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Elegia dorogi (Elegy of a voyage), Sokurov, Aleksandr, 2001
Molokh, Sokurov, Aleksandr, 1999
Vostochnaya elegiya (Eastern elegy), Sokurov, Aleksandr, 1996
Dolce, Sokurov, Aleksandr, 2000

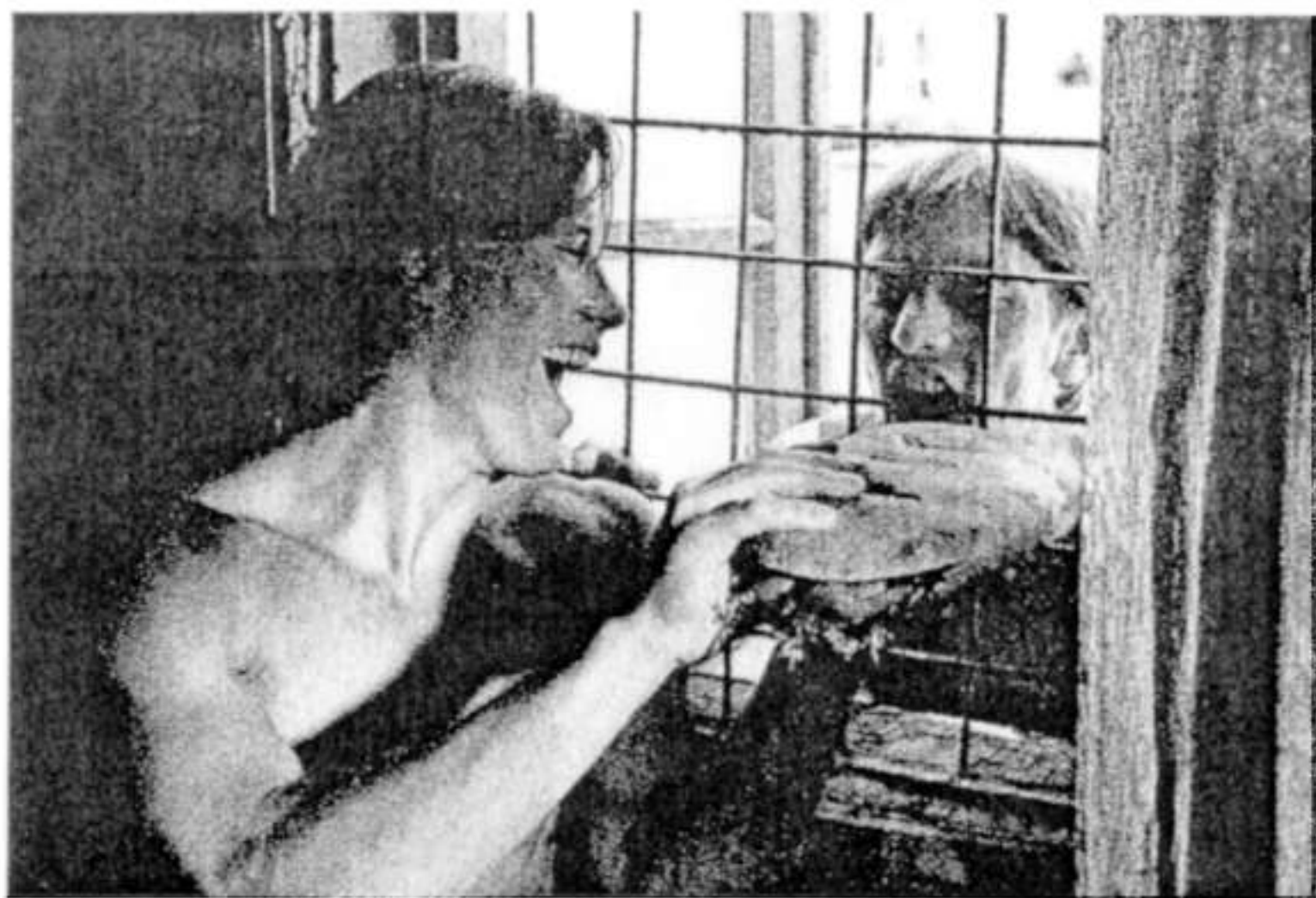
Alexander Sokurov: A Retrospective

February 1–21

This three-week retrospective presents nineteen programs of film and video by the prolific artist Alexander Sokurov. Sokurov's distinctive, visionary works are highly regarded internationally—Susan Sontag has called him “perhaps the most ambitious and original serious filmmaker of his generation working anywhere in the world today.” They have been lauded for their visual acuity and beauty as well as for their penetrating emotional exploration and impact, and their depictions of spiritual anguish and investigations into the metaphysical dimensions of the human condition have earned them comparison with the work of fellow Russian Andrei Tarkovsky.

Sokurov's spectacular video works (larger installations will be exhibited at the Marian Goodman Gallery, concurrently with this retrospective) have ranged from masterfully edited compilations of archival and contemporary footage on life in the former Soviet Union to Russian history, Japanese customs and art, and a series of works on master painters, cultural personalities, and historical milestones. Sokurov fluently shifts between film and video, letting the subject matter decide the form. Likewise, his works exhibit a porous distinction between fiction and nonfiction, challenging the proprieties of objectivity and drama that traditionally are used to differentiate between the two.

Sokurov's images, characters, and landscapes reveal themselves gradually. The sound of his films and videos is as important as the images—he has said that “the



Days of the Eclipse. 1988. Directed by Alexander Sokurov

pictures are my head, the sound my soul.” The often distant sounds of bells, ticking clocks, trains, rustling leaves, wind and rain, breathing, and snippets of music are integral to the emotionally enveloping work of this original artist, who urges us to see, hear, and feel intensely with his fearless exploration of what moves the human soul.

This retrospective was organized by James Quandt, Senior Programmer, Cinematèque Ontario, in collaboration with Jytte Jensen, Associate Curator, Department of Film and Media. We extend our profound thanks to Alexei Jankowski, Studio Bereg, St. Petersburg, for his extraordinary patience and assistance with every detail of the retrospective, and to Susanna Scott of Idéale Audience International, Paris, for her exceptional support. Grateful acknowledgments are also due to Wendy Lidell, WinStar, New York; Lenfilm Studio, Moscow; John Gianvito, Harvard Film Archive, Cambridge; Celluloid Dreams, Paris; zero film, Berlin; and Edith Kramer, Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley.

Krug vtoroj (Second Circle). 1990. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov. With Piotr Alexandrov and Radezhda Rodnova. A young man travels to a small village in Siberia to arrange for the funeral of his father, from whom he has been estranged. The mundane yet complicated details sur-

rounding the burial lead to a penetrating confrontation with death for the young man, who must also come to terms with the loss of his distant parent, now literally a frozen corpse. As much about the emotional bonds between fathers and sons as the filmmaker's *Mother and Son* (1997) is about those that bind mothers and sons, *Second Circle* takes a minimalist approach, generating a stark atmosphere of loss and redemption that is counterpoint to the later film's elegiac romanticism. Sokurov has said that “only when we remain conscious of [death] do life, development, and humanity mean anything. Otherwise the border between life and death threatens to disappear.” In Russian with English subtitles. 92 min. *Friday, February 1, 2:30; Monday, February 4, 6:00*

Dni zatmeniya (Days of the Eclipse). 1988. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov and Piotr Kadochnikov, based on the science fiction novel *A Million Years before the End of the World* by Boris and Arkadi Strugatsky. With Alexei Ananishnov, Eskender Umarov, and Irena Sokolova. *Days of the Eclipse* is a haunting tale of a young doctor's solitary expedition into a barren and scorched republic on the outskirts of civilization, where he practices medicine in an environment of fear, loneliness, and death. Soviet-era radio broadcasts serve as backdrop to this amalgam of hallucinatory imagery, psychological investigation, and breathtaking impressionistic landscape. The film is almost impossibly beautiful with its use of color manipulation, eccentric camera angles, and spectacular wide-screen photography. In Russian with English

subtitles. 133 min. *Friday, February 1, 6:00; Tuesday, February 5, 6:00*

Mat i syn (Mother and Son). 1997. Germany/Russia. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov. With Alexei Ananishnov and Gudrun Geyer. *Mother and Son* is a work of pure visual poetry that captures the love between a mother and son. Close to a poem or painting in their economy and layered intensity, Sokurov's exquisite images express the anguish of a son who must let go of his beloved dying mother, as well as her own deep anxiety at leaving him behind. Almost entirely without dialogue, the emotional bonds that tie are made manifest in flowing images of almost otherworldly beauty. Special anamorphic lenses and optical printing were used to stretch time and space, yet the emotional experience of watching the film is direct and unmediated. The film is hypnotic in its naked, elegiac romanticism, and its painstakingly crafted world evoking Russian folktales and the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich yields enormous emotional power. In Russian with English subtitles. 73 min. *Saturday, February 2, 2:00; Friday, February 8, 6:00*

✓ **Prostaya elegiya (Simple Elegy).** 1990. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. *Simple Elegy* was shot in the streets of Vilnius and in the building that houses the Council of Lithuania, during Russia's economic blockade. A remarkable moment is captured when the parliament's terrible silence is broken by the president playing nocturnes on the piano. In Russian with English subtitles. 20 min.

✓ **Elegiya iz Rossii (An Elegy from Russia).** 1993. Russia. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Seamlessly stitching together old and newly shot footage with historical photographs, the filmmaker imbues this elegy to his country and its people with his own special lyrical realism. The Russian landscape is beautifully evoked; the film's sounds and images combine to form poetic metaphors that provide an emotional memory bank of the history of Russia. In Russian with English subtitles. 68 min. *Saturday, February 2, 5:00; Thursday, February 7, 6:00*

Odinokij golos cheloveka (The Lonely Voice of Man). 1978–87. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov, based on Andrei Platonov's "The Potundan River" and "The Origin of a Master." Dedicated to the memory of Andrei Tarkovsky. With Andrei Grudov and Tatyana Gorycheva. After the revolution, Nikita, a man from

the lower class, marries a woman whose parents once belonged to the middle class. The mismatched couple cannot overcome their differences, and Nikita exiles himself to a small town, where he ultimately comes to terms with his life. The director has said that his aim was to concentrate on the traditional Russian theme of inner anguish rather than outward action in his observation of Nikita's subtle feelings: "In the context of the young man's lofty spiritual claims, the erotic motivation reveals how the lonely voice of the spirit dies in the face of matter." In Russian with English subtitles. 90 min. *Sunday, February 3, 2:00; Friday, February 8, 2:30*

✓ **Moskovskaya elegiya (Moscow Elegy).** 1986–87. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Andrei Tarkovsky has been the subject of many films, but few are as revealing as Sokurov's elegiac work about Tarkovsky's forced exile from his homeland and the traces of his life and work that he left behind. Sokurov has said that "the film is a subjective perception of the personality of the great filmmaker and his destiny in the context of History . . . our task was to create a special human approach towards the memory and the personality of Tarkovsky." Originally intending the film to mark Tarkovsky's fiftieth birthday, Sokurov ran into disputes with the USSR's Union of Cinematographers over the film's style and content, and it was delayed for several months. In Russian with English subtitles. 88 min.

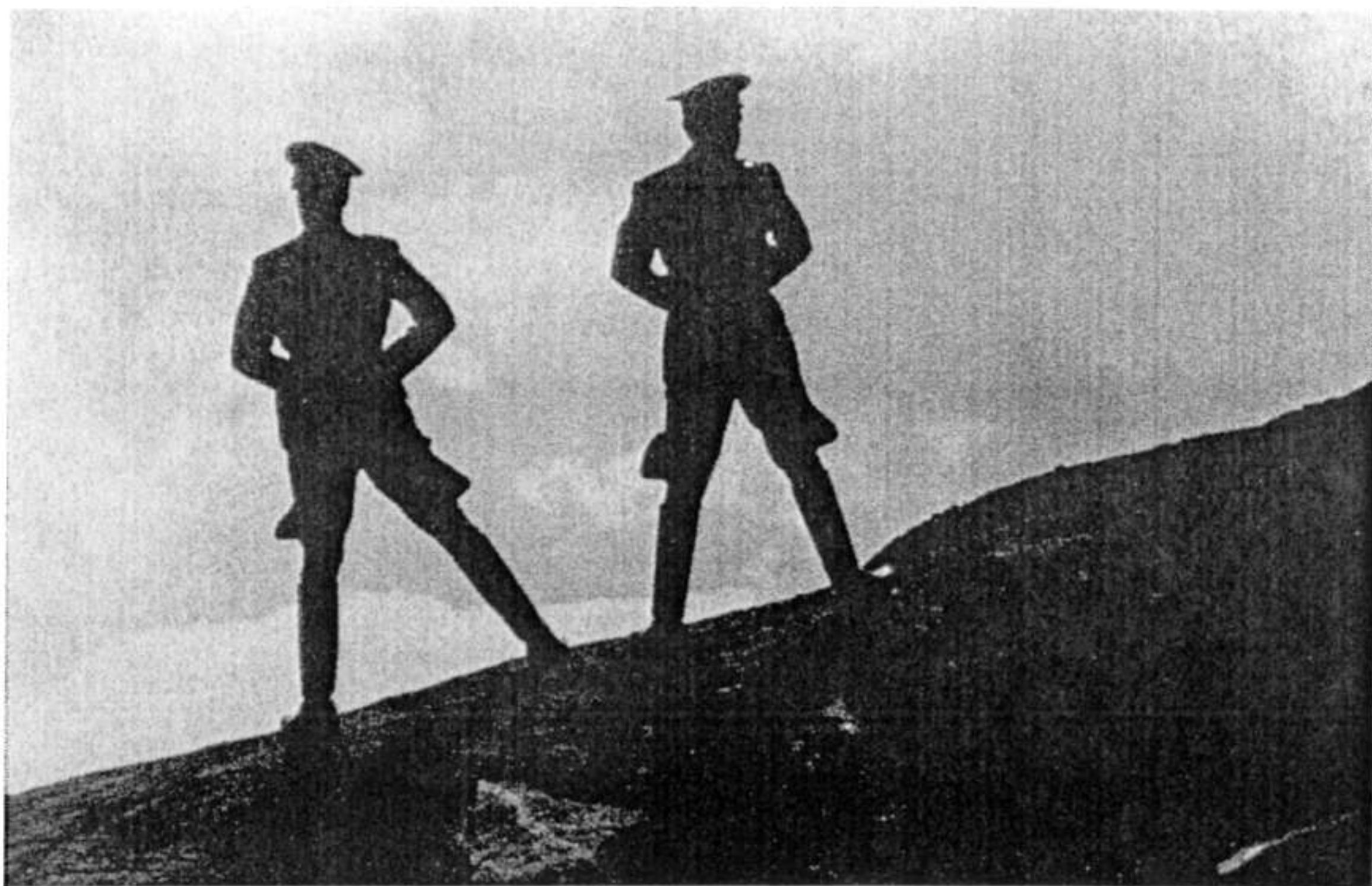
Robert. Schastlivaya zhizn (Hubert Robert, A Fortunate Life). 1996. Russia. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. One of an ongoing series of works about artists and their paintings, this film highlights the treasures of the State Hermitage Museum. While the camera pans across the works of the painter Hubert Robert, Sokurov speaks of a happy era when the artist was one with the spirit of the times. In Russian with English subtitles. 26 min. *Sunday, February 3, 5:00; Thursday, February 7, 2:30*

✓ **Vostochnaya elegiya (Oriental Elegy).** 1996. Russia. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. In this dream odyssey, a disembodied narrator drifts through a remote, mist-shrouded Japanese island, encountering other souls suspended somewhere between life and death. "When the picture of a small Japanese town on a misty island was being created as if by magic by a human hand, I did not bother asking myself what town it was, nor in what country it was. I tried to reconstruct the feeling of sorrow on the

screen. *Oriental Elegy* is an attempt to find the very source of the Image itself, an attempt to search beyond painting, beyond literature" (Alexander Sokurov). In Russian with English subtitles. 45 min. ✓ **Dolce.** 1999. Russia. Alexander Sokurov. *Dolce*, a video biography of the deceased Japanese writer Toshio Shimao and his widow, Miho Shimao, describes the dramatic events of the writer's life and work, but the main narrative is made up of Miho Shimao's lyrical monologue about her life with her handicapped daughter on a solitary island in the middle of the ocean. In Russian with English subtitles. 61 min. *Monday, February 4, 2:30; Tuesday, February 12, 6:00*

Skorbnoye beschuvstviye (Mournful Indifference.) 1983–87. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov. With Ramaz Chkhikvadze, Alla Osipenko, Tatyana Egoreva, and Dimitri Bryantsev. Regarded as one of the director's most accessible films, *Mournful Indifference* is a whimsical adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, about the inhabitants of an ark-shaped mansion who live isolated from the world and suffer from the failure of their illusions. Although they try to hide from the meaningless massacre of World War I by dancing, eating, philosophizing, and indulging in elegant, erotic play, it catches up with them. The narrative is interrupted by documentary footage of starving African children, tribal dancers, and of Shaw himself (as well as an actor playing him). The atmosphere of World War I is reproduced by means of documentary footage intercut throughout the film. Shaw's letters and diaries are also incorporated, as are Sokurov's reflections. In Russian with English subtitles. 110 min. *Tuesday, February 5, 2:30; Saturday, February 9, 2:00*

✓ **Elegia dorogi (Elegy of a Voyage).** 2001. France/Russia/The Netherlands. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Made up of images that evoke a timeless atmosphere, *Elegy of a Voyage* takes us on a journey with an unnamed man (Sokurov's own silhouette) across snow-covered landscapes; to the baptism of a baby; through a "homeland abandoned"; and to a deserted museum at night, where, in the nocturnal silence and surrounded by Dutch masterworks, he discovers a secret about himself. In Russian with English subtitles. 47 min. ✓ **A Humble Life.** 1997. Russia. Alexander Sokurov. An unhurried and detailed reportage about the life of an old woman living alone in the mountains



Moloch. 1999. Directed by Alexander Sokurov

in the village of Aska, Japan. The woman, who remains silent throughout, is observed sewing kimonos, cooking and eating, kindling a fire, combing her hair, and, finally, reciting a sorrowful prayer—a haiku about loneliness and loss. Out of trivial details, Sokurov creates a poetic image of the refined simplicity of Japanese life. In Russian with English subtitles. 76 min. *Saturday, February 9, 5:00; Tuesday, February 12, 2:30*

Spasi i sokhrani (Save and Protect).

1989. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov. With Cecile Zervudacki and Robert Vaab. A retelling of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as a surreal story of universal suffering, the film emphasizes the heroine's internal transformation as she slowly loses her grip on reality. Her erotic fascination with rich clothing and her almost childish desire to seduce and to be lost in passion is brilliantly contrasted with the small-town life that leaves Emma tragically isolated in her passionate attempt to bridge the gap between spirituality and sensuality. In Russian with English subtitles. 167 min. *Sunday, February 10, 1:00; Thursday, February 14, 6:00*

Kamen (Stone). 1992. Russia/Germany. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov. With Leonid Mozgovoi and Piotr Alexandrov. "If ever a film replicated the state of dreaming, *Stone* does. Which is not to say it is, in the classical sense, surreal; but it has the flow and fugitive feeling of a half-remembered reverie, full of mysteries, portents, inexplicable happenings, and chimerical objects. Set in (and filmed in the actual) Chekhov Museum, *Stone* centers on the relationship between a young museum guard and an older visitor, who seems to be at different times a lover, a doctor, or a surrogate father. Shot in evanescent black and white, with a soundtrack of silences, breathing, natural sounds, and fragments of classical music, *Stone* is haunting and enigmatic" (James Quandt). In Russian with English subtitles. 84 min. *Sunday, February 10, 5:00; Friday, February 15, 2:30*

A Soldier's Dream. 1995. Russia.

Directed by Alexander Sokurov. *A Soldier's Dream* can be seen as a sketch for the five-part, seven-hour work *Spiritual Voices*, in which it is included as a scene. Footage of soldiers on patrol duty on the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan becomes a parable of young men positioned between peace and

war—a tragic, very Russian theme treated as a brief lyrical stanza. In Russian with English subtitles. 12 min.

Mariya (Maria). 1978–88. USSR. ✓

Directed by Alexander Sokurov. A requiem in memory of a Russian peasant woman, the film comprises two chapters: The first (in color) is an idyllic presentation of Mariya Semionovna Voinova's life hay-making, bathing in the river, working in the flax fields, and going on holiday to the Crimea; the second (in black and white) takes place nine years later and describes the sad circumstances that led to the end of her life. In Russian with English subtitles. 41 min. *Monday, February 11, 2:30; Saturday, February 16, 5:00*

Elegy. 1985–86. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. ✓ A tribute to the famed Russian singer Fyodor Chaliapin, the film centers on the removal of the singer's body from the Batignolles cemetery in Paris for reburial in the Novo-Devitchye cemetery in Moscow. Archival footage links the beloved artist—who was not, at the time, officially pardoned for emigrating—to Russian history and culture. In Russian with English subtitles. 30 min.

Altovaja Sonata (Dmitri Shostakovich: Sonata for Viola). ✓

1981–86. USSR. Directed by Alexander

Sokurov and Semen Aranovich. A major document of postwar Russian culture, Sokurov and Aranovich's collaborative film about the composer Dmitri Shostakovich was immediately banned upon completion. The directors, both having had earlier films banned by the Soviet authorities, came together to make this experimental documentary organized around an exploration of the meaning of artistic silence. The film, which was finally released in 1986 during the perestroika, charts the heroic composer's struggle with Stalin's regime, employing newsreel footage of the siege of Leningrad, military parades, and Shostakovich and his family. In Russian with English subtitles. 78 min. *Monday, February 11, 6:00; Tuesday, February 19, 6:00*

Sonata diya Gitlera (Sonata for Hitler). 1979. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Banned for ten years, the provocatively named *Sonata for Hitler* constructs a lyrical montage of archival footage of the end of the war in Germany and the Soviet Union: Nazi generals and their victims, landscapes of catastrophe, Soviet victory at a calamitous cost. The images are marked with the dates of Hitler's and Stalin's deaths, forging an

analogy between the two dictators. In Russian with English subtitles. 11 min. **Molokh (Moloch).** 1999. Russia. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov. With Leonid Mozgovoi and Elena Rufanova. *Moloch* is constructed as a day in the life of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun at their alpine retreat in Berchtesgaden during the late spring of 1942, a couple of months before the German defeat at Stalingrad. The breathtaking first scene establishes Braun as the main character—the camera spots her through the mist, exercising on one of the balconies of the grim-looking castle. Sokurov poses the question, "Can one save one's soul by loving a monster?" In Russian with English subtitles. 102 min. *Thursday, February 14, 2:30; Sunday, February 17, 2:30*

Telets (Taurus). 2001. Russia. Directed and shot by Alexander Sokurov. Written by Yuri Arabov. With Leonid Mozgovoi, Maria Kuznetsova, Sergei Razhuk, and Natalia Nikulenko. The examination of fallible tyrants that began with *Moloch* (1999) continues with this study of Lenin (never named in the film) during his last days. It is 1923 in the newly created USSR. Lenin, the Union's founder, is dying at age fifty-one as the result of a stroke.

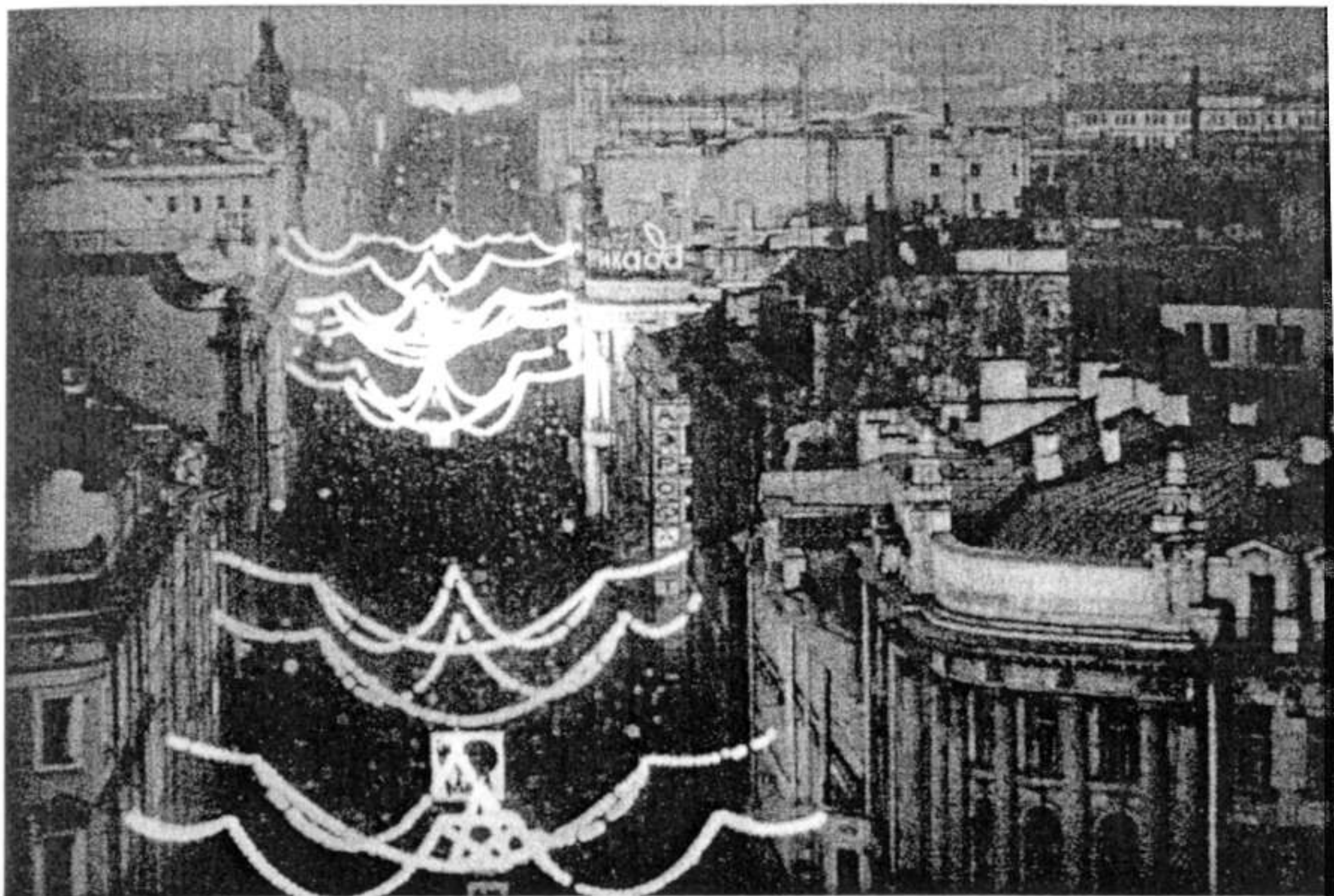
He is stripped of all power and confined to his dacha. Unaccustomed to the banality of everyday life, he is looked after by his wife and sister and by a doctor. One day Stalin (also not named) visits and offers a walking stick as a gift from the politburo. The filmmaker has said, "Dictators do not fascinate me, what interests me are the human characters." Mozgovoi plays Stalin (he played Hitler in the earlier *Moloch*), in this second part of what is projected to be a four-part cycle on men of power in the twentieth century. In Russian with English subtitles. 90 min. *Friday, February 15, 6:30; Sunday, February 17, 5:00*

Tikhiye stranitsy (Whispering Pages). 1993. Russia/Germany. Directed and written by Alexander Sokurov. With Piotr Alexandrov, Aleksander Cherednik, Elizaveta Korolyova, and Sergei Barkovsky. Loosely based on Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the film is a hallucinatory journey into the lower depths of the Russian soul and the brutality of urban life. A young man wanders the sunless streets of a city; he is surrounded by sinister mobs of shadowy figures who kick him, knock him to the ground, and drag him back to his feet, only to force him

Whispering Pages. 1993. Directed by Alexander Sokurov



PULL-OUT CALENDAR >



Evening Sacrifice. 1987. Directed by Alexander Sokurov

to write up various official documents. He finally flees and meets a young innocent girl who tries to show him the way to "repentance," but he only plagues her with unanswerable questions. Prison follows with all of its horrors. In Russian with English subtitles. 77 min. *Saturday, February 16, 2:30; Tuesday, February 19, 2:30*

Inichego bolshe (And Nothing More). 1982-87. USSR. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. *And Nothing More* is a compilation of beautifully edited footage shot by cameramen from the USSR, Britain, and the U.S. during World War II, which focuses on the alliance between the three countries and the terrible effects of the war on all sides. Commissioned by Central TV to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany, the film was promptly shelved for its tragic outlook and was not shown publicly until 1987, during the perestroika. In Russian with English subtitles. 70 min.

Zhertva vechernyaya (Evening Sacrifice). 1987. Russia. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. A May Day crowd goes through the motions of celebration at a fireworks display in Leningrad. The salute is thundering. The camera moves

above the dispersing crowd toward the sky and the sound becomes muffled. The title refers to a passage in an Orthodox prayer of repentance. In Russian with English subtitles. 20 min. *Monday, February 18, 2:00; Thursday, February 21, 6:00*

Sovetskaya elegiya (Soviet Elegy). ✓

1989. Russia. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. *Soviet Elegy* is a statement on the decay of the Soviet system, featuring the confrontational future president, Boris Yeltsin. In Russian with English subtitles. 40 min.

Primer intonacii (An Example of Intonation). 1991. Russia. Directed by Alexander Sokurov. "Just weeks before he became Russia's first democratically elected president, [Boris] Yeltsin was engaged by Sokurov in a provocative discussion of his personal beliefs. Set in and around Yeltsin's family home, in an informal atmosphere of tea and blinis, the film asks the urgent question: 'Who is this man?' That the resulting portrait is not 'pure' or 'objective' is apparent in the way Sokurov has treated the soundtrack, obscuring Yeltsin's voice in such a way that his intonation is often incomprehensible. The final sequences of Yeltsin's entourage driving through the countryside is one of

his finest achievements" (James Quandt). 48 min. *Monday, February 18, 5:00; Thursday, February 21, 2:30*