴ Because Soviet women, unlike their British counterparts, had no ready access to the birth control pill, they consequently relied on abortion as the first, and often only, way of terminating unwanted pregnancies. Soviet women thus paid a steep price to remain autonomous in making decisions relating to family planning; by the early 1970s the rate of abortion among Russian women was at least ten times greater than that of women in industrialised capitalist economies.³⁵

In light of women's noticeable sociopolitical and personal emancipation following the war, the Soviet and British New Wave productions seem out of sync with their era since they reestablish a community (or a sense of one) in which both gender and class identities are fixed and clearly demarcated, and one in which workers actively resist corrupt superiors while women preserve the home against outside intrusion. As historian Stephen Brooke points out: 'Such nostalgia not only evoked the loss of particular gender identities, but also represented an elegy to an older class identity, the foundation of which comprised established ideas of masculine and feminine roles.'³⁶ Film historian John Hill likewise connects a generalised sense of gender anxiety to the nostalgic vision British New Wave productions promoted: '... these films extend a degree of sympathy towards the virile, working-class male who seeks to resist the pressures towards embourgeoisement and social conformity (including domesticity).'³⁷ The class-oriented nostalgia Brooke and Hill describe also dominated the Soviet New Wave productions, which to a similar degree expressed a class-based nostalgia built on misogynistic sentiments. Khrushchev's aim of constructing an educated, cosmopolitan, and mobile society altered the semi-rural mindset predominating in many Soviet urban centers and fundamentally reshaped the traditional cultures characterising even the most metropolitan Soviet neighborhoods. Whether the location shooting happened in the tenements of England's northern industrial centres or Moscow's suburbs, New Wave directors negatively reflected on the process by which traditional local subcultures gradually succumbed to, what they perceived to be, an effeminate and inauthentic consumer culture.

³⁴ Amy E. Randall, "Abortion Will Deprive You of Happiness!": Soviet Reproductive Politics in the Post-Stalin Era," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no 3 (Fall 2011): 14.

³⁵ Between 1960 and 1979 residents of the Russian and Baltic republics had smaller families as well as higher rates of divorce compared to the Soviet average. See Iu. A. Poliakov, V. B. Zhiromskaia, and V. A. Isupov, *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke: Istoricheskie ocherki*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005), 119–30.

³⁶ Brooke, "Gender and Working Class Identity," 773.

³⁷ John Hill, "From the New Wave to 'Brit-Grit': Continuity and Difference in Working-Class Realism," in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, eds., Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), 249–51.

British and Soviet New Wave directors personalised this socioeconomic transformation by featuring narratives that revolved around the angry young man's battle with the increasingly independent postwar woman, who stands in sharp contrast to the idealised femininity embodied by the figure English novelist Alan Sillitoe called 'good owd mam.' If the 'modern woman' symbolises the rootlessness and cheapness of consumer culture, the asexual and fiercely familial 'mam' becomes coded as the guarantor of a way of life that is quickly becoming obsolete.³⁸ D. E. Cooper rightly points out that 1950s intellectuals attacked effeminacy because it represented 'the sum of those qualities which are supposed . . . to exude from the worst in women: pettiness, snobbery, flippancy, voluptuousness, superficiality, materialism.'³⁹ Ultimately, both Soviet and British New Wave directors fashion a worldview in which women's socioeconomic emancipation costs the community its traditional gender equilibrium and, consequently, its ability to successfully ward off institutionalised social inequities.

The Angry Young Men's Flight from Domesticity

At first blush, Oleg, the protagonist of Natanson's 1960 feature *Noisy Day*, and Colin, the hero of Richardson's 1962 motion picture *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner*, share little in common. Oleg, an earnest, if naïve, high school freshman with a penchant for declaiming poems and ditties seems worlds apart from the terse and aggressive Colin. While Colin defiantly breaks the law, Oleg practices a strict ethical code. Oleg's polished speech and demeanour speak to the fact that he, unlike Colin, inhabits that liminal space between the working- and middle-class existences. Despite these differences, Oleg and Colin share a reflexive animosity toward domesticity, consumerism, and adult authority, considering them to constitute the three pillars of a system designed to benefit only women and those at the top of the class hierarchy. Consequently, both *Noisy Day* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* revolve around the protagonists' conflicts with women and authority figures.

In *Noisy Day* Oleg's sister-in-law, Lena, none too subtly embodies the mindless aspiration to affluence that New Wave directors find so repulsive; Natanson thus renders ugly this outwardly graceful, well-spoken, and attractive female. The twenty-eight-year-old beauty strategically bullies her husband Fedor (Oleg's older brother) to secure them an apartment and provide the money necessary to fill their nest with the latest word in interior design. Lena sweet-talks her spouse into supporting her in this crusade, indifferent to the fact that he is literally selling himself out in the process. In order to fulfill his wife's requests, Fedor abandons his promising but unprofitable scientific research at the lab and begins writing lucrative fluff pieces for magazines and delivering well-paid public lectures. For her part, Lena defends her avarice by disingenuously appropriating the government's populist rhetoric: 'Why, then, are they

³⁸ Brooke, "Gender and Working Class Identity," 732–33.

³⁹ Quoted in Stephen Lacey, *British Realist Theater: The New Wave in Its Context, 1956–1965* (London: Routledge, 1995), 31.

constructing so many beautiful, spacious buildings? Why are they offering so many wonderful apartments? Why are they selling carpets, crystal, expensive furniture, dining sets, and paintings?' For Lena, to exist means to consume. This point is not lost on Oleg, who warns his brother: 'She will devour you.'

In *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, Colin's mother (whose name is never mentioned) expresses a similarly voracious appetite for worldly comforts, inflaming the young man's anger. Richardson consistently accentuates the greediness of this plainspoken and plain-looking working-class woman by contrasting her conformity with the independent-mindedness of Colin's deceased father. Colin recalls his dying father's refusal for hospital care or sedatives – even as he slowly expired from cancer. The patriarch's unwillingness to take the painkillers mirrors his resistance to follow a life script others have prescribed for him. He exclaims: 'They won't get me to go to no hospital. I ain't no bleedin' guinea pig for anybody.' By contrast, the matriarch, absorbed as she is with the politics of the day-to-day, snubs grand causes and her husband's idealism. She even scorns her spouse's dogged determination to organise regular strikes and shake up the factory leadership. She blames his activism for the family's poverty. To punish him, she not only cheats during marriage but also invites a lover into the home shortly after the funeral. Colin reflects on his parents' marriage soberly, generalising it to the level of gender wars: 'Mum and Dad fought like cat and dog. Dad threatened to bash Mum's head in 'cause she was doin' it b'ind with other blokes. Mum cursin' Dad for not bringin' enough money into the house. That's how most people live.' Because Colin admires his father for standing up to the factory managers, he comes to revile his mother's real-politicking. In one of the central moments of the film Colin defines his point of view: 'It's not that I don't like work. It's just that I don't like the idea of slaving me guts out so the bosses can get all the profits. Seems all wrong to me.' The widow's insistence that Colin will never be the man of the house until he starts bringing a regular paycheck confirms his view of her as an accomplice to the exploitation he observes around him, intensifying his feeling of alienation from domestic life his mother presides over.

The directors present Colin's mother and Oleg's sister-in-law as having forsaken their traditional gender duties and as being unwilling to assume the sacred role of the working-class matriarch. Desiring to achieve a level of authority within and without their domiciles, the women affront the young men's sense of decency and fairness. In Colin's case, the mother refuses him the title of the household head as the eldest male of the home. As a wage earner, she asserts her right to dictate the dynamics of home life. Clearly disinterested in mothering Colin or his siblings, she remains interested in (extramarital) sex long after her reproductive duties have been discharged. For his part, Natanson blemishes Lena's character by contrasting her unfavourably to Oleg and Fedor's mother Klavdia Vasilevna, who personifies the matriarch of old: long-suffering, selfless, and interested only in her family's wellbeing. Not coincidentally does Klavdia Vasilevna inhabit the two spaces Lena never enters: the kitchen and dining room. The widowed matron serves as Lena's foil, reminding the audience of alternatives to contemporary gender norms. The fact that at twenty-eight Lena has not

borne children also serves to underscore her distance from the feminine ideal Natanson projects onto Klavdia Vasilevna, who has brought up four children. Lena's eventual insistence that Fedor choose between her and his mother represents more than an ultimatum to a domestic dispute. It signifies a lifestyle choice between an existence revolving around a domestic community or shallow individualism. Establishing both Lena and Colin's mother as the quintessential 'new woman,' Natanson and Richardson set the stage for conflict.

Midway through the narrative, both Colin and Oleg commit themselves to active resistance against the women's moral treachery. Oleg's moment begins innocuously with an accident. Like the other household members, he quietly fumes about the furniture Lena gradually crams into the family's already-constricted living quarters. As Lena waits to move into one of the prefabricated tenements mushrooming around Moscow, she indulges her taste for imported and posh furniture. To make matters worse, she obsessively covers her new Czech cupboards, Polish bed frames, and Lithuanian end-tables with sheets and blankets, forbidding anyone from using them. These sheltered objects take centre stage and create a sort of hellish labyrinth in which Lena's anxiety about the wellbeing of her possessions plays the role of Minotaur. Oleg becomes the monster's first victim. The altercation begins when Oleg accidentally spills ink over his sister-in-law's table. Like Lady Macbeth, Lena shrieks upon seeing the previously immaculate surface stained irreparably. Consumed with rage, she throws Oleg's goldfish out the apartment window in an act of vengeance. Just before she tosses the fish to their death, Oleg screams out in despair: 'But they are living creatures!' Upon seeing alley cats feasting on his pets, Oleg runs to the wall, reaches for the honorific sabre hanging beneath his deceased father's military portrait, and begins hacking away at the furniture in front of the panic-stricken family members. A weapon that had once defended the Soviet Union's borders now strikes against Lena's insatiable appetites.

Colin's own protest against commodity fetishism commences shortly after he and his mother collect the £500 life-insurance premium from the factory management. The laconic comment the newly widowed wife makes upon receiving the cash evinces how she (mis)understands the tragedy behind her husband's death: 'It's a shame you had to wait for the poor devil to die before parting with 500 quid.' Upon returning home, Colin's mother, flanked by her other three children and paramour, asks how the money should be spent. When Colin tersely suggests burning it all, his mother scoffs: 'You take after your dad right enough. You're a bloody loon.' A shopping spree ensues and Colin's mother, like Lena, eagerly indulges in the fruits of postwar affluence: a fur coat, a television set, a carpet, and all manner of household conveniences. These scenes, in which all family members spend the 'blood money' with eagerness, confirm the impression that the deceased patriarch symbolises little more than a long-awaited payout that sates their long-unfulfilled material yearnings. While Colin is not indifferent to retail therapy, he turns away from the consumerist daze long enough to see the situation through his father's eyes. Just as the entire family assembles around the new television set and stares transfixed by an inane musical number, Colin

subverts this TV-centred living room idyll so idiomatic of the 1950s visual landscape. In a moment of silent protest, Colin leaves the living room, enters his parents' bedroom, and proceeds to burn a one-pound note in front of his father's portrait. Although not as dramatic a protest as that of Oleg, it effectively estranges Colin from his kin.

The alienation Oleg and Colin feel at home compel them to take to the streets; their flight from domesticity becomes literal. After he savages Lena's furniture, Oleg drops the sabre, runs outside, and disappears into the bustling afternoon crowds. The young man's flight packs a visual punch since this is the first time the camera leaves the cramped apartment, the camerawork relating a sense of liberation. It is not clear, however, whether Oleg is running away from his problems or running toward a solution. Colin also attempts to solve his domestic predicament in an unorthodox manner. Because he wants to free himself financially from his mother's yoke but sees blue-collar work as a dead end, Colin decides to steal the money. Ironically, by pilfering the cash, Colin seeks to preserve a sense of integrity that spares him from selling himself out to an unfair class system embodied by both factories and postwar domestic life. Unlike Robin Hood, however, he pockets all the proceeds of his 'righteous' fight.

In the final count, both angry young men achieve a stopgap resolution to their conundrum. Colin's robbery, much like Oleg's attack on Lena's furniture, symbolises a temporary answer to a systemic problem. When Colin admits that he has been 'learning a lot lately' without being sure what he's been learning, he parallels Oleg's own confusion when he declaims in a poem that, like a cloud, he drifts without aim. The grand gestures run in tandem with their sense of aimlessness; their bombast reveals their powerlessness.

Oleg's escape echoes Colin's own musing on his lonesome existence: 'All I know is that you've got to run – run without knowing why, through fields and woods. And the winning post's no end, even though barmy crowds might be cheering themselves daft. That's what the loneliness of the long distance runner feels like.' Both of the young men feel an alienating anger but do not know how to escape their condition except to run from it. The impulse to flee seems to be a way to relieve the acute tension 'the angries' feel since injustice appears to be ubiquitous, defining public and private life to an equal degree. While women prioritise creature comforts over moral principles in running their households, (senior) men of authority corrupt the public sphere by unethically exercising their powers. New Wave productions present the private and public sphere as fundamentally interrelated so that they appear as mirror reflections of each other. The antiheroes' microcosm is thus populated by conniving women and authoritarian bosses against whom resistance seems futile. The life trajectory of an angry young man is dominated by a society bent on minimising his agency and possibility of authentic action. Schools and prisons, living rooms and factory shop floors, become interchangeable sites in that they all negatively affect the hero's efforts at self-actualisation. *Noisy Day* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, much like New Wave features in general, endorse Jean-Paul Sartre's idea that 'Hell is other people.'

When the police eventually incarcerate Colin for the robbery and send him to a reformatory for rehabilitation, Richardson makes it clear that the reform school in many ways parallels the outside world. Much like Colin's mother wants him to be a productive member of the household economy, the borstal director wants to make Colin into an upstanding community member. He instructs the young Colin: 'You are here for us to try to make something of you, to turn you into industrious and honest citizens. We want you to work hard and play hard. We believe in all that.' Like his mother, the headmaster promises Colin that playing by the rules benefits everyone when in fact the administration is interested only in making Colin more subservient. Like his father, the young man does not want to be anybody's guinea pig. He declares to one of the fellow inmates: 'The best thing to do is be cunning and stay where you are. I'm going to let them think they've got me house-trained, but they never will, the bastards. To get me beat, they'll have to stick a rope around my neck.' Richardson extols Colin's independence and portrays most of the adults in the reformatory as criminally disinterested in their charges' well-being.

Despite Colin's valiant attempts to achieve autonomy, he remains powerless against the system. Although Colin's final act of resistance does not lead to a broader class action represented by an orchestrated rebellion of the reformatory's working-class inmates, Richardson celebrates Colin's opposition as proof of his protagonist's humanity and independent-mindedness. In the film's iconic climax, Colin competes in an interschool marathon against a local public school. The headmaster makes it clear to Colin – his new star athlete – that victory would mean preferential treatment and an early release. More than that, Colin's willing cooperation symbolises how painless life could be if he only 'played along to get along.' But just as Colin prepares to cross the finish line with a superior lead, he experiences a dramatic set of flashbacks. The montage of his mother, girlfriend, late father, and headmaster crowd his consciousness, all of them pulling him in various directions. The ominous visages express sentiments that make it clear that perhaps 'the outside' epitomises the oppressiveness Colin encounters in the reform school. In an act of brazen defiance, Colin stops just steps away from the finish line, allowing the representative of the opposing team to claim the title the headmaster had wanted to appropriate for himself and his institution. By refusing to be anyone's guinea pig, Colin celebrates his father's attitude and recovers a sense of agency in a system that robs him of any real independence.

Oleg similarly mocks the sanctity of adult authority. A day after returning from a parent-teacher conference, Klavdia Vasilevna informs him that some of his teachers have criticised his performance: he is failing mathematics and physics, disrupts classes by asking too many questions, and is otherwise irreverent toward authority figures. When Oleg responds by saying that his success is tied directly to his level of interest in the subject matter, an imperious know-it-all family friend serves up didactic platitudes that echo the sanctimonious mentality of officials in the English borstal. Ivan Nikitich Lapshin instructs Oleg: 'You ought to study hard. The Soviet authorities give you everything. At your age, I plowed, mowed, and grazed horses. You've all begun to think

a little too much, saying all manner of things. Your father died a hero's death, and all you do is sleep under the hero's portrait, becoming lazier and lazier.' The domineering patriarch expands the critique to the entire generation, proclaiming that the young people working under him have also become too unruly: 'They complain to the higher-ups if you look at them sideways.' Like a little Stalin, Ivan Nikitich mourns the days when a strict hierarchy and unconditional obedience were the order of the day. Because he cannot enforce his will unrestrained, he applies his Stalinist terror techniques in his household, beating his son and wife.

Unlike the rest of the household, Oleg stands up to Ivan Nikitich much in the same way Colin defies the reformatory headmaster. While other family members endure the petty tyrant's delusions of grandeur, Oleg confronts him. The anger the young man feels fills the room, stuns those assembled, and halts the old man's tirade dead in its tracks. The impassioned youth screams at the consternated Ivan Nikitich: 'Don't call me a tadpole! I have a name! How dare you? You've offended everyone at this table, and the worst part is that you don't even notice.' Indifferent to conventions that hold all others beholden to a polite silence, Oleg, like Colin, perceives propriety to be nothing more than submission masquerading as civility.

Even though New Wave directors sympathise with protagonists who speak truth to power, they portray their heroes' rebellion as a futile undertaking. In the final scene, Colin remains in the borstal, suffocated by the tedium of the authorities' reeducation efforts. Richardson's parting shots show Colin disassembling World War II gas masks with the rest of the inmates. While Colin's protest affirms that he can score a degree of autonomy from the system, the victory certainly feels pyrrhic: he cannot escape either the domestic or the societal entrapments. Oleg's campaign against Lena also backfires; she exploits the familial discord to emotionally blackmail Fedor to leave his flesh and blood. Without his mother's advice and guidance, Lena's hold over her husband becomes uncontested. In a sense, New Wave features make it clear that the postwar system organised around social mobility and the accumulation of wealth spells doom for those men who either resist it or submit to it willingly; their options are to sell out or recognise their own impotence.

Soviet and British New Wave directors emphasised not their protagonists' victory but their valiant effort to fight the good, but unwinnable, fight. Colin and Oleg mutiny against the materialism festering in their households and the injustice shaping their public life, knowing in advance that their defiant stance is purely symbolic and even counter-productive. By registering their opposition, they harm their long-term self-interest without reversing the status quo. Colin and Oleg ultimately constitute existentialist figures that refuse to trade in their integrity for a comfortable middle-class existence. In the process of creating a sympathetic underdog figure, however, New Wave directors focus so much on the psychological profile of their protagonists that they inadvertently obscure broader class struggle, emphasising instead the era's gender biases and inequality. Indeed, the Russian and English working-class young men could be seen not as defenders of authenticity in a world beset by spiritual deadness but as men driven by self-interest, bent on preserving their privilege in a modernising and

democratising society. Interpretative differences aside, the New Wave heroes are historically significant since they bear witness to the interconnectedness of Cold War cultures; the angry young men demonstrate how two distinct societies, faced with dramatic sociocultural shifts of the postwar era, expressed their anxiety and vision through analogous tropes of masculinity.

Conclusion

This article emphasises the interconnectedness of the European continent in the first two decades of the postwar era by examining New Wave movements that emerged in the UK and the USSR. A group of directors in distinct national and political contexts set out to critique the consumerist ethos and the mass culture that bred it. To these filmmakers, a study of everyday culture represented a site of resistance to postwar affluence. By creating stirring and provocative visual narratives about working-class life, Soviet and British film industries played a prominent role in discrediting consumer-driven mass culture and extolling the moral superiority of a distinctly working-class worldview. And although New Wave productions appeared shockingly true to reality, especially when compared to the highly stylised films of the pre-World War II era, they actually romanticised their protagonists' lives and deployed misogynistic tropes to register their protest against consumerism.

By structuring their narratives around a hero rebelling against the established order – as embodied by the financially independent and socially emancipated female subject – these New Wave directors represented commercialised mass culture as the death knell of a mythically authentic national way of being. Although Natanson and Richardson envisioned Colin and Oleg's stories as an exposé of the spiritual rot plaguing their societies, in retrospect these charismatic rebels appear reactionary, standing up defiantly to an imaginary feminised threat. While artists across the industrialised world grappled with the gradual modernisation of gender roles and class identities, British and Soviet New Wave directors distinguished themselves in this process by attempting to re-create a disappearing social and gendered order of blue-collar subculture that found itself transformed by the sociopolitical and cultural changes.

The comparison of postwar movements in Soviet and British cinematography reveals two significant aspects of the early Cold War era. First, by comparing and contrasting a particular expression of British and Soviet cultural experience, it becomes clear that the West European postwar narrative is in some ways analogous to the Soviet one. If the events of 1968 serve as a reference point for the comparison, the USSR remains on the sidelines of continental history. From the perspective of the 1950s and early 1960s, however, it becomes clear the Soviet filmmakers and moviegoers, much like their European counterparts, strove to come to grips with a rapidly changing sociopolitical landscape. Consumerism, a recalcitrant youth culture, and a shift in gender dynamics made themselves equally felt on either side of the Iron Curtain. Thus, despite its unique trajectory, the Soviet postwar moment is intrinsically transnational and can be best understood in a comparative context.

Second, a modest but significant number of Soviet reformist directors produced protagonists and constructed narratives akin to those in the UK not because they imitated trends circulating abroad but because they shared a common set of concerns and philosophical values with their European counterparts. Reflecting on the intercultural interaction during the 1960s, Soviet director Marlen Khutsiev observed that: ‘After my [1967] film *July Rain*, I was accused of imitating Antonioni. But the fact of the matter is that I had not seen Antonioni’s films at that point. What I want to say is that at any given point there simply exist certain prevalent historical processes that affect what happens in the film industry.’⁴⁰ Analogous social, economic, and political developments across the continent inspired heroes, narratives, and aesthetics that transcended (and displayed the artificiality of) Cold War borders. Although both Soviet authorities and Western art critics saw the relatively small number of Soviet experimental films as a sign of political dissent and/or kowtowing to foreign fashions, it is more accurate to think of these similarities as proof that Soviet and European artists operated within a larger – and shared – cultural ecosystem.

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⁴⁰ From a transcript of a roundtable discussion entitled “Nikto bol’she ne sdelat ni *Pepel i almaz* ni *Tishinu i krik*: Kinematograf Vostochnoi Evropy—proshchanie s proshlym,” *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 71 (2005): 43.

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