(and suppressed pain). Koleśnik, whose prior background is in theater, does not hesitate to portrays Sylwia as a kindred professional, and an artist.

Indeed, much of the film's tension arises from the pettily cruel clichés it skillfully uses to misguide us. For this social media influencer is no more shallow, narcissistic, or fake than anyone else in the post-globalized Poland that serves as the flat backdrop. We see little trace of religion or politics as modes of social organization but only malls, screens, Sylwia's more-Barbie-than-Barbie self-stylization, Roxette's "The Look" on the radio—even a puppy is named "Jackson." (I'm reminded of the scathing depiction of Korean America-philia in Bong Joon-ho's 2019 *Parasite*.) Yet the more we watch and prepare to judge, the more Sylwia and her sorry stalker (who parks and masturbates near her apartment building, then sends weepy videos of apology) start to seem more human than the normals around them. Himbo fellow trainer Klaudiusz reveals himself to be cut from the same cloth as the stalker, only less self-aware and violent. Sylwia's female fans are no less shudder-inducing as they snatch at her life and body (a body they "want," especially in pieces).

A birthday visit to her middle-aged mother—in hair curlers, in a post-socialist party scene that jolts us into remembering that another era, culture, and really civilization is still alive and kicking in adjoining apartments—pretty quickly reveals what is "wrong" with Sylwia. The screen offers a sad facsimile of love from her 600,000 followers, but so does sex (in *Sweat* an entirely solo act that Sylwia views with the same squeamish disgust as high calorie desert). When she too sobs about her loneliness in a video post, jeopardizing her promotional contracts, Sylwia is right. Nobody loves her. None of these people know how to love. The only exception may be that silly little dog—and the ultimately compassionate camera, which in the end seems to agree (if a touch self-ironically) with Sylwia's teary but defiant last line of defense: weak and pathetic people are the most beautiful.

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Dear Comrades. Dir. Andrei Konchalovsky. New York: Neon, 2020. 120 minutes. Black/White.
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At first glance, Andrei Konchalovsky's *Dear Comrades* appears to be part of a long overdue reckoning with Soviet history. The film tells of the 1962 Novocherkassk Massacre, when workers pushed to the limit by a hike in meat and dairy prices went out into the streets to protest, only to be met with bullets. Many more were arrested the following day and given egregiously long or harsh sentences. Konchalovsky's film presents these events—hushed up and not widely known—in a dispassionate manner, as if performing an autopsy. Cinematographer Andrey Naydenov's camera is still, the frames perfectly composed, even in moments of intensity or chaos, in the manner pioneered by Łukasz Żal for Paweł Pawlikowski's films. (Ironically, though both films return to the period's rich black-and-white, their stillness contrasts with the fleet-footed mobility that came to define Thaw-era cinema across the bloc).

In its re-evaluation of the Soviet period, *Dear Comrades* continues the trend initiated by Valery Todorovsky's musical *Hipsters* (2008) and the miniseries *The Thaw* (2013). Roughly paralleling the American *Mad Men* (2007–15), they demonstrated that enough time had passed for a critical yet aestheticizing approach to be possible, and that there existed an appetite for popular history. The sober tone of *Dear Comrades*, however, is more in line with Sergei Loznitsa's found-footage documentaries. A final

point of reference might be the recent *Chernobyl* miniseries (2019): in both, a crisis reveals the entrenched dysfunction of the totalitarian state, from the local to the regional and national levels. Both are invested in exploring the positionality of the authorities, but *Dear Comrades* does not quite dare abandon the way in which such crises are usually portrayed: melodramatically, from the point of view of the victims. Where *Chernobyl* strikes a compromise in its dual focalization on the scientist charged with directing the clean-up and a firefighter's grieving wife, *Dear Comrades* combines them into one person: Lyudmila Syomina (played by Konchalovsky's wife, Julia Vysotskaya), a local Party official and die-hard Stalinist who is forced to question everything when her own daughter goes missing.

True to the calculating spirit of its director, the film tries to be all things to all people: a perfectly executed piece of art cinema for the Academy, a clinical study of the abuses of power for the intelligentsia, a woman's film, and an apology for faith in authoritarian figures for its ultimate patron. (Syomina's oft-repeated line is "if only Stalin were still alive. . .") The film's endorsement of faith is hard to escape, from the prominence of the Church in the opening and closing shots to the parallels it draws between the portrait of Lenin and the icon of the Virgin Mary and, finally, Lyudmila's "conversion," replete with a direct plea to God, a river baptism, and, in exchange, the miracle of her daughter's "resurrection."

Though ostensibly about a strike, the film does not seem particularly interested in the workers, only ever seen *en masse*, from a distance or from above. (Nor is it the first treatment of the forbidden topic of workers' strikes, as reviewers have claimed). Many Polish films tackled this subject even before the collapse of communism, including Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Short Working Day* (1981, released 1996). It is guided instead by undisguised didacticism: Lyudmila, her father, and her daughter each represent generational attitudes towards the Soviet state: complete rejection, complete acceptance, and a naïve desire for reform from within. Consequently, their conversations feel unnatural, the articulation of distinct "party lines" rather than genuine dialogue. Similarly, the film cannot seem to decide whether it wants to excavate a singular, problematic moment or to inscribe it into a longer history. While the first part of the film privileges the events' uniqueness, references in the second part to the "great Russian tradition" from Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin's paintings during the river scene to the final monologue's echoing of *Uncle Vanya* (1998) suggest that there is nothing unique about the event at all; it is just another instantiation of the Russian/Soviet state's eternal cruelty towards its own people. All of which begs the question: where do the film's allegiances really lie, and does it present any productive way forward?

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