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Poetics of Ukrainian Film 'Earth': Oleksandr Dovzhenko's Conceptual Search

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to analyze the outcomes of Aleksandr Dovzhenko conceptual search based on his work, *Earth* (1930), which became the most remarkable in the Soviet cinematography. The authors also go into the reasons of diametrically opposite reviews of the critics on these film. This article is based on little-known critical publications about these films in the Ukrainian and Russian media in the 1920s.

Earth was filmed in the period of political and social transformations of the Soviet society, in the early days of painful shifts towards collectivization of agriculture and industrialization of production. Stalin's political struggle with his political opponents Trotsky and the opposition headed by Bukharin ended in Stalin's victory. His unlimited power was consolidating, and further repressions in the society were simmering. The amplified influence of Marxist-Leninist critics on creative processes was becoming especially noticeable at that time. Under pressure of such political conditions, Alexander Dovzhenko had to work on his masterpiece *Earth*.

Analysis of Aleksandr Dovzhenko contemporaries' polemic about *Earth* on pages of specialized journals in the 1920s showed that the most common types of publications were: 1. Unconditional recognition (combination of revolutionary ideas with vivid means of expression). 2. Brutal criticism (exaggerated aestheticism and deviation from the Socialist ideology).

Keywords: film history, USSR, VUFKU, Alexander Dovzhenko, documentary film, avant-garde, Kiev film studio, earth.

1. Introduction

The artwork of Aleksandr Dovzhenko as a film director, especially in the Ukrainian period (1927–1930), is still not extensively researched, although a number of publications about these years have been released. The purpose of this article is to explore the conceptual search of director Aleksandr Dovzhenko while working on his landmark film *Earth* (1930), and to introduce the materials of little-known articles on this topic from the 1920s Ukrainian and Russian press into scientific use.

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2. Materials and methods

The materials of our study are academic books and articles written recently and in the 1920s about the creative work of Aleksandr Dovzhenko. The study is based on substantive analysis and comparative approach.

The comprehensive research methodology used by the authors ensured consideration of all aspects and relationships that affected the process under study. The research methods used in the work include comparative and systematic historical approaches.

3. Discussion

As noted above, 'Earth' was produced in the period of political and social transformations within the Soviet society. According to the French film scholar and historian of Ukrainian cinema, author of the fundamental work 'Histoire Du Cinéma Ukrainien (1896-1995)' L. Hosejko, Dovzhenko often repeated that he filmed *Earth* on the cusp of two eras, which foreshadowed major social upheaval and the beginning of a new life — collectivization (Hosejko, 2001).

It should also be added that the prospects of sound films were a topic of hot debate in the press since the late 1920s. The first success of the American cinema, *The Jazz Singer*, demonstrated what opportunities the sound may offer to movies. In the USSR, this spurred not only the development of technical devices for sound films, but also theoretical discussions of aesthetic changes in cinematography. Naturally, Oleksandr Dovzhenko, along with Sergei Eisenstein, Grigoriy Aleksandrov and Vsevolod Pudovkin (authors of the application 'The Future of Sound Film', 1928), closely followed the advent of sound films, and planned to start shooting sound films himself. Thus, the screenplay of 'Earth' was intended as a transition from silent films to the future of sound cinematography.

B. Nebesio, a Canadian film scholar, expert in Dovzhenko's biography and creative work, pointed out the specific composition of certain scenes in the film and the structure of dialogues between characters. According to the scholar, these stemmed from the implication that *Earth* was conceived to be the first Ukrainian sound film. In particular, the author wrote: "Dovzhenko's *Earth*, which contains only dialogue titles, best exemplifies this trend. The total reliance on dialogue titles in *Earth* can also be explained by the fact that in the initial stages of production *Earth* was to become the first Ukrainian sound film. Political intervention caused this decision to be changed and, ironically, the first Ukrainian sound film was made in Russian by Dziga Vertov" (Nebesio, 1996). We should also mention that Dovzhenko adjusted some principles of film shooting and editing to the esthetics of sound films. For instance, the director showed Vasyl and Opanas from the back during their dialogue to accentuate their audible conversation. According to B. Nebesio, dialogues also evolved in the film: "Although dialogue titles are overwhelmingly present in Dovzhenko's silent films it would be difficult to speak of dialogues or conversations taking place. The dialogues in the films are limited to sporadic exchanges, fragments of conversations or speeches, chants of the crowd, or rhetorical questions, posed by the characters to the audience" (Nebesio, 1996).

In his memoirs Dovzhenko wrote that he was attempting to film poetic movies. American researcher L. Schnitzer quoted Dovzhenko's childhood memories enamored with spectacular Ukrainian scenery in his book: "I used to love to sleep on top of the full hay-cart and I loved to be carried into the house, heavy with sleep, when the cart stopped in the yard in front of our cottage. I loved the squeak of the wheels of the laden wagon at harvest time. I loved the twittering of the birds in the garden and in the fields, I loved the gentle croaking of the toads in the marshes in the spring, when the waters fell. I loved it when the apples fell in the meadow, in the evening, in the twilight – quite unexpected, rather secretly, they fell on the earth, in the grass. There was a mystery, something eternally unfathomable in that falling of fruit" (Schnitzer, 1973).

In fact, *Earth* depicts some of the most beautiful, mesmerizing and utopian landscapes in the history of cinema. This love for Ukrainian nature (which Dovzhenko carried through his entire life) is what makes his film *Earth* kind of an overlay on the Ukrainian landscape, providing it with scenery and theme without showing specific episodes of the class struggle. In *Earth*, the history of collectivization gives way to reflections on life, death and rebirth. In Dovzhenko's interpretation, there is no death after time. Speaking about the visuals of the motion picture: We see tree branches bending down under the weight of apples. The rain is drenching the soil. Overripe apples are scattered all over the ground. They will soon be collected; otherwise apple seeds will take roots.

Apple trees are just like people — they are born and die, but the life of nature goes on, and human life is an integral part of it.

Dovzhenko, on the one hand, fills the movie with shots of picturesque nature which he cherished all his life, and on the other hand, he strives in every possible way to break the emotional and physical bond with his past, to erase those painful memories of the death of his brothers and sisters. The US researcher G. Liber devoted his work ‘Alexander Dovzhenko’s Cinematic Visions’ to this collision. According to the author, Dovzhenko aspired to go beyond the reach of death. “In *Earth* (1930), both the grandfather (Semen) and his grandson (Vasyl) die: the grandfather by natural causes, the grandson as a result of murder. The opening scene suggests that the old man, having lived a full life, now faces death at peace with himself. Before Semen died, he eats a fresh apple. He then lays down and passes away. The apples that lay on the ground, like the old man, are associated with death. These apples will never be eaten; they will decompose and enter back into the soil, replenish the ground, and thus serve as a source of renewal. This opening scene emphasizes the themes of life, death, and regeneration which run throughout the film” (Liber, 2000). G. Liber concluded that death, in Dovzhenko’s opinion, is an inevitable part of life. “Life, death, and rebirth constitute nature’s dialectic.”

There were also other studies on the biological nature of the film. D. Gillespie reckoned that in *Earth* Dovzhenko depicted women less socially active than did Lev Kuleshov and Vsevolod Pudovkin in their creative works. In particular, the author wrote: “Like Eisenstein, Dovzhenko shows history as being made by men. Women are almost absent in *Arsenal*, apart from as grieving family members, and in *Earth* they are symbols of motherhood and fertility. We can see that both Pudovkin and Kuleshov portray women as much more active and politically conscious” (Gillespie, 2000).

J. Mayne had a slightly different point of view. She saw women as more socially involved and emotional in *Earth*: “It is women, for instance, who demonstrate the excessive attachment to religion in the film. True, the viewer is led to believe that, for the father, the decision to reject a church service for his son is a serious and difficult one indeed. However, the visual representation of that attachment to the church is virtually exclusively female” (Mayne, 1989).

But Dovzhenko also admires the beauty of women. It is no coincidence that he puts female bodies on display during crop harvesting. We see frames of exposed legs as women bend down to collect the crops. And how expressive is the scene where naked Natalia rampages desperately about the house, grieving over her murdered groom Vasyl!

However, according to J. Mayne who explored feminism in the USSR silent movies, naked woman’s body performs a somewhat confusing function in *Earth*: “Body of the woman becomes, a figure upon which are projected the similarities between representatives of the two orders, similarities which are otherwise unspoken in the film, that is, unspoken in terms of the film’s overt ideological and narrative allegiances. Hence, the connection between nature and culture, between the patterns of agricultural life and those of socialist collectivity, is made across the body of the woman, a body defined as a pure element of nature” (Mayne, 1989).

Dovzhenko skillfully combines lyricism and ideology in the film. The film simultaneously praises the unity of creativity and shows that political and technological progress is inseparable from the natural processes. In this respect, *Earth* is the complete opposite of Vertov’s ‘cult of the machine’. As precisely defined by G. Zabel, Dovzhenko interprets technical progress as an addition to picturesque nature: “The poetic and painterly treatment of nature in *Earth* exists, as Eisenstein might say, in ‘counterpoint’ with scenes of the tractor and the mechanized process of turning the harvested grain into bread. But this dialectical contradiction finds its resolution in scenes where machinery appears to be more the fulfillment of nature than its conquest. When the tractor first arrives at the village, the villagers come out to watch its arrival, but so do the horses and other farm animals” (Zabel, 2012).

The ideological and aesthetic objectives of *Earth* were to accentuate and praise the ties between human and natural cycles, or even to define socialism as the optimal connection between these cycles. However, the ruling elite was unable to accept such interpretation at that time. It was year 1930, when the freedom of art became limited and was kept under tight control of ideology from the center. It was the time when crackdown on Orthodox Christianity and dissent began. The film *Earth* also was caught between these millstones. This is evidenced by studies of Dovzhenko’s work conducted by Oleksandr Bezruchko (Bezruchko, 2008; 2008) and Volodymyr Myslavskiy (Myslavskiy, 2015; 2019), based on the review of archival documents and articles in the press.

These studies give a clear picture of how Dovzhenko's creative approach was changing. D. Gillespie accurately captured the evolution of representation of characters in Dovzhenko's films from specific to general. He wrote: "The heroes of *Zvenigora*, *Arsenal*, and *Earth* all lead inexorably toward their logical successor, Shchors. Shchors himself is a man totally without human passions, he neither drinks nor smokes, and even when he thinks of his wife after defeating the Ukrainian nationalist leader Petluira, he merely dictates a telegram to her via an assistant. As he proudly boasts, "The revolutionary goal always triumphs over personal interests" (Gillespie, 2000).

3. Results

The Ukrainian cinematography, according to many researchers, saw a qualitative rise in 1927, after the release of Oleksandr Dovzhenko's film *Zvenigora* (1927). By the time Dovzhenko filmed *Earth*, he had already achieved great success in finding his own creative style, a specific form for expressing new content. The film *Earth* was the final film of the so-called "silent trilogy" by Dovzhenko, which also included his movies *Zvenigora* (1927) and *Arsenal* (1929).

The movie *Earth* induced much controversy in the press. It is worth noting that this picture by Oleksandr Dovzhenko received polar opposite reviews and caused heated debate. Many critics, especially Ukrainian ones, were sincerely fascinated by the film. In their opinion, *Earth* was the greatest achievement not only of Ukrainian and Soviet cinematography, but also a landmark on the global stage, and Dovzhenko deserved to be on a par with the masterminds of the world cinematography.

"Switching from the language of logic to the language of emotional perception, we can say that *Earth* is a dramatic song about the meltdown of the old world and birth of the new one", the Ukrainian film critic Yakov Savchenko contemplated. – "This is a song about the triumphant coming of new social forces, new social truth. And at the same time, this is a solemn – full-throated and resonant – song about the biological joys of life, about the passion and exuberant fertility of the earth, about its creative, full-blooded, boisterous flesh. However, this smooth and powerful motive of biological ecstasy is social to the core, because it stems from the social health of a new public person... *Earth* is undoubtedly a breakthrough in the Ukrainian cinematography. It enriches our cinematography with a new genre and style experience, its highly artistic culture and broad perspective. It is the kind of experience that propels cinematography towards developing and enhancing the cinema poetics. *Earth* manifested original compositional attempts, new methods for impactful and vivid cinema expression" (Savchenko, 1930).

Many critics who gave positive reviews were captivated by how Dovzhenko portrays the Ukrainian village: exceptionally rich in crops, lavish, flooded with gardens, grain and melon fields. A village that was rejoicing the Ukrainian lyrics, carnal love, wonderful and happy children who were supposed to carry on the glorious line of Ukrainian villagers for centuries to come.

When analyzing the innovative techniques employed in *Earth*, Savchenko pointed out that this piece goes beyond the traditional narrative of genres, and is a unique artistic and cinematic system for constructing and objectifying the reality. In particular, the critic noted: "It is very difficult to define *Earth* in terms of genres. It completely demolishes the genres previously seen or even canonized in our cinematography. 'Earth' incorporates elements that portend the emergence of a new great genre suitable for cinematography in our circumstances" (Savchenko, 1930).

However, the film also caused a storm of indignation. Most of the controversy was focused around the presentation of class struggle in the village. Some found that biological elements dominated over the social content, that watermelons and apples overshadowed the issues of class struggle. Dovzhenko's laudation of the Ukrainian village was renounced by some critics. Poetization of the Ukrainian fertile land, in their opinion, was perceived as an inherently biological beginning of life, where the class struggle was reduced to biology: one was murdered, and another one was born – thus, a grandfather dies and a grandson is born. Hence it appears that class aspects were subordinated to biology, hereby alleviating the class struggle. Instead of class hatred for the enemy, viewers see some sort of "reconciliation of spirit": it does not matter that a Komsomol member was killed, because more are yet to come.

Ukrainian observer Boris Kovalenko was also critical about the film and recognized a biological motive in it: "These attempts to reduce the class category to biology are Dovzhenko's weak spot. By idealizing the biological side of reality, he idealized the Ukrainian luxurious nature – all these precious gifts of the land: watermelons, fruitful apple trees and orchards. Again, Dovzhenko tries to emphasize that this is Ukraine, Ukrainian nature, which he paralleled with the

same “universal” figure of the Ukrainian person being part of the nature, “Son of the Land”, and therefore the idea of class differentiation is substituted by the symbolic idea of “national unity” (Kovalenko, 1931). At the same time, however, the critic stressed that Dovzhenko is a talented director and must be fought for in order to influence his creative approach.

Other critics were also ambivalent about the film. Moscow newspaper *Kino* published a variety of comments about the film: *Earth* is a talented motion picture, a great achievement of the Soviet cinematography. The film invigorates the viewers, charges them with new strength and will to fight the class enemy. Along with its achievements, the film has some drawbacks: biology prevails over the social aspects, due to which the kulak stratum of the village was not clearly identified.”

Some of the comments mentioned that *Earth* had a simple formal structure, yet it was highly artistic. The military community congratulated VUFKU on the release of the praiseworthy film *Earth* and called for drastic changes in their production activities aimed at creating more films similar to *Earth*.

Despite all these shortcomings, the motion picture is vibrant, full-blooded, cheerful. The viewer's sympathy is entirely on the side of the new life sprouting from every frame of the film. *Earth* is an uplifting movie, our movie, a revolutionary movie.

Of course, *Earth* has some flaws. It is not true that history itself works to our benefit, and that our enemies have been destroyed. There is not enough hatred for our class enemy in the film. It fails to show the dependence of the poor peasant on the kulak. And the biological origin obscures the social attitude” (Manukhin, 1930).

Party and Soviet leader Pavel Blyakhin gave a devastating film review on pages of the central mouthpiece of the Communist Party of the USSR — newspaper *Pravda*: “After watching the film *Earth*, there is only one conclusion a viewer can make, and it is far from the Marxist ideology: nature has created all people different, some are good (these are communists, middle peasants and poor peasants), and some are evil (these are kulaks). Dovzhenko's problem is that he lost the sense of moderation and gave rein to his talent, so robust and passionate about the biological essence of life that he eventually emasculated the class content of the film and altered its political attitude. His cameraman Demutsky contributed a lot to this effect: these biological fragments were filmed with exquisite taste. We believe this solution goes too far in the opposite direction” (Blyakhin, 1930).

At the same time, Blyakhin admitted that despite all its flaws, *Earth* was a significant event in cinematography, an important landmark in terms of form, and represented one of the crucial stages in the development of the Soviet cinema. We should mention that there was much controversy regarding the visual image of the film. Theater director and screenwriter of the semi-official party almanac ‘Print and Revolution’ Leonid Varpakhovsky outlined the drawbacks of the film, one of the major being the dissociation of the movie composition. In particular, he wrote: “The film is divided into the following main parts: 1. Prologue; 2. Exposition; a) Kulaks, b) Poor and middle peasants; servicing the tractor, c) Bridging collateral episode at Semen’s grave, d) Characterization of the sentiment in the village (expectation and arrival of the tractor; meeting); 3. Bridging part (transition from exposition to collision), a) Demonstration of a new form of land cultivation as a statement of the idea of collectivization; 4. Collision, a) Kulak finds out about dekulakization, b) Murder of a collective farmer, c) Father's tragedy; shift in his mindset; 5. Culmination, a) Funeral; shift in the public mindset; 6. Epilogue.

The compositional dissociation is obvious. Lack of a core image determined the structure of the film and resulted in mechanical linkage of separate episodes. Each element of the above scheme constitutes quite a self-contained, independent episode. The link with previous and following episodes does not flow directly from the intrinsic development of the theme” (Varpakhovsky, 1930).

To defend his point of view, Varpakhovsky noted that schematic film structure and artificial action development are closely related to the isolated display of the class strata of the village: “The connection between them is external, driven by the development of the overall theme. It is determined from the outside by peculiar social attitude of the artist who is close to the proletariat, willing to offer them his friendly help. The above episodes are no exception. This refers to the composition of the entire film. The inconsistency, incompleteness, contradictory outlook typical for all artists like Dovzhenko inevitably lead to some dualism in the creative approach” (Varpakhovsky, 1930). However, at the same time, Varpakhovsky emphasized that part of the movie was built in rich realistic tones: realistic in a broad, deeply modern sense of the word.

One of the main reproaches to the film was Dovzhenko's interpretation of the two characters shown in *Earth* — the kulak and the priest. Kulak was portrayed by Dovzhenko as a frenetic, neurotic, completely disarmed character, who does not even need to be fought against: he can just be crossed off the list of active social forces in the village. But, according to the critics defending the Marxist-Leninist positions, the kulaks had not yet been completely exterminated and had not surrendered their positions, and were seeking every opportunity to fight the peasants. That is why they believe that portrayal of the kulak in *Earth* can only “disarm the social activity of the poor strata of the village” and, naturally, such interpretation of the kulak “leads to a distortion of the social perspective.” Based on the above, the critics concluded that the director's interpretation of the kulak was very misleading.

Practically the same accusations applied to the image of the priest who found nothing else in his life except the “search for truth”. The critics believed that the film gives one the impression that the church “had already surrendered its weapons and gave up the struggle against atheism and the growing culture”.

In particular, Pavel Blyakhin wrote on pages of *Pravda*: “In the final, most impressive part, the kulak is shown so lonely, so isolated and miserable that he can only arouse scorn. The second equally dangerous enemy in the village — the priest — is displayed in a similar way. The entire final part is constructed so as to persuade to the viewer that the kulak is gone, the church is gone, and both of them together are nought, and therefore there is no one to fight, no one to hate, no one to fear... Such an interpretation of the enemy is completely unacceptable at this stage, because it demobilizes the viewer, weakens their will to fight, alleviates the class hatred. In this case, Dovzhenko indulged in wishful thinking and completely forgot that the viewer would be watching his movie through the eyes of a contemporary surrounded by class enemies” (Blyakhin, 1930).

According to Blyakhin, Dovzhenko's political error was that he, wishing to see the kulaks liquidated as a class, and the religion dead, tried to show this as an accomplished deal, overlooking the fact that the kulaks, who were supposed to have been eradicated as a class, vigorously resisted with the help of collectivization. Furthermore, Dovzhenko failed to understand that “it would take a lot of hard work to ultimately liberate the masses from religious intoxication.”

Blyakhin also accused Dovzhenko of depriving the characters of class features and not providing any social and economic motives for their behavior, which leads to a conclusion that the film ‘*Earth*’ is not intended for a mass audience of workers and peasants, but rather for qualified loners. At the end of the article, the critic inquired: “Perhaps the motion picture is so harmful that it should not be shown to the mass audience?” (Blyakhin, 1930).

At public screenings, Dovzhenko had to make excuses for rather harsh criticism of his film and explain his own position. At one of the screenings for soldiers of the Red Army, which took place in May 1930, the director said: “As an artist working in this field, I want to see some of the ongoing processes already accomplished. That is why, despite the fact that we have not yet eradicated the kulak class, despite the fact that it continues to resist us, I do believe in its imminent elimination, and I want to speak of it as a defeated enemy. Next, I will raise another controversial point: the figure of the priest. Despite the growing number of cults, one thing is undeniable and crystal clear — religion is dying. That is why I displayed the priest as a moribund old man, accustomed to mechanically whisper prayers. But his class interests are still alive — which I showed in the film” (Dovzhenko, 1930).

However, Dovzhenko's contemporaries claimed that he should have incorporated specific anti-religious scenes. Obviously, no one paid attention to the scene where the party speaker announces that the class enemy is doomed, and the villagers look at him like he is a divine being. And when he points at the Bolshevik plane flying in the sky, people shift their gaze from him to the sky and back at him. With this scene, Dovzhenko wanted to show that the Party had replaced God.

Perhaps the most painful blow for Dovzhenko was the stinging and arrogant rhymed criticism by writer Demyan Bednyy on pages of the newspaper *Izvestia*. The author did not mince his words and used pretty humiliating expressions, in particular, called the film “counter-revolutionary” and “obscene” (Bednyy, 1930). In Ukraine, many cultural figures spoke up for the film. Demyan Bednyy's categorical opinion was not supported in the RSFSR either. In particular, in a joint article in the *Pravda* newspaper, V. Kirshon, A. Fadeyev, and V. Sutyurin regarded Demyan Bednyy's statement as precarious, since it seemed to be aimed only at bullying and ravaging the artist. The authors of the article were also puzzled as to why the writer pounced on Dovzhenko's film so zealously, while he had ignored dozens of botched and vulgar films before (Kirshon et al., 1930).

Still, Dovzhenko was not brought into the fold of the proletarian culture and remained in the ranks of companions of the revolution, although he was among the best of them. Companions used to be divided into two categories: the ones who seemingly supported the revolution for their personal gain, and the ones who honestly and sincerely welcomed the revolution, but were not accepted into the “inner circle” due to certain fallacies. Dovzhenko fell into the second category. Despite his artistic achievements, Dovzhenko's views prevented him from becoming “the maestro of truly proletarian films, capable of serving the workers and peasants”. And those views of the director were not accidental, as they stemmed from the social nature of the artist himself, his outlook, his worldview.

The film *Earth* perfectly illustrated this situation. According to the well-established opinion of influential party leaders, the movie was contradictory and contained elements that both brought the artist closer to understanding the revolutionary processes taking place in the village and moved him far away from this understanding, and transferred him to the league of petty-bourgeois aesthetics. This phenomenon is quite predictable, for this was, in their opinion, the social nature of a companion: on the one hand, he subjectively reaches out for the proletariat, and on the other hand he is still guided by the inner forces and social motives of his petty-bourgeois creativity. And the objective of the Communist Party in the realm of art was to liberate these companions from the influence of petty-bourgeois aesthetics and switch them to “serving the broad masses of the proletariat and peasantry, facilitating the expulsion of such artists from the league of petty-bourgeois art, and bringing them closer to proletarian art”. Based on these postulates, some critics urged not to ostracize Dovzhenko, but to lend him a “helping hand”. “Dovzhenko has not yet fully mastered the proletarian ideology,” noted a columnist for the Moscow magazine *Smena* with regret. “We have to help him in this, because he is a solitary warrior fighting against the entrenched flower of Ukrainian chauvinism in the Ukrainian cinematography” (Zaslavsky, 1930).

The unhealthy controversy around the film *Earth* and its author, to a certain extent, paved the way for Dovzhenko's future forced “emigration” to the RSFSR.

5. Conclusion

Dovzhenko can be called “the father” of Ukrainian poetic cinema. His film *Earth*, according to the results of an international poll of critics conducted in Brussels in 1958, took the leading position in the list of “12 best films of all times”.

Dovzhenko emotionally depicts the confrontation between man and nature. He masterly smoothes down this confrontation, while muffling the social significance of the tragedy soon to be experienced by every Ukrainian peasant. Cruel irony is inherent in his work: even the slightest movement in this picturesque landscape embodies the director's apprehension of an imminent catastrophe.

Unlike Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov, who were treated kindly by the Soviet authorities during the silent film era, Dovzhenko was reckoned among the camp of “companions”. He was not forgiven for his “dubious” past, and was obstructed by Marxist-Leninist criticism. Of note, the most abusive criticism streamed from the printed press in the RSFSR. Eventually, Dovzhenko had to make dozens of edits to his film *Earth* so that it was authorized for display in cinemas. Admittedly, Dziga Vertov was criticized as well, however, he was reproached for formalism, whilst Dovzhenko was accused of a political error, which simmered down to misunderstanding the goals of the revolution; he was blamed for “lulling the class vigilance of the proletariat”. Beyond doubt, this harassment had a detrimental effect on Dovzhenko's future career. The hostile reception of the film *Earth* by the party officials broke the director's spirit and drove him into an abyss of depression, isolation and suicidal thoughts. His next motion picture *Ivan* was released in 1932. The central printed media of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian SSR savaged Dovzhenko's new film with even greater fury. Furthermore, the director was under the threat of imprisonment and further persecution. This critical situation forced Dovzhenko to seek protection in Moscow. That is how Ukraine lost one of the best directors in the USSR.

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