New Europe College Yearbook
Pontica Magna Program
2017-2018

NILAY KILINÇ
NATALIA MAMONOVA
ANDRIY POSUNKO
MARIA RYBAKOVA
SERGEY A. TOYMENTSEV

Editor: Irina Vainovski-Mihai

Pontica Magna Fellowship Program is supported by VolkswagenStiftung, Germany.

ISSN 1584-0298

New Europe College
Str. Plantelor 21
023971 Bucharest
Romania
www.nec.ro; e-mail: nec@nec.ro
Tel. (+4) 021.307.99.10

SERGEY A. TOYMENTSEV

Born in 1976, in Kazan, Russia

Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, Rutgers University (2014)
Thesis: *Deleuze and Russian Film: Transcendental Exercise of the Faculties on (Post-) Totalitarian Screen*

Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Polish Institute of Advanced Studies, Warsaw (2017-2018)
Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow at Florida State University, Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, Slavic Program (2015-2017)
Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Russian Institute for Advanced Studies, Sholokhov Moscow State University for the Humanities, Moscow (2014-2015)
Teaching Assistant/Part-Time Lecturer at Rutgers University (2005-2014)

Fellowships:
Junior Fellowship at Polish Institute of Advanced Studies, Warsaw
Graduate Student Fellowship, Rutgers University (2003 – 2007)
Fulbright Research Fellowship, Washington State University, Pullman; University of Washington, Seattle (2002 – 2003)
Research Fellowship, Free University in Berlin, JFK Institute in North American and Canadian Studies (2001)

Published several articles, book and film reviews, and interviews

THE CRISIS OF THE SOVIET ACTION-IMAGE: TOWARDS A DELEUZIAN TAXONOMY OF THAW CINEMA

Abstract

The paper examines the exemplary films of the Soviet "Thaw" cinema in light of Gilles Deleuze's theory of the crisis of the action-image elaborated in the context of post-war European cinema. I argue that, besides aberrant movement as the key characteristic of such a crisis, Thaw cinema could be characterized by other tendencies, such as the proliferation of films foregrounding the sublime action-image, as well as its radical enfeeblement in the 1970s, which similarly testify to the overall crisis of the Soviet action-image. The ambiguous or aporetic form of the Thaw action-image, which both celebrates the sublime revolutionary spirit and emphasizes its utter futility at the same time, serves to problematize the dogmatic aesthetic of socialist realism, as well as helps us explain the constitutive contradictions of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization.

Keywords: Deleuze, Thaw cinema, action-image, revolutionary, sublime, superfluous man, aberrant movement

Introduction

Toward the end of *Cinema 1*, Deleuze's philosophical taxonomy of film images and concepts has recourse to a historical account of the crisis of the action-image in post-war European cinema. As he writes, "Why is the Second World War taken as a break? The fact is that, in Europe, the post- war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe".[1] Not only does Deleuze provide an exact timing for "the great crisis of the action-image" in European cinema ("around 1948, Italy; about 1958, France; about 1968, Germany"[2]), he contextually specifies its causal dependence on a given ideological crisis "external to the cinema".[3] For example, the cinema in France, he argues, was able to break with its classical tradition only after the demise of de Gaulle's

"political ambition to belong fully to the circle of victors" at the end of the war; German cinema had to take time to recover after its long and total subjection to the state ideology; while Italy was the first to move beyond the movement-image, "before France and Germany," because it "could certainly not claim the rank of victor" and, at the same time, "had at its disposal a cinematographic institution which had escaped fascism relatively successfully."[4]

Deleuze never mentions a similar crisis of the action-image in post-war Soviet cinema, which is probably due to its limited availability to the *Cahiers du Cinéma* film critics whose reviews served as his dominant frame of reference regarding the history of cinema. And yet, could Deleuze's omission mean that in the 1950s and 1960s Soviet filmmakers were still imprisoned within the sensorimotor whole of the movement-image and could hardly establish a new tradition of the time-image? In this paper I will demonstrate that the crisis of the Soviet action-image was indeed parallel to similar tendencies in post-war European cinema, yet it can only be explained by slightly different terms we can find in the *Cinema* volumes: namely, the sublime intensification of the action-image as well as its radical enfeeblement, in addition to its definitive crisis via aberrant movements. In Deleuze's taxonomy, the sublime and enfeebled versions of the action-image refer only to its structural instability and somewhat foreshadow its crisis caused by the eruption of pure optical and sound situations. In post-war Soviet cinema, because of its ultimate subjection to the Communist censorship as well as countless compromises with it, such imperfect formations of the action-image (including aberrant movement in film) could, however, qualify as legitimate indexes of its historical crisis in the Thaw era.

The Agony of the Dream and the Rise of the Action-Image

In his discussion of Kazan's post-war films (e.g. *On the Waterfront* (1954), *East of Eden* (1955), *America, America* (1963)), Deleuze discovers a curious dialectics in the relation between the American dream and reality: the more the American dream is challenged and contradicted by reality (e.g. corruption, crime, poverty, betrayal, etc.), the more powerful and intense it becomes. As he writes,

> The American Dream is affirmed more and more to be a dream, nothing other than a dream, contradicted by the facts; but it draws from this a sudden burst of increased power… And it is precisely after the war - at the very moment when the American Dream is collapsing, and when the action-image is entering a definitive crisis… that the dream finds its most fertile form, and action its most violent, most detonating, schema. This is the final agony of the action cinema, even if films of this type go on being made for a long time yet.[5]

After Khrushchev denounced the cult of Stalin's personality at the Communist Party's Twentieth Congress in 1956, the Communist dream was similarly on the verge of collapsing under the pressure of Stalin's (partially) exposed crimes as well as the great flock of amnestied prisoners returning home from the gulag camps. Yet in his repudiation of and moving away from Stalin's terror, Khrushchev reemphasized his loyalty to the fundamental tenets of Communism, betrayed by Stalinism, and pledged to return the country to the early ideals of Leninism by praising the heroism of old revolutionaries. The ambiguity of the Thaw "de-Stalinization" campaign consisted, therefore, in viewing the thirty-year period of totalitarianism, which took the lives of over ten millions of people, as an unfortunate digression from the Soviet radiant path toward Communism. The idealization of Leninism as a counterweight to the condemnation of Stalinism was, nevertheless, a rather fragile ideological compromise promoted to save the shattered regime from decisive defeat, as it seemed utterly unconvincing to the socialist allies in Eastern Europe, such as Poland and Hungary, where Khrushchev's liberal policies stirred political uprisings in 1956 (brutally suppressed by Soviet troops). In the Soviet Union of the late 1950-1960s, however, this ambiguous compromise was sufficient to serve as a powerful stimulus for the intellectual and cultural renaissance known as the Thaw epoch, characterized by a rapid expansion in film production. Although still supervised by the state censorship apparatus, the Thaw cinematic image was no longer in total service of ideological propaganda and was, therefore, rather quick to express the inherent contradictions of the Communist dream and its criminal underside. Just as Kazan's post-war films push the action-image to the limit in order to salvage the American dream, the Thaw action-image similarly finds "its most violent, most detonating, schema" in order to defer the agony of the Communist utopia.

The post-war Soviet action-image celebrating the excessive revolutionary heroism of pre-Stalinist times could best be described by Deleuze's concept of the sublime action-image which he attributes to Herzog's action cinema that exhausts both large and small forms of the action image by pushing the character's activity to an utter absurdity. In Herzog's SAS' action films, according to Deleuze, the hero is presented as a conqueror of the useless, i.e. "a man who is larger than life" confronted with "a milieu which is itself larger than life, and dreams up an action as great as the milieu."[6] Given in such form, the empirical value of this action-image is strongly undermined because

> the action, in effect, is not required by the situation, it is a crazy enterprise, born in the head of a visionary, which seems to be the only one capable of rivaling the milieu in its entirety. Or rather, the action divides in two: there is the sublime action, always beyond, but which itself engenders another action, a heroic action which confronts the milieu on its own account, penetrating the impenetrable, breaching the unbreachable. There is thus both a hallucinatory dimension, where the acting spirit raises itself to boundlessness in nature and a hypnotic dimension where the spirit runs up against the limits which Nature opposes to it.[7]

In Herzog's films, such as *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972) or *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), the heroic action is no longer executed according to empirical laws of activity; it is rather hyperbolically magnified to its sublime or transcendental exercise and thus abstracts itself into "pure Idea."[8] This ambiguous form of the action-image, which simultaneously celebrates the sublime acting spirit and emphasizes its utter futility, will help us explain the constitutive contradictions of the Soviet action films in the late 1950s which similarly romanticize the excessive heroism of revolutionary action, yet implicitly problematize its overall purpose.

Korchagin & Co: Revolutionary Sublime Action

The Thaw tradition of the sublime action-image arguably begins with Alov and Naumov's *Pavel Korchagin* (1957), an adaptation of Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Unlike Donskoi's earlier adaptation (1942) that organizes the narrative in a linear fashion, *Pavel Korchagin* starts off with the end of the novel, where the already blind and

paralyzed protagonist receives the news that the only manuscript of his novel has been lost in the mail and is thinking whether he should rewrite it over again. What follows is the hero's entire life presented in a series of flashbacks. As Lev Anninskii observes, "the life itself is structured in the film as a preparation and justification of such finale."[9] By the end of his mnemonic journey, the film shows the hero's hand blindly scribing the titled words of Ostrovsky's novel in the dark, which symbolizes the victory of the revolutionary spirit over his bedridden condition. The film's circular self-reflexive narrative composition, therefore, invites the viewer to reassess together with the protagonist the value and meaning of his life from the point of view of his present disability. Although at the closing scene the healthy Korchagin (or rather the actor who plays him) cheerfully declares to the viewer not to believe that he surrendered and died, the overall message that the film conveys is far from the obligatory optimism of conventional socialist realism. While some critics praised the film for its return to the pure form of the socialist realism of pre-Stalinist times ("*dorappovskie vremena*"),[10] others were appalled by the darkness of the representation of hardships and sufferings that the hero must go through by protesting that it "was not like that" in the early years of Soviet Russia.[11]

Whereas Donskoi's pro-Stalinist adaptation fully omits the fact of Korchagin's illness, Alov and Naumov, on the contrary, focus on those episodes in which the hero has lost his health and thus problematize his fanaticism and ascetic sacrifice. Most of Korchagin's flashbacks are centered on his building of a narrow railroad somewhere in the Ukrainian countryside, a construction project commissioned by the Party during the late autumn. The film deliberately emphasizes how this project amounts to an inhuman and nearly impossible mission since no working conditions have been provided for the young Komsomol enthusiasts forced to live in shabby barracks and die of typhus, hunger, and cold. For Korchagin, however, this railroad, which will be abandoned after it fulfills its service of supplying firewood to the city, emblematizes the Revolution itself and it is there that his physical health has been fully undermined. Furthermore, the directors reintroduce this construction site as the setting for the hero's attempted suicide towards the end of the film. While returning home after his trip to the doctor from whom he learns that complete paralysis and blindness await him within a year, he decides to get off the train at a random station and shoot himself. In Ostrovskii's novel, Korchagin thinks about committing suicide in Crimea, on the Black Sea shore. In the film, the train station where he plans to end his life turns out to be Boiarka, the

same Ukrainian town where he used to build his "revolutionary" railroad a while ago. For Korchagin, the encounter with the landmark of the past, which is largely responsible for his illness, triggers his spiritual rebirth and encourages him to stay alive to the very end in his service to the Revolution. For the viewer, however, such a convergence of the hero's suicidal mission in the past and his suicidal attempt in the present only further problematizes the validity of his Christ-like sacrifice.

For Anninskii, "Alov and Naumov not only recreated the world of revolutionary romanticism in its purified and crystallized version; they turned this world of heroic act into an argument in the debate."[12] That is to say, by pushing the heroic action beyond the limit of its empirical exercise, they abstracted it into a "pure idea". The same idea of the destruction of a personal life sacrificed on the altar of a new state is foregrounded in their next film, *Wind* (1958), where young revolutionaries perish one by one on their long journey to the first Komsomol Congress in Moscow, yet their tragic death is shown as accidental and essentially antiheroic. The conventional image of heroism is most strongly subverted by the figure of the prostitute, Mary, who joins the trip to Moscow not because she shares the revolutionary cause of the voyagers, but because she is personally attracted to one of them, Fyodor. After both of them are arrested by the White Army police, she exposes herself as the chief delegate to the Komsomol Congress and thus rescues Fyodor so he could continue his important journey. Mary is executed, yet her sacrifice has neither ideological nor romantic reason, since she knows that Fyodor doesn't love her. Her death, as Neya Zorkaya argues, "cannot give us an idea of either the collapse of the old world or the birth of a new proud person out of the revolutionary turmoil."[13] That is, her entrance into the Revolution is as accidental as her exit from it.

By the late 1950s, the sublime action-image, initiated by Alov and Naumov, had become almost the official cinematic discourse, by which the Communist utopia could legitimize itself and through which more critically oriented directors would smuggle their reservations about the nature of revolutionary heroism. In Raizman's *Communist* (1958), for example, the hero of titanic power struggles against the hostile mass of peasants in a remote Russian village to which he is appointed by the young Soviet government to work on one of the electrification projects. Yet, during the White Army attack on the village, he is the only one who perishes. His heroism is undermined by the fact that as the civil war veteran he is often dressed in a military uniform, yet he never uses a gun in any

of his confrontations with the local counter-revolutionaries. The film was commissioned for the fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and its release was even delayed because of the close supervision of the state censors. Despite the enormous ideological investment in the film, the protagonist turned out to be more complicated than expected. As Josephine Woll observes,

> Vasili Gubanov is *not* the hero these critics so desperately wanted him to be. He is not a revival of the heroes of the 1920s, nor a new incarnation of the revolutionary communist ideal. He superficially resembles the heroes of the 1920s or 1930s… and his heroism is set within the civil war context, but its nature and performance are redolent of post-Twentieth Congress values. He never holds a weapon, even amid a barrage of shots… He does give up his life for his cause, but his self-sacrifice is motivated by… "thaw altruism" rather than by revolutionary zeal.[14]

Soviet Russia was born in the bloodbath of civil war, in which violence, brutality and aggression should be the prime characteristics to be attributed to the early communists, as they were in Rogozhkin's post-Soviet drama *Chekist* (1992), in which the sublime action-image is degenerated into the impulse-image of dark naturalism. In the Thaw romanticization of this period, however, the revolutionary hero could only be a martyr ready to sacrifice his/her life for the common cause, even though s/he "wants to live and be happy."[15]

The theme of revolutionary martyrdom continued to dominate in the early 1960s as well. Remaining structurally the same, the plot of romantic self-sacrifice was only modified in terms of gender and ethnicity. In Samsonov's *Optimistic Tragedy* (1963), a fragile female commissar, representing "the image of an impregnable fair maiden as a symbolic embodiment of the Revolution,"[16] is sent by the Party to the Marine squad led by anarchists, in order to form from the marines a Red Army battalion to take part in the civil war. Although she triumphs in taming the anarchic power of the all-male crew, managing to escape their attempts to either kill or violate her, she still tragically perishes in combat. In Konchalovsky's *The First Teacher* (1965), the ascetic and over-committed revolutionary Diuishen, appointed by the Party to educate illiterate countrymen in a Kyrgyz village, is eager to enlighten them about the Marxist values, yet his romantic fanaticism results in nothing more than an avalanche of disasters. The film's final sequence is particularly representative of the

utter futility of his enterprise. After his school has been burnt down as an act of revenge on his endeavors, he starts chopping down the only poplar tree in the village in order to rebuild the school. Even though it is the only tree in the village, and it would thus be of little help to him anyhow, he still obsessively keeps on chopping it even after the film's credits start running. This sequence perfectly exemplifies what Deleuze says about a sublime action as "a crazy enterprise" which is "not required by the situation" and is "born in the head of a visionary" (C1 184). The romantic action of the teacher does reaffirm the shining power of Communist ideals for a moment, yet the emphatic futility of such action undermines their relevance to the actual milieu.

Revolutionary Sublime Action in Peacetime

The resistance Diuishen encounters from the inhabitants stubbornly sticking to their tribal traditions is structurally analogous to the resistance of any other milieu associated with the old pre-revolutionary world, whether it is a Russian village with ignorant peasants or a ship with anarchic sailors. It restages the old mythological conflict between order and chaos (as well as culture and nature or center and periphery), in which the romantic hero-demiurge is responsible for bringing light to the darkness even at the expense of his/her life. In this regard, the Thaw vogue for the revolutionary "death drive" was extended to and replicated in the contemporary civic context, in which self-sacrifice was not required at all. In Romm's *Nine Days in One Year* (1962), for example, the atomic physicist Gusev is obsessed with his research on nuclear energy. As the result of his ultimate dedication to science, he gets accidentally irradiated, yet refuses to abandon his work until his death by exposing himself to even more radiation. Despite the film's foregrounding an intellectual as a new type of Soviet hero, it did scare a number of critics with its overbearing pessimism regarding the enlightening power of scientific progress predicated on personal self-destruction.[17] As Alexander Prokhorov points out,

> That progress… is questionable in the film, portrayed as sickening obsession that slowly kills the protagonist. The invisible deadly power of nuclear radiation incarnates the perilous force of progress as the master-narrative of modernity.[18]

The film's plot consists of a number of isolated episodes or novellas that discretely portray Gusev's personal and professional life from the accident of his irradiation to his lying in the hospital and are bound together into a coherent narrative by the hero's unifying perspective as a scientist at the service of scientific progress. As Deleuze comments, "Romm's *Nine Days of One Year* proceeds by clearly distinguished days, each of which has its indices, and the whole of which is a progression in time."[19] In this regard, Romm is a "disciple of Pudovkin,"[20] since both of them integrate the small form of the action-image, associated with random occurrences in the individual life, into its large form in the context of a greater ideological narrative, be it Communism or scientific progress. What Deleuze does not elaborate, however, is that in *Nine Days* both forms of the action-image are in a "dialectical struggle"[21] with each other: the discrete personal narrative is integrated into, or sacrifices itself for, the totality of the grand narrative of the film, yet its integration, or sacrifice, ultimately undermines the sublime coherence and teleology of the latter.

After the premiere of *Nine Days of One Year*, Yevgeni Urbansky, the lead actor of Raizman's *Communist*, remarked that "the time of the intelligent, delicate and ironical hero is approaching. The time of my straightforward, non-compromising and down to earth mastodons is coming to an end."[22] Urbansky could be right in his prediction regarding the emergence of a new intellectual hero who would replace the working class protagonist in the Soviet cinema of 1960-1970s.[23] Yet the mutation of the positive hero in terms of gender, ethnicity or class did not affect the overall structure of the Thaw action-image but only further reinforced its ideological foundation. In Ordynsky's *The Big Ore* (1964), Urbansky plays an overly ambitious truck driver who comes to work in a mine which is desperately digging for an iron ore hidden under the layers of clay and rocks. Eager to beat the records of labor productivity, the driver strives to transport much more gravel than required despite heavy rainfall and his worn-out vehicle. Eventually he does get killed after his truck slips into the canyon under the pressure of its massive load. Yet the mine's final discovery of "the big ore," as the film sadly suggests in the end, is the result of his excessive efforts. Mysteriously enough, Urbansky himself perishes in a car accident by volunteering to perform a stunt on his own during filming.

The intentional hyperdramatization of action for its own sake found its most radical expression in Kalatozov's *Letter Never Sent* (1959) that follows four geologists in search of diamonds in Central Siberia. Once they find

them, they dream out loud about how many schools and kindergartens the government can build after selling them. The heroes, however, never make it home since throughout the film all of them tragically perish in fire and ice, leaving behind only the unsent letter about this expedition and the map for diamonds. The final sequence depicts the delirious vision of one of the characters seeing the future "Diamond City" built thanks to the diamonds they found. Yet the vision is soon replaced by the vast panorama of the majestic Siberian scenery with the frozen hero lying in the snow. In the film, the landscape plays a role on its own by expanding to an inhuman and indifferent totality that absorbs characters one by one. Its autonomy from humanity, visually represented by Urusevskii's panoramic and angle shots, effectively undermines the assumed superiority of the Soviet man over nature characteristic of Stalinist cinema (e.g. Stolper's *Story of a Real Man* (1948)). The Stalinist director Pyriev was one of the most critical opponents of the film, claiming that it did not show us a "man" but only a "furious elemental nature."[24] Furthermore, censors were so appalled to see so much death and suffering in the film that they forced the director to revise the script and leave at least one survivor. And yet, as Prokhorov rightly observes, "this imposed closure hardly changes the general atmosphere of the picture."[25] What was most scandalous about *Letter* is that it was shot in the actual natural environment, in severe Siberian conditions, although a similar setting could be found "fifty kilometers from Moscow."[26]The romantic yet unnecessary sacrifice in the service of the state was thus intentionally reenacted by the film's crew themselves. Some of the actors were even hospitalized after the film shooting: Vasili Livanov, for example, broke his voice and Innokenti Smoktunovsky got a brain concussion.

The sublime action-image of the Thaw cinema seemingly remains within the confines of the socialist realist aesthetic. And the characters' ardent devotion to the early Communist ideals that such films persistently promote could be viewed as a "counterweight to the shocking revelations about the Stalinist system"[27] in the late 1950s, as it is most evident in Kalatozov's tendentious celebration of the Castro Revolution in *I am Cuba* (1964), despite its acrobatic cinematography. Yet by following the dictum of the Communist ideology to fully sacrifice personal happiness for the collective well-being to the letter, such an image pushes the characters' identification with the ideological machine to an utter absurdity and thus ultimately deterritorializes the heroic rhetoric of the movement-image. As Zizek comments,

> an ideological identification exerts a true hold on us precisely when we maintain an awareness that we are not fully identical to it, that there is a rich human person beneath it… For that reason, an ideological edifice can be undermined by a too-literal identification, which is why its successful functioning requires a minimal distance from its explicit rules.[28]
>
> [Therefore,] overidentifying with the explicit power discourse - … simply taking the power discourse at its (public) word, acting as if it really means what it explicitly says (and promises) - can be the most effective way of disturbing its smooth functioning.[29]

The sublime revolutionary hero overidentifying with the power discourse to the extent of his or her personal destruction is, therefore, a logical extension of the Stalinist search for the "new Soviet man" fully devoid of psychological complexity and, instead, overcommitted to the collective purpose of building socialism. As John Haynes puts this in Lacanian terms, for socialist realism "the positive hero was in no way to be seen as a split subject," it "refuses to work with anything exploring or celebrating the split between subjectivity and objectivity."[30] The subject of socialist realism is rather a subject stuck in the imaginary "mirror stage", being completely identified with the image of its own wholeness. As Leonid Trauberg proclaimed at the 1935 All-Union Creative Conference of Workers in Soviet Cinema, "in these five years we got away from the accursed legacy of fractured consciousness."[31]

For Deleuze, the "fractured self" is the foundation of the time-image as it internalizes the split of time into "before" and "after." Furthermore, it is only through this fracture filled with the pure and empty form of time that a genuine thought can be born. The sublime action-image of the Thaw period does nevertheless articulate the urgent need for this fracture within a cinematic subjectivity by hyperdramatizing the tragic consequences of the radical or *unfractured* revolutionary consciousness. Such image, therefore, could be viewed as the origin of the crisis of the Soviet action-image, which reflected the "unsteadiness"[32] of the Communist dream in all its aspects.

From Romantic Action to Romantic Inaction

What happened to the sublime action-image after the Thaw revolutionary optimism finally exhausted its vital power and got replaced by the intelligentsia's pessimism of Brezhnev's era of stagnation? Indeed, should

there be any need for the excessive romantic pathos when post-Stalinist reforms were discontinued and the Communist dream itself was no longer in danger? Interestingly enough, in 1970s the failure of the Thaw rhetoric of romantic *action* gave way to a similarly subversive tradition of romantic *inaction*. A great number of late Soviet films (e.g. Konchalovsky's *Uncle Vanya* (1970), Melnikov's *September Vacation* (1979), Daneliya's *Autumn Marathon* (1979), Balayan's *Flights in Dreams and in Reality* (1983)) foregrounded a deliberately weak and passive protagonist whose genealogy refers to the Russian version of the romantic or Byronic ennui of the "superfluous man" aka Onegin, Pechorin, Rudin, Beltov and Oblomov. The Soviet "superfluous man" of the seventies was no longer a hero but an educated loser, i.e. a bored intellectual lost in his mid-life crisis and self-indulgent enfeeblement, incessantly abstaining from work and social and family duties. With no venues to realize their talents in Brezhnev's milieu, the Soviet Onegins and Pechorins found their legitimate refuge in "the small form" of the action-image that let them drift from one absurd situation to another and dispassionately engage in idleness, adultery, betrayal, public embarrassment and alcoholism. Such shift from the romantic heroization (or hyperactivity) to equally romantic deheroization of action (or hyperpassivity) in the Soviet cinema of stagnation strongly resonates with Herzog's subversion of active heroic agency by the opposite extreme of its radical "enfeeblement" in his other films (e.g. *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), *Nosferatu* (1979), *Woyzeck* (1979)), where heroes are replaced by idiots and weaklings and whose activity is similarly reduced to the minimum. In both cases, the failure of the visionary's sublime plan in "the large form" found further extension in "the small form" where "his whole reality was enfeebled."[33]

The enfeeblement of the Soviet action-image proceeded mainly through a series of screen adaptations of Russian classic literature, which proved to be the safest mode of representation in that cultural climate of stagnation. Film adaptation has always been a popular genre in Soviet cinema, yet in the mid-seventies the cinematic translation of the literary classic became particularly subversive. Its critical potential is most evident if we compare the adaptations of Pushkin's story *The Shot* from *The Tales of Belkin* and Lermontov's novella *Princess Mary* from *A Hero of Our Time* in the Thaw and stagnation periods. Both literary texts center on the disillusioned and mysterious Byronic hero who withdraws from all social activities and thus inadvertently provides a critical commentary on Nikolai I's reactionary reign: in the former, the protagonist Silvio dedicates

his entire life to plotting revenge for a slight he received in his youth, in the latter, Pechorin is engaged in plotting psychological games with people to whom he is utterly indifferent. Both narratives deconstruct the romantic notion of honor and dramatize the desperate lack of purpose for the Russian intellectuals of the nineteenth century squandering their lives in idleness and useless actions. Whereas Naum Trakhtenberg's adaptation *The Shot* (1966) faithfully follows the plot development in Pushkin's original by closely reproducing the characters' flashbacks as well as the lively dynamic of their confrontations, Petr Fomenko's theatrical staging *The Tales of Belkin: The Shot* (1981), on the contrary, emphasizes the static gaps of silence and immobile passivity between the characters' encounters and focuses more on their facial expressions rather than on actions, rendered by unnaturally long close-ups. According to Deleuze, the close-up stands for the affection-image: "*The affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face.*"[34] Furthermore, the face in the affection-image, as the interval between the perception-image and the action-image, "is abstracted from the spatio-temporal co-ordinates which would relate it to a state of things,"[35] it sacrifices the mobility of the body for the sake of affect and thus expresses the state of suspension between received action and executed reaction. A film consisting of predominantly facial close-ups, such as Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), would thus unavoidably occasion the crisis of the action-image, since affects in such film are expressed as separate entities, independently of their connection to sensory-motor situations. Fomenko's repeated use of close-ups, portraying the unshaved, exhausted and somber face of the protagonist (played by Leonid Filatov), as well as the unemotional and detached face of the narrator (played by Alexei Eibozhenko), similarly abstracts affects from their dependence on either characters or situations. While watching Fomenko's theatrical production, one simply forgets that Pushkin's story is about a duel and a plotted revenge, since the incredibly dense ambience of black melancholia and alienation permeates the entire screen and emphasizes the futility of any action whatsoever. Anatoly Efros' *Pages from Pechorin's Journal* (1975) similarly differs from its cinematic predecessor *Princess Mary* (Issidor Annensky, 1955): whereas the latter is more interested in the narrative intrigue unfolding in the setting of the typically romantic mountain landscape and accompanied by the sentimental soundtrack consisting of romances set on Lermontov's lyrics (e.g. "Sail"), the former deromanticizes Pechorin's superfluousness and dramatizes instead its tragic consequences by reducing actions and

decorations to a bare minimum and having the despondent protagonist play the role of Lermontov as well. In other words, in the films of mid-seventies the romantic ennui of the Russian superfluous man is stripped of its dependence on the dramatic action and milieu and taken in its own right as an autonomous affect which manifests itself as a powerful expression of the morbid sensibility of the late Soviet intelligentsia.

Characteristically enough, it was Konchalovsky who launched this post-Thaw tradition of noble boredom and passivity in the Soviet film. Whereas the figure of the young overcommitted revolutionary in his debut feature strictly followed the conventions of the Thaw sublime action-image, which was already in the pre-stagnation stage of demise in mid-sixties, his *The Nest of Gentry* (1969) and *Uncle Vanya* (1970) offered a completely different protagonist: a middle-aged melancholic aristocrat isolated from any civic activity in the Russian hinterland and brooding over the lost years of his unfulfilled life.[36] What is most interesting about Konchalovsky's transition from one romantic extreme to another is that it is mediated by his *The Story of Asya Klyachina Who Loved but Did Not Marry*, made in l967 yet shelved until 1987. Shot in the naturalistic style of *cinema verité* with only two professional actors involved, it thoroughly demythologizes the life and labor of simple collective farm workers by portraying their everyday activity on the fields. As Anna Lawton comments, *The Story of Asya Klyachina*

> records the hardships of work during the harvest days, under scorching sun, with sweating farmers covered with dust and dirt, shouting at each other in the realistic language of workplace. This was a deliberate blow on the director's part against one of the most cherished myths of Socialist Realism, the country idyll. In the 1930s 1940s images of… rural beauties in embroidered blouses and smart fellows in shiny boots and dancing to folkish accordion tunes were intended to afford the people a glimpse of the promised land. Mythmaking was used to pacify desires and to foster dreams. But even before Konchalovsky made this film, the dream was long gone, exposed by Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the XX party Congress.[37]

That is to say, because of its innate tendency to push the utopian impulse to the very limit where it eventually dissolves, the excessive revolutionary romanticism triggered by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization was destined to extend itself to harsh naturalism in order to represent reality "as is." Konchalovsky's endeavor, in this regard, aimed at redeeming the

ordinary life of farmers from the Stalinist glamor of kolkhoz musicals by discovering there the unadorned poetry of simple work beyond ideological mythologization. It should not, therefore, be surprising that after this film was scandalously banned, he decided to focus on the theme of the inability and impossibility to work at all, a theme which was already consistently developed in Russian literature throughout the entire nineteenth century.

In the seventies, the late Soviet abstinence from work became almost like a political stance which could be compared to the French Situationists' resistance to any labor as such, proclaimed in Guy Debord's famous 1953 slogan "Ne travaillez jamais!" Although safely packaged in the genre conventions of melodrama and screen adaptation, a great number of films of this period centered on the sympathetic, if not celebratory, representation of the hero as an idle non-achiever whose social failure was, nevertheless, rendered as self-chosen and therefore justifiable. For example, in Mikhalkov's *An Unfinished Piece for Player Piano* (1977), Sophia almost faints when she learns that her former lover Platonov is not a minister, as expected, but a university drop-out and a current schoolteacher in a remote village. Yet it is Platonov, according to Mikhalkov, who is granted the most rational voice of judgment among all the characters in the film. In his *Oblomov* (1979), the lazy protagonist is no longer a parasite benefiting from the institution of serfdom but a lovable dreamer whose sentimental idealism is nostalgically poeticized as a viable alternative to Stolz's pragmatic materialism. In Kheifits' *A Bad Good Man* (1973), the adaptation of Chekhov's *Duel*, Laevsky's boredom and lyrical sensibility are similarly juxtaposed with the cynical Darwinism of the naturalist von Koren. In Melnikov's *September Vacation* and Balayan's *Flights in Dreams and in Reality*, mischievous yet adorable protagonists always try to find hilarious and absurd excuses to sneak out from their workplace. In Daneliya's *Autumn Marathon*, the talented translator Buzykin is suffering from his impotence to become a writer; even his translations are rejected for ideological reasons. In Mikaelyan's *Love by Request* (1982), a parody on the socialist realist production drama in which a more sophisticated communist assists a younger character in her/his ideological and professional evolution, the former sportsman Bragin, working now as a mechanic, is couched by his would-be girlfriend to approach his work at the factory lathe with more enthusiasm and pleasure, yet with no success.

In all these films, the cause of the hero's melancholia and inability to realize the creative potential is never fully disclosed or explained but only indirectly suggested through a chaotic series of absurd and tragicomic

circumstances which loosely comprise the film's overall narrative. The elusive nature of the protagonist's social abnormality in such features makes them very similar to mystery movies structured according to the small form of the action-image (ASA') where "one moves from blind actions, as indices, to obscure situations which vary entirely or which fluctuate completely."[38] Just as in the detective genre, educated viewers were summoned to decode through the romantically framed enigma of the protagonist's malaise, imperceptible to the censors, a symptom of a larger pathological condition of the late Soviet system, which could neither be changed nor challenged at that time. Once the social system got changed in the late eighties, the Soviet melancholic similarly vanishes from the screen or literally dies, as it occurs in Ryazanov's *Forgotten Melody for a Flute* (1987). The post-Soviet resurrection of the Soviet-like charming loser in Veledinsky's *The Geographer Drank His Globe Away* (2013) could be another riddle for viewers and critics to decode: some of them, following the novel's author, identified the despondent protagonist as a "saint"[39] and others as "the gloomiest symptom of the post-Soviet intelligentsia's defeat."[40] However, given Veledinsky's excessive melodramatization (if not victimization) of his hero's self-indulgent enfeeblement and passivity with little reference to social factors for such a condition, we may conclude that the critical potential of the socialist romantic legacy is yet to be fulfilled.

Aberrant Movements of Soviet *Flâneurs*

The sublime action-image was not the only form of subversion of the Soviet movement-image in the Thaw cinema; it run parallel with another dominant image where the excessive valor of the revolutionary subject was deconstructed through a thorough and systematic deheroization and "the sensory-motor action or situation [was] replaced by the stroll, the voyage and the continual return journey."[41] By the end of *Cinema 1*, Deleuze argues that at the moment when the "most 'healthy' illusions fall," the "first things to be compromised everywhere are the linkages of situation-action, action-reaction, excitation-response, in short, the sensory-motor links which produced the action-image."[42] The loosening of the sensory-motor link in the action-image results in the irruption of aberrant movement freed from the spatio-temporal coordinates. In this regard, Deleuze discusses films of Italian Neorealism, the French new wave and

post-war American cinema outside Hollywood that foreground characters' aimless movements and strolling through the city. He categorizes such films as "trip/ballad" films (*films de bal(l)ade*) in which the wandering movement itself becomes the form of narration. In the voyage form, characters are no longer responding to situations they are confronted with but become instead the passive observers of various spaces they traverse.

Surprisingly enough, Deleuze never mentions any Soviet film to exemplify this trend, which was indeed extremely popular in the Thaw cinema at the time. Suffice it to mention such films in which the trip/ballad narrative form is already inscribed in their titles: films like *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959), *Man Follows the Sun* (1963) and *Walking the Streets of Moscow* (1964). These films testify to the emergence of the so-called "poetic cinema" in the Russian new wave. And yet, Deleuze's omission of Soviet examples could be justified by the fact that such films, emphasizing the natural and unabashed sincerity of the characters' emotions, were still produced in the mode of traditional psychological realism, a mode of expression celebrated in Vladimir Pomerantsev's early Thaw article "On Sincerity in Literature" (1953). Deleuze is, however, not interested in the characters' psychology. In *Cinema 2*, the aberrant movement of the voyage films is immediately linked to the emergence of the pure optical and sound image, a new image which is occasioned by the character's encounter with something intolerable and unrecognizable and is exemplified by Rossellini's *Germany, Year Zero* (1948) and *Europa '51* (1952). In such films the traumatic optical image can't be assimilated into consciousness as the perception-image but persists on its own as something literal and imperceptible. For Deleuze, the only proper reaction to it would be a paralysis, which at the same time designates the transcendental exercise of sensibility. Such "transcendental" experiences were still unavailable for the Soviet *flâneur* of the time as they were naturally overwhelmed with freedom and jubilation granted by Khrushchev's liberal politics. In other words, Soviet cinema of the late 1950s appears to be behind the developments of Western cinema outlined by Deleuze. Even though their emphasis on emotional simplicity was truly innovative in the context of early post-Stalinism, for most Western film critics it seemed more like an anachronistic "anomaly." As Woll comments,

> At Cannes [in 1960], *Ballad* presented an attractive anomaly when set alongside Antonioni and Buñuel's surrealism, and Fellini's scandal provoking *La Dolce Vita*. The British critics called it a 'calming note in a

discordant symphony'; *Le Monde* acknowledged that 'from time to time it's nice to see normal and healthy people on screen'.[43]

It is only towards the end of the Thaw period, that is, in the mid-1960s, that we can witness the emergence of the pure optical and sound images in Soviet films, such as Khutsiyev's *July Rain* (1966), Shpalikov's *Long Happy Life* (1966) and, of course, Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966), considered to be the last film of the Thaw era. In what follows I will discuss how the "trip/ballad" form manifests itself first in the Thaw war film and then in the early "poetic cinema."

Wanderings in a War Movie

Grigory Chukhrai's *Ballade of a Soldier* is justifiably praised for having introduced a new kind of Soviet subjectivity characterized by authentic sincerity and disarming naiveté and sharply opposed to the cold austerity of Stalinist superheroes. The film narrates about a nineteen-year-old soldier Alyosha who becomes a war hero purely by accident: while running from the enemy tanks as they chase him through the battlefield, he fires at them in fear and desperation and, to his own surprise, hits them. For his bravery, which he attempts to disclaim out of modesty, he is granted a medal which he trades for a six-day leave to visit his mother at home. What *Ballade* then offers to the viewer is Alyoasha's "continual return journey" to his home in a Russian village with multiple digressions, delays and interruptions which eventually leave him only a minute to kiss and embrace his mother before rushing back to the Front, where he is killed, as we learn from the off-screen narrator. The film's time frame and progressive teleology strictly set at the beginning are thus continuously dismantled by the protagonist's "aberrant" movements through multiple urban and rural spaces devastated by war. As Deleuze would put it, Chukhrai's journey narrative becomes a ballade of *balade* (trip or wandering) which displaces the linearity of movement by discontinuous deviations from the goal caused by the slackening of the sensory-motor link between the hero and the milieu.

In *Ballade*, Alyosha's short leave from the war temporality expands into his falling out of the empirical temporality regulated by timetables, schedules and deadlines. His progressive trip home is broken down into a series of digressions, during which he sacrifices his precious time to

help others on various utterly insignificant occasions. At the train station he volunteers to help a one-legged soldier carry a suitcase and because of this he misses the train. He misses another train when he attempts to fetch water for his accidental travelling companion, Shura. Although he gets a lift to the next station from an old woman truck driver, he is still too late. The train has already departed yet Shura is awaiting him and they gradually fall in love with each other. Before the trip, he has promised to his war fellow Pavlov to deliver a present to his wife in another town *en route*. Yet Pavlov's wife is having an affair and he delivers the present to Pavlov's invalid father instead. For Turovskaya, the protagonist's "road to his native village becomes his road to himself."[44] For Widdis, his journey similarly "acts as a path to self-knowledge or consciousness... [presented as] a series of trials and encounters... through which he grows in self-awareness."[45] For Woll, Alyosha's chance encounters constitute his "heroism" as "a mosaic consisting of many separate details."[46]

From a Deleuzean perspective, however, the hero's return journey would be neither spiritually enlightening, nor heroic, even in an ordinary sense. His personality hardly evolves throughout the narrative since there are no signs of the hero's internal progression in his physical digressions; just as his ordinary "heroism" seems to refer more to the viewer's impression rather than to his character quality. Chukhrai's *ba(l) ade* is essentially about the hero's failure of time management: he loses his time as well as his control over events in the present because he is always *affectively* open to the world and others in general. That is to say, the hero is as open to his mother as he is to others. In his trip to help her fix the roof, he keeps helping strangers instead by getting affectively involved in their affairs. His affection is multiplied and disseminated and so is his action, or the sensory-motor link between situation and response. For Deleuze, affection serves as the interval between perception and action. That is, the affection-image is what enables the character's reaction to what s/he perceives. With the "break-up of the sensory-motor schema" after the war, according to Deleuze, the narration similarly gets fragmented because of "the rise of situations to which one can no longer react."[47] In *Ballade*, on the contrary, the narrative is fragmented because the hero is affectively responsive to *all* situations occurring to him. In a strictly Deleuzean sense, there is no crisis of the action-image in Chukhrai's *Ballade*, yet its protagonist consistently manifests affective openness to "intolerable" situations (rather than the Stalinist denial of them) which would later trigger that crisis.

Whereas in *Ballade* the character's sensory-motor whole is splintered and dispersed into multiple contingent actions, in Bondarchuk's *Fate of Man* (1959) it is nevertheless unified by the hero's spiritual evolution as the result of his traumatic encounters during the war. The narrative totality and continuity (or "fate") of Sokolov's numerous hardships and wanderings that constitute the film's plot (e.g. the loss of his family, his captivity, escape, etc.) are provided by the fact that the protagonist himself plays the role of narrator presenting the story of his life in a series of flashbacks to his fellow military driver. Even though he is irreparably damaged by the war, he is celebrated as a survivor who has managed to put together the scattered pieces of his life and identity and become a responsible father for his adopted son, playing around while he recounts his story. Sokolov is undoubtedly no longer a Soviet hero but he is proudly a Russian man. Whereas in *A Tale of a Real Man* the hero overcomes his ordeals because he is a *Soviet* pilot, in *Fate* he finds his will power in the fact he is a *Russian* soldier. In the concentration camp, for example, Sokolov has a drinking duel with the Nazi officer: despite his hunger, he refuses to eat the offered bread with vodka by claiming that a Russian soldier never eats after drinking (he does nevertheless break off a demonstratively tiny crumb after his third glass). As Graham Roberts observes, "the kind of masculinity which Sokolov represents can be read as a sign of the Soviet Union's new-found confidence under Khrushchev."[48] Enjoying huge commercial success at the time, Bondarchuk's film, therefore, resolves the crisis of the Soviet action-image by removing it from the Stalinist context and refashioning it in terms of the hero's Russian patriotism and dedication to family values.

Receding from the ideological constraints of socialist realism, the Thaw action-image gravitated toward the conventional psychological realism. Efros' *Two in the Steppe* (1962) similarly deheroizes the protagonist who fails to deliver the commander's order because of his panic attack in the battlefield. The army tribunal sentences him to death for cowardice, yet the sudden intrusion of German troops interrupts his execution, which leaves the hero together with his committed escort alone in the steppe, disconnected from their battalion. Efros' faint-hearted soldier, nevertheless, manages to reclaim his heroism, or sensory-motor whole, towards the end of the film: while randomly wandering through the vast spaces of the Russian steppe and joining scattered military units in occasional combats, he never attempts to escape from his escort; even after the other gets killed, he returns to the commander and demands to repeat execution. The

spiritually reformed soldier is acquitted and the action-image, therefore, restored. That is to say, the deheroization of military action in the Thaw cinema, influenced by the public acknowledgment of the enormity of war casualties concealed by Stalin's government, hardly undermines the overall coherence of the action-image, in which the sensory-motor link is only temporarily suspended. In this regard, Stolper's *The Living and the Dead* (1964), a long overdue "artistic explanation of what happened in the summer and fall of 1941,"[49] entirely focuses on the chaos and confusion of the first months of the war during which the Soviet Army was encircled and paralyzed. The film is often praised for its honest representation of the immensity of the disaster at that time: crowds of scared refugees and disoriented soldiers from disrupted battalions intermingle with each other, running into different directions, falling dead here and there under constant bombardment and the sudden attacks of German tanks; soldiers losing their weapons and documents and committing suicide in despair. *The Living*, nevertheless, concludes with a Soviet massive counter-offensive just as the wounded protagonist, officer Sintsov, who has lost his documents and is awaiting a trial, is reinstated in his title.

Wanderings in Poetic Cinema

The crisis of the action-image was most strongly implemented in the "poetic cinema" where the protagonist was not a soldier but an artist, a teenager or a child. Many critics have noticed that the Thaw cinema was virtually obsessed with the figure of child as a protagonist. As Prokhorov observes, in order to fight the epic monumentalism of Stalinist cinema in favor of "individuality, domesticity, and emotional self-expression," the Thaw filmmakers "literally reduced the hero in size and made him much younger and more spontaneous."[50] "If there were such a term as "pedomania," writes Anninskii, "it would perfectly define that conscious or unconscious tendency which appeared in our cinema of the early sixties, i.e. an attention to a little future person put at the center as our moral judge."[51] For Deleuze, in this regard, the figure of child as a seer becomes particularly important in effecting that crisis which, in turn, triggers the emergence of a new sound and optical image disconnected from action. As he writes,

> in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing. Similarly, if everyday banality is so important, it is because, being subject to sensory-motor schemata which are automatic and preestablished, it is all the more liable… suddenly to free itself from the laws of this schema and reveal itself in a visual and sound nakedness… There is… a necessary passage from the crisis of image-action to the pure optical-sound image. Sometimes it is an evolution from one aspect to the other: beginning with trip/ballad films [*films de bal(l)ade*] with the sensory-motor connections slackened, and then reaching purely optical and sound situations. Sometimes the two coexist in the same film like two levels, the first of which serves merely as a melodic line for the second.[52]

The "visual and sound nakedness" of everyday banality perceived by the child is the main theme of Mikhail Kalik's *Man Follows the Sun* (1962), whose innovative genre, according to one commentator, resembles a "lyrical ballad as it inscribes the novelistic principle of narration into its overall "poetic" composition."[53] Kalik's film is widely considered as the Russian version of Albert Lamorisse's short *The Red Balloon* (1956). Both features focus on the imaginary friendship between the child and the object in the context of urban space: Sandu befriends the sun just as Pascal, the red balloon. Yet Kalik's film significantly departs from its French predecessor in two important moments. First, in Lamorisse's "fairy tale", the boy's "affair of the imagination" is possible due to "the zoomorphism of the balloon" merging with "the anthropomorphism of the animals,"[54] an affair which is easily transcribed into Winnicott's model of the child's imaginary relationship with the transitional object and which solicits essentially allegorical interpretations. As Catherine Liu points out, "Lamorisse's narrative… is intensely allegorical and pivots on the anthropomorphization of the balloon, which appears first as a mischievous and loyal companion and then as martyred victim of a resentful mob when it falls victim to the persecution of group of ragamuffin bullies. Lamorisse's balloon can be interpreted as a martyr to class resentment; its rebirth a Christ-like resurrection."[55] Second, Lamorisse's "imaginary documentary,"[56] despite its visual splendor, does not represent the Parisian space in its "visual and sound nakedness" but diegetically frames it as a contrasting background for the balloon's singularity: the city is deliberately colored in grey and dark tones to make the balloon look vividly and exceptionally red or crimson. In *Man Follows the Sun*, Sandu's imaginary friend is the opposite of the zoomorphic/anthropomorphic "balloon that can follow

its master like a little dog."[57] As the film's title pointedly suggests, it is Sandu, or rather "a man," who follows the sun. Such a reversal of the boy's relationship with the imaginary companion effectively transcends the projected anthropomorphism of the sun by radically opening the protagonist's perception toward the brightness and vastness of the world. In contrast to Lamorisse's gloomy ambience, therefore, Kalik's sunlit city spaces emphatically manifest their full exuberant autonomy.

Man Follows the Sun narrates about one day of the life of a five-year-old boy who has heard from his fellows at the playground that if one follows the sun in its trek, one can cover the entire earth and get back to the same spot of departure but from the other side. Excited about this idea, the boy decides to prove it in practice and sets off on a journey by rolling his hoop around the city and looking at things through bits of tinted glass. During his urban odyssey, he encounters a great number of amusing, absolutely disconnected strangers whose sketchy portraits and stories constitute the film's fragmented narrative: for example, a lottery ticket vendor; a scientist from the Sun Research Institute; a boy with a magnifying glass; a girl rushing to a date with a bunch of multi-colored balloons; happy fathers at a maternity hospital; a motorcycle racer who performs dangerous stunts yet turns out to be a timid aged man rather than a daredevil; a young woman working as a gardener taking care of sunflowers in her flower bed, and her boss, a park attendant, who cuts a sunflower down by insisting on replacing them with roses; a shoeshine man with a passion for soccer who has lost his legs in the war; a funeral procession and taxi drivers respectfully waiting for it to pass; a truck driver worried about his sister dating a suspicious stranger; golden fish in the fountain; gymnasts working out in a huge stadium while the sun is setting down. By the end of the day, Sandu falls asleep next to a stone lion on the street. In his dream, most characters he has met during the day reappear in their surreal metamorphoses: the park attendant cuts a sunflower and turns into a mannequin, while the now gigantic sunflower replaces the dead body in a funeral procession which the boy and the gardener follow in somber silence. Then comes the shoeshine man, who now has his legs again, standing against the huge disc of the sun in the background. He guides the boy along a wide beautiful street at the end of which they would meet the sun. Next the boy sits near the truck driver who gave him a lift but then he drives the truck himself giving a lift to one of the happy fathers with a child he has met at the maternity hospital. At the end of his dream he sees himself in the place of the lottery-ticket

vendor but instead of lottery-tickets he gives out pieces of tinted glass to other children. They look at the world through the glass, which makes the world appear splintered into multicolored fragments. He wakes up in the arms of a man who introduces himself as a military musician. Together they now go to meet the sunrise.

The film's narrative could not be more naïve and banal. Yet the naïve banality of the everyday is precisely what the film is striving for since its goal is to present the world through the eyes of the child. The entire film consists of a series of discontinuous pure optical and sound situations, which the protagonist passively observes and moves on without responding to them. As one Soviet critic remarked, "the director renders the narrative of his film as rhythmic, yet passionless. The possibilities of passions emerge and the viewer does entertain them. But passions themselves are absent."[58]Unlike Lamorisse's *The Red Balloon*, the film does not contain any conflict, such as that between individual and collective or brightness and darkness. The motifs around which the narrative is loosely organized are quite minimal and archetypal: such as birth (maternity hospital) and death (funeral precession) or good (the gardener) and evil (the park attendant). The boy's wandering is fundamentally anti-teleological: by following the sun he intends to arrive at the same place from which he sets off. Furthermore, not only does the boy abstain from reacting to numerous situations he encounters, he lets them enter his memory, from where they reemerge as dream-images. As Deleuze characterizes the same process, "between the reality of the setting and that of the action, it is no longer a motor extension which is established, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs."[59] That is, the film reenacts the passage of the cinematic image from the actual to the virtual and it is the perception of the five-year-old boy that makes this passage possible. It is at this point, according to Deleuze, when the actual environment loses its utilitarian and diegetic functions and gets disconnected from the character's actions and passions, that "objects and settings [*milieux*] take on an autonomous, material reality which gives them an importance in themselves."[60] Such an autonomous "deactivated" milieu born by pure optical situations is, for Deleuze, "any-space-whatever," i.e. a singular "space of virtual conjunction"[61] opposed to the "qualified space-time of the old realism."[62] Removed from their ideological determination and infused with impersonal non-actualized affects, the film's fragmented spaces (e.g. streets, alleys, parks, roads, stadium, etc.) understandably met a negative reaction from the Communist

censors. As one of them protested, "a man follows the sun, but what does he see? He sees total nonsense, not Soviet achievements."[63] By its de-socialized and dehumanized nature, any-space-whatever is therefore one of the most powerful cinematic means of subversion of the ideological status quo. Deleuze exemplifies such spaces by Bresson's disconnected milieus and, most importantly, Antonioni's empty alienated landscapes. In Soviet post-war cinema, however, such spaces began appearing only towards the end of the Thaw era, such as in Shpalikov's *Long Happy Life* (1966) or Khutsiev's *July Rain* (1966), where the camera seems to fall out of the diegetic course of events for a moment and forget about the viewer and characters by staring at unrelated areas and strangers involved in their own activities.

Conclusion

Anyone familiar with Deleuze's *Cinema* volumes would certainly remember their fast and sketchy analyses of film examples serving to illustrate his vast philosophical taxonomy of cinematic concepts and images. In my attempt to put Deleuze's theory of the crisis of the European action-image in the Soviet context, I have tried to dwell a bit longer on representative films that exemplify similar tendencies in the Thaw cinema. Besides aberrant movements, which Deleuze describes as the main characteristic of such crisis, I have also examined the sublime intensification of the action-image and its radical enfeeblement in the Soviet cinema of the 1950-1970 period. These developments clearly position post-Stalinist Soviet cinema within the overall history of post-war European cinema.

NOTES

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, xi (Hereafter C2).

2 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, 211 (Hereafter C1).

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 C1, 157-8.

6 C1, 184.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Lev Anninskii, *Shestidesyatniki i my: kinematograf, stavshy i ne stavshy istpriei*. Kinotsentr, 1991, 14.

10 Pogodin, N. "Eto i est' pravda" in Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov: stat'i, svidetel'stva, vyskazyvania, Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1989, pp. 38-43, 38.

11 Lev Anninskii, *Shestidesyatniki i my,* 15.

12 Ibid.

13 Neya Zorkaya, "O yasnosti tseli" in *Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov: stat'i, svidetel'stva, vyskazyvania*, Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1989, 47-50, 50.

14 Josephine Woll, *Real images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, I.B. Tauris, 2000, 86.

15 Ibid.

16 Elena Monastireva-Ansdell, "Redressing the Commissar: Thaw Cinema Revises Soviet Structuring Myths," *Russian Review*, Vol. 65. 2. (2006), pp. 230-249, 238.

17 See Josephine Woll, *Real images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, 127-33.

18 Alexander Prokhorov, "The Unknown New Wave: Soviet Cinema of the Sixties" in *Springtime for Soviet Cinema: Re/Viewing the 1960s.* Ed. by Alexander Prokhorov, Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Russian Film Symposium, 2001, 7-28, 10.

19 C1, 179.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 11.

22 Kirill Baryshnikov, "Lubov' kommunista," *Ogoniok* No 52, 1998: http://www.ogoniok.com/archive/1998/4577/42-40-45/

23 In Mashchenko's *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1973), the third adaptation of Ostrovsky's novel, the figure of Pavel Korchagin is indeed presented as a "delicate" intellectual.

[24] Baskakov, Vladimir. ""Serebryanyi vek" sovetskogo kino" in *Kinematograf ottepeli: Dokumenty i svidetelsva ochevidtsev*. Ed. by V. I. Fomin, Moskva: Materik, 1998, pp. 178-188, 183.

[25] Alexander Prokhorov, "The Unknown New Wave: Soviet Cinema of the Sixties," 12.

[26] V. I. Fomin, *Kinematograf ottepeli: Dokumenty i svidetelsva ochevidtsev*, Moskva: Materik, 1998, 125.

[27] Peter Rollberg, *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Cinema*. Scarecrow Press, 2008, 43.

[28] Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, Verso, 1997, 21-22.

[29] Slavoj Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!" in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Ed. by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, Verso, 2000, pp. 90-136.

[30] Haynes, John. *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema*, 45.

[31] Ibid., 156.

[32] C1, 206.

[33] C1, 185.

[34] C1, 87.

[35] C1, 97.

[36] After his return from emigration in the US, Konchalovsky once again turned to Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* by directing it on stage: yet this time, in 2009, the protagonist's boredom is no longer poeticized but is harshly ridiculed and satirically criticized. That is to say, in contemporary Russia the aristocrat's noble sloth has become out of sync with the newly adopted capitalist ideology of work.

[37] Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time*. CUP Archive, 1992, 120-121.

[38] C1, 164.

[39] Dmitrii Bykov, "Proiti porog," *Moskovskie novosti*, 1 November 2013: http://www.mn.ru/oped/20131101/361232510.html

[40] Mark Lipovetsky, Tatiana Mikhailova, "Aleksandr Veledinskii: *The Geographer Drank His Globe Away* (*Geograf globus propil*, 2013)" *KinoKultura*, Issue 43 (2014).

[41] C1, 208.

[42] C1, 206.

[43] Josephine Woll, *Real images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, 97.

[44] Quoted from Josephine Woll, *Real images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, 97.

[45] Emma Widdis, "'One Foot in the Air?' Landscape in the Soviet and Russian Road Movie," in *Cinema and Landscape*, eds. Graeme Harper, Jonathan R. Rayner, Intellect Books, 2010, 73-89, 80.

46 Josephine Woll, *Real images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, 98.
47 C2, 272.
48 Quoted from John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema*, 176.
49 Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005*, University Press of Kansas, 2006, 137.
50 Alexander Prokhorov, "The Adolescent and the Child in the Cinema of the Thaw," Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema, 2007, Vol. 1.2. 115-129, 115.
51 Lev Anninskii, *Shestidesyatniki i my*, 88-89.
52 C2, 3-4.
53 Natalia Balandina, "Poeticheskoe prostranstvo Mikhaila Kalika," *Kinovedcheskie zapiski,* vol. 57, 2002: http://www.kinozapiski.ru/ru/print/sendvalues/482/
54 André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Volume 1, University of California Press, 2005, 45.
55 Catherine Liu, "The Flight of the Red balloon (2007) and D.W. Winnicot", in Pyschoanalytic Pscyhology. Vol 28(3), 2011, 446-456, 446-447.
56 André Bazin 46 *What is Cinema?*, 46.
57 Ibid., 45.
58 Lev Anninskii, *Shestidesyatniki i my*, 90.
59 C2, 4.
60 Ibid.
61 C1, 109.
62 C1, 208.
63 Lev Frukhtman, "'Ya rodilsya svobodnym chelovekom…' (zametki o tvorchestve kinorezhissiora Mikhaila Kalika)," *Dom uchionykh i spetsialistov Rekhovota*, January 2012: http://www.rehes.org/lst7/lst7_k.html