The events of the Holocaust have informed a great deal of modern theory and philosophy. The barbarism and absolute absence of morality totally disrupted our idea of society's linearity. Great thinkers have been trying to unpick how, why and what now ever since. Hannah Arendt pointed to evil's banality; Zygmunt Bauman put the tragedy down to the conveyor belt of modernity, that allows each individual to distance themselves from the responsibility of involvement; Theodor Adorno famously pointed to poetry's limitations in dealing with such barbarism and Primo Levi, a Holocaust survivor wrote his autobiographies detailing the brutality and in 1987 jumped from his third floor flat in Turin. Elie Wiesel, a fellow Holocaust survivor stated, 'Primo Levi died at Auschwitz forty years later.'

The various philosophical stances one could take on Holocaust films are varied, the moral complications of using either footage or representing events and condensing a serious topic to a short piece are numerous. How should one treat such horror? Orson Welles' The Stranger (1946) was the first Hollywood film to show Holocaust footage. Many mainstream filmmakers have tackled the subject since then. The events are so tragic that depictions have never ceased to shock and horrify, despite our familiarity with the subject, but it is rare to see the horror from the angle Konchalovsky has chosen. The film's male lead, Helmut, is educated, dazzlingly handsome and capable of empathy and affection. Turning a film trope on its head, it is strange to see a beautiful couple, the kind that in regular circumstance we would root for based on aesthetics alone, in this horrifying situation. Andrei Konchalovsky's deep and unique characterisations provide us with an angle that take us deeper into the complex psychological and sociological states that engendered the tragedy.

Helmut, in the interview film footage, (to which Konchalovsky deliberately adds wear and tear to mimic archival footage), tells of how he came to join the National Socialist Party. He talks of the dissolution of Germany and the decay he saw around him. He speaks of his high class family and their pride in being Aryan. He talks romantically of Russian literature, his escape from reality during the harsh years of the Weimar Republic and of his belief in the paradise described by Aryan thinking. Throughout the film we see Helmut's capacity for love and idealism as well as his capacity for total evil. The most shocking thing, we realise, is there is almost no discrepancy between these two modes of being. Olga contemplates his cultural sensitivities, and wonders 'Who did this to him?' The figure of the idealist and dreamer, in both art and our cultural imagination, tends to be an agent of good. Konchalovsky forces us to look at extremism in the eyes. It is much easier to think of crazed fanatics committing atrocities than handsome dreamers. Helmut's capacity for obsession is noted throughout the film, even his love for Olga is obsession and based solely on a fleeting romance in Italy.

The dreamlike film reel of the Italian holiday is the film's centrepiece. The highly aestheticised shots of carefree, fashionable lightheartedness are deliberately juxtaposed with the rest of the film's content. When Helmut implores Olga to watch the reels, he laughs animatedly whilst she simply watches. The difference between Olga, chic and commanding in a white jumpsuit, and between Olga the prisoner is palpable. As viewers we ponder the fates of the unnamed characters in the reels. We wonder how the conflict would have swept up the unnamed friends in the footage. Thus it quickly moves from a nostalgic taste of summer to a harsh taunt, a snippet of paradise lost.

The question of paradise hangs over the film. The Lieutenant says to Helmut, 'You dream of paradise, but there is no paradise without hell. And this hell I created.' Krause, Helmut's friend, comes home wasted and incoherent. He reveals his sexuality, one condemned by the Nazis, and tells Helmut that there will be people like him in paradise. Strangely, for all the fervency of his Nazi beliefs, Helmut does not condemn his friend. The viewer wonders how much self doubt this information may have prompted. Shortly after this scene, we see Helmut break down after Olga acquiesces to Aryan greatness. He walks around a room shouting that, 'The ubermensch is not afraid of death...: as if to re-indoctrinate himself. As the film draws to a close and we become aware of the nature of the prison-like purgatory Olga and Helmut give their interviews in, the everlasting pain of tragedy is communicated. In the film's final moments, Helmut reasserts his devotion to the Reich.
Andrei Konchalovsky

Andrei Konchalovsky (1937) was born into an aristocratic family of writers and filmmakers. His brother is Nikita Mikhalkov of *Burnt by the Sun* fame and his father, Sergei Mikhalkov was a satirical author. As a talented pianist, Konchalovsky initially trained in Moscow’s conservatory. But in 1960, he met filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky and ended up co-scripting the great *Andrei Rublev* (1966). Early in his career he favoured adaptations, his filmic versions of Ivan Turgenev’s *A Nest of Gentle Folk* (1969) and Andrei Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* (1970) are much lauded. A few years later, he released the epic *Siberiade* (1979). Internationally acclaimed this film facilitated his move to the United States. Since then he has been involved in popular Hollywood releases such as *Runaway Train* (1985) and *Tango and Cash* (1989) as well as continuing to make films in Russia.

About Red Front

Marking VE Day and the end of the war on the Eastern Front, May 9th, this season of remarkable and rarely screened films includes works from famed directors Aleksei Germann and Andrei Konchalovsky, contemporary director Sergei Loznitsa, female director Tatyana Lioznova, as well as Yuri Norstein, widely considered to be the greatest animator of all time.

Screenings will take place online every Tuesday and Saturday, from Saturday 9 to Saturday 30 May 2020. Reframed in short order, since cinemas have gone dark, **Red Front** is a unique co-operation between Kino Klassika, the Institut français du Royaume-Uni and partners and directors of cinemas and studios in the UK and Russia. Supported by the Russian Embassy in London, Lenfilm, Soyuzmultfilm, Gorky Film and others, it replaces a planned cinema season in London, Bristol Watershed and Broadway Nottingham. The program celebrated the diversity and complexity of Soviet, Russian and Caucasian musicals. It gave UK audiences a unique opportunity to explore an undiscovered musical tradition.

Kino Klassika’s trustees are Professor Ian Christie, Daniel Jowell QC, Roger Munnings CBE and Justine Waddell. The patron of Kino Klassika is Ralph Fiennes.

The Kino Klassika Team

This screening could not happen without the unstinting support of the Kino Klassika team: Joseph Andreyev, Nathan Dampier, Tatiana Isaeva, Zoryana Mischiy, Olja Miljjevic, Seraphina Paisey and Talitha Piggott.

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Kino Klassika is a UK registered charity (1150791). We rely on the generosity of our supporters. If you want to encourage education and engagement with classic Russian language, Eastern and East European film, please support us by making a donation.

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About Kino Klassika Foundation

Kino Klassika creates programmes of film restorations, publications, art commissions and events to educate audiences about classic Russian language and Eastern cinema. This includes a 2-year programme to spotlight the pioneering work of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, our first restoration projects including *Hakob Havndatanyan, Arabesques on the Phrosmani Theme* and *Jirtdan* (1969). We have recently completed *Melodia! Discovering Musicals from Russia and the Caucasus*, a screening season in partnership with the British Film Institute, Institut Français, Bristol Watershed and Broadway Nottingham. The program celebrated the diversity and complexity of Soviet, Russian and Caucasian musicals. It gave UK audiences a unique opportunity to explore an undiscovered musical tradition.

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#kinoklassika #redfront #75years

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