

MODALITIES OF THE LONG TAKE IN THE ERA OF LATE SOCIALISM:
MIKLÓS JANCÓS, SERGEI PARAJANOV, ANDREI TARKOVSKY
(1956 – 1986)

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Abstract

In the years between 1935 and 1975, a tangible transformation takes place in certain films of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. What was once the nationally-venerated cinema of rapid-fire montage under directors such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov becomes the slow, single-take study of individuals and their environments. At the same time, a parallel progression of the history of the Soviet Union and the countries comprising the Eastern Bloc occurs. With the death of Lenin comes the waning hopes of world-wide revolution, the rise of Stalinism and its monumental betrayal of the Soviet People, and social and economic woes as the Soviet Union attempts and fails to integrate itself into a capitalist world system under Brezhnev. The overtly-didactic essence of montage cinema, then, makes way for its obverse: narrative and political ambiguity introduced by the long take, and viewers who must fend for themselves.

This dissertation examines three filmmakers whose employment of the long take – the realist aesthetic par excellence – both assists and complicates our understanding of the rich historical contexts from which they emerge. This comparative analysis of the work of Miklós Jancsó, Andrei Tarkovsky, and Sergei Parajanov situates the long take at its core and will reveal the multiple ways the device as trope is used to articulate the emerging, post-Stalinist subject, the ambiguous space of criticism, and the illusion of revolution as the antidote to the horrors of Stalinism.

Acknowledgements

The cutting room floor of this dissertation will attest to my countless attempts to tuck away writing in spaces off limits. Footnotes lasted pages, parentheticals cupped paragraphs, and brackets squared the edges of clauses too unruly for curved hems. These spaces were the benign margins, where words stomped clumsy but carefree. Now, these words are strewn around the feet of this desk, and so I begin to collect them and find in them again their sense of independence. How apt that they, and all those I wish to thank, settle here, where the pages are unmarked and unnumbered, save for lower-case “x’s,” “v’s,” and “i’s.”

When I arrived at Stanford, I intended to focus primarily on the art of the Russian and Soviet *avant-garde*, and this I did for a time, until my eye began to wander when film passed through the frame. Film was there when I first served as teaching assistant for Scott Bukatman’s *Cinematic Spectacle* course. It was there when Scott spoke about the camera, exhibited it untethered and free, tracking, panning, zooming. It was there when, after having attended my first film class, I was fortuitously seated between Ben Katchor and now *Professor* Bukatman who, upon hearing my undeniable interest in the medium asked in tandem, “*Why not* study film?” My thanks begin, then, with Scott for introducing me to film and an academic enthusiasm and camaraderie I didn’t know existed (or hadn’t remembered since my undergraduate courses with Darcy Grigsby). I

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I thank Bryan Wolf, whose presence in the Department of Art & Art History made Stanford a dimensional place. I took but one graduate seminar with him, the topic: Eakins and Vermeer. We spent days pulling every imaginable detail from the former's *Perspective of a Lathe* and the latter's *Woman Holding a Balance*. I treasured the steady analysis of every work of art, and I felt so at home near a carousel occupied by a light handful of slides. Bryan's patience and intellectual generosity continues to inspire confidence and possibility, and his kindness in this realm of increasingly costly ivory towers is unparalleled. I offer him my gratitude for all this, and for joining my committee. I leave the life of a graduate student with memories of Bryan to my left, just happy to be present at yet another dissertation defense. Thank you, Professor Wolf.

Part way through my studies, I heard news of a young Tarkovsky scholar who would be giving a job talk at Stanford. I attended the talk, of course, hoping afterwards the university would hire this inventive and original candidate. As luck would have it, he was appointed, and within months Nariman Skakov and I were throwing ideas through the Quad's arcades. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Professor Skakov who, perhaps having felt sorry for me for taking on Tarkovsky, spent considerable time walking through my material and making it, and me, bolder. I thank Nariman for his support, not only where his work intersected with mine, but also where our interests diverged.

Nariman is a gifted and imaginative thinker, and I am grateful for his pursuit to encourage the same.

I have been a student a long time, and over the course of countless years in lectures and seminars, never have I been as inspired as when I am listening to or engaging with my advisor, Professor Pavle Levi. It was in Pavle's *Politics and Aesthetics in East European Cinema* class where an opening sequence – a long take of soldiers on horseback, racing in impossibly slow motion towards the camera – changed the course of everything. This was the first I had seen of Miklós Jancsó's work, and I knew it would not be the last. With Pavle's guidance, I shifted my focus to this extraordinary filmmaker as well as two others of equal originality. I have so many fond memories of Pavle, from the historic *Surrealism and the Cinematic Imagination* seminar to the informal screenings of films in Annenberg Auditorium. Pavle is an interlocutor, a gifted teacher, a respected colleague. He has a way of making those around him materialize their potential. He is a kind and generous friend. If I feel any nostalgia as I write these words, it is for the loss of the immediate privilege of working closely with the most brilliant mind I have known. I thank Pavle for his patience regarding my impossibly long road to the PhD. I would have never made it, were it not for his guidance and support.

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My thanks also go to Professor Michael Marrinan. As I write this, I smile, remembering all the joyous moments teaching for his *Introduction to the Visual Arts*. Michael showed me what it was to lecture clearly, grade judiciously (and on graph paper shipped from Paris), and laugh heartily in the lobby of Cummings. His assembly of Miele goods and collection of *October* periodicals were points of genuine amusement. I am happy to know he will no longer need to import stationery and Ariel, and I wish him a life of mirth in the city of lights. I would like to thank Jody Maxmin as well, whose teaching and mentoring I have long admired. There are few at Stanford who invest as much in education as Jody does. Her dedication leads students to great things.

There is also work executed in the classroom when no one is there, and this work is done by the countless and unnamed personnel who clean this university, who groom its fields, and dust its shelves. I thank them for their hard work.

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Having worked at a supermarket earning minimum wage for a total of six years, I am keenly aware of what this degree brings as well as where it brings me from. I am, therefore, encouraged to know this university continues its efforts to make education affordable. I can only hope that one day, it will be free.

While researching abroad, I frequented the Russian State Archives for Literature and Art, and so would like to thank the archivists for their tireless work retrieving weighty dossiers. I would also like to thank Evgenii Tsybal for his kindness and hospitality.

As a graduate student at Stanford, I found myself huddled around seminar tables, slumped over library chairs, and engaged in vigorous intellectual play with a number of colleagues and friends. To Soyoung Yoon, comrade, the Marie I to my Marie II, I will not soon forget our hours-long conversations about all things, our agonizing over *Red Desert*, our fawning over *Nadja*. Oh, how our minds exploded in Art 103. We are happy never to be the same. To Kenneth White, artist, constructor, and film historian; to Nora Niedzielski-Eichner, feminist, hero; to Dan Hackbarth night-puncher, tenor; to Alex Fialho, my dear colleague; to Jill Davis, Philippe Buc, Igor Gorievich: thank you. To Gwen Allen and Gail Dawson, thank you for giving me the opportunity to teach your students at SFSU. To Erik Bach Nielsen, thank you for getting me started on Russian. To Susan Delaney for bringing art history into the picture; to the American Psychoanalytic Association and my fellow cohort: thank you, thank you.

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This dissertation and this degree are dedicated to my father who passed away before I reached graduation. He was the light of my life, a storyteller who gave to me a love of narrative. He worked hard at an unforgiving job, and paid for my education with long hours on construction sites. If there is one thing he taught me, it was to value education, something he never had. It is for him that I kept on, that I wrote and read when I could write and read no more. It is for him that I didn't bemoan my lot, challenging as it was, because this lot doesn't blare with trucks and cranes and dust and grime. This lot is serene and privileged. It opens doors to prepared rooms, hiding the history of its labor.

In my father's memory, I will continue to teach, and I will seek to abolish the doors keeping education out of reach for those who can't afford it.

The road to the PhD is unpredictable and long. When you set off, people come waving flags and sending well wishes for a nice trip, yet by the time you turn the first corner, you no longer see them and they no longer see you. They may send letters now and again, asking why you are still out there. They are happy to hear a few details of your odyssey, which is all you can give since you don't know where you're going. In short, the trek is a solitary and sometimes terribly lonely one. With all the difficulties I have experienced along the way, one figure was consistently by my side, refusing to leave: my loving husband. He carried my books when I was weary, and at times he carried even me. He took a great leap, of faith and everything else, then set me down just before the finish line so I could cross on my own. The most beautiful sight I have seen these last years was not the handwriting of some historical figure tucked away in an archival box, but rather my partner smiling proudly, beckoning me to the other side. I'm finally coming home.

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Introduction

From the Movement Image to the Time Image: the Phenomenon of the Long Take

“We must not accept historical events, but rather understand them.”

Miklós Jancsó

“I’m an Eastern European director, and my whole life – unfortunately – has been filled with politics; it is a tradition that, good or bad, you must deal with politics, especially for my generation, educated under Stalinism.”¹

Márta Mészáros

The first films Gilles Deleuze mentions in his *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (1985) consist of a trilogy by Rossellini: *Europe '51* (1952), *Stromboli* (1950), and *Germany Year Zero* (1948), listed in this exact order. These films, Deleuze notes, mark the advent of the “time image,” where time is no longer “subordinated to movement, but rather movement to time.”² These early films of the immediate post-war era feature deserted warehouses, swaths of demolished cities, and figures who – not knowing how to “react to...spaces which [they] no longer know how to describe,”³ see rather than act. They look; they ponder; they brood; and this they do in the space war left behind. This space is captured by an equally observant camera, and a mode of filmmaking which begins to foreground fragmentation and discontinuity. The result is a sense of multiple tracks of

¹ Márta Mészáros, quoted in *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffeehouse to Multiplex* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 114.

² Gilles Deleuze. *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. Trans., Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), xi.

³ Ibid.

time, the sense of a loss of complete control. Narrative, that pikestaff, that heavy, demarcated crease along which action is ordered, is split open wide. Movement falls in and we are left with time. Tarkovsky scholar Nariman Skakov explains the difference between the movement and the time image thus: “Movement-image is a bearer of narrative, and comprises a linear progression of spaces and characters organized by means of montage. Time-image, in contrast, presents an abstract situation with loose narrative ends.”⁴ These loose narrative ends are the markers of an open text,⁵ one presenting a broad field of multiple meanings made possible not by the organizational properties montage brings, but rather the ambiguity the long take affords.⁶

The long take as a phenomenon consistent in but not entirely exclusive to post-war cinema, is a formal device increasingly featured in a number of filmmakers’ work, beginning with the Italian Neo-Realists and advancing in greater degree towards and into the 1960s, where the French New Wave also emerges. The iconic traffic scene in Godard’s *Weekend* (1967), the lengthy sequence shots coupled with fluid camerawork in

⁴ Nariman Skakov. *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* (London: I.B. Tauris), 4.

⁵ The term “open text” or “open work” is here taken from Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*. Anna Cancogni, Trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 83-104.

⁶ Bazin often argued against montage and its effects, championing instead the spatial unity unedited scenes and staging in depth provide. In “The Virtues and Limitations of Montage,” he concludes that realism “resides in the homogeneity of space,” and that montage, at times, is not the essence but rather the negation of cinema. It dismantles space and does not permit action to unfold unmolested. See André Bazin’s “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema.” *What is Cinema*, vol. 1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 37, fn. 50. The question of the ambiguity the *plan sequence* permits *vis-a-vis* montage (or a cued means of perception) is initially posed by André Bazin and will be discussed later in this introduction as well as the ensuing pages of this dissertation.

Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964) or *L'Eclisse* (1962), the latter's inimitable final take in *The Passenger* (1975), and the countless uncut sequences in Visconti's *The Leopard* (1963) are just a few examples. Additional modeling of the long take exists in the work of Warhol who famously experimented with the device, providing hours-long observation pieces in which not a single cut is made. Films such as *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964) present a "seemingly literal relationship to time – of extended duration,"⁷ yet to a viewer within the realm of the gallery, an altogether different space and history than that of "conventional" narrative cinema.

There are countless auteurs whose use of the long take figures prominently during this post-war period, yet for the purposes of this dissertation, I limit my focus on the device as it appears in the Eastern Bloc during the era of Late Socialism. While the long take and film form are points of intersection, the historical context is the most critical common ground for the three filmmakers my project addresses: Miklós Jancsó, Sergei Parajanov, and Andrei Tarkovsky. These filmmakers are in no way isolated cases whose work features the *plan sequence*. They have themselves made note of their formal contemporaries and influences, a number of whom have been named above.

Hungarian director Miklós Jancsó directly cites Antonioni as a major influence in his work, claiming to have studied the latter's films in great detail. In an interview on the topic, he states, "When we (with Harnádi)⁸ began working together in analyzing the films

⁷ Pam Lee. *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 279.

⁸ Hungarian writer and scriptwriter who worked extensively with Jancsó on the latter's screenplays, beginning in the early 1960s.

of Antonioni, we included both the technique of the filmmaker, his sense of composition, and pace of his thought.”⁹ Regarding this formal intersection, Jancsó scholar András Bálint Kovács continues,

He [Jancsó] chose Antonioni as his model, whose style seemed to be best suited to represent people whose relationship to one another and to their environment is essentially broken. Antonioni’s characters wandering aimlessly in an environment in which they have no contacts created a feeling of emptiness that was one of the main novelties of modern cinema at the time. The main motivation for Antonioni’s characters was a search for the lost contact with their environment, which is why there is always an illusion of a linear plot development, but in fact, the stories always lead to nothing. Jancsó radicalized Antonioni’s style.¹⁰

And in Yvette Biró’s book-length study on Jancsó, the question of outside influence again arises. Here, Ingmar Bergman and the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha (whose highly political works *Black God, White Devil*, 1964 and *Entranced Earth*, 1967 were screened to great acclaim at Cannes in their respective production years) are named.¹¹

In his book *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffeehouse to Multiplex*, John Cunningham notes,

The Hungarian New Wave was hardly an isolated phenomenon: many filmmakers throughout Europe – in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia and Britain – were influenced by the work of Godard, Truffaut and others in France. Truffaut’s groundbreaking *Les*

⁹ Miklós Jancsó quoted in Yvette Biró, *Jancsó* (Paris: Albatros, 1977), 31. Translation mine. Gyula Hernádi, a prolific writer in the realm of both narrative fiction and cinema, worked closely with Jancsó on the greater part of the director’s *oeuvre*, collaborating consistently with him since *My Way Home* (1964).

¹⁰ See András Bálint Kovács, “Szegénylegények/The Round Up: Miklós Jancsó, Hungary, 1956.” *The Cinema of Central Europe*. Peter Hames, Ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 113.

¹¹ Yvette Biró, *Jancsó* (Paris: Albatros, 1977), 32.

Quatre Cents Coups was released in Hungary in 1960, as was Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour*. . . Hungarian film-makers, both established and aspiring, were eager to see the latest releases from Paris and elsewhere, and with the more relaxed and open policy at the Film Academy it was now possible for students to see most of the important new foreign films, including those not on general release. . . To see the Hungarian New Wave as a primarily French-influenced phenomenon would be one-sided; developments in the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia were also important.¹²

The Khrushchev Thaw permitted filmmaker and acting artistic director of Mosfilm Mikhail Romm to bring new and international films to Moscow, as Cunningham notes, to “encourage new directors such as Andrei Tarkovsky to develop their ideas and skills and, given the close links with the Soviet Union, this was bound to have an effect in Hungary.”¹³

This explains, then, Tarkovsky's own exposure to and interests in the likes of Bergman and Antonioni, both of whom find frequent mention in his writings. In a diary entry from 07 January 1974, Tarkovsky writes, “Someone says there is an interview somewhere with Bergman, who considers me the best contemporary director, even better than Fellini (!) . . . I must find where it is, what paper and when,”¹⁴ and regarding Antonioni, “For some reason I keep thinking about Antonioni. When all is said and done, he is the best Italian director today.”¹⁵

¹² John Cunningham. *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffeehouse to Multiplex* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Andrei Tarkovsky: Time Within Time, The Diaries (1970-1986)*. Kitty Hunter-Blair, trans. (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 90.

¹⁵ Ibid., 289.

Parajanov, too, cites international influence in a 1988 interview staged with French filmmaker Patrick Cazals at the Rotterdam Film Festival of the same year. Here, Cazals inquires about Parajanov's predilection for including collections of various artifacts within his compositions, and his inclination to match those antiques with an authentic archaic character in his films. Parajanov remarks this may not have been a consequence of his father's profession as an antiques dealer but rather the result of contemporary influence, namely by way of Pasolini, among others. Parajanov notes, "I have been influenced by the films of Fellini and Pasolini. When you turn an old subject, the film must acquire a character, an old style...My love for antiques is not a hobby, it's an aesthetic conviction."¹⁶

As evidenced in the quotes outlined above, an international dialogue was underway between these filmmakers, despite their *perceived* isolation in the Soviet Union. New wave films were available, and their influence – including the long take – was within reach. For the three filmmakers who constitute the bulk of this dissertation's study, the *plan sequence* is a common formal trope, yet each use the device towards differing ends. Indeed, this is an unlikely group whose politics and use of the *plan sequence* differ, yet whose history is the same. Each of these three filmmakers was born within no more than ten years of each other (Tarkovsky: 1932; Jancsó: 1921; Parajanov: 1924), and while each began a practice of filmmaking within the Soviet Union in the early to mid 1950s, it was not until the 1960s — during the period of Late Socialism

¹⁶ See Sergeï Paradzhanov. *Paradjanov le Magnifique: Exposition du 13 février au 8 avril 2007* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2007), 203. Translation mine.

(1960s to 1980s) — that the long take emerged as a feature consistent in and emblematic of their work. Could one, then, not seek an explanation for this formal emergence within this shared historical context? How might these filmmakers' employment of the *plan sequence* respond to and evoke the context from whence it materializes? In my project, I attempt to approach these questions by considering Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956, the failed Hungarian Uprising of the same year, as well as the subsequent period of de-Stalinization. For Miklós Jancsó, for example, a former Stalinist who turns to filmmaking and the long take *in particular* in order to demonstrate how one is always a subject of ideology, there is a clear relationship between history and form. Here, Jancsó is unable to make a claim for an individual's perceived freedom *while simultaneously exposing that individual's subjection* without the un-manipulated appearance of film the long take affords. By allowing the camera to roll uninterrupted, Jancsó seems to suggest there is no difference between what appears onscreen and what occurs – in the camera's absence – offscreen. Jancsó's films express a desire to maintain political allegiance to Marxism despite its gross misinterpretation at the hands of the Stalinist regime. He ultimately adopts the "anti-humanist" strain of Marxist revisionism, denying revolution and liberation of the individual are the antidotes to Stalinism – a theory fashioned directly upon history itself. The failed Hungarian Uprising and Jancsó's witness of it is key in point. In a filmic method unique to Jancsó alone, the director first establishes patterns the camera is to follow – *before* finalizing any narrative, script, or screenplay – then choreographs all action around the tracks resting rigid and immutable on the ground. Jancsó's protagonists, then, are not independent entities but rather mere placeholders,

moving on cue as the camera passes by, thereby reiterating their inalterable roles in history. In essence, form appears preordained (the camera's tracks), yet it is determined by the content it must embody (character action).

The period of Khrushchev's Thaw (1956-1962), as well as the era of Stagnation under Brezhnev which followed (an epoch of economic and social stasis coupled with a return to Stalinist policies – 1964-1982) was, as outlined in my chapter on Parajanov, oftentimes difficult for artists and filmmakers to navigate due to the freeze or thaw and ultimately circular nature of Party rhetoric. Parajanov, here, employs the long take, but does not permit his camera to move seemingly freely throughout a fluid visual field, in the manner of Jancsó. Instead, this Russian-Armenian filmmaker increasingly fashions tableau compositions where, while the camera rolls without the interruption of montage, the frame itself becomes a marker of limitation and the place within which editing often occurs. As with Parajanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964) and – with greater intensity – *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969), a major work from the poetic of Soviet Cinema, the director resists traditional cinematic structures (a clear linear narrative), which propel the films forward. Instead, countless *associations* – whether they be by way of color, shape, or graphic match – are the devices which drive the film. A process of signification remains, yet one which rests on the laurels of what came before. Parajanov's work, I argue, is firmly embedded in an epoch of narrative circularity where the function of his formal devices is not to refer to new knowledge or even new

knowledge production but rather to “mediate preexisting knowledge,”¹⁷ thus becoming pure reference. The question of narrative circularity, as well as the duplicated and performative nature of Party discourse in the Brezhnev era are key here. The act or the *form* is what pushes the Party forward, not the validity or authenticity of its content.

Parajanov’s later work appears to respond directly to this circularity. As the Party further entrenches itself in the strictly performative reproduction of its discourse, so too does Parajanov further entrench his work in the increasingly empty center from whence that rhetoric emerges.

My work on Andrei Tarkovsky attempts, as well, to contextualize and historicize his films, linking his formal devices to the history which produces it. Tarkovsky’s work is the most varied of the three, posing tremendous challenges to the viewer. Dream imagery figures large, as does temporal disambiguation. While Jancsó’s politics are clear, Tarkovsky’s are not. The former filmmaker hits politics head on while the work by the latter seems to quietly reflect or be a symptom of its political context. The former aligns the practice of filmmaking with historical materialism; the latter seeks transcendence by way of matter, or transcendental materialism. In contradistinction to Jancsó, Tarkovsky’s camera’s inexorable examination of objects, landscapes, and people distorts the dimension of time beyond what is reasonable for any visual or narrative understanding. If Jancsó’s focus on matter always provides the same, preordained, expected result, Tarkovsky’s focus on the same seems to call the reliability and readability of matter into

¹⁷ Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75.

question. Rather than couple lucid narrative significance with the cinematic realism Tarkovsky's lens promises, the camera continues to roll unceasingly, replacing realism with ambiguity. Indeed, in the wake of the Stalinist purges, in the aftermath of de-Stalinization, the brief period of the Thaw followed by a return to more restricted and restrictive policies, Tarkovsky's long take – the realist aesthetic *par excellence* as defined by André Bazin – persists and returns to cinema: “a sense of the ambiguity of reality,”¹⁸ which, as Yvette Biró notes, particularly prevalent during these post-war years.

In an essay titled “Pathos and Irony in East European Films,” Biró claims the historical context from which filmmakers such as Jancsó emerged was an ambiguous one, in turn leading him and other artists to compose ambiguous works.¹⁹ The “political and cultural murkiness” of Eastern Europe from the 1950s through the 1970s, Biró notes, is marked by films which “suggest all motives are equivocal: that oppressors and victims may be indistinguishable from each other and may change positions with ease.”²⁰

With this study of the long take, a consistent evocation or disavowal of offscreen space (evocation pertaining to Tarkovsky and Jancsó; disavowal to Parajanov) rises to the fore. For Tarkovsky, offscreen space is suggested by way of sound which, at times, is

¹⁸ André Bazin. “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema.” *What is Cinema*, vol. 1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 37.

¹⁹ Yvette Biró, “Pathos and Irony in East European Films.” *Politics, Art, and Commitment in East European Cinema*. David W. Paul, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 34.

²⁰ Ibid., 34. Biró notes Jancsó's *The Red and the White* and *Silence and Cry*, Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* (Poland, 1958), Jan Němec's *Diamonds of the Night* (Czechoslovakia, 1964), as well as Krsto Papić's *Handcuffs* (Yugoslavia, 1969) as examples.

entirely asynchronous to the unfolding action onscreen. This sound is often provoked by memory – an immaterial phenomenon subject to triggers such as a graphic match, yet for the viewer, these triggers may be wholly unrelated, polysemous markers, like memory itself. In a study of sound in Tarkovsky, Andrea Truppin writes, “the use of ambiguous sound plunges the audience into a never fully resolved struggle to believe in the diegesis, much as [the characters in Tarkovsky’s films] struggle with their own ability to have faith”²¹ – whether this be the faith of Rublëv, the old fool Dominico who immolates himself at the end of *Nostalghia*, or Alexander in *Sacrifice* who prays to God, offering his most precious possession – the *dacha* – in exchange for the deferral of war. While Tarkovsky’s offscreen sound rarely tends to visually materialize, Jancsó rarely provides an offscreen sound which does not eventually make its way into the frame. My turn to the aural appearance of *La Marseillaise* in Tarkovksy’s *Stalker* and Jancsó’s *Red Psalm* is a comparison in point. Here, by way of the long take (which permits *La Marseillaise* to run its course), and the evocation of offscreen space, I argue that Tarkovsky’s conceptualization of on- and offscreen space is – not unlike Jancsó’s – interrelated. Both are, in the words of Jacques Aumont, homogenous, reversible, “equally important for defining film space.”²²

Yet where the homogeneity of Jancsó’s on- and offscreen space purposefully moves from the imaginary to the actualized, consistently materializing matter, Tarkovsky

²¹ Andrea Truppin. “And Then There Was Sound: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky,” in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (London: 1992), 235.

²² Jacques Aumont, “Film as Audio Visual Representation” in *Aesthetics of Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 14-15.

perpetually shirks a strictly materialist approach. Instead, his offscreen use of sound perpetuates and underscores not only the immaterial nature of the framed image, but of matter itself, thus evoking his transcendental materialist approach to film, where matter is simply a byway to the spiritual.

In contrast, Parajanov's work – at times with *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, almost entirely with *The Color of Pomegranates*, does little to refer to or make use of offscreen space. His tableau compositions, coupled with the camera's stationary, centrally-positioned perspective of the unfolding action within the frame, reinforce the frame itself and thus the fixed nature of it. These constructions are staged as though within a theater setting, not a fluid world within which figures and objects flow seamlessly across a temporary border. In the tavern scene from *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* described in Chapter Two, isolated tableaux are offered. With each staging, Parajanov dismantles space with fixed cells of activity, suggesting to the viewer that little if anything exists beyond them. Then, with two uninterrupted long takes back to back, Parajanov merges the fixed cells into one continuous frame, thus undermining the viewer's initial belief that no additional or continuous space existed. It is only by way of turning the camera 360 degrees, then unwinding that rotation – a perfect circle in either direction – that the viewer is made aware of the unified space that was always there, as well as how Parajanov fractured it.

For Parajanov, the filmic image is one which takes place in the realm of fiction, albeit one which summons fault with its surrounding reality. For Tarkovsky, as we shall see, the primacy of the visual image is grounded upon a blurring of reality and fiction.

For both, the long take serves as the fictional attempt to represent reality in a Late-Socialist context.

The Long Take vis-à-vis Montage: the Pursuit of Realism

Methodologically, this dissertation draws on André Bazin's writings on cinematic realism in an effort to add further complexity to the realist aesthetics usually attributed to Bazin. In "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism," Bazin – cinema's greatest proponent of the long-take, deep focus, and staging in depth – aligns Eisenstein's *Potemkin* with Rossellini's *Paisa*, the former a feat of Soviet montage, the latter an exemplar of Italian Neorealism and the burgeoning *plan sequence* aesthetic. In the history of film theory, the long take vis-à-vis montage has long been the crux upon which the realist versus formalist debate has been staged.²³ It is of great note, then, that Bazin would draw a comparison between two theoretically-opposed films on the basis of their parallel "search for realism,"²⁴ yet it becomes clear the author wishes to establish a realist lineage beginning with the Soviet avant-garde in order to connect cinematic realism to aesthetic

²³ The earliest filmmakers of the debate can be found in Siegfried Kracauer's "Basic Concepts" from his *Theory of Film* published in 1960. Kracauer outlines two main tendencies in filmmaking: the realist tendency which focuses on the basic properties of the medium (the simple photographic recordation of "physical reality" and *movement*) and the formative tendency which foregrounds the technical properties of cinema, namely editing. Kracauer defines Lumière as a realist, a director who imagines film as little more than a "scientific curiosity." Lumière is a practitioner of the event or "actualities." Méliès with his trick films and sleight-of-hand editing, conversely, is clearly of the formative camp. See Kracauer, "Basic Concepts" in *Film Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). 143-153.

²⁴ André Bazin, "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism." *What is Cinema*, vol. 2. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 16.

and political revolution (the humanist, anti-Fascist thrust of Italian Neorealism, then, comes to the fore).

The seminal aesthetic shift from montage to the long take in this lineage, Bazin argues, is emblemized in the work of Orson Welles whose films reveal a consistent employment of deep focus, staging in depth, and the long take. Montage does not disappear; rather, it is subsumed by the *mise-en-scene* and *performed* by the viewer. Editing, then, no longer provides a cued means of perception but rather activates the spectator, compelling him to independently discern the locus of dramatic significance.²⁵ Rather than presenting the viewer with an explicit plane of signification via montage, a realist aesthetic allows the cinema to become more open, equivocal. Realism does not simply provide access to the real, it allows cinema to become the real. Cinema ceases to function as an illusion of objective representation. A more critical engagement with the cultural/political/social *status quo* ensues.

It is against Sergei Eisenstein's early theories of montage that Bazin posits his own theories of an ambiguity arising in the absence of editing. According to Eisenstein, montage foregrounds a *collision* which not only generates meaning but is also the only means by which to communicate or impart an ideological conclusion. Communication of ideas occurs at the level of affect. In "Montage of Attractions" of 1923 and "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" of 1929, Eisenstein addresses the psychology of the viewer

²⁵ Analytical montage, Bazin would argue, "only calls for [the viewer] to follow [the director's] guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see." See André Bazin "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema." *What is Cinema* vol. 1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 36.

which is manipulated via a series of dramatic attacks or shocks, what Eisenstein deems “attractions.”²⁶ These shocks and their resulting physiological affect, according to Eisenstein, are the only means by which the final ideological conclusions of a film or theatre piece are perceptible. The significance of the scene concretizes within the mind of the spectator.

As early as the 1950s, Jean-Luc Godard – one of Bazin’s proteges – begins to posit a new way of theorizing the distinction between montage and the long take, ultimately eliminating this distinction altogether. Both in theory and in praxis, the filmmaker acts as historical precedent in conceptualizing montage as part of the *mise en scene* which, he argues, subsumes it. In “Montage my Fine Care” Godard writes, “Talking of *mise en scene* automatically implies montage,” concluding editing submits to the device of the long take and deep focus.²⁷ Godard’s understanding of the collapsed binary between the long take and montage aesthetic – the very interrelation between the two modes of cinematic expression – is key here.

Beginning with Bazin’s claim for an ambiguous reality unveiled by cinematic realism, Godard employs the long take as a means of generating tension between the denotative continuity the viewer expects the *plan sequence* to offer and the perpetual deferment of that continuity. At the same time, the ability of the viewer to independently determine the locus of dramatic significance within a single take is hindered by Godard’s

²⁶ Sergei Eisenstein. “Montage of Attractions.” *The Film Sense*. Trans. Jay Leyda. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1942), 230.

²⁷ Jean-Luc Godard. “Montage my Fine Care.” *Godard on Godard*. Ed. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne. (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 39-41.

refusal to maintain the integrity of the cinematic realism Bazin outlines. In other words, Godard puts to use the seminal device of realism, yet strips it bare of those characteristics (namely, staging in depth) lending to active deductive reasoning by the viewer. Godard constructs flattened compositions the viewer does not enter but rather “stands outside [of] and judges *as a whole*.”²⁸ The filmmaker’s revision of this realist device foregrounds the synthetic quality of the image, rendering an intense interrogation of cinematic representation. Godard’s critique of capitalism by way of cinema – an instrument of capital itself – takes place at the convergence of montage and the long take.

This dialectical relationship between montage and the long take becomes a point of substantial consideration in Gilles Deleuze’s two-volume study of time and movement in cinema. Like Bazin, Deleuze sees Italian Neorealism as a decisive moment in the history of film, and it is this Neorealist tendency which functions as the physical break between the latter’s *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Both theorists attribute tremendous significance to the films of Orson Welles, particularly the director’s use of staging in depth and the long take. It is here, Deleuze argues, that “montage tends to disappear in favour of the sequence shot,” *despite* its insistence on remaining “the essential cinematographic act. It [montage] simply changes its sense: instead of composing movement-images in such a way that an indirect image of time emerges from them, it decomposes the relations in a direct time-image in such a way that

²⁸ Brian Henderson. “Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style.” *Film Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 56.

all the possible movements emerge from it.” Time, he concludes, “ceases to be subordinate to movement.”²⁹

This real time of duration, provided by the long take, enables a new positioning of the spectator. Cinema, no longer subjected to the straightforward didacticism favored by Eisenstein and others, instead provides a critical perspective of an unbroken visual field, one which is impossible in the absence of cinematic duration. This endless establishment of continuity, narrative, and predigested meaning loses ground in the films of Miklós Jancsó, Sergei Paradjanov, and Andrei Tarkovsky. An increasing obliteration of narrative takes place, and what is offered is no longer the hope of worldwide revolution manifest in the potential of what Lenin called the most important art. Rather, a loaded return to the ontology of the photographic image takes place in the era of disillusionment with the promise of Stalinism, the promise of Socialism, and the years of stagnation that follow. These filmmakers were not musing on revolution or change as it happened elsewhere; they were directly engaging with their histories – in some cases, more clearly and more politically motivated than others.

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 142-143.

Chapter One

Miklós Jancsó

From WWII to the Failed Uprising: Situating the Hungarian New Wave

In September 1944, during the height of WWII, Soviet troops crossed Hungary's border and remained in the country for nearly forty-five years. Their siege of Budapest – spanning from 25 December 1944 to 12 February 1945 – coupled with land and airstrikes by the Germans to slow the advance of Soviet troops throughout the country, left Hungary in remarkable disarray.³⁰ At that time, the entire country “turned into a battlefield between German and Soviet forces.”³¹ Germany had occupied Hungary only months earlier during March of 1944 after Hitler learned Admiral Miklós Horthy, acting regent of the Kingdom of Hungary, was negotiating a surrender to the Red Army. The surrender – as well as the initial armistice announced by Horthy in October 1944 – was for naught. The Nazis abducted the admiral, promoted the Arrow Cross Government in his stead, and the reign of terror began. Yet, despite the tight grip Germany had on

³⁰ The siege destroyed a number of film production facilities based in the capital, bringing an end to the brief surge in production during the first few years of the war. Historians attribute this surge to Hungary's expanded market due to the annexation of surrounding territories in the early years of WWII. It should be emphasized that on 25 December 1945, the Red Army took control of Hungary's largest film production studio – Hunnia Film Studio – just as the Arrow Cross Government was attempting to dismantle it entirely in an effort to move it west.

³¹ Deborah S. Cornelius. “From Arrow Cross Rule to Soviet Occupation.” *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 334.

Hungary, the country ultimately fell to the Soviets in February 1945.³² This would be the beginning of Hungary's transition to Communism.³³

Over the course of the next three years, a number of elections were held by the provisional government to determine the political future of the country – a future which was not difficult to predict, considering the presence of the Red Army and the backing of the Soviet administration. Hungary's declaration as a republic in February 1946 was followed by a second election in August of 1947 when the Communist Party gained the

³² Hungary's role leading up to and during WWII is indisputably complicated. Historians such as John Cunningham have noted, "sorting through Hungarian foreign policy in this period [1938-1945] is rather like working your way through a very complex maze and it is difficult to see any consistency or coherence." Initially, the country wished to regain territories lost at the end of WWI, and nationalists within Hungary believed these territories could be recouped with the help of Hitler. They also believed – somewhat impossibly – that the mission could be accomplished without aiding Nazi Germany in anything other than minor military ventures and occupations. By 1939, Hungary withdrew from the League of Nations and joined the Anti-Comintern Pact, effectively ending its "neutral" status. State censorship – particularly of Jewish writers – rose, and the series of Anti-Jewish Laws (Law IV in 1939, Law XV in 1941) were passed institutionalizing increasingly dire treatment of Hungary's Jewish population. In 1942, a fourth law was passed depriving Jews of their property and "personhood," ultimately paving the way for labor camps and, in countless cases, extermination. As expected, films appealing to Hungary's increasing nationalism and anti-semitism were produced during this period. Viktor Bánky's two films *Dr. István Kovács* (1942) and *Changing the Guard* (1942) are prime examples. For more details, see "The 1930s and the Second World War" in *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffee House to Multiplex*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2004). Quotations here are from pages 52-53.

³³ Although numbers differ, the total population loss of Hungary during WWII is estimated to be approximately ten percent (approximately one million from a population of ten million). For more on Hungary's role during the Second World War, see Deborah S. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

largest (but not majority) percentage of the vote.³⁴ Recognizing a majority would be difficult to reach in an expedient manner, the Communist Party forged an alliance with the Social Democrats in June of 1948, rebranding itself as the Hungarian Workers' Party. That same year, Hungary became a satellite state of the Soviet Union. As a consequence, its politics and governance were fashioned according to the USSR model.

Collectivization of agriculture and nationalization of all aspects of industry – including film – began.³⁵

While the nationalization of Hungary's film industry resolved many of its financial problems by consistently allocating funds for long-term projects as well as specialized fields (such as documentary filmmaking), state control also demanded formal oversight. In turn, Hungary immediately adopted the Soviet Union's exclusively-endorsed form of filmmaking, Socialist Realism. Films were to depict "reality in its revolutionary development," just as Zhdanov outlined at the First All-Union Congress of

³⁴ At twenty-two percent of the vote, the Communist Party still failed to hold a majority. The vote was also claimed to have been rigged. For more on the establishment of the Communist regime in Hungary, including details on elections held between 1946 and 1948, see Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944-1948*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁵ The official nationalization of Hungary's film industry occurred on 21 May 1948.

Soviet Writers in Moscow, 1934.³⁶ Films with predictable narratives and worker-hero protagonists proliferated, and collaborations between Hungarian and Soviet directors were encouraged. Of these collaborations were two visits to Hungary by Soviet director Vsevolod Pudovkin (although his political rhetoric seemed to overshadow his technical advice), the first in 1950 and the second in 1951, and a Hungarian film festival held in Moscow in 1952.³⁷

³⁶ Zhdanov defined Socialist Realism thus, “Comrade Stalin has called our writers ‘engineers of human souls.’ What does this mean? What obligations does this title impose on us? First of all, it means that we must know life so as to depict it truthfully in our works of art – and not to depict it scholastically, lifelessly, or merely as ‘objective reality’; we must depict reality in its revolutionary development. In this respect, truth and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction must be combined with the task of the ideological transformation and education of the working people in the spirit of Socialism. This method of artistic literature and literary criticism is what we call socialist realism.” This realism was to depict a “revolutionary romanticism,” one which was to give a “glimpse of...tomorrow.” From Andrei Zhdanov’s speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. Reprinted in John E. Bowlt. *The Documents of 20th Century Art. Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. Ed. John E. Bowlt. (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 293.

³⁷ John Cunningham notes that during Pudovkin’s visit, he not only offered sage advice to Hungary’s filmmakers, he also towed the party line while doing so. He “interfered” on projects, firing directors and demanding scripts be rewritten. One can only infer the pressure on him as an ambassador for the Soviet government was remarkably high. Consequently, his performance would have been closely monitored. In a speech Pudovkin gave to the Hungarian Theatre and Film Art Council in August of 1951, he is noted to have claimed, “The Hungarian directors have to penetrate into the fields of film art in a way to make its message comprehensible to the greatest masses and in a way that is saturated with those ideas which are of decisive importance to the Hungarian people.” For more details, see John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffeehouse to Multiplex*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 216.

With the death of Stalin on 5 March 1953 came a period of relative artistic freedom and the beginning of a nearly thirty-year span marking late socialism.³⁸ Films in Hungary began to take a tangibly critical perspective of the country's involvement in the Second World War. Zoltán Várkonyi's *A Strange Mask of Identity* (1955) and Zoltán Fábri's *Merry-Go-Round* and *Professor Hannibal* (both from 1956) are prime examples.³⁹ Yet this brief period of freedom in Hungary, during which the state seemed unsure of its fate as a satellite country, was short-lived. On 25 February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev – first secretary of the Communist Party – gave a “secret speech” to the Twentieth Party Congress in which he denounced Stalin and condemned his abuses of power, including the punishment and execution of innocent citizens in the name of the State.⁴⁰ Word of the speech and emerging realization of the horrors of Stalinism spread throughout the Soviet

³⁸ The stage of “late socialism” began in the mid-1950s and ended in the mid-1980s before Mikhail Gorbachev (General Secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union from 1985-1991 and first president of the Soviet Union), *glasnost*, and, of course, *Perestroika*.

³⁹ The former film focuses on Communist resistance in Hungary during WWII; the latter, which takes place during the interwar years, follows the life of Latin teacher Bela Nyul who gains notoriety for writing a brilliant article on Hannibal, famed general of antiquity. He is praised for suggesting Hannibal's defeat came at the hands of the people by way of revolution. He is then immediately denounced for inciting revolution, is stoned by nationalist masses, and under duress verbally disavows his article. He accidentally falls to his death. Fábri's film, based on an earlier short story, was remarkably prescient. The Hungarian Uprising of 1956 began a mere five days after the film's release, and those who revolted were not honored as liberators of Hungary but rather denounced as counter-revolutionary fascists.

⁴⁰ Khrushchev's speech is often entitled “On the cult of personality and its consequences” (*О культуре личности и его последствиях – о kul'te lichnosti i ego posledstviach*). See Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, *The Crimes of the Stalin Era (a.k.a. The Dethronement of Stalin): Special Report to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: New Leader, 1962).

Union and its satellite states, and on 23 October of that same year, a nationwide revolt against Soviet-imposed policies broke out in Hungary.⁴¹ On 4 November 1956, after less than one month of the uprising and a near agreement by the Soviet Union to remove its forces from Hungary, the Politburo (the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) reversed its tactics and sent a considerable military presence to Budapest and other regions to extinguish the uprising. Six days later, after countless deaths, the revolt came to an end. Thousands of arrests, prolonged imprisonments, and – in nearly five-hundred cases – executions followed. Tanks and soldiers remained, insurgents were deemed counter-revolutionary fascists, and for the

⁴¹ A monumental shift to Stalin’s “socialism in one country” occurred at the time Stalin denounced Trotsky’s theory of the “permanent revolution.” No longer was worldwide revolution – the march towards an undefined future – the goal. Instead, a series of clear economic plans were implemented. Collectivization ensued, and impossibly ambitious targets for increased industrialization were set and ruthlessly enforced. In tandem with these new standards of production came the Great Purge, a three-year campaign (1936-1939) to rid the Communist Party of perceived traitors and dissenters. Thus began an era of surveillance, execution, and internment at countless labor camps of hundreds of thousands of individuals, both those working in official capacities as well as those whose everyday lives had little to do with the State. During this time, the Moscow Trials (or “show trials”) took place, in which accused traitors publicly confessed to crimes they did not commit. For further scholarship on Stalinism and life in 1930s Soviet Union, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). This text provides access to crucial – and translated – primary-source materials from the era in question. See also *Stalinism: The Essential Readings*. Ed. David L. Hoffmann. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003). This volume includes critical essays by twelve scholars of Stalinism, including Sheila Fitzpatrick and Stanford’s own historian, Amir Weiner.

next three years, an apparatus of surveillance and prosecution attempted to return the country and its inhabitants to a compliant state under the influence of the USSR.⁴²

By 1963, with a more lenient János Kádár as General Secretary, amnesty was granted to all remaining political prisoners and an era of limited freedom, including artistic – despite continued (albeit restricted) censorship and surveillance – was ushered in. Film studios were restructured, film journals published, and international co-productions permitted. The 1960s was the beginning of Hungary’s new wave of cinema when young filmmakers began to address the country’s recent history. During these years, the practice of filmmaking was met with a resurgence in film theory and criticism. The first publication of *Film World* debuted in 1958, and the critical *Film Culture* (*Filmkultúra*) – which had been out of publication during and immediately after the war years – returned to print in 1965. Both publications provided the space for critics and artists to engage in debate over the status and future of cinema in Hungary and elsewhere. This period also saw an increase in international co-productions between Hungary and other countries such as France, the US, and Egypt, to name a few. Only two film collaborations between Hungary and the Eastern Bloc were executed, likely due to Hungary’s more lenient regulation of artistic practice in relationship to its satellite counterparts. The first of these two Eastern Bloc co-productions was between Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1962, and the second – Miklós Jancsó’s *The Red and the White* –

⁴² For more details on the Hungarian uprising of 1956, see Paul Lendvai, *One Day That Shook the Communist World: The 1956 Hungarian Uprising and Its Legacy*. Trans. Ann Major. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), as well as William Lomax, *Hungary 1956* (London: Allen and Busby, 1976). In addition to historical analysis, these two books offer first-hand accounts of the events leading up to and during the uprising.

between Hungary and Soviet Russia in 1967.⁴³ Filmmakers began to address Hungary's recent history, including the uprising of 1956. This was the beginning of the new wave of Hungarian cinema, which arose in the context of late socialism. This new wave included the emergence of filmmaker Miklós Jancsó (born 1921), who quickly became one of the movement's foremost representatives.⁴⁴

Director of more than thirty feature films, Miklós Jancsó entered the realm of cinema by way of documentary filmmaking. At the age of twenty-nine, he graduated from Hungary's film academy, and by his mid-thirties had amassed considerable experience directing documentary newsreels in the service of the state. Yet after the immediate post-war era, the thrust and genre of his filmmaking shifted from state-endorsed documentary to feature-length fiction. In turn, Jancsó sought to forge a critical intersection between aesthetics and politics. Not only had he witnessed the failed Hungarian revolution, he was also one of many Stalinists disillusioned by the revelation and subsequent denunciation of the leader's crimes as outlined by Khrushchev in 1956. That same year, while maintaining allegiance to Marxism, Jancsó withdrew from the Communist Party.

⁴³ It should be noted that Jancsó's *The Red and the White* (despite its equal exposure of both Hungarian and Russian languages) was never distributed in Soviet Russia. I will return to the details of this collaboration and censorship later in this chapter. See John Cunningham, "The 1960s: New Directors, New Films, New Wave" in *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffeeshouse to Cineplex* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 94-115, and Mira Liehm and Antonín J. Liehm, "The Possibilities of Art and the Art of the Possible: Hungary After 1963" in *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 385-411.

⁴⁴ The Hungarian New Wave included filmmakers Zoltán Fábri, István Szabó, and Márta Mészáros, among others.

Two years after Khrushchev's secret speech and Hungary's quashed uprising, Jancsó released his first feature film and was on his way to becoming one of Hungary's most talented auteurs. Jancsó's *The Bells Have Gone to Rome* (1958), set during WWII, focuses on a group of young students who attempt to reclaim bells which the military seizes to fashion into mechanisms of war (namely guns). Despite the film's mediocre quality and reception, it succeeds in its quiet evocation of the effects of armed combat on Hungary's youth.

Jancsó's second film, *Cantata* (1962), again makes reference to Hungary's recent history, if not the Second World War, then the years immediately following (including those surrounding the uprising of 1956). The film observes – in an almost impassive manner – the process by which a young, educated doctor, upon returning home, acknowledges estrangement from both his family and socio-economic class. In an attempt to reconcile his background with whom he has become, the young physician strives to restore the relationship he once had with his peasant father. The film's theme of new generations losing touch with and leaving old generations behind (particularly the generations between fathers and sons in post-war Europe) was a popular one in Eastern Europe at the time.⁴⁵ Yet Jancsó's most remarkable intervention reaches beyond the film's genre or narrative. Instead, the film form Jancsó employs here exposes glimpses of the brilliant director he was to become. As Hungarian film scholar Graham Petrie notes,

⁴⁵ The film's Hungarian title *Oldás és kötés* is translated as “to untie and retie” – thus the theme of estrangement and reconciliation foregrounded in the film. See Mira Liehm and Antonín J. Liehm. “The Revolt: Hungary, 1954-1963.” *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 173. Of course, issues of class are central here.

the setting of the film on the open *puszta* or Hungarian plain, coupled with the poignant and “ambiguous scene in which the hero’s father gently and lovingly calls his oxen to him, then sends them off to be slaughtered” – all in one uninterrupted sequence – reveals “flashes of the ‘true’ Jancsó here and there,” the Jancsó most interested in the dynamics of power and the possibility of ideological critique by way of cinema.⁴⁶ With Jancsó’s fifth feature film *The Round Up* released in 1965, the director finally hit his stride, establishing an original use of the long take which was to be foregrounded in his work through the 1970s.

Maintaining Marxist Allegiances: Miklós Jancsó’s Film Form

This chapter examines four of Jancsó’s most successful films, beginning in detail with *The Round Up* (1965), continuing briefly with *The Red and the White* (1967), and concluding with *Red Psalm* (1972) and *Electra, My Love* (1974). The following pages seek to outline how Jancsó – a Marxist and once a staunch Stalinist – shifts the emphasis

⁴⁶ Graham Petrie. “Somewhere in Europe: Miklós Jancsó.” *History Must Answer to Man: The Contemporary Hungarian Cinema* (Budapest: Corvina Books, 1978), 21. In *The Most Important Art*, Mira and Antonín J. Liehm note a second underlying theme of the film which subtly makes its way to the fore at the work’s conclusion. They write, “The story of a man who experienced the Rákosi [leader of Hungary’s Communist Party from 1945 to 1956; adhered to Stalinist politics and rule] regime and the events of 1956 (though never mentioned in the film) is in a way symbolized by the lyrics to Béla Bartók’s *Cantata Profana* – overheard on the radio at the end of the film – a popular ballad telling of a father who doesn’t recognize his sons who [as a result of war] have been transformed into deer.” For the above quote regarding the events of 1956 and its evocation by way of Béla Bartók’s *Cantata Profana*, see Mira Liehm and Antonín J. Liehm, “The Revolt: Hungary, 1954-1963” in *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 173.

of his filmmaking from state-supported newsreels to ideological critique when the horrors of Stalinism are exposed.⁴⁷ These horrors were executed not only in the name of a Marxist-Leninist State now headed by Stalin, but in the name of socialism itself, the fundamental values of which stood in stark contrast to their ruthless enforcement. In order to maintain political allegiance to Marxism despite its gross misinterpretation at the hands of the Stalinist regime, Jancsó revises how he relates to Marxist theory, ultimately adopting the “anti-humanist” strain of the sort akin to what western Marxism of the same time had found as its most complex expression with the theories of Althusser. This is based in the idea that one is never free from an ideological apparatus.⁴⁸

Jancsó translates this position to film form by basing the preliminary stages of his filmmaking on predetermined patterns of camera tracks which, in every moment of his films, insist on the inevitable process of history as a dialectical system. His protracted sequence shots and camera movements are structured according to these arbitrary patterns, not narrative action, or at the very least a loose interpretation of a storyboard. In other words, Jancsó appears to work backwards, establishing a pattern of camera movement before a narrative or script (traditional *motivation* for this movement) has been

⁴⁷ As noted in the preceding pages, the scholarship on Stalinism is vast. Perhaps the most compelling and thorough book on this era is Sheila Fitzpatrick’s *Everyday Stalinism*, which is composed of countless primary source materials. The text examines life under Stalin, as well as years of surveillance and purges by the Soviet Union’s abominable leader. For more on 1930s USSR, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also *Stalinism: The Essential Readings*. Ed. David L. Hoffmann. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

⁴⁸ This theory, outlined by Louis Althusser in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” will be discussed in more detail in the ensuing pages.

finalized. Jancsó's camera yields to this predetermined diagram, ingesting – as if by blueprint – narratives, protagonists, and action which exist and unfold for the camera itself. Film scholar Gideon Bachmann – who witnessed and studied Jancsó's filmmaking practice at great length, describes the director's process thus:

The actual preparations for the day's *kép* [or shot] begin with the laying of the track. There is always a track, sometimes 60 or 70 feet long, curving in and out of the buildings, like a children's train set. But considering the complexities and acrobatics which the camera performs along its lines, these are remarkably simple, sometimes forming half an ellipse or the form of two 'J's joined at the top and standing on each other, or just half or three-quarters of a slightly squashed circle. On these tracks the camera rides at the end of a counterweighted beam, extending some ten feet outwards, and itself balanced on a hydraulic telescoping lift, that can raise it twelve or fifteen feet in the air....[Rehearsals] can take a whole morning, and sometimes a whole day, often leaving just enough time before the light goes to shoot the take. The best description I can think of that might resemble the movements being rehearsed is a fish tank full of water, enormously enlarged to include the entire set with actors, camera, tracks and crew, with the camera representing a delectable lady-fish aimlessly gliding about in her three-dimensional realm, pursued by every living thing in sight. For despite the fact that ostensibly it is she, the camera, that observes what surrounds her and moves to do so, in reality every movement is being planned for her and every action exists only for her approval. Thus order is reversed: it is reality which is set in motion by deft manipulation in order to be at the right place at the right time. As soon as she has passed them, actors jump up, throw off a costume or don another, run ahead of her along her planned path, and crouch down again ready for another fleeting close-up. Whole herds of horses, over whom she has passed, gallop in a wide circle behind her back to catch up again with their own image where it has been planned on her itinerary. And central actors, courted by her concentric embrace, move against her in their own curves, creating that doubly broken line of vision which makes some viewers dizzy. That is why the line of the track can be

relatively simple: the major part of the movement is orchestrated for the camera in a ballet of calculated fabrication.⁴⁹

Here, content sets the camera in motion, yet the content itself would not exist were it not for the structured form to which it adheres. In essence, form appears preordained, but is itself determined by the content it must embody. The result is a filmic praxis which emphasizes the persistent dialectical relationship between form and content, and in so doing, reveals its own similarity to historical process:⁵⁰ how, as according to Engels, “Men make their history themselves, only they do so in a given environment which conditions it, and on the basis of actual relations already existing.”⁵¹ In Jancsó’s model, individuals are reduced to mere placeholders, moving on cue as the camera passes by,

⁴⁹ Gideon Bachmann, “Jancsó Plain,” *Sight and Sound* 43 (Autumn 1974), 220.

⁵⁰ See *Cinema by Other Means*, in which Pavle Levi argues Jancsó “creates filmed testimonies to his Marxist conviction that History, much like the Cinema, is an always already dialectical, though empty structure. Actual historical praxis is, in turn, not unlike the practice of filmmaking.” Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2012), 97.

⁵¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*. Louis Feuer, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 411. The phrase is also found in the well-known opening to Karl Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the first edition appearing in 1852. It reads, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.” See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. (New York: International Publishers, 1998).

reiterating their predetermined and inalterable socio-economic roles. There is room for neither deviation nor change.⁵²

In addition, Jancsó's use of the long take as opposed to traditional forms of montage is itself a revised mode of dialectical film form.⁵³ Jancsó's continuously-rolling camera and in turn lengthy sequence shots replace the constant juxtaposition of disparate images traditionally leading the viewer to deduce a third meaning. The result is a synthesis of montage and the long take manifest in a complex *mise-en-scène*, the focus of which remains ambiguous now that montage no longer cues perception and thus meaning. Here, the viewer is activated in the struggle of interpretation, not led along a chain of calculated associations. The significance of each shot must be sought out in a newly expanded frame. Dialectical montage does not cease to exist when the long take

⁵² Jancsó also consistently practiced post-production sound dubbing which allowed him to call directions to actors in the field, then replace his audible directions with carefully-constructed and synchronized audio. Bachmann's quote continues, "Lines are spoken, but in whisper tones; they will be dubbed in later at the correct levels." Gideon Bachmann, "Jancsó Plain," *Sight and Sound* 43 (Autumn 1974), 220-221.

⁵³ This "dialectical film form" was theorized and executed by Sergei Eisenstein, one of cinema's greatest theorists of montage. For more on Eisenstein's theory and practice, see Chapter Three of this dissertation, where I discuss his seminal essay "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" in more detail. For the essay itself, see Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form." *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. Trans. Jay Leyda. (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 45-63.

comes to the fore. Rather, it is subsumed by an increasingly complex *mise-en-scène*,⁵⁴ a “pre-montage in the camera,” as film scholar Gideon Bachmann notes.⁵⁵

As early as the 1950s, Jean-Luc Godard posited a new way of theorizing the heretofore vested distinction between montage and the long take, ultimately eliminating this distinction altogether. Both in theory and praxis, Godard acts as historical precedent in conceptualizing montage as part of the *mise-en-scène* which, he argues, subsumes it. In a short essay entitled “Montage my Fine Care” Godard writes, “Talking of *mise-en-scène* automatically implies montage.” Montage, he writes, “both denies and prepares the way for *mise-en-scène*: the two are interdependent,” concluding editing submits to the device of the long take and deep focus. In the following pages, this argument will return to Godard’s claim for a collapsed binary between the long take and montage aesthetic in order to claim that this synthesis – this *dialectic* – is precisely what Jancsó is after.

The following analysis of Jancsó’s films will investigate the director’s use of the long take as a device by which to expose how time and again his protagonists are thoroughly embedded in various historically-specific ideological structures. Yet while the

⁵⁴ See Jean-Luc Godard. “Montage my fine care.” *Godard on Godard*. Trans. and ed. Tom Milne. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972). André Bazin also argues that the use of staging in depth and deep focus – a *mise-en-scène* rather than montage-centric mode of filmmaking – does not eliminate montage altogether. Rather, editing takes place within the protracted sequences by way of camera movement as well as composition, what enters and exits the frame as the camera continues to roll. He writes, “In [Renoir’s] films, the search after composition in depth is, in effect, a partial replacement of montage by frequent panning shots and entrances. It is based on a respect for the continuity of dramatic space and, of course, of its duration.” See André Bazin. “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema.” *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 34.

⁵⁵ Gideon Bachmann, “Jancsó Plain,” *Sight and Sound* 43 (Autumn 1974), 217.

films themselves are fiction based, they not only suggest a realistic depiction of the unfolding drama due to the realism the long take affords, they lay claim to an accurate depiction of the history which exists beyond the frame. In essence, the fiction presented within Jancsó's filmmaking does not simply mirror the reality beyond it; rather the reality beyond the frame *is precisely what Jancsó depicts*. Jancsó, more than any other subject in this dissertation, does not employ the long take as a fictional means to present reality. Instead, the long take is embraced as the countermeasure to fiction itself. As will be noted, over the course of Jancsó's career, the long take grows longer, the movements of the characters onscreen grow increasingly ritualized and repetitive, and the films themselves become progressively difficult to decipher, despite the seemingly uncomplicated stories upon which they are based.

The Absence of Metalanguage and Ideological Hailing: *The Round-Up* (1965)

Miklós Jancsó's films are at once recognizable. The stylistic and thematic elements – the long takes, the panoramic views, the closed and claustrophobic study of the dynamic between oppressor and oppressed – are emphasized in nearly every study of Jancsó's work. These compositional and contextual structures are repeated in critical studies again and again, mirroring their very repetition in the filmmaker's work itself. Yet while many attempt to solve the recurring problem Jancsó presents, offering the reader generalizing statements and thus pulling from the distilled mix not that which seeps through the sieve but rather that which remains on its surface, the reader is left with

excess rather than essence, residue rather than distillate. An example can be found in the authoritative Jancsó volume composed by Graham Petrie.⁵⁶ Jancsó, as Petrie notes, situates his films within concrete historical contexts, yet these circumstances are of little consequence. Petrie writes,

From an overall theme of great national importance[...Jancsó] deliberately isolates a peripheral and complex episode (often giving no other explanation or background than a mere date) and works this through to a rigorously logical conclusion. In isolation, the problem, without losing its specific local relevance, becomes more abstract, allowing the inner realities of power, oppression, violence, cruelty, and dehumanization inherent in any similar historical situation to come to the forefront.⁵⁷

It is not the particular but rather the universal theme which rises to the surface, regardless of the historical context; this – power, oppression, violence, cruelty – is the constant in Jancsó’s films.

Film scholar Roy Armes, in his examination of Jancsó’s *oeuvre*, tends to offer a similar summary, one in the name of dialectics and viewer activation. Jancsó’s use of long sequences, the author argues, is “a tool for revealing the class struggle in filmic terms,”⁵⁸ and the director’s rejection of montage, “allows the spectators to reflect on the

⁵⁶ Petrie’s *History Must Answer to Man: The Contemporary Hungarian Cinema* (Budapest: Corvina Books, 1978) offers a brilliant and thorough chapter dedicated to Jancsó’s work. Yet while this study provides a consummate analysis as to *how* Jancsó presents his recurring subjects of power and oppression, it does little to investigate the significance of Jancsó’s preferred formal device: the long take.

⁵⁷ Graham Petrie as cited in Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 68.

⁵⁸ Roy Armes. “Miklós Jancsó: Dialectic and Ritual.” *The Ambiguous Image: Narrative Style in Modern European Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 144.

action as it unfolds.”⁵⁹ The closed setting in which the characters are placed offers the audience the “*mechanics* of terror,”⁶⁰ and we are, Armes continues, “witness to the maneuvering of human beings like chess-men in a game whose rules we only dimly grasp.”⁶¹ Yet it is not only the spectator who is left in doubt as to the rules of the game; those within Jancsó’s narrative are situated in uncertainty as well, incarcerated within their own confusion. Armes writes, “Throughout his career Jancsó has shown himself to be fascinated by the seizing and maintaining of power, by the way in which repression and authority erode the dignity of man and reduce him to an automaton obeying the rules of a game into which he is denied all insight.”⁶² While Armes acknowledges “the game” and offers its effects and ambiguities, he fails to investigate its nature of being. *What is the game?* What is its purpose? Is the “game” – visual or narrative – present simply to confuse?

Beginning with *The Round-Up* from 1965, Jancsó seems to offer no metalanguage – an extra-diegetic idiom which interprets a first-order language, or in this case, the film narrative itself. Instead, the director employs lengthy sequence shots rather than frequent montage which traditionally cues perception and indicates to the viewer where to focus

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 146. Emphasis mine.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 153.

his or her attention.⁶³ Coupled with this ambiguity of central focus are characters within the narrative who are inexplicably trapped in enigmatic dilemmas and games of torture. In essence, confusion and ambiguity are twofold, existing both within the narrative and within the space of spectatorship. At both levels, Jancsó reveals how much the question of “why” or “what” is indeed one of “how.” Here, the scheme is ideology and the interpellation of the subject. Drawing upon some ideas of Slavoj Žižek’s about the functioning of metalanguage, this analysis of *The Round-Up* will discuss the film’s absence of metalanguage and how the consequences of this absence complicates the audience’s perspective and understanding of the unfolding events.

“Metalanguage,” Žižek writes, “is not just an Imaginary entity. It is *Real* in the strict Lacanian sense.”⁶⁴ For Lacan, the *Real* is that state of nature from which we are separated as infants by our entrance into language. The *Real*, then, is something we cannot express in language for it is our very entrance into language which marks our permanent separation from the *Real*, the thing we cannot put into words. The *Real* is, therefore, always beyond language; it is “impossible.” This, too, is the impossibility of metalanguage. As Žižek notes, it is not only impossible to occupy the position of metalanguage; it is also impossible to avoid it. One cannot assume a position above or beyond language. While the “post-structuralist procedure *par excellence*,” Žižek writes,

⁶³ This is not to say that the use of strategic editing is the *only* means with which to present the viewer with a directed or cued perspective/reading of a film. One must also consider the movement of the camera, *mise-en-scène*, sound, etc. Jancsó’s films are quite unique in all these respects. The additional elements presented here direct viewing in an equal degree to the director’s use of plan-sequence.

⁶⁴ Slavoj Žižek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London: Verso, 1989), 156.

is “to put in parentheses their claim to truth in order to expose the textual mechanisms producing the ‘truth effect,’”⁶⁵ these parentheticals are, in some sense, claims to a position which can never be occupied. They are simply the inverted commas of narrative texts, the language which claims to be beyond or outside that which it attempts to assess. These statements themselves expose and perpetuate the “gap” between utterance and intention. In Miklós Jancsó’s *The Round-Up*, the director’s cinematic narrative does not perpetuate this gap but rather exposes it. With this film and others, Jancsó seems to suggest there is no metalanguage, no space beyond an ideological discourse from which one can describe and critique that discourse without using its very language itself.

Jancsó opens *The Round Up* with a peculiar preface initially composed of amateurish black and white drawings of military regalia and weapons of war presented in succession: an empty hat, a uniform, a single boot, a rifle, a pistol, sabers with elaborate foils and grips, canons. These humble, common drawings are seemingly mocked by a rich soundtrack overlaying them. Here, the grand orchestration and confident crescendos of the Austrian Empire’s anthem *Gott Erhalte Franz den Kaiser* (also known as *Kaiserhymne*) overwhelm the lines produced by a simple hand. At the same time, the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 153.

drawings are no equal partner to the music. Their simplicity quietly undermines the hymn, rendering its composition exaggerated and melodramatic.⁶⁶

As the anthem comes to a close, a drawing of the port of Budapest appears onscreen, followed by sketches of industry (a locomotive) and manufacture (sleek modern architecture). The drawings – floor plans and structural engineer’s diagrams – depict advanced modes of production housed within grand buildings. We see the above and below ground blueprints of factories whose facades suggest domestic rather than industrial use. Sophisticated plumbing and heating designs, as well as novel pulley systems powered by a steam engine are tucked within the walls of these residence-factories.

A voiceover situates the content of the drawings in the 1860s, citing the “industrial revolution,” its resulting “age of prosperity,” and the predominance of the “welfare of the bourgeoisie” over Hungary’s recent history: namely, the revolution of 1848. The fight for equal representation and taxation of all classes (not simply those lacking wealth, nobility, and power) has now been supplanted by those owning the means of production. The mechanisms of their commerce take shape here, rendered in black and white, narrated by a voice acknowledging “the spirit of 1848 is [now] no more than a

⁶⁶ Haydn’s composition gains a particular significance as anthem of the Austrian Empire considering the film is situated in the years immediately following the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. The revolution eventually escalated to a battle of independence from the Austrian Empire, one which was especially complicated due to Russia’s military participation as well as the (split) participation of Serbia against Hungary. Here, the hymn weighs heavy on the film’s soundtrack, failing to harmonize with the drawings onscreen. In other words, the amateur sketches resist the polished anthem of involuntary citizenship. Ultimately, the hymn serves as an empty gesture of unwanted unification.

phrase.” History devolves into a slew of empty words while industry develops indomitable capital.

The voiceover turns to the “people,” those who live in homes like the one depicted next: a humble, thatched-roof farm, its surrounding ground shaded as if to indicate dirt, soil. The drawing’s contrast to its immediate antecedent is stark – its simple, eye-level perspective and exterior-only view made primitive by the meticulous scale diagram which precedes it. “The people,” the voiceover reads, “have lived the same way for centuries. Indeed, the lean years following one after another from the middle of the ’60’s increase their destitution.” Coupled with this statement are drawings of rough-hewn, hand-held tools which replace the renderings of large-scale industrial ingenuity where steam rather than man is the critical generator of production. The sketches depict objects of farming – ploughs and hoes, tools of tilling and harvest. Along this chain of images appears an object in question: a flat board with clamps around its edges. Is this another agrarian device, or a mechanism of torture?

The voiceover seems to explain the drawing, stating “criminal cases are multiplying,” as if to suggest this is the result of the recent “lean years” and “destitution” of the people. Thus, the confusion regarding the device in question is partially clarified by way of interpretative voiceover. The board is indeed an object of terror. Yet rather than illustrating the outbreak of lawlessness by depicting actual offenders and their crimes, the film’s introduction exhibits tools of punishment instead, blurring the object of violation. Is law or the body transgressed? Who is the miscreant here, the lawbreaker, or the law enforcer? Additional torture devices are displayed: a metal ankle clamp, a ball

and chain, a shrew's fiddle.⁶⁷ Upon presentation of these mechanisms, the voiceover convenes upon the target of discipline, the object of transgression. As "criminal cases are multiplying," the narrator states, so too are "the desperate attempts by those born to poverty, to break free." It is the destitute who are subject to discipline, their only crime the class to which they belong, their struggle for liberation from economic hardship manifest in shackles. These are the rebels, the "freedom fighters in folk songs," "the last vestige of active resistance" the law attempts to round up. Their symbols of identity are represented here: hand-made whips and axes, objects used both in their fields, and in defense of their freedoms.

As the voiceover turns to describe Count Gideon Rada, the military general appointed to capture these resistance fighters, drawings of gallows and additional devices of torture follow. So too do diagrams of what appears to be a panopticon: that architectural symbol of surveillance and omnipresence, a model of absolute power stationed at a center with the vulnerable and guilty permanently within reach on the

⁶⁷ Of all the objects of discipline and torture displayed in this opening sequence, the shrew's fiddle is the one device which maintains relevance throughout the film, yet not for its appearance in subsequent shots (it doesn't materialize again), but rather for the motivation behind its design and application. Like many devices of this kind, the shrew's fiddle is an object which inflicts not only physical but – most importantly – psychological distress. Not only does it torture the subject, it makes him/her a spectacle. In addition, the "audience" participates in the trespasser's punishment in order to distance itself from the culprit's guilt (him, not me). In so doing, the audience confirms and assumes its own guilt (if not him, then *eventually* me), thus going to great lengths to participate in this "ceremony" and condemn the guilty. The harder the audience strives to distance itself from guilt, the more complicit it is in its own culpability. The significance of psychological torment in discipline and torture as well as the theme of power and assumed guilt play central roles here and elsewhere in Jancsó's work.

periphery.⁶⁸ These drawings, the viewer soon learns, are based on actual objects and architecture seen in the film itself. We have moved from general to specific, leading towards sequences where these devices will be put to use. The narrator ends this introduction to the film with a final remark. The sole focus of the commander is to capture the outlaws. “He’s not particular about his methods,” the voiceover concludes. This opening sequence and voiceover to *The Round Up* has, unfortunately, gone unaddressed in the literature on Jancsó’s work (the film itself finds scant exposure in the already limited scholarship on Jancsó). I spend time with this sequence for, in addition to its significance as introduction to a complicated and confusing narrative, it should not be downgraded as a simple lead-in.

As Roy Armes notes, *The Round-Up* is rooted in Hungarian history of 1860, yet the film’s objective is not to examine history as such, but rather the mechanisms of power. Situated after the failed revolution to free Hungary from Austrian rule, *The Round-Up* focuses on a group of peasants who have been herded into a walled-in yard. These figures, suspected of sympathy with the continued opposition to liberate Hungary, stand here, passively awaiting their fate.⁶⁹ Time and again, soldiers make their way through the crowd, choosing at random one man or groups of men to partake in enigmatic

⁶⁸ Bentham first published on the Panopticon in 1787, yet it wasn’t before Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (1975) that the Panopticon’s design’s were thoroughly analyzed. For Bentham’s original writings on the Panopticon, see Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon: or, the inspection-house* (Dublin: Thomas Byrne, M.DCC.XCI., 1791). See also Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings*. Miran Bozovic, ed. (London: Verso, 1995).

⁶⁹ We learn these are men loyal to “Sándor,” an historical figure described later in this chapter.

games. One peasant, Janos Gajdor, is singled out in the film, yet not in order to be revealed as the exception but rather the rule of the interpellated subject now unable to escape encompassing ideological bounds.

Chosen randomly by a peasant woman forced to identify outlaws among the prisoners, Janos Gajdor steps forward. Taken to the soldiers' headquarters, he is then confronted by one man in uniform. It is at this moment, when Gajdor is questioned, that his position as a subject, "an answer to the Real" – both in the film and within the ideological apparatus itself – is made manifest. He becomes an identifiable figure, and his recognized presence a symptom of an interpellated subject.

The soldier calmly begins his interrogation, asking Gajdor if he is a farmer, a shrewd; does he know sheepmen; what are their names. His questions become more direct and begin to lead rather than inquire. "Tell me...you knew the Short Baloghs," he asks. "I know them," is Gajdor's reply. "I didn't ask you if you know them. I asked you if you *knew* them," the soldier retorts. We are given Gajdor's face in close-up. He thinks, then replies, echoing the soldier's words. "I *knew* them," is his answer. Gajdor is told these sheepmen were killed, strangled with a halter to which the soldier instructs him to take hold. "Try putting it around your neck," the soldier suggests. Gajdor obeys. The soldier accuses the peasant of murder, and Gajdor adamantly denies the charge, adding to his "I don't kill people, sir" a "Sometimes I get rough, but kill...never." He is then told to make a knot. "If you want me to," Gajdor replies. It is not the soldier who uses totalitarian measures to compromise and thus overpower the peasant; rather the conversion from innocent to guilty, individual to subject, is one which Gajdor himself

permits and performs. He tightens the noose around his own neck at the mere suggestion that he do so. In this manner, he is the bearer of his own death. “If you want me to,” is not equivalent to “If I do not, you will kill me, so I will do so.” Gajdor, then, symbolically kills himself. Confronted with the accusation that he killed three men, he is locked in a room with their bodies, and after due time emerges with the confession “I killed them.” As viewers, we do not know whether Gajdor is guilty or innocent. While this ritual, these questions, and the instruction to place a harness around one’s neck appears to be inexplicable and without reason, its function or product is not without consequence.

In examining the interpellation of the subject, Althusser presents an example of an officer hailing an individual on the street.⁷⁰ While the “Hey, you there!” is not a specific address, the individual who answers the call recognizes himself as the subject of Power, of the big Other-Subject. This moment of recognition is one which, Althusser claims, “cannot be explained solely by ‘guilt feelings,’ despite the large numbers who ‘have something on their consciences.’”⁷¹ Žižek presents the individual’s reaction to this interpellative call as a combination of “perplexed protestation of innocence” – Gajdor’s “No! No! I don’t kill people, sir” – with “an indeterminate Kafka-esque feeling of ‘abstract’ guilt, a feeling that, in the eyes of Power, I am a priori terribly guilty of something, although it is not possible for me to know what precisely I am guilty of, and for what reason – since I don’t know what I am guilty of – I am even more guilty; or,

⁷⁰ See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Essays on Ideology*. (London: Verso, 1984).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

more pointedly, it is in this very ignorance of mine that my true guilt consists.”⁷² In this question and answer sequence of the film, Gajdor’s innocence and feeling of guilt coexist, brought to the fore as he not only appears puzzled at the interpellative call but also as he begins to echo the voice of power, as he places the halter around his neck, as he tightens the noose. His “If you say so” stems from this very sense of perplexed innocence and abstract guilt. Not knowing why he performs these actions, he does so as though he *should*, for it is in his very ignorance that he finds his guilt.

While Althusser promotes a moment of interpellation of the subject, Žižek denies the moment of becoming exists. Individuals do not “become” subjects, he writes; they ‘always already’ are subjects. This overlapping of innocence and undefined guilt is a timeless dilemma or deadlock. The only answer to this impasse is to recognize one’s self as the subject of Power. But this suggestion of guilt and recognition as subject cannot be forced; it must be self-imposed. While Gajdor may or may not be guilty, he answers to the call; he places the halter around his neck and figuratively tightens the noose which strangles him. His “impasse” is resolved in his admission, in his acknowledgement as subject. It is the soldier, then, who functions not as a dictatorial force but rather as confessor, instructing Gajdor to “get it off [his] conscience” in admitting the names of those he killed, thus relieving himself of the impasse by assuming his place in the symbolic order.

Yet it is also questioning itself, Žižek writes, which is the “basic procedure of the

⁷² Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*. (London: Verso, 1994), 60.

totalitarian intersubjective relationship.”⁷³ The form of the question “lays open, exposes, denudes its addressee...[It is] a priori incriminating, provoking a sensation of guilt.” What is exposed, denuded, is that Real within the subject which cannot be symbolized, a *jouissance*, that which “simultaneously attracts and repels us,” which can be neither occupied nor avoided, attained nor escaped. This questioning of the subject is what divides him, hystericizes him. In identifying one’s self with the symbolic order, one thus circumvents this “hysterical deadlock.”⁷⁴

While this moment within the film seems to offer nothing more than another gesture of the cold, calculated, and cruel means with which the oppressor handles the oppressed, upon closer examination it is evident that this sequence exposes the mechanics of how one is ‘always-already’ taken in, rounded up, in the symbolic order. Here, in the seemingly arbitrary details, the leading questions and questions repeated as answers by the subject, Jancsó reveals the impossibility of escape from the symbolic order or that which structures one’s perception of reality. There is no means with which to position one’s self beyond, in the realm of the real, in the position of metalanguage. This inability of escape persists and grows, for once Gajdor identifies himself as subject, his position becomes ever more embedded in the symbolic.

Given promise of release if he can find a prisoner who has killed more individuals than he has, Gajdor frenetically begins his search. With the hope that he will find one whom will ensure his release, he falls deeper into the illusion that freedom is actually

⁷³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London: Verso, 1989), 178.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

possible. This delusion – the belief that there is one who is more shameful, more guilty and thus who *should* be imprisoned in exchange for his liberty – positions the peasant in a circuitous, closed state of misconception. He stands subsumed by ideology, all the while believing he is a free individual. It is for this reason that he is able to sustain the fantasy of release.

Gajdor returns to the yard to find a group of men chained and hooded, marching in a circle. His “freedom” is markedly more evident than theirs, yet Jancsó’s camera and *mise en scène* do little to maintain this difference. Positioned before the doorway to the courtyard, the camera films Gajdor from behind. His darkened clothing, his hat, his mere independence from the marching group mirrors for a moment the soldiers within the yard. The scene then cuts and the camera shifts, facing Gajdor, yet from a distance and from on high. He stands before the entrance, framed by the open doors and the empty *puszta* beyond. As the inmates march clockwise, the camera begins to descend, and Gajdor, once separated from the group by distance and camera angle, is slowly mirrored then overlapped by those who march in the foreground. He falls to their level, and as the ground seems to rise, a tiny slice of sky emerges, framed in the passageway above his head.

In a single gesture of the camera, Gajdor’s illusion of freedom is compressed but not crushed. This delusion remains within the very cohesion of time and space. It is not due to montage that the framing of Gajdor adjusts from closed to minutely and illusionistically open, nor is it a graphic match which *constructs* a similarity between Gajdor and the soldiers, then Gajdor and the prisoners; rather it is the movement of the

camera which *exposes* reality, the fleeting, visual parallel between captor and captive, and the sustained thematic equivalence between all imprisoned. Jancsó's camera does not explain what we see or cue how we are to see it; neither does it produce a point of view shot in an effort to replicate Gajdor's perspective. The camera simply reveals the profilmic reality in its un-manipulated state.⁷⁵ Reality, and thus the illusion of freedom, is not reproduced but rather exposed. The doors behind Gajdor remain open, but he may go nowhere. While he is not physically chained like the prisoners before him, he is as much a captive as they. The absence of shackles is simply an illusion, as is his "distance" from those in chains.

The shot continues and Gajdor randomly chooses an "outlaw" from among the group. He is instructed to remove the prisoner's chains, and while this inmate gains an abstract freedom, Gajdor is denied his. They march back to the yard, and the peasant begins interrogating *his* captive in a manner aping his own interrogators. Concerned only with the names of this inmate's victims, Gajdor himself plays confessor, urging this man to "ease [his] conscience" as he makes his way to the gallows. The repetition is too

⁷⁵ This can be seen as in harmony with André Bazin's reading of spatial unity in cinema. In "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," Bazin offers an analysis of one scene where continuous space is both implied via montage and apparent via a single frame or shot. Bazin concludes that realism "resides in the homogeneity of space," and that montage, at times, is not the essence but rather the negation of cinema. It is also possible to claim the opposite regarding Jancsó's use of the plan-sequence. This reality he presents could be read as one of greater viewer manipulation due to the illusion of untouched or un-manipulated film. The filmmaker's meticulous composition and choreography seems to function unnoticed under the movement of the camera and the unbroken passage of time and space. For Bazin's study of spatial unity in film, see his "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage" in *What is Cinema?* Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 50.

distinct to be ignored. In his very reiteration of those instructions given him, Gajdor embeds himself deeper within the ideological structure; paradoxically, this moment arrives when he feels he is closest to freedom.

As already indicated, Jancsó's filmic project is one which does not allow its characters to occupy a position of metalanguage. Here, Gajdor is made to believe that freedom exists in the man who has committed more killings than the number to which he himself confessed. Rather than recognizing the impossibility of freedom in the constant deferral of his release, Gajdor tries again and again to find the man whose guilt will override his own. When the inmates in the courtyard silently condemn the peasant's cooperation with the authorities, he begins to see his captors as saviors. For Gajdor, freedom is found in the very heart of that which controls him. He knocks on the door and *begs to be let in*, failing to recognize he is already there.⁷⁶ Gajdor cannot step beyond that which subsumes him; neither can he escape it. The position of metalanguage cannot be occupied or avoided. It is that object within him "which at the same time attracts and repels him,"⁷⁷ dividing and hystericizing him.

In *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell examines the possibilities of film narrative functioning as metalanguage.⁷⁸ The author is quick to denounce a simple

⁷⁶ One is reminded not only of the famous parable on "the door of the Law" found in Kafka's *The Trial*, but also the significance to which Welles' adaptation of the book gives this particular allegory. Žižek himself offers a reading of Kafka's parable and Welles' version of it in "I Hear You with My Eyes"; or, *The Invisible Master in Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 95-97.

⁷⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London: Verso, 1989), 180.

⁷⁸ See David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*. (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

reading of the camera as the equivalent of the novelist's third person, indirect speech, and his criticism is keen to parse the difference between stylistics of literature (structures of narration, grammar, and the like) and those of film. Here, Bordwell cites Colin MacCabe: "[In the novel] the narrative prose is the meta-language that can state all the truths in the object-language(s) (the marks held in inverted commas) and can also explain the relation of the object-language to the world."⁷⁹ This language is a distanced commentary which descends upon the diegesis; its function is interpretative, explanative. There is, MacCabe claims, a hierarchy of discourses at the top of which metalanguage or narrative prose finds itself. This principal language, or the camera, "shows us what happens – it tells us the truth against which we can measure the discourses,"⁸⁰ i.e. spoken or diegetic speech, or the object-language of the film itself. Yet because Jancsó's camera "speaks" the very language of the content of its films, it does little more than simply re-articulate the "the lack around which the symbolic order is structured."⁸¹

Bordwell argues, "Much of the frustration and anxiety of Jancsó's narration is produced by an approach in which we should be able to see and know more than we do."⁸² This is achieved by way of "suppressive narration," one which maintains a high degree of "uncommunicativeness."⁸³ In essence, in Jancsó's work, there are neither

⁷⁹ Colin MacCabe as cited in David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*. (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 18.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London: Verso, 1989), 170.

⁸² David Bordwell, *Narrative in the Fiction Film*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 144.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

point-of-view nor establishing shots, and “the frame’s movements never adhere wholly to what a single character knows.”⁸⁴ The narration doesn’t explain or provide additional meaning to the filmic text. What we are given neither wholly generates nor supplements our knowledge but rather limits it. Despite the long take – the primary realist device which appears to achieve unparalleled spatio-temporal continuity – there are consistent absences of explanation, detail, and reason. In addition, there are what Bordwell calls “continuity cues at the stylistic level” which “stand out” when narrative or fictional continuity is broken.⁸⁵ This is an absence of metalanguage itself. Jancsó hovers around its void, revealing metalanguage’s effects, its mechanisms, but never feigning its position. Offering a seemingly “metalinguistic” narrative would only perpetuate the illusion that the language itself exists, and that one can occupy its place.

Instead, Jancsó focuses on ‘materializing metalanguage’s own impossibility,’ thereby also exposing the mechanisms and dynamics of power. In *History Must Answer to Man*, Graham Petrie writes of *The Round-Up*,

Perhaps what is most disturbing about the film, even more than the awareness of the absolute control exercised by one group over another, is the almost aesthetic refinement displayed by the interrogators as they carry out their maneuvers. It is not enough simply to be able to eliminate another person, or even to break his will: he must co-operate and assist in his own destruction, either through turning traitor or unwittingly revealing his true identity. The oppressor may actually see his own position as a paradoxical or even tragic one, for his power can continue to exist only to the extent that it is never fully exercised: once it has been taken to the logical conclusion of the death of the victim, it

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 143.

ceases, by definition, to have any meaning.⁸⁶

While the author does not theorize the mechanics of power, he recognizes their dynamics, how one must “assist in his own destruction” or recognize himself as a subject of Power, how the existence of the captor depends on that of the captive. Žižek proposes a similar dynamic in the structure of anti-Semitism. He writes,

In the anti-Semitic vision, the Jew is experienced as the embodiment of negativity, as the force disrupting stable social identity – but the ‘truth’ of anti-Semitism is, of course, that the very identity of our position is structured through a negative relationship to this traumatic figure of the Jew. Without the reference to the Jew who is corroding the social fabric, the social fabric itself would be dissolved. In other words, all my positive consistency is a kind of ‘reaction-formation’ to a certain traumatic, antagonistic kernel; if I lose this ‘impossible’ point of reference, my very identity dissolves.⁸⁷

This is the very paradoxical position of the oppressor or captor in *The Round-Up*. The “antagonistic kernel” is precisely that element or crux upon which the captor’s existence balances. Elimination of that “impossible’ point of reference” would eliminate the oppressor himself. This may give answer to the question why all inmates – gathered in one location – are not simply killed, thus eradicating in one fell swoop those who pose a threat to the social fabric. They must survive so that the captors’ existence – and thus the dialectic between oppressor and oppressed – may continue.

Towards the end of the film, prisoners are instructed to wear the uniforms of their captors. They march in groups upon the open plain, performing military drills, dissolving and disappearing into power itself by way of prolonged sequence shots. Yet in the

⁸⁶ Graham Petrie, *History Must Answer to Man: The Contemporary Hungarian Cinema*. (Gyoma: Kner Printing House, 1978), 41.

⁸⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London: Verso, 1989), 176.

courtyard in which they were held, only three prisoners and two guards remain. Their numbers are nearly equal, their interaction casual. One prisoner asks if he may take a bath, and upon being granted permission, joyfully jumps – fully clothed – into a large wooden barrel filled with water. The guard seems to partake in the inmate’s pleasure, laughing as he observes the man plunge beneath the surface. He only ends this “free” moment when a group of soldiers on horseback approach the compound, demanding both prisoners and captors report to the field. In other words, once the soldiers thoroughly outnumber their captives, they conform again to their oppressive roles.

The small faction begins its journey to the base, and once there, are asked if they have ever served as soldiers. Two of the three prisoners claim to have fought with the rebel calvary in 1848, an admission their captors have been seeking all along. Surely, the two will be condemned to death. Rather than taking immediate action against the prisoners though, the general asks if they still possess their combat skills, and when they answer in the affirmative, requests a demonstration. They accept the proposal with unexpected eagerness and are subsequently given their choice of horses from a parade of steeds. The first to mount is thrown a whip from the officer in charge. The camera readjusts to a long shot in order to film their exercise upon the open plain.

One would expect these prisoners to attempt escape together – they now have an expanse of land before them, unhindered by fence or frame – but instead they race atop a large mound and battle each other with startling fervor as uniformed soldiers look on. All this transpires during the course of a single take. The brawl is broken up, and the general praises the victor for his prowess, exclaiming “That was beautiful, my friend.” He then

asks if the winner would form a regiment, a “calvary troop.” The captor confirms he will, but only if he may exclude his sparring partner, the man who was – until this combat performance – his comrade in arms. Immediately, the prisoners’ solidarity dissolves, yet not by forcing antagonism between them but rather granting freedom of choice. Here again, the subject himself is “at fault” for his own demise, one which eventually will come now that he has betrayed his identity as well as aligned himself with the opposition.

His move to forge a calvary is met with a final establishing shot. The camera has again opened its scope, shifting from the tight and intimate frame surrounding the general and captor as the former sanctions the latter “friend,” to an expanded perspective made possible by a crane-mounted device. Groups of soldiers stand in formation around the periphery of the frame, and as the regimented battery of uniformed captives marches into view from the bottom of the screen, halting at a sharp angle to it, the victor of the duel begins his own march towards them. The camera slowly descends, collapsing the space between the army, its general, the fugitives, and their newly-appointed leader. For a moment, the loss of a distanced, aerial perspective eliminates the distinction between battalions and commanders (both formal and newfangled). The ground begins to rise, and all upon it are unified by a continuous, mobile shot which confines the figures to a single plane. This unbroken take, which permits spatial and temporal continuity, conflates the division among these figures, illustrating the fluidity of power and the ease by which the captive (now squadron leader) assumes his new role. Here, the manner by which he sides with his opposition is neither forced nor manufactured by way of editing. Yet despite the semblance of autonomy, he is not free. Rather, his actions conform to the

predetermined gestures and movements of the camera. It should not come as a surprise, then, that the moment the captive-leader is most embedded in the dominant political/military apparatus is precisely when the camera is most active, underscoring the arbitrary diagram which precedes it.

As the captive-leader handpicks members of his calvary, calling some by name, the sequence shot remains unbroken. The camera climbs skyward again, and, thanks to a reinstated aerial perspective, we see the battalion of rogues take shape. They stand in formation, resistance fighters gathered from the original detention yard and refashioned (in formal army regalia) as their enemy. A single edit repositions the camera before and slightly above the group as the squadron's leader motions to additional captives to join. The sound of a bugle interrupts this ceremony of call and response, announcing the arrival of a messenger who declares that Ferenc Jozef, "Emperor of Austria by the grace of God, Apostolic King of Hungary," has "pardon[ed] Sándor, the leader, in his absence."⁸⁸ A medium reverse shot of the group shows them still standing at attention with their captain by their side. The soldiers begin to look at one another in an attempt to gauge reaction to the announcement, and after a moment of silence and bewilderment, cry out, waving their hats in jubilation and thus *breaking the formation*. At the same time, the camera too breaks its stillness, slowly lowering from its overhead position, closing in on the celebrating rebels, ultimately narrowing its scope to a gallery of faces. In unison, the captives erupt in revolutionary song, each revealing to and bound to the

⁸⁸ After Emperor Ferdinand abdicated the throne as an arrangement to bring the 1848 revolution to an end, Ferenc Jozef (Franz Joseph) assumed the position as emperor, thus rising to power amid the Hungarian Revolution.

other by lyric and pride of identity. “Long live Hungary,” they sing. “Long live our homeland!” Again, the subject is complicit in his demise, this time revealing his identity as Sándor’s man (or here, men) through revolutionary song.⁸⁹

A second announcement brings their revelry to an abrupt end. While Sándor has been pardoned, “the rest of the troop will get its just punishment,” the messenger states. Immediately, jubilation and the glimpse of freedom turn to fear and the specter of death. It becomes apparent that the preceding games (dressing prisoners as soldiers, suggesting they parade their rebel skills in a duel, watching them form a regiment, telling them their leader has been pardoned) were but a preface to this anticipated moment, one which the camera was planned to ingest by way of tracks laid according to predetermined diagrams. The content the camera films – the profilmic – is always on cue, performing where it needs to be as soon as the camera passes by. In other words, the captives were and never

⁸⁹ The historical identity of Sándor is twofold. There is both Sándor Rózsa, a rebel figure who joined the Hungarian Revolution and earned the nickname “the Hungarian Robin Hood,” and Sándor Petöfi, a figure historians claim contributed to inciting the 1848 revolution by reciting – in Budapest’s main square in the days leading up to the outbreak of revolution – his *Nemzeti dal* (“National Song”). The poem, rebels immediately put to song, encouraged Hungarians to fight for independence from Austrian rule. Sándor was subsequently deemed Hungary’s revolutionary, national poet. For more on Sándor’s role in the 1848 revolution, see *Europäische Romantik und nationale Identität: Sándor Petöfi im Spiegel der 1848er Epoche*. Csilla Erdödy-Csorba, et al. (Baden Baden: Nomos, 1999). For Sándor Rózsa, see John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffeehouse to Multiplex* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 110. While both Sándors here are historically valid figures in regards to the film, perhaps one can conclude Sándor Rózsa is the likely candidate, seeing that the leader of the rebel calvary appears to be modeled on the likeness of Rózsa himself. It should be noted that the song in this sequence would have been recognized by contemporary filmgoers. The rebels’ unity in song reminds viewers of the opening to the film where the outlaws are described as “freedom fighters in folk songs.” Here, they sing an historical song *about themselves*. “They are the last vestige [of] active resistance. They are criminals in the eyes of officials. They are freedom fighters in folk songs.”

will be free.

A sounding drumroll implies execution. The rebels attempt to flee the tight frame, but soldiers rush in, restraining them there, covering their heads with burlap sacks. Here, the dynamic between captor and captive is reestablished and the *raison d'être* of the soldiers renewed. The game has come full circle and begins anew, destined to repeat ad infinitum. In his analysis of *The Round Up*, film historian András Bálint Kovács notes of this repetition in Jancsó's narrative style, "What we can see in the plot is not a chain of events leading to a necessary result. The result could be reached right at the beginning, and the events are only part of a *symbolic ritual* which, according to Jancsó, varies in its form during history, but with its essence and results always remaining the same: oppression and humiliation."⁹⁰ Here, not only has the game come full circle, the film, too, revisits its beginning, emphasized by the deafening return of the Austrian Empire's anthem, *Gott Erhalte Franz den Kaiser*. Now performed by pipe organ, the hymn betrays a liturgical tone as it ousts the irreverent song of the rebels.⁹¹ Not only does this tone invoke rituals of worship, it insists the accompanying scene of torture and execution has been ordained by God. The "Apostolic King of Hungary," evangelist of the divine, carries out a history which has been predetermined and preordained by crushing the

⁹⁰ See András Bálint Kovács, "Szegénylegények/The Round Up: Miklós Jancsó, Hungary, 1956." *The Cinema of Central Europe*. Peter Hames, Ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 109-110.

⁹¹ The use of the organ here – the most monumental of all instruments – could also be said to refer to the dominant Roman Catholic religion in the Austrian Empire at the time. The Empire's central church, St. Stephen's Cathedral, was not only a Catholic institution, it also had a rich organ tradition, housing one of Europe's largest organs in the mid-nineteenth century.

blasphemous rebels who dare seek sovereignty. This sequence recalls a similar scene in Jancsó's 1972 film *Red Psalm* (discussed later in this chapter), where soldiers join the ranks of dancing and singing peasants. Two sides become one, sharing steps and lyrics, and the dynamic dissolves. Yet this moment of unity does not last. At the call of the bugle, the soldiers take up their arms, form a circle around the peasants, and fire.

In this first early film, *The Round-Up*, Jancsó establishes the formal as well as content-based characteristics which will ultimately define his films produced during the latter half of the 1960s. From *The Round-Up* (1965) to *The Red and the White* (1967) to *Silence and Cry* (1968), the director returns to a long-take paired with a perpetually-moving camera. He refrains from providing conventional, explanatory devices such as point-of-view and establishing shots, in turn leaving viewers grasping for meaning due to the "uncommunicative" nature of the narrative. At the level of the narrative itself, future films resume the power dynamics featured in *The Round-Up*. Characters gain and lose power and subject each other to the very treatment they receive, moving seamlessly and effortlessly between the role of oppressor and oppressed.

Yet beginning with *Red Psalm* (1971) and continuing with *Electra, My Love* (1974), Jancsó's long take grows longer and his characters move with more rhythmic, synchronized gestures, indicating a greater degree of stylization within a tested filmic methodology. These changes begin to reflect an altered historical context, where Goulash Socialism, continued Soviet occupation, and the status of the revolution and

independence are questioned.⁹²

“Suppressive Narratives,” the Absent Hero, and Transcending the Diegesis

Three years after the release of *The Round Up*, Jancsó directed *Silence and Cry* (1968), and like *The Round-Up*, the film appears to offer its viewers no explanation as to why those in power perform as they do, or why characters engage in rituals which seem to have no purpose. This absence of explanation is not a subtle one; rather, viewers are made aware, at every turn, of their perpetual confusion as to the meaning and motivation for the unfolding action onscreen. In order to resolve this bewilderment, viewers seek footing where it may be found: in the camera’s explanatory rather than simply indifferent observation of the profilmic, a process Jancsó does not provide. The director once again concludes that the act of inhabiting the space of metalanguage is not possible.

The film focuses on a Hungarian Red Army soldier (István) who, on the run from the Whites, hides away on a local farm with the help of sympathetic residents there. Over time, István realizes the farmer’s wife is daily poisoning her husband. Rather than remain quiet about this development (in the same manner the residents are mute about the awol soldier’s location), István informs the authorities of the crime. In so doing, he emerges

⁹² The term “Goulash Socialism” refers to a practiced form of Communism in Hungary from the mid-1960s until the collapse of Communism 1989. In a departure from the Stalinist principles of the 1950s, Goulash Socialism involved economic reform (opening international trade relations, leaning towards a free market economy) coupled with improvement and recognition of human rights. See Johanna Bockman. “Goulash Socialism and Neoclassical Economics in Hungary.” *Markets In the Name of Socialism: The Left-wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 105-132.

from his hiding place and is ultimately faced with his demise at the hands of Kemer, the local patrolman. At the same time, István's downfall could have been avoided had he remained unseen. As we have seen with *The Round-Up* (and the final scene in *Red Psalm*, which will be discussed), the existence of the captor depends on that of his captive. An eradication of, or identification with, the opposite side of the dynamic would destroy it altogether. Kemer's turning a blind eye to István's presence, then, is not as obscure as one would believe. Petrie writes, "Like the interrogators of *The Round-Up* [Kemer] delays [the moment of István's arrest] as long as possible, knowing that with the death of his victim his whole *raison d'être* disappears and his own death too becomes inevitable."⁹³ Yet again, it is István who must expose his identity to that of the regime, thus enabling his own demise.

In the final scene of *Silence and Cry*, Kemer instructs István be taken to town, yet after the soldiers depart with the fugitive, he catches up with them and offers one last suggestion. Rather than killing the captor himself, Kemer has another idea. "I've thought it over. It's better if you finish yourself off," he explains. With his back to István, he takes out his gun, cocks it, and turns to face his captive. "There's one round left in it," he notes, then walks out of the frame. The camera begins to move, following István as he paces resolutely, gun in hand. In one moment, he turns and shoots, killing not himself but rather his oppressor. The camera, still reeling in one shot, steps back as István steps back, pausing when István pauses. The film ends the very moment István

⁹³ Graham Petrie, *History Must Answer to Man: The Contemporary Hungarian Cinema*. (Gyoma: Kner Printing House, 1978), 43.

condemns himself to death by murdering a stand-in for the regime. Here again, the dynamic is reestablished at the moment of István's arrest, the moment his significance within the structure wanes. Kemerí expires, but due to István's actions, new figures will take his place and the game will continue.

In *The Round Up*, and here in the conclusion of *Silence and Cry*, Jancsó's camera implies neither hope of revolution nor liberation, for although one may fight for both, they are permanently unattainable. Neither revolution nor individual uprising is the antidote. Instead, Jancsó employs a repetitive and unremitting filmic aesthetic which, rather than overtly condemning the perpetual games and tortures waged upon those who have lost power, mirrors the unremitting nature of the games themselves. This is the absence of a filmic metalanguage – a third order idiom which stands outside the object it articulates. Jancsó insists there is no metalanguage; neither is there the prospect of assuming its position and thus an objective, critical distance. The result is an encroaching sense of entrapment. We see no possibility of escape for the protagonists onscreen, and as viewers, are given no explanation as to their continued torture. We have been given no point of view with which to identify, and as a result have a greater investment in solving what we see than rooting for any specific character's plight. Jancsó seems to take a neutral, somewhat removed position regarding the films' content.

Film scholar Graham Petrie notes that this apparent "coldness and *detachment* as a film-maker are not a symptom of [Jancsó's] own moral *indifference*: he is simply presenting, with ruthless honesty, the consequences of a particular political and social

situation.”⁹⁴ At the same time, this deferral of judgment of each scene and narrative whole produces an ambiguous space of criticism. How is the audience to read what it sees? If viewers are not provided a point of reference, they must find it themselves. Petrie continues, “It is the audience that is forced to supply an *overt* moral dimension to the film,”⁹⁵ for in this case, none is given. In addition, Jancsó’s apparent refusal to cast judgement on the unfolding events or fashion protagonists who are not guilty of the same crimes to which they themselves are subject, further complicates the space of identification and criticism. Viewers are unable to align themselves with a single hero’s position, a characteristic of Jancsó’s work standing in direct opposition to the era’s Socialist Realist models.⁹⁶ This failure to identify with the characters onscreen results in a waned investment in their cause, and more importantly, generates confusion as to whose side one should be on.

The problem the spectator faces, then, rests within the space of interpretation on the level of form as well as content. The spectator is challenged by Jancsó’s “suppressive narrative” and how the absence of conventional filmic techniques (point of view shots, for example), coupled with a consistent use of the long take, produce a sense of confusion and ambiguity. What the viewer comprehends, then, is how Jancsó’s form undermines

⁹⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁵ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁶ There are no conventional heroes in Jancsó’s films, figures who lead us through their motivations and thus win our approval. Jancsó not only abstains from psychologizing characters, he prevents viewers from identifying with them. His protracted sequence shots require observation of the profilmic, not wholehearted identification or empathy with those within it. This is, of course, in opposition to the Socialist Realist model where clear heroes rise to the fore, and the distinction between good and evil is invariably clear.

clarity of content. In other words, Jancsó's form leads to an *effect* rather than an understanding. In turn, critical analysis is then replaced by mere description of that effect as well as explanation of the films' structure as a "system at work," as Jean-Louis Comolli notes in his essay "Autocritique." Comolli speaks of an illusion these descriptions engender, where simple acknowledgment of the system at work leads to the false belief that the "film's signifying web" has been "unraveled" and its meanings "exhausted."⁹⁷ That is, the viewer conflates recognition of the films' formal structure with thorough analysis, ultimately leading him to conclude he has solved the riddle and clarified his own confusion. The result is a filmic triumph, for at the level of form *and* in the realm of interpretation, Jancsó reenacts the function of an ideological apparatus, baiting the subject (the viewer) to participate in his own interpellation. This situates Jancsó's project even more deeply within the anti-humanist claim that one is always a subject of ideology, and that attempts to understand it, call it by name, and acknowledge it, are not only ineffectual efforts at overcoming it, they result in further entrenchment into ideology itself. Jancsó's project, then, transcends the diegesis. The making of an ideologically-interpollated subject doesn't simply happen onscreen. It evolves between the audience/subject and the film text itself. This process is further facilitated by the spectator's inability to identify (or misrecognize himself through identification) with characters onscreen and invest in their cause. Jancsó keeps his spectators at bay, on the cusp of the diegesis, in turn making them aware of the effects produced there as well as

⁹⁷ Jean-Louis Comolli. "'Autocritique'." *Readings of Jancsó: Yesterday and Today.* *Cahiers du Cinéma, 1969-1972: The Politics of Representation.* Nick Browne, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 99.

within the space of fiction. The product is, therefore, a very real reenactment not simply in the realm of fiction but also within the space of reality.

Yet Jancsó's project does not aim to lull a passive spectator, one who persistently repeats the "system at work" within each film. Rather, the director invests in activating his audience by coupling the long take with staging in depth – a focus on an increasingly complex *mise-en-scène* which requires the viewer to partake in a greater degree of interpretative action. This shift away from conventional rapid-fire editing leads – according to Bazin – towards a greater realism in cinema, one which requires a more "active mental attitude on the part of the spectator."⁹⁸ "On the other hand," Bazin continues, "depth of focus reintroduced ambiguity into the structure of the image...The uncertainty in which we find ourselves as to the spiritual key or the interpretation we should put on the film [Welles' *Citizen Kane*] is built into the very design of the image."⁹⁹ The design in this case is, of course, the scrupulously constructed *mise-en-scène* which, standing alone and uninterrupted by motivated, strategic cuts, broadens the frame of

⁹⁸ André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema." *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 35-36.

⁹⁹ Here, Bazin champions the staging in depth and lengthy sequence-shots filmmaker Orson Welles employs in his *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Citizen Kane*. In both films, Welles prioritizes deep focus and one-shot sequences over montage, which results not only in an expected spatial and temporal continuity, but also an altered status of montage itself. Bazin notes that Welles does not abandon editing entirely but rather limits its use. When, then, the director returns to montage between lengthy sequence-shots, its contrast to the long take redefines its heretofore conventional status. Bazin writes, "It is not that Welles denies himself any recourse whatsoever to the expressionistic procedures of montage, but just that their use from time to time in between one-shot sequences in depth gives them a new meaning." André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema." *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), both citations page 36.

interpretation. This shift in conventional film language results in a confounding of meaning and thus the viewer who attempts to locate it. Of staging in depth and the long take, Bazin writes,

In addition to affecting the structure of film language, it also affects the relationships of the minds of the spectators to the image, and in consequence it influences the interpretation of the spectacle...It implies, consequently, both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress. While analytical montage only calls for him to follow his guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see, here he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives.¹⁰⁰

In the absence of montage (where the audience simply follows the structural directions of the filmmaker), the viewer must make sense of the action as it unfolds in an uninterrupted manner. In short, the viewer takes an active role in the interpretative process.

Jancsó himself explicitly argues for an active viewer, one who must examine and deliberate on the film material as provided in a cinematic language bereft of the traditional means of explanation. In an interview regarding his filmmaking practices as well as his approach to narrative, he states,

In my opinion, one can imagine a film other than in the form of a story. We must try to widen the limits of expression...Film, by its nature – people of flesh and blood, landscapes, a combination of real visual elements – is always realistic. But perhaps there are possibilities of making it get beyond this everyday reality, so that it becomes a means of expression with several dimensions. A story, if the film is a good one, carries the spectator away on its wings, it is an evasion. A film like *Agnus Dei* preoccupies him, makes him

¹⁰⁰ André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema.” *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 35-36.

think – at least he tries his utmost to; already while the film is being projected the spectator racks his brains trying to order the things he is seeing, he sees himself obliged to, *he is active*.¹⁰¹

This equivocation of interpretation, as well as ambiguity of allegiance (noted above) stems, no doubt, from the ideological betrayal to which Jancsó and others were subject at the hands of the Stalinist regime. As has been cited earlier in this chapter, Jancsó came to age as a narrative filmmaker in the wake of the crushed Hungarian Uprising of 1956. Before that time, he produced documentary newsreels in the service of the state, which his allegiances to Stalinism and the party line no doubt made possible.¹⁰² After the death of Stalin and the release of Khrushchev's condemning secret speech, acknowledgement of the betrayals of Stalinism swept across the Eastern Bloc. As a result, Jancsó

¹⁰¹ Jancsó, interviewed by István Zsugan in *Cinéma* 72, 165 (April 1972), quoted in Roy Armes, *The Ambiguous Image: Narrative Style in Modern European Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 150. Here, Jancsó refers to his *Agnus Dei* of 1970. The film focuses on clashes between religious fanatics and revolutionaries, and is, arguably, Jancsó's most equivocal work.

¹⁰² In 1974, film scholar Gideon Bachmann interviewed Jancsó, who speaks briefly about his political allegiances before 1956, stating he was a Stalinist and continues to be "an expert of Stalinism." His own history, he admits, is a tremendous influence on his work. See Miklós Jancsó and Gideon Bachmann, "I Have Played Christ Long Enough! Miklós Jancsó Talks with Gideon Bachmann in Rome," *Film Quarterly* 28 (Autumn 1974), 49-54. As for Jancsó as a documentarian for the state, see Mira Liehm and Antonín J Liehm. *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 173.

immediately withdrew from the Communist Party.¹⁰³ Yet rather than abandoning the tenets and theories upon which the Party was built (particularly after those tenets, theories, and histories had been distorted at the hands of the Stalinist regime), Jancsó maintained his loyalty to Marxism, and to the belief that history itself is a dialectical structure, a permanent series of conflicts and struggles between opposing classes. The methods by which he constructs his films underscore this belief.

While the opening sequence of *The Round Up* stages the ensuing struggle as one between the the poor captive to poverty and the bourgeois class, the remainder of the film's *content* focuses less on the central conflict in these terms. Instead, the narrative hovers around relatively abstract mechanisms of power and punishment, a step away, it seems, from endorsing or exposing any overt political convictions. In analyzing Jancsó's work, Graham Petrie notes the director's films "use a particular historical setting to make more *generally applicable* analyses of power, violence, revolution, and political and social control."¹⁰⁴ He continues,

Apart from the fact that the victims in these earlier films were either Communists or those fighting for national independence,

¹⁰³ In an interview featured on *Jancsó*, an archival CD-Rom produced by Inforg Studio, Hungary, the director notes joining the communist party in 1946, then marks the show trial and execution of László Rajk (former Minister of Interior, Hungary) in 1949 as striking a major blow to his then Stalinist allegiances. He left the Party seven years later. See *Jancsó*, CD-Rom, Tibor Hirsch, ed. (Budapest: Inforg Stúdió in tandem with Kossuth Publishing, 2000). For more on the show trial of Rajk and the erroneous case made against him, see George H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948-1954* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 33-40, 59-67. By 1969, the subject of the Rajk trial was addressed in *The Witness* (1969), a satire directed by Hungarian Péter Bascó. The film was, of course, immediately banned.

¹⁰⁴ See Graham Petrie, *Red Psalm – Még kér a nép*. (Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 1998), 32. Emphasis mine.

there was little that was specifically Marxist about the nature of the political struggle that was portrayed. The focus appeared to be primarily on the nature of power – no matter who exercised it – and on the mechanics by which it was achieved, maintained, exchanged or overthrown. Neither side was completely pure or innocent: the victims could be manipulated in betraying or deserting their comrades, and former victims were perfectly capable of committing atrocities once they obtained the upper hand. In such a context, the feasibility of achieving social and political justice – even in the somewhat distant future – seemed extremely problematic. ¹⁰⁵

Indeed, the *nature* of the political struggle portrayed in Jancsó's films – which consistently involves a contest for power – may not itself bespeak a manifest Marxist rhetoric. In this sense, the analyses of Petrie and Armes, outlined at the outset of this chapter, are correct, yet they do little to thoroughly acknowledge that Jancsó's politics exist at the level of a *form* which, as has been argued above, is made manifest by the content it must embody. At this fundamental level, the director embraces a dialectical filmic practice undifferentiated from a historical one.

There is in Jancsó's practice a secondary level of discourse brought about by the filmmaker's evocation of the absence of metalanguage. As I have argued, a direct link exists between the inability to occupy the position of metalanguage and the impossibility of extracting one's self from an ideological apparatus. Metalanguage is unattainable precisely because of the embedded nature of the subject within ideology itself – the first order language. Every enunciation is generated by and within the ideological apparatus. By creating films which consistently expose the inability to attain a position of metalanguage, Jancsó engages in deft ideological critique. In his films, protagonists are

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 32-33. Emphasis mine.

caught in inescapable circumstances of physical and psychological torture and viewers are provided no footing with which to make sense of the unfolding drama. Here, neither character nor viewer occupies a position of metalanguage. At the same time, Jancsó employs stylistic and structural devices which enact or articulate the the very mechanisms which make metalanguage inaccessible. There are no conventional point-of-view shots, no external sense of narration, no overtly cued means of perception.

A pointed sequence from *The Round Up*, in which one prisoner is singled out among many and told he is free but must make his way through a maze of sorts first – only to be imprisoned again once on the other side – is a case in point. In this sequence, captured with a single take of a camera which rises when the captor is “free,” then falls when he realizes he may go nowhere, certainly hints at the inescapable nature of the figure’s predicament. Yet the lack of subjective camerawork emphasizes the almost rote manner in which each character (captives and captors alike) follow their prescribed roles. As viewers, we are not given access to any character’s psychology; we are rarely permitted to identify with anyone onscreen. In this sequence, as in many others, we experience the unfolding action from a distance, as does the camera, unable to locate any explanation – either within the characters onscreen or through explanatory camerawork – for what appears onscreen. It is the overly objective, almost uninvested nature of the camera itself which underscores this absence of metalanguage.

In other words, Jancsó turns ideology on itself by exploiting its own distorting means. In “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” (1969), Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni claim the camera passively registers the world of the dominant ideology, ultimately

reproducing reality as it is refracted through this ideology. Yet there are certain films and filmmakers, they claim, which attempt to make ideology turn back and reflect itself, thus making visible its distorting mechanisms.¹⁰⁶ If a filmmaker is able to expose these mechanisms – the modes by which cinema not only reproduces reality but does so as it is screened through ideology itself – then s/he may “disrupt” or even “sever” cinema from this ideological function. Film, then, can be used not to reproduce a dominant ideology but rather expose it. Comolli and Narboni write,

Cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself. They constitute its ideology for they reproduce the world as it is experienced when filtered through the ideology....So, when we set out to make a film, from the very first shot, we are encumbered by the necessity of reproducing things not as they really are but as they appear when refracted through the ideology...The film is ideology presenting itself to itself...Once we realize that it is the nature of the system to turn the cinema into an instrument of ideology, we can see that the filmmaker’s first task is to show up the cinema’s so-called ‘depiction of reality’. If he can do so there is a chance that we will be able to disrupt or possibly even sever the connection between the cinema and its ideological function.¹⁰⁷

Jancsó’s films align themselves with this exact strategy, exposing ideological underpinnings via the very language adapted by an ideological apparatus itself.

Eschewing Recent Histories or Examining distant Pasts? Repetition with Change

Two years after *The Round Up*, Jancsó directed *The Red and the White* (1967), a

¹⁰⁶ See Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” in *Film Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 812-819.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 815.

Hungarian-Russian co-production financed to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian October Revolution of 1917. Rather than situating the film firmly within the revolution itself, thus venerating the emergence of Soviet Communism as well as its contemporary manifestation in the Soviet Union (the intended and expected plan, particularly from a filmmaker working in the Eastern Bloc), Jancsó sets the film two years later, in 1919, during the Russian Civil War. The result, of course, is not a film honoring the heroics of Russians who fought together to oust the tzars but rather an examination of the brutality of war itself, where, in this instance, countrymen battle each other in a fight between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces.

Situating films in a recent or distant past is not a feature specific to Jancsó, yet the director's continued return to a single year (1919) for three of his films – here *The Red and the White* (1967), *Silence and Cry* (1968) which will be discussed briefly later in this chapter, and *Agnus Dei* (1970) – is of particular note, considering he never directly addresses other moments in Hungary's recent history, namely 1956, the year of the Hungarian Uprising and one of the country's most historically-significant moments. In his essay on *The Round Up*, András Bálint Kovács claims Jancsó looked to earlier moments in history in order to address his own historical context. He writes,

Jancsó admits turning to historical topics because he could not express his ideas about politics in any other way [due to state censorship]. Disguised as history, social and political criticism was more acceptable for the representatives of political power than direct criticism. Thus, for example, *The Round-Up* could be released in Hungary on the condition that Jancsó explicitly stated in an interview that this film was not about the retaliations

following the 1956 revolution, it was instead about the retaliations following the 1848 revolution.¹⁰⁸

Jancsó's *The Round Up* was, then, "the first representative of a whole genre in Hungarian cinema, the historical parable, that was to become fashionable in Hungary."¹⁰⁹

As the title of the film suggests, the narrative focuses on the opposition between the Bolshevik Red Army, which includes Hungarian volunteer fighters, and the anti-Bolshevik, anti-communist military faction of the White Movement – a far departure from the unifying theme the 1917 Revolution promised. The opposition seems clear, but as the film unfolds, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the Reds from the Whites. Both sides repeatedly gain and lose power, each time forcing the defeated to strip themselves of their clothing and thus all military regalia. The command dishonors and humiliates as well as enacts the interchangeable nature of individuals who stand in as placeholders of dominance and oppression. In other words, the military symbols are static and enduring. They will prevail as long as there are men who bring them to life. When the victors allow their adversaries to flee, they invariably terminate their escape by shooting them in the back, one by one, as they run.

In essence, the tortuous games of *The Round Up* continue. As with this previous film, there are fewer protagonists than there are types (with *The Round Up*, Jancsó's presents "captors" and "captives;" with *The Red and the White*, he offers simply "soldiers"). The lack of any heroes with whom viewers may identify, coupled with the

¹⁰⁸ See András Bálint Kovács. "Szegénylegények/The Round Up: Miklós Jancsó, Hungary, 1956." *The Cinema of Central Europe*. Peter Hames, Ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 107-109.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

nearly identical behavior of both sides whenever they assume positions of power, results in a persistent difficulty distinguishing characters and the camps to which they belong. It is not until the closing scene of the film that Jancsó seems to offer a viewers a hero – albeit in the final moments – and thus a single character and cause the audience may champion. Yet here as with *The Round Up*, the end of the film provides no closure. Instead, the conflict begins anew, slightly altered, continuing indefinitely.

Similar to *The Round Up*, the film begins with a still image, this time of a map of eastern Europe dotted not with names of countries, cities, and rivers but rather military fronts. Thick black arrows indicating the direction of army movement bend and twist, a number of them converging near the Ukrainian front as well as Moscow. Immediately following is an establishing shot of sorts: a barren hill and on it an uneven path positioned squarely at frame's center. A bugle calls, and soldiers on horseback emerge in the distance. With swords drawn and rifles aimed, they charge towards the camera in a slow-motion shot, the pace of which tempers their assault. The film's only inter-title follows.

It reads:

1919: After the revolution, during the Civil War, the Soviet forces defended the new regime from foreign intervention and foreign-backed White (counter-revolutionary forces) at times on 21 fronts. This is the story of the opposing forces on one front, where Hungarian volunteers had joined the defense. The place is an abandoned monastery used by each side – when it captured the position – as a field hospital and garrison.¹¹⁰

As with *The Round Up*, the film begins with limited explanation, a brief framing of the ensuing conflict without which the narrative would be impossible to contextualize. In

¹¹⁰ Opening text from *The Red and The White* (1967).

both films, this opening commentary appears to situate the plot and thus eliminate any ambiguity regarding it, yet this is not the case. Instead, the viewer takes with him this explanation, expecting it to function as key to the film, yet it grows more and more useless as the drama unfolds. From the outset, this objective perspective of sorts, one which claims to contextualize history sufficiently and in quick summation – and thus explain the ensuing narrative – is not only impossible to occupy, it is impossible to construct. The viewer is left with the realization that there is no objective distance – no metalanguage – one can assume in order explain the ensuing action.

After a brief opening sequence of soldiers racing on horseback, some succumbing to shots fired from an offscreen source, Jancsó delivers his first long take: a medium shot of a an open plain. As the camera rolls, a young soldier makes his way into the frame, moving left while lifting a rifle to his shoulder and shooting right. We do not see his target, but deduce it must be the soldiers who fell from their horses in the opening sequence. The young man continues to fire right as he frantically paces left, the camera tracking alongside his retreat rather than providing an explanatory reverse shot of the figures in his sights. In addition to the omission of this explanatory reverse shot, Jancsó subtly upends the traditional syntax of film language, giving us the reverse shot before the shot itself. To clarify, the soldiers fall from their horses in the opening sequence *before* we see the young Bolshevik take aim, presumably at them. In the very next shot – which is the first long take of the film – he fires his rifle but we no longer see his target. Jancsó heightens the drama of this sequence by insisting upon spatial and temporal continuity in one scene (the long take) while at the same time reversing conventional

cinematic syntax with the scene that precedes it. In an analysis of space in Jancsó's *The Confrontation* (1969), David Bordwell makes note of a similar tension between spatial continuity the long take captures and the fictional space constructed therein. He writes, "If a shot ends with a character looking off left and the next begins with a character looking off right, breaks in the fictional space stand out against continuity cues at the stylistic level."¹¹¹ In other words, these breaks in spatial continuity, including transgressions of the 180-degree rule, stand in high relief to the perceived continuity the long take affords.

In another pointed sequence, a soldier worriedly runs on the opposite bank of a wide stream. He, too, fires right while hastening towards the far reaches of the composition. Yet his line of escape in this broad expanse of land is thwarted by three soldiers on horseback who emerge from a tall row of trees at the very edge of the frame. In one protracted shot staged in remarkable depth, significant action occurs on three planes: the fore-, mid-, and background. The young soldiers change course, now making their way from whence they came, despite the offscreen threat of the infantrymen seen in the opening sequence. The camera, too, retreats with them, moving along the identical pattern upon which it entered the scene, underscoring the tracks beneath it, making their presence known.¹¹²

¹¹¹ David Bordwell. *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 143.

¹¹² The camera moves along these selfsame tracks an additional four times in either direction.

The film continues in this vein, observing each side as it regains power from the other and witnessing the struggle to domination of the defeated. In a particularly disturbing scene, countless men who have been taken prisoner are told they have ten minutes to find an escape, a way out from the compound in which they are held. In a series of shots, each lasting at least a minute or more, the camera follows the captives as they race en masse within the compound, rattling padlocks on wooden gates, testing limits as they attempt (and fail) to scale impossibly high walls. Time begins to wane, and, as film scholar Yvette Biró notes, “The short split-second of hope allows them only to hit, even more brutally, their invincible walls.”¹¹³ Here, as with Jancsó’s previous film *The Round Up*, the conclusion of the film provides no closure. Instead, the conflict begins anew, slightly altered, continuing indefinitely.

Upon completion of *The Red and the White*, Soviet authorities hindered its release, citing the work’s equivocal handling of the civil war as well as its suspected negative portrayal of the Bolsheviks and their cause. Jancsó’s reluctance to individualize characters and create conventional Soviet heroes in his films surely contributed to widespread frustrations with the work. Ultimately, the Soviet authorities re-edited the Russian release of the film in an attempt to eliminate any ambiguity, a move that only seems possible with a project that minimized editing in order to create ambiguity itself. Ultimately, the film was banned from Russia. Fortunately, Jancsó retained his original

¹¹³ Yvette Biró, “Pathos and Irony in East European Films.” *Politics, Art, and Commitment in East European Cinema*. David W. Paul, ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 35.

cut of the film, returned to Hungary with it, and enabled its distribution throughout the west where it had a positive, award-filled reception.

The Sight and Sound of Revolution: On- and Offscreen Space in *Red Psalm* (1971)

I would like to turn to the opening of two films, Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) and Jancsó's *Red Psalm* (1971). *Stalker*, which will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Three, is Tarkovsky's very loose adaptation of Arkadi and Boris Strugatsky's *The Roadside Picnic* published in 1972 (the Strugatskys wrote the script for the film). The film seems not so much based on a science-fiction novel but rather is the pretext for denoting this late-socialist landscape itself as science-fiction. Here, the film's setting is a deserted factory based in Estonia, one which, many argue, exposed Tarkovsky and his cast and crew to cancer-producing and ultimately fatal chemicals. Tarkovsky and others from his crew died of the same form of cancer years after the film's release. In the film, the Stalker leads others to explore the Zone, a region overtaken by a mysterious force brought about by a fallen meteorite or perhaps a "visitation from outer space," as the epigraph to the film suggests. There is, at the center of the Zone, a room in which those who enter find their desires granted. Those who have made their way through its doors are forever changed, and not always for the better. The scene in question is from the beginning of the film, where the Stalker is about to leave his flat to make his way to the Zone.

After the opening credits, the camera moves at a lethargic pace. Over the course of nearly one minute, a slow tracking shot moves through two doors slightly ajar, passing between the opening and focusing upon a bed positioned against a wall. The camera then tracks, suspended, to the bed, crossing the Stalker's sleeping wife, daughter, and the Stalker himself, whose watchful eyes are open. The sound of a locomotive accompanies this camera movement, as if in strange jest to its own pensile tracks. As the train makes its offscreen approach, we hear carried upon it the course of *La Marseillaise*. The camera pauses, and on its way back across the bed of these figures, the music and the train go silent in the distance. The camera returns to its objects of study upon the shallow tray.

Jancsó's *Red Psalm* (1971) is set at the end of the 19th century, during which a period of peasant unrest and uprisings occurred. The action centers on confrontations between the military, landowners, members of the church, and peasants who – from the very outset – demand economic and political rights. Jancsó's *Red Psalm* begins with a close-up of two doves held in the arms of a young woman and a countrified rendition of the same song: *La Marseillaise*. The camera, positioned at a distance from this scene, slowly begins to zoom out slightly, yet the perspective it offers is obscured by figures moving between the camera itself and the seated women of its focus. The camera zooms out further, tilting and panning to take in the unfolding action, following a man in uniform, scanning the field inhabited by a disparate crowd, pausing on two musicians and their pastoral instruments which emit this anthem of uprising and violence. The frame widens further, as does the commotion within it. The peasants continue their song in unison, yet are overlapped by a folk tune to the left as they exit right. Ultimately, they re-

enter the scene as one of its members begins to read a letter by Friedrich Engels in which the conflict between landowners – those who own the means of production – and the proletariat, is drawn. Promise of a “new, better social order” is given, but only through violent revolution.¹¹⁴

I focus on these two films to draw attention to where they overlap. Both share a similar historical and political context, the long take aesthetic, and an opening soundtrack of *La Marseillaise*, that hymn of the revolution, of unity, uprising, and justified overthrow of the oppressive class. Its appearance in *Red Psalm* is coupled with a complex, ever-changing *mise-en-scene*, a layered composition surpassing the likes of Fellini. The commotion here is so great that the camera – that device for whom the content unfolds – struggles to find focus, the depth of which is impossible to plumb. It could go any direction, but will ultimately land at the same place. As we know, the film ends with the slaughter of the peasants after they are joined in dance by the very soldiers who kill them. One survivor rises up – the same woman holding the doves in the opening

¹¹⁴ According to Trotsky, “the road to democracy pass[es] through the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus democracy is not a regime that remains self-sufficient for decades, but is only a direct prelude to the socialist revolution. Each is bound to the other by an unbroken chain. Thus there is established between the democratic revolution and the socialist reconstruction of society a permanent state of revolutionary development.” This state is, furthermore, perpetuated by the constant transformation of social relations which ceaselessly collide with one another. Each stage of transformation “develops through collisions between various groups in the society...Revolutions in economy, technique, science, the family, morals, and everyday life develop in complex reciprocal action and do not allow society to achieve equilibrium. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolutions as such.” In other words, the revolution is in a state of becoming. It cannot and should not be defined. See “The Theory of the Permanent Revolution” and “Criticism of the Theory of ‘Socialism in One Country,’” in *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology*. Ed. Isaac Deutscher. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), 62-65 and 145-150, respectively.

sequence – and with her peaceful hands shoots every remaining officer. The long take, employed here as well, emphasizes Jancsó’s historical materialist belief: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”¹¹⁵ Here, Jancsó offers the possibility of change, a “new, better social order” alluded to in Engels’ letter at the outset, yet this will not come without grave cost.

Tarkovsky, too, refers to *La Marseillaise*, yet its call is distant and in motion, ultimately passing its people by. One can only think of the *agit-prop* trains (*agit-poezda*) – those remarkable locomotives launched immediately after the October revolution. Trains such as *The Lenin* and *The Red Star* traveled the country, distributing revolutionary pamphlets, socialist literature, and – most importantly for our purposes – projecting films. These were mobile cinemas, trains with projectors and loudspeakers, radio transmitter-receivers, telephone links. These trains were “associated in the public mind with technology, modernization and progress,”¹¹⁶ the promise of the new Socialist future. They brought “pictures of the new leadership to the population at large.”¹¹⁷ They were “dynamic methods of communicat[ing] with the masses,” and were regarded by

¹¹⁵ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. (New York: International Publishers, 1998), 15.

¹¹⁶ Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema: 1917-1929*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 54.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

them as “direct representatives of supreme power”¹¹⁸ with whom the new soviet people established – by way of cinema – a “quasi-direct rapport.”¹¹⁹ “The *agitki* genre had a decisive influence on the stylistic development of the Soviet film,” writes film historian Richard Taylor. “The essence of economy and dynamism in the visual presentation of material was developed in the principles of editing or, as Eisenstein was later to call it, ‘dynamic montage.’”¹²⁰ This movement defined an entire generation of filmmakers (Eisenstein and Vertov), and film form.¹²¹ Yet in this frame, in this moment, that is a distant past. Here, in Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*, *La Marseillaise* and the promise of revolution it sings is but a passing shadow in a dark room, a tune bereft of impact. It is not a call to arms but rather an invisible presence, an increasingly empty signifier in which no passengers, no unity, can be found.

La Marseillaise serves as a concrete entry-point to compare these two filmmakers. Both address an identical musical theme in remarkably singular fashion, yet the immaterial nature of the music and the offscreen space from which it emanates needs to be emphasized here. Tarkovsky’s and Jancsó’s use of offscreen space – and the sound radiating therefrom – differs dramatically. The two sequences from *Stalker* and *Red Psalm* noted here offer a prime example of this distinction. While Tarkovsky’s offscreen

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Richard Taylor notes, “Dziga Vertov wrote a script for a documentary film to be shot from the agit-train *Sovetskii Kavkas* (Soviet Caucasus) but it was never made.” See Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema: 1917-1929*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 57.

sound rarely tends to visually materialize, Jancsó rarely provides an offscreen sound which does not eventually make its way into the frame. The case of *La Marseillaise* is key. As noted above, *La Marseillaise* as it appears in *Stalker* seems to approach, to come near, thanks to the sound technician's simulation of the doppler effect, yet its source never materializes. One must *imagine* its physical origin. Jancsó begins his film with an audio overlay of *La Marseillaise*, and as his camera continues to roll uninterrupted, constantly reframing the unfolding action, it ultimately lands on the two musicians and their instruments responsible for the song itself. One need not imagine the source. Jancsó provides it, in all its material glory. Not only do the peasants embrace the revolutionary nature of the song, they produce it. In other words, the revolution is first an idea (offscreen, imaginary), then a concrete act (onscreen, achieved).¹²² For Jancsó, what appears within the frame is always and ultimately an actualization of what exists beyond it. It is partly for this reason the director resists breaking the frame by way of montage and the new frame/composition it continually imposes. There is no need to force manufactured continuity (historical and otherwise) when simply capturing the profilmic will do.

As will be noted in Chapter Three, Tarkovsky's use of offscreen sound – dripping water, echoes, footsteps, birds, etc. – stretches the limits of the frame, insisting that which exists offscreen is central to what develops on it, despite its immaterial (intangible)

¹²² I use the term “imaginary” here to indicate not only offscreen space as conceived or imagined in the mind of the viewer, but also “imaginary” as the immaterial nature of the projected image itself, as Christian Metz argues in his *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

status. Tarkovsky's own conceptualization of on- and offscreen space is – not unlike Jancsó's – interrelated. Both are, in the words of Jacques Aumont, homogenous, reversible, “equally important for defining film space.”¹²³ Yet where the homogeneity of Jancsó's on- and offscreen space purposefully moves from the imaginary to the actualized, consistently materializing matter, Tarkovsky perpetually shirks a strictly materialist approach. Instead, his offscreen use of sound perpetuates and underscores not only the immaterial nature of the framed image, but of matter itself, thus evoking his transcendental materialist approach to film (described in Chapter Three), where matter is simply a byway to the spiritual. In this instance, the revolution never physically materializes. It is simply an idea, yet one perpetually out of reach.

The Revolution Renewed: *Electra, My Love* (1974)

Despite the relatively early nature of *Red Psalm* (1971), Jancsó provides glimpses of where he will ultimately go in suggesting the possibility of a revolution a mere three years later. With the release of *Electra, My Love* (1974), the filmmaker presents a perspective which includes real existing revolution – one eternally renewed and redefined due to the sacrifice of countless vanishing mediators rising from the ashes of those who

¹²³ For more on on- and offscreen (or “out of frame” - *hors-cadre*) space, see Jacques Aumont, “Film as Audio Visual Representation” in *Aesthetics of Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 14-15. See also Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. and ed. Ben Brewster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

fell before.¹²⁴ The film, consisting of twelve shots (eight of which consume an entire reel of film, often lasting nearly ten minutes in length) is a retelling of the Greek myth of Electra and Orestes who together seek revenge for the murder of their father. The entirety of the film takes place upon the Hungarian plain, a familiar and oft-repeated setting for the director's work. Despite the recognizable landscape, *Electra, My Love* marks a significant revision in Jancsó's work. What has changed is the reference not to a distant and shared national past but rather a universal, mythological fable, one that represents themes of tyranny and revenge independent of any specific historical moment. Indeed, Jancsó's project to date has repeated themes such as these (the dynamic of oppressor and oppressed, for example), and his familiar film form has fallen in line. Yet here, the twelve-shot sequence seems to restructure the film itself. The long take has

¹²⁴ Here, we return to the dialectical relationship between form and content. In responding to the critique of Marxism waged by German sociologist Max Weber (active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) that Protestantism was the condition which made capitalism possible, Frederic Jameson in chapter one of his *The Ideologies of Theory* titled "The Vanishing Mediator: or, Max Weber as Storyteller," flips the equation, arranging it in thoroughly Marxist terms. See Frederic Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, Volume 2, Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 3-34. Tony Myers, in his book *Slavoj Žižek*, unpacks the concept thus: "A vanishing mediator is a concept which somehow negotiates and settles – hence mediating – the transition between two opposed concepts and thereafter disappears. Žižek draws attention to the fact that a vanishing mediator is produced by an asymmetry of content and form. As with Marx's analysis of revolution, form lags behind content, in the sense that content changes within the parameters of an existing form, until the logic of that content works its way out to the latter and throws off its husk, revealing a new form in its stead." And Žižek himself writes, "The 'vanishing mediator' therefore emerges because of the way, in a dialectical process, form stays behind content: first, the crucial shift occurs within the limits of the old form, even taking on the appearance of its renewed assertion...then, once the 'silent weaving of the spirit' finishes its work, the old form can fall off." Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 185. See also Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 38-39.

grown longer, figures move in more rhythmic, repetitive, and ritualized gestures. They crack whips in harmony, circle about on horseback in series of concentric circles, and appear to maneuver with (even) less agency, dancing instead to a waltz-like formal edict. In short, there is a marked visual difference here.

One cannot and should not attribute these stylistic changes as simple maturations of an artist's *oeuvre*, or imagine them as variations on a particular (and very singular) formal system. With the apparent repetitive quality of Jancsó's material, it is easy to establish a method of criticism which could then be applied to each of the director's films. Yet this, Comolli notes, would be not only a retrospective but also an ahistorical critique.¹²⁵ He writes,

The relation between [Jancsó's] films would seem to be that of unchanging identity, of resumption – all the system need do, once it is set up, is to repeat itself, producing on demand a series of films, all equivalent to each other, the whole of the process seemingly immune to any determination by history, ideology or politics. As though, Jancsó having perfected his model, his cinematographic production becomes simply an automatic gesture of recasting.¹²⁶

One must, then, note the significance of historical change in the decade between *The Round-Up* (1965) and *Electra, My Love* (1974), where the immediacy of Stalinism, the show trials of figures such as Rajk, and the failed Hungarian Uprising transition to “Goulash Socialism” under General Secretary János Kádár. Here, a series of eased economic and trade restrictions, coupled with emerging recognition of human rights and

¹²⁵ Jean-Louis Comolli. “‘Autocritique’”. *Readings of Jancsó: Yesterday and Today.* *Cahiers du Cinéma, 1969-1972: The Politics of Representation.* Nick Browne, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 107.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

social reforms, were met with a continued presence of Soviet troops within Hungary's borders. A gradual change was underway, yet one which was taking place under and tempered by the specter of Soviet occupation.

Could one not argue, then, that the near rote manner by which characters now assume and perform their roles – dancing, almost, to an inaudible but shared song – mirrors the difference and repetition of history itself? And could one not claim the mythological fable retold here, coupled with the urgency of its outcome, speak to this partial but not complete historical change of national reformation and continued foreign rule? What is the status of revolution nearly eighteen years after its failed attempt, and what has come of those who battled for independence? The answer, perhaps, can be found in the conclusion of Jancsó's film. After executing their revenge, Electra and Orestes board a red helicopter and ascend above the Hungarian landscape. Electra's voice fills the sky:

The firebird must die each day to be reborn the day after. And once landowners and factory owners cease to be and there is neither bourgeois nor proletarian, rich or poor, oppressor or oppressed, once there is not too much food for some and not enough for others, when all may partake equally of the basket of plenty, when all shall sit as equals at justice's table, when the spirit shall shine in every window, then and only then shall man live a life worthy of him one of liberty, joy, peace. Yet the firebird shall still fly here above us, and still perish every day to be reborn even more wondrous the day after. *Blessed be your name, revolution.*¹²⁷

For the first time in Jancsó's films, the setting is broken by the intrusion of modern machinery. At the same time, the "myth" is traversed. The film seems to suggest it does

¹²⁷ Electra's voiceover in final scene of Miklós Jancsó's *Electra, My Love* (1974).

not concern a Greek past but rather a Hungarian present. And the impact of Electra's words, coupled with the force of their delivery, indicates the revolution is at hand, yet will always be in a state of transformation. As for those who embody in extreme fashion the central tenets of the revolution itself – those who call for violent overthrow, etc. – they are the ones who ultimately make more conservative demands possible.¹²⁸ They are the firebird, the phoenix, the vanishing mediator. Their successors will reap the benefits of the seeds they sow, and will build on the sacrifices they make. Indeed, the revolution's central tenets will be tempered, but there will be no end to the struggle and no shortage of those willing to fight.

This final comparison marks a significant break not only for Jancsó as an auteurist filmmaker, but also for Jancsó as one of many filmmakers working in Eastern Europe at the time. With *Red Psalm* (1971) and *Electra, My Love* (1974), the director proposes a conclusion which does not end where each film – and so many others within the filmmaker's *oeuvre* – began. Instead, he opens the field, suggesting a viable yet violent alternative to the status quo. This was a new turn for Jancsó and his Eastern European contemporaries, among whom Andrzej Wajda (Poland) and Jan Němec (Czechoslovakia)

¹²⁸ This is precisely the case with Electra and Orestes. Their call for the violent overthrow of Aegisthus – their stepfather and tyrant of the people, and the one responsible for their father's murder – is initially unheard. Aegisthus continues his reign, and despite the psychological torture he wages on the people, they consistently embrace him as their ruler. Ultimately, Orestes shoots Aegisthus, yet this act is not met with celebration but rather the death of both Electra and Orestes. They are reborn, then alight in the skies aboard a red helicopter.

are counted.¹²⁹ In an essay titled “Pathos and Irony in East European Films,” Biró claims the historical context from which Jancsó’s films such as *The Red and the White* emerged was an ambiguous one, in turn leading him and other artists to compose ambiguous works.¹³⁰ The “political and cultural murkiness” of Eastern Europe from the 1950s through the 1970s, Biró notes, is marked by films which “suggest all motives are equivocal: that oppressors and victims may be indistinguishable from each other and may change positions with ease.”¹³¹ Yet rather than quietly duplicating the political climate at the time, Jancsó’s work provokes intellectual reflection and activation. The point is not only to hold a mirror to the repeating dynamics of power, thus revealing the apparatus itself; it is to provide a way in to how that dynamic functions and evolves. Biró continues,

Is it simply the Grand Inquisitor’s indicated mystery that we cannot comprehend and, therefore, a desperate riddle to which we have to bow – without reflection and even against our conscience? No, the great effort in those years was just the opposite: to seek the

¹²⁹ In addition, these filmmakers were keenly aware of each other’s work. Wajda himself made note of Jancsó’s films in the following stark, poetic terms: “An endless plain, two thirds sky, cloudy, grey, neutral. The earth polished like a table...A man appears, running, his silhouette is moving away, he seems but an ant. And then a gun is raised... persistently, steadily watching the fugitive point. Finally the gun fires.” Andrzej Wajda quoted in Yvette Biró. “Landscape after Battle: Films from ‘The Other Europe.’” *Daedalus* 119:1 (Winter 1990), 178. Also quoted in Yvette Biró. *Jancsó* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1977), 5.

¹³⁰ Yvette Biró, “Pathos and Irony in East European Films.” *Politics, Art, and Commitment in East European Cinema*. David W. Paul, ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 34.

¹³¹ Ibid. Biró notes Jancsó’s *The Red and the White* and *Silence and Cry*, Andrzej Wajda’s *Ashes and Diamonds* (Poland, 1958), Jan Němec’s *Diamonds of the Night* (Czechoslovakia, 1964), as well as Krsto Papić’s *Handcuffs* (Yugoslavia, 1969) as examples.

rules of the secret game and decode the mystery, to understand the mechanism as it became more and more a highly closed system. All those films attempted to give an answer to the basic historical predicament: the conflict of being perpetually caught up in history and thus overruled or paralyzed by it and, despite that deprivation of power, being still unceasingly called upon.¹³²

With this final pairing, we see the turn Jancsó begins to make. He moves from paralysis in repetition to acknowledgment of a future freedom won by a standing fight.

As we shall see in the following chapters, the ambiguity and the long take remain, as does the shared political climate. What changes is the use of the long take – for what purpose and to what effect. For Jancsó, the motivation behind the device is an overtly political one. As a citizen of occupied territory, and as a former Stalinist, Jancsó sought to prove one could retain Marxist principles in the wake of Stalinism's betrayals. Yes, this is filmmaker who focuses on the dynamics of power and the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. Wajda and Němec do the same, and why wouldn't they? They are the satellite states, the occupied territories, those struggling for independence but thwarted at every turn. Throughout his early career, Jancsó firmly embeds his filmmaking in the realm of historical reality, doing so by melding fiction with the ultimate realist device: the long take. Parajanov and Tarkovsky, the filmmakers who follow in the subsequent chapters, employ the long take as well, yet in so doing take increasing departures from the facts of their contemporary contexts, ultimately blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, real and imaginary.

¹³² Ibid.

Chapter Two Sergei Parajanov

Pastiche and Disjunction: An Artist of the Still Moving Image¹³³

In a photo collage titled *Tarkovsky's Nocturnal Bird* (1987) (Fig. 1), two filmmakers – Andrei Tarkovsky and Sergei Parajanov – sit at a table. The former, who died just the year before, was a guest of the latter, the one who constructed the image. Here, a relatively banal black and white photograph of their meeting in 1982 (Fig. 2) is covered by color and texture, cutouts from other times, places, and genres. The flat bread in the original is stomped by a three-tiered cake. Pink flowers nest in otherwise empty bowls, butterflies dance against the backdrop of closed doors, and a bird rests on Tarkovsky's unamused head – a nod, no doubt, to the small chickadee who lands atop Asafiev's ushanka-style hat (Fig. 3) in the filmmaker's *Mirror* of 1975. An identical bird balances on Parajanov's right forearm, suggesting, it seems, that it has taken flight from Tarkovsky and landed here, on a body of color and a body still living. That body, lifted from another medium (namely, painting), is none other than Jacques-Louis David's *Male Nude Known as Patroclus* (1779-80, Fig. 4).¹³⁴ In the original, Patroclus – beloved friend of Achilles – appears alone in a nondescript setting. He turns both head and torso away from the viewer. We see not his face but rather a thick mane of windswept hair and a

¹³³ The term “still moving” is taken from the book of the same name, edited by Karen Beckman and Jean Ma.

¹³⁴ Patroclus appears in Homer's *Iliad*, the narrative of which is driven in large part by his relationship with Achilles. See Keith Stanley, *The shield of Homer: Narrative Structure in the Iliad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

tension in position stressed by bent elbow, wrist, and fingers gripping a jagged slab of stone.

Here, Parajanov lifts the torso from that painting, aligning it with his own black and white portrait and in so doing covers his body. A visual disjunction and narrative condensation result, one which begins to beg the question, how much is this gaping seam between mind and body a consequence of Parajanov's own imprisonment on charges of homosexuality and traffic in icons, one which saw him perform hard labor at camps of "severe regime" from April 1974 until December 30, 1977. For nearly fifteen years, Parajanov was banned from filmmaking and so returned with renewed force and fervor to photomontage, collage, drawing, assemblage, and the construction of shadow boxes reminiscent of those by that other filmmaker, Joseph Cornell.¹³⁵ And how, precisely, does Tarkovsky figure here? He shares a table as well as recognizable iconography (the small bird) with his contemporary, and the chains around his neck which hold a comically-large medallion of the Virgin Mary are seen on Parajanov as well, yet here those chains do not decorate but rather bind. They clumsily obscure Parajanov's right forearm, precisely where Tarkovsky's bird lands.¹³⁶ Parajanov continues existing, it seems, and in the realm of cinema, but not without severe and obvious restraints.

¹³⁵ The overlap with Surrealism is especially interesting here, seeing that Louis Aragon – one of the founding members of Surrealism – made a personal plea to Brezhnev to release Parajanov from prison. His efforts were, surprisingly, successful. See "Sergei Parajanov: A Chronology" in *Armenian Review*, Vols. 47-48, Nos. 3-4, 1-2 (2001-2002).

¹³⁶ Another version of this collage shows chains on both of Parajanov's hands. The Patroclus figure, taken from David's painting of the same name, does not appear in this version. Instead, the contrast between Tarkovsky's medallion and Parajanov's shackles – now dangling from both wrists – is heightened. See Fig. 5.

Between these two colleagues rises a golden crucifix culled from the same source as both chains and medallion. Tarkovsky's left hand, delicately folded at the edge of the table, intersects the crucifix, interrupting its cohesion yet also participating in its integrity. The foundation of the cross is split here, yet Tarkovsky keeps it standing – alluding, perhaps, to the director's struggle with Orthodoxy in the Soviet Union.¹³⁷ Parajanov's collage techniques here and elsewhere – their proclivity for pastiche, layering, disjunction, and continuity by way of discontinuity – reveal much about his filmmaking.

This chapter examines Parajanov's early work, first as an assistant to Igor Savchenko (notably on the latter's Socialist Realist *The Third Blow* of 1948), then under the tutelage of Alexander Dovzhenko, both while a student at the Moscow Film Institute, then later as a member of the Kiev Film Studio under Dovzhenko's leadership. While Parajanov's formal training primed him to produce Socialist Realist works of his own, he ultimately began to bend away from the genre as it was originally outlined by Zhdanov and adopted by the Central Committee.¹³⁸ These early works reveal unexpected formal outbursts suggesting a willingness to experiment not only within the strictly-defined edict

¹³⁷ In June of 1986, Tarkovsky granted an interview with the journal *France Catholique* in which, when asked about his relations with the Orthodox Church, replies, "Clearly, they are very difficult. I was formerly living in the USSR. I arrived in Italy, and now I live in France. Thus I unfortunately haven't had the opportunity to have a normal relationship with the Church. If I go to mass in Florence, the service is celebrated by a Greek, then by an Italian, but never by a Russian... Some relationships with the Church demand a settled life, but I feel a little like someone underneath the debris after a bombardment." See *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews*, ed. John Gianvito (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2006), 185. Parajanov mines the same source to depict both Christian iconography (the crucifix and the medallion of the Virgin) and chains that bind.

¹³⁸ For more on Zhdanov and Socialist Realism in the context of Tarkovsky's and Jancsó's work, see Chapters One and Three.

of Socialist Realism, but also with the definition of the genre itself, indicating where Parajanov would eventually take his filmmaking by the mid 1960s. The consequence for his later formal experimentation was, ultimately, a series of trumped-up criminal charges, incarceration, and more than a decade-long embargo on filmmaking.

Beginning with *The Top Guy* (1958) and *The Flower on the Stone* (1960-62), then continuing with Parajanov's groundbreaking *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964) and *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969), this chapter charts the director's calculated trajectory towards his most compelling work, where traditional narrative cinema and the conventional application of montage which underpins it are abandoned. Here, the director begins to employ the long take as the primary device which, as we see in the work of Jancsó (and Tarkovsky, examined later in this dissertation), "tends to give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality."¹³⁹ Yet in a major point distinguishing Parajanov's use of the device from the work of his dear friend and inspiration Andrei Tarkovsky, the director chooses not to couple pans and zooms with protracted acts of meditative focus on matter resulting in a transcendental materialism, which shall be discussed in Chapter Three. Neither does Parajanov seek to suggest, as does Jancsó, that the practice of filmmaking mirrors historical process, and that which exists beyond the frame is identical to what appears within it. Instead, Parajanov begins to construct complex yet often primitive or naïve tableau compositions where, while the camera rolls with continuous long takes, it fails to transgress an immobile frame, ultimately resisting a

¹³⁹ André Bazin. "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema." *What is Cinema*, vol. 1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 37.

sense of offscreen space. When Parajanov chooses to comply with conventional stylistic means, he does so only momentarily, taking an immediate about face which creates what film scholar David A. Cook calls “perceptual dislocations” and “disjunctions in spatial logic.”¹⁴⁰ Parajanov’s films grow increasingly abstract and disorienting, their structures based almost entirely upon associative processes and narrative circularity, both of which reflect the duplicated and performative nature of Party discourse in the Brezhnev era. Parajanov, then, leans towards greater formal experimentation based in large part on a fascination with filmic poetics, all the while remaining within the register of contemporary politics and the temporally-conflated claim of Socialist Realism: a style of art which represents reality in its revolutionary development. Here, Parajanov’s use of the long take is central, for this device, too, permits a claim of representing a more true and accurate present despite its immediate relegation to the past. In each of these cases – both with Socialist Realism and the filmic device of the long take – spatial and temporal disjunctions rise to the fore.

Socialist Realism with Formal Aberrations: Disruption in the Unified Ideological Field

Born Sarkis Parajaniants in Tbilisi, Georgia on 09 January 1924, Sergei Parajanov (whose name was Russified) spent his early years assisting his father in the latter’s

¹⁴⁰ In an essay on *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, David A. Cook keenly notes Parajanov’s radical reversals. At one moment, for example, the director may employ stylistic conventions to draw the viewer into sharing a point of view, then “rupture” that exact perspective by upending spatial logic, as when “a wall is momentarily made to resemble the surface of a roof.” See David A. Cook, “*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors: Film as Religious Art.*” *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*. Vol. 3, No. 3 (Spring/Summer 1984), 19.

consignment shop.¹⁴¹ This “baroque kingdom,” filled with countless objects of various histories and patronages, ultimately served as inspiration not only for his film aesthetics but also his various art practices, collage included.¹⁴² These art and filmic techniques tend to lean towards layering of space, time, and narrative, not unlike the result one would encounter in a market of interwoven biographies. This penchant for historical and narrative superimposition was no doubt fostered by the singularity of Parajanov’s geographical environs as well: the Georgian capital known for its diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and faiths.¹⁴³

In 1942, at the age of twenty, Parajanov enrolled in the Tbilisi Institute of Railway Transport, but by the following year had abandoned his engineering studies for the State Conservatory. There, he studied violin and voice, with a focus on choreography, a seemingly unusual shift from transit to performance.¹⁴⁴ After three years, Parajanov changed course again, this time for cinema. He began studies for and ultimately passed

¹⁴¹ Here, I rely on Parajanov’s chronology as outlined by James Steffen in *Armenian Review*, vols. 47-48, as well as his *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

¹⁴² Galia Ackerman, “Introduction” in *Sergei Paradjanov: Seven Visions*. Trans. Guy Bennett. (København: Green Integer Books, 1998), 7-8.

¹⁴³ As Ackerman notes in her introduction to *Sergei Paradjanov: Seven Visions*, Tbilisi was a “melting pot where people of many origins and faiths mixed: Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, Kurds, Assyrians, Russians, Christians, Muslims, Jews...All of these people formed a true community with its own culture and morals, its own folklore and social life...Each child spoke three languages: Georgian, Armenian and Azeri, no two of which belong to the same linguistic family.” See Galia Ackerman, “Introduction” in *Sergei Paradjanov: Seven Visions*. Trans. Guy Bennett. (København: Green Integer Books, 1998), 7.

¹⁴⁴ Parajanov’s ongoing battle with diabetes prevented him from being drafted during WWII.

the entrance exam to the Moscow Film Institute in 1945, and one year later enrolled in All-Union State Institute of Filmmaking (Всесоюзный государственный институт кинематографии/VGIK) located in Moscow. As a student of VGIK, Parajanov participated in a directing workshop under the tutelage of Soviet filmmaker Igor Savchenko and worked as an assistant on the latter's war film *The Third Blow* (1948) in the Ukraine. *The Third Blow* was one of many "artistic" or "fictional documentaries" produced in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s to mid 1950s, during the late stage of Stalinism (Mikhail Chiaureli's well-known *The Fall of Berlin* of 1949 was another). These films not only realized state-supported Socialist Realist aesthetics in which artists, writers, and filmmakers were to "depict reality in its revolutionary development;" they sought to fine tune the details of history, ascribing more active and significant roles to Stalin during the Second World War, for example. In Savchenko's *The Third Blow* (the name of which is taken from "Stalin's Ten Blows" – a series of military offensive strategies undertaken by the Red Army in 1944), Soviet soldiers battle to liberate the Crimea from German forces, ultimately retaking Sevastopol with the help of Stalin's "military genius," as noted ironically by André Bazin in his brilliant and farsighted 1950

essay, “The Myth of Stalin in the Soviet Cinema.”¹⁴⁵ Parajanov’s practical introduction to filmmaking, then, was by way of late Stalinist propaganda.¹⁴⁶

In 1948, while in Tbilisi, Parajanov was arrested on charges of homosexuality – charges which would haunt him again some years later, and which would carry severe punishment at that time due to “repeat offenses.” For this early accusation, Parajanov spent two months in prison, but was discharged in time to continue his studies. He returned to Moscow, assisted on another of Savchenko’s films, and two years later married his first wife. Sadly, less than one year after their wedding, she was found stabbed to death, likely by her brothers. The details of her murder remain unclear, although scholars conclude she was killed either for marrying a non-Muslim or for

¹⁴⁵ In this essay, Bazin brilliantly concludes, “As long as the glorification of Stalin was confined to the domain of language, or even of iconography, it could be described as a relative phenomenon, reducible to rhetoric or to propaganda and therefore reversible. But in the Soviet cinema, the supremacy of Stalin’s genius is no longer advanced as propaganda or even as metaphor (i.e., Stalin is History): it is truly ontological. Not only because the reach and the persuasiveness of cinema are incomparably greater than those of any other form of propaganda, but also and above all because the nature of the film image is different: imposing itself on our minds as rigorously as it superimposes itself, in a manner of speaking, on reality, cinema is in essence irrefutable, like Nature and History. A portrait of Pétan, of de Gaulle, or of Stalin can be removed just as quickly as it was hung – basically, it doesn’t mean a thing, even if it takes up one thousand square feet. By contrast, an historical recreation on film of events concerning Stalin, above all an historical re-creation centering on Stalin himself, is enough to define irrevocably this man’s place and importance in the world and to establish conclusively his essence.” See “The Myth of Stalin in the Soviet Cinema” in *Bazin at Work: Major Essays & Reviews from the Forties & Fifties*. Bert Cardullo, ed. Trans. Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 23-40.

¹⁴⁶ While Parajanov’s introduction to cinema included late Stalinist propaganda, he began his most notable work during the period of “stagnation” (*zastoi*) under Brezhnev.

Parajanov's failure to pay a bride price. Either way, Parajanov's involvement with her led to her death, a tragedy from which he never fully recovered.

By 1952, Parajanov directed and submitted his diploma film *A Moldavian Fairy Tale*¹⁴⁷ under the guidance of Soviet filmmaking legend Alexander Dovzhenko (director of *Earth*, 1930), thus concluding his studies at VGIK.¹⁴⁸ Within two years – thanks to the success of his diploma film – Parajanov joined the Kiev Film Studio in Soviet Ukraine upon Dovzhenko's invitation. There, he co-directed his first feature *Andriesh* (1954-55), based closely on his earlier *A Moldavian Fairy Tale*. Both films are adaptations (of sorts, with musical numbers) of the poem *Andriesh* by Soviet Moldavian writer Emilian Nestorovich Bukov.¹⁴⁹ The film was not a grand success, leaving Parajanov with no additional work until nearly three years after its release.

Parajanov's next film, *The Top Guy* (1958) – a *kolkhoz* musical and another film released within the immediate Thaw period – garnered popular rather than critical success, selling over twenty-million admissions within the Soviet Union, far outperforming all Parajanov's other works at the box office.¹⁵⁰ While the film was subject to

¹⁴⁷ Parajanov's *A Moldavian Fairy Tale* no longer exists, although his next film – feature-length *Andriesh* – offers some indication as to the former's style and content.

¹⁴⁸ In 1950, Dovzhenko assumed Savchenko's role as teacher and mentor upon the latter's premature death at the age of 44.

¹⁴⁹ Bukov, the author of this verse poem, was a well-known writer at the time, having ultimately won the Order of Lenin in 1966 for his work. His poem *Andriesh*, is published here: Emilian Bukov, *Perevod c moldavskogo Arkadiia Shteinberga; illiustratsii i pereplet khudozhnika B. Nesvedova* (Kishinev: Kartia Moldoveniaske, 1964).

¹⁵⁰ The film was Parajanov's most popular work, out-selling *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969), for example. See James Steffen, *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 42.

rather harsh criticism from the Central Party regarding its perceived dated approach to comedy (it was released on the tail end of Stalin era *kolkhoz* musicals, when the genre was losing its “ideological *raison d’être*”),¹⁵¹ its potential minor acts of subversion went unchecked by censors. In an analysis of *The Top Guy*, James Steffen writes,

One question that arises from today’s perspective [of *The Top Guy*] is the possible presence of homoerotic jokes. In the scene where Kirill Pavlovich observes the youth training for various sports, at one point he looks down at the ground and says, “Boys! What on earth is this?” Two men stand up and it becomes clear that they are wrestling. A nearby police officer replies, “I’m here. Everything’s in order!” Most viewers would read this gag innocently: Kiril Pavlovich thinks that the two men offscreen are merely scuffling on the ground. However, later in the film two young men in the announcer’s booth play a waltz over the PA system and dance together. That shot is followed almost immediately by a long tracking shot of young men with powerfully built physiques bathing outdoors. One hesitates to read too much significance into such moments – for instance, this was hardly the first Soviet film to idealize the male body – but considering that Parajanov deliberately introduced more overtly homoerotic elements into his later films, the possibility at least should be raised here as well.¹⁵²

It should be noted that in the first scene on which Steffen focuses – where Pavlovich, surprised, asks what the young wrestlers are doing – we see only Pavlovich’s expression.

His bewilderment is directed offscreen, thus opening the space of interpretation and potential for misinterpretation on the part of the viewer. What is it, exactly, he sees?

Once the camera turns to the young men wrestling, the ambiguity of their act is

¹⁵¹ For more on the musical genre in the Soviet union, see Trudy Anderson, “Why Stalinist Musicals?” *Discourse* 17.3 (1995): 39-48, and Richard Taylor, “Singing on the Steppes for Stalin: Ivan Pyr’ev and the Kolkhoz Musical in Soviet Cinema.” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), 143-159.

¹⁵² James Steffen, *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 41.

momentarily sustained. By way of contrast, their interactions in subsequent scenes are no longer subject to ambiguity due to montage or the use of offscreen space. Instead, Parajanov presents a long take of the men bathing outdoors where the protracted gaze – not the gaps within it – is the source of ambiguity. The confusion is no longer what one sees. Rather, the gaze of the camera is now “suspect.” This early example of the long take in Parajanov’s work draws upon the equivocation the device introduces, despite the exhaustive perspective an uninterrupted sequence allows.

Parajanov’s following feature-length films (*Ukrainian Rhapsody*, 1961 and *The Flower on the Stone*, 1960-1962 – the former a post-war melodrama, the latter an anti-religion, pro-mining propaganda piece) contain few if any formal innovations. When the intended director of *The Flower on the Stone* was removed from his role, Parajanov was called in to complete the film after the majority of the footage had been executed. Parajanov, then, was faced with the task of shooting and integrating a minimal amount of new footage with existing material, as well as editing both to create a sense of continuity and coherence.

The film begins with Grigori Griva – the protagonist and injured mine worker whose head in this opening scene is bandaged – awakening in a hospital bed. He rises, stumbles from his room, gains balance and strength as he marches through a mining landscape replete with wire towers, and ultimately begins banging on a residential door. When the occupant answers, Grigori pulls him outside and proceeds to beat him until, depleted of all energy, falls unconscious to the ground. The following scene shows him back in the hospital while a voice offscreen asks, “Why did you do it?” Grigori,

answering the questions of his doctor as the two make their way to a nearby window, asks, “Do you know how it all began?” Thus, the protagonist begins to tell his story by way of one long and sustained flashback, visually suggested by a slow superimposition of past images onto the present scene. We see young Komsomol miners converging by car, bus, and motorcycle on a vast swath of land.¹⁵³ One drives a sign into the ground, upon which reads “Here will be a Komsomol mine.” Within the first ten minutes of the film, workers begin to break ground and we see this new Komsomol mine under construction. The frenzied, stakhanovite-inspired labor of miners digging, plowing fields, pouring concrete, and laying railroad tracks is met with equally frenzied movements of the camera. The device undulates with the rise and fall of picks and shovels, sways with the gestures of laden cranes, and slides with the graceful placement of massive iron beams. These cinematographic effects – not unlike those exhibited in Mikhail Kalatozov’s *The Cranes are Flying* (1957) – stand out from the remainder of the film in their perspectival revelry, yet are superseded in their novelty by way of a highly unexpected and oddly redeeming montage sequence which initially seems to have little to do with the film itself. The sequence is an outburst of sorts, as though its hasty stitching together has resulted in broken seams.

First, after having fallen drunkenly to the base of a tall mound of coal, Grigori is carried to his dorm. He is shown resting in bed as he listens to the stories relayed by and

¹⁵³ The Komsomol (*Vsesoyuzny Leninsky Kommunistichesky Soyuz Molodyozhii*) or All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth, was an organization devised for young adults within the Communist Party. Representations of these young members figured prominently in Soviet cinema, including Esfir Shub’s *Komsomol: Patron of Electrification* (1932), discussed briefly below.

to his mining colleagues regarding a mythological block of coal within which a fossil of a fern is embedded. As the young men turn out the lights, the camera focuses on a potted fern positioned on the dorm's windowsill, suggesting a content as well as a graphic match in scenes to follow. From here, Grigori falls asleep and the story continues, now framed within his dream.¹⁵⁴ Miners dig at the surface of the earth, the fossil within the stone of coal is uncovered, carried to the court of Peter the Great (Russia's modernizing emperor, no less), where the tsar, dressed in an unceremonious apron, kisses the stone and places it on an ornate cauldron where it bursts into flames. The camera then pans across the faces of those within the court who witnessed this miracle of sorts. They smile from their soot-covered visages and white Rococo wigs as they wave lace fans to clear the smoke. Dark plumes fill the frame and we return to Grigory, now awake, now listening to an altogether different story – not recited but rather read from a book – about the death of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Another flashback begins, but it does not belong to Grigory alone. The young man reading the story conjures and shares it as well, making this vision a communal one. This second sequence, in combination with the dream sequence that precedes it, takes an increasingly interesting formal turn.¹⁵⁵

As the storyteller's voice reciting the date of Lenin's death trails off, a factory whistle sounds and a tall smokestack is seen from a low angle. A train, also shot from a low perspective, slowly comes to a stop. A young miner, seen in closeup, looks anxiously

¹⁵⁴ This back-to-back sequence begins approximately 38 minutes into the film.

¹⁵⁵ The juxtaposition between these two sequences seems to draw a connection between Peter the Great who attempts to electrify the whole court, and the Komsomol miners who bring electrification to the whole land.

skyward and ceremoniously removes his hat. Smoke and soot swirl around him (not unlike the smoke and soot seen swirling around the faces of Peter the Great's court, markedly). A reverse shot of a towering industrial sorting device, its pulleys and cogs still spinning, is split and doubled, the two images of the same device now rotating around one another onscreen. Another worker, head bowed, sorrowfully removes his cap as well, then lifts his ash-covered lids skyward. His vision, too, is split. Doubled heaps of coal circle within the frame. Yet another miner, looking skyward, is met with a counter shot of doubled electrical poles, their multiplied number and shape here suggesting crosses on a hill. The whistle continues to blow.

A closeup of a doctor whose face and hair are covered by procedural garb is offered next. He raises his alarmed eyes and, too, envisions the same smokestack now split and repeated by a factor of five. As he removes his mask, the whistle stops and is replaced by the sound of a crying baby. The specter of death is met with the sound of new life. His gesture is then intercut with scenes of a train shot from the perspective of the tracks. All sounds converge and overlap here: locomotive, wailing newborn, and now Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor.¹⁵⁶ As the concerto reaches its

¹⁵⁶ Of all the musical choices at his disposal, Parajanov chose Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, an arrangement that carried particular significance within the *The Flower on the Stone's* historical context. In 1958, the First International Tchaikovsky Competition was held in Moscow. The event was designed by Khrushchev as a cultural pendant piece to the technological victory of the launch of Sputnik I nearly a year earlier (this successful launch effectively began the US-USSR space race). American Virtuoso Van Cliburn, whose rendition of this exact Tchaikovsky arrangement, won the competition. This was, of course, a remarkably publicized and well-known feat, one which garnered the performer as well as the concerto worldwide attention. Here, one could argue the concerto, coupled with Lenin's death (and, effectively, Stalin's) as well as the cries of a newborn signifies a new beginning, albeit a disorienting one.

climax, it overcomes the sound of train and infant. The denouement of this collection of juxtapositions (both visual and aural) is an array of electrical poles seen from a variety of angles, both high and low, visually reminiscent of the severe perspectives of Rodchenko's Shukhov Transmission Tower photographs, or even El Lissitzky's photomontage designs for *USSR in Construction*, dated 1930.¹⁵⁷

James Steffen argues that with this foray into montage, Parajanov makes clear reference to Vertov's *Enthusiasm: A Symphony of the Donbas* (1930), yet fails to approximate the artistic ingenuity of his predecessor in the process, as if this were the filmmaker's sole intention.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the visual connections link this sequence with Vertov's first sound film, but more than providing a formal lineage, one which Parajanov *seems* unable to live up to, the sequence permits us to investigate how the director translates Vertov's (and other avant-gardes') project nearly forty years after the original, a translation which emerges within an entirely new context and addresses an entirely new viewer. This translation is an interesting one, for it recalls the Soviet avant-garde's use of formal inventiveness in the name of viewer activation, as well as the State's denunciation

¹⁵⁷ In an essay titled "Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky's Dresden and Hannover *Demonstrationsräume*," Maria Gough brings Vertov and El Lissitzky into dialogue. Here, Gough investigates Lissitzky's "theory and practice of [viewer] activation" executed in his 1926-1928 gallery and installation designs for Constructivist and contemporary art. After visiting the Hannover location in the summer of 1929, Vertov wrote to Lissitzky, noting the physical and intellectual *disorientation* (not simply activation) he experienced while there. See Maria Gough. "Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky's Dresden and Hannover *Demonstrationsräume*" in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed, Eds. (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2003), 76-125. 81.

¹⁵⁸ James Steffen. *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 53-54.

of the very formalist tendencies employed to achieve these ends. Parajanov's excursion into this territory, particularly by way of a very familiar visual rhetoric, is not to be so easily dismissed.

The significance of Parajanov's unexpected montage sequence begins with Ossip Brik's 1926 essay on photography titled "What the Eye Does Not See," published in the film journal *Sovetskoe Kino*. The essay included early photographic works by Rodchenko in which the artist experiments with perspective.¹⁵⁹ The Shukhov Transmission Tower photographs, mentioned above, are part of this collection. Brik writes in favor of these extreme perspectives, claiming they don't simply present the viewer with new ways of seeing old things, they require a certain amount of work – perceptual and intellectual – to understand. The viewer is, in this case, an active participant. Brik writes,

The camera...can suggest new points of view and demonstrate how to look at things differently...This is the kind of experiment that Comrade Rodchenko undertook when he photographed a Moscow house from an unusual viewpoint. The results proved

¹⁵⁹ Rodchenko notes the revolutionary potential of the sharp-angled perspectives of his photographs, the details of which were published in the journal *Novy Lef* in 1928. In his essay "The Paths of Modern Photography," Rodchenko denounced conventional photography and the lackluster effect of its rote perspectives. He writes, "Behind this dangerous stereotype [of traditional photography] lies the biased, conventional routine that educates man's visual perception, the one-sided approach that distorts the process of visual reason." It is the "belly-button" view of traditional photographic perspectives which "gives [the viewer] just the sweet kind of blob that you see reproduced on all the postcards ad nauseam. Why bother to look at a factory if you only observe it from afar and from the middle viewpoint, instead of examining everything in detail – from inside, from above down, and from below up?" Alexander Rodchenko, "The Paths of Modern Photography," trans. John E. Bowlt, in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*. Christopher Phillips, ed (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 257.

extremely interesting: that familiar object suddenly turned into a never-before seen structure, a fire escape became a monstrous object, balconies were transformed into a tower of exotic architecture.¹⁶⁰

In other words, the unconventional perspectives the camera is able to achieve not only demonstrates but also teaches new ways of seeing, thus encouraging active, more cognitively-engaged spectatorship. Rodchenko's employment of the camera to transform the familiar (a Moscow house) into a "never-before seen structure" resonates with the contemporaneous writings of literary theorist and critic Viktor Shklovsky. In his formative essay "Art as Device" of 1925, Shklovsky seeks an explanation for stylistic changes in art, claiming the purpose of art is to disrupt convention, not simply in appearance, but more specifically and more importantly, in habits of perception.¹⁶¹ According to Shklovsky, whose essay focuses primarily on literature but maintains concrete relevance across all creative fields, changes in art can be traced to a tendency to make the familiar strange or unfamiliar (*ostraniene*). It is precisely this "enstrangement" that breaks the habitual – and thus passive or automatized (bourgeois) – modes of perception.

¹⁶⁰ See Ossip Brik, "What the Eye Does Not See (*Chego ne vidit glaz*)" in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1919-1940*. Christopher Phillips, ed. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 220.

¹⁶¹ Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device" in *Theory of Prose*. Benjamin Sher, trans. (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 1-14. The essay's date (1925) fixes it firmly within the context of the Rodchenko-Brik dialogue. Regarding Shklovsky's term *ostraniene*, Sher writes, "It is a pretty fair assumption...that Shklovsky speaks of *ostraniene* as a process or act that endows an object or image with 'strangeness' by 'removing' it from the network of conventional, formulaic, stereotypical perceptions and linguistic expressions (based on such perceptions)." See Benjamin Sher, "Translator's Introduction" in *Theory of Prose*, xix.

Brik, Rodchenko, and Shklovsky converge precisely where Vertov, too, makes his claim for a new mode of cognitive activation and knowledge acquisition via the camera and film. Brik's essay draws a parallel between what the camera/photograph reveals to the unaided eye (thus revealing "what the eye cannot see") and Vertov's own call a year earlier for the camera to supplement the eye, also exposing to it what it cannot observe alone. In Vertov's case, the goal is not simply a new perspective, it is a "communist decoding of the world."¹⁶² This can only be achieved by complementing the eye with a camera and revealing to it "cine-facts." Towards this end, Vertov exploits properties specific to the medium of film itself, using split screens, superimpositions, fast-forward, slow-motion, and reverse techniques – special effects which aid and lead the eye and thus the viewer to participate in the decryption process and, ultimately, the construction of a new socialist state.¹⁶³ His short film *Reverse Bread* (1924) does precisely this.¹⁶⁴

Parajanov's unexpected formal departure via montage in his otherwise formulaic propaganda piece *The Flower on the Stone*, then, is not as arbitrary as it initially seems.

¹⁶² See Dziga Vertov. "The Essence of Kino-Eye (1925)," *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Annette Michelson, ed. Trans. Kevin O'Brien. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 50.

¹⁶³ During a lecture he gave in Hannover in 1929, Vertov even projected fragments of his documentaries on the ceiling of the auditorium. See Margarita Tupitsyn, "Back to Moscow" in *El Lissitzky: Beyond the Abstract Cabinet: Photography, Design, Collaboration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 40 (fn. 79).

¹⁶⁴ Vertov's theoretical claim of a communist decoding of the world by way of cinema is triumphantly met with his own practice. His *Reverse Bread* (1924), begins with a shot of a loaf of bread on a bakery shelf. The loaf is picked up, but does not go to the hands of the consumer. Instead, its journey to the bakery, from the harvesting of wheat to the kneading of dough to the placement of the loaf on the bakery shelf, is screened in reverse, thus unveiling all labor involved in the finished product.

Granted, this eruption of rapid-fire editing and the Rodchenko-styled perspectives of electrical poles is matched nowhere else in the film, yet this is precisely the point. The sequence is an anomaly, the contents of which suggest severe disorientation at the very hands of those given the task to construct and carry out socialism *in one state*: the young Komsomol members represented here. As James Steffen notes, Parajanov's work here alludes to Vertov's *Enthusiasm: A Symphony of the Donbas* (1930) – an homage to and carrying out of the definition of communism by Lenin as “government by the Soviets plus the electrification of the whole land. Only when the economy has been electrified and modern heavy industry has become the technical basis of industry, agriculture and transportation, only then will we succeed at last.”¹⁶⁵ *The Flower on the Stone* is, after all, another film set in the Donbas region of the Soviet Ukraine where Komsomol miners

¹⁶⁵ Lenin, V.I., “Address to the Eighth Congress of Soviets” in *Collected Works, Vol. 31*. Julius Katzer, ed. and trans. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 496-518. Walter Benjamin, during his two month stay in Moscow from December 1926 to January 1927, noted “Now it is made clear to every communist that at this hour revolutionary work does not signify conflict or civil war but rather electrification, canal construction, creation of factories.” See Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*. Gary Smith, ed. Trans. Richard Sieburth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 51.

directly participate in the spread of electricity throughout the USSR.¹⁶⁶ Yet Steffen's claim that Parajanov fails to approximate Vertov's visual mastery, as though this was his undisputed goal, is misguided. Steffen writes, "While Parajanov appears to strive for the visual dynamism of Vertov, the [montage] sequence sorely lacks the conceptual unity and rhetorical power of its model."¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the "conceptual unity" wanting in Parajanov's efforts here speaks to the disruption in the "unified ideological field"¹⁶⁸ post-Stalin.

In the work of Vertov and others noted above, the dream of worldwide revolution was still at hand and the participation in it was consistently reinforced by equally

¹⁶⁶ This sequence could as easily evoke Esfir Shub's *Komsomol: Patron of Electrification* (1932), another early sound documentary of sorts, in which Komsomol are shown establishing electricity throughout the Soviet Union. The opening sequence begins in a sound studio where the recording of a musical performance is underway. The performance features a theremin, an electronic instrument invented by Lev Theremin a mere four years before Shub directed her film. The instrument translates the movement of its conductor, emitting musical sound without touch. In other words, the musician plays the instrument somewhat remotely, simply by the waving and positioning of hands. This gesturing is then translated into audible electrical currents. The operator, then, is the crucial and necessary component in the transmission of electricity, a role not unlike the Komsomols'. With Vertov and Shub, the coupling of sound and electricity is a prominent feature in their films noted above. The transmission of sound by radio/electricity is in many ways the practical manifestation of Communism as defined by Lenin, quoted above. Both Vertov and Shub celebrate this triumph, suggesting with their films that sound here *is* the accomplishment of Communism itself. As will be discussed later in this chapter, sound was a crucial component of the poetic school of Soviet cinema, of which Parajanov was a part. His montage outburst, coupled with the soundtrack of a train, Tchaikovsky's concerto, as well the cry of a baby briefly indicates where he will take cinematic sound later in his career, namely with *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969). For Lenin's quote above, see Lenin, V.I., "Address to the Eighth Congress of Soviets" in *Collected Works, Vol. 31*. Julius Katzer, ed. and trans. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 496-518.

¹⁶⁷ James Steffen. *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 53.

¹⁶⁸ Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 73.

participatory visual aesthetics. Communist decoding, viewer activation, cognitive stimulation: these are the tropes employed by the early Soviet avant-garde. Parajanov's *The Flower on the Stone* briefly returns to these formal devices in recollecting the death of Lenin, no less, yet neither the audience for whom these devices are most relevant nor the ideological underpinnings of their very necessity are the same here. Instead, Parajanov's work is firmly embedded in an epoch of narrative circularity where a handful of the devices outlined above are still in play, yet their function is not to refer to new knowledge or even new knowledge production but rather to "mediate preexisting knowledge,"¹⁶⁹ thus becoming pure reference. The central crux of this circularity rests in Stalin's legitimation through a constantly reproduced and reinforced connection to Lenin. Gustav Klutsis' *Under the Banner of Lenin for Socialist Construction* of 1930 (Fig. 6) is just one of many examples of this legitimizing strategy executed in the realm of the visual arts.

At the same time, while Parajanov's montage sequence refers to the formal devices practiced by the Soviet avant-garde, similar montage sequences from that early era were subject to severe criticism. In the Soviet Union of the 1930s, abstract and non-linear works (both in art, film, film narrative) were castigated as "elitist," arcane, "formalist." In September 1929, the same year Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* was released, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) published a resolution stating, among other things, that "The concept of revolutionary cinema...has given Formalists the chance to camouflage themselves as 'revolutionaries' and declare

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 75.

‘revolutionary’ any formal experiments, even those devoid of social content.”¹⁷⁰ The claimants failed to see, of course, the revolutionary potential of those formal experiments. In a particularly pointed fashion, Parajanov’s sequence seems to address this split between montage in the name of viewer activation (revolutionary) and montage defined as pure formalism (and thus counter-revolutionary) by RAPP and other Central Committee members. It was, of course, these arguments against formalism which paved the way to socialist realism. Interestingly, Thaw politics returned to this exact argument, undermining the foundation which brought it into being. In May of 1958, a mere two years before *The Flower on the Stone*, the Central Committee reversed its denunciation of formalism in music made a decade earlier. *Iskusstvo kino* printed this resolution on the first page of its July 1958 issue, a publication Parajanov was sure to have seen.¹⁷¹

In addition, the era of de-Stalinization under Khrushchev sought to eliminate a critical component in the existing narrative by removing markers of Stalin’s existence altogether. Sites and cities were renamed (Stalingrad to Volgograd), films were re-edited

¹⁷⁰ “RAPP Resolution on Cinema (September 1929)” in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*. Trans. Richard Taylor. Eds. Christie, Ian and Richard Taylor. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 274. For the “elitist” and “formalist” quotes, see Andrei Zhdanov’s speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. Reprinted in John E. Bowlt. *The Documents of 20th Century Art. Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. Ed. John E. Bowlt. (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 293.

¹⁷¹ See Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), 64. Immediately following the Twentieth Party Congress, *Iskusstvo Kino* published the following in its 1957 issue: “We wish that our magazine would not be the leader tape, but more like a movie. We will start to read it only when we talk about the most important thing: the art of cinema.” Here again, film is the most important art, with renewed focus. “Хочется, чтобы наш журнал был бы не ракордом, а больше походил на фильм... Начнут его читать только тогда, когда мы будем говорить о самом главном — об искусстве кино.”

to cut Stalin from their story lines,¹⁷² and Stalin's very body was removed from Lenin's mausoleum in October of 1961 – precisely when Parajanov was at work on *The Flower on the Stone*. These reorganizing efforts, though, further entrenched the circular nature of official rhetoric within the USSR by calling for a new era in the name of the old (and now more legitimate) one.¹⁷³ In denouncing Stalin in his secret speech of 1956, and by ordering the dismantling of the former leader's cult of personality, Khrushchev in his own words sought to “restore completely the *Leninist* principles of Soviet Socialist democracy.”¹⁷⁴ He concludes, “We are absolutely certain that our party, armed with the historical resolutions of the 20th Congress, will lead the Soviet people along the Leninist path to new successes, to new victories. Long live the victorious banner of our party: Leninism.”¹⁷⁵ “New successes, new victories” will now be had by reinstating and reestablishing (“restoring”) the true Leninist doctrine, the genuine “Leninist path.” Parajanov's *The Flower on the Stone* lands precisely where and when that path is redirected.

¹⁷² See Oksana Bulgakowa. “Povelitel' kartin–Stalin i kino, Stalin v kino” in *Agitatsiia za schast'e. Sovetskoe iskusstvo stalinskoi epokhi* (St. Petersburg: State Russian Museum, 1994), 65-70. As Yurchak notes, Mikhail Romm's films *Lenin in October* (1937) and *Lenin in 1918* were subject to this re-editing. See Yurchak, 74.

¹⁷³ See Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 74-75.

¹⁷⁴ Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev. *The “Secret” Speech: Delivered to the Closed Session of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. Trans. Tamara Deutscher (Nottingham: Spokesman Books for the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 1976). Emphasis mine.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Indeed, *The Flower on the Stone* is a film caught between two divergent ideologies even without Parajanov's montage outburst. As film historian Josephine Woll notes, Khrushchev's Thaw brought about rather quick changes in the literary and pictorial arts, but changes in the realm of cinema were sluggish due not only to the complex manner in which films were (and continue to be) made, but also to the magnitude of the apparatuses which produce them. Immediately after Stalin's death, a handful of films were in production. They were permitted to reach completion, yet once they arrived in the theaters, their content often appeared to lag behind not only official rhetoric but also their literary counterparts.¹⁷⁶ This accounts, in part, for the inconsistencies in form and content between Kalatazov's groundbreaking *The Cranes are Flying* of 1957 and Parajanov's *kolkhoz* musical *The Top Guy* released just one year later. Both were produced within the context of the fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and, subsequently, amongst calls to produce "ideologically and artistically significant films devoted to the 40th anniversary of Great October."¹⁷⁷ Neither – nor many other films from this era, for that matter – seem to do exactly this. Despite the rather clear edict above, there were conflicting directives regarding what should and should not be produced. Outlining these contradictory messages, Josephine Woll writes,

Writers, directors and studio administrators needed the skills of expert trapeze artists to balance the conflicting demands issuing from on high. Films were expected to demonstrate the grandeur and dignity of workers, peasants and intellectuals, but they must also be true to life, and therefore acknowledge human weaknesses.

¹⁷⁶ See Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), 60-61.

¹⁷⁷ "Nachalo s'emok kartiny," *Kommunist*, *Iskusstvo Kino* 3 (1957), 125. Woll, fn. 5.

They must expose flaws, but not to the detriment of the heroic image... Films should take pains to avoid naturalism and *bytopisatelstvo*, the depiction of everyday life ‘stripped of its larger social context.’¹⁷⁸

And as historian Boris Groys notes, “Socialist realism began to yield to a traditional realism whose most typical and influential representative in the thaw years was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Utopian dreams of the ‘new human being’ were replaced by a focus on the ‘eternal values’ embodied in the Russian people, who had ‘suffered’ the Revolution and Stalinism.”¹⁷⁹ Filmmakers of Khrushchev’s Thaw were, then, to produce works which were more authentic, and which presented an “unvarnished [*neprikrashennaia*]”¹⁸⁰ representation of reality. In short, there were new freedoms, but within definition, leading to a disorienting atmosphere of “thaw” and “freeze.”¹⁸¹

Parajanov and the Poetic School: Influences at Home, Inspiration from Abroad

In October of 1964, after having endured intense pressure from his political opponents, Khrushchev resigned from the post of General Secretary. Leonid Brezhnev quickly assumed the open seat, initially as First Secretary, then as General Secretary of the Central Committee. In the midst of this exchange, Parajanov concluded his next film:

¹⁷⁸ Josephine Woll. *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), 8.

¹⁷⁹ Boris Groys. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Trans. Charles Rougle. (London: Verso, 2011), 76.

¹⁸⁰ Josephine Woll. *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), 7.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (1964), an adaptation of Ukrainian writer Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky's novel of the same name. The film launched the poetic or "archaic school" of Soviet cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. As film historian Karla Oeler writes, filmmakers of this school look back to the silent films of Aleksandr Dovzhenko as models,"¹⁸² which comes as no surprise seeing a number of these directors – not just Parajanov – were students of Dovzhenko.¹⁸³ Most directors associated with this school are non-Russian. Their films, Oeler writes, "accentuate the cultural specificities of the republics in which they work. Films of this school often feature the folklore, costumes, decorative arts and music of particular ethnic groups,"¹⁸⁴ in the case of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, the Ukrainian Hutsuls of the Carpathian Mountains. Stylistically, the poetic school is often "realized through a poetic style, which emphasizes not the accretion of narrative information, but rather the visual and metaphorical or symbolic qualities of a shot and the graphic 'rhymes' between shots."¹⁸⁵ The distinctive formal

¹⁸² Karla Oeler. "Nran Guyne, *The Color of Pomegranates*: Sergei Parajanov, USSR, 1969," in *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*. Birgit Beumers, ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 140.

¹⁸³ Yurii Illienko, Parajanov's cinematographer for *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, was another filmmaker closely associated with Dovzhenko. His *Spring for the Thirsty* (1965) and *The White Bird Marked with Black* (of 1970-71 and produced by the Dovzhenko Film Studio) were both remarkable films in their own right. The former, a film with no detectable narrative and limited dialogue, was banned within the Soviet Union for more than twenty years. The latter, another film set in the Carpathian Mountains, garnered praise at home despite Illienko's tangles with Party authorities, ultimately winning the highest prize at the Moscow Film Festival after its release.

¹⁸⁴ Karla Oeler. "Nran Guyne, *The Color of Pomegranates*: Sergei Parajanov, USSR, 1969," in *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*. Birgit Beumers, ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 140.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

characteristics of poetic cinema outlined here are neither entirely new nor entirely specific to the Soviet school.

As early as 1927, Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky outlined the essential qualities of poetic cinema in an essay titled “Poetry and Prose in Cinema.” In it are echoes of the work Parajanov would ultimately develop, particularly in relation to the formal rather than narrative-based rhythms which drive the director’s films forward.

Shklovsky writes,

There exist both prose and poetry in cinema and this is the basic division between the genres: they are distinguished from one another not by rhythm, or not by rhythm alone, but by the prevalence in a poetic cinema of technical and formal over semantic features, where formal features displace semantic and resolve the composition. Plotless cinema is ‘verse’ cinema’ [the device that “exploits the formal rather than the semantic features...is a poetic device”].¹⁸⁶

In this early iteration of poetic or “verse” cinema, formal exegeses displace and disrupt linear narrative constructions.

At the same time Parajanov was emerging as a foremost practitioner of the poetic school of cinema in the Soviet Union, directors such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Maya Deren were writing on and experimenting with the potential of poetic filmmaking. While Pasolini’s extended essay on the topic, the “Cinema of Poetry,” was not published until October 1965, Soviet filmmakers were well aware of his work, both by way of screenings as well as mention of the director in *Iskusstvo Kino* as early as 1966.¹⁸⁷ Parajanov

¹⁸⁶ See Viktor Shklovsky, “Poetry and Prose in Cinema” (1927) in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*. Trans. Richard Taylor. Eds. Christie, Ian and Richard Taylor. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 178.

¹⁸⁷ Sergei Iutkevich. “Parizh Kan, 66.” *Iskusstvo Kino*, no. 9 (1966).

himself claims Pasolini was an influence on his filmmaking,¹⁸⁸ and even Viktor Shklovsky, who was keen to outline poetic cinema decades earlier, collaborated with Parajanov on a screenplay for a film immediately before the latter was arrested in 1973.¹⁸⁹ It is, though, Ukrainian born Maya Deren who offers the most detailed description of “poetic cinema,” one which resonates with both Parajanov’s style of filmmaking and Shklovsky’s early definition of the genre.

In published excerpts from a 1963 symposium titled “Poetry and the Film,” Deren describes “formal features” or devices such as montage which create breaks in strict linear or “horizontal” narrative continuity, allowing for non-linear, “vertical” and thus “poetic” exegeses within a film. Deren remarks, “the vertical breaks are not limited to

¹⁸⁸ In 1988, French filmmaker Patrick Cazals conducted an interview with Parajanov at the Rotterdam Film Festival of the same year. Cazals inquired about Parajanov’s predilection for including collections of various artifacts within his compositions, and his inclination to match those antiques with an authentic archaic character in his films. Parajanov remarked this may not have been a consequence of his father’s profession as an antiques dealer but rather the result of contemporary influence, namely by way of Pasolini, among others. Parajanov notes, “I have been influenced by the films of Fellini and Pasolini. When you turn an old subject, the film must acquire a character, an old style...My love for antiques is not a hobby, it’s an aesthetic conviction.” See Sergeï Paradzhanov. *Paradjanov le Magnifique: Exposition du 13 février au 8 avril 2007* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2007), 203. Translation mine. That Pasolini and Fellini could be named here as equal influences is telling, considering the former’s stark neorealist tendencies and and the latter’s often excessive, stylized, and baroque interests.

¹⁸⁹ While Shklovsky tends to be a significant and very present figure throughout the history of Soviet avant-garde literature, art, and filmmaking practices, his connection to Parajanov isn’t simply by a matter of contextual coincidence. Rather, several years after *The Flower on the Stone* – and immediately before Parajanov’s arrest in 1973 – Shklovsky collaborated with Parajanov on the latter’s unfinished project *A Miracle in Odense*, a film based on the life of Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen. Shklovsky’s contributions focused mainly on the film’s screenplay. James Steffen. *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 59.

investigatory interruptions in an otherwise conventional linear plot. Instead, the vertical or poetic moments have the potential to be the main feature of a work. They are not subservient to narrative. The plot eventually abates to the device by which extended or repeated moments of verticality become possible.”¹⁹⁰ Here, narrative is not the strict driving force upon which the film is structured and unfolds. Rather, narrative takes a subordinate role to the poetic moments, which, in turn, become the motivation for the film itself.

Parajanov’s subsequent films, beginning with his *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, fall within these writings on the effects and potential of poetic cinema, effectively inaugurating not the genre itself but rather a specific resurgence of it within 1960s Soviet Ukraine. With these works, this Armenian filmmaker working in the USSR begins to explore the limits of narrative cinema, as though his experimental montage sequence in *The Flower on the Stone* from a mere two years earlier has now been permitted to expand and permeate the entirety of his successive work. Spinning cameras, tableaux compositions,¹⁹¹ “illuminated manuscript”¹⁹²-styled frames, visual rather than

¹⁹⁰ See Maya Deren, Arthur Miller, et. al. in “Poetry and the Film: A Symposium (1963).” *Film Culture Reader*. Ed. P. Adams Sitney. (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 171-186. Filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini also writes on these tendencies in his essay “The Cinema of Poetry” of October 1965. For more on Tarkovsky and poetic cinema, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

¹⁹¹ For more on Parajanov’s tableau constructions, see Yuri Lotman, “Novizna legendy,” *Iskusstvo Kino*, 1987.5, 63-67.

¹⁹² In an analysis of Parajanov’s *Color of Pomegranates* (1969), Karla Oeler notes the director’s transformation of celluloid “into the pages of an illuminated manuscript or the painting of a Persian miniature.” Karla Oeler. “Nran Guyne, *The Color of Pomegranates*: Sergei Parajanov, USSR, 1969,” in *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*. Birgit Beumers, ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 139.

narrative-driven rhythms, and ambiguous open texts due to static long takes: these are some of the formal elements Parajanov employs. Here, his use of the long take differs dramatically from the device as seen in Tarkovsky's and Jancsó's work. Rather than functioning as a device by which to infer transcendental materialism, or a tool through which filmic praxis mirrors historical process, Parajanov's *plan sequence* suggests a poetics beyond Tarkovsky and a politics abstracted from Jancsó's Marxism.

Parajanov's long take does not seek to locate a deeper meaning within or beyond matter. His camera does not pan and zoom slowly, as does Tarkovsky's, encouraging viewers to ponder – at length – the profilmic. Rather, Parajanov's lengthy sequences allow the camera to remain remarkably still on the surface of the image, the place where all activity occurs. Parajanov's increasingly strict tableau compositions begin to deny a sense of space beyond the frame – a move in direct opposition to Jancsó, yet one which confronts the late-socialist era from a similar angle: a critique, perhaps, of the closed, repetitive, and circular nature of Party discourse. Parajanov's employment of the long take belies a politics of independence, subversion, and entrenchment where, returning to the main tenets of his avant-garde predecessors, begins to push their claims and their aesthetics to their unexplored conclusions, unraveling and, thus, decoupling practice from ideology. At the same time, Parajanov, having been subjected to hard labor at the hands of an ideologically tumultuous history (freeze or thaw), over-identifies with the mandates and judgements on culture as prescribed and juried by the Central Committee, in so doing exposing the manufactured, citational, and duplicated nature of Party rhetoric. In other words, as the Party further entrenches itself in the strictly performative reproduction of its

discourse, so too does Parajanov further entrench his work in the increasingly empty center from whence that rhetoric emerges. The result is a poetics of cinema on the verge of nonobjectivity.

Narrative Circularity and Duplicated Party Discourse: *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964)

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors, Parajanov's first major work in this direction, offers glimpses of where he would take his cinema years later. In a short synopsis, the film follows Ivan, a young man who, after falling in love with and proposing to marry Marichka (whose father killed Ivan's father), departs his village for work in order to financially prepare for his upcoming nuptials. While away, a pregnant Marichka falls into a river and drowns. Tormented by this loss, Ivan throws himself into his work until he marries Palahna in a traditional Hutsul ceremony where the two are blindfolded as they are physically yolked together. Their marriage is an unhappy one due to Ivan's longing for his lost first love. With Ivan distant and in despair, Palahna turns to a local sorcerer. Ivan observes the two in an embrace, attacks and is struck down by his rival, and slowly staggers to a forest where he sees visions of Marichka. As she reaches out her hand to touch his – an identical gesture seen earlier in the film – Ivan cries out and succumbs to sorrow.

The film begins with explanatory text, establishing the setting and suggesting an ethnophilic tone.¹⁹³ “This film is a poetic drama about the great love of Ivan and Marichka,” the text explains, continuing, “The film introduces us to the world of the old Carpathians’ folk legends.” After this brief exposition, a young Ivan calls to his brother Olekso who is somewhere in the forest harvesting lumber. As Ivan spots his brother, a tree begins to fall, and Olekso, in an effort to push his young kin aside, is killed by the falling sapling. The camera plummets with the tree, effectively crushing the young man. Horns sound, Ivan races through the forest laden with snow, the film’s title card appears, and additional explanatory text is given. “The Carpathians, a Gutsul land, forgotten by God and people...”

The film reopens with figures hammering a wooden cross into the ground. The scene is carefully composed and the camera moves quietly to observe the solemn act. The camera then pans across a group of women playing small jaw harps. The footage as well as the handheld nature of the camera appear as if culled from a documentary. The camera turns and swirls with their gestures, merging its delirium with theirs, then turning to observe additional performers, beggars, and merchants peddling their handmade wares. With each introduction of additional figures within the frame, their authenticity

¹⁹³ In his essay “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” historian Yuri Slezkine investigates the classification by the regime of all citizens according to their nationalities, and how certain visible or tangible aspects of their ethnicities were promoted. Essentially, national state units represented separate rooms of a large communal apartment. The partitions between rooms were reinforced, yet their occupants were considered part of the “community.” There was, as Slezkine writes, a “chronic ethnophilia of the Soviet regime.” See Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism” in *Slavic Review* 53, No. 2 (Summer 1994), 414-452.

increasingly deteriorates, as though they are no longer non-performers from a documentary but rather outlandish caricatures of villagers. They each act in their own tightly-constructed tableau, their presence here doing little if anything to produce a narrative for push one forward. Ivan walks amongst them until his mother beckons him to enter the church, outside of which the frenzied nature of these villagers takes place.

Once inside the chapel, Ivan walks amongst a new type of performance. Here, the act and actors are religion and a man who interrupts worshippers with a bell calling for monetary offerings. Ivan's father, perturbed by this interfering solicitation, disturbs the ritual ceremony with riotous and insulting laughter. He and the alms-taker then make their way out of doors where, wielding axes, the latter strikes down Ivan's father. The fatal blow is directed at the camera as blood then washes over the lens. An infrared shot of horses, stained red, leaps across the frame. Here, a juxtaposition of images based on their visual (color) match rather than a link based on content is just one of many examples of Parajanov's filmic assembly.

Other key points throughout *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* which feature Parajanov's poetic approach to cinema include attempts to redefine meaning through memory by way of similarly-composed or constructed shots and scenes. For example, at the beginning of the film, when Olekso is crushed by the falling tree, he continues to grasp Ivan's coat. The young boy struggles to free himself from his brother's deceased grip. At the end of the film, Ivan's vision of Marichka clutches his arm, recalling this earlier gesture. Cut into this scene is a large orb of red twigs which is seen twirling. Still images are then offered of these rouge-tinted branches, the significance of which is not

given. The use of sound as a disorienting effect is key as well. Rather than sync with the action unfolding onscreen, sounds often linger and spill into subsequent frames, at times emerging much later.

Perhaps the most compelling sequence of the film arrives with the “Tavern” chapter. In this scene, Ivan and Palahna enter a brightly-lit barroom. Within this space, a series of compositions are shot with a completely immobile camera: a portrait of Austrian Emperor Franz Josef framed by garlands, flowers, and corn;¹⁹⁴ twin boys simultaneously pouring drinks and lifting smoked fish; three nearly identical gentlemen seated in a triangular composition; festive drinkers cavorting at a long table; twin boys sitting on a tilted wooden ladder; Ivan, Palahna, and the sorcerer seated at the edge of a long wooden bench. It is as though each new frame reveals an independent tableau. Not one scene is permitted to overlap with another, creating the sense of spatial discontinuity despite the unified context of a single tavern. Here, not even dialogue unifies the scene. Instead, no speaking exists other than the jarring chanting which permeates the space. Only when Ivan becomes aware of Palahna’s embrace with another man does the camera begin to move with him, transgress the frames of isolated cells with him. In a single long take of the camera, Ivan makes his way around the small tavern, reversing the order in which he entered the room as well as the order in which each tableau was initially presented.

Ultimately, he lands where he began: at the table where he was seated. He lifts an

¹⁹⁴ The inclusion of the emperor’s portrait here, lovingly decorated, is a highly unusual detail, particularly when considering Franz Joseph’s involvement in the First World War, namely against Russia. In 1914-1915, Joseph sought to maintain the Habsburg Empire by supporting the winter offensive in the Carpathian Mountains. This offensive endeavored to retake territories lost to Russia towards the beginning of the war.

axe as does his foe, and as the latter's falls, the uninterrupted take is severed. What follows is a second long take – tinted red and projected in slow motion – in which Ivan stumbles around the periphery of the room, this time reversing his direction yet again. His exit introduces the final chapter: "Ivan's Death." Here, Parajanov returns to the composition as well as the objects seen in the opening sequence when the protagonist's father is killed. Axes are wielded yet again, and with the strike of each – directed at the camera both in the opening sequence and here in the tavern scene – the following shots include either blood directly on the lens or a red filter fixed firmly there. The film, then, comes full circle, emphasized, perhaps, by the manner in which Ivan circles the room in either direction, always returning to where he began. More than narrative, the structure of the film rests upon the thematic as well as visual repetitions outlined above. These elements drive the film forward, albeit in a circular fashion. Formal circularity matches the film's contextual narrative circularity.

In addition, at the outset of this sequence Parajanov does not permit offscreen space. Rather, with each movement his figures make from their respective tableau frames (if they breach them at all), it is as though they walk off the set entirely. The suggested spatial isolation of each set or cell is then undercut by a continuous and unbroken take of the camera. The result is an unusual sense of spatial disorientation that comes at the hands of providing the viewer with prolonged establishing shots which were initially lacking. In other words, confusion arises when Parajanov offers more, not less.

Here is where Parajanov's *form* – as improbable as it seems – briefly overlaps with Jancsó's. Jancsó's camera is in a state of perpetual movement. It offers a sense of

of the vastness of space (both onscreen and off), yet a space which is constructed in an unpredictable fashion due to the lack of a narrative or even a point of view which guides it (this is, of course, in addition to the lack of a cued means of perception conventional editing typically promotes). Herein lies the contradiction: Jancsó's form *suggests* we see more. It intimates we are privy to all there is to see, yet his lack of metalanguage, or at the very least explanatory content, disrupts our totalizing view. This is precisely what Bordwell means when he claims our frustration and anxiety regarding Jancsó's narration is a direct consequence of feeling we should know more than we actually do.¹⁹⁵ With Jancsó's long take and mobile camera, we imagine a more complete rendition of space and the unfolding action therein, yet that image of totality is undermined by a suppressive narrative, one which withholds conventional communicative means such as the point of view shot mentioned above.¹⁹⁶

Parajanov appears to work towards the same ends, yet in reverse. Not only does he *limit* the sense of space (offscreen and otherwise) due to an increasingly immobile camera which captures equally immobile tableau compositions, he often undermines our construction of that space by *expanding* our vision, by showing us more. Here, the two filmmakers converge upon spatial as well as narrative disorientation from opposite ends of the long-take spectrum, each based on the law of inverse proportions. When they reveal more, less is understood.

¹⁹⁵ David Bordwell, *Narrative in the Fiction Film*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 144.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

At the same time, Parajanov's use of the long take here as well as his evocation of offscreen space (or lack thereof) differs dramatically from Jancsó's use of the device, despite the historical context both filmmakers share. As has been outlined earlier in this dissertation, Jancsó's predetermined patterns of camera tracks (form) force equally preordained actions of protagonists (content) who move as the camera moves, and who reenact their immutable roles in history. The director's film practice, then, emphasizes the dialectical relationship between form and content, underscoring Frederick Engels' argument: "Men make their history themselves, only they do so in a given environment which conditions it, and on the basis of actual relations already existing."¹⁹⁷ Ultimately, Jancsó's definitive use of the long take permits an equally definitive evocation of offscreen space. For Jancsó, what appears within the frame is always an actualization of what exists beyond it. There is no need to force manufactured continuity (historical and otherwise) by way of montage when simply capturing the profilmic – and thus historical process – will suffice. Theoretically, on and offscreen space are one in the same.

In contrast, Parajanov's work – at times with *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, almost entirely with *The Color of Pomegranates*, as we shall see – does little to refer to or make use of offscreen space. His tableau compositions, coupled with the camera's stationary, centrally-positioned perspective of the unfolding action within the frame, reinforce the frame itself and thus the fixed nature of it. These constructions are staged as though within a theater setting, not a fluid world within which figures and objects flow

¹⁹⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*. Louis Feuer, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 411.

seamlessly across a temporary border. In the tavern scene described above, isolated tableaux are offered. With each staging, Parajanov breaks up the space with fixed cells of activity, suggesting to the viewer that little if anything exists beyond them. Then, with two uninterrupted takes back to back, Parajanov merges the fixed cells into one continuous frame, thus undermining the viewer's initial belief that no additional or continuous space existed. It is only by way of turning the camera 360 degrees, then unwinding that rotation – a perfect circle in either direction – that the viewer is made aware of the unified space that was always there, as well as how Parajanov fractured it. This is, of course, in direct opposition to Jancsó's use of the long take and the sense of space therein, whether within the frame or suggested beyond it.

At the same time, though, the unified space Parajanov presents is a claustrophobic one. In all directions, we see only a closed interior. These are the limits of spatial freedom. The result is a closed circularity, not only of form *and* content (Parajanov's return to exact themes and compositions within the film, the actual rotations of the camera, etc.), but also of perspective and its limitations. The question of narrative circularity and duplicated nature of Party discourse returns here. The Central Committee's perpetual citations and reproduction of existing Party rhetoric becomes pure performance. The act or the *form* is what pushes the Party forward, not the validity or authenticity of its content. By the same token, Parajanov's circularity – the *form* as well as the performance, not the content or narrative of the film – is what drives the film forward.

In essence, both Jancsó's and Parajanov's use of the long take refers in disparate ways to the complicated history of which they are a part. Jancsó wages a thorough critique of ideology, questioning the ability one has to free one's self from an ideological apparatus. His critical position is based on his own role as a Marxist and a Stalinist, who, after experiencing Stalinism's betrayal, sought to maintain his allegiance to Marxist principles despite their gross misinterpretation at the hands of the regime. His film form – particularly the use of the long take – underscores the embedded nature by which individuals “participate” or rather react to a history already determined. By contrast, Parajanov's use of the long take is made to reassemble fragmented space, yet that reassembly produces another closed and circular set. Meaning or narrative is not furthered but rather placed in a perceptual loop where the formal devices and pure visual effects advance the film. Here, neither in the case of Party rhetoric nor in the case of Parajanov's cinema does consequent content or narrative propel politics or film forward.

In a telling example of disconnect between party discourse and policy, Parajanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* was praised and endorsed by the Central Committee as an accurate and worthy representation of Ukrainian Hutsul culture at a time when promoting the “unified” nature of the USSR and all its national identities was of tremendous relevance and need,¹⁹⁸ yet also at a time when a number of Ukrainian

¹⁹⁸ The first part of this contradiction lies in the promotion of ethnic and national identity while at the same time calling for the loosening of national distinctions and thus, even, “bourgeois nationalism.” See Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism” in *Slavic Review* 53, No. 2 (Summer 1994), 414-452.

nationalists were subjected to arrest and persecution. After the death of Stalin, the Ukrainian dissident movement began to take shape. Members of the movement consisted of writers, artists, historians and other intellectuals who demanded “democracy, humanism, an end to Russification and in defense of Ukrainian language and culture.”¹⁹⁹ Literary scholar Ivan Dziuba, the de-facto leader and publicist for the movement, called for a “return to the Leninist nationalities policy that had generated the Ukrainisation of the 1920s...His book *Internationalism or Russification* [1965] quoted Lenin...to argue that Stalin and Khrushchev had perverted Leninist nationality policy.”²⁰⁰ Dziuba and other Ukrainian intellectuals from the dissident movement used the premiere of Parajanov’s film in Kyiv as platform for their protest. Parajanov’s film, then, falls precisely at the juncture of the Central Committee’s simultaneous support and suppression of national identity.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ For more on the Ukrainian National Front and the Ukrainian dissident movement, see Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence*, Second Edition (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 55-60. Interestingly, Parajanov’s *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* was one of the first films released in the Soviet Union to have retained its original soundtrack and, thus, language. The film was, significantly, not dubbed.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁰¹ Some would read the reception of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* another way, foregrounding the work’s religious valences and the Party’s attempt to shut them down, as David A. Cook notes, “Parajanov may have dabbled in political dissent and been too outspoken in his criticism of officialdom, but the Soviet bureaucrats silenced him because *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* is an extraordinary testament to the powers of film as religious art and its maker was a poet of God.” See David A. Cook, “*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*: Film as Religious Art.” *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*. Vol. 3, No. 3 (Spring/Summer 1984), 22.

A Grand Disavowal of Realism and the Concrete Historical Atmosphere of Our Time: *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969)

Parajanov's next completed film, *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969), pushes tableaux constructions as well as the lack of space beyond the frame to an even further degree. The long take grows longer, tableaux multiply, and narrative fades. *The Color of Pomegranates* emerged at the end of Khrushchev's Thaw and the beginning of the period of stagnation (*zastoi*) under Brezhnev, marked by the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968.²⁰² During this time, efforts to celebrate the distinct national identities composing the Soviet Union continued, as did the persecution of those seeking to promote their own languages and cultures. By 1972, a short three years after *The Color of Pomegranates*' release, the suppression of Ukrainian dissent led some to conclude "the atmosphere resembled in many respects that of the Stalinist terror."²⁰³ Dissent was growing in Poland (the Solidarity Movement was not far behind), Hungary (the Hungarian uprising of 1956 garnered continued support throughout the region, including western Ukraine), as well as Czechoslovakia (the Prague Spring occurred just

²⁰² Historian and anthropologist Alexei Yurchak notes the term stagnation (*zastoi*) emerged only after Brezhnev was no longer the General Secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. Not until Gorbachev's reforms, "after Brezhnev's period had ended and the socialist system was undergoing its rapid transformation," did the term appear. "In fact," Yurchak continues, "the very conceptualization of the late 1960s and 1970s, when Brezhnev was the party's general secretary, as a certain 'period' with concrete historical features, also emerged retrospectively during perestroika." See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 31 and 7-9, respectively. For the break between the thaw and stagnation, see also Vittorio Strada, "O Proekte 'Rossiia'" in *Rossiia/Russia* 1 (9): 11-13.

²⁰³ Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence*, Second Edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 57.

one year before the film's release). Parajanov's work, "a proposed film about the [eighteenth-century] poet Sayat-Nova, whose very trilingualism symbolized the 'friendship of peoples' (an important theme for the Soviet empire)"²⁰⁴ then, was considered safe territory, seeing the material was distant enough in both time and region. The work was produced not by Dovzhenko Film Studio, under which Parajanov directed his previous films, but rather by Armenfilm Studio.

The film itself is difficult to summarize. Indeed, it addresses the life of Armenian troubadour poet Arutin Sayadan, better known by his pseudonym Sayat-Nova, whose dates of birth and death, although debated, tend to be noted as 1712 and 1795 respectively.²⁰⁵ As the opening explanatory text of the film states, "This film does not attempt to tell the life story of a poet. Rather, the filmmaker has tried to recreate the poet's inner world through the trepidations of his soul, his passions and torments, widely utilizing the symbolism and allegories specific to the tradition of Medieval Armenian poet-troubadours." Without this explanation – a caveat, perhaps, for those expecting a more traditional approach to the material – viewers might become lost in the film's unconventional and nearly impenetrable structure.

The film's opening sequence begins with a meditation on an open text: the actual writings of Sayat Nova. A voiceover states, "I am the man whose life and soul are torture." This frame of the Armenian manuscript is then intercut with a shot of three

²⁰⁴ Karla Oeler, "Nran Guyne: The Color of Pomegranates." *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*. Birgit Beumers, ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 140.

²⁰⁵ Sayat-Nova was a Tbilisi Armenian, as was Parajanov. The connection here was remarkably significant to the director.

pomegranates on a white linen cloth. Crimson juice seeps from their bases, marring the delicate material upon which they rest. A shot of the book is shown again, and the voiceover returns, repeating its claim. This rhythm of pairing a frame of the text with the camera's uninterrupted meditation of a number of objects – fish gasping for air, a dagger, metal cups, twigs laden with thorns (suggesting the passion of Christ) – continues, as does the voiceover's opening statement. These aural chants are met with visual rhymes, repetitions, and associations.²⁰⁶ As these pairings multiply, the voiceover ceases, as though the connection between text and image no longer needs "reading." A synthesis has been achieved. Yet here, despite this synthesis, despite the suggestion that this combination of objects represents both words on the page as well as the overarching statement "I am the man whose life and soul are torture," the strand of images seems to lead nowhere, offering the reader a strange symbolism doused in heavy matter. There is no connotative core, no real anchor to which the symbols adhere and refer. A constant slippage is offered instead, one in which images on the verge of intention and meaning slide into and efface one another. They do not link together as if to build a narrative chain but rather create a confusion preempted by the opening's explanatory passage. *This* is poetic cinema where, even in these minimally-staged opening shots featuring the long take, the process of signification, of making meaning, is itself interrupted.

²⁰⁶ Scholar and archaeologist Levon Abrahamian draws attention to Parajanov's fondness for associations, noting a scene in which Sayat Nova caresses a *kamancha* – a stringed instrument which, according to the author, "bears a striking resemblance to the female breast." He continues, "Just as milk had been poured onto the wheel and the breast of the woman bathing, now pieces of mother-of-pearl are poured onto the 'breast' of the musical instrument." See Levon Hm. Abrahamian. "Toward a Poetics of Parajanov's Cinema." *Armenian Review*, Vols. 47-48, Nos. 3-4, 1-2 (2001-2002), 79-81.

The film continues in this vein, presenting tableau after tableau shot with a wholly immobile and centrally-positioned camera. In a particularly evocative series, we see a young woman dressed in a long, wine-colored gown. With each gloved hand, she pulls crimson thread from a spool, waving her arms gracefully as she weaves. A voice repeats, as if in invocation, “You are fire. Your dress is fire,” making literal and thus stripping bare the often subtle space in which similes are made. Not only do the dress and the woman’s gestures liken themselves to fire, the voiceover insists they *are* flames. Behind this female figure, a golden frame sways, and behind it a plaster putto twirls and dangles in front of an ornate swath of red silk. This is followed by a scene in which the same woman, seen in closeup, obscures her eyes, one at a time, with her hands. With each uncovered eye, she gazes intently into the camera, returning the bewildered look of the viewer. It is as though her gesture repeats the condensation of the simile above. While word and image are plainly connected, here, the young woman’s act literally flattens vision as ours is flattened, reducing an otherwise stereoscopic reading of depth to a collapsed space seen with one eye only. As the woman denies herself a sense of depth perception, so, too, is the viewer denied perceptual access (in three dimensions) to what is otherwise a deeply-staged set. Objects within this frame, despite their positioning at varying distances from the camera itself, appear to be on a shared plane. Space is compressed.

Yet in spite of the apparent simplifications noted here, Parajanov’s formal complexity and ingenuity remain. In an attempt to explain the director’s film aesthetics,

Jonathan Rosenbaum notes what he calls Parajanov's "conscious naïveté"²⁰⁷ – a deliberate and seeming inexperience, yet one, I would argue, which is executed with the highest degree of artistic skill. On a formal level, Parajanov appears to reduce film to properties specific to the medium itself, at times composing frames of little movement (camera and otherwise), thus foregrounding pure duration.²⁰⁸ While Rosenbaum may argue sequences such as the one outlined above "register as primitive and childlike," containing "images that giggle with delight rather than brood or ponder,"²⁰⁹ he fails to make note of the innovative means by which Parajanov pushes filmmaking beyond that of his contemporaries.²¹⁰

For example, with each meticulously-staged composition the director constructs – some altered slightly due to jump cuts, suggesting temporal elisions – clear poetic devices rise to the fore. Cells or frames, as if lines of poetry, bespeak an incompleteness or

²⁰⁷ Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Parajanov's Films on Soviet Folklore." *Cineaste* 27:3 (Summer 2002), 44.

²⁰⁸ Parajanov seems to combine the early cinematic techniques of both Lumière and Méliès, recording the profilmic as an ultimate realist and implementing special effects such as the stop trick.

²⁰⁹ See Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Parajanov's Films on Soviet Folklore." *Cineaste* 27:3 (Summer 2002), 44.

²¹⁰ In the introduction to *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, Karen Beckman and Jean Ma write of film and photography which blur the boundary between movement and stasis (something Parajanov's later work tends to do), and the "impossibility of watching the movement without simultaneously watching the stasis and the media that produce these effects," ultimately arguing that the interval between the two is the space in which "rigorous thinking can emerge." In other words, Parajanov's work does not need to emulate the "apparent" contemplative form of his contemporaries' in order to create a space in which thinking is involved. See "Introduction" in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.

enjambment at the end of their run, the visuals of which spill over to the next frame. Senses are fused or even transposed in an optical synesthesia. Simile and metaphor abound, pushed beyond limits of logic. During a funeral sequence, a body is carried into a stone church. Lambs begin to fill the space until both the deceased and the cleric are engulfed by their sheer number. The metaphor of innocence is overwhelmed by its own signifier. Meaning is on the verge of collapse. Here is Parajanov at his most radical degree.

Art historian and literary critic Peter Bürger claims avant-garde art “neither creates a total impression that would permit an interpretation of its meaning nor can whatever impression may be created be accounted for by recourse to the individual parts, for they are no longer subordinated to a pervasive intent. This refusal to provide meaning is experienced as *shock* by the recipient.”²¹¹ He continues, claiming avant-garde works compel their viewers to

wrest meaning from them. If recipients will not simply give up or be contented with an arbitrary meaning extrapolated from just a part of the work, they must attempt to understand this enigmatic quality of the avant-gardism work. They then move to another level of interpretation. Instead of proceeding according to the hermeneutic circle and trying to grasp a meaning through the nexus of whole and parts, the recipient will suspend the search for meaning and direct attention to the principles of construction that determine the constitution of the work. In the process of reception, the avant-gardiste work thus provokes a break, which is the analogue of the incoherence (nonorganicity) of the work. Between the shock like experience of the inappropriateness of the mode of reception developed through dealing with organic works of art and

²¹¹ Peter Bürger. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Michael Shaw, trans. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 80. Emphasis mine.

the effort to grasp the principles of construction, there is a break: the interpretation of meaning is renounced.²¹²

Parajanov's work here resists meaning, as though he has taken avant-garde principles and stretched them to their logical conclusion. Neither the parts – individual shots or cells fashioned as tableaux – nor the whole (what would be an attainable narrative) permit thorough and decisive acts of interpretation. In addition, the sequences described above, as well as others that follow, engender what critic and philosopher Umberto Eco calls an “open work” and an open process of reception, where the former presents a wide field of meaning and its potential, resulting in the latter whose searches for order and linearity often yield none. An ambiguity and a multiplicity of meaning replaces a fixed, unequivocal, and thus “closed” text.²¹³ For both Bürger and Eco, as well as Parajanov, this equivocation, this intellectual struggle, these shocks are all welcome. For the Soviet critics of the film, as well as the authorities heading cultural production in the USSR, *The Color of Pomegranates* was a grand “disavowal of realism,” or, more directly, Socialist Realism.²¹⁴

These exact unfavorable assessments of the film were delivered by Mikhail Bleiman, a critic, director, and prolific scriptwriter then serving on the editorial board of Goskino – in other words, a figure whose opinion carried significant weight regarding the State's reception of the film as well as its future distribution both within the Soviet Union

²¹² Ibid., 81.

²¹³ See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*. Anna Cancogni, Trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 83-104.

²¹⁴ James Steffen. *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 155.

and beyond.²¹⁵ In an essay titled “Archaists or Innovators?” published in *Iskusstvo Kino* shortly after the release of *The Color of Pomegranates*, Bleiman lamented the remarkable “degree of subjectivity” as well as the “incomprehensible,” “unclear,” and associative nature of the film, concluding, “Parajanov faces a danger: he can get carried away with that capricious associative course which gives rise to the life and poetry of Sayat-Nova and leave aside the object of the associations – *reality*. And this disregard will lead the film to failure.”²¹⁶ Not only is Parajanov’s greatest filmic feat to date labeled here as purely subjective and wholeheartedly primitive (“archaic”) on all fronts, it is immediately at risk of leaving a State-sanctioned reality behind, something Party officials weren’t entirely prepared to endorse. Reality – at least the one Parajanov’s long take captured – was not revolutionary enough in its depiction. It had shirked its responsibility to engage with and present to an audience a “sketch of the hero” as well as “his ties with the *concrete historical atmosphere of his time*.”²¹⁷

The resulting criticism threw Parajanov squarely within the temporally-ambiguous space between obsolescence and change (“Archaists or Innovators?”), the

²¹⁵ For more on Mikhail Bleiman’s role within the Soviet film industry, see *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*. Derek Spring and Richard Taylor, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 247-248.

²¹⁶ Mikhail Bleiman, quoted from essay “Archaisty ili novatory?” (Archaists or Innovators?) *Iskusstvo kino* no. 7 (1970), 55-76. Here, quotes from James Steffen’s translation published in “From *Sayat-Nova* to *The Color of Pomegranates*: notes on the production and censorship of Parajanov’s film.” *Armenian Review* 47-48: 3-4, 1-2 (2001-2002), 114-115. Italics mine.

²¹⁷ Quotes from the Editorial Board memo written by Goskino’s Deputy Chief of the Main Administration, translated and published in James Steffen’s “From *Sayat-Nova* to *The Color of Pomegranates*: notes on the production and censorship of Parajanov’s film.” *Armenian Review* 47-48: 3-4, 1-2 (2001-2002), 115-116. Italics mine.

exact space within which the definition of Socialist Realism (and its very enforcement) resides. Here, reality is to be depicted in its revolutionary development, in a state of becoming. In this depiction, a “concrete historical atmosphere” must be engaged. This is, of course, a temporal impossibility, a conflation of present and future. Bleiman’s judgment, even the title of his essay, dwells in this space of confusion. Is this archaism or innovation? The absence of a middle term between the two extremes, coupled with the critic’s uncertainty as to which side Parajanov’s poetic film falls, exposes the flawed nature of the criticism itself as well as the unstable ideological premises upon which it is based. Parajanov’s work, then, achieves the ultimate feat: not only does it expose the performative, citational nature of Party rhetoric outlined above, it baits a form of criticism which exposes the contradictory definition of Socialist Realism. The film is not simply one produced within an ideologically-confounding climate. It is one which elicits the split nature of that climate in the selfsame words of those who define it.

With the support of the Party, Goskino ultimately prohibited *The Color of Pomegranates* from international distribution, severely limiting its potential for influencing a global audience. Although the film was never officially screened abroad, a bootleg copy made its way to Europe and the United States where it served to generate attention regarding Parajanov’s subsequent imprisonment. The film was instrumental not only in garnering worldwide attention for the director’s cause, but also in assisting his release.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ See Patrick Cazals. *Serguei Paradjanov*, Cahiers du Cinema Series. (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

From Tastelessness to Greatness: Contemporaries Overlap

While in prison, Parajanov corresponded with none other than Andrei Tarkovsky, the figure with whom this chapter opens, and to whom we return now. As early as 1967, when asked about his colleague, Tarkovsky remarked, “About Parajanov...I do not understand him! Perhaps it makes sense to bring tastelessness to the absurd. If it is possible to compare the artist Laktionov with someone who has no sense of humor and takes things too seriously, then there is no one with whom Parajanov compares on the scale of tastelessness.”²¹⁹ The director’s opinion of his contemporary, bolstered by an invocation of Aleksandr Laktionov, could not be more harsh. It was Laktionov who, in the late 1940s and 50s, produced works of art which not only aligned themselves wholeheartedly with Socialist Realist principles, they pushed them to near absurd extremes. The artist’s 1947 painting *Pis’mo s Fronta* (*Letter from the Front*, Fig. 7) garnered State praise and national attention, placing Laktionov on the proverbial map. Yet the 1952 work *V novuiu kvartiru* (*Into a New Flat*, Fig. 8), a painting which depicts a young family smiling as it enters its new and sparkling living quarters, now filled with books, instruments, flowers, a large radio and – importantly – a framed portrait of Stalin, provoked mixed criticism. Intellectuals and artists lambasted the work for its “illusory,”

²¹⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky, “Life is born from disharmony.” Interview, 1967, *Kinovedcheskie Zapiskii*, No. 50, 2001, pp. 219-230. Here, page 230. Translation mine. The full quote reads as “У Параджанова... Не понимаю его! Может быть, есть смысл в том, чтобы безвкусицу довести до абсурда. Если можно с кем-то сравнить художника Лактионова, который лишен чувства юмора и слишком серьезно ко всему относится, то Параджанова по масштабам безвкусицы — не с кем.”

“oversaturated,” and “dead” or “still-death” quality, ultimately coining the term “*Laktionovshchina*” to demarcate works of similar character.²²⁰ The Party responded with increasingly loud endorsements in order to drown the emerging negative reception, yet the cries of “bad taste” or “tastelessness” (the same term Tarkovsky uses to criticize Parajanov) persisted.²²¹

Responses to the painting seemed to touch upon what scholar Oliver Johnson calls the work’s not so subtle effort to “varnish reality.” He writes, “A symptom of Socialist Realism’s attempt to synthesize art with ideology, varnishing reality and its twin evil *beskonfliktnost*’ (literally, conflictlessness) were born out of the precarious nature of the Zhdanov-era art establishment, in which ambiguity of style or content could lead to harsh criticism, loss of privileges or worse.”²²² This precarious nature of the Zhdanov-era establishment is clearly echoed in Bleiman’s criticism of *The Color of Pomegranates* above, namely his (and others’) desire for the film to deal directly with a concrete and unwavering historical atmosphere, one which did not expose the ambiguous nature of that atmosphere itself.

Delving deeper into the reception of Laktionov’s work, and thus the problem of Socialist Realism, Johnson writes,

Viewers and critics were aggravated by Laktionov’s painting because he undermined the mechanism of Socialist Realism by making the thematic message transparently explicit. The discreet

²²⁰ Oliver Johnson. “Kul’turnost’ or Kitsch: Varnishing Reality in the Art of Aleksandr Laktionov,” *Studies in Slavic Cultures*, VI (2007), 87.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 82-106.

²²² *Ibid.*, 85.

incentive system, the generous allocation of new flats and the improving lifestyles of Soviet citizens were acknowledged as valuable themes, but in this depiction they were tainted by an all-too-obvious representation of good old-fashioned materialism.²²³

In essence, *V novuiu kvartiru (Into a New Flat)*, pushed too aggressively towards praising the economic promises guaranteed by the State, in turn representing the contradictory end of their spectrum. At the same time, the painting depicted an untruth that could not be repudiated due to the absence of authoritative discourse indicating otherwise (flats such as the one depicted did not exist – but least not in abundance – yet that reality was suppressed). Instead, the discourse “varnished reality.”

Alexei Yurchak describes the consequence of this gesture thus: “Since authoritative discourse did not provide an accurate constative description of reality and since no competing description of reality was widely available, one could conclude that the late Soviet world became a kind of ‘postmodern’ universe where grounding in the real world was no longer possible, and where reality became reduced to discursive simulacra.”²²⁴ What the authorities wanted, of course, was a space in which the shaky foundations of Socialist Realist principles would not be rattled. Parajanov’s early work seemed to provide that space, albeit with minor formal “abberations” those in charge pleasantly forgave. Is this, then, the “tastelessness” to which Tarkovsky alludes? Did he imagine the young Parajanov as an artist wholeheartedly aligned with the likes of Laktionov, someone who didn’t challenge this simulated reality?

²²³ Ibid., 92.

²²⁴ Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75.

By 1981, Tarkovsky's opinion of Parajanov had changed, no doubt due to the latter's formal inventiveness and his willingness to test the limits of representation. In an interview staged with Ian Christie that same year, Tarkovsky noted, "I regard the Georgian Iosseliani and Sergei Paradjanov as the best Soviet filmmakers"²²⁵ – two directors "with whom [Tarkovsky] shared an insistence on the primacy of the visual image, even if each developed that interest in parallel and distinctively different ways."²²⁶ For Parajanov, the filmic image is one which takes place in the realm of fiction, albeit one which summons forth with its surrounding reality. For Tarkovsky, as we shall see, the primacy of the visual image is grounded upon a blurring of reality and fiction.

On December 17, 1973, having returned to Kyiv after being forced to leave due to the increasingly dangerous political climate there, Parajanov was arrested. By April of the following year, he was put on trial and convicted of homosexuality as well as traffic in icons. From July 1974 until December 1977, Parajanov was imprisoned at camps of "severe regime." Thanks to a bootleg copy and screening of *The Color of Pomegranates* in the West, Parajanov garnered international support from countless admirers including Godard, Pasolini, Buñuel, and others. Letters and petitions were written and signed on the director's behalf, yet it was Louis Aragon, a founding member of Surrealism, who was most instrumental in Parajanov's release. Having been awarded the Order of the

²²⁵ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 69.

²²⁶ Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie. *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 15.

Friendship of Peoples by Brezhnev, Aragon traveled to Moscow to accept the medal, and while there appealed to General Secretary regarding the director's unwarranted imprisonment.²²⁷

For fifteen years, after his filmic triumph with *The Color of Pomegranates*, Parajanov's formal experimentation was put on hold. While imprisoned, he focused on various drawing, collage, and montage practices, all of which reveal a similar penchant for pastiche, layering, and the construction and erosion of meaning by way of endless juxtapositions seen in his films. We turn, therefore, to a photo collage titled *Search*, dated 1988 (Fig. 9) and associated with a 1969 script for Parajanov's unrealized film *Confession (Ispoved)*. The script, autobiographical in nature, includes scenes of Parajanov himself. He recalls his father's consignment shop and how it and the family home were subject to frequent searches, thanks to its collection of "bourgeois goods" on commission there. With these details and Parajanov's own turn to autobiography, the collage evokes his ancestral home and the searches conducted within it. Here, a photograph of a young boy is seen wrapping his arms around his mother's waist. Her arms return his embrace, and her hands rest delicately and protectively on his small shoulders. Around them crowd a pen and ink drawing of three figures in official military garb. One of these figures is none other than Stalin. Their hands encroach upon her shoulders, mirroring her own gesture with her son, yet the expression is less clear. They outnumber her, dwarf her, transgress with inked fingers the boundaries of her

²²⁷ James Steffen. *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 197.

photographed body. In the background stand two Victorian tables upon which various decorative vases and high-heeled shoes are displayed. At the top of the collage is a photographic portrait of Lenin, around which Parajanov has drawn a stylized frame. The mother and the boy stand directly below him, their photographic representations rhyming with Lenin's, yet he seems to be of no use here. He is dead and gone, and those who have taken his place encroach upon and violate independence, autonomous space. In a telling explanation of the piece, Parajanov's more complete title reads, "They said to us: hang a portrait of Lenin and you will be respected more, but it has not helped."²²⁸

²²⁸ *Kaleidoskop Parajanova: Ricynok, kollage, assemblage*. (Muzei Sergei Parajanova, Erevan, 2008), 138. Translation mine. The original reads: "нам сказали: повесьте портрет ленина, и вас будут больше уважать, но это не помогло."

Chapter Three **Andréi Tarkovsky**

The Inexorable Insistence Upon and Transcendence by Way of Matter

Mid-way through Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), the filmmaker places his protagonists in an abandoned warehouse. Until this moment, we are confronted by interminably long takes of one bleak landscape after another, all in Sepia-tinted celluloid. Now, in the distance, a certain haze lingers, yet rather than obscuring what exists at the very far wall, this hovering veil curiously completes the composition. It is a contingent presence, formless matter not unlike the water in the foreground reflecting nearly everything around it. Light passes quietly through a number of unseen passageways and barred windows, growing dim in corners, accentuating structure. Despite the latticed walls, sound travels tightly here, as though space – despite its grand scale in this shot – is enclosed, sealed without interruption. Thus, a certain dichotomy arises in which the seemingly visual infinite – highlighted by strong orthogonals which recede and merge somewhere in the impossible distance – clashes with acoustic immediacy and finitude.

Three men – the Scientist, the Writer, and the Stalker – are on their way to the Zone, that space beyond the unrelenting insistence upon what can be quantified by the camera. The men climb into a wagon, and for nearly four minutes, we focus on the most-minute details – their skin, eyes, hair, the slow trajectory of tears blown across a face – as a blurred landscape passes by. The camera then cuts from a close-up of the Writer's visage to a long shot of the landscape beyond. The dramatic shift of the camera's focus and depth is heightened by the abrupt transition from oppressive shades of brown to

color.²²⁹ The trolley comes to a halt. Flowers bend in an audible breeze and the camera pans slowly to the right, stopping on two worn and tilted telephone poles posing as abandoned crosses upon a hill. This open, natural space is found when one traverses the invisible border of the Zone. At the same time, in this space of traversal, the wooden crosses in the foreground seem to offer some semblance of signification: a blunt, iconographic reading opening the impenetrable plane of interpretation.

This chapter pursues the implications of situating the work of Andrei Tarkovsky within a materialist discourse manifest in the perpetual ricochet between and ultimate synthesis of oppositions such as duration and interruption, visual continuity and narrative dislocation, signification and distortion. While evoking grand gestures of spiritualism and transcendence for example, Tarkovsky repeatedly tethers his characters and viewers to the sheer weight of matter. His camera looks at objects, landscapes, studies them in uncut detail, slowly panning towards them, tracking across them, moving away from them in ever increasing, unbroken filmic time. It is this inexorable insistence upon and examination of mere objects which begins to distort the dimension of time beyond what is reasonable for any semblance of visual or narrative interpretation and comprehension. What results is a path to transcendence by way of matter and its intensification – what Deleuze would call “transcendental materialism” – thus shifting Tarkovsky’s work from

²²⁹ Tarkovsky experimented with various film stocks throughout his filmmaking, often shifting between black and white, sepia, and color, even during the course of a single film, evidenced here with *Stalker*. Of these changes, Tarkovsky scholar Robert Bird notes, “What Walter Benjamin called the percussive effect of film was for Tarkovsky not only the discontinuous staccato of frames, but also the constant alternation between types and gradations of coloration (as well as between different speeds of projection).” Robert Bird. *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 154.

mere orthodox religiosity²³⁰ or obscurantism.²³¹ The “theology” Tarkovsky evokes is one which arises by way of this counterintuitive path where spirit is only reached through matter. Further, the suspension of symbolic space by a traversal of it results in a destabilization of the viewer who is left with little with which to identify. Yet the camera continues to move and record with an indeterminate, almost passive momentum.

In a close analysis of a number of Russian films from the 70’s and 80’s, Fredric Jameson writes of an “interpretive dilemma,” the location of which does not exist in representation or the making or obscuring of meaning. Rather, the dilemma resides in a certain indeterminacy, “in locating and hypothesizing that feature of the national culture and the national experience to which this peculiar interpretive dilemma can be said to be relevant.”²³² These are the Brezhnev years, he notes, “the era of stagnation,” and the years immediately following find the Soviet Union attempting to elevate itself to a First World status yet ever failing. “What blocks socialism is no longer ‘socialism’ itself, or Stalinism, or Communism or the Communist Party – it is the capitalist world system into which the Soviet Union has decided to integrate itself,”²³³ he argues.

²³⁰ See Anna Lawton. “Art and Religion in the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky.” William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic, eds., *Christianity and the Arts in Russia* (1991), 154.

²³¹ Slavoj Žižek. *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski Between Theory and Post Theory* (London: BFI Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 102-104.

²³² Fredric Jameson. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 88.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 109.

And yet, not only is the Soviet State as such no more, what has taken its place is a mere projection and interpretation of what it aspires – in vain – to be, as though a meditation upon the “hard matter” of capital will enable quantifiable progression or transcendence. On a micro level, the absence of a master signifier or, in this case the Soviet State, ceases to define the citizen. What remains is a depoliticized subject, a vague individual in the wake of the purges of Stalinism. Tarkovsky’s films, with their long takes and ambiguous narratives, can then be said to bespeak, however indirectly, the space and the makings of the new, post-Soviet subject as symptom of the abandonment of specifically Stalinist and Marxist ideologies at large. Tarkovsky’s *oeuvre*, then, does not only articulate “the Russian soul,” a common, limiting claim by countless admirers of the director and his films. Rather, beyond what Tarkovsky himself intended or even aspired to do, the entirety of his work may be understood as a sophisticated filmic symptom of a shifting political and ideological landscape. It not only mirrors this historical moment in stylistic terms, it enacts the very lack of a sound, consistent perspective embodied by contemporary Soviet citizens. Here is where the contradiction exists: the long take increasingly replaces montage, yet rather than resulting in a heightened sense of temporal and narrative continuity, the obverse is the case. Empty duration and spacial disarticulation are at stake.

“Beyond the Edges of the Screen”: Tarkovsky and Eisenstein at Odds

This is an argument based on form, a form which develops with history, a form which seemingly turns its back on the revolutionary nature and function of montage and

cinema as defined and practiced by Eisenstein and Vertov (among others) in the 1920s and 30s. For the Soviets of that era, cinema was both an epistemological instrument and a device which activated the mind and transformed the eye – the locus of reason – “into an agent of critical production.”²³⁴ The perception and attainment of total reason could only be had by way of cinema and those mechanisms specific to the medium of film. The naked eye was insufficient. Film, then, would be the tool by which one would gain a clearer and more complete understanding of historical process. As Annette Michelson aptly summarizes, “The general aim was no less than the transformation of the human condition through a cinematic intensification of cognitive accuracy, analytic precision, and epistemological certitude.”²³⁵

Yet why, then, address montage if Tarkovsky does not strictly adhere to the principles of the device as laid out by its original and greatest theorist: Eisenstein? Why position Tarkovsky in the same formal lineage as Eisenstein if his films and writings appear to initially grapple with and seemingly attempt to circumvent editing altogether? Tarkovsky himself believed his filmic enterprise betrayed a clear break from his early

²³⁴ Annette Michelson, “Introduction,” *Kino Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, p. xix. It should be noted, of course, that Eisenstein’s and Vertov’s theories on film were not one in the same. Vertov claimed the naked, “ordinary” eye saw only untruth, and that the “cinematic eye (aided by special cinematic means [including] accelerated shooting)” enabled one to see things as they really are [Kino Eye, xix; Vertov, “Three Songs of Lenin and Kino-Eye”]. While both filmmakers had similar goals (initially, the activation of the viewer), they were often at odds. Eisenstein went so far as to criticize Vertov for his “formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief [in] *Man with the Movie Camera*” (Eisenstein, “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram,” *Film Form*, p. 43).

²³⁵ Annette Michelson. “The Wings of Hypothesis: On Montage and the Theory of the Interval.” *Montage and Modern Life: 1919-1942*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 62.

Soviet film predecessors. Tarkovsky made repeated efforts to distinguish his work from Eisenstein's, aiming primarily where historians continue to this day to focus: the perceived dichotomy between montage (as defined by early Eisenstein) and its argued obverse, the long take. Tarkovsky distances himself from montage cinema, neglecting to acknowledge any overlap between explicit (actual) and implicit (viewer executed) editing. The historical context of Tarkovsky's work differs tremendously from that of his filmic predecessors (as explained later in this chapter). As a result, editing and its revolutionary connotations is neither the focus nor the foundation for Tarkovsky's film. He writes, "...Nor can I accept the notion that editing is the main formative element of a film, as the protagonists of 'montage cinema', following Kuleshov and Eisenstein, maintained in the 'twenties, as if a film was made on the editing table."²³⁶ The answer rests in the theories and practices of montage as filmmakers developed and redefined them over the course of five critical decades. In addition, one must investigate and account for the later work of Eisenstein which so many seem to overlook.

During this time, montage transformed from explicit cuts resulting in a cued means of perception to an implied practice of editing executed by the viewer, a practice about which André Bazin – cinema's greatest proponent of realism in film – wrote extensively. Here, Bazin praised the likes of Welles and Renoir for their consistent employment of deep focus, staging in depth, and the long take. Bazin often argued against montage and its effects, championing instead the spatial unity unedited scenes and

²³⁶ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on Cinema*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 114.

staging in depth provide. In “The Virtues and Limitations of Montage,” he concludes that realism “resides in the homogeneity of space,”²³⁷ and that montage, at times, is not the essence but rather the negation of cinema. It dismantles space and does not permit action to unfold unmolested. At the same time, montage not only eliminates the ambiguity of both expression and reality, it prohibits the viewer from more actively engaging in the ongoing action. Staging in depth and the absence of montage diminish the director’s influence, allowing the viewer to exercise “personal choice” and “will” not only in locating the critical sites of action but also in deriving meaning from the image. In this latter variation, the viewer is responsible for making sense of the unfolding scenes.²³⁸

Tarkovsky’s place in the tradition of Eisenstein is ultimately justified, as the latter’s theories of montage – as early as his 1930s writings on overtone montage – began to express concern with issues which Tarkovsky himself, in a not unrelated manner, would pay attention as well. For the Soviets, cinema is an epistemological instrument where the reason, the mind, a goal of a rational control or seizing of the world, a preaching of the dialectic as a human mastery of the world. In a work such as *Capital*, the apparatus is rendered obsolete. Its function is no longer that of prop as the mind is now to have achieved its critical potential sans camera, projector, screen. A

²³⁷ See André Bazin. “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” in *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 50.

²³⁸ This is in contrast to focusing primarily on where he diverges, where his film is different, better. This is the same endeavor of the historian who either seeks to align a lineage, thereby drawing a narrative of influence, or who seeks to mark diversions, thereby framing a narrative of progression.

transformation of the human condition – one which would function as permanent remedy, a permanent revolution – is the ultimate goal.

Interestingly, it is Andrei Tarkovsky who, in his *Sculpting in Time* published in 1986, also speaks of meaning beyond the shot or frame. Yet this meaning is not produced via the clashing together of disparate images but rather by the film medium which “faithfully record[s] [upon itself] the time which flows on beyond the edges of the frame.”²³⁹ That which exists beyond the shot is not the final, predetermined ideological conclusion. It is a more fluid and amorphous entity which, upon adhering to a kernel of significance within the viewer, gains a certain retroactive significance. The meaning is always there; it need only be activated. Tarkovsky writes, “Film becomes something beyond its ostensible existence as an exposed and edited roll of film, a story, a plot. Once in contact with the individual who sees it, it separates from its author, starts to live its own life, undergoes changes of form and meaning.”²⁴⁰ Tarkovsky discredits and criticizes montage cinema for what he calls a total onslaught of meaning on the audience. He writes,

I reject the principles of ‘montage cinema’ because they do not allow the film to continue beyond the edges of the screen: they do not allow the audience to bring personal experience to bear on what is in front of them on film. ‘Montage cinema’ presents the audience with with puzzles and riddles, makes them decipher symbols, take pleasure in allegories, appealing all the time to their intellectual experience. Each of these riddles, however, has its own exact, word for word solution; so I feel that Eisenstein prevents the audience from letting their feelings be influenced by their own reaction to what they see. When in *October* he juxtaposes a

²³⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on Cinema*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 118.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

balalaika with Kerensky, his method has become his aim... The construction of the image becomes an end in itself, and the author proceeds to make a total onslaught on the audience, imposing upon them his own attitude to what is happening.²⁴¹

Tarkovsky, then, appears most interested in maintaining the integrity of what exists in front of the camera. Cinema is a time-bound medium, and what is captured by the lens and assembled beyond it creates, according to Tarkovsky, “a new awareness of the existence of that time.” There is no third meaning. There is only time as a consummate entity, the editing of which “brings out a quality already inherent in the frames that it joins.”²⁴²

In a critique of the battle on the ice scene in Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky* from 1938, Tarkovsky claims Eisenstein relies entirely upon editing to evoke a certain rhythm and dynamic “time pressure”²⁴³ which the shots themselves do not contain. The event unfolding on the screen appears “sluggish and unnatural.”²⁴⁴ Time must be allowed to pass unobstructed within the shot. Time cannot be suggested.

Tarkovsky’s argument immediately evokes similar critiques of editing as theorized by André Bazin who, in both “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” and “The Virtues and Limitations of Montage,” investigates the long take versus montage aesthetic. Bazin examines the hunting scene in Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* of 1922, claiming montage could suggest the time in which Nanook waits for the seal to emerge

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid., 121.

²⁴³ Ibid., 119.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 120.

from the ice, but it is the long take which triumphs. Flaherty refrains from editing the shot, thus revealing the actual time of the hunt and the real effect of anticipation. By using the example of this scene from *Nanook of the North*, Bazin argues for a cinema that does not add to reality but rather reveals it. He argues for a cinema that respects the continuity and duration of dramatic space. Depth of field, deep focus, and long takes not only alter the structure of film language, these aesthetics “affect the relationships of the minds of the spectators to the image, and in consequence...influence the interpretation of the spectacle”²⁴⁵ – the most pressing of these affects or influences being that of increased viewer activation. Where editing cues the viewer, the long take requires him to exercise his own powers of deduction. Metaphor and symbol constructed by montage are replaced with objective presentation – an integrity for the pro-filmic. The viewer must now make sense of what he sees. In an interesting turn, Jean-Luc Godard claims editing itself is an integral part of *mise-en-scène* or that which the image or profilmic consists. Montage, he

²⁴⁵ André Bazin. “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” in *What is Cinema? vol. 1*. Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 27, 35.

writes, “both denies and prepares the way for *mise-en-scène*: the two are interdependent.”²⁴⁶

Yet with Tarkovsky, the integrity of that which rests before the lens is one which begins to bleed into what we can call a persistence of material – where the camera’s lingering insistence upon an object brings about a certain transcendence, a contemplative mode which yields an excess of that very object, an excess of materiality. Time itself is a fundamental component of this persistence of materiality. If Bazin claims the long take and depth of field require more from the viewer, Tarkovsky’s unforgiving concentration of time within a single shot overwhelms the spectator with responsibility and ambiguity. At the same time, it liberates him from narrative and thereby symbolic space, for if that moment of transcendence occurs via an insistence upon material, then one is able to break through the mechanism of signification by an over-saturation of the signified object itself. An insistence upon observation and experience – the empirical – is that which leads to the transcendental. Tarkovsky – often deemed a metaphysical and religious filmmaker – can now be seen under a slightly shifted definition of these terms. The

²⁴⁶ Godard. “Montage my fine care.” *Godard on Godard*. Trans. and ed. Tom Milne. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 40. Pier Paolo Pasolini chimes in here as well. In his essay “Observations on the Long Take,” he claims montage brings a certain death and thus retroactive meaning to film, thus eliminating the ambiguity of the un-manipulated image. The long take evades absolute decipherment; it remains *in potentia* – “modifiable by eventual future actions.” With montage, Pasolini writes, we get “a multiplication of ‘presents,’ as if an action, instead of unwinding once before our eyes, were to unwind many times. This multiplication of ‘presents’ abolishes the present, empties it, each present postulating the relativity of all others, their unreliability, imprecision, and ambiguity... Without death, our lives are untranslatable, “a chaos of possibilities, a search for relations among discontinuous meanings.” See Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Observations on the Long Take,” *October*, Vol. 13 (Summer, 1980), 3-6.

metaphysical, here, is as constituting, constitutive of, and a mode of access to “hard matter.”

Slavoj Žižek writes of meta-physics in precisely these terms. He states,

Drive can be said to be ‘meta-physical’: not in the sense of being beyond the domain of the physical, but in the sense of involving another materiality beyond (or, rather, beneath) the materiality located in (what we experience as) spatio-temporal reality. In other words, the primordial Other of our spatio-temporal bodily reality is not Spirit, but another ‘sublime’ materiality. Perhaps modern art provides the most pertinent case of this other materiality. When typical modernist artists speak about the Spiritual in painting (Kandinsky) or in music (Schoenberg), the ‘spiritual’ dimension they evoke points towards the ‘spiritualization’ (or, rather, ‘spectralization’) of Matter (colour and shape, sound) as such, *outside* its reference to Meaning. Let us recall the ‘massiveness’ of the protracted stains which ‘are’ yellow sky in late Van Gogh, or the water or grass in Munch: this uncanny ‘massiveness’ pertains neither to the direct materiality of the colour stains nor to the materiality of the depicted objects – it dwells in a kind of intermediate spectral domain of what Schelling called *geistige Körperlichkeit*. From the Lacanian perspective, it is easy to identify this ‘spiritual corporeality’ as materialized *jouissance*, *‘jouissance* turned into flesh.²⁴⁷

In other words, the spiritual here is not something existing in and of itself, independent of the artist or filmmaker. It is not that thing beyond the frame which Tarkovsky (or Kandinsky or Schoenberg) locates and brings to the fore. Instead, in the case of Tarkovsky, the “spiritual” is something created and *enacted* by way of the repeated insistence on filming matter in prolonged duration. The realm of signification established by the camera (a brief focus on a glass of water, for example) is distorted by continued and unreasonably-long focus on that same glass of water without explanation as to why

²⁴⁷ Slavoj Žižek. *Plague of Fantasies*. (London: Verso, 1997), 32.

this focus is necessary. The process of signification is stretched and ultimately crippled. Transcendence of the symbolic plane results. The spiritual, then, is that thing beyond language. It cannot be defined. It can only be achieved through matter, thus the “spiritual corporeality,” the transcendental materialism. The spiritual entity is constituted in experience: the insistence upon the empirical which leads to the transcendental. Transcendence, then, is that of the symbolic plane. In practical terms, it is that which enables a reading of this enigmatic filmmaker beyond his own religiosity.²⁴⁸

A Time and a Camera Unhinged: *Ivan’s Childhood* (1962)

In order to thoroughly understand Tarkovsky’s eventual departure from conventional narrative cinema, one must begin with an examination of his first feature film, *Ivan’s Childhood*. Tarkovsky’s cinematic body of work commences here with the story of a young boy whose waking and dreaming life is embedded in and motivated by war. The project, produced in a mere eight months, was released in 1962 at a time when war-themed films were still the state-endorsed genre, despite the brief “thaw” after Stalin’s death in 1953. The countless losses of the Second World War and the horrors of its aftermath had yet to be thoroughly investigated and understood, and so for a time films glorifying not present day but rather the war years with subjects of victory, noble sacrifice, heroic soldiers and resilient civilians were not only promoted but also remarkably well received. In other words, the effort to foreground idealized triumphs of

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

individuals softened the brunt of recent history's real and state-supported violence. Tarkovsky's *oeuvre* emerges during these decades, within the first ten years of Stalin's death, and just five short years after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Party Congress of 1956, when socialist realist production was at dizzying heights in an effort to sustain an increasingly untenable state apparatus.

With the release of Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes are Flying* in 1957, the socialist realist tradition had begun to wane, and a new wave of directors and films ceased to focus on the improbable and uniform triumph of the Soviet everyman. Instead, this new wave of Russian cinema explored and exposed the psychological and seemingly permanent terrors of war by way of dynamic cinematography and the elimination of stock Soviet protagonists. Stalin had been dead nearly a decade, and the brief thaw that followed allowed for a temporary break from socialist realist production, albeit within the bounds of institutionalized genres. This thaw under Khrushchev also permitted Soviet artists to screen works by a number of western and asian filmmakers such as Luis Buñuel, Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman, Orson Welles, Michelangelo Antonioni, Luchino Visconti, and others. Tarkovsky himself wrote of Buñuel's and Kurosawa's mastery of camera movement and *mise-en-scène* in an attempt to articulate what he envisioned were cinema's most fundamental characteristics, namely its "purity" as an art form, and the capacity of its "images to express a specific, unique, actual fact."²⁴⁹ From the outset,

²⁴⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 72-73.

Tarkovsky appeared to be most interested in a realist aesthetic where cinema, “by its very nature [...] must expose reality, not cloud it.”²⁵⁰

Yet despite Tarkovsky’s concern with and desire for cinema to “expose” rather than “cloud” reality, his films often accomplish the opposite. The long take Tarkovsky employs allows reality to unfold uninterrupted before the camera, but what this means onscreen and before the eyes of a viewer is an entirely different thing. Who sits in a field and watches the grass sway, prohibiting his/her attention from shifting to individual reeds or the details of moving grass, instead remaining fixed with a somewhat meditative perspective? The very definition of attention supposes a constant shifting of perspective in order to capture and inspect as much as possible, yet this is not the perspective Tarkovsky offers. The question is one of reality itself. What reality does Tarkovsky wish to expose? The reality observed by a disembodied viewer thrust onto a wholly embodied spectator, or the reality the natural eye sees? Is Tarkovsky’s “reality” here cinematically determined, or does it consider the role of the spectator in its formulation? In other words, is this a reality filmed or a reality perceived?

Despite the influx of international influence and the temporary departure from sanctioned socialist realist models, Tarkovsky emerged as a director whose feature-length films – of which there are only seven – presented a consistent, singular aesthetic within

²⁵⁰ Ibid. “The cinema was born as a means of capturing the very movement of reality in its photographically concrete uniqueness.” Ol’ga Surkova, *S Tarkovskim i o Tarkovskom*, 2nd Edition (Moscow: 2005). Printed here in Robert Bird. *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 170.

the “poetic cinema” tradition.²⁵¹ And although *Ivan’s Childhood* was Tarkovsky’s first feature film, an abandoned project he inherited upon his graduation from the Gerasimov All-Russian State Institute of Cinematography (*Всероссийский государственный университет кинематографии имени С.А.Герасимова*, or VGIK), the work already began to articulate and test the filmic and theoretical principles which would come to define his *oeuvre*.

It is, of course, easy to read this first work as one of early experimentation, of investigating and trying new modes of cinematic production which would be fine tuned and perfected over time. In other words, the film is often seen as the first step in a technically- and aesthetically-honed trajectory arcing a quarter century. Tarkovsky himself – with the benefit of hindsight – begins his own narrative here, one which adopts the archetypal story of development in sequence. In the first chapter of his *Sculpting in Time* – a collection of essays hailed as his testament to and philosophy of cinema – Tarkovsky returns to *Ivan’s Childhood* and the lessons learned while creating the film,

²⁵¹ In his essay “Poetry and Prose in Cinema,” the great Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky articulates the difference between prose and “poetic cinema.” He writes, “There exist both prose and poetry in cinema and this is the basic division between the genres: they are distinguished from one another not by rhythm, or not by rhythm alone, but by the prevalence in a poetic cinema of technical and formal over semantic features, where formal features displace semantic and resolve the composition. Plotless cinema is ‘verse’ cinema” [the device that “exploits the formal rather than the semantic features...is a poetic device”]. See Viktor Shklovsky, “Poetry and Prose in Cinema” (1927) in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*. Trans. Richard Taylor. Eds. Christie, Ian and Richard Taylor. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 178. This is not dissimilar to filmmaker Maya Deren’s 1963 definition of “poetic cinema” and the possibilities the genre holds. For More on Deren’s discussion of poetic cinema, see Chapter Two of this dissertation. See also Maya Deren, Arthur Miller, et. al. in “Poetry and the Film: A Symposium (1963).” *Film Culture Reader*. Ed. P. Adams Sitney. (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), pp. 171-186.

neglecting to mention the project was given to him after another director abandoned it. This first film was a test of sorts, one which would prove to Tarkovsky himself whether or not he was a capable director, let alone a director at all. Upon concluding *Ivan's Childhood*, he writes,

The completion of *Ivan's Childhood* marked the end of one cycle of my life, and of a process that I saw as a kind of self-determination...I could now assess the experience of *Ivan's Childhood*, accept the need to work out clearly, albeit temporarily, my own position in the aesthetics of cinema, and set myself problems which might be solved in the course of making my next film: in all of this I saw a pledge of my advance onto new ground.²⁵²

Although Tarkovsky's statements on cinema – statements infused with exegeses on artistic truths, charging works with “spiritual energy,” and “timeless longings for the spiritual, for the ideal”²⁵³ – are notoriously opaque and his films exceedingly obscure, they worked their way into the Soviet and international canons as masterpieces of cinema.

The opening of *Ivan's Childhood* does not begin with the first image to appear onscreen but rather the sound which is coupled to the film's lead in, ultimately transgressing the space of narrative and fiction. Composed of a turning version of Vera Mukhina's sculpture *Worker and Collective Farm Girl* with the Kremlin's Spasskaya Tower as backdrop (Fig. 10), the lead-in for *Ivan's Childhood* was adopted in 1947 by

²⁵² Andrei Tarkovsky in the first chapter of his *Sculpting in Time* entitled “The beginning,” originally published in *After Filmmaking (Iskusstva, Moscow 1967)* five years after Tarkovsky won the Golden Lion for *Ivan's Childhood*. See Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 15.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 38.

Mosfilm, the Soviet Union's largest production studio responsible for producing a number of Tarkovsky's films.

Originally constructed to stride east to west (in direct confrontation with the pavilion of the Third Reich) above the 1937 Soviet pavilion in Paris (Figs. 11, 12),²⁵⁴ Mukhina's sculpture became the emblem of Stalin's USSR, defined in 1936 as "a state of workers and peasants."²⁵⁵ Forged from individual, hand-fashioned plates of stainless steel, a novel medium for sculpture at the time, the nearly 80-foot-tall work was a monument to Soviet industrial and agricultural progress. The piece portrays two figures, a sinewy steel worker and a robust collective farm girl stepping forward in tandem, their arms reaching overhead, their hands grasping a hammer and sickle – the ultimate symbols of communism. The worker's apron hangs low on his chest, bending and folding, billowing heavy and solid behind him, mirroring his outstretched right arm. The dress of the collective farm girl ripples too, its dense undulations emphasizing the sculpture's dynamic and aggressive composition. The work suggests a palpable kinetics, so it is no surprise Mosfilm would choose to set the sculpture in motion, turning the figures from east to west in deference, it seems, to its original installation.

The lead-in for *Ivan's Childhood* opens with this stock footage of *Worker and Collective Farm Girl* and the Kremlin's tower to the right. The letters "Mosfilm," sculpted in transparent material, stand at the bottom of the screen, and as the *Worker and Collective Farm Girl* begins to twist from right to left, light falls on the letters, bringing

²⁵⁴ The Soviet pavilion faced the pavilion of the Third Reich. Both were separated by the Champ de Mars.

²⁵⁵ Matthew Cullerne Brown. *Art Under Stalin*. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1991), 82.

them into high relief. Here, Tarkovsky reworks Mosfilm's introductory footage by coupling the call of a cuckoo to the turning *Worker and Collective Farm Girl*. The sound of a cuckoo calling not once but three times is grafted onto the heretofore silent image. Light fades, the screen goes black, and the cuckoo sounds once more in total darkness – the interstice between production acknowledgements and film proper. The cuckoo's fifth and final call then matches the first shot of the film: a close-up of a young boy standing behind an equally young pine tree. Across its branches and trunk is stretched a fragile and inconsistently-woven spider web.

The sound of the cuckoo gains significance as the film progresses, but here it seems oddly out of place. There is, as yet, no explanation for the noise. Instead, before the very first shot of the film, before establishing space, time, or narrative, sound traverses pro-filmic space. Only retroactively do these opening calls of the cuckoo take on meaning. At the same time, this traversal of sound redefines and initially trivializes *Worker and Collective Farm Girl*, the Soviet icon par excellence. As the figures turn to the call of a cuckoo, their monumental, iconic status begins to unravel. They suddenly appear tiny and quaint, the inner gimmicks of a cuckoo clock. Sound interferes with history, uprooting the monument to Stalin's USSR and the emblem of socialist realist artistic production. Here, the significance of *Worker and Collective Farm Girl* resides not in the grandeur of Soviet achievement but rather the simplicity of a mechanism audibly marking the passage of time. This, too, is a gesture of retroactive significance, a metaphor for how one makes sense of history by looking back at time. It is only with

hindsight that actions become errors, and the promise of communism becomes the distortion of belief.

While the cuckoo clock is most commonly linked to Europe's Black Forest region, the device was not unfamiliar to 1960s Russia. The Soviet Union saw its own version of the mechanism produced and manufactured almost exclusively by the Russian company *Majak* as early as the 1940s.²⁵⁶ Powered not simply by the usual spring and balance wheel found in most timepieces, the cuckoo clock instead presents an infinitely more complex mechanical system. In this version, the time-keeping mechanism is not an oscillating wheel which vibrates at a constant frequency, resulting in counted seconds registered by hands on the face of the clock, but rather a weighted pendulum which oscillates under a controlling device. This device, or "escapement," both regulates and sustains the swinging of the pendulum by replacing the energy it loses to friction, converting its oscillations into a series of pulses which repetitively push the swinging weight and allow the gears attached to it to advance (or "escape") temporarily.

Atop the pendulum are two arms of a right angle, and with each swing of the weight, the opposing arms release a single tooth of a fastened gear, pitching the gear between contending states of "locked" and "drive." When the gear is released, the hands

²⁵⁶ The significance of the name *Majak* (Маяк): The term is derived from the Russian *mayatnik* meaning "pendulum." In 1957-58, the city of Kyshtym – located on the east side of the Ural Mountain Range – was the site of history's third worst nuclear accident at the Mayak Production Association nuclear facility. Tragically with the Kyshtym Disaster, there was an initial cover up which delayed evacuation of the area. Pollution of the Techa River, Karachay Lake, and surrounding areas left countless sick. See Diane Soran and Danny B. Stillman. *An Analysis of the Alleged Kyshtym Disaster* (New Mexico: Los Alamos National Laboratory, 1982).

of the clock advance. In other words, time is registered by the concrete opposition between absolute stasis and permanent motion, the synthesis of which materializes duration. At the same time, this registration of duration is based not on physical progression but rather a constant return to either point of an opposition. In essence, time goes nowhere. Mukhina's sculpture, an icon of Soviet progress, turns yet is forever fixed in its place.

And yet the timing of the cuckoo is imprecise. Mukhina's *Worker and Collective Farm Girl* begins to turn *before* the cuckoo sounds, exposing a delay between action and registration of that action, or action and its temporal – physical – account. Time itself is ajar – a splitting of the time-movement continuum, which is characteristic of Tarkovsky's *oeuvre*. This simple yet atypical use of sound which both precedes and introduces the first images of *Ivan's Childhood* is an apt beginning for a body of work deeply interested in time, in *duration*. Tarkovsky's camera meditates on the mundane, allowing for a sense of transcendence by way of matter. It is also an apt beginning for a debut film, the narrative of which focuses on a young boy who oscillates between stasis and motion, flashbacks and present-tense, dreams and revenge.

In an analysis of the effect of sound in Tarkovsky's films, Robert Bird first notes Andrea Truppin's argument that "[Tarkovsky's] sounds destabilize; they make the coherent and comfortable seem suddenly strange and disorienting." He continues, "Thus Tarkovsky's use of discontinuous sound opens up spaces for the spectator to glimpse the numinous real or else to question the possibility of any ontological safety whatsoever. In both cases, the real shock of the film is that it has this effect not by masking its use of

artistic convention, but by foregrounding the impossibility of the fiction, which becomes as stubbornly inevitable as reality.”²⁵⁷ Here, the transgression of sound’s diegetic space, coupled with a narrative which swings between binary ends of time (flashbacks and present-tense), and opposite registers of reality (dreams and revenge), thoroughly destabilizes not only the space of perception, but also the nature of the fictionalized account.

On the very cusp of the cuckoo’s fifth chime, the face of the young protagonist, Ivan, appears. He stands behind a tree and a spider web. He looks around, mostly up, seemingly in search of the cuckoo. Music begins. He shifts his gaze to his right, and as soon as he walks off screen, the camera – instead of following the protagonist laterally, thus recouping him within the frame – begins to climb the tree vertically. Immediately, the camera is revealed as one which runs counter to the conventions of establishing filmic space. Rather than following the action, it moves independently of it, throwing its range wide and moving its frame as if expecting to catch something in it, concerning itself less with cause and effect – action and reaction – than with discontinuity. Here, height has given the camera eye perspective, and as quickly as Ivan disappears from the frame, he reappears in its background, now small and walking towards its center. He stops; the camera ceases its ascension, and the boy turns to face the viewer, albeit from a

²⁵⁷ Robert Bird. “Gazing into Time: Tarkovsky and Post-Modern Cinema Aesthetics.” A paper read at the 2003 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Toronto. © Robert Bird, University of Chicago, Slavic Languages and Literatures. The Truppin quote noted here as Andrea Truppin. “And Then There Was Sound: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky,” in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (London: 1992), 235.

remarkable distance. Yet rather than cutting to a close-up of his face in order to develop his character or deepen the burgeoning narrative, a close-up of the head of a tethered goat is provided instead, filmed not by a smooth, crane-mounted camera but rather an unsettled hand-held one. There is no mistaking the vision is from an embodied perspective, implied by the slight jostle of the camera, yet there is no indication as to whom this perspective belongs. In addition, there is no explanation for the appearance of the goat, standing in place where the viewer might have expected a closely-framed shot of the boy. The collision of images suggests a simile (the free boy is like a bound animal), but the jarring shift in camera disrupts the leap of allusion viewers may have attempted to make.

The hand-held camera is then trumped by an ever more restless mobile device which chases the protagonist through a forest, its trees acting as opaque frames – violent breaks of the visual field. The frames here are vertical rather than horizontal, as though the film is projected on end, its reels tipped and parallel to the ground. The scene ends abruptly, followed by the sight of a delicate butterfly bobbing clumsily above dry grass. The camera struggles to keep up.

Another cut, this time to the face of Ivan who *appears* to be watching the butterfly. A discontinuous reverse shot of the butterfly is given, followed by a shot of the boy, now smiling, now filmed by the camera which begins to circle him. The camera seems to fasten itself to the boy as both rise above the ground in tandem, pushing through

branches towards open sky, then falling to earth again.²⁵⁸ Here, we are given a point of view shot from camera and child unhinged, plunging rapidly towards the ground. A tiny female figure walking past a well looks skyward, presumably towards the young boy who is heard laughing joyously, her small hand shielding her eyes from the sun. Ivan's laughter ceases, and the camera – having reached the tree tops – decelerates as it quietly and slowly approaches the ground, scanning its dimpled and root-filled surface in meticulous fashion. As the camera gradually comes to a stop, the cuckoo sounds again, and what appeared to be the ground is suddenly revealed as a vertical plane against which Ivan stands in profile. Next to him is perched the butterfly, its wings now fixed in place.

One may perhaps be reminded of the Yugoslav film *When Father Was Away on Business*, directed by Emir Kusturica in 1985, in which the story is told through the eyes of a young protagonist, Malik, who just so happens to fly. In his book *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema*, Pavle Levi notes the film is “centered around President Tito's 'No' to Stalin,” marking both the country's independence from the USSR as well as its “autonomous road to socialism.”²⁵⁹ The film, Levi argues, “couples a profound feeling for cinematic naturalism with a fascination for the irrational, the psychomystical, resulting in a lyrical roller-coaster ride between the subjective and the objective, wakefulness and dream.”²⁶⁰ This, Levi

²⁵⁸ One may perhaps recall Emir Kusturica's *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985), told through the eyes of the young protagonist, Malik, who just so happens to fly as he sleepwalks. Magical realism by way of Jameson in *Geopolitical Aesthetic?*

²⁵⁹ Pavle Levi. *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 87.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

continues, quite clearly aligns with Frederick Jameson's definition of magic realism as "not a realism to be transfigured by the 'supplement' of a magical perspective but a reality which is already in and of itself magical or fantastic," a definition not far afield of Parajanov's work as well.²⁶¹

Indeed, there is a real confusion – here in *Ivan's Childhood* and repeated in Tarkovsky's later films – between the subjective and the objective as well as the distinction between dreaming and waking states. In his book *Films and Dreams: Tarkovsky, Sokurov, Bergman, Kubrik, Wong Kar-wai*, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein writes of this confusion that Tarkovsky "elaborates the aesthetic phenomenon of dreams into a consistent version of anti-realism. For him, cinematic truth must be looked for in a new concept of cinematic time. Dreams take place in an intermediary domain of abstractness and concreteness, and dreamlike expressions neither represent the 'real' nor do they symbolize the 'unreal' but remain in the domain of the 'improbable' between symbolization, representation and *verfremdete* expressions."²⁶² The link here is less one of the magical or fantastic domain but rather, according to Botz-Bornstein, of a liminal state between representation and alienation.

Tarkovsky furthers this confusion by upending spatial continuity not by way of disorienting, rapid montage but rather a single cut followed by the slow and deliberate movement of the camera. In other words, the pro-filmic material appears unmolested. The camera simply rolls without interruption, and with each passing second, the

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Thorsten Botz-Bornstein. *Films and Dreams: Tarkovsky, Sokurov, Bergman, Kubrik, Wong Kar-wai* (Lanham: Lexington Press, 2007), x.

disorienting device of a quietly revised perspective is concealed further. In this case, Tarkovsky shifts the camera from an aerial to a grounded, panning perspective without any visual clues that this shift has taken place. The result is a sense that the ground has pivoted on its axis, not that the camera has changed its perspective. The camera disavows itself of this confusion by way of its specific ability to register reality. It simply captures – in uninterrupted fashion – the action placed before it.

A wide beam of light penetrates the trees, and the boy, in an act reminiscent of the woman walking near the well, raises his small hand to shield his eyes from the sun. He turns and smiles, as though recognizing something, and the scene cuts to him running towards a woman carrying a bucket. When he reaches her, she lowers the bucket to the ground, and as he bends to take a drink, the cuckoo begins to call yet again. Ivan – seen not from the woman’s perspective but from a location slightly over her left shoulder – lifts his face from the water and, brushing his hair from his forehead, utters the first words of the film: “Mama, there’s a cuckoo.” The following shot is, unexpectedly, not from the kneeling boy’s point of view but rather from an entirely different position far from the ground. From here, Ivan’s mother is seen smiling, mirroring her son’s gesture by casually wiping her hair from her brow. Startling machine-gun fire ruptures this idyllic moment, killing off the sound of the cuckoo and sending the camera tilting and plunging towards the frightened mother’s face. As the machine gun fires, Ivan’s scream of “mama!” is emitted in a tinny echo which rattles into the following scene. Here, the boy is no longer in the presence of his mother. Instead, we find him startled awake and alone in a dark, abandoned wooden structure where machine gun fire gives way to the

sound of creaking lumber. Ivan has awakened from a dream which, until this point in the film, appeared as some version of reality. The external stimuli – the creaking lumber of the windmill in which Ivan hides – triggers the dream content, a latent narrative needing only faint provocation to materialize.

This opening chain of associations, however disorienting and discontinuous, slowly makes sense retroactively. As viewers, we learn all preceding scenes are dream material belonging to a young boy whose waking life is plagued by the nightmare of war. We then double back on this chain of disparate images, attributing our confusion neither to form nor to content but rather lack of context. This is a subtle move on Tarkovsky's part, one which offers some semblance of traditional montage cinema while turning it on its head, ultimately manipulating viewers' desire to narrativize discontinuity or piece together a metaphorical connection in order to locate meaning in otherwise illogical juxtapositions.

“Puzzles and Riddles” or “The Diversity of Life Perceived”: Eisenstein and Tarkovsky Revisited

This is in direct conflict with earlier Soviet traditions of montage cinema in which figures such as Eisenstein attempted to create a third meaning by way of the collision between disparate images. As stated at the outset, for Eisenstein in particular the goal was for the viewer to produce a synthesis from the collision between two contrasting shots, or thesis and its antithesis. The objective was to teach the viewer to think dialectically. Eisenstein argued that a dialectic approach to film form leads to a dialectic

method of thinking.²⁶³ Despite Eisenstein's resistance to explicitly revealing exactly what this synthesis might be, he nevertheless intended viewers to reach one possible interpretation. For example, In *Strike* (1925), Eisenstein parallels scenes of troops killing workers with the slaughter of a bull. The viewer is to deduce the workers are slaughtered like cattle. In *October: Ten Days that Shook the World* (1928) Eisenstein loops a scene of Alexander Kerensky ascending the same set of stairs again and again while inter-titles indicate his rise in power from Minister of the Army, Minister of the Navy, to Prime Minister, etc., etc. Despite the repeated ascension of the same stairs, Kerensky goes nowhere. The viewer concludes Kerensky's rise is merely symbolic. His promotions are trivialized and mocked.²⁶⁴ There is no ambiguity, despite the lack of shots directly illustrating the association. The association may be implied, yet it most certainly is controlled, and the event – while not visible – is “alluded to.”²⁶⁵

The point of Eisenstein's endeavor is not to strong arm passive viewers towards arbitrary conclusions. Rather, the goal is to lead the viewer through the *process* of deduction, whereby he/she makes an “*intellectual* decision” and is ultimately

²⁶³ Sergei Eisenstein. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form.” *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. Trans. Jay Leyda. (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 45-63.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

²⁶⁵ André Bazin describes the effect of this school of montage in his essay as “the creation of a sense or meaning not objectively contained in the images themselves but derived exclusively from their juxtaposition...Montage as used by Kuleshov, Eisenstein, or Gance did not show us the event; it alluded to it.” See “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” in *What is Cinema? vol. 1*. Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 25.

intellectually dynamized – in other words, an active agent of his/her own intellect.²⁶⁶ In an attempt to explain this process which occurs by way of montage – by way of form – Eisenstein writes,

The strength of montage resides in this, that it includes in the creative process the emotions and mind of the spectator. The spectator is compelled to proceed along that selfsame creative road that the author traveled in creating the image. The spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author. And this is, obviously, the highest possible degree of approximation to transmitting visually the author's perceptions and intention in all their fullness... Relevant to this part of the discussion is Marx's definition of the course of genuine investigation: 'Not only the result, but the road to it also, is part of truth [...].' The strength of the method resides also in the circumstance that the spectator is drawn into a creative act in which his individuality is not subordinated to the author's individuality, but is opened up throughout the process of fusion with the author's intention...²⁶⁷

Eisenstein walks a fine line here, claiming this new film form enables a real freedom of deduction, albeit one which takes place *within* the range of analysis and structural composition the director has made in advance.

Tarkovsky, by contrast, criticizes what he calls the “puzzles and riddles” of montage cinema where viewers take pleasure in decoding symbols as though in empty

²⁶⁶ Of this strategy of film form, Eisenstein writes, “I would not attempt to deny that *this form is most suitable for the expression of ideologically pointed theses*, but it is a pity that the critics completely overlooked the purely filmic potentialities of this approach.” See Sergei Eisenstein. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form.” *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. Trans. Jay Leyda. (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 61-62. As explained later in this chapter, Eisenstein faced steep criticism of his 1928 film *October*. The film, some argued, was *too* intellectual.

²⁶⁷ Sergei Eisenstein. “Word and Image.” *The Film Sense*. Trans. Jay Leyda. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1942), 32-33.

play. This tradition of film appeals to the viewers' "intellectual experience," he continues, as if to suggest this is an unimportant enterprise. At the same time, the pleasure of deduction is somehow tempered by what Tarkovsky describes as a "total onslaught on the audience," whereby the author/director imposes upon the viewers "his own attitude to what is happening." Tarkovsky concludes, "Eisenstein prevents the audience from letting their feelings be influenced by their own reaction to what they see."²⁶⁸ Here, Tarkovsky takes direct aim at Eisenstein, simplifying the latter's theories on intellectual cinema and intellectual montage. Rather than providing the viewer with a series of controlled associations leading to a final ideological conclusion, Tarkovsky argues for an open film form which "allow[s] the audience to bring personal experience to bear on what is in front of them." He concludes, "Editing has to do with stretches of time...not with abstract symbols...not with two similar concepts which in conjunction produce – we are told – a 'third meaning'; but with the diversity of life perceived."²⁶⁹

Tarkovsky's reference to and quoting of Eisenstein's "third meaning" is in no way casual.²⁷⁰ It is as though he argues for a similar interpretative procedure waged by the viewer, yet in the absence of that exact "third meaning." Despite Tarkovsky's interest in allowing the viewer to unleash "personal experience" in the interpretative process, what

²⁶⁸ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 118.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁷⁰ The criticism of an "intellectual" play or tendency in film could be said to echo the critique waged on soviet avant-garde art and film after the rise of Stalin. At that time, the work of the *avant-garde* was seen as formalist, too intellectual, and elitist, as I explain briefly below.

should not be ignored is the deductive struggle he prompts his viewers to experience. In other words, the act of subjectively interpreting various juxtapositions is complicated. The viewer does not strive towards the intellectual reward of solving the problem set up by the director. Rather, the viewer is made to struggle towards uncertain ends. The task is not simply to interpret; it is to *construct*. The long take here is key, the length of which is no arbitrary matter. In his text on the filmmaker, Sean Martin writes, “Tarkovsky proposed that if a take is lengthened, boredom naturally sets in for the audience. But if the take is extended even further, something else arises: curiosity. Tarkovsky is essentially proposing giving the audience time to inhabit the world that the take is showing us, not to *watch* it, but to *look* at it, to explore it.”²⁷¹

Both Eisenstein and Tarkovsky tout the significance of the viewer’s perspective and participation, but each possesses a different view of the responsibilities the viewer carries and what his/her perspective and participation entails. For Eisenstein, the viewer is not to be a passive spectator who ingests film material with indifference; instead, the viewer is to attend to the unfolding of images as he/she would attend to the process of cognitive activation. The participation of Eisenstein’s viewer is defined by the promise of cinema and its potential to function as an epistemological tool, one which has the potential to educate and stimulate the masses by way of art for the masses. The spectator of Eisenstein’s era is part of a larger equation comprising the collective of the Soviet Union whose ultimate aim is, as defined by Friedrich Engels in his essay “On Social Relations in Russia,” the “victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, and the

²⁷¹ Sean Martin. *Andrei Tarkovsky* (Harpenden, Herts: Pocket Essentials, 2005), 49.

establishment of a new organization of society by the destruction of all class distinctions.”²⁷²

Eisenstein’s theory and practice are tied directly to this context, reflecting a belief in the potential of film (and all arts) not only to perpetuate the victory over the tzars during the Russian Revolution of 1917, not only to contribute to achieving the goal of worldwide revolution and thus the spread of Communism (as it was originally defined), but also to teach the masses to think. For Eisenstein and others, film form had a specific political function, not the least of which was to continue the revolution. It should be noted that more than once, Eisenstein refers directly to Lenin’s statement that “the cinema is the most important of all the arts,”²⁷³ underlying film’s role in the formation of a new Soviet society. The theories of Marx and Engels were critical in catalyzing an entire class, and here, Eisenstein’s quotation of Marx in support of his theories on a dialectic approach to film form (“Not only the result, but the road to it also, is part of truth...”) reflects the degree and significance of this influence. This was an era that embraced Marx and Engels. This was a movement which used their theories to inspire the working class to overthrow its suppressors.

This is not to say, of course, that the period immediately following the October Revolution was one in which Russia was wholeheartedly unified. To the contrary. The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR) was not officially formed until 1922, and a

²⁷² Friedrich Engels. “On Social Relations in Russia.” *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), 665.

²⁷³ Lenin as quoted by Eisenstein in his “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form.” *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. Trans. Jay Leyda. (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), 63.

mere two years later,²⁷⁴ the death of the revolution's leader – Lenin – enabled the ascension of the Union's new head: Stalin. The dream of worldwide, permanent revolution outlined by Leon Trotsky, diminished to “socialism in one country” as articulated by Stalin in 1924.²⁷⁵ With the abandonment of this dream fell the role of

²⁷⁴ Stalin rose to power despite, of course, Lenin's warnings. See Appendix 1, “Some legends of the bureaucracy,” in Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman. These references can be found from pages 1220-1223.

²⁷⁵ Stalin's theory of “socialism in one country” – formalized by Nikolai Bukharin in 1925 – was in direct opposition to Trotsky's theory of the “permanent revolution,” ultimately printed in the latter's *Permanent Revolution* in 1930 while Trotsky was in exile. According to Trotsky, “the road to democracy pass[es] through the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus democracy is not a regime that remains self-sufficient for decades, but is only a direct prelude to the socialist revolution. Each is bound to the other by an unbroken chain. Thus there is established between the democratic revolution and the socialist reconstruction of society a permanent state of revolutionary development.” This state is, furthermore, perpetuated by the constant transformation of social relations which ceaselessly collide with one another. Each stage of transformation “develops through collisions between various groups in the society...Revolutions in economy, technique, science, the family, morals, and everyday life develop in complex reciprocal action and do not allow society to achieve equilibrium. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolutions as such.” In other words, the revolution is in a state of becoming. It cannot be defined. In addition, achievement of the socialist revolution necessitates movement on an international scale. If a country limits its “proletarian dictatorship” to its own borders, “the internal and external contradictions” between national liberation of the proletariat and continued international subservience of the working class will ultimately destroy the nation's proletarian state. “The way out [for the proletarian state] lies only in the victory of the proletariat of the advanced countries. Viewed from this standpoint, a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain.” The illusion of constructing an isolated, self-sufficient socialist society is, in Trotsky's words, a “profound breach with Marxism,” one which was “reached by the epigones [i.e., the Stalinists, whom Trotsky considers the epigones of Lenin] in the process of permanent struggle against the theory of the permanent revolution.” See “The Theory of the Permanent Revolution” and “Criticism of the Theory of ‘Socialism in One Country,’” in *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology*. Ed. Isaac Deutscher. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), 62-65 and 145-150, respectively.

avant-garde art and film to not only depict but also contribute to the development of a new world, and – importantly – the new Soviet man.

In the realm of cinema, similar aspirations to effect a reconstitution of the world were expressed by its theorists and filmmakers. As stated above, for the early Soviets, film had ideological, pedagogical, and epistemological promise. The camera was no longer conceived of as an independent mechanism but rather a “supplement” to the human eye, capturing what it could not see on its own, and revealing to it crucial facts.²⁷⁶ Film theorist and historian Annette Michelson concludes, “the eye [was] transformed by the revolutionary project [of Dziga Vertov] into an agent of critical production.” Again, participation by the viewer is key. It is only by way of the camera, the moving image, that the worker shifts from a passive stupor of the every day to an agent who is newly capable of not only critical examination but also critical production. These viewer-workers were not to stop at discovery; they were to continue to invention. According to Vertov, for these viewer-workers, the “unerring ways of electricity [are] more exciting than the disorderly haste of active people and the demoralising inertia of the passive.”²⁷⁷ One must act. In his short essay “The Essence of Kino-Eye” of 1925, Vertov writes,

We place life itself at the center of our attention and our work, and by the recording of life we all understand the recording of the historical process; therefore, allow us, the technicians and ideologists of this work, to base our observation on society’s economic structure, not

²⁷⁶ Dziga Vertov. “The Birth of Kino-Eye.” *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Ed. Annette Michelson. Trans. Kevin O’Brien. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 41.

²⁷⁷ Dziga Vertov. “We. A Version of a Manifesto.” *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*. Ed. and trans. Richard Taylor. (London: Routledge, 1994), 69-70.

screened off from the viewer's eye by a sweet-smelling veil of kisses and hocus-pocus...Instead of surrogates for life (theatrical performance, film-drama, etc.) we bring to the workers' consciousness facts (large and small), carefully selected, recorded, and organized from both the life of the workers themselves and from that of their class enemies. The establishing of a class bond that is visual (kino-eye) and auditory (radio-ear) between the proletarians of all nations and all lands, based on the platform of the communist decoding of the world – that is our objective.²⁷⁸

Here, the the filmmaker explains a documentary trend in his work, claiming life must be recorded in order to examine the economic underpinnings of society. In this process, the eye – aided by the camera – will critically examine facts presented to it and thereby decipher them in a fashion informed by a newfound class consciousness.

During this time, while Vertov, Tatlin, Lissitzky, Eisenstein and others argued art and film were the prime devices by which to perpetuate the proletarian revolution, produce class consciousness, and dissolve the division of labor, labor productivity on a national scale became a central concern. The economic and industrial infrastructure of the Soviet Union – having suffered years of war and revolution – was in a fragile state. Factories were outdated, and production itself was at a severe low. While analyses of and solutions to the nation's production woes were in full swing, so too were investigations into the effectiveness (and output) of avant-garde art and film. As early as 1924, the Communist Party had begun to question the task of the artist and filmmaker and what, precisely, s/he had the obligation to represent. During this time, efforts to consolidate artistic forces resulted in a series of “umbrella societies” which would manage fields of

²⁷⁸ Dziga Vertov. “The Essence of Kino-Eye.” *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Ed. Annette Michelson. Trans. Kevin O'Brien. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 49-50.

practice such as architecture, literature, film, and music, among others.²⁷⁹ These groups functioned in the service of practicing artists and were meant to strengthen their position of creative freedom vis-a-vis the state. These societies maintained, for the most part, a relative independence of the political machine, yet this independence was short lived.²⁸⁰

In 1928, the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932) – often defined as an economic revolution to strengthen all facets of industry in the USSR – began. Coupled with the First Five Year Plan’s demand for increased productivity and efficiency in industry was the “Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” another five year plan focused on the content, yield, and efficiency of cultural production.²⁸¹ What precisely the Proletarian Cultural Revolution would entail and how it should be executed was to be decided by the Party over the course of a series of conferences on the arts. The final meeting, appropriately

²⁷⁹ These societies included, among others, *Vsekokhudozhnik [Vserossiiskii kooperativ khudozhnikov]* or All-Russian Cooperative of Artists in 1929, FOSKh (Federation of the Association of Soviet Workers in the Spatial Arts) in 1930, RAPKh (Russian Association of Proletarian Artists) in 1931, RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), RAPM (Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians), etc. The number of these societies is undeniably impressive. By 1932, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party produced the “Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations,” which brought an end to these umbrella societies. Monolithic artistic unions – established to promote and implement Party ideology rather than maintain relative independence for artists of every kind – took their place. With this gesture, State and Party control of artistic production became explicit. A decree on the Party’s new form of art – Socialist Realism – was not far behind.

²⁸⁰ See John E. Bowlt. *The Documents of 20th Century Art. Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. Ed. John E. Bowlt. (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 288.

²⁸¹ It should be noted that while Soviet Russia attempted to reorganize its film industry, no technical aspects of the cinematic apparatus were produced in the country at that time. Even at the advent of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1928, film stock, cameras, and projectors were imported from abroad. In other words, the nationalization of the industry depended upon international trade.

named the All-Union Party Conference on Cinema Affairs and held in Moscow from 15 to 21 March 1928, was to address the status of film in the Soviet Union and to “work out a single platform for the unification of the socialist state with the cinema on proletarian foundations.”²⁸² Meeting notes reveal tense debates on the purpose of cinema, and discussion often turned to the medium’s perceived revenue-driven environment. Was cinema “an art form, an industry, or some other form of commercial enterprise”?²⁸³

Most attendees of the conference recognized film’s importance, citing Lenin’s statement on cinema as the most important of the arts. They expressed concern as to how film could function as political agitation while at the same time amuse audiences as a mode of popular entertainment. The question of *form* was key. Only two months before, in January 1928, Anatoly Lunacharsky – the People’s Commissar of Enlightenment – gave a speech to the All-Union Conference of Cinematographic and Photographic Workers in which stated,

Many of us do not appreciate that our cinema must stimulate the public appetite, that, if there is no public interest, then the films that we show become boring agitation and we are transformed into boring agitators. But it is well known that boring agitation is counter-agitation. We must search out and find a line in accordance with which the film is both ideologically sound and artistic, in which there is both romantic

²⁸² “K predstoyashchemu kino-soveshchaniyu,” in *Zhizn’ iskusstva*. 27 September 1927, 1. Richard Taylor. *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 103.

²⁸³ For a thorough analysis of and translated minutes from this meeting, as well additional details regarding the Party takeover of the Soviet film industry, see Richard Taylor. *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). The citation above can be found on page 117.

experience and experience of an intimate and psychological character.²⁸⁴

The line they were to “search out and find” was a fine one indeed. It was not as much an object of finding as it was one of defining. How was the Party to define “artistic,” and how was it to envision an enactment of its own ideology onscreen? As stated in the conference resolution, attendees concluded that cinema, “the most important of all the arts, can and must play a large role in the cultural revolution as a medium for broad educational work and communist propaganda, for the organization and education of the masses around the slogans and tasks of the Party.”²⁸⁵ No longer is the proletarian dictatorship master of its own movement. The masses no longer define their tasks but rather are *defined by* and “organized around” the proverbs of the Party.

Immediately after the All-Union Party Conference on Cinema Affairs, criticism turned to Eisenstein’s *October*, which was originally screened in January 1928, just two months before the conference convened. Now that the Party had taken control of Soviet cinema and begun its course as critic and censor, it could address its directives to past and future works. In the case of *October*, calls were made to re-edit the film to relieve the “lack of coordination between...different stylistic devices,” (“newsreel...direct

²⁸⁴ ‘Tov. Lunacharskii o kino,’ *Zhizn iskusstva*, 24 January 1928, 2. See Richard Taylor. *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 106. Taylor

²⁸⁵ *Puti Kino* [The Ways of Cinema]. *Pervoe Vsesoyuznoe partiinoe soveshchanie po kinematografii*. Ed. B. S. Ol’khovyi. (Moscow: Tea-Kino-Pechat’, 1929), 430-31. All proceedings of the All-Union Party Conference on Cinema Affairs are published in this volume. Cited here from Richard Taylor. *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 117.

action...high cinematic metaphor...and...elements of aesthetic symbolism”).²⁸⁶ In addition, the film was criticized for failing to be “intelligible to the millions” and causing front-row attendees of one screening to fall asleep and snore loudly.²⁸⁷ Here, the author mentions Eisenstein’s *October* “was filmed a long time before the Party Conference,” yet he does not excuse the director for failing to adhere to the Party’s “formula” regarding appropriate film form – both aesthetically and ideologically – as outlined in the conference’s resolution. The “formula,” he states, “was self-evident to anyone who had given the problems of cinema any thought.”²⁸⁸ In other words, Eisenstein should have known better. He should have had the foresight to adhere to a filmic formula which had yet to be determined. As for the reports of snoring in the front row, they were taken by members of The Cultural Section of the Leningrad Regional Trades Union Council who were installed in theaters and instructed to “carefully monitor audience reactions while the film is being shown.”²⁸⁹ Surveillance of artistic production *as well as* audience reception was, after the All-Union Party Conference on the Cinema, in full swing.

²⁸⁶ Adrian Piotrovsky: *October* Must Be Re-Edited! ‘Oktyabr’ dolzhen byt’ peremontirovan!’, *Zhizn’ iskusstva*, 27 March 1928, 12. *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*. Ed. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 216. Today, this call to re-edit the film seems almost absurd, considering Eisenstein’s revered status as master theorist and practitioner of montage.

²⁸⁷ T. Rokotov: Why is *October* Difficult? T. Rokotov, ‘Pochemu malodostupen Oktyabr’’, *Zhizn’ iskusstva*, 10 April 1928, 16-17. *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*. Ed. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 219.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

When Tarkovsky set out as filmmaker, he found himself in a historical context which carried with it not only the rise but also the dissolution of early Soviet avant-garde cinema, as well as the arrest (and often exile or execution) of its practitioners, theorists, and critics for failure to adhere to a shifting party agenda. Complicating this context is the death of Stalin in 1953 and with it Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 "secret speech" at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in which Khrushchev denounced the former leader and accused him of gross distortion and misinterpretation of the Marxist principles to which the Party originally adhered.²⁹⁰ Within months, efforts to de-Stalinize the Soviet Union were underway, and nearly thirty years of his rule and Socialist Realist propaganda were wholly rejected. Approximately five years after Khrushchev's Thaw began, Tarkovsky released his first feature-length film. Yet Tarkovsky chooses not to distance his artistic endeavors from filmmakers of recent history. Instead, he focuses on figures such as Eisenstein.

In formulating his difference vis-a-vis Eisenstein, Tarkovsky doesn't simply move against perceived traditions and early formal tendencies, as artists are wont to do. Instead, he takes direct aim at the heart of Eisenstein's endeavor of intellectual cinema, and with it those histories that made dialectical montage possible and relevant. Initially, it seems as though he wages a critique similar to those of Piotrovsky and Rokotov who,

²⁹⁰ At the 20th Congress of 1956, copies of Lenin's last testament (referenced earlier in this chapter) were distributed among attendees. This was, of course, a bold move, in which Khrushchev evoked the revolution's leader in bringing about his successor's fall. For Khrushchev's speech, see See Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, *The Crimes of the Stalin Era (a.k.a. The Dethronement of Stalin): Special Report to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: New Leader, 1962).

in 1928, claimed Eisenstein's *October* foregrounded an intellectual form of cinema at the expense of intelligibility. Yet here, Tarkovsky does not take Eisenstein to task for his films' lack of accessibility or transparency. Intelligibility is not the issue. Instead Tarkovsky argues Eisenstein's "montage cinema" leads to a certain transparency and predictability of method where "the construction of the image becomes an end in itself."²⁹¹ What is left is an author who "imposes" on the audience "his own attitude to what is happening."²⁹² With Eisenstein, the viewer must reach a final ideological conclusion, and the only route to that conclusion is through dialectical montage. Indeed, a third meaning arises via the clash of disparate images, yet that third meaning is predetermined. According to Tarkovsky, film must not fix meaning but rather "continue beyond the edges of the screen"²⁹³ where the viewers' experience – seemingly devoid of any party ideology – is key. Tarkovsky says nothing of meaning here, and instead focuses on subjective, independent experience, on feeling bereft of and liberated from preordained meaning. Is this a resistance to ideology? Is this a repudiation of three decades of ideological betrayal?

At the most basic level, Tarkovsky purposely neglects to provide the viewer with establishing shots which situate the unfolding action. Tarkovsky himself, in a lecture to young filmmakers, insisted "a film's dramatic structure must take a 'musical form' where emotion is evoked through the destruction of narrative logic. He reminded them that

²⁹¹ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 118.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

Chekhov, upon finishing a story, would throw out the first page, thus removing the motivation.”²⁹⁴ The opening sequence of *Ivan’s Childhood* is a prime example of this narrative distortion.²⁹⁵ As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the film begins with a dream sequence, yet as viewers, we have no knowledge of this. Instead, we proceed along and “suture” ourselves into the only chain of signifiers Tarkovsky offers, and once we determine the opening scene is not “live” action but rather a dream based on recollection, the chain is broken and we readjust our position in relationship to it.²⁹⁶ We

²⁹⁴ Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie. *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 76.

²⁹⁵ Tarkovsky’s deviation from traditional, linear narratives was not free from criticism. Here, he recalls the resistance he met while producing his first feature-length film. “Working on *Ivan’s Childhood* we encountered protests from the film authorities every time we tried to replace narrative causality with poetic articulations. And yet we were moving quite tentatively, still only feeling our way. There was no question of revising the basic working principles of film-making. But whenever the dramatic structure showed the slightest sign of something new – of treating the rationale of everyday life relatively freely – it was met with cries of protest and incomprehension. These mostly cited the audience: they had to have a plot that unfolded without a break, they were not capable of watching a screen if the film did not have a strong story-line. The contrasts in our film – cuts from dreams to reality, or, conversely, from the last scene in the crypt to victory day in Berlin – seemed to many to be inadmissible.” See Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 30.

²⁹⁶ Suture designates the process by which a spectator moves across a chain of cinematic signifiers and is thus incorporated into a film. The discourse takes place by way of negotiations of on/off-screen space. See Jean-Pierre Oudart. “Cinema and Suture,” *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977-78); Jacques-Alain Miller, “Suture: Elements of the Logic of the Signifier,” *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977-78); Stephen Heath. “Narrative Space,” and “On Suture” in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1981), 19-112; Kaja Silverman, “Suture” in *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), 194-236. Finally, see Joan Copjec. *Apparatus and Its Umbra: a Feminist Critique of Film Theory*. Dissertation. New York University, 1986.

consistently make sense of the unfolding action retroactively,²⁹⁷ pulling ourselves from and re-inscribing ourselves into yet another sequence of shots, thinking *this time, the narrative must be coherent*. Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie take note of this “pattern of ‘retrospective understanding’ in which often important narrative information is imparted obliquely, belatedly, and even grudgingly. It is only halfway through the film that we are told what had happened to Ivan’s family (though his mother’s death, at least, is clearly enough indicated through the dreams). The temporal relationship between scenes – as well as the time span of the main action of the film – is often left very vague.”

The Zone of the Late Socialist Era: *Stalker* (1979)

Coupled with Tarkovsky’s manipulation of plot is his use of the long take which further complicates narrative cohesion. While the director’s experiments with the long take find subtle debut in *Ivan’s Childhood*, they come to complete maturation in his subsequent films. After the opening credits of Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* of 1979, a scrolling inscription is given and the film, continuing in sepia-tone, cuts to a darkened room slowly warmed by feeble light. Sound is key in this sequence. The whirl of petulant wind and persistent drops of water gouge the space of substance. It seems no life could live here. Over the course of nearly one minute, a slow tracking shot moves through two doors slightly ajar, passing between the opening, focusing upon a bed positioned against a wall, panning to introduce three characters all resting in the same bed, only to hover across

²⁹⁷ See Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie. *Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 76.

them again, one by one, on its return to objects upon the shallow tray which rattle due to a passing train. Here, time is unsparing and merciless, moving unbearably slow, in easy sync with the measured pace of the camera. It is not without significance, then, that the first spoken words of the film come from the Stalker's wife who, looking directly into the camera (and thereby the viewer), desperately asks, "Why did you take my watch?" What is the consequence of measuring time in this space of unbearable lethargy?

The film, loosely based on the science fiction novel *Roadside Picnic* by writers Boris and Arkadii Strugatsky, itself is a journey, one which begins once the Stalker leaves his home and guides the protagonists to the Zone, a site of inexplicable and unpredictable powers. As Alexei Yurchak notes, the book upon which the film is based is widely recognized as a "metaphor of late Soviet reality."²⁹⁸ He explains,

The Zone did not imply any concrete "real" territory; it referred to a certain imaginary space that was simultaneously internal and external to late-socialist reality. Crucial was its paradoxical status – intimate, within reach, and yet unattainable. The Zone could only exist as an imaginary construct that could not be encountered in reality. When the characters of the Strugatskys' book reach the room, they find to their surprise nothing extraordinary there. But the stalker who brought them there insists that this news should be kept from the others in order not to destroy their hope, as the Zone was constitutive of their reality.²⁹⁹

Here is a space, the journey to which leaves one empty-handed. Yet rather than permit the fantasy of the Zone – that place just out of reach – to fall victim to reality, those who

²⁹⁸ Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 160.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

travel there make *greater* efforts to believe it and its powers exist, despite the knowledge which proves otherwise.

In the film version, a similar outcome results, yet one which highlights the journey the viewers take with the Stalker and his protagonists. Nariman Skakov argues the Stalker's "interrelationship with the Zone is founded on the ultimate irrationality of action; his neurotic, bewildering guidance leads his fellow travelers to nothing but utter confusion. Their winding spiritual pilgrimage reaches a dead end, with nothing tangible having been achieved."³⁰⁰ At the same time, what has been achieved on the part of the viewer? For those who look closely, there are moments the apparatus constructing the journey is revealed. In a scene in which the Stalker and the Professor rest prone on the ground, both look directly into the camera, breaking the fourth wall, and then something tremendous in all its subtlety happens – something Skakov's eye and no other has heretofore seen. As the camera slowly tracks alongside the Professor's reclined body, the camera itself is reflected in a tiny button on the figure's coat.³⁰¹ While Tarkovsky could have quite easily reshot the sequence, he kept it in as a quiet nod, perhaps, to the imaginary nature of the Zone to which the Strugatskys allude. The reflection, according to Skakov, also "brings into focus the agent and the process of production itself, and it does so in a literal manner. The button makes the invisible visible and breaks the real-

³⁰⁰ Nariman Skakov. *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2012), 161.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 157.

fictional borderline.”³⁰² In essence, the button is the device precariously holding the delicate seams of fiction and reality together.

It should be noted this is not the first place vestiges of the cinematic apparatus pierce the diegesis. In Tarkovsky’s *Mirror* (1974), the shadow of a boom microphone is seen in the very first minutes of the film.³⁰³ Yet while these transgressions appear minor and unintentional (but excused), there are additional and more significant traversals of the fictional space, blurring the boundaries between the two. Skakov notes, “*Mirror* consistently explores the same violation by slightly different means: mirror reflections, documentary chronicle, the presence of Tarkovsky’s own body and the acting family members [Tarkovsky’s wife plays the title role of Nadezhda] all diffuse the viewer’s perception of the cinematographic fictional reality.”³⁰⁴ Upon these observations, Skakov ends with a quote that proves quite useful here. It comes from Borges who, questioning the traversal of fictional space in literature and theatre by those who construct it (the appearance of Tarkovsky’s camera above as example), and the traversal of spectatorial space by fictional characters within, writes, “Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of *Don Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or

³⁰³ Brief mention of this shadow is given in Robert Bird, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 12.

³⁰⁴ Nariman Skakov. *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2012), 159.

spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious.”³⁰⁵ The spectator, then, is not only a willing and active participant in the construction of the fantasy, he himself is a construct. Here, with the space of the Zone and the metaphor of the late Soviet era, fiction is reality and reality is very much fiction. This is the space of the late Soviet subject, one who, by way of the long take – the fictionalized attempt to represent reality – loses footing regarding the distinction between what is real and what is constructed.

The Question of Russian-ness, Examined From Abroad: *Nostalghia* (1983)

In his text *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky notes of his 1983 work *Nostalghia*,

I wanted to make a film about Russian nostalgia – about that state of mind peculiar to our nation which affects Russians who are far from their native land...How could I have imagined as I was making *Nostalghia* that the stifling scenes of longing that fills the screen space of that film was to become my lot for the rest of my life; that from now until the end of my days I would bear the painful malady within myself?³⁰⁶

The author was alluding to his move from the Soviet Union to Italy, where he would spend the next year filming *Nostalghia* (a film, coincidentally, about one’s longing for one’s homeland), never to return to the USSR. As Robert Bird notes, “Tarkovsky’s

³⁰⁵ Jorge Luis Borges. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 196. Here, quoted by Nariman Skakov in *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2012), 159. I thank the author for generously pushing me towards the blurred boundaries of reality and fiction.

³⁰⁶ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on Cinema*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986),

temporary estrangement became a permanent ‘defection’ in 1984,” an event that “marked the Soviet Union’s final refusal to be rejuvenated from within by its brightest talents.”³⁰⁷

Nostalgia was the first work Tarkovsky shot entirely abroad, and like *Stalker*, its premise is one of travel. The Russian poet Gorchakov travels to Italy to research his literary predecessor of sorts, an eighteenth century Russian composer who, centuries earlier, hanged himself while in the throes of nostalgia for his homeland. Gorchakov, set to research, falters, finding partial solace in his Italian translator and visited by visions of his Russian wife (a symbol, no doubt, of the motherland). Ultimately, the poet finds himself at a crossroads. Unable to work and torn between the culture in which he finds himself and the history of which he is a part, he seeks the help of an old fool, Domenico who, leads by example in an act of self-immolation. Gorchakov’s sacrifice is not as great – he does not light himself on fire, but rather carries a small and benign flame, resulting in a similar outcome. Here, perhaps more than elsewhere in the content or narrative of Tarkovsky’s body of work, the question of Russian identity within the post-Stalinist era arises. At the level of form, Tarkovsky presents a focused homage to film as a medium of duration. Yet at the same time, the gravity of the physical and spiritual sacrifice the protagonist, Gorchakov, ultimately makes sets in high relief the sacrifice of his counterpart: the old fool.

In perhaps the most iconic *plan sequence* in Tarkovsky’s *oeuvre*, Gorchakov attempts to carry a lit candle from one end of an empty basin to the other. After two

³⁰⁷ Robert Bird. *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 8-9.

attempts, the flame expires, and so the poet returns from when he came and tries again. We watch as the candle burns, its wax growing soft and dripping on the writer's hand. This is a sequence of pure duration, marked by the declining candle. The camera tracks alongside Gorchakov, matching him pace for pace until, on his third attempt, he reaches the other side, fixes the candle there, and falls from the frame.

Here, the protracted sequence shot employed by Tarkovsky, can perhaps be compared with the same device as it is used by Jancsó. For both, the protracted sequence shots and staging in depth allow for a greater degree of ambiguity of image (and narrative), yet the two directors apply these stylistic devices towards different ends. Tarkovsky's camera often lingers on the profilmic, either tracking parallel to it or moving slowly towards it. This persistent focus on a single object, for example, distorts the dimension of time, leading to a transcendence not only of the object itself, but also of the process of signification and thus the symbolic plane (a transcendence by way of matter, or "transcendental materialism"). This results in a destabilization of the viewer who struggles to make sense of what he sees. In most cases, no resolution is offered. Jancsó employs the plan sequence as well, yet as is noted above, structures his camera's movements along predetermined patterns of tracks which weave throughout a scene rather than simply track parallel to it. Indeed, his long takes encourage a certain observation and contemplation of the profilmic, but because Jancsó's camera does not perpetually linger (or slowly zoom) on single objects, scenes, or settings, transcendence by way of matter and a total destabilization of the symbolic (and thus the viewer) is not

the outcome. Instead, Jancsó's fluid long takes and complex *mise-en-scène* compel viewer activation, but not towards thoroughly destabilizing ends. The viewer is led through the unchanging dynamics of power (ascension, oppression), all the while cognizant of the manner by which Jancsó structures every aspect of his films on predetermined, abstract diagrams. The unfolding narrative, then, is not arbitrary, and the increased ambiguity of a scene – thanks to the long take – is not simply a symptom of an absent master signifier. Rather, the story, like history itself, has always and will always be this way: an arbitrary structure onto which any narrative and any protagonist's action can be grafted. The structure itself (like the dialectical relationship of form and content discussed at the outset) is materialized by the actions, movements of the characters – “concrete material individuals materially producing their existence.”³⁰⁸

Where these two filmmakers intersect is, perhaps, regarding their investigation of the subject. The subject with whom Tarkovsky is most concerned is one of new Soviet identity, explored here from a position beyond the Soviet Union's borders and from the position of a filmmaker who is unable to return there. Only by traversing its limits can this question be raised. Jancsó, of course, does not address issues of national identity as such but rather one's identity as a *subject* of ideology. Perhaps the intersection here, then, is how there is no difference between the two.

³⁰⁸ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 108

“Meaningless Sacrifice”³⁰⁹

Tarkovsky’s direct treatment of sacrifice exposes a more critical engagement with the status and existential quandaries of this new Soviet subject. While Gorchakov’s sacrifice is treated with utmost reverence, both to the subject as well as to the form which captures it, *Nostalghia* interrupts what would be another devout and severe self-sacrifice with blunt clumsiness as Dominico attempts to set himself aflame. In a single long take, Dominico first ungracefully and nearly unsuccessfully douses his body with gasoline. Then, he fumbles with the matches, and the music queued to accompany his self sacrifice won’t start, skips, sounds warped. There is no divine veneer except and most importantly at the level of form. Tarkovsky’s camera moves slowly and uninterruptedly over these scenes, mocking, as it were, the ungainly sacrificial act by way of the camera’s austere objectivity, its fluid and effortless observation of the unfolding ineptitude and artlessness. This scene immediately precedes Gorchakov’s self-sacrificial act, and one must ask: does this set them apart or undermine the reverie which follows?

Another scene involving sacrifice is depicted in Tarkovsky’s last film. *Sacrifice* (1986), focuses on Alexander and his family who decide to live in their summer house in the Swedish countryside. Low-flying jet planes signify the beginning of nuclear war, but rather than give in to the inevitable, Alexander prays to God, offering his most precious possession – the *dacha* – in exchange for the deferral of the apocalypse. His prayers answered, Alexander burns down the house. Yet rather than offering the viewer a

³⁰⁹ I borrow this term from Slavoj Žižek, as outlined in his *The Parallax View*. Please see Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

resolution which may reciprocate the significance of the protagonist's sacrifice, Tarkovsky closes the space of triumphant relief, sending instead an ambulance to deliver the protagonist to an asylum. In a single take, we watch the *dacha* fall to the ground in the background as medical personnel chase after Alexander in a seemingly-comical game of cat and mouse in the foreground. They catch him; he escapes. And again. Again.

In both cases, with *Nostalghia* and *Sacrifice*, the severity of sacrifice, the spiritual nature of the act, is undermined by the banality of the everyday, whether it be matches that won't light or a precious home set aflame for reasons no longer necessary or apparent. In these two films produced outside the Soviet Union, it is as though Tarkovsky seems to castigate the ultimate failure of matter to bring about legitimate transcendence. The transcendental materialism hinted at here can't seem to rise from the ground. These are what Žižek calls acts of "meaningless sacrifice," "the ultimate guarantee of sense," where "the ultimate Meaning of sacrifice is the sacrifice of Meaning itself."³¹⁰

It is not without great consequence these films which interrogate existential matters take place outside Russia – as though the status of the new Soviet subject cannot be explored within the subject's own country itself. Whether in Sweden or Italy, the specter of the *datcha* – a significant material object of Russian cultural identity and "the safety and authentic rural roots of Home"³¹¹ – persists, yet as that which cannot be possessed.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 86-87.

³¹¹ Ibid., 86.

Conclusion

The Long Take Continues, Uncut

In 2002, Russian director Aleksandr Sokurov – the heir to Tarkovsky³¹² – released *Russian Ark*, a film comprised of a single long take running nearly one-hundred minutes in length.³¹³ The work exhibited a major technical feat. In it, the camera rolls uninterrupted, gliding through room after room of St. Petersburg’s Winter Palace as a fictionalized version of a French diplomat converses with an offscreen narrator: Sokurov himself. The diplomat is not just any incidental figure. He is the Marquis Astolphe de Custine, the real-life author of *Russia in 1839*, a travelogue published in Paris in 1843 in which he faults Russia for imitating Europe and lacking a national identity.³¹⁴ He is refashioned here as a foreign visitor, taking in Russian history and culture from an

³¹² In one of the final interviews Tarkovsky was to give before his untimely death, he makes note of this new filmmaker, stating, “You see, in Leningrad there is a young director, a cinematic genius. His name is Alexander Sokurov.” See Boleslaw Edelhajt, “Entretien avec Andrei Tarkovski,” *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 392 (February 1987), 39. Noted in Anna Lawton. *Before the Fall: Soviet cinema in the Gorbachev Years* (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2002), 144, 302, fn. 225. In addition, Sokurov directed *Moscow Elegy* (1988), a documentary about Tarkovsky, the production and release of which was delayed due to its negative reception by Soviet authorities. Given that the chronology of the film takes place during Tarkovsky’s absence from the USSR, it is, perhaps, easy to conclude why it ran into trouble.

³¹³ As noted by film scholar Birgit Beumers and others, the single take of *Russian Ark* was recorded on 23 December 2001, the shortest day of the year in St. Petersburg in which a mere four hours of daylight were available for filming. See Birgit Beumers. *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg Press, 2009), 251.

³¹⁴ See Tim Harte, “A Visit to the Museum: Aleksandr Sokurov’s ‘Russian Ark’ and the Framing of the Eternal.” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), 43. See also Birgit Beumers. *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg Press, 2009), 251. For the original travelogue, it is Marquis Astolphe de Custine, *La Russie en 1839*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1843).

unnamed year in the mid-1800s to a grand ball set in 1913. Sokurov is his guide, yet is reshaped into an anonymous character, a ghost-like and out-of-frame apparition resurrected from an accident to which he alludes in an opening voiceover. He has been transported here, it seems, by way of inexplicable time travel, and audibly questions in what era he finds himself. As viewers, we assume the narrator is our contemporary, confused as we are by our sudden placement *in media res*, and speculating as to the nature of the disaster which brought him here.³¹⁵

Over the course of the next ninety minutes, the camera, the offscreen narrator, and the characters within the frame make an unbroken journey through 300 years of history displayed in and among thirty-three rooms of the Hermitage.³¹⁶ Yet despite the uninterrupted quality of the long take foregrounded here as well as the troika of centuries featured, the narrative represented is not always chronological. Characters of different epochs “rupture the neat chronology of the Romanov dynasty,” Birgit Beumers notes.³¹⁷ History takes a central position. It is dolled up and on fine display in this most significant of buildings, yet its makeup is amiss. Characters follow a central floor plan (the motivational device for the film itself), making their way down long passageways, either side of which contains a series of doorways. These rooms lead to strict units of time. Traversing their thresholds is an act of spatial and temporal montage, all within a single

³¹⁵ At the film’s opening, the Sokurov the narrator states, “I only remember there was an accident. Everyone ran for safety as best they could.” Did the accident involve the narrator only, a larger group, or an incalculable number of the population?

³¹⁶ See Birgit Beumers. *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg Press, 2009), 250-252.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

take. The film, then, is a consummate conflation of space and time, a true synthesis of montage and the long take which executes the very collapsed binary between the two, imagined but never realized by Godard a half century earlier.³¹⁸

Yet in this amalgamation, an elision occurs. Indeed, *Russian Ark* sways between past and present, and the years of centuries turn and wind with apparent ease, coming and going in frames, but what has been left in this vessel's wake is the October Revolution, the horrors of Stalinism, and everything that follows. What is offered instead are the progeny of that era, performing here in a grand masquerade choreographed in the selfsame Winter Palace stormed by Red Army soldiers in 1917, the selfsame Winter Palace in which countless extras reenacted the Revolution in Eisenstein's *October* (1928). It is not for nothing, then, that the final vision of the film, a shot of grey and misty fog sans frame and rising from the Neva River, is entirely and digitally constructed.³¹⁹ Despite its fabrication, it is the thing most real. It has taken on no guise. It represents only itself, and it puts into high relief the unnatural nature of everything to this point.

Sokurov's film is entirely uncut, and as such, remains within that space of chaos and aggregated presents in a series of endless overlaps which, Pasolini writes, "abolishes the present, empties it, each present postulating the relativity of all others, their unreliability, imprecision, and ambiguity."³²⁰ This is the legacy of Jancsó, Parajanov,

³¹⁸ See Jean-Luc Godard. "Montage my Fine Care." *Godard on Godard*. Ed. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne. (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 39-41.

³¹⁹ Tim Harte, "A Visit to the Museum: Aleksandr Sokurov's 'Russian Ark' and the Framing of the Eternal." *Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), 43.

³²⁰ Pier Paolo Pasolini. "Observations on the Long Take." *October*, Vol. 13 (Summer, 1980), 3-6

Tarkovsky – the *plan sequence* taken to its logical conclusion. Here, characters are again choreographed for the camera, captured in a single protracted sequence, yet the long take as it appears in *Russian Ark* does less to articulate an historical process than it does a temporal and historical confusion. Time has begun to fold upon itself. The rooms here are not unlike Parajanov’s tableaux, yet when figures walk offscreen, they risk plunging into a sea of fog.

This film and the long take featured therein are no longer of the late-Socialist era but rather the Post-Socialist one, and the most crucial history which got us to this point – the revolution itself – has been entirely omitted. It is as though the failure of Socialism can be forgotten by erasing the emergence of it altogether, and to maintain the guise of its nonexistence, one must remain in a perpetual state of performance within this glorious construction, this ark-like refuge. As long as one stays on board, in Sokurov’s final words of the film, “We are destined to sail forever, to live forever.”

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