

From Orientalism to Postcoloniality

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Introduction

Kerstin Olofsson, Department of Russian, Workshop organizer

At the conference on postcoloniality at Södertörn University College in April 2006, one of the workshops dealt with Russian culture, which is a rather unusual setting for postcolonial studies. In an article that has attracted much attention, David Chione Moore argues for the extension of the postcolonial to include the post-Soviet sphere. He criticizes what he describes as the silence of postcolonial studies today on the subject of the former Soviet sphere, as well as the unwillingness of scholars specializing in the post-Soviet sphere to use postcolonial concepts.¹ Maybe the situation is beginning to change, a change to which this conference itself bears testimony.

Professor Irina Sandomirskaja's keynote lecture, "*One-Sixth of the World: Avant-garde Film, the Revolution of Vision, and the Colonization of the Periphery in the USSR during the 1920s*", is here extended. The author explores the role of avant-garde film in the symbolic re-colonization of Russia's periphery during the 1920s. The early USSR's policy towards its periphery was complex — there was a conflict between what is designated as "imperialist hegemonism" and "cultural hegemony". Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony presupposes the reclaiming by the proletariat of its own native tongue, which had been expropriated by the language of bourgeois values. The Soviet avant-garde cultural politics of the 1920s were working towards a similar aim: the re-expropriation by the now victorious proletarians of what had been stolen from them - a vision, a language, a self-identity, a true consciousness. "The imperialist hegemonism" is the Stalinist imperialism which in the end crushed the ideas of cultural hegemony and expropriated the cultural utopia of the USSR from its reading/seeing subjects. In the construction of a postcolonial world of today, Dziga Vertov, the director of the film *One-Sixth of the World*, is seen as important with his contributions to the strategies of reclaiming space when his camera performed, rather than depicted, the immense space of the USSR. With the collapse of the Soviet imperialist hegemonism, Vertov's thinking in terms of cultural hegemony is only beginning to be understood. The lecture concludes that he is essential for an awareness of the complexity of Soviet phenomena and, by implication, post-Soviet phenomena as well. This should be kept in mind when creating a conceptual space for Baltic and East European postcoloniality.

The workshop had seven participants, of whom four publish their papers here, in some cases with extensions. The articles explore post-Soviet postcoloniality from different angles. Interestingly enough, Russia is placed both at the imperial and the subaltern pole. This is a manifestation of the much discussed doubleness with Russia as the centre of an empire but, at the

¹ David Chione Moore. "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique", *PMLA*, Vol. 116, No. 1, Special Topic: *Globalizing Literary Studies*. (Jan., 2001), pp. 111-128

same time, exposed to an “orientalizing” discourse from the West. Moore names the upholders of this discourse “Russo-orientalists”.²

The article placing Russia partly at the subaltern pole is “‘Russia and Postcolonialism?’ Surely, It Should Have Read Neo-colonialism: Aleksei Balabanov’s *Brat 2* (2000)” by Lars Lyngsgaard Fjord Kristensen, PhD student at the University of St. Andrews, UK. On the one hand, he writes that the “First World” intellectuals using the term “postcolonial” about Russia may in certain circumstances manifest a “new form of colonialism”, the term “postcolonial” here seen as designating the subaltern side. On the other hand, analyzing the film *Brat 2*, Kristensen describes how the main character acts to defuse “American cultural imperialism”, when he arrives at the airport in the US. In other situations the character is described to act in a neo-colonial way in relation to an Afro-American woman. The airport scene in *Brat 2* is related to a scene in *Meeting Venus*, a film by István Szabó, where an Eastern European intellectual arrives at a Western airport. As the article argues, this scene supports the film scholar Anikó Imre who has called the Eastern European intellectual the “new European black”.

Russia as an empire is dealt with in the remaining articles. Yulia Gradszkova, PhD student at the Baltic and East European Graduate School at Södertörn University College, studies colonial aspects of Soviet politics in her article “From ‘Backwardness’ to ‘Modern Culture’? ‘Beauty’ and ‘Femininity’ during the Soviet Cultural Modernization in the 1930s to the 1960s”. The paper is written in connection with the author’s dissertation research. In her study of the cultural transformation in Soviet Russia, she uses written sources as well as an oral history approach — 21 interviews with women born in 1919-1947. The purpose is to analyze how “beauty” norms are interpreted by representatives of different social, ethnic and confessional groups, and how various perceptions of “beauty” influence constructions of femininity in the stories of the informants. In the paper five interviewees are presented — Russian, Bashkir, and Tartar women, interviewed in Moscow, Saratov, and Ufa (capital of the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Republic). The presentation shows differences in the normativity created in the cross-section of “culture”, “religion”, “ethnicity”, and “social group”. It demonstrates the effects of Soviet social, cultural, and national policy on the level of every-day practices.

Professor Per-Arne Bodin, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Stockholm University, explores the contemporary Russian debate on the relations between empire and language in his paper “Two Languages and three Empires: About the Discourse on Russian and Church Slavonic in Today’s Russia”. The two languages mentioned in the headline are Russian and Church Slavonic. The three empires are the geographically fixed Russian Federation, the religiously and geographically determined Slavia Orthodoxa (the Slavic Orthodoxy), consisting of a couple of countries with Russia as its centre, and, finally, the religiously determined conception of God, the “Kingdom of Heaven”, seen as universally valid. Between the three discourses concerning these three empires, there is a paradoxical relation. Russian, the imperial language in the first empire, the Russian Federation, is seen as an unclean language not suitable for the two other empires where Church Slavonic reigns. This debate on language casts an interesting light on some aspects of the political atmosphere in the new Russia.

The last of the published papers is a close reading of a contemporary short story, “Who Is the Prisoner of the Caucasus? Vladimir Makanin, ‘The Prisoner of the Caucasus’”, by Kerstin

² Ibid., p. 120

Olofsson, former Assistant Professor at Södertörn University College, Department of Russian. The story's title refers concretely to the plot in which a Caucasian boy is taken prisoner by a Russian soldier. But many devices in the story support what is said by a Caucasian in a dialogue with a Russian officer, as he asserts that it is not he himself who is a prisoner, but the officer and all his soldiers. A state of immutability and immobility is depicted in the story, among other things expressed in the title — it is the same title as of several works by Russian Classics. As lorries with Russian soldiers are ambushed by Caucasian guerilla and stuck at a “tight spot”, so Russia, according to the article's interpretation, is unable to pass the “tight spot” between past and present, and unable, therefore, to move on and change. Thus Russia is a prisoner of the Caucasus.

Hopefully, the texts published here will contribute new knowledge about Russia and the post-Soviet sphere as well as about postcolonialism. This is a rather new field of research, which is here studied from the perspective of cinema theory, literary history, sociology, and cultural studies. The composite picture given is of necessity fragmentary, but perhaps the very multiplicity can be illuminating.

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One Sixth of the World: Avant-garde Film, the Revolution of Vision, and the Colonization of the USSR Periphery during the 1920s (Towards a Postcolonial Deconstruction of the Soviet Hegemony)

Irina Sandomirskaja, Södertörn University College

*For Rønnog and Steve Seaberg,
citizens of the six sixths of the world*

Difference, sameness, and “not-as-yet-sameness”: East European (post)coloniality?

Although this article was originally presented at a conference on postcoloniality, I have to begin with a few reservations about the applicability of this term to the territories that were formerly owned or controlled by the USSR, and especially with regard to its Western frontier, i.e. the present-day Baltic States and the states of former Eastern Europe.¹ There are three objections against subsuming these territories, their histories and identities under this academic designation. One objection, paradoxically, comes from the academic field itself, as postcolonial scholars tend not to include Soviet and post-Soviet cultures in their academic agendas, mostly out of a mere lack of competence² (although this deficiency has been considerably but inconclusively addressed in recent years, the immense diversity of post-Soviet locations and contexts are yet to be accounted for).

The second conceptual objection is related to the idea that colonialism and colonization originate in West European modernity: colonialism is an intervention from the West – not from the East. Christianity, capitalism, industrial technology, enlightenment, and eurocentric knowledge set the parameters of colonialism, none of which apply to the USSR in relation to its Western periphery. The USSR carried the Western territories under its rule by means of a militant state atheism, a socialist planned economy, and a collectivization campaign in agriculture that was, technologically speaking, inferior to already existing practices. Instead of

¹ Applicability of post-colonial analytical apparatus to this region is also discussed – and resolved in various ways but all in the affirmative — by practically every of the 20 contributors in Kelertas, Violeta (ed.), *Baltic Postcolonialism*. Rodopi : Amstersam and New York, 2006. See, in particular, Violeta Kelertas. “Introduction: Baltic Postcolonialism and its Critics”. *Op.cit.* pp. 1-10.

² David Chione Moore. “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique”, *PMLA*, Vol. 116, No. 1, Special Topic: *Globalizing Literary Studies*. (Jan., 2001), pp. 111-128, revised and reprinted in Violeta Kelertas (ed.) *Baltic Postcolonialism*, pp. 11-44.

furthering enlightenment, it brought about a stagnation of intellectual life under the Stalinist/Zhdanovian slogan of cultural diversity representing cultures as inarticulately “national in form, socialist in content”.

Such is the formal argument against the inclusion of the Soviet case in postcolonial studies. It is to be noted that the USSR also intervened in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, which is often forgotten. In these territories the Soviet intervention actually contributed to the fall of the colonial system, especially in the overseas countries who were members of the global socialist system, for instance Angola, Cuba and North Vietnam. None of these post-Soviet subjects have, as far as I know, been included in post-Soviet studies.

On the other hand, it is the conception of Stalinist cultural politics (with its campaigns against illiteracy, the modernization of everyday life, ideological education and other measures against the population’s “cultural retardedness”) that gives rise to objections against the applicability of the postcolonial paradigm to the USSR. Indeed, from the point of view of the Eastern European intelligentsia, such a “civilizer” appears less “civilized” than its East European subaltern. The USSR is rather perceived as an “Asiatic” barbarian, a new Chengiz-khan with no idea of, or concern for, European cultural values. Such is the conservative critique against the application of the postcolonial paradigm to the Baltic States and Eastern Europe, a view which was predominant during the period of post-Soviet transition in the region. Conservative East European intellectuals believe, as was once communicated at a conference in 1991, that “it will be shaken off as a tree shakes water off its leaves after the rain.”

Now then, what could be an argument *for* postcoloniality? It is an empirical rather than a theoretical one. Nowadays, as a result of the process of Europeanization, the Western periphery of the former Soviet empire has once more become the Eastern frontier of the West. Although the center of the region has changed the “core vs. fringes” distinction has been retained. The Europeanness of the newly (re-)Europeanized countries is experienced by the European “core” as a distinct otherness – not as a difference but as a “not-as-yet-sameness”. This “not-as-yet-sameness” presupposes that the “not-as-yet” will be successfully eliminated, resulting from the furtherance of democratic values in the East European population, the increasing transparency of economic and political processes, and the upgrading of institutions to meet the EU standards. Thus the age-old Modern colonialist notion of time – with its unidirectional evolutionary movement towards a predictable future, and its values of progress and development – can also be discerned in the new rhetoric of European democracy. What is at stake is not respect of singularity and difference, but a silent presupposition of a “not-as-yet-sameness” to be overcome with time and proper guidance. This presupposition underlies political decisions in the “fringes” and characterizes the identity of the area in the eyes of the “core”. It is not a difference to be respected, but a “not-as-yet-sameness” to be overcome in time, through proper guidance. Interestingly enough, the empire of the USSR proceeded from the same assumptions with regard to identity and difference, since it also conceived of time in terms of progression towards a universal Communist sameness. They saw their subjects as “not-as-yet-same”, developing towards the “same-as” with the evolving socialist world system. It was precisely this logic of hegemony that the USSR used as a justification for its occupation after World War 2, for its interventions in the left movements in the West, and for its political and military presence in the Third world.

The Soviet hegemony, therefore, is the issue that has to be addressed first, before we can determine whether a discussion of Soviet colonialism or post-Soviet postcoloniality is legitimate.

The Production of Soviet Hegemony

For this purpose, we have to reconsider the central notions of Soviet hegemony, its “not-as-yet-communism” and respective identity, the “not-as-yet-sameness” (“national in form and socialist in content”). This reconsideration must include the initial construction of these hegemonic notions in the 1920s, at the very inception of the Stalinist state. We will see, then, that the early USSR’s policy towards its periphery was quite complex, that the periphery itself was much more varied (and resistant) than the Bolshevik theory concerning the “national question” had anticipated. Moreover, the understanding of hegemony differed among the cultural and political elite. The ultimate triumph of crude force manifested in the occupation of Eastern Europe was not only a repressive response to national resistance in the occupied countries; it was also an act of self-colonization, or repression of the Other in the hegemonist’s own self: the hegemonist’s *external* violence in response to an *internal* ideological conflict. For the sake of brevity I will designate this conflict as one between *imperialist hegemonism* and *cultural hegemony*. As I will argue, in the establishment of the USSR – a sixth part of the world continental territory, in effect one vast periphery dominated by a tiny center in Moscow – the idea of historical progress towards a communist universality was not entertained by the Kremlin alone. Leftist cultural policies in the 1920s – particularly those represented by the programmatic activities of the avant-garde, not least by avant-garde film – were highly instrumental in the creation of the USSR. These leftist policies, which did not wholly contradict the early Soviet project at large (and which had been ruthlessly suppressed by the time Stalin consolidated the Soviet state in the mid-1930s), were invented in an internationalist Marxist spirit. While in principle supporting the regime’s hegemonistic goals to control the periphery and repress local resistance, those cultural policies of the 1920s are rather akin to Antonio Gramsci’s idea of cultural hegemony. Whereas Lenin and Plekhanov used the term *class hegemony* to define the proletariat’s tactical interests in the creation of temporary alliances against the common enemy, Gramsci defined hegemony as a strategy for a “passive revolution”, a revolutionary “war of positions”, and a linguistic turn. Such a revolution takes place in the symbolic domain. Neither this response, nor the manipulative domination against which it revolts, is necessarily violent. As a result of the bourgeoisie’s manipulation, the proletariat find themselves deprived of their own language, which restricts their freedom in the marketplace of symbolic exchanges. Moreover, because of this expropriation of their mother tongue by the language of bourgeois values, the proletariat lose the awareness of their own class interests.³ Hegemony in Gramsci’s sense, although a linguistic term, can easily be extended to other fields like film. It presupposes the proletariat’s recuperation of their own native tongue – a “stolen language”; it enables them to expand their horizons and re-appropriate their class consciousness: the awareness of their presence and role in the world.

During Gramsci’s stay in Moscow in 1920-21, he could have discussed those matters with his Soviet comrades; his ideas could also have influenced the development of the Soviet linguistic debate in the early 1920s – a dramatic period when several agencies were fighting over the

³ Ives, Peter, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, Winnipeg: Ferwood Publishing, 2004.

project of the colonization and modernization of the multiple cultures of the USSR through the invention of languages and scripts.⁴ As for Gramsci's direct involvement in this process, we do not know enough about his stay, his contacts and his discussions in Moscow.

Nevertheless, even though the Soviet avant-garde cultural politics of the 1920s was not directly influenced by Gramsci himself, neither confined to Gramsci's ideas about linguistic grammar and the alphabet, nor expressed as programmatically as in Gramsci's cultural hegemony, the avant-garde still shared his aim to re-expropriate what had been stolen from the proletarians: a vision, a language, a self-identity, and a true consciousness – in distinction from the false consciousness of bourgeois ideology. This was the cultural component of the world revolution: the symbolic empowerment of all working people throughout the world.⁵

During the cold war, the Sovietologists understood Soviet hegemony as Stalin's continuation of the early Soviet program of world revolution.⁶ This was not the case, however, since world revolution as a strategic goal (supported by the avant-garde activists) had been abandoned in the mid 1920s, when Stalin started his program of industrialization, made a revision of Lenin's theory of revolution, and proclaimed the theoretical possibility of constructing socialism in one separate country. However, as Boris Groys correctly observes⁷, Stalin's cultural apparatus borrowed its rhetoric and social engineering from the avant-garde who first introduced these ideas. At the same time, it is quite unfair of Groys to imply that the avant-garde project was analogous to Stalinism, and that they shared the imperialist purposes of the Stalinist state. It would be equally unfair of me to say, however, that the avant-garde activities under the sign of cultural hegemony were completely innocent vis-à-vis the hegemonistic pretensions of the Soviet national and international policies. What I want to argue is that the production of Soviet hegemony as we know it from the Cold War period was a historically complex process which Sovietology has grossly oversimplified. For the sake of retrieving this

⁴ Smith, Michael G., *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR 1917-1953*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998

⁵ In another book, Peter Ives makes a comparative analysis of Gramsci's language politics vis-à-vis Walter Benjamin's ideas of linguistic diversity. Ives, Peter, *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 97-133. He does not, however, take up another correlation between Gramsci and Benjamin, that between cultural hegemony as a game of "coercion and consent" in the symbolic production of reality and the self, on the one hand, and that of Benjamin's "reception by distraction", *Zerstreuung*: the appropriation of art by the masses in practice, the mastering of symbolic realities *in performance*, "through habit". Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility", *Selected Writings*. Vol. 3. 1935-1938. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002, pp. 119-120. I am leaving this parallel in a footnote but want to point out its importance for the construction of a theory of post-Soviet postcoloniality. On the *performance* of hegemony as it appears in Dziga Vertov. See further. Compare both the concepts of hegemony, that of knowledge and that of performance, with the postcolonialist theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's expansion of the idea of hegemony in her definition of the task of teaching the humanities at the university after the crisis of 9-11 and as response to the increasing essentialism of the conservative Western academia (an essentialism, I will add, also relevant in Europe's treatment of the new ex-Soviet European cultures): "In the humanities classroom begins a training for what may produce a criticism that can possibly engage a public sphere deeply hostile to the mission of the humanities when they are understood as a persistent attempt at *an uncoercive rearrangement of desires, through teaching reading*." Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *Terror: A Speech after 9-11*. *boundary 2* 31.2, 2004, pp. 81-111, emphasis mine. – IS.

⁶ See for instance the bible of the Cold War doctrine of containment, the text that presents the concept of Soviet hegemony to American military strategists, George F. Kennan, *The Long Telegram*. <http://www.ntanet.net/KENNAN.html> (accessed January 17th, 2006).

⁷ Groys, Boris, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

complexity from under the debris of Soviet and Sovietological constructions, I want to return to the period of the USSR in the making, the 1920s. These are the years of political and cultural construction of that which collapsed in 1991. How was the USSR constructed at this time, of what material and with what technologies was it built? And was it actually *just one* USSR? What kind of media and technology were used for the creation of the utopian avant-garde time-space of the USSR under construction?

What I am suggesting, preliminarily, in the limited space of this article, is that some fundamental features of the avant-garde version of hegemony, which partly coincide in its rhetoric with Kremlin-style hegemony, allow a discussion in postcolonial terms. The avant-garde and the Kremlin hegemony differ, however, in their methods and goals. Notwithstanding these differences, the presence of hegemonistic imagination in the avant-garde can be identified in their concepts and terms, such as:

(1) Thinking in terms of global expansion, whether expressed in terms of a world revolution (Trotsky), or fellow-travellers' utopian belief in the inevitable triumph of socialism throughout the world (which Stalin's program of industrialization accepted but postponed indefinitely);

(2) Thinking in terms of 'the East and the West', 'civilization and wildness', 'progress and retardedness (*otstalost'*)', 'development and underdevelopment', "obscurity (*temnota*) and enlightenment', etc.;

(3) Thinking in terms of 'majority and minority' (*natsmeny*, 'ethnic minorities') and 'center and periphery';

(4) Thinking in terms of, and actively inventing and implementing, various unified, universalising systems of representation (like alphabets and normalized linguistic standards); imagining and constructing universal languages in order to overthrow historical, national, and literary systems of representation;

(4) Thinking, in the arts, in terms of art's own "universal languages", the self-elucidation, self-explication and self-systematization, and, apart from any censorial efforts of the regime, "disciplining" by art itself of its own artistic expression as such; alongside with the theoretical work by Malevich and Kandinsky, one must refer to Dziga Vertov's, Lev Kuleshov's and Sergei Eisenstein's search for a universal language of film;

(5) Thinking in terms of technological dominance, i.e., conceiving of life in the pragmatic terms of social engineering and political management; the denial of history, tradition, and psychology; in general, the technological and teleological questioning of 'how to' and 'where to', in contrast to the genealogical questioning of 'why' and 'where from', which is characteristic of the positivist, self-identifying rhetoric of the national state;

(6) Thinking in terms of 'urban-industrial' (as progressive) and 'rural-patriarchal' (as reactionary); these concepts imply not only to the stigmatization of the peasantry (to be industrialized) but also of ethnic minorities (to be alphabetized), women (to be emancipated through their involvement in productive labour), and children (to be educated in the communist spirit through young pioneer and komsomol organizations). Thus, the *okraina* (outskirts) presupposes not only reclaiming the geographically remote territories of the former Russian empire,

but primarily the upgrading of *all difference* on a truly intersectional basis: class, ethnicity, language, gender, and age.

“Among the arts, film is the most important to us” (Lenin)

Film is an ideal medium for the experimental construction and testing of such technologies, an ideal instrument for reaching out to the masses and carrying the message from the centre to the farthest corners of the periphery. Lenin treated the enlightenment of the masses in a cynical, pragmatic fashion (teaching workers and peasants literacy enough “for them to be able to read out decrees, orders, and appeals”, as he is reported to have said in 1921).⁸ He was fully aware of film’s imperializing potential when he coined his slogan in the early 1920s, that film is the most important art form “to us”.⁹

Avant-garde activists were just as conscious of the potential of the film medium to organize the masses. Aleksei Gan (1895-1942), a constructivist and an ardent supporter of new Soviet film, was one of the first to outline the connection between film technology and the new historical time in 1922. This new concept of time is expressed in images of movement, mass, and velocity:

Our Revolution is so rich in the movements of the masses, the swiftness with which events arise, their development and disappearance, that only a machine, an apparatus, can capture and record what is happening. We need special means of expression to transmit the real world of human activity to the latecomer or the person who has not yet learned how to see reality in its concrete content. cinema, as a quality of our industrial age, and cinema as a means of expression, is the only production element which can organize consciousness and help us to orientate ourselves in the present day.¹⁰

In this short extract we find some central notions of the avant-garde cinematic representation. First, cinema is understood as an element of production: the production of the self, as Gan put it in another text from 1922.¹¹ Note that Gan makes a literal interpretation of Marx’s metaphor as the symbolic manufacture of the self. Also, the emphasis is on the production of the *self*, not the *other*: Gan’s technological interpretation of history, as is so characteristic of the avant-garde elite of the Soviet cultural centers, does not see an “other” in the new history of mass movements; everybody is included in the “us”. Another important aspect of the role of cinema is its capacity to explain a swiftly transforming reality to the “latecomer”: cinema’s role as a mechanical witness, an accumulator of quickly changing events, the interpreter of these events for those who have not yet learned how to see reality correctly. Finally, cinema is a map and a compass: it offers a better view of the time and the space of the USSR and is thus important for us to orient ourselves. All of these ideas are to be found in the cinematic practice of Dziga Vertov, in his “orientational” film *One Sixth of the World*, to which I will return below.

⁸ Annenkov, Iurii, *Vladimir Lenin. Dnevnik moikh vstrech: Tsikl tragedii*. Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1991. p. 247.

⁹ These words by Lenin are proverbial, but only related by another memoirist, Anatolii Lunacharskii. Otherwise the fact of Lenin saying this is not established as well as the context of quotation is obscure. See just one conscientious but failed attempt of the slogan’s ultimate attribution on <http://liveuser.livejournal.com/62878.html>, accessed October 24, 2006.

¹⁰ Gan, Aleksei, “The Tenth Kino-Pravda”, Yuri Tsivian (ed), *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*. Le Giornate del Cinema Muto 2004, p. 55.

¹¹ Gan, Alexei, “The Cinematograph and Cinema”. Richard Taylor, Ian Christie (eds), *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988, pp. 67-68.

Walter Benjamin was not a constructivist but he, too, was mostly concerned with the potential of cinema to symbolically produce and reproduce man. In Benjamin's analysis, it is cinema's phenomenology – the way it produces its "other" – that leads to a reversed, much deeper understanding as compared to Gan's formulation of the link between history, its subject, and the technology of representation. In *The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility*, it is not the advent of the masses (the subject of the new imperialist era in Modern history) that creates the necessity of film and gives rise to film as a medium but, on the contrary, it is film technology itself – its optics, its techniques, and its whole apparatus of image reproducibility – that gives rise to the mass, the mass movement, and the mass individual. The camera demands that a mass movement be "fed" into it; seeking panoramic shots of "hundreds of thousands", it confronts the masses with the apparatus and the masses with themselves:

In great ceremonial processions, giant rallies and mass sporting events, and in war, all of which are now fed into the camera, the masses come face to face with themselves. (...) A bird's eye view best captures assemblies of hundreds of thousands. (...) This is to say that mass movements, and above all war, are a form of human behaviour especially suited to the camera.¹²

As a collective art form, film implies a radical democratization of the spectacle, a technological revolution in (re)production, a consequent restructuring of subjectivity, and a fragmentation and anonymization of agency (whether of the film-maker, of the performing actor, or of the character performed and filmed). Since films are intended to be watched by hundreds of people gathered in the same room, they offer a collective experience, a spectacle that appeals to a collective eye. Film features the life of the masses and is watched by the masses; presented with a cinematic image, the masses confront primarily the representation of their own collective self, and their legitimate claim to be filmed corresponds to their equally legitimate claim to be justly and equally represented in political institutions. At the same time, film is a collective production, it is created by a team, not by a single author. This is especially relevant to the documentary, the truly outstanding invention of mute cinema. With its team-based authorship and its orientation towards "fact", "fact" in this case being a representation constructed by the optics of the camera and the work of the cameraman and the editor. According to Benjamin, fact as a reality performed through the agency of the film camera can serve the (ultimately fascist) mobilization of the masses towards a new imperialist war – and as effectively mobilize the masses against the militarism of imperialist propaganda. What is crucial in the choice of the masses between fascism and anti-fascism, is film's own consciousness towards the way the camera works constructing the spectacle of history. Compared to Gan's analysis, in Benjamin's perspective, film is more than how a technology defines reality and transmits it to the latecomers. To Benjamin, film is a prosthetic sensation and a collective intelligence for the social body, a provider and editor of collective experiences. Given this tendency of film to act *instead of* the human eye, ear, touch, etc. – and, consequently *instead of* human judgment and self-consciousness, the question naturally arises, whether film producers choose to give the collective mass body a false consciousness through cinematic illusions (conducive to fascism and, eventually, to a new world war), or a self-consciousness that would organize the formless, senseless, and brainless masses into a political class. The task of the "anti-fascist" camera as it provides an enlightened class consciousness is to loosen the compactness in which the mass appears to its oppressor. The work of film is that of differentiation:

¹² Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility", pp. 132-133.

...the loosening of the proletarian masses is the work of solidarity. (...) In the solidarity of the proletarian class struggle, the dead, undialectical opposition between individual and mass is abolished; for the comrade, it does not exist".¹³

This "loosening", "de-massing" of the mass is, according to Benjamin, the purpose of the strategy of "the politicizing of art" as it is pursued by progressive Soviet avant-garde.¹⁴

Thus Benjamin's analysis of the political mission of film seems to coincide with Lenin's dictatorial thesis about the utmost importance of film "to us" in the manipulation of the masses. In his work, published during the late 1920s, and especially after the Nazis seized power in Germany, Benjamin showed solidarity with the Soviet film platform. This gave rise to a simplified interpretation of Benjamin's own affinities: his allegedly unconditional support of the Soviet project vis-à-vis the development towards fascism in Germany, and his disregard for the catastrophic development in the USSR towards Stalin's show trials of the mid- and late-1930s. Those show trials were staged in full awareness of cinematic spectacularity and of the role of the masses in terror; the scholarly community have still not discussed properly the purely cinematic component of terror, for cinematic technology contributed to the dissemination of this terror. As distinct from Nazism, the Grand Terror never produced a cinematic epic of its own; it was represented mostly through short newsreels. However, these are comparable to the epic cinematic representation of the 1934 Nazi Congress in Nuremberg, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, which was logistically planned and staged for the camera (*Triumph des Willens*, 1934).

"Aestheticizing politics", the strategy of the imperialist mass entertaining industry, is conducive to the total elimination of the masses in a new devastating war to come, as Benjamin wrote in 1936.¹⁵ What about Soviet film and Stalin's terror then? Is there any difference at all between the imperialist aestheticising of politics and the Bolshevik politicising of art? In fact, as early as 1926, Benjamin was quite conscious of Stalin's "class struggle", and he was already concerned about the future of Soviet film, even though he did not make this public. His views are evident, however, in private observations made in his Moscow Diary:

Russian film itself, apart from a few outstanding productions, is not at all that good on the average. It is fighting for subject matter. Film censorship is in fact very strict (...) a serious critique of Soviet man is impossible in film (...) Whether film, one of the more advanced machines for the imperialist domination of the masses, can be expropriated [by the avant-garde cultural policies. – I.S.], that is very much the question.¹⁶

Benjamin was not at all prepared to accept all Soviet things out of party solidarity; nor was he blind to the new processes of Stalin's state building and the way film was used in the erection of the new empire. His diary notes tell us that he did not exclude Soviet film from the perspective of potential "aestheticizing" for the sake of a new world war (Stalin's class war) to come. In 1926-27, he observes that the cultural revolution in the USSR is a gigantic project, "arresting the dynamic of revolutionary progress in the life of the state – one has entered, like it or not, a period of restoration while nonetheless wanting to store up the energy of the youth

¹³ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁴ Ibid., 122.

¹⁵ Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility", p. 122.

¹⁶ Benjamin, Walter, *Moscow Diary*. Ed. by Gary Smith. Cambridge, Mass, and London: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 55

like electricity in a battery.”¹⁷ Revolution thus ceases to be experience and becomes mere discourse, manipulated by educators in schools and youth organizations. Film, as the most democratic technology for education and enlightenment, may therefore play a principal role in the reconstruction of the empire. In addition to his cautious analysis of Soviet film, Benjamin’s published review of Soviet film, which focuses on Vertov’s *One Sixth of the World*, is testimony to his prophetic vision.¹⁸ Here, Benjamin observes that Vertov has not achieved

...his self-imposed challenge of showing through characteristic images how the vast Russian nation is being transformed by the new social order (...) What he achieved, however, is the demarcation of Russia from Europe.”¹⁹

Benjamin also refers to the separation of “the one sixth” from the European leftist intellectuals – the theoretical and political fellow-travellers outside of the USSR. Another important observation Benjamin makes seems to undermine the whole program of the cinematic emancipation of the proletariat: the filmed subjects and the film audience are not in fact proletarians; they are peasants. This indicates yet another direction of cinematic colonization. “To expose such audiences to film and radio constitutes one of the most grandiose mass-psychological experiments ever undertaken in the gigantic laboratory that Russia has become.”²⁰ Benjamin also registers another effect of this experimentation: the colonization of film itself by state censorship which, at the time of writing, affects film more severely than theatre and literature. At the end of his review Benjamin indirectly denies that film is a means of constructing (and being) a social body. This, as we will see, is Vertov’s project in *One Sixth of the World*, for this film does not intend to *depict* the body of the USSR, but to *become* that body; not to *present* the USSR, but to *perform* the USSR. Vertov’s failure, according to Benjamin, is due to the fact that in actual reality there is no such thing as a Bolshevik society apart from its cinematic spectres – there is only a mass audience vis-à-vis the Bolshevik state.²¹

However, in spite of Vertov’s failure, irrespective of the possibility of expropriation on a massive scale by the regime, the cinematic image still preserves, in its technological potential, a revolutionizing force of its own. Even though film is expropriable, it is still a powerful technology for emancipation and (re)production of the self: it expands our vision, adds to our knowledge about ourselves, extracts the individual life from its enclosure in the local and the everyday, and opens up the horizons of agency. Film creates and confirms the individual’s belonging to a vast majority of people who do not know each other personally, but who share the collective vision by watching their own collective portrait as it is presented to them by the film camera and the film projector. Even though film technology may be abducted by the pragmatic regime, it never loses its potential to empower the disempowered by enabling democratic, horizontal (cinematic) participation, and providing an anti-hierarchical (filmic) self-representation. Due to its double-edged technology, film is potentially *a tool of enslavement*, but also potentially, and always-already, *a technology of becoming aware*.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 53

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin. On the Present Situation of Russian Film. Quoted from: Tsivian, Yuri (ed.), *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, 2004, pp. 210-214.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 212-213.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 213.

²¹ Ibid., p. 214.

The Empowerment of the Blind and the Proletarian Hegemony of Vision

Benjamin's famous formula in which he contrasts the "good" Soviet film as "the politicization of aesthetics" to the "bad" fascist film "as "the aestheticization of politics" has caused quite a lot of ironic eyebrow-raising and indignant shoulder-shrugging among post-Soviet scholars who are not in the Leftist camp. They are ready to reproach Benjamin for his alleged affiliation with Stalin, with Adorno who claimed that Benjamin's theory of distraction implies "identif[ication] with the (Nazi) aggressor".²²

Vertov, on the other hand, was quite open about his own "affiliation" with the Soviet power, seeing the "oppressor" not in the Soviet state regime, but rather in the reactionary film clichés – clichés he devoted his life to demystify. Thus, he liked to compare his filming method (to which I will return later on) with those of the fearsome Bolshevik secret police, the GPU:

The work of the movie camera is reminiscent of the work of the agents of the GPU who do not know what lies ahead, but have a definite assignment: to separate and bring to light a particular issue, a particular affair.²³

Vertov's romantic misunderstanding of the "truth" of the GPU casts a shadow over all early Soviet film (and not without grounds), and also over Benjamin's vision of film technology as politically and aesthetically empowering, especially in the USSR. This latter Benjamin's view of the role of film has recently been described as "technologically utopian". In discussions about the development of the contemporary global film industry, Benjamin's critics still cannot deny the merits of his "utopian" thinking when it comes to predicting the future.²⁴ Utopian or not, Benjamin's attitude toward the politically and socially creative possibilities of film technologies were shared by many at the time. Nor should these possibilities be considered quite exhausted today; in our time of simulated and animated digital visuality, film seems almost to have depleted its innovative and social-constructive potential but remains, nevertheless, a powerful instrument of critical reflection. The current technology of animated and simulated seeing – a new blindness, one might say — also includes the technologies that produce political and theoretical visions, which postcolonial studies and area studies have to be able to deal with.

It is therefore with a starting point in Benjamin's film theory that I will present my case of cinematic politics and geopolitics: Dziga Vertov's legendary film *One Sixth of the World* (1926). Neither Benjamin nor Dziga Vertov regarded a fact as a piece of positive evidence to support a theory; to them, facts were not separable from theory. Rather, a fact was a *piece of self-commenting, self-critical, self-aware life*: "all factuality is already theory", as Benjamin, the Marxist phenomenologist, put it in 1926.²⁵ Or, as Dziga Vertov wrote, more inclined to a natural-scientific understanding of truth in the same year,

²² See a discussion in Bratu Hansen, Miriam, "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street", "Angelus Novus: Perspectives on Walter Benjamin", *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 25, No. 2. Winter 1999, pp. 306-343, footnote on Adorno's critique p. 313.

²³ Dziga Vertov. Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups. *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Ed. by Annette Michelson. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London : University of California Press, 1984, p. 69.

²⁴ Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Ibid.*, pp. 306-309.

²⁵ Letter to Martin Buber in Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, p. 132.

Our eyes see very poorly and very little – and so men conceived of the microscope in order to see invisible phenomena; and they discovered the telescope in order to see and explore distant, unknown worlds. The movie camera was intended in order to penetrate deeper into the visible world, to explore and record visual phenomena, *so that we do not forget what happens and what the future must take into account.* (Emphasis mine. – IS.)²⁶

For it is in Dziga Vertov's *One Sixth of the World* that the double-edgedness of film technology becomes especially visible. In 1926, we see the USSR being constructed in response to certain demands. In the Kremlin, where Stalin's *TsK* had already suppressed all party oppositions except the strongest one, the Trotskiite (its termination would begin in the fall of 1927), a vision of the USSR which was to be demanded by the future regime was already in place. In Vertov's film, we see a USSR that is still demanded by a different, unorthodox instance: by cinema itself, with its collective technologies of making-sense through production and reception. Basically, Vertov's project is that of a collectivization of vision, or of a horizontal expansion of vision. What is at stake is an ambitious program of visual alphabetization. What is offered through the filmic vision is not only the image of the sixth part of the world (an immense geographic space with its immense cultural diversity to be appropriated by the proletarians) but, more importantly, a collective subjectivity for the benefit of those who can understand such visions. The camera constructs the new eye; it takes over the perception of the seeing subject (what Marx referred to as "sensuous labour") and enhances the seeing eye's techniques, its optical and interpretational performance. Thus film evolves in its fight against blindness: this project involves a radical negation of individual vision (individual sight is "bourgeois", as all things individual, and is ultimately, if inherited by the masses, conducive or equivalent to blindness). The task is that of the visual re-appropriation of the former empire through its democratic re-distribution among the proletarians in the form of filmic images. It is a *politics of vision*.

The Soviet foreign trade company, *Gostorg*, commissioned Vertov to produce a simple advertisement film about Soviet export and its perspectives. What emerged from Vertov's editing studio was a visual introduction of the USSR, a grandiose representation of the USSR that sought to emulate, through its scope and inventiveness, the scale and the historical uniqueness of the social transformation in the USSR. Immediately after its release in the USSR the film was subjected to devastating political and aesthetic criticism from all directions and very quickly taken off the screens. Its story is the story of the cultural revolution in a nutshell, when the USSR was trying to invent itself as a symbolic entity par excellence and pull itself together as a vast symbolic capital – either to be reclaimed by the proletarians or to be invested in the "construction of socialism in one separate country". We know that it was ultimately the second scenario that became a reality. At the time of the shooting of the film (and at the time when Benjamin watched the film in Moscow), these two possibilities were still in a temporary condition of unstable balance. In Vertov's film, we encounter the vision produced *for* the masses, the vision that *belongs to* the masses, but also the spectacle *of* the masses, as the masses sit in the movie theatre watching a film about themselves. This completely horizontal, anarchist and an-archic democracy of vision, not at all Bolshevik, had not as yet at the time of its production developed into the nightmarish, chilling scenario that Benjamin the Cassandra sketches in the closing lines of *The Work of Art* (and "war" in the extract below is easily substituted for Stalin's designation of terror as "the intensification of class struggle in the socialist society"):

²⁶ Annette Michelson (ed). *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London : University of California Press, 1984, p. 67.

*“Fiat ars – pereat mundus, says fascism, expecting from war (...) the artistic gratification of a sense perception altered by technology (...) Human kind, which once, in Homer, was an object of contemplation by Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its (the humanity’s in its capacity of a mass. — IS) alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure.”*²⁷

The Kino-Eye: Film Technology and Horizontal Politics

In this section I will present a very brief overview of Dziga Vertov’s revolutionary inventions in film technology, which he first introduced in collaboration with a group of fellow film makers. They created a common platform in 1918-19 (according to other sources, in 1922) and organized an experimental film group called *the Kino-Eye (Kinoglaz)*. The history of the Kino-Eye group has been extensively discussed, but I am returning to some principles in order to establish the relevance of their experimentation to the questions of hegemony. For this purpose I will focus on the production of the Soviet subjectivity as it was projected by the Kino-Eye in their film work, the production of the colossal, visual figure of the USSR, and the elaboration of a mechanical filmic gaze, a vision for the masses that would be instrumental in the proletarians’ symbolic appropriation of the “one sixth of the world”.

We want to bring clarity into the worker’s awareness of the phenomena concerning him and surrounding him. To give everyone working behind a plow or a machine an opportunity to see his brothers at work with him simultaneously in different parts of the world and to see all his enemies, the exploiters.²⁸

The mission of “capturing the power of vision” was thus to capture the human experience (of seeing and later hearing), re-formatting it, expanding it “through the use of technology”, and giving the audience intelligent control over *what* they saw, and *how*. This is the hegemonic aspect of the filmic gaze, the class bond to be created between international proletarians: seeing together, seeing each other, and seeing the surrounding world. Towards this goal, the Kino-Eye mobilized an unprecedented amount of experimental work developing new filming methods and inventing new production techniques. What makes the Kino-Eye’s project unique and ambitious is that, in addition to the idea of capturing the power of vision, they actually initiated the spectacle of the “socialist fatherland”, to whose space-time the citizen could belong virtually, through the acquisition of the techniques of the gaze. The cinematic spectacle of the USSR thus presupposed not only proletarian spectators’ symbolic reclaiming of the proletarian state, but also the proletarian masses’ reclaiming new eyes, a virtual and collective corporeality assisted by cinematic technology.

By engineering such an eye, by creating a gaze for the masses, the Kino-Eye was thus in effect assisting the production of Soviet citizenship. It is not accidental that their technical search in the construction of the proletarian gaze becomes central in 1925 – 1929, at the very threshold of Stalin’s *velikii perelom* (“the great turning point”), that is, between the beginning of industrialization and the beginning of collectivization. This period in the evolution of the Stalinist state and society is also connected with the political engineering of quite a different, all-Union vision: the Gaze of the Leader. This Gaze was produced through the gradual elimination of alternative and oppositional points of view in the party itself. It was also produced in

²⁷ Benjamin, Walter, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility”, p. 122, emphasis mine. – IS.

²⁸ Dziga Vertov. Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups. *Kino-Eye. The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, pp. 73-74.

the course of kolkhoz building by the physical extermination and dispossession of the lion's share of Vertov's models and viewers: the peasants. As far as Vertov's published materials allow us to judge, he abandons the subject of "sight for the masses" by 1930. Thus it is not only Vertov's idea of recolonization that "misfired" (Benjamin), but also his idea of creating an oppositional model of horizontal democracy: a non-Stalinist citizenship and subjectivity for the Soviet individual.

The Kino-Eye's main artistic principle was "life caught unawares/off-guard" (*zhizn' vras-plokh*), or "life as it is" (*zhizn' kak ona est*). This central thesis received quite a lot of critical attention, especially from the film and literature theorists of the LEF circle (Viktor Shklovskii and Osip Brik) who insisted on the actual inexistence of anything that might be understood as "life as it is". However, the paradox of Kino-Eye's "life as it is" is exactly life's embeddedness in the act of its reflection and representation: the act of shooting/editing the film. Life, according to the Kino-Eye, is that which does not know that it is being filmed, and that which does not pose to be filmed.

The task of a cinematic production of such a life and its further instilment with (filmic) consciousness resulted in Kino-Eye's most daring experimentation. Indeed, today we admire some of their inventions as technically superb, but regard them as ethically suspect. They were the first to introduce the hidden camera, and their capability to invent new and new tricks to distract the attention to "life" was inexhaustible: to spy on life, intrude on it, and capture it off-guard.²⁹ The Kino-Eye did not only learn to use a portable inconspicuous camera, but also to use provocation, for instance, pretending to be filming one thing (directing the crowds' attention to this) while filming the unsuspecting crowd with a different camera.

All this was certainly far from their claims to be shooting life "as it was", without interrupting its normal course, as they confronted life with the extraordinary circumstances of film shooting. Kino-Eye's heritage rather shows how extremely skilful they were, working with their models, allowing life to remain "unawares" as long as possible – and then suddenly confronting its gaze with the gaze of the lens. Their skill is also evident in the way life responds to the confrontation with the lens: the model usually replies with an equally direct look into the camera, smiles at it, and thus signals her readiness to join the game of the making of the film. One such confrontation with "life caught unawares" amazed Vertov himself. He was once shooting in a mental hospital, where a patient responded to his intervention by looking into the camera and mimicking the cameraman. While doing his act of filming the filming, the madhouse inmate was shouting "*Memento mori*". This exemplary filmic episode showed Vertov that "life unawares" – in this case "unaware" to the degree of life itself being outright deranged – is probably a better film-maker than film itself. He included the sequence, together with the madman's message of memory, in one of Kino-Eye's newsreels.³⁰

Meeting the eye of the person being filmed – catching the moment when life suddenly becomes aware of its being filmed, thought, reflected by the camera³¹ – means, therefore, capturing the moment when life stops being life and is transformed into something entirely different: a filmic consciousness and the fun of movie making. Here, life (Russ. *natura*) transforms

²⁹ Tsivian, Yuri (ed.), *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, 2004, pp. 42-43 and 384.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³¹ Compare Chris Marker's poetic reflection on the moment when these two eyes – that of the camera and that of a living human being – meet and recognize the existence of each other (*Sans soleil*, 1982).

into something it originally is not; the unconscious life thus comes to an end, and what begins instead is an exciting game of awareness, a game of mutual recognition between life and the camera – a game that engages both of them into a collaboration of the construction of a common field of vision and performance: the filmic reality of the USSR.

(b) All those tricks, paradoxically, served the purpose of producing an “honest proletarian film”. “Honesty” is thus another apparently simple phenomenon whose production required technological ingenuity, which the Kino-Eye was also aware of. Dziga Vertov’s holy crusade against all cinematic illusionism knew no compromise. He saw film drama as the remains of literary illusionism and detested the exploitation of the clichés of bourgeois theatre that acted film made use of, including professional acting. “Sighs and kisses”, “Mary Pickford’s knickers”, and other clichés of acted – i.e., dishonest – film were to Vertov equivalent to drunkenness of the same origin as the “opium for the people” supplied by the church. An honest film, like a newsreel or a scientific film, was equivalent to the clear vision of a sober, completely self-conscious Bolshevik eye seeking to “decipher” the surrounding world. Still another enemy of the Kino-Eye was narrativity, as it was represented in the film script. Vertov resolutely refused to produce a film through a scenario. Instead of a linear, discursive representation, he composed intertitling which is reminiscent of Maiakovski’s or Walt Whitman’s poetic forms; he drew diagrammatic montage schemes and carefully designed and calculated still-to-still montage tables.³² In the 1940s and 50s, when Vertov had been reduced to an obscure technical position at a documentary film studio, his stubborn negation of the scenario became a barrier for his receiving a better commission. The apparatus of preliminary censorship in the film industry of the Stalinist USSR required a scenario text, and the censors refused to censure his diagrams of montage. Vertov’s honesty thus led to his still deeper alienation from the film making process. An “honest proletarian film” was a film that wished to address the proletariat directly, not only without the censor, but also without any other intermediate, normalizing institutions, such as narrative, dialogue, and acting.

(c) It was only logical that the Kino-Eye proclaimed art (as it was understood in film industry) to be “opium for the people”. In this rephrasing of Marx’ famous critique of religion, the Kino-Eye not only demonstrated their position with regard to the film’s potential power to intoxicate, narcotize, and thus pacify the masses, arresting their march towards revolutionary progress, but they also revealed their understanding of the reactionary nature of filmic illusion and its tendency, like any other form of art, to acquire “a cult value” (Benjamin), to betray its mission to enhance revolutionary awareness (the ideological and political sobriety of the revolutionary class) for the sake of developing a narcissistic, fetishist conception of film as an aesthetic icon. However, even more radical than Vertov’s critique of commercial, narcotizing illusionism in cheap filmic spectacles for the masses is his disavowal of his Bolshevik colleague’s, Sergei Eisenstein’s program of using film for the creation of a new revolutionary myth for the people, as well as of Eisenstein’s pioneering attempts to use film for the creation of a new revolutionary pathos to imbue the masses with. Vertov referred to Eisenstein’s work as “film church” and “capitalist sorcery”.³³ The violent dispute between the two leading leftist film theorists is of great importance for the understanding of the Soviet hegemony, in its representation by the two contrasting artistic approaches, and also in Stalin’s official aesthetics. Vertov’s principles of honest sobriety were rejected and trivialized, while Eisenstein’s montage – with its aim of imbuing the masses with the Soviet pathos through the

³² Ibid., pp. 109-110.

³³ Ibid., pp. 126 and 134.

use of expressive, exaggerated cinematic language – proved much more usable, until the time when USSR became a Stalinist political and ideological automaton.

(d) The Kino-Eye invented an entirely new film production technology in order to democratize film. The film was not shot – it was montaged. What was actually shot were smaller pieces of filmic footage, as many of them as possible, covering as many subjects as they possibly could. The use of found footage was also a pioneering invention. It made no difference which cameraman produced which footage, as long as he or she was working in accordance with the Kino-Eye agenda and with their technology. Film footage obtained this way was gathered into working archives and classified under thematic headwordings (like “Factory”, “Hospital”, “Garage”, and so on). Vertov shows such a library of film clips in his *Man with a Movie Camera*, and he shows the operations of the film editor montaging these pieces together into a filmic statement. Thus, the work of cinematography was not the production of a film in the normal sense of the word but (a) the elaboration of a technology for the collection of material, (b) the creation of encyclopaedically organized archives, whose elements could be used in the production of future films, and (c) the techniques of montage to combine those fragments into a statement. The Kino-Eye were therefore also the encyclopaedists of the new Soviet civilization to come.

However, this resulted in the endless debate about the budget of the production of *One Sixth of the World* between the film team and the economists at the film studio. The sponsors accused Vertov of a colossal over-expenditure, while Vertov argued that with these funds he had produced not one, but many other films: what remained to be done after the library of footage had been collected was only to use the montage technique to create ever new filmic productions. How many films that were thus produced in the production of *One Sixth of the World*, we still cannot say. However, the accountant office won the debate; Vertov was reprimanded for a breach of economic discipline. Relieved of his position at the film studio, he left Moscow for Kharkov, where he later produced his outstanding experiment in film sound, *Enthusiasm* (1930; “a work of Cage before Cage”, as Peter Kubelka, the filmmaker who restored the film in 1972, described it) as well as the world cinema’s absolute and all-time masterpiece, *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), in which two films he included some footage he had accumulated during the period of the production of *One Sixth of the World*.

(e) The practice of the Kino-Eye’s film-making produced both theoretical and political challenges. For Vertov, those were but the logical outcomes of film’s inherently open, democratic, anti-hierarchical nature as a technology of representation. With the elimination of the author, the question of property – “whose film?” – was also eliminated: film was in every respect no one’s, that is, everyone’s property. Thus film technology and practice worked against the capitalist economy of authorship, which is based on the accumulation and holding of rights, priorities, authority, merits, fame, fees, etc. Instead, a collectivistic open economy was evolving: the renunciation of the petty vanity of a creative author, an equal possession in terms of authorial authority; a renunciation of the very instinct of possession and accumulation in the making of films. All these freedoms, one must remark, were introduced in the rhetoric of commissarial decrees and dictatorial instructions. Needless to say, the realization of such principles produced multiple conflicts, first, with other filmmakers (whose production Vertov so easily incorporated in his own), secondly, inside the Kino-Eye group, and, thirdly, between them and the studio administration. At the same time, this radical an-archic re-distribution of the power of the filmic gaze also led, logically, to the elimination of the idea of film as a piece of artistic work.

(f) “Not a factory of dreams but a factory of facts” – such was the Kino-Eye’s central slogan in terms of the reality they wanted their film to be able to construct. This issue was broadly debated at the time (I have already mentioned LEF and their theory of fact which partly coincided with that suggested by the Kino-Eye). In connection with the discussion about Eisenstein’s *October* (1927) an additional dimension of this debate surfaced: the filmic nature of the historical fact. The Kino-Eye advocated a fabricated, constructed nature of reality. They developed the artificial, politically informed structure in their film production, but also analysed it. For cinema, in their view, was a synthesis of the world, and, to an equal degree, an analysis of cinema itself.³⁴ This was achieved by the unmasking of their own filming and production process in their films. Vertov wanted the filmic technologies of fact fabrication to be made visible and available to the audience. This device through which film demystifies its own technique is a reflection Marx’s early definition of human perception as work of theory:

The eye has become a human eye when its object has become a human, social object, created by man and destined for him. The senses therefore become directly theoretical in practice.³⁵

It is exactly such a reality – a world articulated through a technically equipped, politically engaged and conscious cine-gaze – that they were offering to the masses for re-appropriation, collective possession, and management. Such was the cinematic USSR in their work: a land which the proletarians were supposed to repossess or claim, once their vision had been equipped for cinematic seeing. It was a USSR as a hegemony of the seeing; it was a proletariat no longer blind, nor hypnotized, nor inebriated, but a visually-politically conscious proletariat.

(g) Thus, the Kino-Eye’s effort in developing film technology was, in the final analysis, aimed at the negation of film: cinematography was systematically demystified and disassembled as a field of expertise, as a work of art, and as a fiction. They were doing this not by unmasking film as a false reality, nor by implying the existence of a “genuine”, “true” reality somewhere else. On the contrary, the Kino-Eye radicalized the fabricated nature of reality: by driving film techniques to a limit, by opening up the secrets of film technologies, by demystifying filmic attractions and transforming film into an activist, interventionist, performative arena. The purpose of expanding film’s democratizing and emancipating potential was thus based on filmic self-denial. At the same time film acted as a ruthless colonizer when Vertov proclaimed the purpose of film: to *replace* (not simply enhance) human perception: “I am kino-eye. I create a man more perfect than Adam, I create thousands of different people...”³⁶ It is through the transformation of a human eye into a film camera that Vertov envisaged the elimination of the abyss between the world and its representation, between the film and its audience. This transformation corresponded to the transformation of the USSR into the filmic *One Sixth of the World*. On the one side of the screen, there were filmically created “more perfect Adams”, some of them posing, others watching. On the other side of the screen, there were other “more perfect Adams” sitting in the movie theatre, equipped with a filmic gaze, and also watching. The camera was offering the audience a possibility of total identification with its own mechanical vision, which was the condition *sine qua non* in the film’s program of social mobilization.

³⁴ Dziga Vertov. The Birth of Kino-Eye. Annette Michelson (ed.) *Kino-Eye: the Writings of Dziga Vertov*, p. 41

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

³⁶ Dziga Vertov. The Council of Three. *Ibid.*, p. 17

“*A Sixth Part of the World* is more than a film, than what we usually understand by the word “film” (...) *A Sixth Part of the World* is somewhere beyond the boundaries of these definitions; it is already the next stage after the concept of “cinema” itself (...) “This film has, strictly speaking, no “viewers” (...) since all the working people of the USSR (130-140 million of them) are not viewers but participants in this film. The very concept of this film and its whole construction are now resolving in practice the most difficult theoretical question of the eradication of the boundary between viewers and spectacle. *A Sixth Part of the World* cannot have critical opponents or critical supporters within the borders of the USSR, since both the opponents and the supporters are also participants in the film. (...) Our slogan is: All citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics from 10 to 100 years old must see this work. By the tenth anniversary of October there must not be a single Tungus who has not seen *A Sixth Part of the World*.”³⁷

This was how the Soviet “spiritual automaton” (Gilles Deleuze) was constructed by and in film, a project as daring as it was dangerous, given Benjamin’s prediction of the way “spiritual automatons” thus assembled can be first depoliticized and then used by the militarist state for the instigation of world wars. Let us be reminded that Walter Benjamin, in his review referred to above, evaluated *One Sixth of the World* as an attempt at “the recolonization of the periphery that *misfired*”.

Still, not only Vertov but the whole project of the USSR as we know it ultimately “misfired” in a colossal, catastrophic way, sixty years after the release of the film. *One Sixth of the World* is, indeed, as Dziga Vertov says, *a film that is more than film*: by including the whole of the multi-million population of the USSR, the film itself becomes its depicted reality. *One Sixth of the World* is not a picture *about* the USSR – it *is* the USSR. How, then, is this USSR made; how is its facticity fabricated? This question, again, is a question about the USSR “misfiring” in general, the collapse of its hegemony. I am trying to anticipate what happened quite recently in Vertov’s pioneering work. Below, I will approach an answer to this question by concentrating on the conceptual structure of Vertov’s USSR-narration and, for this purpose, use the published text of the film’s inter-titles.³⁸ These inter-titles are not only interesting as work of poetic creation (which they in fact were, and thus provoked many accusations against Vertov for the insincerity of his proclaimed aim of making film wholly without “literature”). I am using them for the purposes of revealing Vertov’s *strategies* in representing the USSR – i.e., as already pointed out, the film’s strategies in *becoming and performing* the USSR.

Becoming the USSR: “You, the Owners of the Soviet Land...”

...wide-open eyes, hypnotized by the cheerful emotion of construction and victory ...³⁹

The film is divided into six chapters, each of them adding a new dimension of Soviet reality but, at the same time, adding a new aspect of cinematic analysis; a new modality to the filmic statement that expresses the essence of the Soviet “one sixth of the world”. Thus, the composition of the narration is circular and linear at the same time. The circularity is seen in the (almost obsessive) repetition of the structure of the film phrase, the sequence: the camera visits a

³⁷ *A Sixth Part of the World* (A Conversation with Dziga Vertov). Tsivian, Yuri (ed.), *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, pp. 182-184.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.187-193.

³⁹ Tsivian, Yuri (ed.), *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, p. 186.

new, “exotic” place (like Central Asia or the Far North) – it concentrates on a new, “exotic” *habitus* (ethnic costumes and rituals). At the end the focus shifts from the “exotic” to the universal in the Soviet people, irrespective of the geographic or cultural distance between them. This universality is that all the characters being filmed are involved in *work*. Work, the subject’s concentration on the work done, and the variety of work performed – ploughing, weaving, baking, milking, building, fishing, breast-feeding – is implemented by the eternal return in the work of the camera: wherever the lens turns, behind the “exoticism” of habits and ways, it invariably identifies the principle that subjects all those widely varying situations to the effects of the same force of social renovation: production.

The second, non-circular, evolutionary movement of Vertov’s filmic narration shows itself in the gradual movement of the modalities of his statements. The awareness of work’s central and unifying, empowering role, does not appear as an insight but becomes an increasingly complex statement about the role of work and working people in “the one sixth of the world”. In every new chapter, Vertov returns to the representation of work situations and elaborates on them, adding depth and precision to the main thesis of the film: “you, the owners of the Soviet land / hold in your hands a sixth part of the world”.⁴⁰

The elaboration of this thesis begins with an aerial view: the film opens with the footage of a plane and the landscape under its wings (the footage was incidentally “appropriated” from a German documentary and, technically speaking, has nothing to do with the “one sixth”). The film opens as a cinematic map; the immense landscape beneath the airplane is flat and non-differentiated with regard to the life that inhabits it. In his review of Vertov’s film Walter Benjamin mentions that maps of the USSR at that time were the trendiest, decorative detail: they adorned Moscow’s public spaces in abundance, beside hammer-and-sickle emblems and portraits of Lenin. *One Sixth of the World* starts as a filmic cartography, when the camera descends to look more closely at the faces and the hands of the working people, and turns into an encyclopaedia of Soviet labour, a poetic archive of its forces of production. Still later, the film becomes articulated to such an extent that it assumes the function of a political manifesto, a statement of future purposes – this ultimate articulation takes place in the last chapter of the film, where the inter-titles are all quotations from Stalin’s speeches. Here, the language of Stalin, as well as his face, becomes a new unifying force, a symbol and self-representation of the USSR: its map, its encyclopaedia, and the most perfect machine through which the USSR expands beyond the one sixth of the world, into the capitalist West and the colonial East.

In every chapter, there is a central thesis expressed in its visuality and supported by the poetic inter-titling. In the opening chapter, in keeping with the already established Soviet canon, Vertov seeks to represent the moral superiority of the USSR over the colonizing, exploiting and rotten West. The key word is *vizhu* (‘I see’). The camera unmask the bourgeoisie by its omnipotent gaze; it is a witness and a judge at the same time. There is no concealing the ugly truth under capitalist glamour (the “glamour” was incidentally borrowed from another filmmaker’s documentary about Europe, in parts staged with the help of Vertov’s friends, and in part filmed at the Moscow circus). The all-seeing witnessing/judging camera reveals capitalist vices by addressing every bourgeois individual personally: “I see you / and you / and you /

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 189, the slashes represent boundaries of the inter-titles as interrupted by untitled visual sequences.

it is you I see / (...) the toys / the guns / hatred / cramps / on the verge of its historical perishing / Capital / is having fun”.⁴¹

Chapter two develops this strategy of personal address, now to Soviet life. One could call this film fragment a *vocative geography* of the USSR. Flying over from the extreme north to the extreme south, penetrating deep into the desert, the mountains, the taiga, or the tundra, the camera shows its character in action while the inter-title addresses him or her directly: “you / in Dagestan villages / you in a Siberian virgin forest (...) you / you Tatars / you / you Buriats / Uzbeks / Kalmyks / Khakass / mountaineers of the Caucasus”⁴² and so on. None of these “yous” to whom the film appeals in such a personal manner, no matter how “exotic”, is merely an exhibit in some Soviet imperial museum. “You” is the producer: “you with your grapes / you with your rice / (...) and you who use your feet to do your laundry (...) / you / who are up to your knees in grain”⁴³ Significantly, the film audience, the producer of what Marx called “sensuous work”, performs as an addressee of the film’s vocative geography: “and you that are sitting in this auditorium”.⁴⁴ These appellations are crowned with the politico-economic statement towards which the visual and verbal poetics were working: “*you, the owners of the Soviet land / hold in your hands a sixth part of the world*”.

The politico-economic geography of the USSR thus produced is further developed in chapter three through the elaboration of the figure of collective ownership: the key word is *vashe*, ‘yours’. When the camera explores the dimensions of the USSR, its natural and political space, it moves, again, not in a linear fashion, but jumping in colossal intervals over the whole of the land from its one extremity towards another: “From the Kremlin / to the borders of China / from the Matochkin Shar / to Bukhara”.⁴⁵ *Vashe* (‘yours’) is attributed to a whole archive of goods and resources to be found in the destinations of these cinematic leaps; the USSR is not a “*where*”, but a “*wherever*” and an “*everywhere*”: wherever the camera moves, it finds new resources for the film audience to become aware and partake of: “all yours / your factories / your plants / your oil / your cotton / and sheep / wool / wool / wool / your butter / fish / your flax / your tobacco”.⁴⁶

Chapter four, formally exploring the routes of Soviet export (which was originally *Gostorg*’s rather modest idea in commissioning the film to Vertov) in fact becomes a visual *fugue*, an interplay between the movements and motives of communication, transport, transpositions, and transfers; this is a USSR that is itself motion and transition, a USSR that is a complete metaphor of itself. It is the driving force of the USSR, its colossal libido, an insatiable desire of change and exchange: “along dirt roads / along mountain paths / by caravans of camels (...) and there / where roads do not exist at all / where in the span of a hundred miles / you may not encounter a single soul / through severe frosts (...) they are moving...”⁴⁷

Chapter five is an archive of things that are *vse esche* (‘still’, in the meaning of ‘not yet’, cf. the ‘not-yet-sameness’ as discussed in the beginning of this essay): the remnants of patriarchal, pre-socialist prejudice, retardedness (*otstalost*) and various forms of “opium for the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 187.

⁴² Ibid., p. 188.

⁴³ Ibid., p.189.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 190.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

people”. Here, Vertov showed quite rare footage of pagan religious and ethnic rituals that particularly enraged his opponents who accused him (not quite without grounds) of exoticizing, ethnographic voyeurism. In the meantime, in this chapter he is exploring the dialectics of “already” (yours) and “still” or “not yet” (yours). In Vertov, the “retarded” agent of “retarded” rituals is not yet a “you”, not yet a concrete addressee with residence in a concrete place (“you / in Dagestan villages”), but an anonymous “someone”, who can be occasionally discovered in an anonymous “someplace”:

Someplace people still plough the field with a stick / someplace women still cover their faces (...) / someone is still counting his rosary (...) / someplace the shaman is dancing / there are still places / observing the ritual of woman’s purification.⁴⁸

These are the people from the past, and it is not to them that Vertov appeals, not are they sitting in the auditorium: “not as yet”.

Finally, in chapter six, he formulates the solution to the fragmentation of the multiple “you”, as well as the solution to the “not as yet” problem. The variety of the local finds a new unifying force. One of the key words here is, again, *vizhu* (“I see”), a dialectical return to the beginning of the film which marks a radical renovation and a rebirth of the eye. It is a qualitatively different sight that opens up to the renovated gaze:

Another woman educates the women of the East / young Communist Samoyed is reading the newspaper *Northener* / Buriats and Mongols are reading the newspaper *Buriat-Mongol Pravda* / Mongol children become members of “The Young Pioneers.”⁴⁹

Another key word is “plant”: “the Volkhov electric plant / the plants / more plants.”⁵⁰ Finally, a renewed, firm statement of the will: *khotim* (“we want to”). This is where a long quotation from Stalin, and the footage representing Stalin, are included in the film. Broken by visual sequences between the titles, Stalin’s speech reads like a poem in the popular Maiakovskiyite / Walt Whitmanesque style. Vertov’s titles manipulate Stalin’s speech, subjecting the prosaic repetitive style of the Leader to the poetic taste of the film-maker. Stalin’s face is also manipulated: it is used rhetorically, as the crowning vignette, the most powerful figure of expression.

Thus, the film does not only construct its own USSR; it does not only populate it with its own characters and viewers, but it also supplies the USSR thus obtained with its own, cinematically manipulated Stalin. Given the Kino-Eye’s filming principles, it is a Stalin who can be assembled but who can also be disassembled, a Stalin who can be synthesized under the camera’s gaze but who can also be analyzed – in short, it is a critically deconstructible Stalin. The camera demonstrates its ultimate control over Stalin by making him articulate his statements so that the film may better express its own cinematic program. It is a statement of collective will and that of sovereignty: Stalin’s slogan, “*we want to produce by our own means*”, is repeated several times in the inter-titling throughout the chapter:

... we want to produce by our own means / not only the chintz / but also the machines needed to produce chintz / we want to produce by our own means / not only the tractors / but also the ma-

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 191.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

chines that produce tractors (...the workers of the West and the nations of the East ...) will flow into the channel of unified Socialist industry / into the channel / of UNIFIED / SOCIALIST / INDUSTRY.⁵¹

One Sixth of the World and the Other Five Sixths: Vertov, Postcoloniality, and Us

Now, where is the place, in my excursion across the *One Sixth*..., for the USSR's Western Europe, or EU's Eastern Europeans, the ones for whose benefit my project was undertaken? Vertov's work does not seem to be of direct relevance to the Baltic, or to the former Eastern bloc countries. They came to be sovietized later on, mostly after the war, when not only Vertov's cultural hegemony had been long taken off the Soviet agenda, but at a time when even Stalin's own hegemonism was going through a crisis. The regime therefore chose brutal force in the suppression of its new territories but no longer came forward with any concrete theoretical "suggestions". Stalin's last contributions to Marxist theory, his *Marxism and the Questions of Linguistics* (1950)⁵² and his last treatise, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1951) dealt with questions of world order, the problems of material and symbolic exchange on the global, "macro-level", he was no longer interested in the problems of local cultural and historical difference. By this time, as George Bataille remarks in his critique of Stalinism, the Soviet Union had developed into a state of "imperial socialism" without concern for the "national":

The Soviet Union (...) is a framework in which any nation can be inserted: It could later incorporate a Chilean Republic in the same way as a Ukrainian Republic is already incorporated.⁵³

For Bataille, who was writing this prediction some time between 1946 and 1949, the USSR, was thus *a post-national empire*. For Vertov's visions of the USSR to come – the USSR ultimately abducted by Stalin — it was never an empire but, definitely and resolutely, something entirely different from a national identity. Vertov did a lot to construct the USSR the way Bataille saw it 20 years later, so that any nation "could be inserted" in its horizontality. Vertov's horizontality, however, needs to be carefully considered in its *superficial likeness* to Stalin's imperial indifference to difference. Bataille's analysis of the USSR thus gives us one additional, and very serious reason, to consider the postcolonial ex-USSR in greater detail, with an emphasis on producing a difference between things that *look alike*.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 192-193, capitalized by Vertov, at least as in that version of the film a copy of which I have in my possession. – IS.

⁵² Sandomirskaja, Irina, "Jazyk-Stalin: 'Marksizm i voprosy iazykoznaniiia' kak lingvisticheskii povорот vo vse-lennoi SSSR". *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia*, edited by Ingunn Lunde & Tine Roesen, (Slavica Bergensia 6), Bergen 2006

⁵³ Bataille, George, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. Vol. 1. Consumption. New York: Zone Books, 1991 p. 151.

⁵⁴ Apart from a discussion of Bataille, a methodological critical dialogue with another *enfant terrible* of philosophy and theory, Frantz Fanon, would be extremely useful in the business of differentiating between likenesses. With his theory of colonialism as the *mimetic performance* of colonization by the subaltern (instead of the enforcement of colonization by the colonizer as in Anglo-Saxon political theory), Fanon is indispensable for the postcolonial critique of likenesses. His work is totally ignored, as far as I know, by post-Soviet studies. I am leaving Fanon in a footnote, just as I did when I mentioned Benjamin's (also performative and mimetic) theory of distraction. I mean primarily a critical rereading of Fanon's classical work from 1952, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 2000. I hope to be able to return to this discussion elsewhere.

The effective sovietization of the Baltic states and Eastern Europe occurred after Stalin's death, under Khrushchev's "vegetarian" rule, after his half-hearted destalinization in 1956. Apart from the outbursts of utter violence in the repression of open resistance (the Baltic guerilla, the Polish resistance, revolts in Budapest and Berlin, the Prague Spring), this sovietization was effected through bureaucratic, system-based, cybernetic technologies of planning, control, and management. The role of these institutional actions are largely underestimated in post-Soviet research.⁵⁵ This happened when the revolutionizing age of film was over; it was already the era of television. The demontage of this now televised, no longer filmic USSR – the revolutionary events at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s – were also performed by the people who gathered around, and fought for, TV stations and towers. No one ever saw anything like the dramatic events at the Vilnius TV centre in 1989, or those in Ostankino in 1993, in the vicinity of a film studio.⁵⁶

So, why Vertov?

For post-Soviet scholarship, Vertov is, of course, an important witness. We like to use his pictures as historical documents, as living illustrations of the every-day life of the 1920s. This is of course abuse rather than any "usage". Besides, to believe that an artist and intellectual like Vertov could ever be *used* for any practical purpose at all is a misconception. Even Stalin did not succeed in using Vertov; instead, he found himself used by Vertov, as merely an element – though a privileged one – in Vertov's archive of fabricated facts.

What is more important is Vertov the political activist, a theorist and performer of resistance. By studying his techniques we learn more about, and of, actionism: Vertov was in fact a pre-situationist situationist, whose analysis is comparable to that of Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem as developed in their street performances in the 1950s and 60s.⁵⁷ Given the importance of their work for the theory and practice of the politics of space as we find it in today's urban movements, ecological movements, global activism, and internet activism, we cannot forget that Vertov's was one of the first practical and theoretical contributions to the strategies of reclaiming space, as his camera performed rather than depicted the immense space of the USSR. Hence we understand the meaning of Vertov in the construction of a postcolonial world: today it finds itself stitched together into a virtual totality by television and the internet. These media leap from one extremity over to another and produce the world as an interval, in the same way as Vertov's leaping camera produced the interval of the USSR. Such "interval realities" have to be thoroughly considered if we want to produce a postcolonial theory that may include the post-Soviet territories.

⁵⁵ See, however, Egle Rindzeviciute. "From Desovietising towards Governmentality: Perceptions of Governance in the Interviews with the Leaders of Lithuanian Cultural Organisations". Paper presented at the Conference *From Orientalism to Postcoloniality* (Södertörn University College, Sweden 2006 04 27-30); Egle Rindzeviciute. "Mapping Technologies of Control: Cybernetics and State Cultural Policy in Lithuania". Paper presented at the *Fourth International Conference on Cultural Policy Research ICCPR 2006* (Vienna, Austria, 2006 07 12-16).

⁵⁶ See a witness account *cum* critical analysis of the role of the televisual media in the collapse of the USSR in Buck-Morss, Susan, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: the MIT Press, 2002, pp. 260-278.

⁵⁷ On situationism in the context of the post-war practices and theories of performing space, see Hellström, Maria, *Steal This Place: The Aesthetics of Tactical Formlessness and "The Free Town of Christiania"*. Doctoral Thesis. Alnarp: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, 2006, pp. 106-173.

Vertov is the foundation of today's film and media theory. No less important is Vertov's contribution in critical methodology of the humanities at large. He pre-visions the development of poststructuralist critical methods in the humanities, a foundation which both area studies and postcolonial theory rest on. His contributions are self-critical film camera work, a montage replete with reflexivity, a filmic statement that is aware of its political agency, offering as effective analyses of various realities as syntheses of them. The critical possibilities of film in Vertov are best investigated and performed in *A Man with a Movie Camera*. This film is a pure theory of culture: by deconstructing the filmic image, it teaches us how to apply critical instruments in our own scholarly media, how academic interpretation is to be performed to achieve a critical consciousness about the world and about itself. A deconstructing methodology, Vertov's cinematography teaches an important lesson to the academic scholars of culture in general. He is by no means film history.

Finally, Vertov is a political philosopher: he makes his films instances of practical democracy and investigations in the governmentality of vision.⁵⁸ The philosophical value of his experimentation – the construction of political subjectivity and the practical implementation of horizontal politics in filmic visuality – is yet to be fully accounted for. With the collapse of the Soviet imperialist hegemonism, Vertov's thinking in terms of cultural hegemony is only beginning to be understood, but he points the direction for us to become aware of the complexity of all things Soviet – and, by implication, of the complexity of all things post-Soviet, which complexity, after the collapse of the USSR, has been growing in a geometric progression. While creating a conceptual space for Baltic and East European postcoloniality, it might make sense to consider the possibility to, from now on, use designations like *Soviet hegemony*, *Soviet citizenship*, and even *the USSR*, in the plural.

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‘Russia and Postcolonialism?’ Surely, It Should Have Read Neo-colonialism: Aleksei Balabanov’s *Brat 2* (2000)

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In 2003, when I was doing research on Aleksei Balabanov, I went to Moscow to interview Professor Evgenii Gromov, who teaches at VGIK (State Institute of Cinematography). When he inquired what theory I subscribed to, concerning the analysis Balabanov’s film, I replied that I was looking into postcolonial theory. He looked perplexed and asked, how? I explained, to the best of my abilities, that the postcolonial subject tried to form the nation anew out of the pre-colonial and the colonial/postcolonial, presenting the example of the Steel drums of the West Indies. At this point Professor Gromov grew quite agitated and said that such an approach would suit the former Soviet republics, but not Russia. Being new to the academic game, I found myself somewhat surprised by the Professor’s response; after all he had kindly invited me to his house, and the last thing I wanted to do was to offend him. But it also aroused my curiosity: Why did this highly distinguished scholar react in this way to a theory which is taught throughout the universities, and which has proven successful for post-independent nation states?

Part of the answer lies in the fact that postcolonial theory in Russia is associated with Third Worldism of the political left, which aligns Russian culture, in this case post-Soviet Russian cinema, with the cultures and cinemas of the developing countries of South America, Africa and Asia. This relegates Russia from Second to Third, when, in the eyes of the Russians, Russia should instead be promoted into a First World country. If we look at Eastern Europe, then the same mechanism is at work, which might explain the mute reception of Anikó Imre’s 1999 article, ‘White Skin, White Mask: *Mephisto* Meets *Venus* in *Screen*’. Imre is one of the few film scholars I have found who tackles the postcolonial and Eastern European subjecthood in cinema (not including Russia here). Her writing is therefore important for my analysis here.

I will briefly state Aniko Imre’s argument and move to a more general discussion on the post-colonial in a post-Soviet context, before ending with (hopefully) a few illustrative clips from Balabanov’s film.

Frantz Fanon in Eastern Europe

In her article, Imre analyses two films of István Szabó, *Mephisto* (1981) and *Meeting Venus* (1991), according to the postcolonial inferiority complex, which she takes from Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967). It is Imre’s claim that, like Fanon’s Black intellec-

tual, the Eastern European intellectual, traveling to Western Europe masquerades as or mimics the Western intellectual to subvert his or her self-contempt as an Eastern European.

Although Imre's argument is multi-layered and includes many important assertions on issues of sexuality and gender, I will here focus on two scenes that she highlights in her article, and which, when compared to moments from *Brat 2*, will reveal similarities and differences in the two very different film-makers' attitudes towards postcolonial power structures and, in particular, race and ethnicity.



In *Mephisto*, the protagonist Höfgen (Klaus Maria Brandauer) has a mulatto lover, Juliette (Karin Boyd), who is also Höfgen's dance teacher. In Imre's opinion, this relationship is embedded in a colonial discourse:

Juliette's eroticism [...] justifies Höfgen's wish to learn to act naturally from the most natural creature of all: the black woman.¹

Not only will the 'colonial' aspects of an inter-racial relationship find resonance in Balabanov's film, but it is equally important to note that, for Szabó, there is created an analogy between the icon of suffering, the black woman, and the white male Eastern European artist. However, according to Imre, where the Black woman's suffering is fixed and metaphorical, the suffering of the Eastern European intellectual is reified and transparent.²

In *Meeting Venus*, the protagonist, Szántó (Niels Arestrup), a Hungarian conductor, travels to Paris to set up Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. The whole film centers on the Hungarian conductor overcoming the obstacles, largely caused by Western democracy and labour unions, in re-establishing the old opera house, "Europé". Of course, Szántó succeeds in getting all the nationalities to act together, but only after becoming a natural Western man through a romance with "the white, blond, emancipated phallic woman [...] the Swedish diva, Karin Anderson (Glen Close)".³

Arriving at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, Szántó is regarded with suspicion by Immigration and Custom officials. In voice-over, he comments to himself: 'Is it my face that irritates them? Or just the smell of Eastern Europe? They make me feel like a man entering a drawing room with dogshit on his shoe'. While in this scene it is the body of the protagonist that is identified by the boarder officials as Eastern European, the artistic or intellectual mind of the protagonist is already – and always has been – 'universally' Western. The postcolonial consists in Szántó's negation of his Eastern Europeanness, masquerading as a universal Western intellectual.

¹ Imre, Aniko, "White Man, White Mask: Mephisto Meets Venus", *Screen*, 40:4 1999, p. 413

² Ibid: 413

³ Ibid: 418

These two scenes from Szabó's films support Imre's case for labelling the Eastern European intellectuals 'the new European black', who disguise themselves in order to negate their Eastern Europeanness, their bodies, which are still detectable to the boarder officials.⁴ This clearly suggests that the postcolonial is applicable to the post-1989 Eastern Europe trying to close the gap between the West and the East. But can we with the same certainty say that the 'post-' in 'post-Soviet' is the same as the 'post-' in 'postcolonial', as David Chioni Moore (2001) has asked, paraphrasing Kwame Anthony Appiah (1991).

Post-Soviet Postcolonial?

If there is a connection between the postcolonial and the post-Soviet, then it is in the crisis that the fall of the Soviet empire inflected on postcolonial thinking. Ella Shohat, in her seminal essay, 'Notes on the 'Postcolonial'' (1992), states that the term 'Postcolonial' has been drained from its political connotations, meaning that it is no longer the preserve of a Third World where the political left used the term to connote the anti-colonial. Third World euphoria, i.e. the First World left merging with Third World guerrillas, has given way to a politically depleted postcolonial term, because of the collapse of the Second World and the crisis of socialism.⁵ The post-Soviet postcolonial takes the prefix post- literally; post-Soviet postcolonialism is the movement, historically, beyond both the progressive anti-colonial and the authoritative colonial. As such it becomes a First World pastoral term that participates in a new form of colonialism. This neo-colonialism involves, as we shall see, the same forms of racism and exploitation as its predecessor.

This perhaps explains Gromov's reaction to the term postcolonial: Russia is not a nation that is rejecting a colonised past, but, on the contrary, it is a nation reasserting itself internationally as a neo-colonial (if no longer Soviet) force. While this perceived neo-colonialism is not without its problems, it also highlights a Western tendency through the discrepancy between Russian and Western attitudes: if Russians, like Gromov, don't see themselves as postcolonial, are we Western academics not guilty of neo-colonialising the Russian mind by defining its culture and cinema according to a pastoral postcolonial? By turning to Balabanov and *Brat 2*, in which the old struggle between Russia and the neo-colonial hegemony of the First World is foregrounded, we can perhaps re-invigorate the postcolonial debate through a more radical anti-colonialism or counter-colonialism.

Combating neo-colonial power structures is not new to cinema. The term 'Third Cinema', which is loosely interchangeable with other terms such as Imperfect Cinema, is the parent of the present postcolonial cinema and was formed as a political cinema on the left. Third Cinema fought, often from the exile in the West, both the bipolar political structures of the Cold War and the dictatorial systems of post-independent Third World countries.

The original proponents of Third Cinema were Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, who, in their essay from 1969 *Towards a Third Cinema* (1985), argued for a guerrilla-cinema that should counter the first cinema (Hollywood) and the second cinema (the European *auteur* cinema). Third cinema is politically anchored in the left's criticism of the economic hegemony of the First World, although it also refuses a direct engagement with the Second World's

⁴ Ibid: 418

⁵ Shohat, Ella, "Notes on the 'Postcolonial'", *Social Text*, No 31/32 1992, p. 101

participation in the same critical practice. For Solanas and Getino a revolution was needed in order to ‘decolonise culture’, and in this context the camera was a weapon that shot 24 frames per second. What they saw was that where the former colonial powers had left, a neo-colonial power division was emerging, in which a formal independence was granted, but economical, cultural and social exploitation continued. Solanas and Getino discuss the distrust that is attributed to the intellectual and the artist in overturning this neo-colonial power structure:

When they [the artist and intellectual] have not been openly used by the bourgeoisie or imperialism, they have certainly been their indirect tools; most of them did not go beyond spouting a policy in favour of ‘peace and democracy’, fearful of anything that had a national ring to it, afraid of contaminating art with politics and the artists with the revolutionary militant.⁶ [They continue], our truth, that of the new man who builds himself by getting rid of all the defects that still weigh him down, is a bomb of inexhaustible powers....⁷

Here we see a resemblance between the Third World and the Eastern European intellectual, whom Imre found masquerading as Western. But Solanas and Getino’s brand of Third Cinema is not only instructive for understanding the Eastern European intellectual, but also understanding the Russian as portrayed in the work of Balabanov. If Third Cinema is not afraid of sounding nationalistic, nor of contaminating art with politics, and if it emphasises the inexhaustible powers of truth, then so does Balabanov’s *Brat 2*. The power of truth is illustrated when Danila at gunpoint lectures the Americans. Balabanov is fighting a neo-colonial system where the United States hold the economic power, the Russians – the power of truth. Third Cinema provides a useful theoretical framework for analysing *Brat 2* (and the nationalistic work of Balabanov in general), but Balabanov also provide a completely different political outlook to the left-leaning Third Cinema.



Balabanov’s Third Cinema guerrilla tactics mean that he is not afraid of making nationalist overtones. In fact, Balabanov endorses the rhetoric of nationalism and builds characters that do not possess the defects imposed, generally speaking, by Western decadence. In this way, Balabanov creates a cinema outside the binary opposition between the mainstream Hollywood and the European *auteur* cinema, but, where Third Cinema is on the radical left, Balabanov’s nationalistic film is on the radical right.

Aleksei Balabanov's *Brat 2* (2000)

Neither *Brat 2* nor its makers tried to hide the film’s mainstream credentials and aspirations. According to Miroslava Segida and Sergei Zemlyanukhin, *Brat 2* was ”the first wide-open

⁶, Solanas, Fernando & Getino, Octavio, “Towards a Third Cinema”, Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movie and Method, Volume 1: An Anthology*, University of California Press, Los Angeles & London 1985. p. 52

⁷ Ibid: 63

(not to be confused with the popular) all-Russian film project,”⁸ with an influential video game (*Brat. Obratno v Ameriku / Brother. Back to America*). Susan Larsen also emphasizes its *Brat 2*-website in making the film into a modern post-Soviet Russian blockbuster⁹. From the outset, therefore, the aim seems to have been to produce a modern post-Soviet blockbuster, as confirmed by the film’s producer, Sergei Sel’yanov: “we want to beat all Russian records in video [sales]” (Sel’yanov, 2000: 12). There is no question that the STV film company (founded by Sel’yanov and Balabanov) was out to please as many people as they possibly could with the production of a sequel to the popular *Brat* (1996).



Brat 2 picks up from its previous installment. Danila Bagrov (Sergei Bodrov Jr.) is living the easy life in Moscow; he goes to the banya with his old army buddies and has the pop singer, Irina Saltykova (played by herself), as a girlfriend. This high life is disturbed when one of his war buddies is killed. Danila and his brother Viktor (Viktor Sukhorukov) has to go to the US in order to “get” the American Mafiosi boss, Richard Mennies (Gary Houston), who has cheated money out of a Russian hockey player, the twin brother of Danila’s war buddy who is now dead. In order not to be

discovered by the Ukrainian-American gangsters, the two Bagrov brothers fly separately to the US; Danila flies to New York and Viktor to Chicago. Chicago is where Mr Mennies, the new American Al Capone, is located. On arrival in New York, Danila is to buy a car in Brighton Beach and drive to Chicago.

There are two scenes that will help us to deduce whether Balabanov’s *Brat 2* has a similar postcolonial (or neo-colonial) paradigm as Imre found in István Szabó’s two films: firstly, I will focus on the scenes where the Bagrov brothers enter the United States, and secondly, on Danila’s relationship with Lisa (Lisa Jeffrey), the black American news reporter, who looks after Danila after accidentally running him over in her car. In the first scene, I want to recall how Szántó in *Meeting Venus* was encountered at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris by comparing to the two entries of the Bagrov brothers. In the second scene, Danila’s inter-racial relationship with Lisa can be compared to Imre’s reading of Höfgen’s affair with Juliette in *Mephisto*.

Entry to the United States

‘Look confident and smile’ is the advice given to Viktor and Danila when receiving the tickets and fraud passports from Danila’s remaining war-buddy in a Moscow restaurant. The advice allures to the postcolonial inferiority complex, which Imre found earlier in Szántó’s

⁸ Segida, Miroslava & Zemlyanukhin, Sergei, *Fil’my Rossii: Igrovoe kino (1995-2000)*, Dubl’-D, Moskva 2001, p. 14

⁹ Larsen, Susan, “The Post-Soviet Blockbuster: Mikhalkov and Balabanov”, *Slavic Review*, 62.3 (Fall) 2003, p. 510

voice-over. However, the two brothers are going under false identities (Victor plays the role of a computer specialist, and Danila assumes the role of someone going to a film festival – both performing, through false cultural capital, to have something to offer to the Americans) and for a short period, whereas Szántó endures the scrutiny of his ‘real’ identity and plans, as a European citizen, to stay for a longer period. On hearing that they are only meant to stay four days, Viktor says, ‘why so short?’ This is an early indication of Viktor’s desire to remain in the US, which is again enforced by his last remark before leaving the restaurant: ‘freedom to Angela Davis.’¹⁰ This latter reference places Viktor within the framework of Soviet rhetoric and explains both his fascination with the American Other and his desire to stay. Viktor’s desire to stay is never expressed explicitly in the film, which places negative connotations the Russian and Ukrainian Diaspora in the US. For example, Danila’s car breaks down despite the words of its salesman, a Russian Jewish émigré.



Instead Viktor’s desire to stay in the foreign land is contrasted with Danila, who, as a true Russian hero would never contemplate permanently leaving his homeland. In fact, Danila has already bid farewell to the US before entering the country, just as his favourite band, Nautilus Pompilius, and their song ‘Proshchal’noe pis’mo’ (Farewell Letter) with the famous refrain ‘Good Bye Amerika, Oh/Where I have never been/Farewell forever [...]’ The song is heard in several key parts of the film, but the chorus is made prominent and given a post-Soviet and pro-Russian meaning at the end of the film when it accompanies Danila’s flight home.

On their way out of Russia, Viktor is shown leaving customs control and then buying duty-free whiskey, whilst Danila simply sleeps on the plane to New York while listening to his Discman. As Danila sleeps, we hear the announcement from the plane’s steward: ‘We’re starting the inflight, information on filling out immigration forms can be found in your entry visas. It consists of two forms...’ This information is unnecessary for the new all-Russian hero, who, as an ardent Nautilus fan, would never dream of emigrating. Viktor’s positive attitude towards leaving Russia does not save him from close scrutiny at the immigration desk in Chicago. The immigration officer asks, ‘what is the purpose of your stay in United States?’ And Viktor, who does not speak any English, replies, ‘what?’ A translator arrives and asks the same question in Russian. This time Viktor replies, ‘it’s...a conference on new computer technologies,’ as he has been told by Danila’s friend who forged his passport and visa. ‘How

¹⁰ A reference to the American communist Angela Davis, who was imprisoned on charges of been involved in the killing on Judge Harold Haley by three members of the Black Panther movement. Davis was later criticised by exiled Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who encourage her to stand up to the political prisoners in Czechoslovakia. Davis refused stating that they should remain in prison

long will you stay in the USA?’ and ‘where will you be staying?’, asks the immigration officials. To which Viktor answers, ‘it’s written there, in the invitation. Here is the return ticket.’ The immigration officer gives the stamp with a ‘welcome to the United States.’ Viktor, now in heavy accented English, replies, ‘thank you very much!’ and, as he smilingly walks off, utters ‘such morons!’ (vot urody).

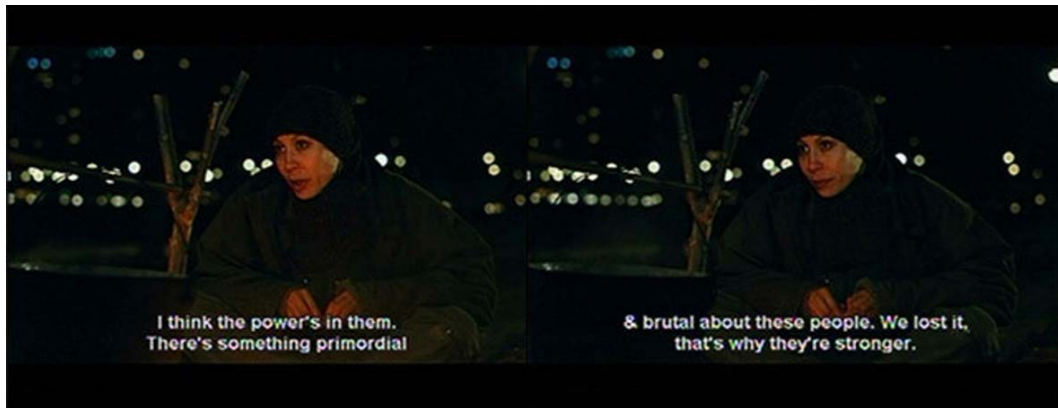
At the baggage claim, Viktor is scrutinised further. An official asks him in Russian, ‘do you have fat (salo) or apples?’ To which Viktor replies, ‘don’t they sell them here?’ The official responds, ‘you don’t understand. This is quarantine!’ ‘Are you ill?’ is Viktor’s reply and he is subsequently winked through with an overbearing attitude.¹¹ This system of post-Soviet Russian identity scrutiny stands against Danila’s oblivious sleeping on the plane. Viktor’s entry is far more important than Danila’s in regard to the post-Soviet neo-colonial system, which interrogates Russians as Third World subjects. While Danila passes through immigration control painlessly – he just replies that he is going to the New York Film Festival and receives his stamp – Viktor calls the customs official freaks, implying that they are stupid on account of their failure to discover his real identity. Furthermore, he negates the potential of a further scrutiny when, upon being asked whether he has any fruit, he naïvely and comically retorts: ‘don’t you sell fruit here?’ Here the West’s presumed neo-colonial superiority is undermined by Viktor, who ridicules the power structures. In this way, the neo-colonial situation, in which America asserts a form of cultural imperialism over the rest of the globe, is acknowledged, but made to look foolish and is thereby subverted. It is this neo-colonial structure of American cultural imperialism that Balabanov tries more generally to defeat in *Brat 2*. Although Szántó, too, acknowledges the West’s cultural imperialism in *Meeting Venus*, he is passive and expresses his ‘inferiority’ not directly but only in voice-over; Viktor is active and progressive in ridiculing the immigration system.

Encounter with the African-American Woman

When Viktor does not show up at the planned rendezvous, Danila walks around aimlessly in Chicago. He is accidentally run down by Lisa, a local African-American news reporter, who takes him into the car in order to drive him to a hospital. Danila refuses hospital treatment and instead they go to Lisa’s apartment, where she again offers to get Danila to a doctor, but he says that there is no need because he is a doctor himself (another false cultural capital which is used conveniently). Danila goes to the bathroom where we see his bruised backside. It is these bruises that fascinate Lisa when she returns later from work. As she enters the flat, we see a second Lisa reporting from city hall on the apartment’s television set, and her image stays onscreen throughout the scene (see *Image 1* below). She takes off her jacket and sits on the bed where Danila is lying asleep. We clearly see the bruises on his backside, but Lisa has to lean over the sleeping Danila to touch them. Danila wakes and, as Lisa recoils with an ‘I’m sorry,’ he grabs her. Lisa utters a reluctant no, but Danila holds her back saying ‘what’s the fuss’ (da, ladno). Danila then pulls Lisa over himself and on to the bed. As Danila rolls on top of her, the film fades into black.

¹¹ The comedy of this situation is no doubt heightened by the comic skills of Viktor Sukhorukov, who emerged from the Leningrad comedy scene in the late 1980s to become one of Balabanov’s favourite actors.

The fact that Danila ‘conquers’ a woman of African-American origin could be read as similar to Höfgen’s relationship to his mulatto love, Juliette. But where Höfgen learns from Juliette in *Mephisto*, his suffering is aligned with hers, Danila’s conquest is that of being a champion *over* the black Lisa. This makes of Balabanov the perpetrator of the very racist and neo-colonial discourse that Imre found criticised in *Mephisto*. Balabanov’s own racism (as opposed to his critique of racism) is reinforced when Dasha (Dariya Lesnikova), the Russian prostitute that Danila saves from her black pimp, claims that the blacks assert power over



whites because they are still in connection with nature. Such a remark, made by an open fire on the shore of Lake Michigan, is of course deeply rooted in a racist colonial discourse, and it highlights how Balabanov not only reacts to that of others (the West), but also creates his own (Russian) neo-colonial discourse.

Although we find these neo-colonial attitudes in *Brat 2* - and this was also the basis of the criticism that the film received from the liberal film critics in Russia (e.g. see Dondurei, Lipovetskii, Mantsov, Sirivlya, 2000) – the film is, or tries to be, balanced. For example, Danila’s ‘conquests’ of Lisa is mirrored by his ‘conquest’ of Irina Saltykova, whose image, like Lisa’s, is projected in her living environment [Image 1]; the Metropol restaurant is to be found both in the US and in Russia, which also aligns the two cities and nations [Image 2]; the film also features two taxi drivers (New York and Moscow respectively), who are both Russians and who uniformly agree on the opinion that Gorbachov ”sold out” the Russians [Image 3].



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3

Furthermore, Danila is aligned not with a US minority (African-Americans), but with the white majority, the simple white American truck driver, Ben Johnson (Roy Toler), with whom Danila forms a close relation, and who can be seen as representative of the American white majority. In other words, Balabanov tries to depict Russians as being equal to Americans, which in turn puts forward ('real') Russians (like Danila) as similar icons of the First World. The only problem is that this equality is not recognised by the American version of this First World, as we saw in the case of the boarder officials.



Conclusion

Brat 2 is by far a pretty sight with blatant racism played out in front of us, but if we are using postcolonial theory in analyzing post-Soviet Russian culture – and I am still not completely convinced – then we have to address issues of neo-colonialism, including both the neo-colonial that the Russians fight against and the neo-colonial that they bring about. As James Clifford has asserted, the prefix post- in the postmodern, the postnational, and the postcolonial, is always eclipsed by the neo- (1994: 328). And along these words I will argue that if the Hungarian Szabo stands in the light of the postcolonial, then the Russian Balabanov stands in its shadow.

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From "Backwardness" to "Modern Culture"? "Beauty" and "Femininity" during the Soviet Cultural Modernization (1930-1960s)

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For my dissertation, which deals with practices of maternity and beauty in Soviet Russia in three decades, from the 1930s to the 1960s, I decided to adopt an oral history approach and make interviews with women who were young adults at the time. The focus of my research was an analysis of the importance of the practices of beauty and maternity for the production of Soviet femininities. In addition, I investigated how women interpreted the discourses on female beauty and maternity, as they adjusted their lives and bodies to those discourses, on one hand, and how they subverted them, on the other hand.

My initial intention was to include not only women from the centre (most of the research on Soviet every-day life concerns women from Moscow and St. Petersburg¹²), but to interview women from regions other than those of ethnic Russians. Thus, besides Moscow, I have chosen Saratov (in Volga region) and Ufa, the capital of the Republic of Bashkortostan (Volga-Urals region). The widening of the geographical and ethnic scope to include women from ethnic minorities (including particularly Bashkirs, but also Tatars) in research into the Soviet past introduced new problems and, consequently, contributed to bringing new aspects to light. This article elaborates on some of those findings, particularly those connected to beauty practices.

In the first section of the article I analyze problems related to the inclusion of minority women in research concerning the Soviet gender history. This section deals with contemporary approaches to studies of the non-Russian regions in the Russian Federation. The second part of this article is dedicated to an analysis of that part of the Soviet discourses on beauty that is aimed at women from the former Russian colonies. The third part, finally, presents an analysis of memories of every-day practices of beauty in the 1930s to the 1960s.

¹² Olga Vainshtein, "Female Fashion, soviet style: bodies of ideology". In *Russia - women – culture*. H.Goscilo and B.Holmgren eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, 64-94; Rotkirch, Anna. *The Man Question: Loves and Lives in Late 20th Century Russia*. Helsinki:University of Helsinki, 2000; Наталья Лебина, и Александр Чистиков, *Обыватель и реформы: картины повседневной жизни горожан в годы НЭПа и хрущевского десятилетия*. Санкт-Петербург: Дмитрий Буланин, 2003.

“Other” women and Soviet/Post-Soviet studies

The problems with analyzing non-Russian women in Russia, particularly in an article written in English, originate in the very word for the citizen of contemporary Russia. In contrast to the Russian language, where there is one word that defines a “Russian” as a representative of an ethnic group (*russsk(aia)/ii*), and another word to define a citizen of the Russian state (*rossiyan(ka)/in*), the English expression is the same for both. This has consequences for a study devoted to those differences.

If we leave the ambiguity of the English language, however, and concentrate on the problem of the internal “Other” as such, the number of uncertainties increase. In the present day, scholars adopt various approaches as they attempt to come to terms with this problem.

The first approach prioritizes citizenship over other kinds of social belonging – ethnic, religious or regional. In contemporary Russia a great number of studies (including those comparing the situation in Russia with the situation in other countries) which concern regions that have extensive ethnic or religious minorities, and that used to be colonies of the Russian Empire, analyze these regions alongside and on the same conditions as predominantly Russian regions.¹³ When a result of such a study concerns a special condition of a particular region it is treated as a “regional” specific. Thus, any mention of “colonial power relationships”, the “imperial past” or a specific “ethnic tradition” becomes meaningless. This can be illustrated through a recent publication by a sociologist from Bashkortostan, Venera Zakirova. In her article “War against the Family - a view from the Bashkortostan republic,” she writes about violence “in a Russian society,” with examples from the Republic of Bashkortostan as one of the federal regions.¹⁴

In such a perspective, all women who lived in the territory of the contemporary Russian Federation have a common Soviet past and thus may become objects of studies about gender and every-day life. However, as I pointed out above, this is not the case, since most of the research involving Soviet every-day life and Soviet women considers only Russian women from the central cities (an important exception is a book by David Ransel “Village mothers”¹⁵, which attempts to bring village and Tatar women into the analysis). Thus, Soviet and post-Soviet experiences of women “other than Russian” have been largely ignored in studies with this approach.¹⁶

The second approach is connected to a post-Soviet “national” and “ethnic rebirth” that led to a re-writing of history from an ethnic and national perspective. These publications pay attention to a collective discrimination in the imperial and the Soviet era, as well as to the role ethnic

¹³ Johnny Rodin, *Rethinking Russian Federalism*, Södertörns Högskola, 2006; Venera Zakirova, “War against the family: Domestic Violence and Human Rights in Russia – a View from the Bashkortostan Republic”, *Current Sociology*, 2005, issue 53, pp. 75-91.

¹⁴ The author writes mainly about violence “in Russian society”, provides short information about Bashkortostan, on pages 76-77, without mentioning any ethnic group or minority - Venera Zakirova, “War against the family..”

¹⁵ David Ransel, *Village Mothers: Three generations of change in Russia and Tataria*, Indiana University Press, 2000.

¹⁶ The cases when authors bring into their texts their reflexivity about exclusion are few. In a methodological chapter of their book Posadskaya and Engel wrote that they refused to include memories of a Tatar woman into their anthology due to their feelings that her “experiences reflected particularities of her culture that we would have had trouble contextualizing” – Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, *A revolution of their own: voices of women in Soviet history*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998, p. 224.

culture and religion played for the forms of oppression and resistance.¹⁷ Consequently, many publications edited, for instance, in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, have been criticized by Moscow historians for being too “biased” and “partial”.¹⁸ In some of its radical variants these new national historiographies appear to be very ethnocentric, in search for their roots, offering explanations of history.¹⁹ The case of Bashkortostan is particularly remarkable. This republic is an example of a federal subject where the titular ethnic group – Bashkirs – do not make up a majority of the population.²⁰ Indeed, Bashkortostan should rather be presented as a federal subject with three minorities: Russians, Tatars and Bashkirs. Given this situation, the “post-colonial” pathos of some publications about Bashkirs or Tatars in this region can be easily interpreted as a struggle for dominance on the local level.

On the other hand, in order to evaluate the situation where a “new”, postcolonial(?) history is created, it is necessary to take into account the character and quality of political changes in Bashkortostan. After the beginning of the transition period, Bashkortostan has been known as one of the less democratic subjects of the Russian Federation. During a long period of time the local regime was rather independent from Moscow, described by the German political scientist Jörn Grävingholt, as a case of post-soviet authoritarianism.²¹ The position of the republic’s authorities with respect to the history of relations with the center is ambiguous: this year Bashkortostan is officially celebrating the 400th anniversary of its “voluntary” union with Russia,²² an event sponsored by the republic’s authorities and widely represented on the web.

The “national rebirth” approach contributes to research on “women” from a particular ethnic group, who are brought into analysis, in Nira Yuval-Davies’ words, primarily as “carriers of a tradition”.²³ Thus Bashkir women are presented as having problems in preserving an “ethnically traditional” life style in the process of urbanization.²⁴ Due to specificity of the situation

¹⁷ Д.М. Исааков, *Феномен татарского джаддизма: введение к социокультурному осмыслению*, Казань: Имам, 1997; Марсиль Фахршатов, *Самодержавие и традиционные школы башкир и татар в начале XX века (1900-1917)*. Уфа: Гилем, 2000; М.М. Кульшарипов, *История Башкортостана. XX век. Учебник для 9-го класса общеобразовательных школ республики Башкортостан*. Уфа: Китап, 2001, pp.62, 77, 100, 115.

¹⁸ Салават Исааков, “История народов Поволжья и Урала: Проблемы и перспективы «национализации»,” *Национальные истории в советском и постсоветском государстве*, К. Аймермахер и Г. Бордюгов ред., Москва: АИРО-XX, 1999, pp. 297-294, 283, 293.

¹⁹ Игорь Кучумов, *Крючья под ребро истории*, <http://dk.ufanet.ru/nomads/kuchumov01.htm>, last accessed 15.10.2004; Christian Noack, *Muslimischer Nationalismus im Russischen Reich: Nationbildung und Nationalbewegung bei Tataren und Baschkiren, 1861-1917*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000 – reviewed by Robert Crews in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 4(2), Spring 2003, pp. 444-50.

²⁰ According to a Central statistical Committee of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Bashkirs consist of 21,9% of the population, Tatars – 28,4%, Russians – 29,2%. <http://www.memo.ru/hr/discrim/bashkir/Chapter3.htm>. However, these numbers are subject to discussion. See also Dmitry Gorenburg, “Identity change in Bashkortostan: Tatars into Bashkirs and back”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. Vol.22, Number 3, 1999, pp. 554-580.

²¹ Йорн Гревингхольт, *Республика Башкортостан: через государственный суверенитет к авторитарному режиму*. Игорь Кучумов ред. 2003. (Russian translation of Jörn Grävingholt. *Regionale Autonomie und post-sowjetische Autoritarismus: Die Republik Bashkortostan*. Köln, 1999), last accessed 2006.06.27.

²² <http://www.bashkortostan450.ru/?lg=rus§ion=160&id=432>

²³ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi : Sage, 1997, p. 61.

²⁴ Гульдар Ахметова, *Башкирская женщина и современный город: конфликт или гармония?*. Уфа: РИО РУНМЦ ГКН РБ, 2001; Шаура Шакурова, “Современная башкирская женщина в семье и обществе,” *Язык, сознание, коммуникация*. В.В. Красных и А.И.Изотов ред., Москва - Диалог МГУ, № 10, 1999, pp. 118-122.

of Bashkortostan,²⁵ these studies, although extensive, leave many questions about the comprehension of the Soviet experience unanswered.

Finally, the third approach is focused on religious identity. In the beginning of the 20th century, religious identity of Tatars and Bashkirs was frequently described as “Muslim”.²⁶ Since ? and confession were more significant than class differences in the Russian empire, the epithet “Muslim” was regarded as a civil rather than a religious identity at the time. New publications, edited in Russia as well as abroad, attempt to bring together and/or compare the social practices and the historical experiences of people who could be considered “Muslims” from different geographical locations in Russia and former Soviet Union”.²⁷ Particularly important for gender research in this regard is a publication by Elena Omelchenko and Gusel Sabirova, which comes to the conclusion that there are significant differences between post-Soviet gender identities of Dagestani and Tatar women, in spite of their apparently “common” “Muslim” culture and traditions.²⁸

In light of my interest in the every-day life of “Soviet women”, these uncertainties are particularly important with regard to research ethics (I myself being an ethnic Russian from Moscow, studying colonial aspects of Soviet politics), as well as for theorizing geographical, ethnic and language boundaries of “Sovietness”. I had a particular problem in carrying out this project since I come from Moscow, and since the Russian language, as the language of Soviet power, is my native language, which is not the case for most of my Bashkir informants. Thus, I was perfectly aware of the fact that dominance, and the questioning of dominance was at play during the interviewing process, and that it could influence the results of my study. Another important problem was connected to my intention to avoid a conversation scenario similar to traditional/Soviet ethnographic interviewing where the bearer of some exotic culture is interviewed for the dominant culture to understand the “exotics” of another. However, my interviewees and other people with whom I spoke in Ufa were ready to have conversations about such issues and proudly told me, “a stranger,” how nice national/ethnic traditions of everyday life are. Indeed, when I expressed my interest not only in Bashkir/Tatar traditions, but also in my informants’ personal experiences of their every-day life in a particular period of Soviet history, they were ready to have a different kind of conversation with me; they accepted me as a “historian” interested mainly in “common” Soviet experiences of “their gen-

²⁵ In contrast to gender research on the experiences of Tajik or Azeri women, the Soviet history of Bashkir and Tatar women of Bashkortostan is usually not studied according to schemes for Central Asia or Azerbaijan, where a specific gender contract is defined (Temkina) or the division of public/private is seen as parallel to the division between Soviet/ethnic(national) (Tohidi) – Анна Темкина, “Гендерный порядок: постсоветские трансформации (Северный Таджикистан)”, *Гендер. Традиции и современность. Сборник статей*. ред. С.Р.Касымова. Душанбе, 2005, 6-92, <http://www.genderstudies.info/sbornik/sbornik18.pdf>, last accessed 2006.08.7; Nayereh Tohidi, “Soviet in public, Azeri in private. Gender, Islam, and Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan”, in *Women’s Studies International Forum*. Vol. 19, 1996, pp.111-123.

²⁶ Марсиль Фахршатов, *Самодержавие и традиционные школы башкир и татар в начале XX века (1900-1917)*. Уфа: Гилем, 2000; Christian Noack, “Russische Politik und muslimische London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. Identität. Die Wolga-Ural-Gebiet im 19. Jahrhundert”. *Jahrbucher fuer Geschichte Ost-europas*. Munchen: Osteuropa Institut, Band 47, Heft 4, 1999, pp. 525-537.

²⁷ *Мусульмане изменяющейся России*. А.М.Кобищанов ред. Москва: РОССПЭНН, 2002; Hilary Pilkington and Galina Yemelianova eds. *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia, public and private faces*.

²⁸ Elena Omelchenko and Gusel Sabirova. “Gender discourses within Russian Islam”. In *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia, public and private faces*. Hilary Pilkington and Galina Yemelianova eds. London and New York, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp. 242-263.

eration". In this case fairly established models of telling Soviet biography²⁹ became important. However, as I indicated in the beginning of this article, I was interested in differences in Soviet constructions of femininities. Thus, I wanted to know when and why "Soviet" was intersected with different understandings of "culture", "education", and "religious normativity" and, in addition, when "being different" and "being excluded" becomes significant.

The topic of my research (everyday practices), as well as the form for collecting material, is significant for the project itself, the form being "kitchen women's conversations about everyday life, children and being beautiful". The main sources for my research are popular women's magazines, advice publications, and 21 interviews with women from Moscow, Saratov and Ufa (mainly Russians and Bashkirs), born between 1919 and 1947. This article is dedicated to the gender dimension of the cultural transformation in Soviet Russia with respect to normativities of "beauty" and "appearance". The campaign of "bringing culture to the masses" (*kulturnost*) in the 1920s and 30s had an impact on the Soviet discourses of beauty, particularly the propaganda for "good taste", and for the "modernization of appearances", at a time when a "universal" city fashion was to substitute for a "backward" local and ethnic tradition. In addition, a lot of attention was paid to a "modest" look. Consequently, I am particularly interested how norms of "beauty" were interpreted by the representatives of different social, ethnic and confessional groups, and how different interpretations of "beauty" influenced constructions of femininity in the stories of the informants.

Fighting backwardness, dealing with differences

The history of clothing of the 20th century can according to Diana Crane be presented as a process of the slow disappearance of strict class, regional and gender differences in dress.³⁰ Soviet Russia was obviously part of this process. However, the homogenization of dress and the softening of regional, ethnic and social boundaries were enormously accelerated by the revolutionary politics of social equality, as well as by strong and direct pressure from the centre towards the regions. What characterises the Soviet process of the "modernization" of appearances, particularly? How far did the politics of equality go with respect to looks and appearances?

The main context for the modernization of appearances is constituted through the discourse on *kulturnost* that is widely described in works by Sheila Fitzpatrick, Catriona Kelly and Natalia Kozlova. *Kulturnost* presupposed that every-day life had to be changed according to rational and scientific principles.³¹ According to Kelly and Kozlova, the politics of *kulturnost*, could

²⁹ Нина Цветаева, "Биографический дискурс советской эпохи", *Социологический журнал*, № 1/ 2, 1999, 118-132, Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson and Anna Rotkirch eds. *On Living Through Soviet Russia*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 9.

³⁰ Diana Crane, *Fashion and its social agendas*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000, pp. 3-11.

³¹ As Fitzpatrick writes, the idea of *kulturnost* (Soviet propaganda of raising the level of the culture of the population) was very widespread. "In practice, we can distinguish several levels of the culture that people throughout the Soviet Union were busy mastering. The first was the culture of basic hygiene – washing with soap, tooth-cleaning, not spitting on the floor – and elementary literacy, which was still lacking among a substantial part of the Soviet population... The second, emphasizing such things as table manners, behavior in public places, the treatment of women and basic knowledge of Communist ideology, was the level of culture required of any town-dweller. The third, part of what had once been called "bourgeois" or "petty-bourgeois" culture, was the culture of propriety, involving good manners, correct speech, neat and appropriate dress, and some appreciation of the high culture of literature, music and ballet. This was the level of culture implicitly expected of the managerial

be viewed as the Soviet variant of a civilizing process, or as the realization of Enlightenment ideals.³² The appearance aspects of the *kulturnost* discourse included, first of all, ideas on hygiene, functionalism and physical training. However, a certain homogenization of looks has a bearing on another aspect of the *kulturnost* discourse – the struggle against backward customs, habits and looks – this comes across in colonial aspects of the Soviet politics³³ of appearance and will be examined here.

In the pamphlet *The art of clothing* (1927), the Soviet minister of health, Nikolai Semashko, wrote: “The understanding of beauty is far from being the same with respect to different nations and different groups of society”³⁴. However, this did not mean that very different standards of beauty would be tolerated inside the rationally organized Soviet state. To cultivate a “cultural appearance” was seen as an important aim of the *kulturnost* politics. Whereas peasants may be seen as the first colonized group, countryside clothes were viewed as backward in every sense, in comparison with the possibilities for consumption that cities offered³⁵. Furthermore an important part of the message of the “*kulturnost*” discourse was addressed to the non-Russian population of the former Russian empire. Echoing the colonial discourse on the “civilizing mission” of the Russian state³⁶, Soviet *kulturnost* discourse paid special attention to bringing culture to “backward people” (including people of Central Asia, Caucasus, the North and Far East, as well as the Muslim population of the Central Russia – Bashkirs and Tatars).

The work among women of these peoples was coordinated by an institution created especially for this purpose (1926), with the term “backwardness” in its title – The Commission for the improvement of the work and everyday life of the women of culturally backward people.³⁷ The aim of this institution was to defend women’s equal rights in families, to increase literacy, and to work for women’s political enlightenment. In addition, one of the important aims of the commission was to change the backward customs of women’s clothing, including the attempt to make women stop using veils, head scarfs, and elaborate ethnic dresses that were considered unhygienic³⁸. The modernization of appearances was part of women’s liberation, a campaign which included women’s participation in social life, education, and political activism, and, in addition a forceful anti- religious campaign.

It is important to note that the campaign for the dissemination of Soviet culture ignored all “traditional” and self-organized movements, which may be considered signs of a “high level of cultural development” – for example, a campaign for post-natal hygiene among Bashkir and Tatar families,³⁹ a growing Djadidist network for girls’ education, and edited in a Tatar

class, members of the new Soviet elite” – Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: ordinary life in extraordinary times*, pp. 79-80.

³² Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia. Advice Literature, Polite Culture and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Наталья Козлова, *Советские люди: сцены из истории*. Москва: Европа, 2005.

³³ Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia ...*, pp.181, 187-208.

³⁴ Н.А.Семашко, *Искусство одеваться*. Москва-Ленинград, 1927, N 1, p. 14.

³⁵ About the importance of a “cultural” look for the upward social mobility of former peasants see, for example, Наталья Козлова, *Советские люди...*, p. 217.

³⁶ Jörg Baberowsky, *Auf der Suche nach Eindeutigkeit: Kolonialismus und zivilisatorische Mission in Zarenreich und in der Sowjetunion. Jahrbucher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. Band 47, Heft 4, 1999, 482-504. München: Osteuropa Institut, pp. 500-502.

³⁷ Комиссия по улучшению труда и быта женщин культурно-отсталых народностей - GARF, P-6983.

³⁸ *Труженица Северного Кавказа*. 1925. 1-3; ГАРФ, P-6983, оп. 1, ед. хр. 64, p. 29.

³⁹ According to David Ransel, the number of infant mortalities among the Slavic population of the Russian Empire was higher than that of the Muslim and the Jewish population - Давид Рэнсель, “Культура деторождения

language magazine dedicated to women's education and women's rights, *Syuyumbike* (1913-1918).⁴⁰ On the contrary, Soviet publications about Tatar and Bashkir women from the 1920s –to the 1930s schematically presented them as “backward people” in “national dress” with covered hair,⁴¹ women who had no rights in their families and no education at all. Thus these presentations provided one more argument for “bringing culture” to non-Russians and Russian women. Indeed, the creation of this collective “backward other” contributed to the destruction of those local organizations and political groups that were influential on the eve of the revolution. In addition, it helped to portray the “Russian” centre as a symbol of progress⁴².

The borders of normativity were particularly strong for young, people aspiring to rise in society. For example, a Tatar language magazine entitled *Azat Hatyn* (Liberated woman), published fashion pages in the 1930s with urban dresses that were very similar to those that were published in *Rabotnitsa*.⁴³ *Azat Hatyn* presented tight dresses and hats, and no models including any elements of Tatar dress. It seems reasonable to conclude that the Tatar look was contrasted to Soviet beauty norms and, consequently, to Soviet ideas of progress. From the 1930s to the 1950s, ethnic differences in look were not permitted for the “active builders of the socialist future” but were reserved for groups considered less ideologically important: elderly people and rural women who were made to represent “real people” in the magazines, in contrast to the “models”⁴⁴.

After the Second World war, the colourful ethnic dress of rural women represented “real people” or different ethnic groups in important state events, probably symbolizing the “Soviet family of nations” or the “unanimous people’s support of the party’s politics”. For example, the newspaper *Red Bashkiria*, dedicated to the elections of 1947, showed an old woman and a young kolkhoz worker in head scarfs,⁴⁵ undoubtedly trying to demonstrate the wide participation in the electoral campaign of the autochthonous Bashkir population.

The 1950s saw a revival of the “ethnic look” that was influenced both by trends in international fashion and by a certain liberalization of the country after the beginning of post-stalinist reforms. Thus beginning in 1968, fashion publications from *Azat Khatyn* and the Bashkir language women’s magazine, *Bashkortostan Kizi*, show a hybridity and/or a mixture of styles. In the fashion pages of *Azat Khatyn*⁴⁶ from 1958 it is not unusual to find models with a “Tatarness”, wearing dresses with frills and headscarf, along with models wearing “urban dresses”.⁴⁷ However, this decorative “Tatarness” look are portrayed as a masquerade rather than an every-day dress. The fashion page from one of the first issues of *Bashkortostan Kyzy*, featuring mini skirts that were in style at the time, is even more conspicuous: “Bashkir” ele-

у белорусских, еврейских и татарских женщин на территории Белоруси конца XIX- начала XX века”, в Елена Гапова ред., *Женщины на краю Европы*. Минск: ЕГУ, 2003, pp. 74-89.

⁴⁰ Azade-Ayse Rorlich, “Intersecting discourses in the press of the Muslims of Crimea, Middle Volga and Caucasus: The woman’s question and the nation”. In *Gender and identity construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*. Feride Acar and Ayse Gunes-Ayata eds. Leiden- Boston-Koeln: Brill, 2000, pp. 143-162.

⁴¹ И.А.Стина, *Башикурка*. Москва: Отдел охраны материнства и младенчества, 1928.

⁴² Some personal photographs shown during the interview process demonstrated that older, less educated Russian, Bashkir and Tatar women wearing kerchiefs, looks rather similarly than represent difference between “cultural” and “backward look”.

⁴³ *Azat Hatyn*, 1936, N 5, fashion page; *Azat Hatyn*, 1936, N 24, fashion page.

⁴⁴ *Azat Hatyn*, 1936, N 12, p. 8.

⁴⁵ *Красная Башкирия*, Уфа, 1947.

⁴⁶ After 1939 “*Azat Hatyn*” started to be published using Cyrillic alphabet in place of Latin- “Азат Хатын”.

⁴⁷ *Азат Хатын*, 1958, N 2, p. 24; *Азат Хатын*, 1958, N 1; p. 25.

ments like ornaments and headscarves seem “imposed” on the fashionable tight and short dresses.⁴⁸

Based on amateur photographs from private collections that were shown to me in the process of the interviews, it is possible to conclude that the modernization of women’s attire seems to be successfully realized towards the end of the period in question. Photographs suggest that young city women in western dress from Moscow and Ufa look rather similar. However, frequently their appearance is somewhat outdated compared with Western/capitalist countries.⁴⁹ In photographs collected in Moscow and Ufa women usually wear a modern hairstyle and are frequently presented in sport clothes. Thus, it is possible to assume that new norms of beauty based on rationality, fashion and consumption, rather than on ethnic traditions and religion, became very important to people.

With this assumption as a starting point, the next section is devoted to an in-depth analysis of memories of the erasure of the differences in appearance in the process of Soviet cultural modernization. This will help explain how the participants in this process regarded beauty norms and practices.

Fashion, taste and kulturnost in memories

The beauty practices of the young years was a topic welcomed by the interviewees who recalled how they sewed or “got hold of” nice dresses, coats and shoes (since it was difficult to buy dresses during the period of a shortage of goods⁵⁰). They showed pictures where they were wearing “that dress” or hair style, and remembered situations when they were young and attractive for men. A large part of the interview materials considers periods when there was a lack of clothes (particularly during 1940s), including high prices and efforts to care about appearances in the homes. In spite of the importance of and interconnection between these topics in the presentation of the practices of beauty, this article focuses on the contexts of memories of moments when ideas of backwardness, culturedness, modernization, and ethnic and religious differences came to the fore.

In my analysis I use the intersectionality approach that has been described in works by Nina Lykke.⁵¹ In analyzing women’s stories about beauty I pay special attention to connections between femininity and education, social status and “cultural tradition” (the last is understood here as a combination of geographic, religious and ethnic identities). Central to my analysis are conversations with 5 informants interviewed in Ufa (F and P), Saratov (J) and Moscow (B and U). Their education range from high (in the case of F, P, B) and secondary (U and J). The native language of two informants (F and P) is Bashkir, of the others Russian. Among those who named Russian as their native language are U (Tatar from city in the Urals) and B (most possibly mixed Jewish-Russian origin). However, in the process of my analysis I do not take

⁴⁸ *Башкортостан кызы*, 1968, N 3, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Olga Vainshtein, “Female Fashion, Soviet style: bodies of ideology”, *Russia - women – culture*. H.Goscilo and B.Holmgren eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, pp. 64-94.

⁵⁰ Елена Осокина, *За фасадом «сталинского изобилия». Распределение и рынок в снабжении населения в годы индустриализации, 1927-1941*. Москва: РОССПЭН, 1997.

⁵¹ Nina Lykke, “Interseksjonalitet – ett användbart begrepp för genusforskning.” *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, 23(1), 2003, 47-57, for a historical application of this theory see, for example, Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting identities*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

ethnicity, education or religious adherence for granted, but I investigate how femininity and beauty normativities are co-enacted with changing categories of social self-identification.

If we consider the stories of two of my older, educated informants, it is possible to find certain similarities in their presentations of beauty normativities and their ways of incorporating modernity into every-day beauty practices. B the oldest of my informants (born in 1919), presented herself as coming from a “quite cultured” family. B’s mother was an actress, but by the time of B’s adolescence her mother and step-father were living together with B in Kazan and could be defined as party cadres. After getting married, B and her husband moved to a Russian-Mordovian village in Tatarstan where she worked first as a teacher, and later (after her husband was called to front in 1942) as a school principal.

B presented her childhood as a rather happy one, and mentioned that as a child she was reluctant to wear a dress that resembled somebody else’s. B. attributed it to her family’s “culturedness” and their educated taste. She also told a story about her clothing practices in the countryside, which showed that good taste and a “cultured” look was very important.

I was walking through the village in my high-heeled shoes. Once a month I had to walk to the district administration in order to bring a report. This was a distance of 20 kilometers from my village. I would put on bast shoes [lapiti⁵²]. When I arrived there, I put my bast shoes away in my briefcase and put on the high-heeled shoes. There I was walking in my shoes with an appropriate appearance. On the way back I was wearing my bast shoes again...

From this passage we may conclude that in B’s understanding, “culturedness” was particularly important in places where (Soviet) authorities were present. At the same time, however, B was convinced that people around her were not able to understand her feminine taste.

Nobody paid attention...it was so sad! All my clothes were...well... I was from that kind of family; I wore crêpe de Chine, chiffon. All of it was totally uninteresting for the kolkhoz people.

On the basis of these two passages it possible to conclude also that “culturedness”, in the case of B, could be interpreted as including a taste for well-made and stylish clothes, a feminine look and a high social status.

However, B’s picture of the world referred not only to an opposition between people with an educated taste and non-cultured village people as a whole, but it included “other”, different cultures. After answering my question about her pupils’ use of earrings, she told me that girls were expected not to wear earrings or jewellery to school. However, if the mother of some pupil would come to her and say that body decorations like earrings were “their tradition”, she would allow those pupils to wear them. However, it seems that “their traditional” culture, in this case, was seen as inferior compared with the “culture” she represented herself.

A second informant, F, was born in 1939 in the family of a Soviet trade-union activist who was arrested in 1947, as a consequence of a political accusation, and spent 8 years in a camp.⁵³ In contrast to B, who had a fairly unproblematic city childhood in Kazan, F’s adolescence was connected with suffering and deprivations; as a wife of a political prisoner, F’s mother had to

⁵² In this case “bast shoes” did not necessarily mean literally traditional wicker shoes (лапти), but was used also as pejorative name for different kinds of ugly, self-made shoes.

⁵³ F’s father came back from camp only in 1956.

leave the city in Urals for a miserable life in a kolkhoz, where there was a shortage of clothes, as was the case in many places in the post-war period. After finishing school in 1956, F decided to study in Ashkent, mainly because of her idea of Central Asia as a place where “it is warm, where you hardly need to wear clothes, and where tomatoes cost 40 kopeks and bread is also cheap”.

In spite of F’s social status which, in contrast to B’s, was mainly that of a victim, she managed to get an “unproblematic” Soviet career (she was a Komsomol member, a teacher, a school inspector and, at the end of her life, she even worked in the Bashkir ministry of education). Several times during the interview F showed herself as a supporter of the dominant discourses on look. It is particularly visible in her story about the fight with petite-bourgeois⁵⁴ habits in college.

We had this campaign. [against philistinism – YG.] If somebody would perm their hair, wear too extravagant clothes, we would question her: Why are you wearing that? It wasn’t like everyday conversation, but a Komsomol meeting. It would happen, for example, if somebody wore a skirt that was too short, or something overly pretentious, for example a very low neck.

Later F also told me about the importance of a “strict dress” in school and said that if one of her pupils came to school with a ring she would call her parents to come to school.

In the continuation of her story, F showed a certain similarity with B’s attitudes to beauty and culture. Beauty for F meant a good taste and a sense of individuality. At some point in her story, F showed that she took pride in her appearance.

I was fashionably dressed. I could allow myself a dress covering my feet when nobody was wearing these kind of dresses. I usually had an original hair style and was styling my hair differently. [...] Once I made a dress with a rectangle neck. A rectangle neck, at that time it was just [shows with her voice and body that it was something very remarkable]

In contrast to B, F made a different distinction between people like her and others— in her story, the others are rather Uzbeks who wore “national dresses” and did not have “very good customs”.⁵⁵

However, besides being a victim of Stalinism and being successful in her professional life, interview materials suggest another possible interpretation of F’s life, including beauty normativities.

I was active. And I would never believe that I could become like this from that downtrodden girl. It is only Allah says some fast words of gratitude that are difficult to understand on the tape]. He opened a way for me.

In different parts of the interview F recalled that her mother taught her to pray in Arabic, that female college students tried to observe “appropriateness” (including having rather long dresses⁵⁶) and that the “Russian girls” in the dormitory were dressed differently – highlighting

⁵⁴ In Russian – мещанство.

⁵⁵ In her story F mentioned the tradition of showing bed linen after the first wedding night, and polygamy.

⁵⁶ This suggests another interpretation of F’s very special long dress – it is possible to suppose that F was trying to follow some “traditional” recommendations and incorporate religious moral standards into modern dress.

their waist, wearing very wide or very narrow skirts. Thus, it is possible to suppose that the Muslim religion was an important source for F's identity and beauty normativity.

The story of J. from Saratov (born in 1924) differs from the two previous ones, when it comes to her social success and social mobility. She was born in a Russian peasant family and tragically lost her father during the flight from famine⁵⁷ to a neighbouring region. After finishing 7 years of school, she moved to Saratov in order to study medicine. However, not being able to afford the course, she transferred to an accountant course, and after 6 months of education she started working as an accountant in a communal system, where she remained almost all her life.

As she describes her practices of beauty, J. makes a clear difference between an "urban" and a "village" dress. Village dressing is defined by her as "clean, but not refined", while the city gave her an opportunity to look "nice". J happily tells about the opportunity to look nice in the city: even during the war (in 1943) hairdresser's salons were opened in Saratov, where J. could get a very fashionable perm. Also, despite earning very little money and bringing up a child without being married in the 1950s, she could buy a full fox collar from her colleague from work using quotas.

From the description of J's clothing practices, one may conclude that she sees herself as belonging to a ("modern?") generation that is interested in style, in contrast to the "generation" just before her. Showing a picture of her and her sister, who was only 10 years older, J told me that her sister wore her hair parted in the middle all her life, while J. herself curled her hair in various ways.

The stories of the two younger informants who now live in Moscow seem to confirm that international (Western) fashion helped define beauty normativity for young women in the 1960s. P was born in a Bashkir village in 1939 and U in an industrial city in the Urals in 1947.⁵⁸ After finishing school P. started her education in the Ufa pedagogical college, where she graduated as a teacher. U was born in a Tatar family (in the beginning of the interview she presented herself as a "russified Tatar"). Her father was a qualified worker and her mother was a waitress in a restaurant. U graduated from a vocational college in Ufa and worked as an engineer in a factory. In contrast to many older informants, P and U's lives were characterized by a higher degree of stability and security, since they had almost no option but to go through a secondary education system.

U told a remarkable story about Western designs, home-made versions of these models, and the pleasure connected with the idea of appearing in these clothes in public. This story is connected with a film about Babette⁵⁹ and the appearance of the film's leading character who became a symbol of sex appeal.

There was this film about Babette. This was when it all started. This kind of ribbon [points to her head]. The special hairstyle was inspired from that film. With a fringe and here's the white ribbon. And the hair had considerable volume. It all started with her, didn't it? Of course we

⁵⁷ In Russia the famine as a result of the forced collectivization in 1932-1933 was particularly hard in the Volga region.

⁵⁸ U moved to Moscow only after retiring.

⁵⁹ «Бабетта идет на войну» - shortened version of the French film *Babette s'en va-t-en guerre* where Brigitte Bardot played the lead role. (Christian-Jaque, 1959).

had to imitate it! The skirts were called "babetka". We put on stiff skirts, everybody became Babettes. [pause] We wore, you know, "marlevka" [a type of light, thin cotton fabric] that appeared in the shops. It was stiff and was a nice cloth, covered with flowers. Underneath you would put on stiff gauze! That's how Babette looked! It was such a chic dress! Everybody started to wear it.

P. also presented herself as a person concerned with looking nice while in college. She told me about how she died her hair – “during one year it was of all colors, from black to blond”. Also, she was a stilyaga⁶⁰, wearing very narrow skirts – “boys were laughing and showing how girls are entering a tram” (P. showed how difficult it was to raise her leg on the stairs).

At the same time, when talking about her work as a teacher in the 1970s, in similarity with B and F, P stressed that she did not tolerate too much make-up or decorations among her pupils.

Despite the obvious acceptance of a modern, urban, stylish and fashionable look, even younger informants reveal the contradictory effects of the modernization of look.

U's story implies that today she is interested in traditions and religion (she is reading the Quran, has attempted fasting, and regrets not speaking Tatar). However, she still sees traditional clothes (most probably, according to a Soviet discourse on allowing “backwardness” in the elderly) as something belonging to another generation and a non-modern way of life (in similarity with J), in her phrase, that of “old women” (*babushki*).

Elderly women were wearing them [scarfs and kerchiefs] and now they are doing it again. My mother-in-law was born in 1917 and when she came to live with us, she had lived for 76 years in a Bashkir village. Well, it was not really a village; they had a sovkhos.⁶¹ There were Bashkirs and Tatars there. She was an ardent Tatar, but she did not have anything like this. Even in her wardrobe you could not find anything. Maybe just one item, really – her clothes were mostly green. Perhaps this green color was characteristic for elderly women.

At the same time she thought the fashion of her youth strange, with reference, for instance, to her wearing a mini-dress at a wedding celebration.

On the other hand, in the interview with U there are further complexities of beauty normativity. Drawing a line between “village girls” who studied together with her in a technical school, and herself as a modern city inhabitant, U said that the first thing they did after coming to the city was to cut their braids off. Collected material from other interviews show that to cut the braids off was a very symbolic act in Soviet beauty practices: it symbolised both the entrance into adulthood and changing “backward”/village norms to progressive/urban ones. However, it is very interesting that in this case “village girls” were accompanied by their ethnic nomination – “Bashkir”. Thus it is possible to suppose that U here draws a line not only between urban and village, but also between modern/city/Russified and backward/village/Bashkir.

⁶⁰ According to Hilary Pilkington, “styliagas”, the young people who followed style in clothes, were defined as “youth-as-victims-of-Western-influence” by dominant discourses – Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and its Culture: A nation's constructors and constructed*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 68-69.

⁶¹ The Soviet name for a state agricultural enterprise.

Furthermore, it was P who expressed more clearly than the others of my transcribed informants⁶² the possibility of explaining modernization in terms of the colonial domination of the Russian-speaking centre over traditional every-day practices in the periphery:

National traditions very soon became more Russian. [Pause] Probably they were somehow suppressed by parents. Maybe I am wrong.

Summary

The presented material shows that Soviet femininity may be studied from the perspective of a cross-sectional analysis. Beautifying practices in Soviet Russia in the 1930s to the 1960s were connected to the complex interplay of different social categories and different interpretations of “culture”/“culturedness” and “tradition”. However, beauty normativity did not presuppose separated elements, but was a system of rules and meanings which women simultaneously internalized and resisted.

The analysis of a cross-section of gender with a performative presentation of “culture”, “education”, “religion” and “ethnicity” on the level of every-day practices also contributes to studies of the effects of Soviet social, cultural and national policies. The actualization of ethnicity through “tradition” as a response to practices of gender discrimination, as well as the construction of hierarchies among women through the use of “culture” and “education” discourses, are only a few examples.

Many modern attitudes to beauty (including hygiene practices and the education of taste) stem from the Western social and political agenda and were incorporated into the Soviet discourses about female beauty. Although it would seem likely that those attitudes would symbolize ideas of modernization and progress, they are remembered by many of my informants as “genuinely” Soviet norms of new “cultural” appearances and forms of body care. However, as the interviews with Bashkir women demonstrate, this modernization/Westernization/Sovietization could be questioned and, sometimes, reinterpreted as the continuation of the pre-Soviet colonial politics toward the periphery and towards non-Russian ethnic groups.

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⁶² During my last trip to Ufa in the spring of 2006 I had less formal conversations with two Tatar women who told me that in the post/war period young girls who were too eager to follow city fashion were named “Maria”, a name clearly suggesting the “Russiness” of their beauty practices.

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Two Languages and three Empires: About the Discourse on Russian and Church Slavonic in Today's Russia

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Language has always been the perfect instrument of empire.
-- Antonio de Nebrija, *Granidtica Castellana*

Even if an empire disappears, its language is preserved. This is the case, for example, with Latin, French, Spanish and English. For the former colonies the dependence on the earlier, imperial language is manifold and profound in many aspects of public and private life. Often the imperial language remains the high status language even after decolonization.

The Russian language of today, after the demise of the Soviet Union, is in the same position as French and English once were. I will here follow the Russian debate on the relationship between empire and language, using primarily the web. I am interested in these aspects of the discourse on language in contemporary Russia but not in the distinctions and nuances between different parties in these discussions, nor in variations of scientific discourse. I am thus concerned with the discussion in its entirety and not primarily with the real situation of the Russian language - or any other language. As a working definition of the term 'imperial language' I will use Robert Phillipson's definition that pertains to English, in his book *English Language Teaching and Imperialism*:

/.../ the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. Here structural refers broadly to material properties and cultural to immaterial or ideological properties.¹

The empire is lost, but the Russian language still plays an important role in almost all of the countries in the so-called "Near Abroad" - the Russian term for the countries once belonging to the Soviet Union. This is stated in one of the numerous articles on the destiny of the Russian language published in the press and on the web over the last years, as in this almost triumphant statement on the situation of the Russian language today:

The language of the empire did not die together with the empire; the region where it remained alive was not confined within the borders of the Russian Federation.²

¹ Phillipson, Robert, *English Language Teaching and Imperialism*, Trønninge 1990, p. 41.

² Zhukov, Boris, "Zhivoi iazyk mertvoi derzhavy", http://www.itogi.ru/paper2000.nsf/Article/Itogi_2000_10_26_182348.html, 2006-07-04.

In almost all of these countries new language laws have been instituted, laws which stress the hegemony of the titular language of the country, formally giving Russian a new and diminished, secondary role in various ways. At the same time, the Russian language is still de facto very important in all parts of the former Soviet territory, with the exception of Estonia, and partly Latvia, although more than 30 percent of the inhabitants in those countries are Russians. The inequalities between Russian and almost all the other languages in the territory of the former Soviet Union mainly remain. Due to the fact that Russian was taught throughout the Soviet Union, it is still often used as the common language in official contacts between former Soviet countries even today, both out of necessity and as a practicality.

In the Russian context of today, from a political perspective the Russian language is seen as a way of holding the Russian Federation together:

But the Russian language is not only a medium of communication between nationalities. It is a powerful factor in shaping the system; it is the foundation of our multinational state. And if cracks appear in this foundation, then there is reason for concern about the fate of the entire building.³

'Multinational' is used as an honorary word in the same way as in the Soviet propaganda. Russia, as well as the Soviet Union, is a multicultural state with Russian as its leading language. Multi-nationality is one of the terms used in the definition of the country, in the preamble of the new Russian constitution from 1993.

Even more so, the promotion of Russian is a way of protecting the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation outside of its own territory, in the Commonwealth of Independent States and in the rest of the world:

In connection with the development of processes of integration between nationalities and states, it is at the present time imperative to secure support for the Russian language at the common state level as a powerful social factor for the consolidation of the CIS countries, as a stimulus for the development of cultural, legal, economic and political conditions within the Russian Federation, and **for the realisation of Russia's geopolitical interests**. The programme envisages **a strengthening of the position of the Russian language in Russia, in the CIS states, and beyond their borders**.⁴

This role of the Russian language as a world language - as a language of intercommunication and science, including its civilisating properties - is stressed in various ways by the Russian government and by nationalists of different kinds. I will dwell on this issue for a while. I will thus not go into details of differences in this discourse but try to paint the over-all picture. This discourse has many similarities with the corresponding ones that defend the role of English in today's world, though one can debate whether English needs defending. I will make a short comparison of the situations of the two languages and use Phillipson's study on the role of the English language in today's world⁵, and I will use his notions.

³ Kolin, K., K., "Russkii iazyk i natsional'naja bezopasnost'", <http://www.slavmir.ru/arhiv97/sib30okt.htm#1>, 2006-07-04.

⁴ Informatsionno-poiskovaia sistema, zakon, http://www.vcom.ru/cgi-bin/db/zakdoc?_reg_number=%D09603718, 2006-07-04.

⁵ Phillipson, *op.cit.*, p. 217-233.

The ability to use Russian as well as English in the English imperial discourse is seen by the Russians as part of **universalism**, that is, being a part of the international community:

There is absolutely no doubt that Russia's greatest contribution to the development of the human spirit and world civilization, to world culture, is her language, and her great literature.⁶

Other terms used by Robert Phillipson are **mobility** and **access code**, which mean that English opens up to different spheres of culture and civilisation. This is also an argument used to promote Russian: in such a view, to use Russian is to open up to the civilisation of the world, which is otherwise closed. Since Russian is a universal language, the knowledge of this language makes the peoples of different local languages parts of this universality. This line of argumentation can be seen in this extract from a text about the situation in Islamic republics:

Since in both cases this was followed by the mass annihilation of the bearers (living or in paper form) of this previous book-culture, of a generation of these peoples, those who entered life in the second half of the century found themselves cut off from their own literary tradition as well as from world literature, of which only an insignificant part had been translated into their languages (and that often not from the originals but from Russian translations). By mastering the Russian language they can, to some extent, bridge this gap.⁷

The 'two times' mentioned here are the changes from Arabic to Latin and then to the Cyrillic alphabet in the Islamic area of the Soviet Union. The continuation of the use of Russian is according to this argumentation a way to open up these cultures to the world. However, it can not be taken for granted that everyone would agree with this line of argument.

To master Russian also means to master technology and science, that is, **modernity** in general; it is the language of learning, especially at university. This is a second parallel to the imperial discourse on English:

The Russian-speaking inhabitants of the post-Soviet countries are people who belong to contemporary society; they are the recipients of information flows, the bearers and creators of a culture which does not coincide with the culture of the "titular" people.⁸

One more attribute given to the Russian language pertains more specifically to the Russian imperial discourse: that it is holy or, in any case, closely connected not only to the nation but also to faith:

Language is a gift from God. Guard it as you would your mother, your child. Remember: The nation stands on two pillars: faith and language. This you must know: What happens to our language happens to ourselves.⁹

The Russian language is thus understood as sacred in the context of holistic speculations in the Russian religious tradition.

Even this argument, however, has a parallel in the discourse on English, as we can see in this summing up of the traits given to English in Phillipson's book:

⁶ Pavliuk, C. V., "Russkii iazyk i biblioteka", <http://pushkin.kubannet.ru/1/ibo/rus22012004.html>, 2006-07-04.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Zhukov, op.cit.

⁹ "Obrashchenie k zhiteliam detskogo goroda-kurorta Anapa", http://www.orthodox.kubannet.ru/chron/c_2_chr.htm, 2006-07-04.

If one conflates the English-intrinsic arguments one can conclude that English "is" god-given, civilizing, noble, a vehicle of the entire developing human tradition.¹⁰

There are thus a great many parallels between the discourses on English and Russian in this respect. But apart from all these positive aspects of the Russian language, it is also seen to be exposed to threats, which do not have any parallels with the discourse on English. The threats are, according to the Nationalistic discourse on language, mostly coming from two sides: loans from other languages - on the one hand from English (to an overwhelming degree), and on the other hand from colloquial language, especially *mat*, - vulgar language.

These are the threats: The Russian language may be polluted by terms and turns of phrases of foreign extraction not typical of the traditions of Russian literature: the ever growing use in Russian speech of words and phrases of a slang character.¹¹

The threats from English and from vulgar language are seen as a pollution of the Russian language, as an ecological catastrophe. Ecology, as a modern and popular science, is intermingled with an attack on the use of English and vulgar language in Russian, in an article by V. S. Milovatskii, "Ob ekologii slova":

At the same time we can see in everyday life how low, dirty and vulgar words ruin the moral buttresses and obliterate spirituality; the language is ruined and souls are ruined. Is the truth not that the domination of the English language destroys the integrity of our language and our spirit? We will not be able to restore the ecological integrity of nature, if we do not understand that a precondition for the integrity of nature is the integrity of the human spirit and of the kinship between different levels (family, people). And linguistic integrity is essential for that. A full-blooded, intact development of one's own language is essential. Words are full of life just as everything living in nature. Words are not less alive than herbs, trees or rivers.¹²

The discourse makes use of a term already coined - 'the ecology of language' - but uses it not as a term for the scientific study of language and of the environment, but as a catch-word for the protection of languages, very much in the same way as ecology is used regarding nature preservation.¹³ The words used when describing these threats are often the same as when as describing war: "zasil'e", "napadok", and so on:

The Russian language is exposed to attacks even in Russia itself. Over the past decade up to 10,000 foreign words have entered it, such as *baksy* [bucks], *vaucher* [voucher], *biznesmen* [businessman] and *bizneslanch* [business lunch].¹⁴

The Russian language is in this context given a crucial importance for the state and for the imagined Russian empire, and it is given a string of imperial attributes as "velikii", great, and "moguchii", powerful, attributes derived from the discourse on Russia and not on Russian language.

¹⁰ Phillipson, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

¹¹ Kolin, *op.cit.*

¹² Milovatskii, V. S., "Ob ekologii slova", <http://durnoypony.livejournal.com/>, 2006-07-06.

¹³ For the scientific study use of the term see: Einar Haugen, *The Ecology of Language*, Selected and Introduced by Anwar S. Dil, Stanford 1972.

¹⁴ Conant, Eve, "Govoriu 'net' russkomu iazyku ('MSNBC', SSjA). Za predelami rodnoi strany russkii iazyk idet na ubyl'", <http://www.inosmi.ru/text/translation/150475.html>, 2006-07-06.

These are the arguments for the use of Russian in the non-Russian speaking areas of the Russian Federation, or in the “Near Abroad”, and the reason for the sense of a threat. The logical response to this discussion from the side of the Russian government has been the forming of Russian language and cultural centres of the same kind as the British council, which has taken place over the last years. Some have already been opened in the Near Abroad, according to numerous articles on the subject, and the opening ceremonies have often been led by Putin’s wife, who is a philologist by profession.

As a result of this discussion, the Russian government has also issued a special language law, where the imperial status of Russian inside of the Russian Federation is stressed:

1. In accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation the state language of the Russian Federation on all of its territory is the Russian language.¹⁵

4 The state language of the Russian Federation is a language which promotes mutual understanding and the strengthening of the links between the peoples of the Russian Federation within one single multinational state. ¹⁶

The law also forbids the use of words and expressions that do not adhere to the norms of Russian literary language. Obscene language is also forbidden - in most cases English **loan words** –which can be referred to the threats discussed in the articles quoted above. This part of the law was issued as late as in 2005.

6. When the Russian language is used in its capacity as the state language of the Russian Federation, it is not allowed to use words and expressions which do not conform to the norms of the contemporary Russian literary language, with the exception of foreign words without analogues commonly used in the Russian language.¹⁶

In this law there are also passages about the importance of Russian language studies, both for the different peoples of the Russian federations and for those abroad. In another, earlier law, the Cyrillic script was prescribed to be obligatory for all languages in the Russian Federation, which was also a geopolitical step to stop the influence from the West and preserving the peoples of the Russian Federation in the Russian sphere of influence.

In the Russian Federation the alphabets of the state language of the Russian Federation and of the state languages of the republics are based on the Cyrillic script.¹⁷

As we can see, the issue here is not the imperial status of the language but that of the script.

The Russian language in this discourse is seen as one way of stabilizing the Russian federation and preserving its unity, but also as an instrument to preserve and strengthen the Russian influence in the former territory of the Soviet Union. The Russian language is seen as one of the ways to re-imperialise Russia - an important aspect of the politics of the president, Vladimir Putin.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Zakon RF ot 25 oktiabria 1991g. N 1807-I "O iazykach narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii", <http://www.internet-law.ru/law/smi/iazuk.htm>, 2006-07-06.

The second empire

At the same time, another empire exists in the nationalistic discourse in Russia of today – that of Slavia Orthodoxa, the Slavic Orthodoxy, with Russia as its centre and Church Slavonic as its language.¹⁸ The Old, originally south Slavonic liturgical language of the Slavs, with its pretensions of being a holy language, is also given a territorial or imperial status:

The special role of the Church Slavonic language in the history of the Russian language is connected with the fact that originally, old Slavonic (i.e., Church Slavonic from the period of Cyril and Methodius), and then the special Church Slavonic language, was a supra-national language. It developed as the language of the sermon, addressing all Slavs. Its centres changed. In the course of only the first one and a half centuries of Christianity, among the Slavs the centres of book and linguistic culture changed twice: first Moravia and Pannonia, then Eastern Bulgaria, and, finally, Kiev and Novgorod. However, it retained its general Slavic character and its appeal to all Slavs everywhere.¹⁹

Along the same lines, a Ukrainian bishop under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate somewhat surprisingly includes Poland in this unity, but leaves out the Czechs:

The Church Slavonic language is the uniting origin of the Polish, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Russian, Serb, and Bulgarian peoples. But someone does not like that we are one.²⁰

Church Slavonic is at the moment also seen as a uniting bond between the three East Slavonic countries: Russia, Ukraine and Belarus:

The Church Slavonic language is the language of the Orthodox Russian Church, a means by which our people are drawn within the fold of the church and learn the catechism; the Church Slavonic language is the language of the vast expanse of our Fatherland given to us by God in answer to our prayers; it is the language which now for the second millennium defends and guarantees the unity and integrity of the Equal of the Apostles Prince Vladimir's legacy. And if we cannot retain the Church Slavonic language in the Russian Church, it will be difficult to retain the unity of the Orthodox Church of Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus.²¹

Church Slavonic has united these countries both historically and still unites them today, although to a lesser degree. This link is also established between generations of earlier Slavs. Thus the area of the empire of Church Slavonic embraces what is called Slavia Orthodoxa, but very often in the post-Soviet discourse the area is more or less limited to the East Slavonic countries: Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus. This is especially important in the political situation of today, when Russia is attempting to draw the other two East Slavonic countries nearer. Sometimes this empire is expanded to include even the orthodox world as such, then taking into consideration the strong substratum of the Greek language in Church Slavonic; the ac-

¹⁸ The term Slavia Orthodoxa was coined by the Italian scholar Picchio. His articles on this subject has recently been published in Russia: Riccardo Picchio, *Slavia orthodoxa : literatura i jazyk*, otvetstvennyye redaktory N. N. Zapolskaja, V. V. Kalygin, Moskva 2003.

¹⁹ Panin, L. G., "Tserkoslavianskii iazyk i russkaia slovesnost'", http://vvv.image.websib.ru/03/text_article_point1.htm?49, 2006-07-06.

²⁰ "Svidetel'stvovat' zhizn'iu", http://www.pravoslav.odessa.net/Andreevkiy_vestnik/1_2002/sv_zhiznyu.htm, 2006-07-06.

²¹ "Tserkovnoslavianskii iazyk v sovremennoi natsional'noj shkole", <http://slovník.hgsa.ru/rus/shuravlev/07.html>

companying geographic notion is "vselenskoe pravoslavie", "the universal orthodox area"²². Greek and Church Slavonic are then equated. Sometimes this area is restricted to Russia and all other areas are neglected in the image of Holy Rus, with Church Slavonic as its language. This empire is hard to pinpoint geographically and ontologically.

The structural inequality, in the words of Philipson, is here between Church Slavonic, holding the higher position, and Russian or other Slavonic vernaculars, being in the second position, and not in the first position as in the first discourse.

It is not a matter of talents but of the strength and expressiveness of one language and the inertia and limpness of another. To convince oneself of this, it is sufficient to say familiar prayers in the Russian language.²³

Russian is not only seen as inadequate for liturgical life, but as an inferior language in general - not only, as in the first discourse, momentarily polluted. In this second discourse, Church Slavonic is the 'clean' language, and the ecological argument is here used to distinguish the 'polluted' Russian from the clean Church Slavonic:

The Church Slavonic language is, to use an expression that is fashionable and thus understandable to all, an "*ecologically pure*" spring; there are no harmful admixtures or distortions of meaning in it.²⁴

The Church Slavonic language is also 'clean' in the sense that it lacks associations to modernity, and it even has the quality to purify the Russian language by existing beside it:

It is the language of a noble culture; there are no dirty words in it, you cannot talk in a coarse tone in it. It is a language which presupposes a certain level of moral culture. The Church Slavonic language in that way not only has significance for the understanding of Russian spiritual culture but it is also of great educational and pedagogical importance. The rejection of its use in the Church, and the learning of it in school, would lead to a further decline of culture in Russia. The Russian language "is purified", it is ennobled in the Church.²⁵

Church Slavonic is placed on a high cultural level; it also includes a moral quality. Church Slavonic, which in the 19th century was often linked to seminaristic coarseness and barbarism, is seen in a quite different light by the traditionalists of today. Church Slavonic can even clean the unclean Russian language.

As in the first case, in which the defenders of the Russian language propagated laws and prohibitions, the representatives of Church Slavonic want some kind of laws or prohibitions against the use of Russian in the divine services of the Orthodox church. The notion of constancy is even more important for Church Slavonic than for Russian. In a holy language all parts are sacred; vocabulary, syntax, grammatical forms, even orthography. One scholar claims that the Slavonic script, together with the Church Slavonic language, will fall to pieces with the least change of the orthography.

²² Nazvanov, D., "Pochemu nel'zia sluzhit' Bogu na iazyke mira sego", *Bogoslužebnyi iazyk russkoi tserkvi*, ed. by arichimandrit Tikhon (Shevkunov), Sretenskij monastir' 1999, p. 307

²³ Ibid., p. 305.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 307.

²⁵ Likhachev, D. S., "Russkii iazyk v bogoslužhenii i v bogoslovskoi mysli", *Vozrozhdenie*, 1998, http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Life_church/Article/Lih_RussBogosl.php

The home of the Russian art of writing was created by God himself through His chosen, and this house must not be destroyed. It is time to repulse decisively all enemies of the Church Cyrillic script and to return to the **traditional** norms of church orthography. The grace of the Holy Ghost resides in the letters of the Church Slavonic alphabet!²⁶

The patriarch of the Russian Orthodox church has also de facto forbidden all attempts to use Russian as a liturgical language. One of the critics of this situation has said that the Russians are the only people in the world denied the possibility to hear the divine service in their own language.

This second discourse has clear political implications, evident, for example, in the support of Serbia in the conflict on the Balkans in our time, or in Russia's participation in the wars against the Turks on the Balkans in the 19th century.

The issue of Church Slavonic contra the vernacular is also important in Bulgaria and Serbia, but not in the same way. The vernacular is used there with much less controversy, and one scholar means that Serbian and Church Slavonic exist with equal right in the Serbian church today.²⁷ The debate is most infected in Russia, and it is difficult for the Russian traditionalists to find support for their total denial of the vernacular.

Church Slavonic, being a South Slavonic language, is still perceived to be a Russian commitment by the Russians, and the south Slavonic origin of this language is often blurred. The centre for this language is perceived to be Moscow, and, as a matter of fact, all the orthodox Slavs today use the Russian redaction of Church Slavonic. During the Turkish hegemony over Serbia and Bulgaria, the Russians helped them with liturgical books, and thus this version of the language was set. The defence of Church Slavonic in Russia is a defence of that language also in Serbia and Bulgaria:

The Church Slavonic language is preserved in the Orthodox Churches of Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, cementing the feeling of kinship of peoples of the same faith and of the same blood. And if we do not succeed in restoring the tradition of the sound and teaching of the Church Slavonic language in the Russian school, it will become more difficult to maintain its position in the Russian Church, and it will be more difficult for the Bulgarians and the Serbs, the Ukrainians and the Belorussians, to hold on to Church Slavonic services in their churches.²⁸

The empire in this discourse is thus also geographic and cultural, with strong political implications. It differs from the first empire in its historical dimension and its concrete, geographical location, and, in addition, it differs with regard to the positive and the negative characteristics ascribed to the languages. What is also common is Moscow and Russia in the centre for these empires.

²⁶ Novikova, A., "Iz istorii tserkovnoslavianskoi azbuki i o normakh sovremennogo tserkovnogo pravopisaniia", <http://212.188.13.168/izdat/JMP/03/6-03/11.htm>, 2006-07-11.

²⁷ <http://www.russian.slavica.org/article106.php>

²⁸ <http://churchslavic.narod.ru/zhuravlev.html>

The Day of the Slavic Alphabet and Culture

The two discourses mentioned above encounter each other without confrontation on one occasion, that is on The Day of the Slavic Alphabet and Culture, celebrated on the 24th of May, a day dedicated to Kirillos and Methodios, the two brothers who created the Church Slavonic literary language. This day is widely celebrated in Bulgaria, and was celebrated in Russia before the revolution but begun to be observed again in the last years before the demise of the Soviet Union. In Moscow it has been celebrated from 1992 with a divine service in the Uspenskij cathedral and a procession to the statue of the two brothers, which was erected and unveiled in 1992 at the Slavonic Square. This feast means a special rapprochement between the church and the profane powers in Russia.

The accent here is, on the one hand, the close connection between the Slavonic peoples and the Slavonic languages, especially the Southern Slavonic languages and peoples, who in different degrees are influenced by the traditions of Kirillos and Methodios. Today the Russian language is also celebrated on this day:

The appearance of the Slavonic alphabet united all Slavic peoples, and this unity runs through our entire history – from Kiev Rus to the present day. Today we celebrate the Day of the Russian Language – in fact, it is the day of our national culture. It is, in truth, a feast full of significance.²⁹

In the rhetoric connected with this feast, yet another fellowship is alluded to, that is All Slavs, echoing the views of the Pan Slavists in the 19th century. During the feast in 2000, for example, a special conference was organised with this purpose:

The main objective of scientific conferences held within the framework of the feast is the search for an answer to the question: what stands in the way of the restoration of cooperation and trust between the Slavic peoples?³⁰

The close relation between the Russian language and Church Slavonic is also stressed during this holiday. The demands of the study of Church Slavonic at school is often put forth, a study which was forbidden after the revolution in 1918.

Let us secure the introduction of the Slavonic language into the school programme as the basis of the safety of the “great and powerful” Russian language.³¹

In this discourse the difference between Church Slavonic and Russian is often blurred, and the day is also often called the day of the Russian language. Two different names are used for that day: “The Feast of the Russian Language, Slavic Literature and Culture” and “The Feast of Slavic Literature and Culture”. On this day the common elements in these two discourses are stressed, and the conflict about the liturgical language is hidden.

This day is thus an attempt to join these two discourses, and in a way also to join the whole territory of these two imperial discourses: a strive for Russia’s geopolitical influence.

²⁹ "Edinaia Rossiia' chtit sviatykh ravnoapostol'nykh Kirilla i Mefodija, i napominaet o znachenii russkogo iazyka", <http://www.edinros.ru/news.html?rid=147&id=106264>, 2006-07-06.

³⁰ *Etnosfera*, No. 4, 2000.

³¹ "Obrashchenie k zhiteliam detskogo goroda-kurorta Anapa", op.cit., 2006-07-06.

The third empire

And now to the third empire: in the contemporary discourse Church Slavonic is not only the language keeping Slavia Orthodoxa together, and the liturgical language of the church - it is also the language per se in which to talk with God. Also, in the Kingdom of Heaven, carstvo nebesnoe, Church Slavonic and not Russian is used. This is the third imperial discourse on language in post-Soviet Russia, but one closely connected with the second discourse:

Everyone who sincerely wishes to join the ancient culture of the Spirit will easily find an opportunity to familiarize himself with the invaluable treasure of the holy Slavonic language, which in an amazing way corresponds to the great sacraments of the liturgy. A few peculiarities in this language facilitate a temporary withdrawal from the passions of our ordinary lives: *now we will put aside every worldly care.*³²

The last italicized words is a quotation from one of the most famous hymns from the Orthodox liturgy sung when the priest comes from the altar to the nave with the Bread and the Wine, giving the use of Church Slavonic almost a sacramental status. Another quotation from an old believer's source, which is by far the most conservative element of Russian orthodoxy:

The centuries-old experience of praying of the Russian Church shows that the Church Slavonic language is best suited to communication with God through prayer. In this language we can also communicate with God's saints, who have already left this life on earth and are now praising God and the Heavenly Church while interceding for us before God's throne.³³

One more example defines Church Slavonic as God's most beloved language: one of the most maximalistic utterances in this polemic.

"Church Slavonic is the language God loves most", affirmed the Venerable Ioann Vyshenskii, and thus we will talk with the Lord in this ancient and beautiful language.³⁴

The foe is here perhaps not the modernists who want to use Russian but the devil himself, as is stated in this article on the use of Russian:

I don't know what there is more of – the sincere wish to bring the Church nearer the people or the political intrigues. Someone is of course interested in splitting the Slavonic peoples for good. Moreover, here I see the force of sheer evil at work.³⁵

Church Slavonic is the language of heaven - carstvo nebesnoe - and a part of the idea of Russian messianism. A large part of the polemic is here drawn from the Orthodox dispute against Latin in the Ukraine in the 17th century, where Church Slavonic. In contrast to all other languages, Church Slavonic was regarded as sacred, with a redeeming power. Ioann Vyshenskii, quoted above, was the most important representative of the Orthodox side in the dispute.

Both Russian and Church Slavonic are characterised by a double function, both as imperial and sacred languages. The ideological stand creates a very complex relation between them. Three empires and two languages – that is the paradoxical situation in post-Soviet Russia in

³² Archimandrit Sofronii (Sakharov), "Liturgicheskii iazyk", <http://www.ipmce.su/~cyril/orthodox/apologet/slavic4.htm>, 2006-07-07.

³³ "Kratkaja istoriia Tserkvi", www.nita-press.de/Doklad.doc, 2006-07-07.

³⁴ Zarutskii, Sergei, 2005.

³⁵ <http://svet.orthodoxy.ru/2003/n6/s019.htm>

broad groups of nationalists and orthodox believers - and sometimes also in the rhetoric of the Russian government.

Translation of quotations Erland Janson

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Who is the prisoner of the caucasus? Vladimir Makanin, "The Prisoner of the Caucasus"

Kerstin Olofsson

Vladimir Makanin's short story "The Prisoner of the Caucasus" was published in 1995, during the first war in Chechnya, but it was written before the war. As for the title the story has three well-known predecessors in Russian literature: 19th-century classical works set in the Caucasus by Alexander Pushkin, Michail Lermontov and Leo Tolstoj.

The prison theme, however, dates further back in Russian culture. In literature it was first introduced with "The Lay of the Host of Igor" (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*) from the late 12th century with its exclamation that it is better to be dead than to be taken prisoner. The Novgorod prince, Igor, is caught by the Asian steppe people, the Polovtsians, during his campaign. This medieval work was important to Russian romanticism. However, the Romantic writers, headed by Alexander Pushkin, transformed the prisoner theme which used to be based on actual events, in a number of earlier works.

The classic theme is accordingly that Russians are taken prisoners by Asian peoples whom they meet in their open territory during their troubled history. In the three precursors to Makanin's story mentioned above it is also Russians who are taken prisoners by various Caucasian peoples. In Makanin, on the other hand, it is instead a Caucasian who is taken prisoner by Russians.

This is a departure from the historical tradition, but, nevertheless, it is not new. Michail Lermontov's influential novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, from 1840, is set in the Caucasus. There the Circassian girl Bela is taken prisoner by the main protagonist, the Russian officer Pechorin. There are echoes of this novel in Makanin's story. It is not a coincidence that his next work is the novel *Underground Or A Hero of Our Time* (1998). Again, to depict the present, the author alludes to the past in the very title, with the reference to Lermontov's work.

Many Russian critics give prominence to Makanin as *the* great depicter of our age in the Russian literature of today. This was especially the case during the 1990s. One critic describes him in the following way: "Makanin is very rational in everything that pertains to 'the structure of the text.' But the original impulse is caught in the air, in the atmospheric situation, which is condensed into an image of hallucinatory clarity, a core image. Everything else is the result of an almost mathematical inventiveness. But the 'core image' appears to him on its own accord, without asking his permission. And in this sense Makanin is a wise man—one of the most irrational, almost oracular interpreters of his own time, a vessel for its stream."³⁶

³⁶ Irina Rodnjanskaja, "Sjuzety trevogi. Makanin pod znakom'novoj zestokosti", *Russkaja literatura XX veka v zerkale kritiki. Xrestomatija*, Moskva/St. Petersburg 2003, p. 429

Makanin is an allegorical writer, albeit of a modern and complicated kind, without a simple or exact correspondence between expression and content. His work is not easily interpreted, which is evident in the criticism cited above. Some of his works have given rise to many different, sometimes contradictory interpretations, among them "The Prisoner of the Caucasus".

* * *

The story begins with an allusion to another Russian classic, namely Dostoevsky: "The soldiers probably did not know that beauty will save the world, but what beauty was they both knew, on the whole. In the mountains they sensed the beauty (the beauty of place) all too well—it frightened them."³⁷ And this is how the story ends: "The mountains. The mountains. For how many years had his heart been agitated by their magnificence, their mute solemnity — but what did this beauty ... want to tell him? Why did it call out to him?" (226)

In the introductory quotation two Russian soldiers are on their way through the Caucasian mountains on a task yet unknown to the reader. The story's main protagonist, Rubachin, leads the way, and behind him comes Vovka, the rifleman. It is Rubachin's heart that is agitated by the beauty of the mountains at the end of the story. He has served his term but has time and again remained in the Caucasian mountains, never returning to the steppe beyond Don which is his home, soul of the plain (*ravninnaja dusja*) as he is called in the story (194). This contrast between the plain and the mountains—one at home in Russia, the other away from home in the Caucasus—is to be found also among others in Lermontov.

Rubachin has consequently got stuck in the Caucasus—the mountains will not "let him go" (226). In this sense he is taken prisoner in the Caucasus. The story's title refers both to Rubachin and to the Caucasian that he takes prisoner on his way through the Caucasus to complete the task that he has been given, together with Vovka the rifleman. The Caucasian prisoner is a boy at the age of 16-17, with long, black curls, just like Lermontov's Caucasian prisoner, Bela. He resembles Bela also by being remarkably beautiful. This beauty agitates Rubachin at least as much as that of the mountains. The beauty of the mountains and the prisoner can be seen to interact.

A feature of Rubachin's story that has given rise to some protests among Russian reviewers is the homosexual aspect of his interest in the prisoner. In a tragic scene Rubachin kills the prisoner during an unforeseen meeting with Caucasian guerrilla. The death scene is also an act of sexual intercourse—the Caucasian boy shivers as a woman before intercourse; Rubachin suffocates the boy with his arm that also embraces him. (220, 221) In this way their relationship ends, a relationship which, in addition to being characterised by diffuse desire, is also marked by Rubachin's care and empathy—the encounter with beauty in the boy's figure has aroused new and previously unknown feelings in him.

There are also explicit discussions as to who is the actual prisoner. The two soldiers first arrive at a military unit led by Lieutenant Colonel Gurov, who is "almighty" in this beautiful place (196). Two lorries with soldiers have been ambushed by the guerrilla, and the two soldiers have been dispatched to get help. Gurov refuses to send his soldiers. This is why Rubachin takes a prisoner, to exchange him for free passage.

³⁷ Vladimir Makanin, "Kavkazskij plennyj", *Antologija sovremennogo rasskaza*, Moskva 2002, p. 194

Lieutenant Colonel Gurov is sitting on his porch in "endless conversation" with this old friend, the Caucasian Alibekov (197). They are bargaining, trading weapons for supplies. But they also digress, venturing into philosophical discussions, some of which concern the prisoner theme. Gurov urges Alibekov to lower his demands—he is, after all, a prisoner: "You are in my place." Alibekov answers: "—Why in your place? /- - -/ You are joking, Petrovich. What kind of a prisoner am I? You're the prisoner! —He points, laughing, at Rubachin, who assiduously pushes the wheelbarrow: —He is a prisoner. You are a prisoner. On the whole, each and every one of your soldiers is a prisoner!" (199)

* * *

Something that put its stamp on Russian life in the 1990s was the abrupt transition caused by Russia's change of system and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a transition that made people speak in terms of the "old" and the "new" era, clearly separated, a transition that also brought demands on people to change. This transitional situation can be regarded as Makanin's main theme during the 1990s.

The prisoner theme in itself, in terms of being stuck, unable to move on, fits perfectly into the writer's treatment of this overarching theme of the 90s. There are a number of expressions in the story that denote someone being stuck. Gurov and Alibekov are stuck in their "endless conversation". The mountains will not let go of Rubachin; he is stuck in the Caucasus. Not to speak of the Caucasian boy who is stuck in Rubachin's mortal embrace. At the moment of death the boy's eyes try to bypass Rubachin's eyes to catch sight of his own people, the Caucasian guerrilla fighters who are approaching. The two lorries have been ambushed at a "tight spot." (222) Such tight spots recur in several of Makanin's works as metaphors describing the transition between the Soviet and post-Soviet era, or between different times generally; to pass through this place may entail change or even regeneration. The lorries cannot pass through; bypassing the spot is as impossible as it is for the boy to bypass Rubachin. Thus the story's structure is a network of parallels—in the manner of allegory.

The two soldiers return to the lorries at the end of the story, without a prisoner and without succeeding to get help; consequently, nothing has changed, despite the dramatic events that have occurred. A number of expressions indicating immutability and immobility can be found in the story. When it comes to the lorries, they are stuck and are emphatically immobile in the same position (222-226). They can be seen as an embodiment of Russia's situation in the Caucasus, that is of Russia being prisoner there.

There is one episode in the story where the issues of change and the absence of change are explicitly addressed: it is a part of the conversation between Colonel Gurov and Alibekov together with a passage that hovers between omniscient narration and Free Indirect Speech, coloured by Gurov's perspective (203, 204). It is stated in this episode that neither the times nor people change. At the same time, the expression "times past" is used to describe the Soviet era, and the expression "present times" to designate the post-Soviet present—this is the sharp distinction that the abrupt change has occasioned. Gurov is a man of the past, and he misses the days gone by. But he adapts to the present— "life has changed on its own accord, to include all kinds of bargaining"; it is, consequently, not his responsibility. In the past he was able to acquire whatever the unit needed. "[S]ometimes he bribed the proper person with a handsome pistol, with his name engraved on it (he said that it might come in handy: the East

is the East! He could never have imagined that these playful words would one day come true)." (204) Gurov's jesting words of wisdom about the immutability of the East consequently come true when the times change. It is not surprising that one Russian critic has called Makanin a man of paradoxes.

"The East is the East", Gurov says, jokingly. In another part of the conversation between them Alibekov says: "Europe is always Europé." (200) He has just explained to Gurov that the wise old men in the Caucasian villages are against the war with the Russians and think that they ought to join forces against Europe instead— "The old men say that then there will immediately be peace. And life will become what it ought to be." (200) This may seem somewhat confusing, but the meaning is apparently that Russia is also an Eastern country, having more in common with the Caucasus than with "Europe." This interpretation corresponds with expressions indicating affinity that occur frequently in the story. We can see in this the traditional theme of Russia as a country both of the East and the West. However, the theme of affinity is not universally prevailing. We may recall that Gurov's words, "the East is the East," imply that the East is the Other, against whom it is necessary to be armed; or we may recall the death scene where the Caucasian prisoner tries to reach his own people, bypassing his murderer. The story paints an ambiguous picture.

I cited above the closing lines of the story: "The mountains. The mountains. For how many years had his heart been agitated by their magnificence, their quiet solemnity—but what did this beauty want to tell him? Why did it call out to him?" (226) Just before this passage Rubachin is annoyed by his own attachment to the mountains. He wants to exclaim: "for how many years! But instead, he said: 'For how many centuries!..' — as if by a slip of the tongue, the words jumped out of a shadow, and the soldier, taken by surprise, pursued this quiet thought that had lain dormant in the depth of his consciousness." (226)

Rubachin's name is one aspect that makes him represent the Russian people in the manner of allegory, that is the decent, down-to-earth and responsible part of the people. The name alludes to the expression *rubacha-paren'*, as several critics have noted. And Vovka the rifleman calls him Rubacha. In the last passage of the story he is thus described to have a memory that extends his individual consciousness, a memory that comes out of the shadow and surprises him. Besides immutability the story also deals with fickleness and forgetfulness, not as opposites but as interacting phenomena. For example, Rubachin's memory of the Caucasian boy is dissolved in a dream of his (225).

In one of Makanin's earlier works, with the theme of escape from the past, one of the characters claims that we humans make an effort to forget the past, hoping that the past forget us. But the past does not forget us.³⁸ This is why the playful "The East is the East" overtakes Gurov. Perhaps the short story tells us that the past that is denied has overtaken today's Russia in the Caucasus, and that escape from the past prevents change. Susceptibility to beauty and its transforming power is, if my reading of the story is correct, also connected to memory.

Translation Anna Uddén

³⁸ Vladimir Makanin, "Grazdanin ubegajuscij", *Izbrannoe*, Moskva 1987, p. 21