

Day- dreaming in the Hood



The Collective Film Workshop

The Collective Film Workshop is a project meant to continue over a period of years, but the forms it takes change with time and only gradually become clear to the project's creators. Underlying the entire construct is the idea of cooperation and joint authorship of a group of people united in the process of creating a single work. In contemporary art-critical thought, this kind of activity is classified as "participatory art."

The Workshop offers a space and an environment conducive to experimentation: projects emerge in the course of open dialog or conversations, and occasionally out of argument or confrontation, but always as part of the process of overcoming individual alienation. A crucial aspect of the Workshop is establishing and developing interpersonal connections, relationships, and also organic internal communications, so that everybody is incorporated into the process. In terms of the constitution of the Workshop, all participants are equally important and each unique in his or her own way. It is precisely and solely this that becomes, in turn, the basis of collective work. In this way, our ethos conditions our aesthetics, a "relational aesthetics."

The digital revolution has led to a general democratization of the audiovisual production, while the rapid development of personal gadgets has influenced the process of its individualization. Today, it's as simple to create your own video utterance and publish it on the web as it is to jot down your thoughts with pen and paper. The collective media are constructed on interrelationships among, and cocreation by, groups of authors, where a theme established by one is taken up and developed by another, the process both giving expression to the individuality of each and, at the same time, forming a single, unitary work. That technique, in some ways more like theatre or music than pure cinema, revives the modernist dreams of communalism – refitting those dreams in digital clothing – in place of the harsh industrial model of authoritarian production of meanings and cinematic goods. Experimental practices in this vein engender various kinds of experience, including the marginal, because authors who do not know how (or do not wish) to incorporate themselves into the existing cultural mainstream frequently engage them.

It is important not to confuse a workshop with a workshop – the term is used all too broadly in humanities education. The Collective Film Workshop is neither a film school nor a set of film courses. It does not intend to educate people in a professional craft. Its goals are entirely bound up in the creative work of its participants. In sixteenth-century European painting, there was a relatively common form of temporary collective workshop. Artists came together to fill major commissions in an era of narrow specialization, distributing labour among draughtsmen and their colleagues. One would draw faces, another – hands, a third – hanging cloth, and yet another – landscapes and scenery. In this way, the skills and talents of a number of artists were conjoined to create a single, consistent image, without any one of them occupying a dominant position or having a right to place a personal authorial signature on the work. Our ethos, then, may be expressed in the slogan: we send films out into the world, not people bearing certificates.

The Workshop adheres to a way of thinking where our collective, and society at large, are viewed as organisms functioning according to a principle much like a neural network. Within the group, horizontal ties are established which make possible spontaneous interaction, movement

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unguided by any prescribed structure or predetermined image of the work to be achieved, incorporation of the production technologies of documentary or artistic cinema, adherence to principles of performative or actionist practice, the post-factum creation a script – once the camera has already captured human experience, the participants' impressions of the “here and now,” their improvisations and variations on the appointed theme. This point of view offers a broadening of our horizons and invites us to wander at will the new landscapes now open before us. Just as in neurobiology it is customary to relate the plasticity of the human brain to the images both of a sculptor and of the sculpture he chisels from the stone, so the curators of our Workshop see the opportunities and possibilities offered by new media as creating conditions in which the consciousness of our authors can themselves be conceived of as works of art.

In “The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music,” written in the second half of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche glorifies the Dionysian aspect of human nature, the irrational and the tragic. Nietzsche was convinced that the ancient Greek, at particular moments in his life, ceased to be an artist and became himself a work of art. The ancient world knew many collective ritual practices, some of which bequeathed particular forms of social life to later European culture: the festival, the carnival, along with sporting and theatrical games.

There is a good reason Nietzsche and the Greeks arise here. The whole idea of creating a collective film, after all, emerged from the spirit of the festival. This is important if we are to understand the ontological foundations of the entire Workshop project as it developed over time. The festival is an artificial – by which we mean intentionally organized – event, whose participants spend several days or weeks in a state of celebratory exaltation, raising themselves in a certain sense out of and above the ordinary, the mundane and the routine. That state of mind is well in accord with the intensified desire associated with creative artistic pursuits. The mass of master classes, seminars and workshops included in the programs of film festivals around the world eloquently make the point.

Between 2015 and 2018, like wine in oaken barrels, the Workshop project “ripened” within a number of different Russian festivals, as part of which group classes were organized and led by director and curator Andrey Silvestrov. The series of collective cinema experiments opens with “Russia as a Phantasma”, shot in the Siberian town of Kansk, which has for many years now hosted an international festival of short experimental films. Every guest of the Kansk 2015 festival was offered an opportunity to take part and shoot a short video on the topic of the relationship between human beings and landscape, civilization and nature, reality and dream. In the course of one week, several hours of footage were filmed, from which a film was later edited and composed. The film travelled the festival circuit for a time, then won the Grand Prize at the Omnibus Competition at the 2016 Kinoshock Festival. After the success of the Kansk experiment, workshops were held in a number of other cities, including Vladikavkaz, Volgograd and Ekaterinburg. In 2019, now with the participation of the V-A-C Foundation, a large-scale project was established and the Workshop, with about thirty participants enrolled, ran for four months in the Shchukino neighbourhood. Since January, 2020, the Workshop has been actively working with participants gathered via Pushkin Youth programs.

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The initial impulse behind the choice of dreams as a theme came from the special “sensual” approach taken by the organizers of the Kansk international video festival; it determined the melancholic tenor of the first “mosaic” of films. That theme then underwent a transformation from its “local” application in the Kansk workshop to a kind of ideological worldview uniting those films with what, at first glance, might appear to be unrelated works produced by the workshops in other years. In this way, when the V–A–C Foundation organized Daydreaming in the Hood, the theme of dreams had been relatively thoroughly worked out in terms of its internal mythology. It had even evolved into a new term of art. The word son, Russian for dream, became an abbreviation, standing for Sposob Obrazovania Narrativa, or a Method for Generating Narratives – one that plays with, or even outright violates, traditional notions of linear narrative in order to seek new kinds of images.

The source of the idea of understanding dreams as stories built according to their own idiosyncratic principles was Pavel Florensky’s book *The Iconostasis*. From the religious perspectives of “visible and invisible worlds,” Florensky explains the principle of reverse perspective in icons – in contradistinction to Western painting, the vanishing point in an icon can be located not somewhere in the distance, on the horizon line in the image, but within the body of the viewer of the icon. In the first part of this text is a consideration of the nature and qualities of a dream, including an understanding of the impulse behind the unfolding of dream events that may be interesting for storytelling. Relying upon examples drawn from Freud’s “*Interpretation of Dreams*,” the Russian theologian builds out a theological discourse based on a reversal of conventional cause-and-effect ties. Florensky demonstrates that, for a number of Freud’s cases, the set of images in a dream are formed directly in the moment of awakening, that they are a reaction of the conscious mind to occurrences in the outside world. A man wakes up when something cold falls on his neck. In his dream, he was in the French Revolution, his life was ended at the guillotine. In reality, he woke up when part of the headboard of his bed came loose and fell on him. The dream about the Revolution was a result of that actuality; in his perception, however, in the shift from dream to wakefulness, his mind, for its own purposes, switches out the cause for the effect, and vice versa. And so we end up with the sense that the event that created the story of our dream was actually the end point of that dream itself. We can say, then, that the structure of history in a dream is formed starting at the end and moves back to the beginning. The theatrical practice established by legendary stage director and teacher Anatoly Vasiliev includes an acting technique for constructing a game beginning with its endpoint. Such devices make it possible to retain a peculiar emotional intensity that does not depend upon suspense or ignorance of the direction of the yet-unseen plot, and to convey that intensity to a viewer.

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Interest in the structure of dreams as a means of telling a story, an approach developed by Andrey Silvestrov, was combined with the idea of expanding a space centrifugally. This latter idea happened also to be one of the fundamental ideas of the V–A–C Foundation’s Expanding Space: Out of the Centre program (launched in 2019), created on the basis of the cultural and educational and, more broadly, general urban infrastructure of the City of Moscow, at a location removed from the city centre. The program aimed to shift the focus of artistic practices towards social

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openness, towards an investigation of their connections to their local context. In this way, the Daydreaming in the Hood project came to be, located at once in Shchukino and at the intersection of two themes. And this time “From Oneself,” a film forum run by curator Kirill Adibekov, together with the Moskino chain, played a key role in establishing the Workshop project. The Daydreaming in the Hood film workshop was scheduled to run over a four-month period, from early March to the end of June. It soon became clear, however, that the project had grown into something larger than originally planned.

The Workshop participants were selected in two stages. First, an open call was announced, in the form of a written task, and in the course of one month the Workshop curators received about one-hundred-and-sixty applications. About eighty of them made it to the second round, which consisted of interviews filmed using the one-hundred-and-eighty-degree (shot, reverse shot) rule. Video material created in these introductory interviews became the dramaturgic basis of the Daydreaming in the Hood: The Eight web series. The second round ended in the selection of a group of twenty-eight people. A number of them left over the first month of work – either they were unable to reconcile their Workshop activities with their primary occupation, or they found themselves faced with unexpected family crises, or they discovered that the Workshop itself was not at all what they had expected. Most, however, remained within the project and continued pushing ahead, turning their creative impulses into realities.

The workshop activities were divided into four thematic sections. The first section included weekly meetings through March, held on the weekends. They took the form of lectures, video screenings and conversational seminars. Andrey Silvestrov, the artistic director of the Workshop, devoted the introductory session to the principles of constructing an audiovisual portrait. Afterwards, the participants viewed several short videos they had made, in which they talked a bit about themselves. In arranging these collective viewings, beyond the obvious goal of helping the participants get to know one another, the curators also sought to help establish bonds of real friendship within the group. Sometimes, after all, what people make speaks far better to who they are than anything they could convey themselves in words, and that can lead to new interactions. These kinds of horizontal connections, happily, did arise as a result. The participants filmed one another in their projects, and they helped one another with shooting and editing. At the second session, about landscape on the screen, two participants who actually lived in Shchukino gave presentations about their neighbourhood, after which Daniil Fomichev, the project cameraman, gave a lecture on the principles of shot composition, illustrating his points with photographs he had made especially for the occasion. The first weekend concluded with a game about how to pitch a web series led by a specialist in the area, Elizaveta Simbirskaya. The following two Sundays were filled with lectures, screenings, and discussions of video assignments given to the participants. One such assignment, for instance, was devoted to advertising genres – trailers, promo clips and the like. Some of these made their way into episodes of the Daydreaming in the Hood: The Eight web series.

In early April, a film forum was held, in which Kirill Adibekov showed the Workshop participants a selection of films on the topic of self-representation and the cinema portrait. At that same stage, excursions around the neighbourhood were arranged, including a visit to the Kurchatov Institute, ordinarily closed to the public. The image of the atomic explosion would later recur as a motif in several of the films. But most

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crucial was a series of individual consultative meetings at which Workshop participants presented their project ideas to the curators. Most of these ended up becoming completed films and chapters in the Daydreaming in the Hood anthology. Some even made their way out into the world as independent short films. Mikhail Bodukhin's Sandwich, Yana Osman's Paradise Soiled, and Ivan Susarin's The Dream of the Fish were entered into a number of festivals for short films.

The third section ran from mid of April to mid of June, when weekends were devoted to film shoots at various locations in Shchukino At the end of June, a short period was reserved for preparing video materials for eighteen separate projects to be presented to the public in the Yunost movie theatre – this was the culmination of the active phase of the Workshop. Over the summer and fall of 2019, the cinema anthology was assembled and the web series was edited for the screen. In March of 2020, the Daydreaming in the Hood anthology was entered into the Russian competition of the Spirit of Fire Festival of Cinematic Debuts, and in April came the premiere of the Daydreaming in the Hood: The Eight web series.

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