



Crush: Five Stories about Love
[Korotkoe zamykanie]

Russia, 2009

Color, 92 minutes

Russian with English subtitles

Director: Boris Khlebnikov, Ivan Vyrypaev, Petr Buslov, Aleksei German, Jr., Kirill Serebrennikov

Screenplay: Maksim Kurochkin, Ivan Ugarov, Boris Khlebnikov, Ivan Vyrypaev, Andrei Migachev, Petr Buslov, Konstantin Fedorov, Andrei Khaas, Kirill Serebrennikov

Cinematography: Shandor Berkeshi, Fedor Liass, Igor' Griniakin, Evgenii Privin, Oleg Lukichev

Music: Petr Volkov, Darin Sysoev

Editing: Ivan Lebedev, Sergei Ivanov, Pavel Khaniutin

Cast: Aleksandr Iatsenko, Il'ia Shcherbinin, Irinia Butanaeva, Karolina Gruszka, Aleksei Filimonov, Ivan Dobronravov, Evgeniia Sviridova, Tat'iana Zhukova, Karim Pakachakov, Anna Ekaterininskaia, Pavel Sergienko, Aleksandr Bezrukov, Dmitrii Vladimirov, Dmitrii Voronets, Aron Mel'nikov, Nikolai Andreev, Iurii Chursin, Iuliia Peresil'd, Alena Doletskaia, Andrei Savel'ev, Andrei Fomin, Vitalii Khaev, Psoi Korolenko, Anastasiia Golub, Svetlana Brilliantova

Producer: Sabina Eremeeva

Production: Studio "Slon," with financial support from the RF Ministry of Culture

The search for the meaning behind an almanac film like *Crush* can be synonymous with efforts to define *auteur* cinema as a whole. What purpose does a collection of short film-

novellas typified by highly personalized aesthetics serve, if it is not to place the *auteur* above all other participants in the cinematic event? The introductory sequence reinforces their primacy, as each contributor to the film orders a beverage from the camera, before they all enter an empty auditorium. Through the various drink orders, Boris Khlebnikov sets himself apart from Ivan Vyrypaev, who sets himself apart from Petr Buslov, who sets himself apart from Aleksei German, Jr., who sets himself apart from Kirill Serebrennikov. And if Khlebnikov's hundred grams of vodka or Buslov's espresso are not the most esoteric drinks ever, their singularity is assured by the absence of cast, crew, and, most importantly, an audience. They are producing themselves by themselves for themselves.

The five directors optimize the exhibition of contrast by approaching the same topic, the difficulties in confessing love, from different artistic points of view. Some, though not all, play with the image of the "short circuit" (the literal translation of the film's Russian title *Korotkoe zamykanie*). Others, by contrast, are connected by their depictions of senseless violence or graphic mutilation, conveying more strongly the meaning of the film's English title: "crush" means both the state of being in love before the other person ever loves you in return, and violent compression or oppression. Otherwise, there appears to be very little to connect the five novellas thematically or visually.

Khlebnikov opens the collection of shorts with his film-novella "Shame" ("Pozor"), which is inhabited by taciturn young men who cannot communicate. The search for logos is so central that cinematography and sound editing take supporting roles to the script. When Sasha (Aleksandr Iatsenko) is introduced inside of a cluttered newspaper office, it is clear that something prevents him from expressing himself. "Can you utter more than two words? In succession?" wonders his boss, before sending him to interview the participants of a local foofaraw. When he arrives, it becomes clear that there was a second, silent command from the camera during the initial POV shot: find something worth speaking about. Sasha attends to this command doggedly when he discovers this "something" hanging in the air

between graffiti and an apartment window. Sasha prevails against suspicion, *dezturnye*, and head trauma to translate a sullen young man's inarticulate and offensive message of adoration to the object of his attraction, and in so doing, he finds his own voice.

In the next novella, "Feel It" ("Oshchushchat"), Vyrypaev takes the problem of communication and love in a different direction. By contrast to the other film-novellas, a great deal of the dialogue in "Feel It" is not in Russian, but in Polish or English. A Polish girl visiting Moscow (Karolina Gruszka) is beckoned to the side by a Russian fellow from out of town (Aleksei Filimonov). Though they promptly run into a language barrier, he continually enjoins her to grasp his feelings, even if she cannot understand his words. He argues with enough pathos that the viewer might be persuaded that something penetrated the barrier between them.

Such a conclusion, however, is complicated by Vyrypaev's additional layer of mediation in his novella. The film's action is caught with a handheld camera in the style of a home movie, and the audience is augmented by an additional viewer, who can control the speed and direction of the action on a DVD-player within the film. When the movie is rewound and progresses again through Dima's plea, overlaid dialogue erases the first impression that the speech left; rather, the Russian's prominence in the home movie is demonstrably mismatched with his real effect.

In "Urgent Repair" ("Srochnyi remont"), Buslov introduces a fairy-tale quality to his narrative of inarticulate love. The simplicity of the plot and pathetic loneliness of the cobbler (Ivan Dobronravov) certainly contribute to a sense of childlike melodrama. Arguably, however, the fairy-tale aesthetic derives from the novella's darker elements: the matter-of-fact psychological alienation from the cobbler's mutilated body, or the peculiar savor of suffering he experiences as a result of his wholly underground existence. By contrast to the vast majority of folk wonder tales, "Urgent Repair" thwarts the hope that the cobbler's suffering will result in an intervention or in "winning the girl" (Evgeniia Sviridova); the fairy tale falls apart and the cobbler can no longer separate himself from his bloodied hand.

Arguably, as a result of this half-turn toward the fantastic, Buslov has brought the greatest cinematographic virtuosity to the almanac. His subterranean settings, disembodied legs, jarring manipulations of sound and light, and highly emotive puppetry continuously attract attention, enriching an otherwise straightforwardly simple story.

German Jr. turns to his signature bleak settings, cluttered with litter, in order to tell the story of Kim (Karim Pakachakov), in the film-novella "Kim." Though he eschews fairy-tale motifs, German preserves a sense of the fantastic when he introduces the circus magician Kim to the doctors and patients assembled in a mental hospital on a remote island off the Russian coast. The electricity Kim manipulates for the benefit of others is also a meter for his own health and volition; when the gift dies, Kim's doom is sealed.

In "Kim," German observes the almanac's general theme of difficulty with communicating feelings of love. However, Kim's case is slightly different, as he has no difficulty expressing clearly—if wordlessly—his infatuation with an attractive doctor (Anna Ekaterininskaia), nor does she have any difficulty in deciphering his messages. Rather, the message is deliberately rejected, though Kim continues to pine. The tragedy of the novella, however, lies not in thwarted overtures, but in Kim's deliberate self-sabotage: rather than leave the island, he prefers to remain with the doctor within the insane asylum, a suiting metaphor for the permanent state of unrequited love.

Serebrennikov's "A Prawn's Kiss" ("Potselui krevetki") returns to Khlebnikov's device of the delegation of a task, during a POV shot, to a similarly tongue-tied young man (Iurii Chursin). It turns out he is most comfortable repeating the catch phrases of the restaurant he represents in a bright pink foam shrimp costume. The mascot costume is one of several elements that make "A Prawn's Kiss" the most visually striking episodes of the almanac; others include the odd range of settings, including a trash barge, and metal rock interludes.

The novella is also set apart by an unambiguously happy ending, this time bringing its fairy tale influences to full realization. A young crustacean initially speaks in the corporate slogans that have produced him as an

economic being, but he also speaks in the wordless language of love, kissing all he meets until true love (Iuliia Peresil'd) breaks the spell and allows him to cast off his animal skin.

Throughout the almanac, crushes meet with the frustrations of distance, rejection, miscommunications, but they nevertheless continuously move toward one resolution. Having reached this culminating resolution in the union of lovers in "A Prawn's Kiss," the film almanac as a whole can be considered satisfactorily concluded, and the *auteurs* who produced it, satisfactorily showcased.

Boris Khlebnikov (1972-)

A born Muscovite, Boris Khlebnikov spent the first years of his adult life in a variety of positions: student of biology, laboratory assistant, vendor at the Luzhniki market, foundation pit digger. He graduated in 1997 from the film criticism faculty of the State Institute of Filmmaking (VGIK) in Moscow, and directed several shorts before his feature-film debut *Koktebel*, co-directed with Aleksei Popogrebskii, in 2003.

Filmography:

- 2009 *Help Gone Mad*
- 2009 *Crush: Five Stories about Love*
- 2006 *Free Floating*
- 2006 *He Left* (documentary; co-directed with Gai Germanika)
- 2003 *Koktebel* (co-directed with Aleksei Popogrebskii)
- 2001 *The Sly Frog* (short)
- 1997 *In Passing* (documentary short; co-directed with Aleksei Popogrebskii)

Ivan Vyrypaev (1974-)

Ivan Vyrypaev comes to film from theatre, a background established at the Irkutsk theatrical college. Now entrenched in Moscow, he has enjoyed critical success as a playwright whose works include *July, Oxygen, Valentine's Day, Genesis No. 2, The City Where I Am*, and *Dreams*. He made his film debut in 2006 with *Euphoria*.

Filmography:

- 2009 *Oxygen*
- 2009 *Crush: Five Stories about Love*
- 2006 *Euphoria*

Petr Buslov (1976-)

Buslov came to Moscow from Khabarovsk by way of Vladivostok. He studied at VGIK under Karen Shakhnazarov and Vadim Abradashitov, graduating in 2003. As a student he also worked closely with Daniil Gurevich, with whom he made Russia's first post-Soviet blockbuster, *Bimmer* (2003) before graduating from the institute.

Filmography:

- 2009 *Crush: Five Stories about Love*
- 2006 *Our Russia* (TV)
- 2006 *Bimmer 2*
- 2003 *Bimmer*

Aleksei German, Jr. (1976-)

Aleksei German, Jr. comes from a cinematic family—his father, Aleksei German is renowned for such films as *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (1984). German studied at the St. Petersburg Academy of Theatrical Art, and in 1996 was accepted into the workshops of Sergei Solov'ev and Valerii Rubinchik at VGIK. He has been prominent on the film festival circuit since his 2001 diploma film *Little Fools*.

Filmography:

- 2009 *Crush: Five Stories about Love*
- 2008 *Paper Soldier*
- 2005 *Garpastum*
- 2003 *Last Train*
- 2001 *Little Fools* (short; diploma film)
- 1999 *Large Autumn* (short)

Kirill Serebrennikov (1969-)

Kirill Serebrennikov hails from Rostov-on-the-Don, where worked in various theaters of the city, as well as in regional television. He has found great acclaim as a theatrical director and playwright, but also as a film director, especially since the success of *Playing the Victim* in international film festivals.

Filmography:

- 2009 *Crush: Five Stories about Love*
- 2008 *Yuri's Day*
- 2006 *Playing the Victim*
- 2005 *Bedtime Stories*
- 2004 *Ragin*

Elise Thorsen