FRAGMENTED MYTHOLOGIES: SOVIET TV MINI-SERIES OF THE 1970S

by

Elena Prokhorova

BA, Moscow State University, 1987

MA, University of Pittsburgh, 1997

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This dissertation was presented

by

Elena Prokhorova

It was defended on

May 12, 2003

and approved by

Nancy Condee, Associate Professor, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Jane Feuer, Professor, Department of English

Carol Stabile, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

Martin Votruba, Lecturer, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Vladimir Padunov, Associate Professor, Department of Slavic Languages and Literature
Dissertation Director

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Elena Prokhorova, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2003

My dissertation provides an analysis of the Soviet television mini-series released between the late 1960s and early 1980s, specifically the spy thriller, the police procedural, and the detective series. I argue that serialized production were an ideal form for the negotiation of the inherited models of individual and collective identity with the new cultural, social, and political values that came into play during the Brezhnev era.

Chapter One provides an overview of Russian and Western studies of Soviet television and describes the methodology used in the three analytical chapters. I approach the three genres as variations of the socialist realist masterplot, which undergoes fragmentation and transformation in mini-series.

Chapter Two discusses the spy thriller, which addresses the issue of "inside" vs. "outside" of the political system, revealing the absence of a stable meaning behind the category of the Soviet "us." My case studies in this chapter are Evgenii Tashkov's *His Highness's Adjutant* (1969) and Tat'iana Lioznova's *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (1973). Chapter Three analyzes the genre of police procedural. The "institutional" version of the genre—*The Investigation Is Conducted by Experts* (1971-89)--lays bare the absurdity of the Soviet economy, while *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* (Stanislav Govorukhin 1979) redefines police narrative as a populist story of idealized past. Chapter Four discusses detective mini-series. As case studies I use the Aniskin series of made-for-TV films (1968, 1974, 1978) and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* (Igor' Maslennikov 1979-86). These

productions use temporal and spatial displacement to construct a protagonist, whose status of positive hero is entirely determined by the utopian nature of the community he represents. In late Soviet culture, modernist utopia turns into a stylized "Victorian" past, which above all values stability.

Finally, Conclusion discusses the role of Brezhnev era productions on post-Soviet television. I argue that these series both fulfill a "therapeutic" function by establishing a link with the past culture and serve as models for the construction of a new Russian identity. I interpret Russian television's privileging of the police procedural as the revival of Russians' search for a communal, rather than an individual identity.

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Introduction: Object and Outline of the Dissertation

My dissertation provides an analysis of Soviet serial television productions of the 1970s and early 1980s—the decades when television finally emerged as the dominant popular culture medium in the Soviet Union. The last two decades have witnessed major changes within the field of Slavic Studies. First, scholars have abandoned the exclusive emphasis on the literary canon in favor of more extensive research in cinema, visual arts, and popular culture. Second, Soviet culture was re-integrated into the field of Slavic Studies as a "worthy" subject of analysis. Soviet television, however, has benefited little from these new directions of research. The study of 1970s television was constructed to fit Cold War models and was, consequently, associated exclusively with the ideological freeze during the rule of Leonid Brezhnev—the period in late Soviet history referred to as Stagnation. Unlike more "expressive" cultural periods—Stalinism, the Thaw, or perestroika— Stagnation bears the stigma of political conservatism and cultural bleakness. As the mouthpiece of the ideological state, Soviet television before perestroika appears as monological, ideologically driven, and a "simply" boring medium, whose primary (and virtually only) function was political, social, and cultural brainwashing of the populace.

But, to quote Richard Taylor's pioneering article on Boris Shumiatskii and "Soviet Hollywood" of the 1930s: "if we do not ask different questions, we shall never get different answers or, indeed, much new information at all" (193).[1] Studies of Soviet television are in dire need of the same (re)-animation through asking "different questions." Political and sociological studies of the Soviet television, which have defined the field up to this time, have failed to

[1] In 1930 Shumiatskii was appointed head of the major Soviet administrative unit of the film industry, Soiuzfilm (formerly Sovkino). Until his dismissal in 1938, he was in charge of the Soviet film industry. Inspired by his trip to Hollywood in 1932-33, Shumiatskii announced the creation of a "Soviet Hollywood," which would combine ideological tasks with box office considerations. A major product of this "merger" was the rise of the Soviet musical comedy, which enjoyed huge success with audiences. Because of its associations with Stalinism, both the genre and its administrative "sponsor" had been unwelcome topics in Slavic studies for many decades.

explain why television took over the Soviet media market by storm, not only marginalizing the printed media and movie theaters as prime venues for the dissemination of information and entertainment, but also challenging the primacy of literature in "the most reading country in the world." As Ellen Mickiewicz notes, in the 1970s "for every increase in books read or movies and theater presentations attended, there is a fivefold decrease due to television" (1981, 33). Watching television was the principle leisure activity for most children and many adults, raising concerns of "television addiction" [*telenarkomaniia*] on the part of educators, parents, and Party officials.

This dissertation partially fills the gap in the studies of one of the most television-addicted cultures in the world. The dissertation provides an analysis of the Soviet television adventure mini-series released between the late 1960s and early 1980s, specifically the spy thriller, the police procedural, and the detective series. Many of these "ideological" television productions became cult experiences for sophisticated and naïve Soviet audiences alike, and continue to be after the fall of communism. By analyzing the Soviet mini-series of the 1970s, this dissertation accomplishes two interrelated objectives. First, it discusses the ways in which serialized television of the Brezhnev era appropriated and redefined cultural models, tropes, and values of preceding cultural periods, in particular those of Stalinism and the Thaw. Second, it establishes connections between the fragmentation of monolithic Soviet ideology and the emergences of serialized narratives. The ultimate goal of this research is to examine Brezhnev-era mini-series and answer the question: how did the new medium and its genres negotiate the inherited models of individual and collective identity with the new cultural, social, and political values that came into play during the 1970s?

Chapter One provides an overview of Russian and Western studies of Soviet television and describes the methodology used in the three analytical chapters. I approach the three genres as variations of the socialist realist masterplot, which undergoes transformation in serialized television productions. Chapter One describes the masterplot as it existed in Stalin-era defense films, as well as its instantiations in Thaw-era spy and detective films and the early mini-series. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Soviet television discourse in the context of Brezhnev-era culture.

The three "genre" chapters are organized around the analysis of the basic opposition of "us" vs. "them" as it is re-interpreted through genre conventions and modified by episodic and, at the same time, extended, narratives. The nature of the positive hero and his position vis-à-vis his environment in the three genres express various aspects of the late Soviet identity crisis. The spy thriller, which addresses the issue of "inside" vs. "outside" of the political system, reveals the absence of a stable meaning behind the category of the Soviet "us." The police procedural, which explores the limits of the admissible inside the system, lays bare the absurdity of the Soviet economic system, while blurring the boundary between social and moral problematics. The detective genre deals with Soviet culture's position vis-à-vis modernist utopia, which by the late Soviet period turns into an unattainable and stylized past.

Chapter Two discusses the spy thriller. The protagonist finds himself in the midst of enemies—the White Guards, the Nazis, or Cold-War Americans. The task that the Soviet agent has to fulfill is very specific, but to do so—and thus to assert his Soviet identity and Soviet values and myths—the protagonist has to function as one of "them." This split in the protagonist's identity—the external compliance with alien codes of behavior and the secret mission—becomes the narrative *dominanta* of the series. Because the actual assignment is re-

defined as a long-term goal (extending over five to twelve episodes), the emphasis shifts from an opposition of "our" and "their" value systems to the protagonist's ability to act out "theirs." A heroic Soviet agent is transformed into a bureaucratic agent, whereas enemies become more human. Moreover, for contemporary Soviet audiences, the extensive treatment of the inner workings of power structures offered a glimpse into the Soviet machine of power. The combination of an epic scale of the narrative with televisual representation resulted in ambiguities and left the series open for interpretation.

In the 1973 spy thriller *Seventeen Moments of Spring* Soviet consciousness "splits" from the protagonist and exists as a voice over. The protagonist acts and talks as an exemplary Nazi officer, while the voice over reveals his hidden thoughts, dreams, memories, and plans. Disembodied and overburdened with its mission to be the ideological *dominanta* of the series, the voice over often dissociates from the hero and takes over the narrative, commenting not only on the events on screen, but on history and on the protagonist himself.

Chapter Three analyzes the genre of police procedural. While the 1970s television spy thriller re-defined the basic socialist realist opposition of "us" and "them," Soviet police procedurals deal with the roots of crime inside the Soviet system itself. The genre in its Soviet version comes out of the Thaw-era detective narrative and inherits its major ideological assumption: the discourse of crime as a temporary and "non-organic" phenomenon in Soviet society. The episodic structure of the police mini-series, however, contradicts this premise, since the same crime situation is recycled from one case to another. The detailed exploration of the social causes of crime leads to a shift of emphasis from the police team to the criminal milieu. The appearance of organized crime and the sheer scale of embezzlement of state property

implicate the existing system itself—a conclusion that the official discourse of police heroes cannot hide.

In police mini-series, the positive hero himself splits into several complementary figures. The police team in *Investigation Is Conducted by Experts* (1971-89) represents a composite positive hero, whose narrative functions are distributed among three team members. The fixed nature of their roles gradually takes over the narrative. The police are allowed only internal disputes; as a team—that is, as a positive hero—they are above criticism, speaking in the unchanging and abstract discourse of Soviet Law, which contrasts sharply with the varied and psychologically complex villains.

The late 1970s police procedural, *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* (1979) redefines state mythology as a populist narrative of an idealized nation forged by war sacrifices. The series also features a "double" protagonist. Unlike the internal conflictlessness of *Investigation,* however, the series allow some space for controversy. While the major opposition between Volodia Sharapov and Gleb Zheglov is established along the lines of Stalinist "vigilance" vs. Thaw "humanism," the conflict is represented as the age-old Russian juxtaposition of justice and law. Because of the show's populism—extensive use of war mythology, the casting of the charismatic 1970s guitar singer in the role of a police officer—neither cultural paradigm is established as "right."

Chapter Four discusses mini-series that follow the model of a classical detective. Soviet detective mini-series use temporal and spatial displacement to construct a protagonist, whose status of positive hero is entirely determined by the utopian nature of the community he represents. This community is removed from contemporary, 1970s Soviet life either spatially—a remote Siberian village that looks like a setting for a Disney movie in the *Aniskin* series (1968,

1974, 1978)—or both spatially and temporally—*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* (1979-86). The idealization of patriarchal order, the cult of stability, the containment of conflicts within the familiar and secure limits of genre conventions represent late Soviet culture's Victorian underpinnings. The central opposition of the late Soviet detective mini-series is "us" vs. the desired but unattainable imperial utopia. The only escape into the imperial utopia is through the television "tube."

The late Soviet detective series share two key conventions. First, the protagonist is the master detective of retirement age who combines a tenacious mind with sexual sterility, and old body, and limited mobility. For example, the laet Soviet Sherlock Holmes solves most of the crimes while sitting in his armchair on Baker Street. Second, the visual stability of the detective mini-series hinges on citation as the primary mode of visual representation. That is, the mise-en-scène recycles familiar, at times banal, images of Victorian London and Stalinist rural idyll—the distanced and sterilized modernity juxtaposed to the ambiguous present.

Finally, Conclusion discusses the role of Brezhnev era productions on post-Soviet television. The prominence of Soviet mini-series in contemporary Russian culture is partly explainable by nostalgia for the "stable" past in the turbulent new Russia. The chapter argues, however, that these series function both as signs of cultural continuity (fulfilling a "therapeutic" function) and as models for the construction of a new Russian identity. I examine specifically Russian television's privileging of the police procedural at the expense of the detective series, and interpret this preference as the revival of Russians' search for a communal, rather than an individual identity.

Chapter One. Mini-Series in the Context of Late Soviet Culture

1. Studies of Soviet Television.

Until quite recently studies of Soviet television have been dominated by the same two approaches, which, as Robert Allen argues, have defined television research in the West (10-13). One is traditional, predominantly literary criticism; the other is traditional mass communication research. Traditional literary criticism approaches a text as a unique and autonomous object of study, the boundaries of which are clearly defined. The work of art is judged primarily on the grounds of its intrinsic value. From this point of view, television productions, which target a mass audience, as well as privilege repetition and narrative transparency, are, by definition, located within “low” culture if compared to literature and even cinema.

Mass communication research is primarily the domain of sociologists, psychologists, and political scientists, whose primary interest in television is its impact on behavior and the attitudes of its audiences. Whether this research is conducted in the interests of broadcasters, who are interested in ratings, or in the interests of politicians and educators, who analyze the impact of the message on the audience, the major model for study is that of the social sciences. Applied to television, quantitative methods of analysis and reliance on hard data gave birth to the "hypodermic needle" model of media effect. This model relies on the assumption that messages and meanings broadcast by television are decoded by audiences in the way intended by the sender and are interpreted in the same way by all recipients. Although challenged, this assumption and research methods based on it still bear heavily on television criticism.

These two approaches construct their objects of study quite differently, and their respective theoretical assumptions and practical conclusions are often diametrically opposed to

each other. In respect to television, however, they share many problems and have similar blind spots. For instance, they typically focus on "broadcast content," isolating it from the medium via which it is delivered, and consider this content within a pre-set ideological context. Consequently, the most challenging—and often ignored—issue in television is discourses: "the complex of all the ways television addresses us, appeals to us, tells us stories, entertains us, and represents itself and the world" (Allen 15).

In the case of Soviet television the impact of these approaches has been deeper than in the West. The reasons for this are endemic to Soviet culture, but historically precede it. The cult of high art, and above all of literature, that was typical of pre-revolutionary Russian culture, was inherited by new Soviet cultural producers and consumers. Within the Russo-Soviet hierarchy of art forms, television has always been treated condescendingly (if at all) by Soviet art critics. Unlike cinema, television did not have its own auteur directors who could legitimize television in the eyes of high culture lovers. To compensate for TV's reputation as a (boring) mouthpiece of party politics, television producers relied on other arts: broadcasts of theatrical productions and ballets, literary readings, and concerts of classical music.

The prominence of methods of traditional mass communication research in the Soviet Union was a result of the Communist Party's perception of television as an industry analogous to the press. The major function of television was conceived to be education: the mobilization of the populace to the fulfillment of economic and social goals formulated by the Party. Even if in practice only a small percentage of programs fulfilled this task directly, and even though their effectiveness at fulfilling these goals was consistently questioned[2], television criticism was inextricably linked with the medium's role as an educator and mobilizer, rather than an art form.

[2] The results of a 1974 survey of Moscow residents indicate that the top seven programs singled out by more than 60% of respondents were feature films (including mini-series), musical variety shows, and sports programs. The

1.1. Television Research in the Soviet Union.

Although the origins of television in the Soviet Union go back to the 1940s, as late as the 1950s Soviet television suffered from random programming and the lack of a clear picture of the medium's nature and functions. "Concerning the Future Development of Soviet Television," a decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (adopted on 29 January 1960) marked a new stage in the party's and the state's view of television. Among the problems afflicting Soviet television the decree cited the poor quality of programs containing socio-political themes; the lack of coverage of important events in arts and sciences; bad or non-existent programming for children and youth, etc. The decree went on to define the purpose of television as "the propagation of decisions of party congresses and plenums of the CC CPSU, of domestic and foreign policies of the Soviet government."[3] At the same time, this overarching goal was translated into specific changes within the industry. For example, the decree charged the State Committee for Radio and Television (Gosteleradio) with establishing a studio, Telefilm, to produce made-for-TV films and to broadcast theatrical productions.[4] More importantly, even though the decree made clichéd references to socialist realist themes, it targeted, above all, the dull and unimaginative format of TV programs.

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least popular broadcasts were high culture broadcasts (classical music, literary readings, etc.), adult political instruction, and programs on economic production (Mickiewicz 25-26).

[3] "O dal'neishem razvitii sovetskogo televideniia." *O partiinoi i sovetskoi pechati, radioveshchanii i televidenii. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov.* Moscow: Mysl', 1972. 536-541.

[4] Soviet television had double accountability. The State Committee on Radio and Television Broadcasting was created in 1957 to oversee both branches of mass media. At the same time, television was a domain of the Ideological Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the head of which was the second most influential figure within the Party hierarchy after the General Secretary.

The debates on the nature and functions of television that took place during the Thaw (1954-68)[5] reproduced the discourse of authenticity, which characterized most artistic discussions of the time and which was a reaction to the perceived falsity of Stalinist narratives. Vladimir Sappak—a pioneer of Soviet television theory[6]--and other Soviet critics of the late 1950s-mid 1960s approached television as a new art form, which possessed an enormous aesthetic and social potential. Discussions of television during that time centered on a search for a specifically televisual language, as an analogue for "literariness" and "cinematographicity." Such a unique characteristic was found in television's ability to produce a "reality effect." In the round-table discussion organized by the journal *Cinema Art* in 1965, TV producers and critics mention such features of television broadcasting as improvisation and spontaneity (56), as well as its participatory, active nature (58); and formal eclecticism (61).[7] This search for a tele-language and for "tele-truth" evokes Soviet filmmakers' search in the 1920s for "cine-truth."[8]

The end of Thaw's liberal politics also brought to an end the debates on the advantages of live versus recorded and fictional versus documentary television. By the late 1960s-early 1970s many genres of live television broadcast had disappeared. Those remaining were reduced to the "talking heads" format (newscast) or were overscripted, leaving no space for surprises and

[5] The term "Thaw," as a designation for the decade of partial de-Stalinization and relative loosening of ideological control over cultural production, originated in the title of a novel by Il'ia Erenburg (1954). The succession of "seasonal" tropes demonstrates a certain schizophrenic symbolism. The preferred season for the 1970s is "autumn," as the preceding "summer" had already been appropriated by Stalinism: intensely-blue skies and tropical imagery are the "natural" landscape of Stalinist paintings, architecture, and films. For a detailed description, see Vladimir Papernyi *Kul'tura-2,* especially pp. 90-92.

Katerina Clark argues in *The Soviet Novel* that de-Stalinization started as early as the late 1940s-early 1950s, with the works of such writers as Vera Panova, Viktor Nekrasov, and Emmanuil Kazakevich. Russian film scholars, for the most part, consider the period to extend from the early 1950s to the early 1970s (see, for example, the collaborative study *Cinematography of the Thaw* [*Kinematograf Ottepeli*], Moscow: Materik, 1996.

[6] See for instance Sappak's book *Television and We* ([Televidenie i my], Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961.

[7] "Za kruglym stolom – televizionisty." *Iskusstvo kino* 3 (1965): 53-67.

[8] *Cine-truth* was the title of the documentary film journal produced by Dziga Vertov and his group of "Cine-Eyes" in 1922. Vertov believed that in order to catch the new Soviet reality "unawares," cinema should have as little human interference as possible. The camera eye was seen as the perfect mechanism, capable of absolute objectivity.

improvisation even in the more free format of talk shows.[9] With the virtual disappearance of live broadcasts, the quest for an authentic tele-language lost its object of study. The view that dominated Soviet television theory in the 1970s combined three separate phenomena: fictional, journalistic, and educational broadcasting. Each of these demanded a description based on a corresponding general theory: aesthetics, journalism/communication, and pedagogy respectively (Mikhalkovich 121).[10]

As a result of the restructuring of the Soviet broadcast industry under Sergei Lapin, who directed Gosteleradio from 1970 until 1985, television adopted broadcast policies that were to define its content and form for the next decade. Among the basic principles of these policies were isolationism (jamming TV signals from abroad); central planning (including compulsory broadcast of the news program Time [Vremia] on all channels); a drastic reduction of live television broadcasts; privileging interpretation over information; the reduction of television journalism to "creative" retelling of pre-approved stories; and the reliance on an “iron script” which facilitated censorship (Boretskii 16-17).

At the same time, the growing number of television mini-series and their popularity with audiences opened up a new area of critical inquiry. The 1970s are marked by a surge of interest

[9] In 1957 a quiz show "An Evening of Merry Questions" [Russian acronym "VVV"–Vecher veselykh voprosov) got on the air and was immediately cancelled after a telling incident. During a live broadcast, the host promised to give away three prizes to those who would show up in the studio wearing winter clothing (despite the steaming heat outside). Soon a crowd of citizens appeared in the studio claiming their prizes. All the while the program was being broadcast live. After some confusion, the program was blacked out and soon thereafter cancelled. An account in the newspaper warned of the dangers of unscripted, live, and mass television: "When a person gets into a stupid situation before the eyes of 4 or 5 people, he alone looks stupid; when 4-5 millions observe the stupidity, all become stupid" (Iurovskii, qtd.. in Parrat 55).

[10] The claim of Soviet television productions to the status of artistic texts occasionally found confirmation in viewers’ responses, but rarely, if ever, in critical reviews. Cinema and television had different print organs: the journal *Cinema Art* [Iskusstvo kino] and *Television and Radio Broadcasting* [Televidenie i radioveshchanie] respectively. The only point of intersection was the weekly *Soviet Screen* [Sovetskii ekran], which published critical discussions and reviews of, as well audience responses to both film and television premieres. It is worth noting, however, that of these three publications only *Cinema Art* enjoyed a reputation comparable to that of literary "thick" journals, the publishing vehicle that defines Russian cultural norms. Until the late 1960s, *Cinema Art* maintained a

in specific TV forms and genres. In 1975 the journal *Soviet Screen* organized a discussion by leading film and television critics of mini-series or "multi-episodic productions"—an umbrella term for any fictional television show that exceeded two episodes. The critics agreed that such productions were the most "organic" form for television, privileging stable and predictable formats. In attempting to explain mini-series' success with audiences, critics traced the form's cultural lineage back to literature and film. Some concluded that mini-series re-vitalized epic forms of narratives; hence, the success of literary adaptations on TV (Vartanov).[11] Others drew a parallel between TV series and serialized popular literature of the turn-of-the century (Zorkaia).[12] Zorkaia also discussed some of the formal features of TV mini-series: length, discreteness, permanent cast of characters, and predictable structure (e.g., the repetition of key elements that ensure audience's familiarity with texts).

In several respects this discussion was quite revolutionary. First, even though literary models continued to serve as the major point of reference for TV productions, the purpose of such a comparison was to establish structural parallels between verbal and visual narratives rather than to pass the familiar judgment that television was a "low art." Second, several of the critics (e.g., Viktor Demin) focused on issues of the audience, in particular the integration of serial television broadcasts into daily routine, creating an affect of "parallel existence."[13] Structural and psychological factors in the analysis of serialized television, however, remained marginal to the field, which was dominated by theories of social usefulness and the educational function of any Soviet television text.

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permanent rubric for the discussion of television theory and practice. By the 1970s this rubric disappeared, re-appearing sporadically in the 1990s.

[11] "Otmenno dlinnyi, dlinnyi, dlinyi fil'm," *Sovetskii ekran* 6 (1975): 14.

[12] *Sovetskii ekran* 1 (1975): 18.

[13] *Sovetskii ekran* 16 (1975): 7.

A collection of articles, *Big Problems of the Small Screen* (1981), addressed both issues of television aesthetics and programming, as well as specific problems of TV genres and forms. Andrei Plakhov discussed made-for-TV films that dealt with contemporary "production" issues. Plakhov positioned such films midway between documentary reportages and "openly conventional forms" of TV spectacle (76). Contemporary television films, according to Plakhov, suffered from predictable and banal scripts that recycled the schema of the Soviet production novel.[14] The importance of Plakhhov's argument lies in the link he established between socialist realist novels and a new "epic" form of serialized productions. In TV series, Plakhov argues, this schema was artificially lengthened to accommodate topical themes without integrating them into the plot. The lower prestige and the lower pay for TV scripts in comparison to both film scripts and literary texts led to manufacturing uniform products to fill broadcast slots.

Viktor Demin's article in the same collection focused specifically on adventure genres broadcast on Soviet TV: spy thrillers and police series. In examining the problem of a new hero for television, Demin noted that there was a peculiar imbalance in the representation of positive and negative characters. While the latter were socially particularized and psychologically convincing, the former remained idealized, formulaic figures, bound by ideological prescriptions. Analyzing the success of the police procedural *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* (1979), Demin wrote:

> Not fate, not chromosomes, not the conventional, chess-like
>
> division into black and white draws the boundary between those

[14] The "production novel" was a model genre of socialist realist literature. It typically centered on a factory collective fulfilling production plan and overcoming various problems (from technical difficulties to purposeful wreckage). In the process, the protagonist matured into a conscious member of the collective; hence, the genre effectively linked economic production goals with the production of Soviet consciousness. For a detailed discussion of the production novel, see Clark, *Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981, 69-77.

> who are in pursuit and those who are in hiding. This boundary is fluid, and the choice is up to the individual: to cross it and face the consequences, or to tighten the belt and endure, remaining on the right, the human side. (119)[15]

Demin's criticism of formulaic heroes put Soviet genres in historical perspective, affirming their right and need to change in order to correspond to changing cultural context and audiences: "We change, our interests change together with our concepts of what should and should not be, what can be forgiven and what cannot" (120). Such views, however, were not typical of Soviet criticism. For the most part, mini-series were treated as instantiations of socialist realism—the "fundamental method" of all Soviet arts.

Since the end of the Soviet Union, there has been a growing interest in the culture of the 1970s and in television as one of the period's major cultural venues. Admitting that Brezhnev-era culture defies facile interpretations, many Russian critics turn to the Soviet-era mini-series to analyze late Soviet mythologies. For instance, Sergei Shumakov examines Shtirlitz, the protagonist of the spy thriller *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (dir Tat'iana Lioznova 1973), as the archetypal figure of the 1970s, who embodied the strategies of individual survival in a totalitarian society (22). Post-Soviet criticism, therefore, attempts to go beyond an ideological interpretation of the plot (Soviet agent against Nazi regime and American diplomacy) to uncover underlying cultural paradigms.

One of the most original and productive approaches to Soviet TV narratives is offered by Zorkaia in *Fol'klor. Lubok. Ekran* (1994). The book is devoted to various genres and forms of Russian popular spectacle: from the *balagan* (fair ground performances) to serialized narratives

[15] All translations from Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

in print and on screen. Zorkaia argues that many late Soviet TV series were neither ideologically-driven nor conceived as "artistic texts" but rather should be considered as a modern serialized *lubok.*[16] Such blockbusters of the late Soviet TV screen as *Seventeen Moments of Spring, Eternal Call* (dirs. Vladimir Krasnopol'skii and Vladmir Uskov 1974-77), and *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* (dir. Stanislav Govorukhin 1979) owed their popularity to the successful use of models familiar from popular culture: fairy-tale plots that defy demands of realistic representation, transparent narratives and their orientation towards spectacle, the preference for stereotypes in characterization and for the folklorization of history, and, last but not least, explicit moralism.[17] Zorkaia's approach offers an alternative to the one-sided view on late Soviet television as an "official" medium. Instead, she suggests that the major force behind the rise of television (at least, serial television) is "cultural memory"—the migration of genres, motifs, plots, and characters from folk culture texts into contemporary popular culture texts.

1.2. Western Studies of Soviet Television.

Cold War studies of Soviet media, which dominated television research in the West in the 1960s and 1970s, suffered from the same ideological "tunnel vision" as their Soviet counterparts. First, many studies judged the Soviet media from the standpoint of Western values--"freedom of media," "objectivity," "consumer orientation"--with the inevitable result that Soviet television was described through a series of negative statements. Second, the only context for these discussions of the media was Soviet political culture. Researchers' own political agenda—probing the efficiency of the Soviet propaganda machine—narrowed their field of vision. The failure to link various media forms to broader Russian culture and daily life, or to discuss the

[16] *Lubok*—woodcut books that were the favorite reading of the semi-educated urban population and of some peasants before the revolution. In the broad sense, *lubok* refers to simplified and formulaic representations in literature and film that defy the traditions of Russian psychological realism. The word is sometimes used as a pejorative synonym for "genre art."

actual consumption of media products by different groups of the Russian population minimized the value of many early studies.

A number of studies that appeared in the early 1970s, written by historians and political scientists, offered plenty of statistics and facts, and an overview of the history of various Soviet media. Even when not overly biased, they focus almost exclusively on heavy-handed Soviet propaganda: both efficient and weak aspects of the Soviet press, radio, and television were discussed exclusively through Party politics. Many Western studies give preference to the more traditional media (radio and the press) that fit the propaganda model better and are easier to analyze because of their reliance on the word. For instance Mark Hopkins' *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (1970) devotes only one chapter to both radio and television. Among television genres, newscasts and documentaries were the preferred objects of analysis because they contain explicit ideological statements.

Daniel Parratt's 1975 dissertation, "Soviet Television Broadcasting: Its Growth, Social Role, and Effects," provided an overview of the technical and ideological development of Soviet TV from the 1940s through the early 1970s. Parratt evaluated the functioning of television by relying on official decrees and criticism "from above," as well as on viewer responses. Parratt's conclusion—that early Soviet television lacked not only a specifically Soviet theory of broadcasting but also a clear picture of the impact of the new medium on its audience—was quite valid. At the same time, the abundance of statistics and quotes from official sources did not add up to a picture of Soviet television as (by that time) a major player in the public sphere and a central presence in the household.

One of the best Western accounts of 1970s Soviet society in general, and Soviet media in particular, is Hedrick Smith's book *The Russians* (1976). Smith worked as Moscow Bureau

[17] See especially 95-107.

Chief for the *New York Times* from 1971 to 1974 and his observations of Soviet day-to-day life provide a rich and suggestive context for a discussion of the workings of mechanisms of power. For instance, the access to information in the 1970s depended on one's rank, social status, and presumed political reliability. The traditional Cold War account of this phenomenon draws a picture of an oppressive totalitarian society. In contrast, Smith shows the analogy to the "compartmentalization" in other spheres of daily life in the Soviet Union, above all in the consumer sector.[18] Information in the Soviet Union was as much a commodity as it was in the West, but the rules of its circulation were different.

Another striking departure from most Cold War accounts of Soviet media and culture is the focus of Smith's analysis. Much of the discussion addressed not what Soviet television and the press were (agencies of political indoctrination, etc.) but what they omitted and why. This allowed Smith to show the underlying patterns of state ideology within daily practice. For instance, he analyzed the "deconstructive" strategies Soviet people used for reading the press and watching newscasts: reading from the bottom up, looking for items hidden among routine reports of socialist achievements, or reading and watching "between the lines." According to Smith, late Soviet propaganda should be analyzed not on at the level of belief in the facts presented, but rather on the level of a "cultural mantra." The media's daily affirmation of socialist progress and capitalist decline (in the content of news, documentaries, or fiction productions), even if questioned by the viewer, fed into Russian patriotism and the feeling of cultural superiority (489).

[18] The access to consumer goods depended on one's rank in the political hierarchy and one's connections. For instance, there were unmarked stores for members of the Politbureau, their families, and even staff. For those few who worked abroad, there existed a chain of *Berezka* shops, where Western goods were sold for hard currency and Soviet rubles were not accepted. Smith describes a similar hierarchy of access to information. The major news agency, TASS, issued several versions of press releases. "Red TASS" and "White TASS," available only to Party leaders and editors-in-chief of major Soviet newspapers, differed greatly from the sanitized and censored version of

While Smith suggested new directions for research, the pioneering study by Ellen Propper Mickiewicz *Media and the Russian Public* (1981) provided a model for a detailed and unbiased analysis of Soviet television as, above all, the dominant mass medium. The book used results of Soviet surveys and polls to discuss the exposure of Russians to the mass media. In these polls television was considered among more traditional media, including radio, the press, theater, and cinema. Mickiewicz's chapter on television provides statistics on the ownership of TV sets and discusses audiences' viewing preferences, as well as the effects of television viewing on the daily life in the Soviet Union.

Mickiewicz's next book, *Split Signals* (1988), was devoted exclusively to television and is considerably more analytical. It provided important insights into the day-to-day functioning of television in the late Soviet period, primarily as a medium for transmitting information and propaganda about Party policies. While the focus is on the changes in Soviet broadcast policies triggered by perestroika, Mickiewicz also provided an overview of television channels and outlined some key concepts of Soviet media theory. The most important of these are "newsworthiness,"[19] which defined Soviet media politics for several decades, and the new principles of "glasnost'" and "timeliness," which were introduced under Gorbachev. Some chapters discuss television coverage of particular events (e.g., the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown), while others analyze individual programs in the context of perestroika politics. This two-directional approach, as well as the focus on the structure and presentation of information in broadcasts, allows Mickiewicz to offer useful insights into Soviet television culture.

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the news that circulated in newspapers, referred to as "Blue" or "Green" TASS. For more on this see Smith, especially 474-482.

[19] Ellen Mickiewicz refers to the underlying concept of Soviet media operation as "newsworthiness"—that which "reveals the underlying reality toward which history is tending. Since history is seen in its Marxist-Leninist interpretation, the reality toward which history is moving is already known" (1988, 30). Hence, the prominence of news items that reveal a "future trend" (e.g., an economic riot in the West) and the downplaying of fast-breaking news, as well as sensationalist items, celebrity columns, etc.

As with most Western studies that came out during Gorbachev's reforms, the bulk of Mickiewicz's book is devoted to the presentation of news, whereas the discussion of entertainment television is limited to examining one youth program and one game show. Such a one-sided image of Soviet television, in fact, was perpetuated by Gorbachev's perestroika. The new policy of glasnost' affected mostly news and TV documentaries, that is, the area of primary interest to political scientists and historians. The political urgency of analylizing perestroika reforms reduced entertainment television productions to the status of ad hoc illustrations of changes in the media.[20]

Richard Stites' *Russian Popular Culture* (1992) remains the most comprehensive and lucid account of Russo-Soviet genres of popular entertainment. Although necessarily brief, Stites addresses the place of television in Brezhnev-era culture and discusses Iulian Semenov's blockbuster novel *Seventeen Moments of Spring* and the mini-series based on it. In his Introduction, Stites outlines some important features of Russian popular culture: the role politics has played in defining its content and form, its relative conservatism and homogeneity (the migration of genres, conflicts, and characters from "high" to "low" culture and back), its moralism or "ethical injunction," its collective impulse and the cult of social bonding (6). Stites also makes an important distinction between the Western use of the term "mass culture"—the content of mass communication, often used pejoratively—and the Soviet term "culture for the millions" coined in the 1930s by fusing the old and the new, education and entertainment. This distinction becomes one of the cornerstones of new approaches to an examination of Soviet television in the 1990s.

[20] For instance, James Dingley's article in the 1989 collection *Culture and the Media in the USSR Today* (eds. Julian Graffy and Geoffrey Hosking) discusses several new entertainment programs and TV news programs (Vzgliad, Do i posle polunochi, Prozhektor perestroiki, Gardemariny, vpered!), but his comments focus on the loosening of censorship and opening up for discussion of some previously tabu topics.

In the last several years more studies have attempted to go beyond an analysis of Soviet television through the prism of politics and high culture. Instead, they look at television's politics of representation, its relationship with other cultural forms, as well as with political culture.[21] A recent volume, *Russian Cultural Studies* (1998), purports to redefine the field by drawing closer to Western cultural studies. In the Introduction, the authors contend that they define their approach to Russian culture against the dominant totalitarian theory, and try to avoid traditional binaries: between politics and art, power and dissent, etc. Instead, they focus on the development of "concepts of value, hierarchy, and identity" (13). Some articles in the collection succeed in suggesting new approaches to Soviet culture (e.g., Catriona Kelly's article on populism under Khrushchev and Brezhnev). With respect to television, however, old models die hard.

Frank Ellis' article "Media as Social Engineer" in the collection moves from a discussion of Lenin's theories on the revolutionary press, through the nature of the press and radio under Stalin, to mass communication in the post-Stalin period. The section on television relies heavily on Mickiewicz's *Split Signals*. Consequently, political programming and, in particular, the discussion of "newsworthiness" (and the changes introduced under Gorbachev) constitute the focus of the section. A brief mention of the success of Mexican soap operas in the late 1980s concludes with a rather vague statement:

> [Soviet audiences'] addiction to *The Rich Also Cry*[22] underlines the total failure of some seventy years of Marxist-Leninist

[21] See, for instance Victoria Bonnell and Gregory Freidin's article "Televorot: The Role of Television Coverage in Russia's August 1991 Coup" in *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-Century Russia*, ed. Nancy Condee, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995, 22-51.

[22] *The Rich Also Cry* [aka *Los Ricos tambien lloran*], Mexico (Televisa), 1979. 248 episodes. Shown in Russia in 1991. The title of the serial has been assimilated by the Russian culture and language to such a degree that a computer search produced over a hundred references, only one of which was informative (production details). The rest ranged from proverb-like invocations to the name of a cake.

> indoctrination. It marks an affirmation of shared humanity with all its absurdities, contradictions, strengths and weaknesses over the dehumanizing effects of Soviet ideology, and of "vulgar," tear-jerking melodrama, of the kind so popular before the revolution and in the 1920s, and so detested by the Bolsheviks, over the dramas of socialist realism, or indeed traditional high culture. (220)

Not only does this conclusion replicate the old binary of an oppressive ideology of power and of the (latent) humanism of the masses, but it completely ignores the twenty-year history of the Soviet mini-series, which prepared audiences for the reception of Latin American (and later American) TV dramas.[23] Unfortunately, the only two Soviet mini-series Ellis mentions are *Seventeen Moments of Spring* and *TASS Is Authorized to Announce* (1984), which are characterized as "escapist" (219).

What many Western studies demonstrated, often against their own assumptions, is that the impact of Soviet television was more subtle and mediated than the one postulated in the Soviet media doctrine and expected by Western experts. As David Powell bluntly, if somewhat overstating the argument, put it his 1975 study of Soviet viewing patterns: "The poor quality of most political broadcasts, plus the availability in most cities of more than one channel, represent significant barriers to any official effort to use television for political socialization purposes. As a result, television in the USSR is basically a vehicle for light entertainment " (29). While this

[23] The juxtaposition of "shared humanity" with "dramas of socialist realism" does not quite stand up to a serious analysis. The element of social drama was strong in all the TV productions that became blockbusters in Russia, starting with the Brazilian "historical soap" *Escrava Isaura*, which combined a sentimental love story between a slave owner and a slave with social commentary, and through contemporary Mexican "telenovelas." As one of the Russian critics astutely notes, "A rich guy, a bureaucrat, or a politician can be a villain, whereas 'señor engineer,' 'señor architect, or 'señor doctor' can never be one" (Sergei Fomin 2000, 20).

conclusion is, indeed, a radical departure from Cold War accounts of the medium, it presents a flipside of the view of Soviet television as a propaganda machine par excellence.

The analysis of late Soviet culture requires a systematic study of popular genres and forms. As Adele Marie Barker puts it in the Introduction to the volume *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev,* "Why popular culture? Because as Russians search for answers to the uncertainties of the present and try to forge a new discourse and a new culture for themselves, they must inevitably confront the fact that they no longer have a dominant discourse, if there ever was one to begin with" (10). It is precisely the attempt to answer this question—whether there was a coherent discourse that found expression in the Soviet mini-series of the 1970s—that underlies this dissertation research.

2. Research Methodology.

The major assumption underlying this research is that Brezhnev era television used popular culture formulas in order to foster state mythology. Specifically, I argue that 1970s Soviet mini-series attempted to translate familiar collectivist mythology, inherited from socialist realist texts, into individualized meanings by actualizing certain tropes of socialist realism and to "market" ideology through the use of adventure genre formulas. My analysis relies on Katerina Clark's discussion of the structure and tropes of the socialist realist novel—the major narrative genre and a model from the 1930s through the 1970s. Clark describes a masterplot, which underlies not only the genre of the "production novel" but of any socialist realist text, whether verbal or visual. Its most important elements are the positive hero, the binary view of the world (the war trope of "us" vs. "them"), and the trope of the Great Family of the Soviet people. The major device of the socialist realist aesthetic system is the positive hero, who carries the plot's ideological *dominantas*: class-mindedness, people-mindedness, party-mindedness, and idea-

mindedness. In canonical works of socialist realism[24] the positive hero fulfills a certain mission—overcoming the alien forces of capitalism, taming nature, or otherwise transforming the chaotic "old" reality—and in the process matures into a conscious member of the Great Family. The *Bildungs* masterplot relies on narrative teleology and strong closure, which establish the unity of ideological victory and personal maturation. The symbolic closure also anchors what Clark calls the "modal schizophrenia" (1981, 37) of socialist realism: the interpretation of the past and the present in terms of the utopian reality-to-be, a communist future where history will be suspended.

In its focus on the hero at the expense of narrative interest, in its overt didacticism, and in privileging social purpose over aesthetic considerations, the Soviet novel was a direct heir of the 19th-century Russian realist novel. The major function of the epic Soviet novel, and of Stalinist cinematic narratives, was to forge a new Soviet identity. Likewise, 1970s television mini-series were the last attempt to portray a coherent Soviet identity by adjusting socialist realist model to the new medium and economic realities.

The objective of my research is to describe the mini-series as a form of mediation between narrative models of socialist realism and the new cultural values and economic reality of the Brezhnev era. As a major television form of the 1970s, the mini-series functioned as a vehicle of official discourse, fostering myths and values inherited from previous cultural periods. Some of them were only slightly modified versions of Stalinist mythology (e.g., the myth of revolution and the Civil War as the sacred cradles of the new social order); others were new myths emerging out of the Thaw culture (e.g., the myth of the socialism "with a human face");

[24] Clark provides a list of "exemplary" Soviet novels that were repeatedly mentioned in speeches to Congresses of the Writers' Union as model works of the socialist realist method. (1981, 262-263).

yet others had been challenged in the years following Stalin's death but still defined public discourse (e.g., the myths of progress and the inevitability of the communist future).

In my description of the transformations these myths underwent in 1970s television productions I use Roland Barthes's discussion of myth as depoliticized speech, which does not deny or hide anything but merely distorts things: “its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (Sontag 1982, 132). While Barthes focuses on the bourgeois myth, his description of the mechanism of giving "historical intention a natural justification" is applicable to Stalinist mythology. By the late 1920s the dynamic revolutionary culture, which, to use Barthes's terminology "made" the world, gave way to Stalinist "celebration" of the new world. To a large degree, Stalinist mythology was perpetuated by mass circulated epic forms of verbal and visual culture, which, moreover, emulated high culture forms.

The transformation of Soviet myths in television productions occurred along two lines. At the level of the narrative it involved a diversification of the masterplot. While still adhering to the general syntax of a socialist realist narrative, new adventure genres manifest an adjustment of major Soviet tropes, and of the myths they expressed, to the demands of popular culture productions. At the level of the medium, the format of television mini-series triggered radical changes in the representational codes of Soviet visual narratives. Episodic structure, emphasis on dialogue, recycling tropes and narratives, as well as the nature of the television screen (small size, lower resolution, domestic setting) deprived even the most straightforward and epic narratives of their ideological “aura” and monumental stance. The development of Soviet mini-series from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, therefore, involved two interconnected processes:

the gradual shift from film aesthetics to purely television aesthetics, and the accompanying fragmentation and popularization of Soviet narratives. John Fiske notes that there is a correlation between the degree of conventionality and the popularity or decodability of an aesthetic construct: "In general, the more conventional and constraining the code, the more popular and less high brow is the work of art" (61). The popularity of serial television programs, then, is due to their ability to engage and recycle (or sustain) certain generic codes of representation and cultural meanings that audiences share.

I examine three genres of the mini-series: the spy thriller, the police procedural, and the detective story. The major reason for the choice of adventure genres over, for instance, the historical drama, is that all three genres privilege narratives of control: over individual irrationality, over social environment, and over meaning. In this respect, the mini-series re-engage with the myth of modernity as the remaking of society and human beings themselves in accordance with a rational plan, the myth which lies at the center of Stalinist aesthetics. Stalinist literary and cinematic narratives relied on teleological movement: narratively—towards the resolution of all conflicts, symbolically—towards the bright future. This rationalized and optimistic view of modernity, however, undergoes a major transformation in the mini-series. Mini-series of the 1970s privilege genres, in which clarity of meaning is conveyed through conventions. The spy thriller, the police procedural, and the detective genre outline the boundaries of the community and distinguish between what is acceptable and what is not. But this genre clarity barely compensates for the ambiguity inherent in the structure of serialized productions.

My analysis of the 1970s Soviet mini-series examines genre conventions as a system of signs functioning within larger systems of signs. Specifically, the genres of Soviet television are

considered within the visual and verbal culture of post-Stalin Soviet culture. I approach culture and the texts it produces as communicative systems (1) in which every element derives its meaning from its relationship to other elements; (2) which circulates signs that combine into codes; and (3) in which signs and codes are conventional ways of representing cultural meanings and values. Hence, both the codes and the meanings that these codes communicate are not fixed but depend on cultural context and an interpretative community.

The next two sections are designed to provide the necessary background for a discussion of the mini-series. First, I describe the socialist realist visual canon as it existed specifically in Staliniist spy films and its transformation in the 1950s and 1960s. Second, I situate television as the medium of Brezhnev era culture.

3. Socialist Realist Masterplot and its Fragmentation after 1953.

3.1. Defense Culture and the Soviet Scout Film.

The Soviet cinematic spy thriller was in many ways the archetypal model for adventure texts. The war trope, i.e., the opposition of a Soviet "us" and a capitalist "them," which was the central trope of 20th century Russo-Soviet culture, found its clearest expression in the genre of the spy thriller. In this respect, both thematically and formally Soviet police procedurals and detective films inherit the basic visual codes of the Stalinist spy film. A semiotic description of this core genre of Soviet culture is, therefore, necessary for an analysis of its fragmentation, structural modifications, and ideological mutations in 1970s television productions.

The spy plot was, undoubtedly, one of the central generic and, more broadly, cultural models of Soviet culture. Historically, it originated in the "defense culture" of the 1930s, which circulated narratives about anti-Soviet bourgeois conspiracies. Spy thrillers were among the few genres actively promoted by the state under the label of "defense literature" and "defense films"

(*oboronnaia literatura* and *oboronnye fil'my*)—stories about imperialism's attempts to turn back the "wheel of history" by penetrating Soviet borders and destroying socialism. As their official name indicates, the major function of defense films was to implant in the citizenry the idea that the safety and integrity of the first socialist country as a political system and—even more importantly—as a new type of community, was under constant threat. The idea of national security lay at the core of both literary and cinematic texts and cut across many genres.

Soviet defense culture dates to the early 1930s—the period of centralization of political power by the Communist Party and the tightening of controls over cultural production. But the roots of Soviet paranoia can be traced to 1924 when the concept of "world revolution"—the central trope of Lenin's policies—was replaced by the doctrine of "socialism in one country." The Soviet Union found itself in a hostile environment. The trope of a Soviet "us" vs. a capitalist "them" became the expression of this anxiety of isolation. It did not take long for defense to become a central idea of virtually all Soviet culture industries.

The organization most directly responsible for the production of defense literature under Stalin was LOKAF—the Literary Union of the Red Army and Fleet [Literaturnoe Ob"edinenie Krasnoi Armii i Flota], formed in 1930.[25] It had its own journals: *Volley* [Zalp] in Leningrad and *LOKAF* (renamed *Znamia* in 1933) in Moscow. I. Bekher, one of LOKAF's major theoreticians, expressed the organization's position in the following terms: "We should broaden the front of defense literature to ensure that the issues of war and the danger of war become an organic, inalienable part of our fiction works on building socialism . . . Every fact concerning

[25] LOKAF was one of the many organizations that sprang up during the "proletarian" phase of post-revolutionary culture (1928-1932). Incidentally, it was the only organization to survive the Central Committee Resolution of 1932, which liquidated RAPP, ARK, and other professional proletarian organizations within the arts that claimed to speak on matters of culture "in the name of the Party."

the building of our socialism (as well as the entire project itself) has its own defense aspect" (qtd. in Dobrenko 160).

The film industry did not hesitate to produce films that took the direction advised by the Party. In a 1932 letter "To All Creative Workers in Soviet Cinema," signed by Vsevolod Pudovkin, Esfir Shub and other prominent filmmakers, the Secretariat of the Russian Association of Workers of Revolutionary Cinematography (RosARRK) stated: "In our films we must widely popularize our peace policy and the need for constant vigilance against imperialist provocations and summon . . . all those who labor to the defense of the USSR" (qtd. in Taylor 323). From 1935 until the German invasion in 1941, more than twenty defense films were released, at a time when total annual film production averaged merely 45 full feature films.[26]

As an exegetic system, Stalinist mythology was built around two major symbolic axes: the horizontal—"us" (the Soviet people) vs. "them" (world imperialism, the White Guards, saboteurs, etc.)—and the vertical—the hierarchically constructed "Great Family," with Father Stalin as its head, watching over Mother Russia and his children-people. The organic metaphor of the collective body (resisting penetration and expelling any alien matter), and the social metaphor of the "Great Family" intersected to create the myth of a monumental historical antagonism. This myth was based on the postulate that the battle pre-existed the individual and was bound to continue until the victory of world communism. It is not surprising that the spy genre occupied the central place within this system, being a distilled expression of the antagonism.

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[26] A. Macheret, *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: annotirovannyi katalog,* Vol.2 (1930-1957), Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961. Evgenii Dobrenko in *Metafora vlasti* gives a much larger number: 104 film by 1930 (175). This number, however, includes documentaries and agitation films. Similarly impressive is the literary output of defense narratives. One year after the formation of LOKAF, 61 books on "defense themes" were published (Dobrenko 162). Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *Aerograd* (1935)—a poetic saga about attempts by Japanese samurai and Russian Old Believers to prevent the construction of a communist city on the Pacific coast—helped to pioneer the genre.

Consequently, the idea of national defense was not just a theme, a motif, or a genre. By the early 1930s, it became the backbone, or the deep structure, of any literary or cinematic text. Stalinist defense literature and film treated not the problem of war and peace (political, class, or ideological) but peace *as* war. Peace was a moment of deceptive stability, concealing a global capitalist conspiracy against the first socialist republic, or a local military conflict, which, however, had universal ramifications. The war trope defined not only the frontline imagery, but also the nature of the conflict, its resolution, and the collective hero as the protagonist.

The defense film and literature most fully articulated the ideology of national integrity under attack. However, military or industrial espionage, sabotage, and wrecking were major issues not only in spy thrillers but also in the so-called production novels. The struggle for the fulfillment of Party economic plans was both modeled on the war conflict and described through war tropes. Industrial and, especially, "strategic" military machines had the aura of sacred objects, and especially unchallenged among them were airplanes. In *Engineer Kochin's Mistake* (dir. Aleksandr Macheret 1939), the blueprints for a new Soviet aircraft fall into the hands of a Western spy and function as the center of gravity around which dynamic action rotates: the murder of a seductress (played by Stalin's favorite actress, Liubov' Orlova), the repentance and punishment of a criminally negligent aircraft designer, and the capture of foreign spies. Neither the airplane nor its drawings feature in the film as real objects; the symbolic meaning of the object, however, effectively splits the world into "them" and "us"—the NKVD investigator and the vigilant family of a Jewish tailor.[27]

[27] The NKVD investigator is played by Mikhail Zharov, whose cinematic career is quite remarkable. Among his major roles is Peter the Great's aide Aleksandr Men'shikov in Vladimir Petrov's *Peter the First (*Part I-1937, Part II-1938), Ivan the Terrible's henchman Maliuta Skuratov in Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (Part I-1944, Part II-1946), and a village detective, a local Stalin-like paternal figure of authority, in a Stagnation television mini-series (see chapter four).

The positive heroes of Stalinist spy thrillers, who fully embodied and enacted collective values, were major carriers of both national mythology and narrative teleology. Closure, invariably achieved through the capture of foreign spies and internal enemies by heroic border guards or the NKVD[28], articulated Soviet mythology in its totality by constructing a peculiar mise-en-abîme.[29] The arrest of a foreign spy and his pseudo-Soviet marionettes was just a microcosm, the supreme cultural distillation of a similar socio-political struggle across every square inch of the country, which in turn was part of the mortal battle between socialism and capitalism on a universal scale.

Positive heroes were action heroes, who, however, were never individualized or allowed a personal life: emotions (with the exception of love for the Motherland) and self-reflexivity were suspect. NKVD agents, border guards, and the Soviet people were represented as one and the same. In fact, failure to volunteer to help catch a spy meant becoming an easy target for the enemy or simply to become the enemy oneself.[30] Patriotism, then, was constructed not as a matter of choice but as a natural quality, akin to the native language. Like the latter, patriotism and vigilance were never individual issues but defined the very essence of the Soviet collective.

[28] NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), aka CheKa, GPU, KGB—was the Soviet state security and intelligence agency. CheKa (Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counterrevolution and Sabotage) was organized on 20 December 1917. Feliks Dzerzhinskii was the head of the CheKa, and the first head of its successor—the GPU (State Political Administration). In 1934 the GPU was absorbed into NKVD. The agency changed its name several time and modified its functions until Stalin's death, invariably broadening its sphere of influence. In 1954 it was renamed the KGB and retained this name until the end of the Soviet Union in 1991.

[29] Soviet newspaper titles provide a perfect expression of such a totalitarian tautology: *Pravda, Moskovskaia pravda, Komsomol'skaia Pravda, Pionerskaia Pravda, etc.* In addition, almost every provincial town had its own local "Pravda," which, however, was always in total compliance with the centrally published editions.

[30] The criminal code article on "non-informing" survived well into the 1970s. It stipulates up to three years in jail for failure to report state crimes (i.e., high treason, espionage, wrecking etc.).

For instance, texts of the era give many examples of patriotic non-political criminals.[31] When accidentally detecting a foreign spy, vigilant Soviet crooks cooperated with the NKVD, often at the cost of their own freedom, and were thus re-integrated back into the collective.

Children were often featured in these films as the most vigilant social members. Even when they were not the protagonists, children comprised both the primary material from which vigilant patriots were recruited and the major target of the enemy (it is their future that was threatened). Raw material of the revolution, children were also a natural outgrowth of it. Unlike "unstable" women or peasants, they required no re-education. The pantheon of young pioneer-heroes, exposing class enemies and foreign spies grew throughout the 1930s-1950s, culminating with war-time myths of single combat between eight-year-old Soviet pioneers and Nazi generals.[32] The organic Soviet Family also included "patriotically-minded" dogs. For instance, in the film *Dzhul'bars* (dir. Vladimir Shneiderov 1936), the vigilant dog functioned as a visual replica of his master-border guard (Figure 1). Dzhul'bars became an iconic figure and entered children's games, becoming a sign in a greater cultural text.[33]

[31] Reformed criminals-turned-patriots feature prominently in the late 1930s works of Lev Sheinin, who combined writing with a career as an NKVD investigator.
[32] The last representative of this breed is, ironically, the protagonist of Andrei Tarkovskii's *My Name is Ivan* (1962). Ivan, however, displays an "aftermath of belief"—a paranoid consciousness haunted by visions and a suicidal bravery.
[33] In Sergei Livnev's 1991 film *Hammer and Sickle* the "border guard game" crowns the creation of the "new Soviet family" of Stalinism: a perfect Soviet man (created out of a peasant girl through a sex-change operation), an exemplary female worker, and an adopted girl from revolutionary Spain. At the film's closure, the paralyzed protagonist, whose body is displayed in a revolutionary museum, initiates a new round of the "border guard game." This time, however, he encourages his daughter to use a real gun. Getting himself killed is the only way the hero can break out of the borders of the great Soviet family.

Figure 1

Equally collective was the representation of the villains, often identified only by the type of their subversive activity and, at times, by their ethnic features (especially the Japanese and the Germans).[34] Representation of ethnic "otherness" was also important in another respect. Visual markers and accented speech representing ethnic features became efficient means of signifying both the "multinationalism" of Soviet power and, when necessary, a particular "trouble zone." The grotesque and often somewhat satanic image of the enemy in 1930s spy films was in part justified by his ethnic and/or political otherness, and in part inspired by the rhetoric of speeches at the 1930s show trials. Serving as both public enactment and public justification of the purges, the trials effectively neutralized any sympathy to the accused by referring to them in animalistic or physiological terms ("mad dogs," "hyenas," "degenerates," etc.).

Heroes and villains were twin brothers, presupposing each other's existence both as ideological opponents and as narrative antagonists. The theme of eternal battle, traveling through films, songs, romanticized in poetry, and hailed by the revolutionary intelligentsia (see, for example Aleksandr Blok's "Eternal battle . . . Through blood and dust, we can only dream of rest" [192]) was crystallized in spy and saboteur films as single combat. The war trope, therefore, was the archetypal representational model for spy films. Although usually set during

[34] Teutonic knights in Eisenstein's *Aleksandr Nevskii* (1938) commit unspeakable atrocities (e.g., throw children into fire). They are, however, feminized and thus inferior to Russian warriors: the Germans' long blond curls and white, dress-like capes contrast with the Russians' masculine, if equally stylized, faces and outfits.

peace time, defense films evoked war-conflict associations by, on the one hand, making military and other strategic objects the targets of enemy action and, on the other, by representing an ideology of suspicion and vigilance as necessary and natural to any true patriot. The uncovering of hidden enemies among the citizenry constituted a necessary element of the defense film. Former Russian White Guards and "kulaks" (rich peasants) played a major role as the fifth column of imperialist spies.[35] Their subversive activity, in fact, did not require any motivation or context. Represented rather schematically, they functioned as signifiers of the monumental class war.

Temporally, defense films were usually set in the contemporary Soviet Union, with the specific location depending on the "enemy of the day," or, more precisely, on the particular military conflict in which the Soviet Union was engaged at the time. However, this "ideological temporality" was either past-oriented (exposing former White Guards, kulaks, and other disguised "splinters" of the old regime) or future-oriented (many films, e.g., *The Fourth Periscope* [dir. Viktor Eisymont 1939] enact an imminent future war, which, in turn, could impede the coming of the "bright communist future").[36] The consistent avoidance of the present, characteristic of most Stalinist novels and films, was especially prevalent in spy films. This "modal schizophrenia" both contributed to the general paranoia of the purges and ensured the viewer's identification with the collective goal rather than with any specific character.

[35] Here, too, *Aleksandr Nevskii* offers a model illustration. After defeating the Teutons, Aleksandr organizes a "court of justice" in the city square. The verdicts are in compliance with 1930s politics. Foot soldiers (the German proletariat) are pardoned because they were "forced to fight," the few knights who had survived drowning in the icy lake are exchanged for soap. The only person who gets harsh punishment is the traitor—a Russian collaborator with the Teutons. On Aleksandr's suggestion the crowd tears him apart.

[36] Even the musical comedy gave tribute to the defense theme. For instance, Ivan Pyr'ev's 1939 collective farm musical *Tractor Drivers* is story of labor and love set in the idyllic countryside. The narrative, however, is punctuated by war allusions. For instance, the scene of plowing is accompanied by a song with lyrics threatening any potential invaders. The song, the visually aggressive sequence of overturned earth, and the powerful figures of tractor drivers effectively transform the peaceful tractor into a tank.

The national border itself can be considered these films' major character. Natural boundaries—rivers, mountains, or the seacoast—had their symbolic counterparts in the hearts and minds of the people defending them. The opening sequence of Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *Aerograd* (1935), for instance, cuts between panning shots of nature (the ocean, the taiga, the sky) and a vigilant Soviet tiger-hunter, who is pursuing Japanese infiltrators. The binary vision of the world had constant visual support in the insurmountable "natural-ideological" frontline, which encircled the country but originated in Stalin's headquarters.

While from the outside this semiotic system was visually circumscribed by natural boundaries, at its ideological core lay the interrogation scene—a cinematic rendition of a public trial which identified the viewer with the interrogator and effectively demonstrated both the "real" face of the enemy and the triumph of Stalin and the Soviet collective. The interrogation scene enjoyed broad cultural circulation, functioning as a peculiar mise-en-scène of Soviet culture.[37] Its instantiations can be found well into the liberal 1960s and 1970s, where they took the form of vilifications during Party or work-place meetings. It is little wonder that cinematic and televisual variants of this familiar ritual proliferated in spy, police procedural, and detective genres. The interrogation scene had the narrative potential to become the ideological and structural center of Soviet visual texts—a promise that was fully realized in the Stagnation mini-series. A static camera, dialogue-driven narrative, shot-reverse-shots of "us" and "them"—all of these features were ideally suited for both the ideological and the formal requirements of the Soviet spy, police procedural, and detective television series.

The conventions of the Stalinist spy thriller were to a large degree summarized in Boris Barnet's *The Scout's Exploit* (1947), a film that enjoyed vast popularity throughout late Soviet

history. The purity of the film's genre was a result of Barnet's bent towards popular, formula-driven cinema. The protagonist—NKVD Major Fedotov—is assigned to capture a Nazi general behind the enemy lines. Facing Fedotov in his own house, full of adjutants and guards, the general surrenders to Fedotov, his spirit "crushed" by the major's passionate speech about his love for Russia.

The fulfillment of the mission (the capture of the general in person) is framed by three sequences: the protagonist's departure from and return to his wife, Fedotov's acceptance of the assignment and the "blessing" from his NKVD superior, and by the flights there and back. The dynamic action is underscored by the focused nature of the protagonist's mission and the clearly specified spatial and temporal limits. After crossing the border he temporarily loses contact with Moscow "Control" and immediately starts making mistakes, until communication is restored. His strength as a heroic scout, therefore, rests solely on his indissoluble link with the Soviet land.

The major tropes of the Stalinist film—the Manichean imaging of a Soviet "us" vs. a capitalist "them," a positive hero, and the "Great Soviet Family"—shaped the paranoia of a permanent threat to Soviet national integrity, and contributed to the consolidation of the so-called "grand" style of Stalinist cinema. The unambiguous interpretation of these tropes by the audience, to a large degree, relied on the transparent narrative and visual syntax of the scout film. First, a single plot line and ironclad closure guaranteed the teleological progression of the scout film's narrative and a consistent focus on the positive hero. Second, plots were primarily driven by action. Third, the constant presence of the border as a visual divider between "us" and "them" signaled the irreconcilable nature of the conflict. This narrative and visual canon started

[37] Vladimir Makanin's 1993 novel *Baize-Covered Table with Decanter* [*Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine*], which won the Russian Booker Prize in 1994, organizes the narrative around the mise-en-scène and familiar figures of the interrogation scene.

changing after Stalin's death, first in film, then, in a much more radical way, in Soviet television productions.

3.2. Domestic Crime Film.

The holistic ideology and worldview of Stalinist cinematic narratives had already started disintegrating by the early 1950s in Soviet cinema. Thaw culture addressed the gap between official and individual discourse, and between national myth and individual reality. As the Soviet community was attempting to come to terms with the past, it internalized the conflict represented by the horizontal axis of Stalinist culture. In Stalinist cinema, any criminal activity within the country was seen as potentially "counter-revolutionary," i.e. a political crime impeding society's progress toward communism, and, therefore, was a subject proper only for defense/spy films. The Thaw redefined the boundaries of the community: "we" was no longer seen as flawless and homogeneous. This reconceptualized community allowed space for internal conflicts, deviations, and doubts without depriving its problematic figures of their Soviet identity.

As a consequence, the spy thriller was temporarily displaced to the periphery of the Soviet genre system. If Stalinist narratives strove to contain the "vast expanses" of the country and the totality of its goals in a single text, Thaw cinema made the individual and the family the new focal points of narrative. Melodrama and the domestic detective film, in turn, moved to the center of the genre system. The first allowed both an examination of an individual's inner life and a contemplation of larger social problems within the safe and familiar limits of a nuclear family. Detective films, which disappeared after their brief popularity in the 1920s, re-appeared virtually for the first time in the late 1950s-1960s, displacing the politically incorrigible "them" to the periphery and focusing instead on the re-education of socially deviant members within the Soviet community.

As in many other respects, Khrushchev-era culture displayed an ambiguous attitude towards the detective genre. As the first literary detectives appeared in journals, starting with the publication of Arkadii Adamov's novel *The Speckled File* in the journal *Iunost'* [Youth], critical discussion focused on the educational potential of the "new Soviet detective," especially in relation to the younger audience—the major consumer of adventure literature.

At the same time, the concern with preserving the high literary standards of the reading public made the status of detective fiction unclear. The entry on detective literature in the 50-volume *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, published from 1949 to 1957, criticized the genre not only because it "ultimately expresses the triumph of the bourgeois law," but also on the grounds of its popular nature: "Piled up horrors, dangers, and murders, cheap thrills, sexual perversions, characteristic of literary detective plots, give it a flavor of a dime-novel (129). Even more objectionable than the naturalism of the genre was the protagonist of the "bourgeois detective"—an individualistic private sleuth. Despite 1950s gestures of liberalization, the function of protecting socialist law and order could only be performed by the collective efforts of the state police.

The newborn Soviet detective faced a dilemma: the need to separate itself from Western tradition while at the same time using its models as the only ones available. This impasse resulted in a number of compromises, both on the level of administrative decisions and on the level of individual artistic texts. First, a discussion of the nature and functions of the detective genre in a socialist society coincided with the publication of works by Adamov and other pioneers of the genre. Even though a 1958 Central Committee resolution condemned Soviet imitations of Western detectives, the genre firmly established itself as a literary and cinematic phenomenon, and as a venue for literary journals' and film studios' commercial success.

Second, Western detective authors were classified according to their suitability for Soviet audiences. Thus, the French writer George Simenon was a welcome presence as a model (because of his emphasis on the "why" at the expense of "how" in his novels), while Agatha Christie, with her individualistic and idiosyncratic sleuths and interest in the mechanics of crime, fell into an undesirable category.

Third, most Soviet literary and cinematic productions of the time that were advertised as detectives dramas were, in fact, police procedurals. Typically, Soviet crime stories combined adventure with tackling social problems of post-Stalin society. Thaw crime films (e.g., *Rumiantsev's Case* [dir. Iosif Kheifits 1955]*, The Speckled File* [dir. Nikolai Dostal' 1958], and *Case No. 306* [dir. Anatolii Rybakov 1956]) often feature a "false father"—typically, an older criminal, who lures or tricks a young orphaned man onto the path of crime. The apprehension of the "false father" is contingent on an older policeman (the "true father") winning the young man's trust. Until the mid-1960s Soviet detectives remained the last refuge of the re-education project and a major battleground against Western popular culture. As Timothy Pogacar notes, the only way to free the protagonist from institutional control—and from the masterplot of re-education— was "by distancing him from his home, the police profession, and even the country" (122).

The signal of the domestic detective's transformation in the late 1960s was the emergence of films that used crime plots to explore contemporary social issues, as well as to comment ironically on the genre itself. Such films as *Beware of a Car* [Beregis' avtomobilia] (El'dar Riazanov 1966) and *Prisoner of the Caucasus* [Kavkazskaia plenitsa] (Leonid Gaidai 1966) featured amateur detectives who, within the existing system of values, were also criminals. Their investigation implicitly targeted a larger community that allowed crimes to take place. In

both films, the police proved to be ineffectual, either by virtue of their reliance on the outdated ideals of male friendship and individual transparency, or because of the (understated) system of bribes and patriarchal relations. It is, therefore, important that in both films the detective-criminal is an outsider in the community. In Gaidai's case, the protagonist is a student who comes to a picturesque Caucasian village to study local traditions and is tricked into participating in a kidnapping. Riazanov's hero is an idealistic insurance agent[38], who cannot accept the consumerist society and punishes "criminals" of his choice by stealing their cars. These films mask the implied message that only a misfit can be a defender of social justice: viewer identification with the protagonist is complicated by an ironic narrative and voice-over in Riazanov's film and by an eccentric, slapstick narrative in Gaidai's.

Both the Soviet domestic crime film and its parodies contributed to the decomposition of the socialist realist masterplot and its generic variants in Soviet cinema. Irony, fragmentation, and self-reflexivity establish themselves as legitimate discursive practices. These new discursive practices demanded a new medium, and television became that vehicle, marrying inherited Soviet tropes and narratives with new practices.

3.3. Films about Soviet Scouts and the Emergence of the Mini-Series.

The end of the Thaw saw not only the emergence of television as the dominant medium of popular culture, but also the resurrection of more conservative cultural narratives. For this reason the first Soviet television mini-series turned to films about Soviet scouts as their narrative predecessors. *The Scout's Exploit* offered a perfect structural model. First, it introduced the figure of a Soviet agent crossing enemy lines and focused on his mission among the Nazi "them." Second, the film featured not only an individualized but a charismatic hero, played by

[38] Until 1991, there was no insurance in the western sense of the word, only centrally planned outlets from the ministry of finance. Gosstrakh (State Insurance Company) had a monopoly on all insurance services and had its

Soviet film star Pavel Kadochnikov. This redefined both the nature of the purpose-driven defense film, and the nature of the viewers' engagement with the text. Third, Barnet was a pioneer of the new genre— "films about Soviet agents"— which conformed to the preceding model ideologically but generically was more of an adventure war film. This new genre proved a successful and productive model for Soviet cinematic and televisual spy thrillers throughout the post-Stalin era. The major discovery of this type of film was the use of war as either a setting or a general framework for references and motivations. Both the Civil War (1918-1921) and the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) provided inexhaustible material for adventure plots, an ideologically immaculate documentary frame, a believable motivation for conflicts, and a legitimate excuse for multi-episodic productions.

The reincarnation of the spy story on the television screen symbolically marks the end of the Thaw. The rise of the spy thriller mini-series in the late 1960s coincides with two phenomena: the tightening of Party control over cultural production and the arrival of a generation for whom Stalinist purges, civic awareness, and Thaw sincerity existed only as literary and cinematic narratives. Television, tape-recorders, rock music, and Western consumer goods became parts of everyday reality, effectively separating the public from the private life of the populace. Television, in particular, redefined viewing as a private activity and domesticated canonical cinematic texts and official messages to the status of a living-room image.

Sergei Kolosov and Evgenii Tashkov were the two major television directors of the 1960s. Within six years they made two mini-series each, all depicting Soviet agents. The pioneer of the Soviet spy thriller mini-series, and of "multi-episodic" television films in general, was the four-episode *Drawing Fire* (Kolosov 1963-64). Set in 1941 in a town occupied by the Nazis, it tells the story of a Soviet woman who, together with Polish prisoners, organizes a

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own "production plan."

resistance group and destroys Nazi planes. Shortly after this first successful experiment, two other mini-series appear: *Major Whirlwind* (Tashkov 1967), which tells of Soviet agents saving Krakow from Nazi destruction in 1944, and *Operation "Cartel"* (Kolosov 1967, 4 episodes)—a story of the CheKa's liquidation of a counterrevolutionary conspiracy supported by the White emigration.

As this brief content description makes clear, mini-series directors, including the producers of the two TV blockbusters of the 1970s—*His Highness's Adjutant* (dir. Evgenii Tashkov 1969) and *Seventeen Moments of Spring*—adopted the safe and well-trodden path of the socialist realist cinematic tradition to introduce a novel generic form. The revolution, the Civil War, and the Great Patriotic War provided, on the one hand, inexhaustible material for adventure plots, and on the other, an ideologically immaculate and symbolically charged setting. It is not surprising that not a single TV mini-series incurred serious criticism from the Party, the military, or the KGB—a telling fact considering TV's mass audience and the flood of criticism that fell upon cinema at the time.[39]

But conservative as they were in their choice of topics and consistent distance from the present, those TV productions loaded the canonical Soviet past with all the ambiguities of early Stagnation culture. It was precisely the mini-series format that brought about a heterogeneity of meanings rarely found in earlier texts and redefined the major elements of the Soviet film about scouts. The mini-series diluted the structure of canonical narratives because of their fragmented, episodic structure, focus on dialogue, and multiple narrative lines. In a way, the choice of key moments of Soviet history as historical backgrounds for the dramatic action of the mini-series

[39] The 1967 report "On the Contemporary State of Soviet Cinema," submitted to the Central Committee of the CPSU by its Culture Department, lists multiple "deviations" from the canon committed during the Thaw. Among the gravest, the report mentions "the loss of the tradition of politically passionate, civic cinema," the foregrounding

contributed to the radical redefinition of the canonical masterplot. Since the historical outcome of events was known and the resolution predetermined, emphasis shifted to narrative complications, as well as to character psychology and motivation. In fact, an attempt at historical authenticity in such mini-series as *Operation "Cartel"* and *Seventeen Moments of Spring*—an abundant use of documentary footage (*Operation "Cartel"* went as far as to use excerpts from Dziga Vertov's 1922 documentary *Cine-Truth* and Walter Ruttmann's 1927 *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*), witness accounts, voice-over narration, black-and-white film—ironically achieved the opposite result. Instead of recreating the heroic past with documentary accuracy, these devices offered an interpretation of the past, its re-evaluation steeped in all the ambiguities of contemporary culture. Most importantly, the opposition between "us" and "them"—the ideological and representational axis of Soviet cultural texts—gradually turned into a familiar landscape for probing contemporary social and moral problems.

Audiences did not wait to respond to the new spectacle, as indicated by viewers' letters and polls. As a survey of Leningrad TV audiences conducted in 1967 indicates, the highest popularity was enjoyed by feature films screened on TV, with "serial films" coming a close third after the popular quiz show "KVN" (Powell 9-10).[40] Furthermore, the appearance of the mini-series practically rescued 1960s television from a flood of staged theatrical productions and economic newscasts that were drawing criticism from all sides. As a rule, mini-series were broadcast during prime time (7-11pm), immediately preceding the most influential news program Time (Vremia), which functioned as the forum for the official point of view. This privileged

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of "facts of material and emotional distress," the bent towards portraying "insignificant, inert heroes," and the "false understanding of human solidarity as class conciliation" (qt. in Valerii Fomin 1996, 12-13).

[40] Difficulties with data about viewers' responses to the mini-series arise not only from the scarcity of TV surveys, but also from the tradition of referring to the mini-series as a "multi-episodic film." It is only possible to assess the popularity of the mini-series indirectly, by the frequency of their re-runs. Thus, *Seventeen Moments of Spring*—with a running time of over fifteen hours—was shown twice in a two-month period in 1973 and rebroadcast again the

time slot was reserved for programs on important socio-political issues and concerts of classical music.

The first mini-series addressed audiences that were looking for familiar images and favorite films to be consumed in the privacy and comfort of home. And indeed, the earliest Soviet mini-series were exactly that: extended films, delaying resolution by means of narrative complications. Both *Drawing Fire* and *Major Whirlwind* were historical war narratives packaged as spy thrillers. In their treatment of the war, both productions, in fact, properly adhere to the aesthetics of the Thaw. Recasting war as a private experience, they focus on the individual heroism of Soviet agents and make love interest a prominent part of the narrative. Even though the agents are professionals, they are constructed as victims, orphans lost amidst a powerful enemy. Both productions lack an optimistic resolution: the triumphant offensive by Soviet troops is "superimposed" on the deaths of the protagonists. The closure, therefore, effectively distinguishes between the historical/public and personal/private meanings (or, for that matter, between the Soviet optimistic and the Russian "inevitable" ending[41]). This split becomes a permanent feature of Stagnation television productions. The static mythology of the state and the dynamic narrative models of entertainment clearly move apart.

Spy thrillers were efficient vehicles for the two hot political issues of the decade: the Cold War, which in visual texts was constructed by directly linking NATO (and especially the United States) with neo-Nazism, and the campaign of "cleansing" the image of the KGB in the public eye (by returning to its myth of origin as the "purifying fire" of the revolution), an image clearly damaged by Khrushchev's exposing the role of the KGB in the Stalinist purges.

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following year. Since the end of the Soviet Union, this production has been broadcast several times a year, often on multiple channels.

Accordingly, the construction of a positive and human secret agent was one of the reasons for shifting the emphasis from the subversive activity of imperialist spies on "our" territory to the difficult but noble "work" of our own agents on "theirs." By the 1950s, diverse villains had already congealed into one. Germany became the archetypal evil, joined by America in its claims to world domination and military superiority.

In the 1960s the Soviet culture industry was still ambiguous about its investment priorities. As a result, simultaneously with producing TV mini-series about Soviet scouts it produced several feature films about a Russian scout who turned into a super agent à la Bond. Precisely because of this mixed television-cinematic heritage, late 1960s and 1970s spy thrillers still retain many features of canonical Soviet cinematic narratives: a single plot line (serial rather than serious), some vestiges of action plot, and ideological binarism.

The multiple political and ideological considerations at work behind the spy thriller's world of adventure brought contradictory and often paradoxical results**.** A popular film, *The Resident's Mistake* (dir. Veniamin Dorman 1968) tells the story of a NATO agent, the son of a Russian émigré aristocrat who left for Germany after the Bolshevik revolution. The film was so popular with audiences that three sequels were released (1970, 1982, 1986). While the protagonist, a professional spy, is "out in the cold" in the Soviet Union on assignment to determine the precise location of a Soviet nuclear weapon base, he works as a cab driver, falls in love with a Russian woman, and has a child by her. He continues to support his Soviet family even when on the run from the KGB, and still later in jail. His noble behavior is consistently linked to his aristocratic origin. Moreover, he explains his decision to turn against his former NATO "Control" as his "unpaid debt" to Russia.

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[41] Iurii Tsiv'ian explains early Russian film audiences' taste for unhappy film endings as an attempt to emulate the forms of high culture. See his discussion in "Early Russian cinema: some observations" (*Inside the Film Factory*, 7-8.

The film offers a typically Stagnation-era recasting of the Stalinist myth of the "Father": the Resident's biological father (a professional spy) is killed by NATO bosses to stop him from publishing his memoirs. The hero's decision "to turn" is, thus, triggered less by ideological considerations than by personal revenge and the quest for the Symbolic Father. By the 1970s, however, the myths become muddled. The orphaned "son" is nostalgic but disoriented about which mythology he should defend—Soviet or Russian. The scene of the Resident's decision "to turn" is constructed by two signifying systems: the visual, with its panorama of imperial Leningrad/St. Petersburg, and the soundtrack, with its theme song accompanied by images of birches, rootless wandering, and a vague longing for the Motherland (figure 2). Ironically, the two lonely figures on Palace Square are both spies—a KGB agent and a soon-to-be-reformed NATO agent—sharing a moment of imperial bliss. The shot captures the nature of détente as a mutual understanding and mirror recognition of two world powers that take it upon themselves to decide the fate of the world.

Figure 2

It was precisely the quest for lost identity that made spy thrillers a favorite popular genre of the late 1960s-early 1970s. The crisis of identity found its expression in the mixed codes of representing the paradigm of "otherness." The Stalinist spy thriller barely required any motivation for the subversive activity of foreign spies: they disrupted the peaceful life of the Soviet people "simply" because they were not Soviet. Any action that was not part of "our" way of life was marked as subversive. By 1970s, the monolithic Soviet mythology was thoroughly fragmented and required narrative motivation for what had earlier been "obvious." Accordingly, the Stagnation thriller makes war a *sine qua non* of the convention. Adventure films set during the Civil War, the Great Patriotic War, or its ideological aftermath—the Cold War—allowed for intensity of conflict and dynamic action to be grounded in ideological and political stereotypes.

But while war mythology per se had indisputable authority and prevented spy thrillers from being read as pure entertainment, war behavior replaced communist ideology as an identity builder. In the *Resident* films, for instance, wartime cooperation with the Nazi regime serves as a litmus test for a person's susceptibility to recruitment by foreign intelligence agents. Loose morals and consumerism—new features of motivation and signs of new values—are secondary to the war mythology. At the same time, references to war behavior differentiate enemy spies from noble agents (like the protagonist himself), who are simply deceived "professionals" and, therefore, can still find their true Motherland. This complex construction of identity prefigures the metamorphosis of the genre in television serial productions of the 1970s.

4. Brezhnev Era Culture through the Mini-Series: Mythologies of "Developed Socialism."

One, and perhaps the major reason for the scarcity of studies of Stagnation culture beyond examination of lives and works of canonized individual writers and filmmakers is the complexity of the period itself. The 1970s is a heterogeneous space that lacks a single

ontological, as well as ideological center, a period ridden with contradictory tendencies both on the level of state politics and in the sphere of everyday life. While a comprehensive analysis of these contradictions lies outside of the scope of this research, it is necessary to outline the major paradigms that define the culture of the period and Soviet television programming in particular.

Television's victory over other forms of mass media and art in the late 1960s-1970s coincides in the Soviet Union with a shift in state ideology and the ensuing re-articulation of national and individual values. Changes in the political culture of the 1970s found concise expression in the doctrine of "developed socialism." Unlike Stalin's "future in the present" and Khrushchev's promise of communism "in twenty years," under Brezhnev the movement of society towards a bright future comes to a halt. The new Soviet Constitution adopted in 1977 declared that

> [i]n the USSR a developed socialist society has been built. At this stage, when socialism is developing on its own foundations, the creative forces of the new system and the advantages of the socialist way of life are becoming increasingly evident, and the working people are more and more widely enjoying the fruits of their great revolutionary gains (emphasis added).[42]

The concept of "developed socialism" marked the open-endedness of the Soviet project. Political stability, material prosperity, and the status quo became proofs of the system's vitality. Stagnation, then, is the ultimate attempt of the Soviet system to re-configure itself within the a-historical paradigm, without challenging the economic base or the one-party system.

[42] http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons01.html#preamble

As with any cultural period, the time limits of Stagnation depend on a particular theoretical approach, which bears upon the choice of symbolic markers. Political scientists and Western Sovietologists have variously suggested 1964 (the ouster of Khrushchev) and 1968 (the invasion of Czechoslovakia) as the beginning of Brezhnevism. Film scholars often extend Khrushchev's Thaw as far as the early 1970s, while for literature the onset of Brezhnev's cultural politics occurred in mid 1960s, culminating in the 1966 trial of Siniavskii and Daniel.[43]

As for the end of the period, the perestroika reforms begun in 1985 mark the political closure of Stagnation. However, as some Russian critics argue, two events in 1980 provided a symbolic watershed in marking the demise of Soviet mythologies. The Olympic Games in Moscow, celebrated with Victorian pompousness, dominated TV screens. At the same time, the national mourning over the death of Vladimir Vysotskii,[44] barely mentioned in the media, constituted the alternative key event. These almost simultaneous events were acted out in the street and revealed the abyss between official and popular mythology. Vysotskii's funeral made his "private" cult a public statement, openly competing with the official bombast of the Olympic Games.

Soviet television history offers its own markers, for example, the restructuring in 1970 of the State Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting, which signaled both the centralization of the two media and the acknowledgment of television's leading role. Another major event was the appearance in 1968 of a regular time slot for the major news program Time

[43] In 1966 Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel were sentenced to seven and five year in prison respectively for publishing their works abroad.

[44] Vysotskii was the unofficial voice of the 1970s: his songs were ubiquitous long before they were officially released. His personality (heavy drinking) and stage persona (the many believable masks he assumed in his songs) made him a cultural idol during his life-time and after his untimely death in 1980.

[Vremia] and the establishment of the fixed hierarchy of news sections within it.[45] Time emerged as the mouthpiece of the Party on television throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. These events, in retrospect, proved to be significant in shaping not just the internal hierarchy of programming, but also in creating the visual image of the period. Soviet TV broadcasting of the 1970s-early 1980s was a museum of socialist discourse and a model of Stagnation culture. Owned, managed, and supervised by the state, Soviet television was its most faithful mirror. The pompous verbosity of news programs constituted the discursive model for documentaries, talk shows, and the mini-series. Within the space of daily programming, Time broadcasts were framed by mini-series (where positive heroes effortlessly moved between past and present, between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany), sports broadcasts (a form of mini-war), and broadcasts of major concerts (with hierarchically organized numbers, united by a "significant" theme).[46] "Sensationalism"—crime and disaster shows, celebrity gossip, etc. —was condemned as catering to the baser instincts of audiences. Violence, while quite prominent in films about the revolution and the Great Patriotic War, was almost always a thing of the past, directed at the community rather than individuals, and rarely represented on screen. "Dead" airtime between

[45] In 1965 another important event occurred: Soviet children received their own program with a regular time slot. "Good Night, Kids!" was broadcast every night at 8:50 pm, immediately before Time. The program not only survived the end of the Soviet Union, but is quite prestigious. Currently it employs as one of its hosts Oksana Fedorova—the former "Miss Universe-2002."

[46] The two most popular TV concerts of the year were the New Year'' broadcast of The Blue Light (Goluboi ogonek) and the concert dedicated to the Day of Soviet Militia. Despite different causes for celebration—one is a popular traditional holiday, the other a state-sponsored event—the structure of the concerts was identical: from more serious official genres to "light" numbers, including pop songs, stand-up comedians, and foreign performers. The difference was defined by the respective venues. The Militia Day concert took place in a concert hall, usually the Palace of Congresses, was hosted by official figures of Soviet culture, and accommodated more "epic" and mass art forms (performances of the Moiseev dance ensemble, circus numbers, static performances of official pop-music). Both the performers and the hosts were separated from the audience by the stage; hence the entire event had a premeditated, theatrical, and official flavor. In contrast, the New Year's concert was filmed in a TV studio, with its mise-en-scène imitating a café-chantant. Performers shared tables with the studio audience, moved around the studio, and entertained the audience with entre-act conversations. The atmosphere of intimacy and the "domestic" setting imitated the TV audience's domestic gatherings at the table. The New Year's concert featured more light genres and foreign, often Western, guests and performers. The concert started at midnight and continued well into the morning hours, often followed by the concert "Stars of the Foreign Pop-Scene." The timing of the latter—after 4 am— however, reduced the audience considerably.

broadcasts and a virtual absence of advertising preserved individual programs as discrete texts. Following the cinematic tradition of "anniversary films"[47] many television programs (including mini-series) were cued to significant socio-political events. Thus, the program's meaning was often anchored by a pre-set political agenda. Soviet television "flow," therefore, existed not as a stream of images but as an unending illustration of the ideological master narrative.

Despite this external rigidity Brezhnev-era television was not, as it was often presented in Western accounts, the monological voice of the party. First, unlike radio or the press, television broadcasts had an appeal of a verbal text supplied with a picture, even if the latter was reduced to a "talking head." In contrast to Khrushchev's occasional television appearances, Brezhnev and his entourage regularly appeared on television. Television played a big role in turning politics into an aestheticized, ritualized, and largely predictable, spectacle. It displayed the ageing face and body of power, thus demythologizing it. It is not an accident that the 1970s witnessed the flourishing of irreverent jokes about the major figures of the Soviet political pantheon and, above all, of Brezhnev.

Second, the discourse of Soviet broadcasts was a complex phenomenon, revealing as much as it hid. While straight political programming was designed in accordance with an ideological master narrative, the vast majority of broadcasts avoided politics at all costs or used it as an excuse to provide entertainment. Moreover, the single most common feature of many programs was double-speak—the discourse of allegories, hints, irony, and hidden meanings. If ideology, as Louis Althusser suggests, is "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162), then 1970s ideology was captured fully in a popular maxim: "They Pretend to Pay Us, We Pretend to Work." This shared discourse of

[47] Starting with the four films released in 1927 to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the October Revolution

irony was the major factor unifying the viewing audience, while at the same time blinding foreign observers to the extent of internal decomposition of Soviet ideology. Irony and tongue-in-cheek discourse also became an indispensable part of the TV mini-series and of their reception. For example, the depiction of Nazi Germany in *Seventeen Moments of Spring* evoked a barrage of jokes about a striking similarity between life in the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. The atmosphere of Victorian London in the detective mini-series *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* provided a comforting and ironic parallel to the stagnant milieu of the ageing Soviet empire.

Third, the development of TV broadcasting redefined both the nature and the reception of Soviet visual narratives as vehicles for transmitting national mythology. Television's mode of consumption (private viewing and a choice of channels, however limited[48]) required the discourse of persuasion to be disguised as news or entertainment, rather than appear as direct exhortation. In other words, Soviet mythology itself entered a stage of decomposition, which found its ideal form in fragmented television texts. As Boris Groys argues, the major cultural outcome of the failed reforms of the Thaw was the acute sense of living "outside of history" (1992, 75). The loss of historical momentum resulted in the loss of heroics both on the level of Big Narratives (typical of Stalinist culture) and on the level of individual identity (typical of the Thaw's reformulation of Stalinism). This perceived gap resulted in Brezhnev culture's obsession

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(among them Eisenstein's *October* released with some delay in 1928*)*, anniversary films became a *sine qua non* part of celebrating major political dates in the Soviet Union.

[48] Until Gorbachev's perestroika, there were two national channels: the First All-Union Program was introduced in 1960, the Second Program in 1982. The Second Program initially provided cable-based broadcasts for the Central European part of Russia. By the mid-1970s it expanded its service to include Belorussia, Latvia, and Lithuania (Egorov 54). Both channels originated from the Central Television Studios (Ostankino) in Moscow and broadcast all their programs in Russian. Moscow had two more network choices: the Third Program (introduced after a 1965 resolution of the Central Committee), offered instruction for both children and adults, and the Fourth Program (created in 1967), which broadcast for several hours in prime time, and featured local cultural events, documentaries, and occasional re-runs of films.

with memory and the past, which underwent intensive "narrativization" (Groys 94) as the time of true heroes, clear goals, and resolved (and resolvable) conflicts.

Among the major narratives that formed the foundation of 1970s ideology was that of the Great Patriotic War.[49] The cultural centrality of war and war iconography in the 1970s rested on the fact that despite its devastating effect on the country's population and economy, war remained the only uncompromised collective experience. As Catriona Kelly points out,

> [w]ar mythology was in many ways a supremely efficient basis of national identity in the post-Stalin era. Unlike the history of the Communist Party or even revolutionary history, it invoked what was universally perceived as a just cause: the righteousness of the war was never questioned, even in private… War mythology tapped private as well as public sensibilities. (265)

The importance of the war in late Soviet culture underlies several phenomena. First, the myth of the holy war forms the basis for what Kelly calls the "official populism" of Brezhnevism: an attempt to wed state mythology with elements of popular culture. Second, most Russians in the 1970s compared their flimsy material well-being not with Western consumer culture but with the hardships of the war and post-war reconstruction. The improvement of living conditions and the discourse of "thirty years of peace" (indeed the longest period of socio-political stability in the Soviet Union) both confirmed the society's progress and perpetuated the symbolic status of the older generation.[50] Third, by the 1970s the narrative of the war emerged in its canonized version, which underlay any print or visual text dealing with the 1940s and

[49] The Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) refers to the war on Soviet territory, when the Soviet Union was fighting Nazi Germany, as opposed to being its nominal ally as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-agression pact of 1939. In Russian cultural memory, the Great Patriotic War occupies an incomparably bigger place than WWII.

[50] It is not accidental that Brezhnev tried to capitalize on the war myth to raise his personal ratings by having a trilogy of memoirs ghosted for him. *The Little Land*, *Reconstruction*, and *The Virgin Lands* (1977) tell about his participation in the hallowed collective experience of the Soviet people.

which was known to any Soviet child. The war myth came with an array of associations and meanings that could be manipulated to provide motivation for contemporary conflicts or to establish links to the past.

The growing number of mini-series in the 1970s reflected the search for narrative forms capable of expressing a coherent national and individual identity, as well as of establishing links between past and present. With both the collective and the family losing their symbolic power as sites of identity formation, Soviet society disintegrated into multiple communities (whether a circle of friends or a group of colleagues), where the individual found social and personal validation, and where his identity was formed. Television assumed the task of addressing this individual—alienated from collectivist values, cynical about state rhetoric, and frustrated with the gap between official pronouncements and day-to-day experience.

Television serial productions, which privilege stable structures and recycled narratives, were the ideal expression for what Stagnation culture valued most: the preservation of the status quo, a fear of change, and the ritualized daily affirmation of the system's (and its leadership's) vitality. Mini-series of the 1970s revealed, better than film and literature, a yearning for strong heroes, capable of expressing Russian culture's concerns, which were not reducible to current politics or ideological myths. In the eyes of the audience, late Soviet policemen and spies were heirs of mythical Russian heroes, protectors of the community.

Since Soviet television, like all other media, was primarily an instrument for socializing and educating the populace, the principles of programming were notably different from commercial Western television. Soviet broadcast policies preserved individual programs as discrete—and often unique—texts. An uninterrupted episode of a mini-series ran for up to ninety minutes. Pauses between broadcasts were filled with still pictures of nature accompanied

by music. Very often mini-series were the only fiction programs during prime time. All episodes of the show were numbered. Frequently the reason for the production and/or screening of a mini-series was an anniversary of a significant socio-political event. Announcements of forthcoming programs often framed mini-series by references to a particular anniversary, thus anchoring their interpretation within an ideological *dominanta*.

Another distinctive feature of Soviet mini-series which sets them apart from most Western broadcasts is their position between ideological and cultural paradigms. In the case of Soviet television, representation was judged not just by standards of high culture, but also by those of official ideology. And while the latter were incomparably looser than in the heyday of socialist realism, political and social significance of the theme was of primary importance in getting a green light for production and financing. "Serious" productions were to be made at film studios rather than television studios; they used film stars and an elaborate mise-en-scène, a well-developed narrative and characters, and good dialogue—in other words, they combined the best of literature, cinema, and theater.

The demands of both cultural respectability and ideological reliability were best satisfied by adapting already published works to the TV screen. The vast majority of 1970s mini-series were, indeed, adaptations of popular novels by Soviet authors –Aleksei Tolstoi (*Road to Calvary*, *Engineer Garin's Hyperboloid*), Anatolii Ivanov (*Eternal Call*), Iulian Semenov (*Major Whirlwind, Seventeen Moment of Spring, TASS Is Authorized to Announce*), the brothers Vainer (*The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed*), and Vil' Lipatov (the *Aniskin* series). Among Western literary works suitable for television adaptation, preference was given to Victorian writers. The latter include Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson*) and Robert Louis Stevenson (*The Adventures of Prince Florizel*).

The double censorship also explains the preference for continuing "epic" productions over case-by-case ones. The latter, for the most part, were fictionalized "histories" of various Soviet institutions, e.g., *Born in the Revolution* (the history of the Soviet criminal police) or *The State Border* (the history of Soviet border guards). In these, narrative development replicated the masterplot of Soviet history, which had a definite and known closure, i.e., ended in the "glorious present." Note that futuristic utopianism is absent from late Soviet narratives. Utopia is displaced into the past or, if presented teleologically, ends in the present of "developed socialism." The notable exception from both of these rules—use of existing texts and the knowledge of the closure, especially in dealing with "dangerous" contemporary material— was the police procedural *Investigation Is Conducted by Experts*. It was produced at the television's Studio of Drama Programs, which prompted many critics to refer to it as "play for TV" [telespektakl'].

The appearance of the term "play for TV" signaled cultural producers' awareness that they did not make films to appear on the small screen. Rather, they produced a distinctly televisual genre for the new medium. And indeed, "plays for TV" followed their own set of conventions: they were episodic, driven by the dialogue, filmed almost entirely on the set in the studio. Last but not least, the central trope of Soviet culture—the opposition of "us" vs. "them" defined as the opposition between Soviet and bourgeois consumer ideology—was drastically redefined in these shows. The ideological confrontation became secondary to the entertaining competition of two teams, Soviets cops vs. Soviet robbers. The irony was that everything robbers craved overlapped with the consumerist wet dreams of Soviet television viewers.

Discussing Reagan-era television in the United States, Jane Feuer writes:

> Narrative forms in themselves cannot structure the ideologies of an era, yet narrative forms—especially the very simple one of the TV sitcom—do have expressive limitations, and, in the case at hand, one can correlate a shift in the dominant narrative form of American network television with a shift in sensibilities outside the text. (15)

The same is true of Brezhnev-era television productions. On the level of content, mini-series were perfect vehicles for the conservatism and conformism of Stagnation. On the level of genre, they functioned as an efficient mechanism for recycling and recasting major Soviet tropes. Through their fragmented form, repeated conflicts, and stable cast the mini-series reproduced the values of Brezhnev era culture, with its cult of stability and the status quo, and its reconfiguration of telos as a "long-term goal."

The history of Soviet multi-episodic television productions partly coincides with changes in political culture, as well as with those in other culture industries, and partly deviates from it. I suggest that there were three distinct periods in the history of Brezhnev era Soviet mini-series. The first period, from the mid 1960s through early 1970s, bears strong connections to values and cultural assumptions of the Thaw: privileging of individual over collective values, documentarism, belief in the possibility of authentic representation, strong polarization of good and evil and, above all, a belief in Soviet myths as an adequate representation of history. At the same time, these residual illusions co-exist with the strong attachment of TV mini-series, especially spy thrillers, to the classical genres of Soviet cinema: historical revolutionary film, war film, and film about Soviet scouts.

The first native mini-series appeared in the mid-1960s[51] as an attempt to kill two birds with one stone: to create ideologically sound productions that could fill program slots and be appealing to diverse audiences. Early spy mini-series were designed to foster socio-political myths by incorporating them into extended versions of a popular film genre—films about Soviet scouts. The two major historical landmarks—the revolution and the Great Patriotic War—provided material for different types of mini-series. The former was the basis of more "official" productions, e.g. *Operation Cartel*, while the latter, established in popular consciousness as a tragic, but nonetheless purifying, experience was treated in such productions as *Major Whirlwind* The third theme for the mini-series, which soon became the most topical, was the Cold War, which capitalized on the established war myth, but added a new binary opposition: America and West Germany (as the heir of Nazi Germany) vs. the Soviet Union. The first period of the Soviet mini-series was, therefore, dominated by spy thrillers, which reflected the Cold War policies of the Khrushchev era and the vestiges of modernist utopia.

The second period, which lasted until the late 1970s, expresses most clearly the political and economic foundations of Brezhnev's rule. It is characterized by an overt celebration of the official version of Soviet history and its mechanisms of control (the police, the ubiquitous KGB, and less overtly, the Communist Party). Whether in spy thriller, police procedural, or historical melodrama, individual lives are linked to and often determined by the canonical Soviet story of origins. Yet, the gap between the political master narrative and the adventure plot widens. In other words, the tightening of ideological control at the level of content lays bare the "bones of ideology." This period is dominated by the police procedural, in which this gap manifests itself in the transformation of the opposition of "us" vs. "them" into an entertaining formula.

[51] Simultaneously with Soviet productions many Eastern European series appeared on Soviet screens. The most popular were the Polish series *More than Life at Stake* (dirs. Andrzej Konic and Janusz Morgenstern 1968) and *Four*

The third period, between 1979 and the end of Brezhnev's rule, features productions that originate in the atmosphere of feast in the times of the plague. Economic crisis and the flourishing of the black market are accompanied by an official rhetoric of non-existent achievements and hollow optimism. The disintegration of public discourse reaches its peak when the political checkmate of gerontocratic Soviet leadership resolves in a series of deaths (Leonid Brezhnev, Dmitrii Ustinov, Iurii Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko). Urban folklore sarcastically responds to the events with a pun of the slogan of the planned economy: "Five (year plan) in Four (years)! [Piat' v chetyre goda] becomes "Five in(to) Four Coffins!" [Piat' v chetyre groba]. Television productions of this period either opt for escapism from any contemporary topics or openly resort to popular culture models and grass root sentiments. This period is dominated by the detective series, especially set in prettified "never-never lands." For their utopian settings, Soviet television directors favored either fairy-tale collective farms or post-card Victorian England, the lands of the late empire and of safely historicized Western modernity.

Mini-series analyzed in this dissertation predominantly belong to the last two periods. Late 1960s mini-series are discussed only in so far as they embody the shift in politics of representation from Thaw to Stagnation culture. This research does not aspire to describe all genres and representational codes of Stagnation television or even of all 1970s serial productions. Its focus is on one genre category of Soviet mini-series—the adventure series—and on its appropriation and transformation of the cinematic codes of socialist realism.

Tankmen and a Dog (dir. Konrad Nalencki 1970). The former is a spy thriller, the latter a WWII film.

Chapter Two. Agents of the Brave New World: Soviet Television Spy Thriller

> It was with a feeling of immeasurable anger that the peoples of our Soviet country learnt of the monstrous and sickening crimes perpetrated by the eternally damned bloodthirsty band of conspirators and Fascist dogs, Trotsky, Bukharin, Rykov, Iagoda and their hangers-on, who were scheming to turn back the history of mankind and deprive the 170 million strong Soviet people of their achievements . . . and surrender them to the depredation of the capitalists and fascist bandits.
> --"The Fascist Cur Eradicated" (*Cinema Art* Editorial, 1938)[52]

> "No,' said the priest, 'it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary." "A melancholy conclusion," said K. "It turns lying into a universal principle."
> --Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, 243

1. Approaches to the Genre and Late Soviet Versions of the Spy Story.

This chapter is about television's "aesthetics of fragmentation" and the Soviet cinematic epic. I examine the Soviet spy mini-series to demonstrate the inherent tension between the spy thriller's attempt to fit the fragmenting demands of television and the monological tradition of Soviet cinema. Because the spy thriller was intimately close to the fundamental narratives of the Soviet ideology, this genre experienced a harder time adjusting to the aesthetics of the new medium than, for instance, the police procedural or the detective mini-series.

Many literary and film critics have argued that the spy hero was the true hero of the twentieth century. He is an everyman, whose verbal and visual representations criss-cross the century's major conflicts and contradictions. Both a hero of modernization and a bearer of the traditional values of nationhood and the political status quo, the spy is an individualist and an organization man, a heroic agent defending the "free world" against evil (whether the latter be

[52] "Fashistskaia gadina unichtozhena," *Iskusstvo kino* 2, 1938: 5-6. Quoted in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*, ed. Richard Taylor AND Ian Christie. London: Routledge, 1988.

constructed as communism, capitalism, or a global conspiracy) and a product of the Cold War's paranoia.

In their interpretations of the cultural symbolism of the spy some critics rely on archetypal cultural models. Bruce Merry, for instance, contends in *Anatomy of the Spy Thriller* (1977) that the spy story is a contemporary version of the ever-popular epic folktale about good and evil. While it is true that popular culture in general constructs its narratives around binary oppositions, which are also typical of fairy tales and legends, this reading offers very little in terms of the spy thriller's specificity. The detective, the Western, and science fiction, use similar basic structures, adjusting them to particular conflicts and settings. In *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of Popular Genre* (1979) Jerry Palmer argues that the thriller attempts to resolve an ideological conflict between individualism and sociality as embodied in two major narrative elements: the individualistic competitive hero and the conspiracy that threatens the fabric of society. Despite such a reading's transcendence of textual boundaries into the sphere of cultural tensions, it presents the spy thriller as a passive reflection of an ahistorically conceived society's values and constructs the figure of the spy as a device that provides formulaic solutions to transcultural (but implicitly Western) conflicts.

Yet both binary oppositions and values remain empty signifiers until filled with culture- and period-specific paradigms. Those paradigms, on the one hand, are predicated on cultural tropes into which socio-political tensions are translated and which have broad circulation within a cultural community, and on the other, on the appropriation and refraction of those tropes by cultural texts. In discussing literary formulas, John Cawelti refers to them as "ways in which specific cultural themes and stereotypes become embodied in more universal story archetypes . .

. . But in order for these patterns to work, they must be embodied in figures, settings, and situations that have appropriate meanings for the culture which produces them." (1976, 6)

The genre of the spy thriller, with its manichean world of good and evil, was popularized not just by the changing political and social reality of the twentieth century, which helped to structure the texts and the context in which audiences have read and interpreted spy thrillers. This interaction, rather, has worked as a two-way movement, whereby, in the process of signification, spy-thriller heroes as carriers of contradictory values transfer their meanings back onto the cultural situations that generated them. Tony Bennett, discussing James Bond as a popular hero, notes that to a large degree Bond's quasi-real status in Western society is a result of the agent's ability to appropriate and redefine existing myths and cultural oppositions (masculinity and sexual politics, capitalism vs. socialism etc.):

> If Bond has functioned as a "sign of the times," it has been as a moving sign of the times, as a figure capable of taking up and articulating quite different and even contradictory cultural and ideological values, sometimes turning its back on the meanings and cultural possibilities it had earlier embodied to enunciate new ones. (19)

While the socio-political turmoil and anxieties of modernity that dominated the last century infused the figure of the spy with much of its cultural significance and symbolism, the spy plot and the conflict it represents possess certain characteristics that facilitate the expression of changing meanings and ensure the genre's popularity. Cawelti names clandestinity as one of the major components of the spy plot. He writes that this basic element of spying holds certain psychological attractions that both provide a narrative impulse and constitute a powerful

mechanism for stimulating audiences' fantasies. Among other fantasies, Cawelti mentions invisibility and the ensuing pleasures of voyeurism and license; the fascination with disguises either as a temporary escape from one's own identity or as a means of creating one; the secret exercise of power; a strong image of belonging to some organization or community; and, finally, shifts from profound loyalty to extraordinary forms of betrayal (9). This psychological involvement of the viewer with the world of the spy thriller and his identification with the figure of the spy explains the popularity of the genre and suggests some ways it can be (and is) used for political and ideological purposes.

When TV appeared in the Soviet Union in the late 1950s-early 1960s, it sought genres and visual models to diversify dull educational programming. Adventures of heroic agents were soon coopted by the new medium. Most mid-late 1960s spy thrillers are made-for-TV-films about Soviet agents fulfilling a specific mission on enemy territory. In contrast to the upbeat closure of Stalinist films, the vast majority of these productions have a tragic ending: an on-screen death or a pending execution of the protagonists. Another feature common to the mini-series of the time is a focus on a group of agents, who, in contrast to the Stalinist collective or the Big Family, form a front-line mini-family. The narrative and ideological *dominanta* of such mini-series as *Drawing Fire* are individual fates rather than the mission itself or its outcome—another Khrushchev-era reversal of the Stalinist hierarchy of values. In all other respects, however, early multi-episodic TV productions faithfully reproduced socialist realist tropes, teleology, and the Manichean picture of the world.

In the late 1960s two very different productions appeared that helped introduce a radically new pattern into the Soviet spy thriller story. Veniamin Dorman's 1968 film *Resident's*

Mistake[53] used the framework of the Cold War to introduce the figure of a turned NATO agent, thus problematizing the ideological aspects of the opposition between the Soviet Union and the West. Evgenii Tashkov's five-episode mini-series *His Highness's Adjutant* (1969-70), which portrayed the activity of a Red Agent among the White Guards during the Russian Civil War, undermines the visual representation of the enemy. More importantly, though, by introducing multiple plot lines, Tashkov's mini-series dilutes the socialist realist master plot and redefines the heroic agent as a bureaucratic spy.

By the early 1970s, then, the spy thriller mini-series and multi-episodic films were a familiar presence on Soviet TV screens. The most successful of them was Tat'iana Lioznova's twelve-episode TV thriller *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (1973), which marked the return both to the monumentality of Stalinism and to the Cold War rhetoric of the Thaw. Ironically, the ideologically conservative spy plot turned into a decoy for engagement with problems of 1970s Soviet society. At the same time, the production lay bare the shallowness of official rhetoric and the fragmentation of the state mythology.

One difficulty in identifying post-Stalinist spy thrillers resides in the semiotics of the genre's name and its ideological significance. By allowing Soviet cinematic agents to start infiltrating foreign borders (naturally, for defense purposes), Barnet's post-war film *The Scout's Exploit* significantly recasts the defense films' identification of "spy" with "enemy." Since this new Soviet "us" could not possibly be labeled "spies," the genre was lumped together with detective films or shared with the latter the indefinite label of "adventure film" (*prikliuchencheskii fil'm*). When Soviet TV mini-series first made their appearance, they filled this newly created niche within the genre of detective/adventure films, often with an added

[53] "Resident" is the term used to designate the foreign agent residing in a foreign country—either legally or illegally—who is responsible for coordinating all espionage operations there.

temporal qualifier: "historical-adventure"—usually set during the revolution and the Civil War; "war-time adventure"—treating the Great Patriotic and World War Two. By late Stagnation, when the spy thriller mini-series engaged contemporary problems (e.g., *TASS Is Authorized To Announce* [TASS upolnomochen zaiavit'], dir. Vladimir Fokin 1984), Soviet film critics adopted yet another euphemism to avoid any undesirable associations: "political detective-thriller" [ostrosiuzhetnyi politicheskii detektiv].

Parallel to this process, which stretches across two decades, spy thriller titles lose their tropological nature. The titles of defense films, for the most part, were very specific in naming the conflict, location, and, often, participants and their roles: *In the Sentry Box, Engineer Kochin's Mistake*, *The Border Secured*, etc.[54] The early Thaw thriller, because of its focus on war crimes, for a short time revived this defense film tradition of titles (*Over the River Tissa).* By contrast, TV mini-series took a different route. Some adopted catchy action titles (*Operation "Cartel")*, others manifest a fascination with aristocratic, especially Russian military culture (*His Highness's Adjutant),* or gravitate towards contemplation and abstraction *(Seventeen Moments of Spring*).[55] At the same time, the latter title employs several cultural tropes central to the previous periods but engages in a dialogue with them: "seventeen" (the revolutionary year and 1960s cult of youth is here transferred onto nature and projected into the past), "spring" (the archetypal period of youth, regeneration, and hope in 1960s culture is here, again, present as a flashback), and finally, "moments"—the ultimate fragmentation of historical experience marking the culture's inability to compose a single coherent picture of its own history. Most importantly,

[54] The late Stagnation mini-series *State Border* (1980-1988) manifests a return to the Stalinist model in more than one way. First, its title re-enacts the vision of the state border as the front line. Second, all spying comes from abroad, with Soviet security agencies presented exclusively in a defensive role. Third, each episode deals with some non-Russian "conflict zone": Poles, Japanese, Germans, Estonians, Ukrainians, and, finally, Americans, in turn, become the enemy-of-the-day.

spy mini-series drew heavily on the aesthetics of spy films of the era. These early mini-series followed a single, ideologically driven narrative and remained more films screened for TV than a distinct genre within a new medium.

2. From Thaw to Stagnation: *His Highness's Adjutant.*

2.1. Fragmentation of the Master Narrative.

Tashkov's five-episode mini-series *His Highness's Adjutant* appeared on TV in 1970 and instantly became a favorite of TV audiences. Set during the Civil War, the mini-series tells the story of a CheKa agent, Captain Kol'tsov, who is sent by his Red commanders to infiltrate the enemy's ranks. The train in which the protagonist travels is attacked by bandits and Kol'tsov is captured together with several other White officers. After making an escape, the protagonist succeeds in becoming Adjutant to an influential White general. For some time Kol'tsov works undercover in the White Army Headquarters, providing information to the Reds. Learning that the British Allies of the Whites have sent a train with tanks to defeat the Bolshevik troops, Kol'tsov organizes a train crash. He is captured and awaits execution in jail.

While adhering to the established and successful model for the mini-series (war theme plus adventure), Tashkov's production radically transforms it. The mini-series of the 1960s, with the exception of the *Operation Cartel*, preserved historical dimensions as a background while they "zoomed in" to trace individual, for the most part tragic, fates. In contrast, *His Highness's Adjutant* paid tribute to the changing political climate of the 1970s. Neo-conservatism and the re-adjustment of state myths to new conditions required both the canonical rendition of Soviet history, and individualized and appealing heroic agents**.**

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[55] Furthermore, the title also offers a secret hint to connoisseurs: it is a line from the 1945 hit song of the Hungarian movie star Marika Rokk and, thus, is a link to popular culture in Eastern Europe. On some other popular culture features of *Seventeen Moments*, as well as on its links to Weimar culture, see Stites 152.

Tashkov's production continued to pay tribute to the cinematic rather than television medium. The two Soviet cinematic models for Tashkov's production—a historical revolutionary film[56] and a "film about Soviet agents" *(fil'm o sovetskikh razvedchikakh*)—although not incompatible, originate in different genres and bring along two sets of conventions. While the former focused on the origins of Soviet power (its "birth pains"), taking the collective hero through major periods of Soviet history, the latter drew on defense film themes but followed the narrative logic of an adventure film.

The historical-revolutionary parts of *His Highness's Adjutant*, especially the first and last episodes, are replete with mass battle scenes and scenes shot on location (in the woods, in the street, on a railroad), most of which are familiar Soviet cinematic clichés. The point of view here is purportedly that of history, closed, omniscient, and objectifying: no shot-reverse-shot scenes, no point-of-view shots. The protagonist, however, plays a marginal role in these episodes: from the moment he is captured by the gang till his final sally, he has little contact with his bosses in Kiev—the main setting for the historical line of the mini-series.

Kol'tsov is identified as a CheKa agent only when the mini-series moves "indoors"—into the Headquarters of the White Army. Not only does the protagonist lead a double life, but his double identity itself is, to a large degree, constructed by the double set of genre conventions. As a bureaucratic spy he functions only in offices, aristocratic mansions, theaters, etc. In these episodes, the camera is often identified with Kol'tsov himself. Stepping outside of his office

[56] The "historical-revolutionary film" appeared in the 1920s, displacing historical film in the genre system. This new genre was an answer to the state's need to articulate an agreed-upon mythology of origins. The two major settings for these films were the October Revolution and the Civil War. The classic historical-revolutionary film also provides the canonized example of the socialist realist method in cinema—*Chapaev.* Eisenstein's *October* and, to a lesser degree, *Battleship Potemkin* also belong to this genre. In 1972, *His Highness's Adjutant* was awarded the Vasil'ev Brothers State Prize—a tribute both to its popularity and evidence of its genre link to *Chapaev.*

(and his mask), he assumes the identity of an action hero and enters the space of a historical-revolutionary film: killing a messenger to the White Army or organizing a train crash. This combination results not just in multiple plot lines, but also in the fragmentation of the master narrative and the splitting of the positive hero into two figures. The historical-revolutionary line is a plot "without a (positive) hero," whereas the "film about a Soviet agent" lacks historical epic background. Facing the difficulty of linking the two plot lines, the mini-series offers an ingenuous solution by introducing a third, a marginal but ideologically important plot—a re-education plot.

The hero of the *Bildungs* narrative is Iura, the twelve-year-old son of a White colonel. Iura's trials—the death of both parents, crossing the frontline several times, and discovering the "truth" about the revolution—synecdochically represents the nation's trials. Charged with the task of providing narrative, as well as ideological links, Iura's plot line is a catalogue of socialist realist tropes. The mini-series assigns Iura several roles: he is the ultimate victim of the split and violence within the country; he is an orphan who loses both parents and a series of surrogate fathers; he is prime material predestined for ideological reforging; finally, although absent in the closing scene, he is the symbol of Kol'tsov's victory from beyond the grave. Furthermore, as Kol'tsov's disciple, he is the second positive hero of the mini-series. However, the re-education plot—the major model for Stalinist cinema and literature—in Tashkov's mini-series is just one of many narrative lines, and, as such, loses its archetypal ideological meaning. At the same time, by passing through the tutelage of a number of surrogate fathers and being exposed to several political camps, Iura becomes the second focalizer of the narrative, a "spy by default," and as such, Kol'tsov's double.

The major narrative lines in the mini-series are not only co-present but are also non-hierarchically arranged. Each of the five episodes traces all of the narrative lines, completely changing the location and cast of characters several times. The complicated narrative structure affects the masterplot in several ways. First, the need to keep all of the main characters in focus splits attention between Bolshevik and White Army HQ, on the one hand, and between Kol'tsov and Iura, on the other. Second, narrative complications weaken the hierarchical structure of the Stalinist masterplot. The Center is both marginalized (it is Kiev, not Moscow) and destabilized (the offensive by White Army troops forces the Bolsheviks out of Kiev). Third, the already fragmented masterplot is further undermined by the incompleteness of the *Bildungs* plot. While Kol'tsov's line is fully contained within the frame of the narrative—from his appearance at general Kovalevskii's Headquarters in the first episode to his arrest and suggested death in the fifth, Iura's line presents a more complicated case. The beginning of his re-education is clearly marked (the death of his mother and the symbolic episode of crossing the frontline from the Whites to the Reds), but its end is open. Iura's last "sincere" conversation with Kol'tsov, which marks the emergence of his "conscious" self, almost coincides with Kol'tsov's death. Iura, thus, learns the true Bolshevik identity of his surrogate father-mentor and immediately becomes a fatherless orphan. Until the last conversation, Kol'tsov-mentor conceals his true identity from Iura, and the boy has to find his "right" path through these and many other lies.

Aware of its transitional form, fragmented structure, and the uncanny use of the *Bildungs* plot, *His Highness's Adjutant* tries to achieve a certain compromise between the epic-scale requirement for a "multi-episodic" production and its televisual nature. The clash between television's "aesthetics of fragmentation" and the cinematic epic is striking in the double framing of episodes. Each episode opens with the epigraph: "Dedicated to the first CheKa agents,"

superimposed on a monumental marble background, with the first head of the CheKa, Feliks Dzherzhinskii's, profile "engraved" on it. Both the logocentric frame of reference and the visual monumentalism are intended to create specific expectations in the viewer and to prevent the narrative from dissolving into a purely episodic structure. It also marks the mini-series as a narrative about the past, the canonical history of which is as closed-ended as the final pages in a book with a very direct message. The birth of the nation here is represented as the birth of the Soviet security agency.

Immediately following the historicizing epigraph the mini-series replays selected scenes from the previous episode, with the theme melody substituting for the original dialogue. Heath's and Skirrow 's observation that television operates as an "absence of memory" (56) helps to illuminate a major shift from cinematic epics to their fragmentation in the mini-series. Indeed, the epigraph strives to position the viewer as a witness to the epic time of "big heroes," while the opening collage of images cancels any "natural" continuity and intrinsic meaning of history outside of individual viewing habits and the narrative logic of episodic structures.

2.2. "Us" and "Them": Mixing the Codes.

Thus, the epic "grand" style appears in Tashkov's mini-series only as a formal frame created by the epigraph, the music, and especially, by the symbolism of closure with its ritualistic sacrifice. The space inside, however, is constructed in accordance with television's "expandable middle": two bureaucratic spies in opposing camps (Kol'tsov has a White counterpart in Red Army Headquarters), two equally efficient security systems organizing cunning traps for enemy agents. As the master narrative was being reduced to the required historical exegesis for a new system of meanings, motivation of human behavior became ambiguous and representations of class allegiances displayed certain "gray zones."

As a historical-revolutionary film, a film of "origins," *His Highness's Adjutant* suggests a clear distinction between "us" and "them." But as a spy thriller it focuses on just one of "us" (the positive hero), who represents the totality of "our" ideology among "them." The production tries to perform a balancing act between these two representational poles. Most episodes are constructed as scenes that alternate between White and Red Headquarters. Such a composition attempts to build a paradigm of opposition. At the same time, the identical structure of power in the two Headquarters suggests a parallelism rather than opposition. Both headquarters have a military commander and a chief of counter-intelligence, who in both cases is smarter, more alert, and more cynical than his superior. Within both Headquarters there is a spy representing the enemy camp, and any new information immediately becomes known to the other side. This game can potentially continue forever.

What is striking within this double structure is the imbalance in the length and detail with which the two camps are represented. The White Guards are constructed both as individuals and as a community, while the Reds remain abstract figures whose names the viewer barely gets to know. The latter are portrayed as clichéd "revolutionaries," spartans with no families, no private life, no details of characterization or setting: they do not exist outside of their mission. In a way, the representation of the Reds becomes as schematic as that of the enemies in Stalinist visual texts. For the viewer of the 1970s, Bolshevik austerity was a matter of lip service to social ritual, familiar from many historical-revolutionary films and acquiring meaning mainly from its juxtaposition to / parallelism with the opulent Victorian settings of White Guards scenes. But while the positive meaning attached to the Reds was anchored predominantly in the viewer's abstract knowledge of state mythology, the representation of the enemy camp offered a source of visual pleasure.

Figure 3

Mise-en-scène is an important element in characterizing the White Guards. The camera lingers on elegant uniforms, on a gallery of portraits of the aristocracy (figure 3), on the large, nicely furnished office of His Highness, on the white marble staircase, and on the audience at a performance of the *Barber of Seville*. While the scenes at the Red Headquarters are, for the most part, constructed in long to medium shots, the scenes at the White Headquarters display more variety. The repeated camera movement from medium shot to close-up creates personalized portraits of the White Guards. Medium shots consistently keep the portraits or the furnishings in the frame. Long shots are reserved for "on location" sequences, but often function as "point of view" shots, e.g., when Iura is "spying" from the top of the staircase.

The domestic sphere, which is the center of conflicts and the site of resolutions in Thaw visual texts, disappears from cinema and television in the late 1960s-70s. The only family man in the mini-series and the owner of the only private space (a mansion) is the White officer in charge of counter intelligence, Colonel Shchukin—the protagonist's major enemy. Kol'tsov and

Shchukin's daughter Tania are in love—a love that has to be sacrificed to the bigger goal in full accordance with classical tragedy or a socialist realist scenario.[57]

But Shchukin also expresses a sober, down-to-earth attitude to life, which distinguishes him from his boss, His Highness general Kovalevskii. For both the White general Kovalevskii, and the Red agent, Kol'tsov, their respective ideas/ideals constitute the totality of their lives (and in that respect both fit the socialist realist canon). By contrast, Shchukin's "professionalism" amounts to a kind of cynicism. While constructed as a far less likable figure than General Kovalevskii, Shchukin is the character who expresses the paradigmatic concerns of the 1970s—his is the voice of conformism, compromise, and material rewards, which hold the power structure together better than any belief system. Learning that a member of an underground counterrevolutionary group exploded a warehouse in Bolshevik Kiev, Shchukin addresses his boss:

Shchukin: Your Highness, I think we should reward this brave man for what he's done.

Kovalevskii: I don't see why he should be rewarded. He's fulfilled his sacred duty. This idea is rewarding enough.

Shchukin: I think we're making a mistake. People are tired of waiting. They want a good life here and now, even if this life is as bad as ours.

[57] Abram Tertz (penname of Andrei Siniavskii) in his essay "On Socialist Realism" demonstrates a homology between the aesthetics of the socialist realist method and the aesthetic categories of neo-classicism.

Shchukin thus openly proclaims the primacy of "the ideology of here and now" over the mythical life of sacrifice for the future. Also, unlike Kovalevskii, Shchukin does not trust Kol'tsov or anybody else. But his paranoia is radically different from that in Stalinist films. His vigilance is based on the knowledge of the abyss between rhetoric (however ideologically correct it may sound) and lived experience.

In his book *Metaphor of Power*, Evgenii Dobrenko argues that humanization of the enemy displaces the entire binary system of representation (261). Indeed, the Stalinist model of the world functioned effectively as long as the ideological otherness found an unmediated and simplified visual expression. The only meaningful feature of the enemy was his bourgeois essence, and his only reason for existence on screen was to destroy socialism. The enemy's "essence" and mission found direct reflection in his behavior and appearance: sneaky, treacherous, asking too many question, too well-dressed, too educated, wearing glasses, etc. Even if the enemy was portrayed as civilized, in climactic moments (e.g., during interrogation) he always showed his "ugly essence."

As soon as the White Guards, the Germans, and Westerners in general appeared in visual texts as non-demonized human beings, with emotions and diverse personalities, the entire Manichean structure started crumbling. *His Highness's Adjutant* is one of the earliest visual texts to give a fairly complex picture of the White Guards and to make a distinction between people and their political cause. While the individualizing tendency of the mini-series marks its link to the Thaw, the parallelism between the Reds and the Whites clearly belongs to Stagnation culture. Watered down principles of casting, too, signal the disintegration of the "image of the enemy."[58]

[58] In Stalinist cinema, the major principle of casting was transparency, i.e., complete correspondence of "inside" and "outside," consistently repeated in all of the actor's roles. The Thaw to a large degree preserved this pattern, simply reversing the plus-minus signs. Thus, Nikolai Kriuchkov, who in the 1930s played enthusiastic Komsomol members and tractor drivers (*Komsomol'sk*, dir. Sergei Gerasimov 1938; *Tractor Drivers,* dir. Ivan Pyr'ev 1939), in the late

In *His Highness's Adjutant*, the inherited ideological binarism of the Reds versus White Guards, articulated verbally, is sustained neither on the visual nor on the narrative level. Visual stereotyping is ambiguous, and the relationship between visual images and verbal commentary betrays an uneasiness with a Manichean depiction of the Civil War. Close-ups and focus on mise-en-scène, on the one hand, and the "aesthetics of repetition" constructing the White Guards as domestic and, often, quite appealing enemies, on the other, undermined the consistency of the myth. Thus, the monological nature of the inherited myth of the Civil War collides with the aesthetics of the television medium.

2.3. Fragmentation of the Positive Hero.

In the absence of a single master plot and a visually marked watershed between "us" and "them," what ultimately makes *His Highness's Adjutant* a socialist realist narrative is its positive hero. Captain Kol'tsov's integrity and readiness to sacrifice his life and love for the revolutionary cause make him a worthy heir of Stalinist positive heroes. Yet, unproblematic as it is for the censor's eye, Kol'tsov's status as the major device of a socialist realist text is challenged by his double identity as an agent, on the one hand, and his relationship with Iura, on the other.

Kol'tsov is a bureaucratic spy[59], as opposed to both heroic spies (like the protagonist of *The Scout's Exploit*) and NKVD master investigators (like the investigator in *Engineer Kochin's Mistake*). Unlike the heroic spy, whose identity and ideological "essence" are manifest in his physical action and verbal statements, the bureaucratic spy has to beat the enemy's system by

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1950s was repeatedly cast as a villain (*Rumiantsev's Case,* dir. Iosif Kheifits 1956; *Over the River Tissa*, 1958). *His Highness' Adjutant* goes even further by effacing the opposition between "us" and "them" in casting. Not surprisingly, the actor Iurii Solomin (Captain Kol'tsov) was initially invited to play Captain Osipov—one of the two absolute villains in the mini-series.

[59] Cawelti notes that in the contemporary world, the majority of intelligence activities involve "sitting in the office and routing the flow of information . . . into the appropriate bureaucratic channels" (1987, 22). The loss of heroics

playing according to its rules. Kol'tsov's only weapons are his aristocratic appearance and manners, as well as a talent for acting. In the viewers' eyes, then, his Bolshevik identity (which we see only at the very end of the series) relies not on a tight narrative but on the knowledge of ideological postulates that the implied audiences are expected to share.

As the mini-series suggests, an open struggle with the system is a beautiful, but a naïve and childish dream. Most characters who engage in the fight with arms and bombs perish, including the protagonist himself when he abandons his office and becomes an action hero. The first "action" sequence results in Kol'tsov's face getting badly scratched, which puts him in danger of exposure. His last sally ends in the victory of his cause and, at the same time, his demise. Kol'tsov—the action hero—defies the major law of a continuing production: the hero must survive.

As a bureaucratic spy, however, the protagonist makes viewer identification easy and pleasurable. The viewer is empowered by his secure position as the Adjutant, his desk in the heart of White Army Headquarters, and his access to secrets. Kol'tsov is handsome and elegant, a gentleman successful in love, liked by his fellow officers and respected by his boss. Together with Kol'tsov, the viewer opens secret documents, gets access to private correspondence, and performs the daily ritual of eavesdropping at a crack in the wall leading to His Highness's office.

But there is another pair of eyes in the mini-series—Iura's—that register everything happening in the office and in the town, including Kol'tsov's own actions. Iura and Kol'tsov are doubles in more ways than one. Chance brings them together in the train at the beginning of the series and later at His Highness's headquarters. Both are "orphaned": Iura quite literally, Kol'tsov by losing his communication link with his Bolshevik bosses. Iura's maturation

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(and the emergence of routine and universal surveillance) triggers audiences' compensatory love for the James Bond heroic type, on the one hand, and for stories of betrayal and corruption from the inside, on the other.

narrative and Kol'tsov's mission occupy approximately equal space in the mini-series. Finally both of them have respective "point-of-view zones," i.e., scenes presented unmistakably through their eyes. While the goal of Kol'tsov's spying is information, the boy, by observing people and life around him, tries to understand the contradictory world into which he was plunged by the Civil War.

Despite its teleological nature and exegetic function, Iura's position as witness to events problematizes not only the re-education plot, but also Kol'tsov's status as the positive hero. The sequencing of scenes frames Iura's "initiation" into communist ideology by his failed attempts to act openly, driven by his emotions. His attempt to save the Red commissar who adopts the boy after his uncle's arrest leads to the commissar's exposure and execution. Terrified by the results of his own interference, Iura yells to Kol'tsov: "Are you all like that? Refined only on the surface?" Kol'tsov's answer is silence, both because the conversation takes place in the street, and because the referent of "you all" is ambiguous. While explicitly it refers only to the preceding diegetic action (and thus to the "inhuman" White Guards), in the context of Iura's "road to Calvary"[60] it raises the deeper issue of the meaning of the Civil War itself.

An analogue of Fedor Dostoevsky's "thinking boys"[61], Iura asks Kol'tsov "adult" questions which are only tangentially linked to specific events in the narrative. Rather, they indirectly question the received postulates of the Soviet "story of origins." Notably, all important conversations between Kol'tsov and Iura take place in Kol'tsov's bedroom, a private space where truthful thoughts can still be expressed. The belief in the existence of a safe

[60] *Road to Calvary* is the title of a trilogy by Aleksei Tolstoi on which he worked from 1920 until 1941 (*Sisters,* 1920-21; *The Year 1918*, 1927-28; *A Gloomy Morning*, 1940-41). The novels portray the fates of the Russian intellectuals who convert to the Bolshevik cause during the Civil War. An eponymous 13-episode mini-series based on the trilogy was released in 1977 (dir. Vasilii Ordynskii).

[61] In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1881), thinking boys constitute the new community that will abandon sensualist civilization driven by atheism and murderous passions. Alyosha Karamazov is the leader of this new community.

domestic space links the mini-series to the Thaw. However, Kol'tsov's verbal tactics of initiating his disciple into communist ideology— silences, understatements, answering with questions, translation of politics into a language of morality—belong to Stagnation culture. All these devices of 1970s Aesopian language[62] mark a break in discourse, a realization of the impossibility of expressing fully and straightforwardly even one's most cherished beliefs and thoughts. Iura's straightforward questions, "Why do adults lie?" or "Are you a spy?" addressed to his mentor, result either in silences or in "cliff note" speeches on Marxism. Intended for a child's understanding, the monologues bring home the basic postulates by presumably relating them to the boy's age and experience. Yet the simplicity of black and white (or Reds and Whites) is so problematized that the mentor abandons the boy with little more than vague statements and a broken heart. If Iura is, in fact, the protagonist of the maturation plot, then the maturation process entails learning to conceal feelings and to read between the lines. His major lesson is to make the distinction between people and their cause, and between what is said and what is meant. This distinction is potentially dangerous: if it can be applied to the White officers and their rhetoric, then why not to the Bolsheviks? The mentor can set an example only by his sacrificial death—neither his life (which presents the boy with a web of spying and lying) nor the *double-entendre* of his words provide Iura with any meaningful insights.

Having a narrative potential to extend through dozens of episodes, the mini-series, however, ends abruptly with the fifth, when the protagonist blows his cover by single-handedly derailing a train carrying tanks sent by the allies to help defeat Bolshevik troops. Both stylistically (in moving the action outdoors) and narratively (by providing closure) the mini-series returns to its historical-revolutionary frame. In their letters, many viewers demanded to

[62] Widely used in the 1970s, the expression "Aesopian language" refers to an array of discursive strategies of Brezhnev-era society—hidden hints, ironic reversals, allegories—as the safe way of talking about the political

"save" the protagonist and continue the series. The official reviewer, however, argued that continuing it would "destroy the real tragic meaning of the film: many CheKa agents courageously faced death for Soviet power" (Revich 2).

The mini-series, however, does not end with Kol'tsov's death in the line of duty, but places him in jail, thus undermining the symbolism of the closure, while preserving its sacrificial overtones. Where the Soviet cinematic tradition required dramatic music, the image of advancing Bolshevik troops, and iconic images of the country's expanses, *His Highness's Adjutant* offers an uneasy combination of televisual closure with an epic meaning familiar from Stalin-era films. After the intense action of the previous sequence (the protagonist jumping off a speeding train and the collision of two trains), the viewer witnesses the almost disappointing silence and stasis of a jail cell. Remarkably, the protagonist appears in a cast, which immobilizes and freezes him in the frame, adding a somewhat statuary look to his agile, slender figure. He is already a monument to himself.

The closure of the jail sequence also locates *His Highness's Adjutant* in the gray zone between Thaw and Stagnation. In Thaw texts, agents die after fulfilling their assignment, signaling a split of meaning into public and private. In contrast, Stagnation agents survive, but often remain on enemy territory after completing the mission—a return to the totality and optimism of Stalinism without the latter's representational transparency. In Kol'tsov's case, the combination of his on-screen survival and inevitable (but not represented) execution betray a confusion about the "appropriate" fate for the Soviet heroic agent. The final shot is a close-up of Kol'tsov's brightly lit face, looking into the future for which he has sacrificed his life (figure 4). The zoom-in of the camera visually "frees" Kol'tsov from jail, and puts the viewer into the position of witness and "heir" to the time of big heroes. The historical frame, however, remains

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system. Vladimir Vysotskii's songs (see note # 20 to this chapter) offered an encyclopedia of such devices.

visually open owing to the illusion of presence, which unites the protagonist and the viewer in some mythical space of the "bright future."

Figure 4

The closure also brings together two aborted relationships: Kol'tsov—general Kovalevskii's daughter (who visits him in jail and swears eternal love) and Kol'tsov—Iura (who is mentioned in Kol'tsov's conversation with Kovalevskii). The three figures form a symbolic (and fragmented) family in disarray, subverting simultaneously the trope of the reconstituted family in Thaw culture and the Stalinist narratives of the small family as a microcosm of the "Big Family" of Soviet people. The most notorious example of the latter provides closure to Grigorii Aleksandrov's 1936 film *Circus*, in which an American circus performer, driven from town for having a black baby, simultaneously wins the love of a Soviet pilot/performer and is adopted by the multinational family of the Soviet people. In *His Highness's Adjutant*, however, the family consists of two members of the noble class and a Cheka man who is about to be executed. Kol'tsov's death, then, is the symbolic demise of the Stalinist heroic agent. His disciple and symbolic son, who must continue his cause, besides being a noble by origin, is infected with doubt and reflexivity.

In many respects, then, *His Highness's Adjutant* is a transitional text, manifesting a clash between the socialist realist cinematic canon, on the one hand, and changing social relations and shifts in aesthetic praxis, on the other. The hybrid genre of the production (a spy thriller within a historical-revolutionary frame), the uneven style of various parts (cinematic action- vs. television dialogue-driven), narrative organized as a parallelism rather than a juxtaposition of "us" and "them,"and finally, a closure that is forced onto an open-ended TV narrative—all these features signal, on the one hand, the fragmentation of the Stalinist epic and of its "grand style," and on the other, the rise of television as the new medium with its own conventions and genres. The canon gradually dissolves into clichés and stereotypes that, unlike the "types" from which they spring, lose the power of symbolic signs. Moreover, those stereotypes are related to one another by a new set of "syntactic" rules—Stagnation values. Teleology is replaced by chance, class-mindedness—by common sense and personal connection, the opposition between "us" and "them"—by conventions of adventure and suspense. Finally, the positive hero is not only demonumentalized but is also split into two figures that both complement and negate each other. The double identity of the positive hero as both an action hero and a bureaucratic spy, on the one hand, and the doubling of the positive hero, on the other, mark the demise of the positive hero as the major narrative device and the intersection of collective ideals and myths.

At the same time, the popularity of Tashkov's production and viewers' demands to continue the adventures of the Soviet agent also testified to Soviet TV audiences' thirst for a returning and surviving hero whose day-to-day screen adventures would become a predictable feature of the evening. This demand found an uncanny answer in the twelve-episode mini-series *Seventeen Moments of Spring*.

3. Spring Time for Schtirlits: *Seventeen Moments of Spring* and Camp Totalitarianism.

The twelve-episode mini-series *Seventeen Moments of Spring* is based on a novel by Iulian Semenov—a part of the writer's cycle about Soviet super agent Maksim Isaev. The cycle covers the period from the 1920s (young Isaev fighting Russian counter-revolutionaries in the Baltic countries) to the Cold War. In drawing on cultural stereotypes as a key to popular appeal, Semenov's novels are the closest Soviet literature ever came to constructing a socialist "Bondiana." Several of the novels were adapted for the screen and were quite successful[63], yet none of the adaptations came anywhere close to the popularity and cult status of *Seventeen Moments of Spring.*

The story of both the novel and its television adaptation is quite remarkable. The idea of the novel was suggested to Semenov by Iurii Andropov, then head of the KGB. The novel came out in 1968 and enjoyed some popularity, although the notorious Soviet "book deficit" made Semenov's works virtually unavailable to the general public. In 1969 Andropov offered Semenov the chance to start working on the script for a television production based on the novel. The official reason for the project was the approaching 30th anniversary of the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War.[64] Andropov ordered his deputy and Leonid Brezhnev's close friend, general Semen Tsvigun, to supervise the production. The second line of support for the mini-series came from the Central Committee of the Communist Party. G. Ezhov, a "consultant on historical issues" to the CC published a positive review of Semenov's novel in the *Literary*

[63] Apart from *Major Whirlwind* and *Seventeen Moments*, adaptations of Semenov's adventure / spy thrillers include *Password Is Not Required* (dir. Boris Grigor'ev 1967), *Diamonds for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (dir. Grigorii Kromanov 1975), *Life and Death of Ferdinand Lius* (dir. Anatolii Bobrovskii 1976), *TASS Is Authorized to Announce* (1984), etc.

[64] The documentary, released in 1998 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the release of *Seventeen Moments*, claims that the production was nothing short of a "brilliant PR move by the KGB" (*blestiashchaia PR-ovskaia aktsiia KGB*): the mini-series suggested that during the war Soviet secret agents helped "to decide the fates of the world, and, assumingly, continue to do so in the present" (Kozhevnikov and Levin 1998).

Gazette[65], and together with the "consultants" from the KGB, was listed in the mini-series credits.

Seventeen Moments thus acquired the support of the two most powerful agencies in the country, something that no other television production could ever dream of. The topical nature of the mini-series as both an "anniversary film" and as a KGB-sponsored production might explain its budget[66] which otherwise might seem puzzling for a TV mini-series, especially in light of the fact that the vast majority of characters were enemies of the worst kind: Nazi secret police (Gestapo), counter-intelligence (SD), brown shirts (SA). Semenov received full access to KGB archives, *carte blanche* for meetings with German and American participants in the events, and the crew received unlimited travel funds.

After shooting was completed and prior to Andropov screening the mini-series, Tsvigun personally watched all twelve episodes several times and approved them. Andropov, too, liked the production, and the power circuit closed. The mini-series, which was made under direct supervision of its major implied viewer—KGB—hit television screens in early 1973. The result exceeded the boldest expectations of the director, Tat'iana Lioznova, and the rest of the crew. The adventures of the "Russian Bond" instantly mastered the shaky balance between "popular demand and state command," to use Richard Stites's apt expression (154). While the absence of reliable polls makes difficult an evaluation of the actual number of viewers, electricity consumption during the screening was reportedly several times higher than on regular prime time evenings, while street crime plummeted.

Lioznova's twelve-episode mini-series became a classic of the 1970s, and, in the words of contemporary Russian critic Nadezhda Azhgikhina, it was "the last mythological film of the

[65] V. Ezhov, "V logove vraga,' *Literaturnaia gazeta,* 15 (8 April 1970): 5.
[66] The series' exorbitant budget included individually tailored Nazi uniforms for 200 characters.

Soviet period, comparable to *Chapaev* in its richness of folklore."[67] This compendium of cultural themes and concerns tells the story of a mole, a Soviet super agent, colonel Isaev/Schtirlits, who for more than ten years worked undercover in Berlin as a prominent member of the Nazi bureaucracy. The mini-series recounts twelve days in the spring of 1945 when the protagonist is assigned by Moscow to obtain information about secret negotiations between the Nazis and the US behind the Soviet Union's back—a mission the protagonist successfully carries out despite formidable odds.

3.1. The Myth of History as Fragmented Memories.

On the surface, the mini-series is a supreme demonstration of the neo-Stalinist tendencies of the Brezhnev-era. For instance, the filmic presence of Stalin (after his virtual absence since the early 1950s) as the ultimate judge and "director" of whatever scenario is played out, and the pre-détente treatment of Soviet-American relations mark the series as conservative. However, the conservatism of the production (visual as well as political), and its claims to epic status as well as historical authenticity (for instance, lengthy insertions of documentary footage of the war and history of the Third Reich) enter into conflict with the serial form. As a result, the form itself becomes the content, offering the viewer fragments of socialist mythology from the point of view of Brezhnev-era society.

Like Leo Tolstoy's novels, the mini-series aspires to achieve epic breadth and psychological depth of representation by organizing the narrative around different types of temporality: historical time (progressive), societal time (static), and natural time (cyclical).[68] The first chronotope, linked to the protagonist, comprises roughly one month in the spring of 1945 and is spatially limited to several streets in Berlin and Bern. The second, the "chronotope

[67] From the critic's comments at the roundtable on *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. AAASS National Convention, St.Louis, November 1999.

of history," spans from Hitler's rise to power to the end of Second World War and spatially comprises all of Europe and the US. The third, conveyed by the title of the mini-series, invokes the temporality of natural cycles, both real (from February to May) and symbolic (spring as the time of hope and change). But unlike Tolstoy's novels, which move within various temporalities to create an integrated and complex narrative, in *Seventeen Moments* different time planes either exist in their separate spheres or are collapsed in the intrusive voice-over/narrator, which not only incessantly comments on the events but often replaces characters' words, thoughts, and memories.

None of the temporalities exists as a whole, around which meaning could be organized. Structural repetitions (the rebroadcast of highlights of the previous episode at the beginning of the one that follows, the recurrence of references to preceding events in conversations, etc.) underscore the external stability of the world on the screen. Each episode is built around several, randomly chosen "moments" that are marked by a precise date and time and by clearly identified locations (figure 5). Opening shots of these locations have intertitles superimposed on them and are accompanied by a voice-over. These serve as establishing shots, with the image doubly authenticated by the word. Marked both visually and verbally, the precise dates, times, and locations proclaim the text's historical authenticity.

[68] See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel,* Cambridge: The MIT P, 1966; especially pages 145-152.

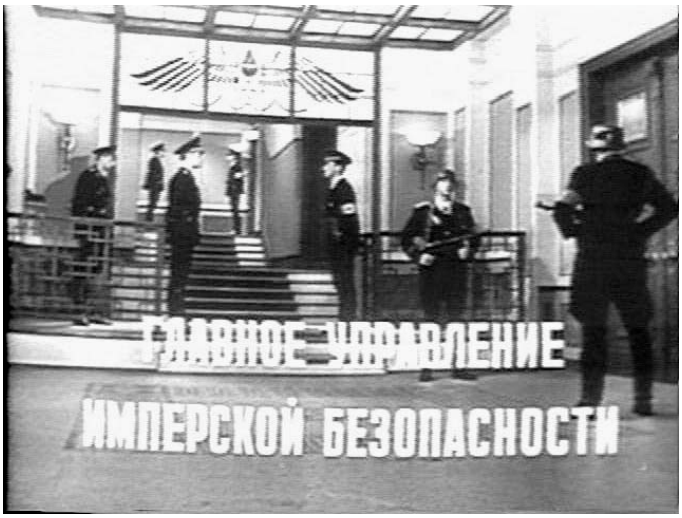

Figure 5

The choice of dates, however, not only lacks any definite purpose, but itself creates a lack of meaning. It is not clear to which chronotope the dates belong—to the one of history or to the one of the protagonist—or what their significance is. The only clue that the mini-series provides in this respect is the theme song: "Don't think of seconds arrogantly,/ The time will come and you will, perhaps, understand: / They buzz by the temple like bullets/ Moments, moments." The only meaning suggested by the link between the establishing shots and the song, with its intensely nostalgic melody undermines the very core of the optimistic and future-oriented Stalinist thriller. Indeed, historical progress (the inevitable fall of the Third Reich) and the urgency of the positive hero's mission in *Seventeen Moment* are portrayed as the nostalgic recollections of an aging protagonist.

The scene of Shtirlits' celebrating the 27th Anniversary of the Red Army is a remarkable example of the impotence of culture in viewing its own history as a coherent whole. Sitting in front of his fireplace, the hero drinks alone, singing Russian folk songs (in his mind) and remembering ("replaying" in his mind) the victories of the Red Army in the Great Patriotic War. The bleak, inexpressive mise-en-scène consisting of standard furniture, a motionless protagonist, and a static camera summarize the viewer's own experience of Stagnation. The ten-minute static

scene consists of a collage of national myths, which reveal the only meaning behind the canonical visual and acoustic images in the mini-series—nostalgia for self, whether social or private.

Contrary to the spring *topos* signalled by the title, autumnal elegiac motifs and mood prevail in the mini-series**.** The repetition of the three musical themes of the soundtrack—"moments," "nostalgia," and "the road"—dominate the narrative. Significant as they are in re-dressing major Soviet tropes—"Motherland" becomes "home," history" and "progress" turn into "moments" that "buzz by the temple like bullets"—the lyrics are overshadowed by nostalgic melodies. In the scenes where the protagonist is engrossed in reflections or memories, the musical soundtrack remains the only meaningful element of the mise-en-scène. All three melodies sound as one; all three are executed in minor key. The composite melody is a strange hybrid between an epic and a melodrama of passing life and personal losses. This tonality, expressed visually and acoustically, contrasts sharply with the historical optimism of the closure: the success of the operation and the victory in the war. Just as the 1930s vigor of cultural mythology waned and fell apart by the 1970s, so the promised spring aged and transformed into autumn.

The epic-historical dimension almost never intersects with the chronotope of the protagonist, except for occasional bombings of Berlin. The inclusion of documentary footage of the war and of Hitler's clique's rise to power is either motivated as a "film within a film" (e.g., Himmler watching newsreels) or is framed as the protagonist's "memories" or "reflections." All major historical figures—Hitler, Georing, Goebbels, and Himmler—are on the periphery of the series. Presented rather schematically, these figures synecdochically stand for the "big picture" in politics, as required by the neo-monumentalism of Stagnation. But for audiences, they served

predominantly as a source of titillation and vicarious pleasure in "witnessing" the intrigues of those on top, a feature of political life that was systematically concealed from viewers in their own culture. Historical elements reduced to ornaments, the mini-series treats them from the position of contemporary sensibilities. The historical scene remains a stage "with an over-stylized background" (Lukács 1962, 246), on which the presentation of history is "one of maximum exactness with regard to individual, isolated facts, torn from their proper context" (251). The crisis of Soviet enlightenment results in a skepticism about the possibility of knowing social reality and its history. Historical subjects are constructed by elaborately reproduced uniforms and decorations, and history exists in its domesticated (and highly mediated) version as a leisure activity in between political games or as a series of facts or anecdotes.

As for the protagonist himself, his major strategy of dealing with the flow of time is passivity. Unlike the traditional spy thriller, when being some place "on the dot" was a matter of life and death, Lioznova's serial inverts the temporal logic. While the entire Berlin Gestapo is looking for Shtirlits after they discover that his fingerprints match those found on a Russian transmitter, we see the hero peacefully sleeping in his car somewhere in the suburbs, thus avoiding arrest. If Shtirlits is the carrier of the teleology of narrative progression or of historical necessity, this teleology constantly stalls, drowned in the hero's on-screen naps and daydreams. The content of his dreams may range from planning an operation to personal memories. Yet the hypnotizing repetition of these sequences and their function as structural centers of episodes or as cliff-hangers establish an uncanny paradigm of the spy narrative as a dream of the hibernating protagonist.

This peculiar narcolepsy of the protagonist reminds one of the Russian fairy tale hero who sleeps on the stove for "thirty and three years" to wake up one day and fight the enemies of

the Russian land. Indeed, as Neia Zorkaia points out, *Seventeen Moments* employs many fairy tale (or "dime novel") formulas, most notably the single combat between Schtirlits and the head of the Nazi Secret Police, Müller (92-93). But unlike the Russian fairy tale knight, who, once awakened, does not exist separately from his function in the tale, Schtirlits's existence oscillates between pre-action "thinking" and post-action "analysis." In other words, the protagonist reflects rather than acts. But even his thoughts for the most part are presented to the viewer not directly as internal monologue but in the form of the quasi-direct discourse of the voice-over. During endless dialogues, inner monologues, and silent reflections, motion on the screen and in the narrative itself freeze. These extended time sequences both invert spy-thriller conventions and completely erase the distance between the viewer and the screen—the distance necessary for the epic perception of time and history.

The epic scale of the series and its forced authenticity of events, thus, is the last breath of totalitarian ideology in its popular, fragmented instantiation. History, War, State, and Power are still heroes in Lioznova's production, but mainly as things to be talked of or reminisced about. In the words of a critic, for the Soviet viewer of the 1970s, the past had either a mythological or a speculative nature (Shumakov 23).[69] If Stalinist film is characterized by a feverish movement toward some short-term (carrying out a mission) or long-term (building communism) goal, Stagnation film is an imitation of motion in a condition of complete immobility.[70]

3.2. The Positive Hero: Double-Speak as both Identity Builder and Visual Pleasure.

In its design, *Seventeen Moments* offers a picture of truly monumental proportions, matching its 1930s predecessors: one Soviet agent triumphs over the entire Nazi political and

[69] "Speculative" [the Russian word "umozritel'nyi" literally means "looking into one's own mind") is a term often used by critics to describe Stagnation. Despite its utter vagueness, the cultural etymology, stemming from the Russian baroque period, is revealing: an overly abstract, spiritual/intellectual view of the world combined with a tragic perception of its fleeting nature.

bureaucratic machine, as well as over US diplomacy and military intelligence. Yet, it is precisely the hero's Soviet identity that is the most questionable aspect of his personality. In earlier spy films, including 1960s mini-series, the ritual of crossing a border, as well as the border itself, are important parts of spy thriller narrative convention. Passing from "us" to "them" and back is always visually represented and charged with symbolic meaning. In *Seventeen Moments*, a few occasional images of the Motherland are contained within documentary footage, shots of KGB headquarters, or Stalin's office in the Kremlin, and the only border crossed in the film is between Germany and Switzerland. Soviet critic Viktor Demin, noting that in the protagonist's transition from "them" to "us," as well as his external activity in general, is de-emphasized, offers the following telling description: "[U]p to a certain moment the hero remains a mysterious "black box" out of which there is simply no response to the signals of the world. [He] is a sort of a superdense star, whose gravity only attracts light waves but itself does not emit any (1973, 5; emphasis added)."

In fact, all visual and verbal markers of the Soviet agent as they were constructed by the preceding tradition, are absent. The protagonist is more Nazi than the Nazis, both in his attire (a stunning black uniform) and in his public behavior. In fact, he speaks official Nazi discourse even when his high-placed colleagues choose to be open with him. Schtirlits's natural environment are offices, mansions, and bars, and his daily routine is that of a high-positioned bureaucrat, not an action hero (or a socialist realist positive hero).

The opening sequence of the series—the hero's contemplation of the sky, trees and, cranes, and the meaningless exchange of words with an old lady—marks the space in which the

[70] The major metaphor for the culture of the 1970s—"running in place"—came into circulation from the song "Morning Exercise," performed by the guitar composer and performer Vladimir Vysotskii.

protagonist belongs: the space in-between, with no real ties to either shore.[71] Nature only "reminds" the protagonist of Russia, as he himself "reminds" the lady of her perished son. This solipsism of space mirrors the confusion of identity: Isaev is "at home among strangers and a stranger at home," to quote the title of Nikita Mikhalkov's first film made in the same era (1974). Not only does the action in the mini-series begin in *medias res*, but the protagonist's identity as a Soviet agent is only revealed at the end of the first episode. While he is listening to the radio, he switches frequencies from a broadcast of German marches to a broadcast for "prospectors' parties."[72] The accompanying voice-over informs the viewers that the information is a coded message from the Center to him, "to Shtirlits, Colonel Maksim Maksimovich Isaev, known to be a Soviet agent only to his superiors in Moscow."[73]

By the 1970s the transparency of the Stalinist positive hero becomes totally opaque. Typically, even the protagonist himself fails to define his own identity. In his internal monologues, he consistently refers to the Germans as "we," with an ad hoc explanation that he identifies with the German people and not with the Nazis. The viewer, however, does not see any Germany beyond the walls of Nazi offices. Thus, not only does the action take place entirely outside of the Soviet Union, but the hero-spy's own generic features give little indication of his Soviet identity. If film genre, as Thomas Schatz asserts, is determined by "its cultural context, its community of interrrelated character types whose attitudes, values, and actions flesh out dramatic conflicts inherent within that community" (21-22), *Seventeen Moments* indicates an ultimate separation of a political idea from both its material expressions and the community from

[71] The image of a tunnel leading nowhere, is abundantly present in Stagnation literature and film. In the literature of the 1970s-80s, Vladimir Makanin was the major exponent of this "tunnel poetics" (cf. his novel *Manhole* [*Laz*]).
[72] This is one of the instances of ironizing Thaw ideals in the series. The myth of prospectors as "free spirits" traveling strictly within Soviet borders, was a recurring image of 1950s-1960s cinema.
[73] Isaev's first name and patronymic allude to a character in Mikhail Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time*. Unlike the Romantic protagonist of the novel, Maksim Maksimovich is down-to-earth, mundane and conservative—a perfect hero, valuing stability above all.

which it originated. Hence, the loneliness of 1970s Soviet televisual spies and the past-oriented, memoiristic bent of many narratives.

What attracted millions of viewers to the screen was neither the ideal of patriotism, with the heroic struggle against Nazism and American imperialism, nor the excitement of action and violence (of which there are but hints in the slow-moving series). Lioznova's serial became for the 1970s what Grigorii Kalatozov's *Cranes Are Flying* was for the 1950s.[74] If *Cranes* offered a common source of cathartic tears for post-Stalin audiences, *Seventeen Moments* addressed a community that shared the experience of an ever accelerating spiral downward. In the words of a Russian critic, viewers were attracted to the "idea that one can cheat, deceive history, the state, and your own fate" (Shumakov 22). The figure of a spy in a collapsing political system was a perfect trope to identify with for the Brezhnev-era viewer. The major theme of the mini-series is the survival of the individual within the totalitarian machine. The ideology of survival entails a double mentality—outward conformity with the rules even as one keeps private thoughts hidden.

Shtirlits-Isaev fulfills the role of the "ego ideal" for audiences. He has "two-and-a-half" identities: he is a Soviet intelligence officer (Colonel Isaev), a Nazi military intelligence officer (Shtirlits), and an engineer at a "People's Chemical Plant" (Bolzen). Even in Nazi Germany Shtirlits has a double identity. Using the last of these identities, he (as a German intelligence officer) rents the villa where he meets with his agents. Not only is he in perfect command of the art of double speak and disguise, but he also has the freedom to cross borders and enter secret corridors of power—something denied to Soviet citizens in their own lives. The verifiability of the protagonist's identity is minimal, since he rarely emerges out of his multiple roles. Nazi colleagues know the protagonist only as Shtirlits. German anti-fascists are aware of his position

in the official hierarchy, but perceive him as a German "patriot." The Soviet radio operator knows him only as a double agent, without any details of his Soviet identity.

Shtirlits's Nazi colleagues are equally opaque. On the one hand, a consistent split exists between characters' words and actions, between words and their covert meanings, the deciphering of which constitutes one of the "pleasures" granted the viewer in the absence of fast action, violence, or sex. Words and images alike are ambiguous. For instance, while confiding his innermost thoughts to Shtirlits, Müller moves in the frame from being visually "subordinate" and loyal to Himmler (figure 6) to covering his master's image completely with his body while betraying him with words (figure 7).

Figure 6

[74] According to witness accounts, Kalatozov's film provoked an emotional response both in its Soviet and Western audiences. Lev Anninskii, in particular, claims that those "purifying tears" marked the beginning of the new, post-Stalin era, for his entire generation (*Shestidesiatniki i my,* 8-9).

Figure 7

On the other hand, there is a disjuncture between the characters personalities and the actors' cinematic and cultural images. Major Nazi figures are played by famous Soviet film and theater actors, who became famous during the Thaw as embodiments of sincerity. Thus, "Reichsleiter" Martin Borman is played by Iurii Vizbor, an auteur-singer and cult figure in the unofficial culture of the 1960s-70s.[75] The head of German intelligence, Shellenberg, is played by Oleg Tabakov, another prominent Thaw figure, an actor of the *Contemporary* theater who specialized in portraying "sincere" and naive characters. Leonid Bronevoi in the role of the "people-minded" head of the Gestapo, brings to the mini-series not only his charm but also his theater image of a "soul-talking" buddy. Finally, Viacheslav Tikhonov (Isaev / Shtirlits himself), who in the late 1950s was consistently cast in roles of spontaneous, unruly youths, appears as a reserved middle-aged secret agent. The reversal of the casting paradigm is a peculiar reaction to the thwarted illusions of the Khrushchev-era society, as seen from the position of older, wiser, and more cynical Stagnation.

[75] The most prominent element of this subculture was "guitar poetry," marked by a lyrical, intimate, low-key performance as opposed to the "uplifting" spirit of Soviet mass songs. Auteur-singers were cult figures among students and urban intellectuals.

The closure of the mini-series is not constituted by the hero's return to a self, either as a journey back home (*The Scout's Exploit)* or as exposure and sacrificial death *(His Highness's Adjutant*). The closing sequence of *Seventeen Moments* is a compromise between the ideological requirement for a "socially relevant" narrative to be historically definite and finite, on the one hand, and the open-ended form of a television mini-series, on the other. As a result, the clash between the overt and the covert meaning of the series makes the closure ambiguous. The protagonist's mission is completed: Stalin is informed about American and British attempts to sign an armistice with SS representatives and files a protest with the British ambassador. The protagonist, however, does not "come in from the cold" and is not reunited with the Motherland. Instead, he chooses to stay in Berlin, where "everything is just beginning." Even the indefatigable James Bond enjoys a brief moment of rest, a sexual encounter on "neutral territory." In Lioznova's film, the protagonist sleeps (alone) in his car on deceptively neutral Swiss soil before returning to continue his struggle against evil. Unlike the opening sequence, which is visually constructed by close-ups of Isaev's face, in the closing sequence the camera pulls back from the protagonist until his lonely figure fades into an indistinct background of nostalgic birches and beautiful but dead leaves (figure 8).

Figure 8

3.3. Aesthetics of Mediation: the Voice-Over.

Just as heroes become opague in *Seventeen Moments*, so too does discourse lose all its transparency. The major aesthetic principle of the mini-series is mediation. All major characters, including Shtirlits himself, are introduced through official dossiers, which, along with the meaningless series of dates and nostalgic melodies, constitute another repetition pattern in the mini-series. As the top Nazi leaders are introduced, they are accompanied by "information for reflection," which combines documentary footage and fictional shots edited without any marked transition. The middle echelon of power is introduced through "personnel files." The identity created by these dossiers is homogenized and depersonalized: "Nordic character, ruthless towards enemies of the Reich, friendly and open with colleagues, good family man, did not have any compromising liaisons." Both the "items" listed and the impersonal tone of the dossiers suggest the ubiquitous Soviet "personal profiles" [kharakteristiki]—a euphemism for the practice of informing, which by the 1970s had acquired the character of a tedious corporate routine.

The Stalinist film is word-driven by virtue of its belief that the word, unlike the visual image, is an unambiguous sign. Stagnation culture, following the thwarted Thaw, is deeply skeptical about the word's ability to be "true" or at least to be an "authentic" expression of the public or the private. More often than not, words are traps in the mini-series. Endless dialogues reproduce clichés of official rhetoric and offer matter-of-fact statements or banalities. But this surface transparency of contentless dialogue is deceptive: words simply do not matter. Voice-over is called upon to reveal actual thoughts, plans, or dreams of the characters—often inserted into the middle of a dialogue. The voice-over, however, just tells another version of the truth, one more possible, but by no means exclusive, interpretation, which is often no less banal or ironic.

The camera remains static in most of the scenes constructed entirely as dialogues. The only motion in the frame is the transition from medium shots to close-ups during intense moments of confrontation. At such points, characters (often through the medium of the voice-over) seem to address the viewer rather than their interlocutor. In her review of the series, Soviet film critic Kisun'ko summarized the mini-series as a peculiar dialogue between the voice-over, as the collective voice of all characters, and the viewer (16). But positioned as the only witness to their "true" thoughts, the audience is also subject to the experience of the emptiness of words, the "zero-degree meaning." Silence, which in *His Highness's Adjutant* creates occasional gaps in the otherwise quite dynamic narrative, becomes a major element of the soundtrack in *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. Breaks range from long pauses between remarks to a six-minute-long hiatus in the narrative, with non-diegetic music playing the role of emotion trigger. In many respects, it is a "silent" film, but silent not by virtue of a creative artistic design. It is rather an epic narrative which has nothing left to say, whose energy is exhausted, word is emptied, and protagonist is tired.

The voice-over, thus, provides a historical dimension to the events and a teleology to the fragmented narrative. Impassive and intrusive, it relates past and future events, fills in pieces of official dossiers and of private conversations, even interprets the psycho-physiological conditions of characters. For example, when the protagonist plunges into another of his "naps" at the side of the road, the voice-over announces: "In exactly 15 minutes he will wake up. The mechanism perfected for many years will work again." The effect achieved, however, is radically different from the effect of narration in the early Stagnation mini-series. In *Operation "Cartel*," for instance, the narrator, who was personally acquainted with the major NKVD figures of the time, claims to take the viewer behind the scenes of world events as they are

described in newspapers and history books. In Lioznova's production, past and future, the public and the private, history and myth are collapsed into the voice-over as the only accessible reality. The major spy in the series, the voice-over is the God-like incarnation of an omniscient, ubiquitous, and omnipotent Narrator. This Narrator-History, however, is mechanistic, reduced to the disembodied word, and positioned nowhere—a supreme illustration of Žižek's "automaton of ideology":

> The externality of the symbolic machine ("automaton") is therefore not simply external: it is at the same time the place where the fate of our internal, most "sincere" and "intimate" beliefs is in advanced staged and decided. […] Belief is an affair of obedience to the dead, uncomprehended letter. (43)

The only characters who speak without the voice-over mediation are professor Pleishner—an absent-minded scholar and an anti-fascist—and a Soviet radio operator Kat—a widow and a mother. Misfits in the efficient machine of the state, their fatal flaws are represented visually as physical disabilities: Pleishner is myopic (near-sighted in a symbolic sense) and limps, while Kat is first pregnant and later has to move around Berlin on foot with two infants. Unlike the community of Nazi officials, both outsiders wear civilian clothes that differentiate them from the overall conformist environment. The genuine emotions and "authentic" behavior of both disturb the surface stability of the system and they are invariably excised from the narrative. The moment of their fatal encounter with the Gestapo is marked by the appearance of the voice-over.

The camera closely follows Pleishner to the compromised safe-house in Bern. The viewer witnesses his blindness to every conspiratorial trick: in the best tradition of Thaw

sincerity, he understands the word “cover” [krysha] literally as “roof.” All the information required to ensure the viewer's understanding of the pending catastrophe is supplied by the interplay between the voice-over and the camera: while the former tells us that “Pleishner was feeling secure and relaxed,” the latter shows German agents hiding behind the doors.

The episode of Pleishner's death opens with a lengthy sequence at the zoo. Pleishner is visually identified with the children, enjoying the playful animals. The cheerful music takes on an ominous tone as two Gestapo agents in civilian suits move through the crowd. When Pleishner realizes his fatal mistake (failure to look at the window, where a flower pot signals “exposure”), his movements progressively begin to resemble those of a caught animal—an image visually reinforced by caged birds in a nearby pet shop. Before Pleishner commits suicide by taking poison and “flying” out of the window, he is watched through the peep-hole in the door. The viewer’s gaze is identified with that of the Gestapo, both aware of the real situation and sharing the Gestapo’s/power’s point of view (figure 9).

Figure 9

Kat's identity is revealed when she screams “Mommy!” in Russian while giving birth. The viewer, however, is spared the emotion. The impassionate voice-over tells the viewers about Kat's rescue from under the debris and her being unconscious, while the camera focuses on

her body of excess. This moment of authentic behavior leads to her being put under surveillance and, eventually, arrested. As in Pleishner's case, Kat's lack of awareness of her real situation contrasts with the omniscience of the viewer: the camera shows the "insurance agent," who visits Kat at the hospital, in his Gestapo office. The scene of Kat's interrogation, during which a Nazi officer undresses the baby and opens the window to let the cold March air in, is constructed by a point-of-view shot: a blurred image of her torturer as a black spot contrasting with the bright spot of the baby—the last thing she sees before losing consciousness (figure 10). The scene reportedly shocked many viewers, mainly because of its sharp contrast with the detached style of the rest of the mini-series. After a disgruntled German soldier, who witnesses the scene, shoots the officer, Kat hides in a sewer with two babies: her own and her savior's. This miraculous rescue, however, cannot resolve the conflict. This resolution relies entirely on the protagonist's knowledge of the power games.

The melodramatic "rhetoric of the too late" (Moretti 160), with its irreversability and linearity of time, generates the pathos and tragic meaning of Pleishner's progression through Bern and the events following the birth of Kat's child. In a way, melodramatic teleology in Stagnation television and cinema becomes the last refuge of Socialist Realist determinism, transformed from optimistic "progress" into dramatic "fate." Lioznova's mini-series provides temporary melodramatic closures to break the otherwise monotonous narrative just as it situates them with the reassuringly stable chronotope of historical "facts" and mediated emotions.

Figure 10

Kat's interrogation and rescue evolve parallel to Müller's interrogation of Shtirlits. The two sequences, edited together as alternating scenes, occupy almost two full episodes and offer ample opportunity for comparison. They depend on each other narratively and structurally: Kat's confession would mean a death sentence for Shtirlits, while the latter's goal during the interrogation is to find a plausible explanation for his fingerprints on Kat's radio transmitter. The two scenes, however, are polar opposites in their style (visually and verbally expressed excess vs. absolute detachment) and temporality (the compressed melodramatic time of psychic shock vs. the extended time of reflection). Locked in a Gestapo jail and virtually on death row, Shtirlits lies down on a "torture table" (figure 11) and loses himself in memories of the sky and the cranes—one of the many visual replays of the opening sequence. While the time of his "musings" is indefinite, the nostalgic music plays on the audience's own "nostalgic strings," producing the effect of a temporal collapse both on- and off-screen, in the viewers' space. Criticizing the frequent suspension of time, Soviet critic Danilov writes: "In conversations, everybody tried in the last analysis to defend some privately experienced moments and not the experience of the protagonist of the film" (18).

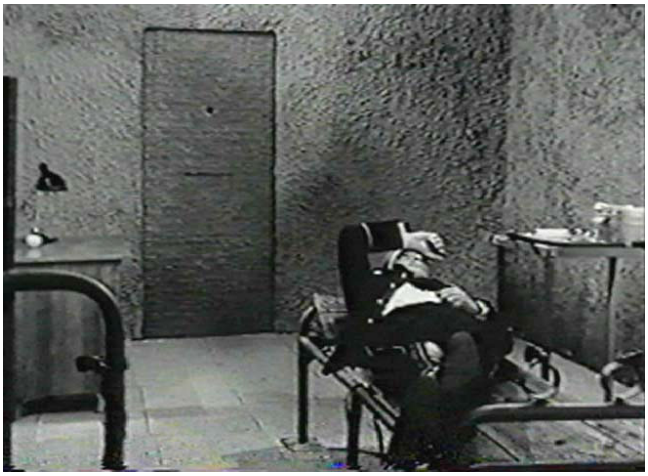

Figure 11

The only instance when the mini-series "sets-up" a melodrama for the protagonist himself is in the film's one real flashback: Isaev's meeting with his wife, organized by his NKVD bosses before they send him on a mission to Spain. The scene is absent from Semenov's novel and according to the series' director, was introduced in order to humanize the protagonist and "to pull him out of his Nazi uniform."[76] The scene lacks dialogue and action: the two just sit at opposite corners of a small German restaurant, in a silence that lasts for almost ten minutes. The sequence is constructed as a shot-reverse-shot of their faces. While narrative logic forbids the characters from showing any emotion, the music and camerawork convey melodramatic tension: their faces do not "fit" into the frame. The television illusion of "presence" is thus taken to an extreme: the characters, each in turn, look at the audience.

The accompanying melody, however, does not convey love, passion, or tragedy. It has already been associated with the themes of birches and nostalgia in the opening sequence of the mini-series.[77] The episode acquires a meaning totally different from Fedotov's departure from

[76] "My rabotali v sumasshedshem ritme…" (interview with Tat'iana Lioznova), *Novoe russkoe slovo* 5 February (1999): 16.

[77] One viewer's letter relates a telling incident. Owing to a technical problem he had to watch the scene without sound and was disturbed by the "unnecessary" and "unbearable" trial through which the film's creators put the protagonist. Only the re-run of the episode with sound satisfied the viewer: the musical score "erased" the uncomfortable melodrama in favor of a familiar nostalgia.

his wife in the *Scout's Exploit.* In the latter, the return to the faithful wife is a reward for heroic service to the country. For Isaev/Shtirlits by contrast, his past, his family, and his Motherland are absent as concrete entities. In their place, there is only the memory as an imaginary link to a geographically and temporally remote "there"—a memory which is detached from the events and emotions and in full control of their meaning. Lioznova's original intention was to make the protagonist die upon his return to Berlin. The "inevitable closure" of Russian melodrama, however, was renounced in favor of an indefinite nostalgic sadness—a much more welcome choice for the 1970s.

The end of the series presents future events—the capture of Berlin, the victory parade in Moscow, and the Nuremberg trials, about which the protagonist does not yet know in March 1945, but both the voice-over narrator and the viewer do. This peculiar documentary "flash forward" achieves several goals. First, it closes the epic frame within the mini-series. Second, it creates a distance (historical, but, more importantly, dramatic) between the protagonist and the viewer. Ironically, the voice-over also intimates to the viewer a piece of information directly related to the protagonist: for the successful completion of the assignment he has been awarded the medal of Hero of the Soviet Union. Last, but not least, the flash forward creates a gap between the historical closure (victory, villains of history punished) and the protagonist's fate (open-ended, repetition of the cycle). The re-establishment of the political status quo co-exists with the potential for endless repetitions on the level of an individual life (the hero's return from the freedom of Switzerland to Nazi Germany). Translated into the socio-political situation of the Soviet 1970s, this double meaning of the closure provides the viewer with an indefinite number of variations and conflicts without affecting the major "asset" of the era—stability. Far from creating an illusion of true history (objective truth) as in Stalinism or of authentic experience

(subjective truth) as in the Thaw, the documentary moments consistently (if unintentionally) present history as interpretable and separated from individual lives.

The completion of the protagonist's "assignment" is, thus, the point of no return, not only because the show must go on, but also because there is no return to the imaginary fullness of the myth. But while the mini-series defeats itself in an attempt to recreate an epic narrative, it successfully interpolates the viewer into the ideology of the empire's fall (in both senses of the word), constructing him as a sophisticated yet passive observer who has fully internalized conformity as the only "natural" response to social and political pressures and lies.

3.4. Saying Goodbye to the Empire "…and Loving It!": Allegory of Brezhnev-Era Society.

If any unifying meaning exists in *Seventeen Moments*, it does not belong to the diegetic narrative but emerges in the space between the screen world and its 1970s viewer—a self-portrait of late empire. The foreboding of the collapse of the Third Reich constitutes the focus of the mini-series. The choice of the time of action (two months before the fall of the Third Reich) and the average age of the major characters (sixty) are simultaneously a courteous bow to the "vitality" of Soviet political gerontocracy and a sign of the culture's realization of its own impotence.

The slow paced, dialogue-driven mini-series invites the viewer to participate in the many discussions of what it means to be a citizen in times when a national mythology and the entire social system undergoes a major crisis, assuming (quite rightfully) that the viewer would find it an interesting and relevant topic. The fact that the myths and institutions are German only masks the parallelism, obvious if unintended, with the Soviet Union. Two themes, in particular, reinterpreted Lioznova's mini-series as a text targeting the present: a (self) portrait of a bureaucratic state and the negotiation of growing consumerism. While it is safe to say that neither of these per se was intended by the makers of the mini-series, it is equally clear that the

cult status of *Seventeen Moments* was created by precisely those aspects of the production that engaged contemporary 1970s sensibilities and anxieties.

Seventeen Moments presents a rather homogeneous community of middle-aged German males. The core of their identity is each individual's position in the political and military hierarchy of the Third Reich. Power relations are, thus, the dominant axes in the production. The series is set predominantly in Nazi offices, corridors, and underground cells, as well as in the protagonist's villa, which has all the conveniences available to a high ranking officer of the Reich, but has nothing personal about it. The total absence of personal markers describes not the characters but the community to which they belong. Similarly, the range in the color of the uniforms—black to gray—is the only external device of differentiating the characters.

The representation of the routine work and cracks in the functioning of the bureaucratic machine of the collapsing Nazi regime could not but trigger identification on the part of the Soviet Stagnation audiences. Nazi officials, masking their lies and betrayals under "right" words, were not just "human," but recognizably "ours." Faceless Nazi offices with pervasive iconic images of Hitler on the wall replicated the familiar mise-en-scène of Soviet bureaucratic institutions, with a pervasive Lenin and Brezhnev on the walls. The personal profiles were twin brothers of clichéd and empty "characteristics." Finally, the very paranoid atmosphere in 1945 Berlin suggested an unambiguous analogy not just with Stalinism, but with the 1970s as well. Indeed, by the 1970s the KGB remained one of the few actively functioning institutions. The only institution that functions efficiently is *Seventeen Moments* is the Gestapo, the KGB's Nazi-era counterpart.

The primary effect of the multiple files, tape recordings, and written reports is to underscore the paranoid split in the mentality of a totalitarian society. Tapped phones, hidden

microphones, eavesdropping, peep-holes in doors, and street surveillance comprise the only "immediate" reality in the mini-series, that is, a reality not mediated by the intrusive voice-over. Private space as safe space is absent in the mini-series. The only truly domestic place—the apartment of the Russian agents—is destroyed fairly early in the series by a bomb, which simultaneously severs the only natural family ties in the mini-series. The Museum of Nature, where Shtirlits in his capacity of an SD officer meets his agents, is a significant setting for representing that the surface and meaning are at odds. Despite the external peacefulness of this panopticon of dead animals, the place is not what it seems: it is full of Gestapo spies.[78]

However, just as with the titillating spectacle of big political lies, surveillance is rendered almost desirable as quasi-voyeurism. For example, the OSS residence in Bern—the locus of "dirty dealings" between Nazi officials and Allen Dulles—is introduced in each episode by an establishing shot with an intertitle read aloud by the voice-over. Next, the camera allows the viewer to "peek" inside, through the window, to watch people move about and converse (figure 12). Only then does the camera move indoors. This "spying on spies" both empowers the viewer and constructs surveillance as a natural element of social life. In fact, in the 1970s, the shared knowledge of "being watched" became a perversely exciting part of any domestic gathering.[79]

[78] El'dar Riazanov's use of the same setting in *Garage* takes the trope of dead animals even further. In Lioznova's production they represent the illusory stability of the social world on the brink of a catastrophe, whereas for Riazanov, people *are* an extinct species devoured by their own instincts.

[79] One of the 1970s most distinguishing features was so-called "kitchen culture," a tradition of gathering with friends in the kitchen (usually around drinks) and of talking through the night with the radio and telephones unplugged. According to the popular wisdom of the time, most radios and telephones, especially in urban apartments, were "bugged."

Figure 12

In this context, the allusions to the reality of Stagnation, as well as the historical "anachronisms," work as part of the mechanism of viewer identification. Shtirlits shoots his Nazi informer with a Soviet "Makarov" gun; a train car in Switzerland prominently features the word "cargo" in Russian. Characters listen to a song performed by French singer Edith Piaf who became widely popular with the Soviet intelligentsia during the Thaw and Stagnation. The mini-series dwells on the familiar topic of food shortages for citizens and material privileges for the Nazi élite. Another, quite conscious choice was the decision to substitute a Mercedes—the dream vehicle of the Soviet 1970s—for the obscure (for Soviet audiences) Horch—Shtirlits's car in Semenov's novel. The latter, while being a more luxurious upper-class vehicle, had none of the cultural connotations of "Mercedes."

In its evocations of the pleasures of consumption, *Seventeen Moments* is quite comparable to James Bond movies. However, in the mini-series, as in Bond films, consumption and hedonism are double-edged. Bond's on- and off-screen image is unimaginable without "shaken, not stirred" drinks, spectacular women, and state-of-the-art gadgets. But as Cawelti notes, these objects are seductively dangerous and treacherous, if only because villains make superb use of them (1987, 51). Similarly, implicated in catering to bourgeois tastes yet

occupying a firm position in the fantasies of the Soviet populace as objects of desire, consumer goods exist in the mini-series as a mise-en-scène for the narrative. The mini-series abounds in references to American cigarettes, French cognac, impeccable tailor-made suits, expensive cars, villas, bars, and travel abroad—in short, the ideal world and the wet dream of the post-Stalinist Soviet intelligentsia.

The Soviet 1970s find a symptomatic reflection in the tastes and *modus vivendi* of the central characters. The head of German military intelligence, the elegant aristocrat and intellectual Walter Schellenberg, is unmistakably identifiable as a member of the privileged élite of the regime, a German "golden youth." The somewhat simpler secret police boss, Müller, prefers Russian vodka to decadent cognac ("After vodka there is no hangover")—a choice that clearly warmed the hearts of Soviet viewers. Vodka here functions as a peculiar signifier of a link to the people reduced to its most basic element which, indeed, by that time was the only "real" (i.e., material) proof of the unity of "workers and peasants" with the "people's intelligentsia." Not surprisingly, in audience's popularity charts Müller shared top popularity with the protagonist, despite his being the latter's deadliest enemy. Finally, the protagonist's position as spy allows him access to goods and comforts while retaining his uncompromised hidden identity as a Soviet colonel. Stagnation public rhetoric still emphasized the abyss between "us" and "them" even though the terms of this opposition were somewhat less definite: "socialist versus capitalist" was transformed into "moral versus immoral" or "spiritual versus material/consumerist." In everyday practice and in the day-to-day dreams of Soviet citizens, however, the boundary between the two was rapidly being erased: the immoral and materialist West had won.

3.5. "Shtirlits Culture" and the Recycling of Soviet Discourse.

Most critical reviews and letters from viewers, that appeared upon the series's release, shared one major feature: confusion about expressing and explaining their fascination with the series. After the first screening, many viewers in their letters to the popular Soviet film magazine *Soviet Screen* [*Sovetskii ekran*] admitted to watching each episode twice (prime-time broadcast and a rerun in the morning). To justify their interest, however, correspondents resorted to clichés of official discourse: "the heroism and patriotism of Soviet scouts," "truthful depiction of historical events," "depth of psychological representation" ("Vchityvaias' v pis'ma" 8-9).

Meanwhile, as the letters suggest, for most viewers the series became material for shared experience, discussed in the family, at work, and in food lines. The streets of Moscow were virtually emptied during the times of the series' broadcast. Both the people and the government loved the mini-series. For many, Colonel Isaev was a real person whose whereabouts were a subject of lively discussions. A group of fans declared Viacheslav Tikhonov—the actor who played Isaev/Shtirlits—an "honorable collective farm member" ("Pis'ma" 20). A legend goes that after a government reception to which the makers of the mini-series were invited, the intoxicated Brezhnev approached Tikhonov. After talking to him for a while, Brezhnev suddenly got pensive and remarked: "We should award Comrade Shtirlits the title of Hero of Socialist Labor." In 1976, the mini-series was awarded the State Prize of the Russian Federation—an unusually high award for a TV production.

Nazi characters enjoyed similar, if not greater, popularity. Leonid Bronevoi (Gestapo chief Müller), who was initially skeptical about playing a notorious Nazi henchman, became famous overnight. After the series' broadcast in the German Democratic Republic, Oleg Tabakov (Shellenberg) received a Christmas card from his character's nephews in West

Germany who thanked him for showing their uncle "as kind as he was in real life" (Kozhevnikov and Levin 1998).

Much more self-conscious was the other form of popular response to the series—anecdotes. The culture of anecdotes in the Soviet Union is a complex phenomenon, which still awaits its thorough study, from the origin of jokes[80] to their classification. The discussion of whether the discourse of jokes is subversive (as some scholars argue[81]) or lies entirely within the boundaries of dominant ideology is beyond the limits of this chapter. It is, however, symptomatic that anecdotes flourished in the Soviet Union precisely from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s—the time of the ultimate fragmentation and castration of ideological structures and discourse, when cultural expression reached extreme artificiality.

The only other film that generated a similar number of jokes is a classic of Stalinist cinema, *Chapaev*. There is, however, an important difference between these two groups of jokes. The characters of "Chapaev jokes" are the three major positive figures of the film: Chapaev himself, his orderly Pet'ka, and Anka—the female machine gun operator. The whites are represented in anecdotes only formulaically and en masse. Jokes about Lioznova's production do not privilege the protagonist; in fact, he is unthinkable without his double—Müller, his many Nazi colleagues, his German and Soviet sidekick agents, and most importantly, without the intrusive and shallow voice-over—the voice of ideology.

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[80] A paranoid version claims that the KGB itself launched a whole series of jokes in 1970—the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth—to prevent the more irreverent joke movement "from below."

[81] For an argument on the subversive political role of Soviet jokes see, e.g, Zara Abdullaeva, "Ob anekdote" in *Iskusstvo kino* 2 (1993): 82-86; Christie Davies, "The Collapse of the World's Best Political Jokes," *National Review* 42.15 (6 August 1990): 32. Seth Graham's dissertation on the origins and functions of Soviet anecdote is the first comprehensive English-language study of the phenomenon. Seth is a graduate student in the Slavic Department of the University of Pittsburgh.

While invoking particular characters (e.g., "Schtirlits Jokes," "Müller jokes," etc.) or themes (spies and spying, nostalgia, etc.)[82], most anecdotes play on the banality and self-serving solemnity of the voice-over, either by imitating its tone or dissolving it into verbal puns.

> Schtirlits came out of a bar, fell face down in a puddle, and fell asleep.
>
> Voice-over: "Schtirlits knew that in twenty minutes he will wake up—the reflex perfected for years will not fail."

Another prominent topic of jokes is the ambiguous identity of the protagonist and its link to the Brezhnev-era conformism:

> Schtirlits woke up in jail. "If a soldier in German uniform enters, I'll tell him I am a Nazi colonel von Schtirlits. If the soldier is in a Soviet uniform, I'll say I am colonel Isaev."
>
> At this moment a Soviet policeman enters and says:
>
> "You were drunk as a skunk yesterday, comrade Tikhonov."

One way to approach Soviet-era jokes is to consider them a camp response to the heavy rhetoric of Soviet ideology and to the monumental pantheon of its canonical figures. In her discussion of camp, Susan Sontag notes that camp readings of a text do not focus on the split between the literal and symbolic meaning; they are rather a difference between a thing meaning something and a thing as a pure artifact. . . . Behind the straight/public sense in which something can be taken, one has found a private zany experience of the thing. It is a

[82] Most anthologies and Web sites of anecdotes are organized by this principle. See, for example, V. Smetanin and K. Donskaia's *Anecdotes about People's Heroes* [*Anekdoty o narodnykh geroiiakh*]: *Chapaev, Shtirlits, chukcha*.

consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of "style" over "content," "aesthetics" over "morality," of irony over tragedy. (281, 287)

If one accepts Sontag's positioning of camp readings as a balance between critical distance and affection, the culture around *Seventeen Moments* is, indeed, an example of camp sensibility. Schtirlits jokes (and Soviet-era anecdotes in general) turned the totalizing discourse of Soviet ideology into an art object. The attitude to this "artifact" is always ambiguous: ironic distancing from its failed purposefulness and seriousness, and the enjoyment of its idiosyncratic unity.

It is significant that the collapse of the Soviet Union put a halt neither to the popularity of *Seventeen Moments*, nor to the off-screen culture around it. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the mini-series in 1998 confirmed the cult status of the show in post-Soviet culture. A two-episode documentary, released to commemorate the mini-series' release, features not only interviews with the crew and the actors, but also the KGB consultant of the production, 18-year olds telling "Schtirlits jokes," and a music remix of songs from the mini-series. The remix is composed by the son of the songs' performer in the mini-series, Iosif Kobzon, a Soviet counterpart of Frank Sinatra and the major official voice of Stagnation popular music. In this carnivalesque spectacle, the Soviet spy narrative came full circle: from the ideological center of Soviet culture it turned into a post-Soviet mise-en-scène of cultural recycling.

As Schatz argues, the success of any genre "depends on […] the thematic appeal and significance of the conflicts it repeatedly addresses and its flexibility in adjusting to the audience's and filmmakers' changing attitudes toward those conflicts" (31). The figure of a heroic secret agent is, undoubtedly, one of the major symbolic signs of the Soviet pantheon, and

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The major Web sites of jokes, featuring thousands of old and new jokes, updated daily, and providing links to other sites are: http://www.anekdot.ru/ and http://www.bk.ru/ . "Schtirlits culture" on the Web comprises more than 50

the one most integrated into the system of official mythology. Not surprisingly, once the system crumbled into recycled, split, and displaced myths, the positive hero-spy underwent a radical transformation. Appropriated by television, Soviet cinematic agents had to comply both with the demands of a new medium and of different audiences. They lost their youthfulness, thirst for action, and single-mindedness. Instead of living embodiments of national myths, they found themselves burdened with a load that paralyzed the genre—the culture's memory of "great times" and "big heroes." Thus, spy mini-series manifested ideological and aesthetic contradictions. The official ideology demanded a single narrative, illustration of ideological dogma through action-driven story, and an emphasis of the opposition between a Soviet "us" and "them." Television as a new medium demanded fragmentation of the narrative, story driven by dialogue, and dialogue undermining the opposition between "us" and "them." Instead of the opposition, television mini-series promoted the parallelism ("we" are like "them") or a complete identification ("they" are like "us").

The fragmentation of the masterplot of the Stalinist spy thriller, which in *His Highness's Adjutant* affected the major cultural tropes and only to a lesser degree the underlying mythology, in Lioznova's mini-series reached the core of Soviet enlightenment utopia: its verbal rhetoric and the cherished difference between bad spies and good agents. As a result, the most officially supported and the most monumental NKVD/KGB saga became an integral part of the Soviet and post-Soviet entertainment industry. The symbolic landscape created in the *Seventeen Moments of Spring* and recycled in the mini-series' off-screen existence, reinterpreted ideology as commerce. This entertainment culture, without being openly subversive, grew out of fragments of socialist mythology that became malleable through an implicit consensus between the "backfiring" state narratives and the popular demand for captivating spectacles.

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sites, including an on-going publication of the hero's adventures in various "hot spots" of the planet.

It is precisely in this spectacle mode that late Soviet mini-series operate. Some of them entertained viewers through temporal or spatial nostalgia. For example, Stanislav Govorukhin's police procedural series *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* created a nostalgic woodcut of post WWII years. Mikhail Zharov produced a detective mini-series set in an idyllic collective farm, a Soviet Cabot Cove, which never existed in the first place and was completely distanced from Soviet TV viewers who were by this time primarily urban dwellers. Finally, in the 1980s, the time of Soviet leaders' funerals and the empire's demise, Soviet television produced a mini-series based on the Victorian detective stories of Arthur Conan Doyle. Both the conservative ideology and the primacy of safely distanced thrill as entertainment defined genre variations of Soviet television mini-series.

Chapter Three. 1970s Soviet Police Procedurals as Vehicles of State Ideology

"We don't live in Russia, you know"
--Ed McBain, *Ax* (an outraged mother to a
policeman who asks her seven-year-old son a few questions

1. Police Procedurals and Soviet Narratives of Law and Order

The Western Cold War-era cliché referring to the Soviet Union as "a police state" either entirely missed the point or had at best a metaphorical value. Like all other Soviet institutions, the police followed party directives in defining its ultimate mission and immediate goals. Between 1917 and 1946 the functions of the secret and the non-political police were carried out by one organization and depended on political campaigns against "internal enemies" of the Soviet state. The role of police narratives in cultural storytelling in the Soviet Union, what Christopher Wilson in *Cop Knowledge* describes as a "power to narrate forms of social understanding," (6) was, therefore, of secondary importance, compared to that of the party or the KGB.[83]

The emergence of literary and television police procedurals—narratives centering on routine police investigation, emphasizing teamwork and routine procedures (including administrative hassles)—was among the changes brought into Soviet culture in the 1970s. In retrospect, this proved to be a radical event. To begin with, the genre had virtually no

[83] In 1946 the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), headed by Lavrentii Beria, was separated from MGB (State Security). The MVD supervised the regular police, but also performed state security functions, particularly in the area of prison and camp administration. In 1960 Khrushchev abolished the central MVD and in 1962 it was reconstituted as the Ministry for the Preservation of Public Order (MOOP). The name change implied a final break with secret police functions. Leonid Brezhnev did much to raise the status of the police. In 1968 MOOP was again renamed MVD and efforts were made to recruit better-qualified personnel and to upgrade equipment. This new MVD was responsible for uncovering and investigating non-political crimes, supervising the internal passport system, controlling traffic, managing prisons and labor camps, and fighting widespread corruption. Under Brezhnev and his successors, the MVD was directly accountable to the Council of Ministers and was divided into several divisions: the Directorate for Combating the Embezzlement of Socialist Property, the Office of Visas and Registration, the Directorate of Public Order, and the Criminal Investigation Directory. As part of the latter,

independent, Soviet prototypes. In the West the procedural appeared as a modification of the detective mystery story, following the Victorian classical detective story of the late 19th century and its mid-20th-century "hard-boiled" version (Winston and Mellerski 1992, Wilson 2000, Clarke 1986). Russo-Soviet culture, however, remained practically untouched by the "detective craze" of the century, except for the brief flourishing of Western and native-made detective stories before the revolution and in the mid 1920s. The tightening of party control over culture in the late 1920s and the introduction in 1934 of socialist realism as the sole artistic method in all spheres of cultural production effectively banished the detective genre. Apart from the genre's association with escapist bourgeois culture, its alien nature was manifest in the rugged individualism of the protagonist, driven by a privately understood sense of justice. The figure of a lone private eye or an eccentric amateur detective who single-handedly solves crimes due to his outstanding mental of combative skills went against the grain of the collectivist nature of Soviet culture.

Most importantly, the television police procedural manifested to a higher degree than the spy thriller mini-series the conventions in tune with television as a medium. First, police procedurals followed fragmented narratives, in which every episode had its own plot/case. Second, parallel action arises as the major narrative principle, which transforms the ideological opposition of a police "us" versus a criminal "them" into entertaining suspense. Third, dialogue was the major, if not the only, mode of storytelling. That is, the interrogation room became the major setting around which the action of each episode was organized.

In their book, *The Public Eye,* Robert Winston and Nancy Mellerski link the emergence of the modern police procedural after World War II with the shift from a market to a managed

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Moscow Police Headquarters (MUR), located on Petrovka Street, 38, was the most powerful and well-equipped of the local offices.

economy, which makes the "corporate hero" into the ideologically central figure of cultural narrative. The authors see the rise of the police procedural as

> a response to the technological penetration and increased bureaucratic complexity of post-industrial society, which operates by proposing a squad of individualized detectives, each possessing certain crucial skills which enable them to work collectively to investigate the same systemic evil that the hardboiled detective nostalgically confronted alone. (6)

From their very emergence, police narratives had to respond to public concern with global policing, which strives for complete visibility and transparency of power in both the private and public spheres. Drawing on Michel Foucault's discussion of surveillance mechanisms in modern society, which internalizes them to the point of their seeming disappearance, the authors of *The Public Eye* suggest that the serial form of the police procedural (especially the repeated reproduction of scenes of interrogation and judgment) is a formulaic expression of the "ideal" disciplinary society. In such a society, the policing and disciplining of the entire social body is rendered almost pleasurable (and, certainly, familiar and non-threatening) by its repetition (8). Another way the police procedural manages "widespread public distrust and fear of surveillance by a faceless bureaucracy . . . and overextended police power" (Winston 6) is through particularizing policemen. The new corporate detective squad does not consist of faceless cogs, parts of the institutional machine, but of fallible human beings and hard-working guarantors of public order and stability.

While Western procedurals had to negotiate between two social readings of policing, Soviet cultural narratives, inherited from Stalinism, by contrast, contained a vision of public

order in which social transparency was not only natural, but also the only possible way of living. Furthermore, the collectivism of Soviet life and mentality clearly preferred a "corporate police hero" to any other. And yet, despite the congenial nature of the genre to Soviet culture, the police procedural was a late development, not in the least because of its association with Western mass culture, i.e., with escapism and propaganda of bourgeois ideology. There were also other reasons for the delay, endemic to post-Stalin Soviet culture itself. First, the investigation of "systemic evil" was not a welcome project in the Soviet Union, where crime was treated as a temporary, individual, and aberrational phenomenon. Second, cultural destalinization and the disintegration of a totalizing view of society within cultural artifacts was slower than destalinization in the sphere of politics. Third, to portray the police as an institution, police work as a routine, and policemen as run-of-the-mill guys, authors had to present them as relatively independent of the party and the state.

The prevailing tendency of cinematic and literary detectives during the 1950s and 1960s was to treat crime as an excuse to explore ethical issues or to tackle the social causes of criminal behavior. In his seminal book on the Soviet detective model, writer Arkadii Adamov names a successful struggle by a community for the individual and the re-education of the negative character as two major conventions of the Soviet detective and the source of its "optimistic nature (183)**.** At the same time, he admits that the representation of the positive hero—the Soviet police—remains problematic, either imitating Western master detectives or stripping the hero of any initiative. Only by the late Thaw-early Stagnation did crime appear in public debate as a social problem, one worth addressing in visual and literary texts.

Among the direct influences on the emergence of the genre on Soviet television are Eastern European police shows, in particular the GDR-made series *The Police Phone Number is*

110, which was irregularly broadcast on Soviet TV from late 1960 through the 1970s. As far as Western models are concerned, the influence is much more mediated but by no means absent. On the one hand, there existed several canonical Western authors of detective stories and police procedurals, who were regularly published in the Soviet Union and were positively viewed by critics. The major figure among these was the French writer Georges Simenon, whose works, unlike those of Agatha Christie, were concerned less with solving a mystery and more with the social conditions of society that generate crime. On the other hand, an entire layer of Western mass culture was present within Soviet society. Clearly, no American or Western European police series made it to Soviet TV screens prior to the late 1980s. This, however, does not imply their absence from public debate. In fact, in the late 1960s-1970s Soviet culture addresses its relationship to Western mass culture in terms of implicit comparisons rather than of contrasts.

Maia Turovskaia captures this cultural self–reflexivity in the title of her 1971 book, *Heroes of Unheroic Times*, a study of Western popular genres, in particular of Bondiana. Turovskaia's book, like a number of other articles and monographs on popular Western cinema, television, and literature appearing throughout late 1960s-mid 1980s,[84] is an ambiguous cultural gesture. Steeped in stereotypes of Soviet ideological discourse but demonstrating an intimate familiarity with the texts, these monographs attacked the "bourgeois system of values" and "decadent mores" disseminated by mass culture, as well as the " brainwashing of the Western public." Ironically, those whom the books targeted—the Soviet public—with the exception of the élite, never saw or read the examined films and TV shows. To compensate for this gap, the monographs offered a detailed re-telling of plots, peppered with descriptions of violence, sex, "rabid" consumerism, and other vices allegedly absent from Soviet life. While these critical

reviews enlightened people in a void, they also served as an advertisement for popular genres and individual texts. In many ways, they paved the way for the notorious "book hunger" of the 1970s[85] and the flourishing of unofficial home video salons and screening rooms that started in late Stagnation.

The title of Turovskaia's book can also serve as a subtitle to the genre of the police procedural. In the context of 1970s Soviet culture, the appearance of the police procedural marked the institutionalization of the police, who had lost their aura of *Übermenschen* (whether seen as God's or Stalin's scourges). Instead, the genre sold the public a self-image of policemen as social mediators, whose job was to enlighten the population and to prevent crime. By the late 1960s, cultural producers and the state reached a tacit agreement. While major journals were allowed to continue publishing detective stories to boost their popularity, the state mandated a favorable depiction of the day-to-day working of the police as an institution and of the everyday life of Soviet policemen. In 1969, the first All-Union Conference on Problems of the Contemporary Soviet Detective Story was held in Baku. The conference resulted in an official "pact" between writers and the state. It established a working relationship between the Moscow Criminal Police (MUR) and individual writers, and instituted jointly sponsored prizes by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Union of Soviet Writers. Clearly, with such close supervision on the part of the state, only few authors were up to the task of creating both engaging and politically sound works-- Iulian Semenov, the Vainer brothers, and Arkadii Adamov among them. Semenov's novels *Petrovka, 38* (1962) and *Ogareva, 7* (1972), referring

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[84] For instance, Ianina Markulan, *Zarubezhnyi kinodetektiv. Opyt izucheniia odnogo iz zhanrov burzhuaznoi massovoi kul'tury* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1975); Raisa Galushko, *Dramaturgiia burzhuaznogo televideniia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977).

[85] Print-runs of popular literature books were insignificant for a population of 250 million. people, especially if compared with the circulation of political literature or 19th-century classics. Works by Western and native detective writers were no less a "deficit" item than American jeans or caviar.

respectively to the Moscow Police and MVD Headquarters, were among the first works that made a police team the protagonist and investigative procedures the structural core of the narrative. Television, with its mixed audiences and without the "aura" of a high art form, was to become a hospitable home for the police procedural.

The most prolific authors of police fiction were two family teams, Arkadii and Georgii Vainer and Ol'ga and Aleksandr Lavrov. Prior to engaging in writing career, one of the team members of each pair worked as a policeman in Moscow, the other as a journalist. Such a background provided knowledge of real cases and of routine of police work, on the one hand, and a journalistic, "documentary" approach to the material, on the other. In roughly fifteen years, the Lavrovs produced over 25 works, including scripts for the major police series of the 1970s, *The Investigation Is Conducted by Experts* (1971-1989). Several of the Vainers' novels were also adapted for cinema and television. Their novel *The Age of Mercy* was reworked into a script for the TV blockbuster of the late 1970s, *Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* (dir. Stanislav Govorukhin, 1979).

As in the case of *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, the state had a direct interest in the productions. Police authorities considered the mini-series a tool for crime prevention and a mechanism for improving public relations. For instance, several MVD generals, in turn, served as chief consultants for the *ICE* and wrote reviews of the scripts. Two of Lavrovs' scripts for the series—"Counter Strike" [Otvetnyi udar] (1975) and "From the Life of Bad Apples" [Iz zhizni fruktov] (1981) —were awarded jointly sponsored prizes by the MVD and the Union of Soviet Writers.

As significant as this "creative cooperation" of writers and the state is per se, much more important is the phenomenon of delegating to the police the power to construct cultural

narratives of public order. As early as the 1930s, the Soviet NKVD and police investigators recorded their experience in fictional form, at times rather successfully. Lev Sheinin's *Notes of an Investigator*, a collection of stories written between the 1930s and 1950s, for instance, is proto-procedural in its design, insofar as it shows the process of investigation as an institutional procedure. Sheinin's stories, however, are not about the police. The police narrative merges with a teleological political narrative to such a degree that the investigator simply becomes a receptacle of Divine Truth, a machine that conveys the spirit of the Party and Stalin.

When police officers in the 1970s turned to writing or to consulting for police series, they saw these narratives as a vehicle of public relations, which would re-establish trust towards the police and help to fight for the "socialist way of life"—a vague (and rather modest) definition that came to replace earlier Soviet visions of the "future in the present." In his review, lieutenant-general B. A. Viktorov defines the mini-series's tasks as follows:

> Unfortunately, even in our society there exist those whom we should fight, re-educate, or, even, punish. In order to do this successfully, the links of the police with the people should be strong, and such links emerge only where people believe the police, where they see a just figure of authority and law in a policeman. Such public attitudes should be inculcated, together with educating people in the spirit of intolerance toward any crime. The television series *Investigation Is Conducted by Experts* attempts to address and to resolve, as well as it can, both these tasks. (269)

The police, then, saw the TV series first and foremost as a tool of education and crime prevention. At the same time, the review defines the ideological parameters of the series: the incidental nature of crime in Soviet society, general public support of police activity, as well as the double (and hence hardly realizable) nature of the police team as familiar and friendly figures and as representatives of "authority and law."

2. *The Investigation Is Conducted By Experts* and the Fragmentation of the Thaw Detective Model.

2.1. Juggling Thaw and Stagnation: the Politics of Compromise.

The Lavrovs started their literary career by publishing of a series of courtroom reportages in the *Literary Gazette* [Literaturnaia gazeta], based on documentary material and focused primarily on the social and psychological causes of crime. These essays already contained some of the plots for the future series. Later, the Lavrovs turned to documentary cinema and television. After writing the script for a two-part television film *Special Investigator* [Sledovatel' po osobo vazhnym delam], the Lavrovs were invited to write scripts for a multi-episode television production.

The Investigation Is Conducted by Experts (hereinafter—*ICE*) stands out in several respects in the history of Soviet TV. It was by far the longest running series (from 1971 to 1989), with the largest number of episodes (22), each introducing an entirely new case. This demanded of the series a dramatic and laconic language not quite typical of the Soviet screen. It was the only purely television mini-series of the period, made by TV directors and produced entirely at the Studio of Literary and Dramatic Programs at Central Television, rather than commissioned from a film studio. Following the release of the first group of episodes, the actual scripts were published, a unique instance in Soviet TV culture, where mini-series broadcasts traditionally followed successful publications that had already passed literary censorship. The

popularity of the series triggered the decision to publish the stories. The precedence of the visual text over the verbal one is a major reversal of the Russo-Soviet cultural paradigm and an early challenge to Soviet logocentrism.[86]

Last but not least, it was the only entirely contemporary production. Based on many real cases, it engaged social and economic problems of the 1970s, which in part compensated for a certain theatricality in the mini-series. While not too daring and rather selective in its choice of issues raised, *ICE* nevertheless focuses on such issues of public concern in the 1970s as economic crimes and the black market, growing consumerism and the general alienation of the population from the interests and rhetoric of the "people's state." For the most part, those problems are treated as individual deviations from socialist law and morality rather than as systemic phenomena. The episodic structure of the mini-series simultaneously serves this goal and subverts it. At the end of each episode a particular crime is "purged" from the narrative. Yet, certain types of crime (for instance, embezzlement of state property) recur with astonishing frequency. The mini-series is, thus, a typical cultural gesture of its time: neither totally false, nor totally honest in the representation of the problems it raises, it dwells in the gray zone of hints, understatements, and common knowledge.

Crime rarely takes place "on stage": it is usually an off-stage prelude, secondary to the investigation and crime prevention, the major socio-political agenda of the mini-series. This educational project affects detective elements in the series. Thus, the identity of the criminal in most cases is clear from the very beginning, and violence and suspense are both underplayed.

[86] In Russian culture, literature has always possessed a sacral aura, whether it was seen as an expression of the monarch's wisdom or as an alternative to political power. The Soviet period took this tradition to the extreme: written texts were seen as the direct and unchallengeable channel of the Party's words. Scripts, therefore, were subject to a much stricter censorship than finished films and television productions. On the sacralization of the written text and its connection with mythological thinking see Boris Uspenskii, "Mif-imia-kul'tura," *Izbrannye trudy,* Vol 1 *(*298-319).

Unlike the Western police procedural, in which murder—because of its extreme and dramatic nature—usually constitutes over a half of all crimes,[87] in *ICE* (with the exception of the last episode) it is an insignificant percentage. Instead, *ICE* places emphasis elsewhere—on the routine work of the police team, juxtaposing it to the activity of criminals. The major narrative principle of the mini-series is parallelism. In early episodes, it functions as a classic melodramatic device: who will be faster and more efficient, the "good guys" or the "bad guys"? At stake often is not a person's life, but his conscience. While structurally this melodramatic parallelism replicates the Thaw-era "struggle for the person," in *ICE* the good guys are pronouncedly figures representing law and order. The re-education plot is of secondary importance.

The central issue is the trust of citizens towards the Soviet police and the socialist state—the concern, which was also central to all post-Stalinist detectives. To a certain extent, it is also present in Western police procedurals, although there it is usually a more practical issue of finding witnesses who would be willing to testify and the ability of the police to protect them afterwards. In the far less threatening world of Moscow in the 1970s, this aspect of "police trust" is of secondary importance. On the contrary, everyone is eager to help cops. As figures of state Enlightenment, the police in *ICE* see their mission as mediating the relations between socialist law and the public. "Trusting the police" is, then, tantamount to loyalty not just to public order but also to the socialist way of life. This issue is of particular importance in relation to the younger generation, those who were born into a relatively stable and prosperous time and who are, therefore, liable to fall into the trap of consumerism and individualism, especially if

[87] In his book on Ed McBain's 87th Precinct novels, George Dove remarks that of all primary crimes reported in the novels fifty six per cent are murders, while the 1980 police report for New York City shows that murder constituted only two-tenths of one percent of total crimes, as compared to almost ninety eight per cent for crimes of theft (70-71).

influenced by an older person. Within this paradigm, the police team assumes the function of a collective mentor, who, unlike their Stalinist or Thaw analogues, cannot work miracles of transformation but can reveal the true essence of false friends and prevent new crimes. The resolution of a case is, above all, about preserving the status quo. The success of the police team prevents the system from collapse rather then propelling it towards the radiant future.

"Dinosaur" (1972) plays out this scenario with utmost clarity. A counterfeiter wins the friendship of two young, orphaned brothers. The criminal, who is genuinely attached to both youths, nevertheless, plans to use the artistic talent of the older brother to counterfeit money—the prime object of desire in late Soviet TV procedurals. Once apprehended and exposed as the "false father,"[88] he produces the following characteristic monologue, in turn addressing the police and the two shocked brothers:

> Was I supposed to yield them to you? So that that they would work for the common good? … But I didn't want you to be socially useful: I wanted you to live a real life! Live for yourselves! I wanted you to grow up free, strong, with firm teeth . . . I don't give a damn about your society!

Although the monologue, and the episode in general, addresses a number of deeply rooted social problems (the values of collectivity vs. individualism, the alienation of the younger generation from the state), the conflict here is personalized in the best traditions of the Thaw. The state is represented by the three familiar and friendly policemen. The crime, committed against state interests, is redefined as the moral corruption of young people. Finally, the criminal himself, who consistently challenges the holy of holies—socialist rhetoric—is reduced to a

melodramatic figure. Among his papers, the police find a letter that reveals that he is the real father of the younger child and had lost track of his family while in jail.

Another aspect of the mini-series that manifests an attempt to reconcile two paradigms is the visual representation of Moscow—the city protected by the police protagonists. Moscow is constructed as an entirely legible and transparent city. There are no hideouts, dark corners, or dangerous areas. The only ambiguous spaces are private apartments. Even though crime itself rarely occurs in private space, it is in this space that criminals conceive their crimes, honest people are blackmailed and threatened. In this respect, *ICE* reenacts the Stalinist belief in the primacy of transparent public spaces and the threatening nature of privacy.

Yet, despite its legibility, Moscow is constructed as a generic city, as an abstract "urban space" rather than through its usual cinematic landmarks. In this respect, *ICE* moves away both from Stalinist and from Thaw images of Moscow. Stalinist cinema focused on imperial Moscow: "wedding cake" buildings, Red Square, spectacular views of embankments and monuments, all topped by an unblemished blue sky. Thaw culture employed the same images of the Moscow cityscape, but shifted the accents: people grew bigger than high-rise buildings (*Good Luck!,* dir. Viktor Eisymont, 1956,), monumental architecture turned into a background for romantic lovers (*Cranes Are Flying*, dir. Mikhail Kalatozov, 1957), who meet under a purifying spring rain. In *ICE*, Moscow is barely identifiable visually. The action either takes place entirely indoors (in police offices, in apartments, cafés, stores, warehouses, etc.), or is set in yards, parks, on small streets, giving the mini-series a domestic but impersonal appearance.

Crime locations are neither named nor identified visually. The only recognizable shots of Moscow are establishing and closing sequences, when the police protagonists drive through the

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[88] The motif of the "false father" came into cultural prominence during the Thaw and, together with the reconfigured family (see note #94), became a symbolic expression of the reconceptualized Stalinist "Big Family" with a missing

streets of Moscow. (figure 13) Here, as in numerous other aspects, the mini-series strives for a compromise. The concern with eschewing systemic criticism and with the preservation of social stability (and, therefore, an attempt not to "excite" the viewer[89]), finds expression in the visual marginalization and containment of crime (hence the anonymous locations *within* Moscow). At the same time, for newly-conservative 1970s Soviet culture, Moscow is important as the symbolic center.

Figure 13

Except for street crowds, *ICE* avoids long shots. Even the establishing shot of the Moscow police building never shows the entire structure or its surroundings. Petrovka 38 is important as a place of work of the protagonists, but less so as a symbolic center for fighting crime. Similarly, prisons only feature as interior shots of interrogation rooms and, occasionally, of cells. The interrogation room functions as the "gray space," above all a place to bargain,

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member.

[89] Soviet media in the 1970s generally avoided reporting "sensationalist" facts, such as crime statistics, accidents, or natural disasters. Even when there existed a real danger to the populace, as in the 1974 case of "Jack-the-Ripper" murdering women on Moscow streets, people learned about it at their work places or through the "grape vine." Such an approach to information can in part be explained by the desire not to set off a panic. For the most part, however, as Ellen Mickiewicz notes, it originated in the Soviet media's understanding of "newsworthy" as something that "reveals the underlying reality toward which history is tending" (30). Crime, with its postulated incidental and temporary nature in Soviet society, did not belong to this category of phenomena.

compromise and, occasionally, re-educate. At the same time, it preserves the institutional character of the investigation. Eager to preserve the myth of a humane state, early episodes construct the police as mediators in a new social situation. In the closing sequence, the three policemen either gather in the quasi-domestic space of the office or in a car driving through the streets of the "cleansed" city. Both the office and the car are spaces of compromise. Neither entirely public, nor entirely private, they re-enact the Thaw's cultural paradigm, while visually separating it from the new life of the city beyond the windows.

2.2. The Police Team against Criminals.

The police team consists of three permanent members: investigator Pavel Pavlovich Znamenskii, inspector Aleksandr (Shurik) Tomin, and criminal expert Zinaida Kibrit (hence the pun in the title of the series: "Znatoki" is a word composed of the initial letters of their last names, which in Russian means "experts").[90] The choice of three colleagues as the protagonists of the mini-series marks a significant shift from the detective films of the Thaw. First, the focus on three police professionals who (at least originally) are equal in rank, recasts the inherited paradigm of an experienced older officer-mentor vs. a rookie detective. The relationships within this new "egalitarian" community are based on professional duties and friendship. The mentor-disciple paradigm, however, does not disappear completely, constituting one of the subplots of early episodes—in Znamenskii's attempts to re-educate criminals.

Second, the three police protagonists complement each other both in their respective areas of expertise and their character traits. Each one possesses certain trademark features that are necessary but not sufficient for a "complete" positive hero. Znamenskii is strong in deduction, analytical ability, and logic. He is the face of the law and, therefore, the most

institutional of the three. For instance, he appears in uniform, has more contacts with his superiors, and rarely leaves his office. At the same time, he is the most "humane" of the three, always looking beyond the letter of the law and beyond mere facts. His humanism, however, is not grounded in the 1960s belief in the inner goodness of the individual. Znamenskii, rather, approaches people from the position of state enlightenment. As he repeatedly declares in his conversations with the accused, it is not he but socialist law that is humane. Despite his heartfelt care for the fate of his "clients," Znamenskii has little contact with them outside of the Moscow police HQ or a jail cell. He, therefore, lacks direct involvement with the life of the city, typical of the paternal figures of Thaw investigators.

The role of unmediated contact with the negative and positive sides of urban life is given to Tomin. Tomin is the action figure of the mini-series, the first visual representation of a street-wise cop on the Soviet screen. Unlike Znamenskii, who is at his best in the office, Tomin is knowledgeable in the labyrinth of Moscow streets. He is able to change masks, use any jargon, and win the trust of crooks by tricking them. He is more spontaneous and hot-headed than either of his colleagues. Tomin is the only member of the team who is ever shot at and wounded in the otherwise bloodless mini-series. His talent for impersonation, hot temperament, inventiveness, and a certain taste for adventurism—all fit the stereotype of a "smart alec" from the Caucasus region.[91]

Finally, criminal expert Kibrit represents the power of science "multiplied by feminine intuition." At her disposal is material evidence, which she transforms into positive facts. Since

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[90] The acronym is a peculiar homage to 1920s culture, which gave birth to such names as "Kukryniksy"—a collective pen-name of the artists Kupriianov, Krylov, Nikolai Sokolov, especially famous for their war-time caricatures of Nazis.

[91] People from the three Soviet Caucasian republics—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—have often been associated with the black market, which flourished in big cities. They were considered cunning and possessing a "natural" business mentality (not quite a positive characteristic) in contrast to impractical Russians.

Znamenskii is the most "sensitive" of the three, Kibrit is endowed with extreme rationalism and skepticism. At the same time, her appearance is always accompanied by compliments and gender jokes. Her role in the series is, perhaps, the most ambiguous. Within the emerging genre of the procedural, she carries out all "objective," technical details of the investigation and is, therefore, an institutional figure. At the same time, within the Thaw police "family" she is responsible for maintaining a "domestic" atmosphere in the office**.** In one of the early episodes, the mini-series assigns Kibrit the role of victim: she is blackmailed and harassed by a gangster. She has to be protected by her male colleagues and, thus, is not completely equal to them.

The distribution of personal qualities and professional functions among the three is a peculiar combination of the socialist realist hierarchy with mass culture stereotypes. Despite the original formal equality among the three, the major figure is Znamenskii—a Russian male—who combines impeccable logic with sensitivity. In a post-modernist pastiche, his last name combines the ideologically significant root "znamia" (Russian for "Red banner") with the aristocratic suffix "skii," signaling nostalgia for a pre-Revolutionary imperial past. The fourth episode re-establishes the institutional hierarchy: Znamenskii is promoted before either of his colleagues. Individually, none of the three sustains the model of the master investigator. As a team, however, they represent a composite positive hero. Kibrit and Tomin provide bits and pieces of information, fragmented facts out of which Znamenskii creates his version of the crime and profile of the criminal, who is revealed at the end of each episode.

The closure of each episode brings together the fragmented functions of the positive hero. Tomin re-establishes social order, stability, and the status quo by the physical apprehension of the criminal. Kibrit penetrates the "opacity" of the urban crowd, making it transparent and readable through traces subject to scientific and rational analysis. Finally, Znamenskii re-

establishes social justice, which overlaps with social order, but is not reducible to it since it deals with the individual (still a Thaw concern) rather than with society at large.

The Experts, thus, simultaneously represent law, science, and common sense. But while the focus on three very different protagonists-colleagues introduced variety into the Soviet detective model, it also indicated the representational limitations of the model. The fragmentation of the single figure of the young detective, who learns the ABC's of his profession and in the process rises from spontaneity and individualism to the consciousness of the high mission of the Soviet police, offers more external dramatic tension at the expense of teleological and ideological maturation. In *ICE*, spontaneity and consciousness are co-present and simultaneous. There is no space (and no need) for the development of the positive hero, no space for his *Bildungs* journey. The Experts are masks, stock characters replaying a static "trip" in each episode, as Znamenskii—the humane Soviet law—re-establishes threatened social stability.

In its representation of crime, the mini-series follows the premise that crime is only a passing problem, stemming from abnormal upbringing or bad influence. Individual cases, therefore, have no deep roots in social life. In early episodes, each crime is solved completely, bringing resolution in the closure at all three levels: the criminal is apprehended; the innocent, the misled, and the criminals are sorted out; and rationalism triumphs over dark passions and individualism. Crime is "purged" from the narrative and from society.

Because of the insistence on the incidental nature of most types of crime, early episodes feature randomly selected criminals, with no obvious pattern uniting them. Among the criminal types are survivors of the turbulent 1920s and 1930s, ex-cons, an aged femme fatale, and even a foreign spy. First and foremost, criminals are masks, or as a critic Viktor Demin calls them,

"pawns on the chess field" (114) designed to flesh out certain features of the police protagonists or to depict the routine of investigation.

The fact that criminals are anomalies, cankers on the otherwise healthy social body, is metaphorically represented by their physical features (e.g., extreme old age in "Blackmail"), rare diseases (blood disease in "The Dinosaur"), "talking names" (Sanatiuk/Sataniuk—"the Satan", Prakhova—literally, "old as ashes") or episode titles ("The Dinosaur"). The recurring use of talking names or proverb-like moralistic titles—devices, more appropriate for an 18th-century novel than to a police procedural—signal the struggle of the mini-series with its own ideological limitations.

Later episodes introduce less transparent (but no less conspicuous) devices. For instance, the head of a house management office ("Without a Knife," 1988), guilty of virtually every crime from embezzling to harboring criminals, has a habit of repeating parts of phrases. Although it resembles stuttering, in a logocentric culture such a defect has a surplus of negative meaning. In the episode, it clearly marks a bureaucrat and a liar. All these anomalies are as individual as fingerprints, but unlike the latter their meaning goes beyond mere detective clues. They are, rather, the last attempt to separate bad organs from the "healthy" social body of the Soviet community.

In fact, the mini-series makes several such attempts to redraw a clear boundary between "us" and "them," which had been blurred in the 1970s. In all such cases, *ICE* employs the reliable tropes of 1930s-50s culture. The episode "Your Real Name?" (1971), in particular, features a true outsider, a foreign spy who is unmasked despite pretending to be a homeless person, without a permanent place of residence or work. The real bum, whose "identity" the enemy appropriates, is a beggar and a thief. Yet, the Soviet bum, as well as the convicted "con"

artist who helps to catch the spy, are both inside the social community. The system of "checks" that Znamenskii designs to probe the alleged bum reminds the viewer of the one employed in Solzhenitsyn's "Incident at Kochetovska Station." In "Your Real Name?," the spy fails in his knowledge of the geography of the Soviet Union and Russo-Soviet criminal folklore. More importantly, his perfect teeth and physical fitness (for instance, a liver not ruined by alcohol consumption) distinguish him from Soviet people. The Soviet community is, thus, constituted by language and songs, and described through bodily metaphors. The organic view of the community—the center of Stalinist ideology of the nation—plays only a peripheral and incidental role in the mini-series (one episode out of twenty two), even though it efficiently draws the boundary between "us" and "them."

Much more prominent is another pattern in representing criminals, which marks a major departure from the Thaw: a negative portrayal of the intelligentisia. Like many other aspects of the mini-series (for instance, xenophobia or anti-semitism) its anti-intellectualism feeds on (and appeals to) the base instincts of Russo-Soviet mass consciousness**.** The major transgression of the intelligentsia (apart from totally succumbing to consumerism) is "deceiving" simple folks or leading them onto the path of crime. In the episode "At Any Price" (1977), the dentist family of a young ne'er-do-well, who kills a man on the street out of greed, concocts a plan to free the youth. With the help of their acquaintance—a prison nurse and a convicted former eye specialist—they convince a simple-minded man who is in jail for a minor crime, that he has a rapidly progressing form of cancer. They offer the desperate man money to support his "soon-to-be-orphaned" children in exchange for admitting to the murder. This scenario and, in

particular, the last scene of the "trial" of the nurse, harks back to the design of the "Doctors' Plot" of the early 1950s.[92]

In the episode "Caught Red-Handed" (1971), an intelligent-looking ex-con, nick-named "Brain" [Bashka], makes his former prison "disciple"—a naive, bear-like man—burglarize a warehouse. The operation is a set up: "Brain" knows that Silin (literally "a strong man") will be caught, but not before he damages the wiring. This opens the way into the warehouse for "Brain." This episode is a complete reversal of the Thaw iconography of friendship. In the 1950s-early 1960s, friendship, like the high mission of the intelligentsia and their organic link to the people, are never questioned. Silin, in fact, relies on Thaw rhetoric by refusing to betray his friend and inform on him, especially because their friendship started in a prison camp, another symbolic locus of Thaw culture. Yet, although the episode presents a full iconography of a dissident, Thaw discourse is turned upside down. The intellectual is a criminal and a traitor, and Silin has to choose between this false friend and the true friend—police officer Znamenskii and the state he represents.

In its representation of the conflict between the police "us" and the criminal "them," the series, thus, attempts to reconcile the new reality of the 1970s with the sterile and moralistic model inherited from the Thaw, and which, to a considerable degree, gave a more personalized interpretation to the socialist realist masterplot. In characterization, this adjustment results in the static and fragmented positive hero who represents unchanging values with repeated configuration of the conflict from one episode to another, on the one hand, and much more dynamic (if predictable) negative figures, on the other. It is the latter category that becomes the carrier of new values and conflicts in the changing Soviet society.

[92] In January 1953 the newspaper *Pravda* accused nine Kremlin doctors of causing the deaths of high Soviet officials, including Andrei Zhdanov. Six of the doctors were Jews, and the trial marked the high point of Stalin's

In its narrative focus and politics of representation, *ICE* falls into two more or less equal parts. Early episodes (those released in 1971-1974), with some modifications reiterate the ideology of the Thaw and reproduce the detective model as it was shaped in Thaw cinema. The three central elements of this model are the representation of the police investigative team as a family unit (both as the narrative center of the episodes and as a social mini-model), the representation of crime as an individual deviation from a socialist norm (hence the recurrence of random crimes, their visual and narrative localization, and the complete resolution of every case), and a concern with the re-education of the criminal. At the same time, the Thaw model undergoes a significant transformation. First, the detective-protagonist in *ICE* is fragmented into three figures, who do not develop over time but simultaneously represent various aspects of the positive hero. Second, in character representation and in conflict development, early episodes employ a variety of ideological patterns and individual tropes appropriated indiscriminately from Stalinism, Thaw, and Stagnation. These cultural patterns and tropes are often quite incompatible. This ideological fragmentation and heterogeneity signal the transitional nature of the text, which attempts to reconcile the static narrative model and the underlying view of society with the dynamic material and the new values of 1970s reality. In later detective mini-series favoring stylization, such as *The Aniskin* collective farm detective and the Soviet Sherlock Holmes adaptations, the filmmakers will engage in a quite conscious ironizing of icons and tropes of Soviet culture and imperial power.

Later episodes of *ICE* (those released from 1975 to the late 1980s), in contrast, represent the police rather formulaically, shifting the focus to the family of criminals. The re-education of criminals becomes secondary to their punishment, or even simply fails as a project. The main reason for the failure of state enlightenment is the emergence of organized crime. In later

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anti-cosmopolitan campaign.

episodes, economic crime is treated as a systemic phenomenon, indirectly implicating the entire system. As the function of the police team is reduced to stock figures of law and order, the "continuity of crime" remains the only structural link from one episode to the next in the mini-series.

2.3. Early Episodes: "Socialism with a Human Face" and the Discourse of State Enlightenment.

Thaw values both shape relations among the police and underlie the conflicts in many early 1970s episodes of *ICE*. These narratives construct an egalitarian community, a brotherhood, where professional and personal bonds mean more than bosses or institutions. The theme song of the mini-series, in fact, reiterates the Thaw hierarchy of values—the primacy of individuality and friendship—within the police-centered narrative.

> If somewhere a person is in trouble,
>
> We'll help, we're always on duty.
>
> If suddenly, somewhere, one of us
>
> Is in trouble, too—
>
> Well, we've helped each other out
>
> Not once
>
> And not just once has a friend's heart
>
> Warmed us in a difficult hour.

Despite an attempt at humanizing the police and redefining its mission, the lyrics are a strange hybrid of Thaw and Stagnation discourses, which reproduce the classicist duo of "duty" and

"heart." The two, however, are not in conflict, since (as the lyrics suggest) "heart" is only applicable to a (police) pal, while "duty" operates outside of the police brotherhood.

The compromise between institutional and "humane" approaches to crime is manifest in the split focus of early episodes: one the one hand, a detective inquiry (crime and its investigation), on the other—a psychological and ethical inquiry. Accordingly, there are usually two suspects who stand in a particular relationship to each other and to the crime: false/real suspect, tool/mastermind, criminal and witness of the crime. Even if both are equally guilty in the eyes of the law, they are not equal in the moral and social implications and causes of their transgression.

Until organized crime moves onto center stage, the criminal is capable of being re-educated and re-integrated into the social body. Redeemable transgressors include those who succumbed to crime under pressure ("Fault Confessed Is Half Redressed," 1971), out of false friendship ("Caught Red-Handed," 1971), or who are simply victims of circumstances ("An Accident," 1972). These people often have to be rescued from their own misconceptions. In each episode, Znamenskii functions as a "father confessor" and a mentor to criminals who behave like children: stubborn, immature, and unreasonable. Their immaturity mainly manifests itself in their lack of trust of the police as the "protector" of their interests, rather than as a generally false or asocial outlook.

The spatial boundary between the accused/criminal and the investigator is constantly violated. Znamenskii starts conversations at the opposite side of the table from the suspect but progressively positions himself next to him/her, until only a few inches separate their faces. (figure 14) The discourse, too, resembles not so much official language as a "soul talk." Several of the early episodes use the interrogation scene as the emotional climax—the repentance of the

criminal, often visually signaled by tears, a trembling voice, close-up focus on the eyes—the epitome of Thaw physical sincerity. Early episodes are often set not in faceless offices but on crime scene locations, in bars, etc.[93]

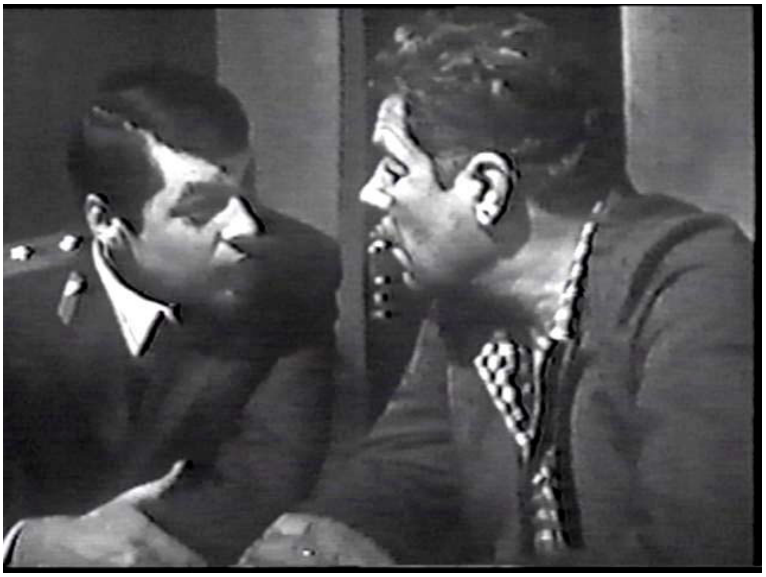

Figure 14

"Communal" smoking also contributes to the atmosphere of bonding. Everyone smokes in early episodes: the investigator, the witness, the suspect, and the criminal. The only symbolic watershed in this bonding bliss is the choice between Soviet and Western brands. When a criminal offers a Marlboro to Znamenskii ("A Fault Confessed"), the latter rejects it: "We are starting a campaign against illegal sales of foreign cigarettes, so you'd better switch to Soviet brands." Incidentally, this detail unambiguously separates the man from his equally guilty but repentant colleague, who smokes Soviet cigarettes.

[93] The paradigm of interrogation-confession was introduced in Fedor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment.* Raskol'nikov's admission of guilt is only the beginning of his journey on the path to salvation. Without repentance, this admission is an ethical dead end. Aware of this, Porfirii Petrovich leaves his office and his role of police investigator, and comes to Raskol'nikov's apartment as a father-confessor. A similar scene, but with ironic overtones, takes place in El'dar Riazanov's film *Beware of the Car* (1966), where the criminal confesses in a pub, sharing a beer with his interrogator.

All three policemen practically live in the office, which is domesticated and comfortable. The quasi-domestic space, where they sit, talk and drink coffee between cases, is a remnant of the Thaw. (figure 15) But the differences between Thaw and Stagnation models of community are equally obvious. First, Thaw detectives have a family, however dysfunctional or reconfigured it might be.[94] And they return to this family after fulfilling their duty. In *ICE* none of the three protagonists has a family. While several episodes mention Znamenskii's mother and younger brother, Tomin's mother, or Kibrit's sister and nephew, their relatives play no role whatsoever in characterizing the protagonists.

Figure 15

Both men flirt with their female colleague, although this flirtation is limited to rather banal compliments and jokes. For several episodes a tension seems to exist between Kibrit and Znamenskii, and some hints promise a romance. The relationship, however, leads nowhere. In the script, Znamenskii has a conversation with his mother, who expects the two to get married.

[94] Thaw culture redefined the "Big Family" of Stalinism in terms of the nuclear family with some kinship slots filled by substitutes. Most often (and most symbolically) it is the substitution of the father or the adoption of a son.

But even this episode is absent from the mini-series. The protagonists' allegiances are to their work and "institutional friendship" is the only model of community offered on screen.

Second, as the series progresses over the years, the transformation of a criminal's consciousness and worldview is less and less likely to happen, in part because of the appearance of organized crime, in part because the activity of the police team becomes formalized. Despite its original reliance on the Thaw model, the mini-series progressively shows Thaw ideals from the point of view of 1970s state ideology: as "bonding" with the state through the medium of the police. The confessional stage gradually looses its redemptive meaning, becoming an *ad hoc* tribute to the humane image of the police.

In fact, Znamenkii's fatherly / brotherly image undergoes the most profound transformation from early to mid 1970s. Action-driven, street-wise Tomin and the detached, rational Kibrit preserve their stock masks, while Znamenskii becomes a figure inextricable from Stagnation culture. Fatherly concern turns into an official duty, intuition into following the letter of the law, care for the individual transforms into moralizing *ad nauseum*.

Investigation of the crime and the purging of the criminal from the community develops parallel to the subplot of saving the criminal from him/herself and false friends, and reintegrating those who "slipped" back into the community. This double structure fulfills two functions: it testifies to the humanism of the system, which never fails to care for the individual, and it helps the mini-series to avoid systemic criticism. But it is precisely this double structure that reveals the gap between the discourse of "socialism with a human face," on the one hand, and the rigidity of the economic and penal system, on the other.

Except for the investigation, no other part of the legal system is present in early episodes. What happens after the investigation is completed is scarcely mentioned and even more rarely

presented visually. Neither prosecution nor conviction terms are discussed, and if they are, then only in relation to hardened criminals. The embezzler in "A Fault Confessed Is Half Redressed," who is facing 15 years in jail, himself states the prison term. Thus, there is "crime" but there is no explicit "punishment" or it is deliberately underplayed. One reason for this symptomatic lack is aesthetic: severe terms of punishment for misappropriating state property would undermine the "humanitarian" flavor of the early episodes. The second, and much more significant reason, is that the connection between the crime and the punishment completes the picture of a system corrupt to the bone, which can fight corruption only at the price of severe penal measures.

The impression of social harmony, a remnant of 1940s-early 1950s "conflictlessness," as well as the non-violent nature of most crimes in the early episodes is misleading. Economic crime—embezzlement or "selling on the left" (black marketeering of state property) ranked second in degree of severity of punishment after murder, far ahead of individual property theft or rape. In fact, article 93 of the Criminal Codex of the Soviet Union —"large-scale embezzlement" (over 10,000 rubles)—stipulated from 15 years in jail to the death penalty as a punishment. At least one third of all episodes deal with crimes of this scale. Yet, until episode 10 (1975), capital punishment never comes up as a topic.

Major crimes and their effects are never represented; they are only discussed during the interrogation, and thus safely "wrapped" in the discourse and enacted in the space of power. In other cases, after the crime is identified, the focus immediately shifts to its side effects. The latter strategy is employed, for instance, in the episode "Blackmail," where the plot rotates around gold dust stolen from a gold mine. The infringement on a state monopoly is a potentially

explosive topic,[95] which remains in the background. Instead, the episode focuses on the criminal's attempt to retrieve the evidence from the police by blackmailing Kibrit.

The dialogue over values between *ICE* and Thaw culture manifests itself not only in the design of conflicts and characters, but also in their discourse. In all other respects early episodes manage to localize crime visually and narratively, and to adhere, with some slips, to the idealistic picture of society inherited from the 1950s-60s. The discourse, in contrast, is the most ambiguous element of the production and bears all the signs of the 1970s.

With the exception of Tomin's occasional jokes and a few colloquialisms, the Experts invariably either speak in the sterilized language of the socialist realist moralistic novel or use professional jargon. The only two groups that deviate from this pattern are high police officials and criminals. Ironically, both share a predilection for official socialist rhetoric; the difference is in the use to which they put it. In criminal's speech, this rhetoric is emptied, ironized, and used in derisive clichés. For example, in "Blackmailer," the criminal addresses his accomplice "Our dear invalid! The hero of our inconspicuous everyday reality!" ironically reproducing newspaper clichés. A striking example of such appropriation is the inspired monologue of the counterfeiter ("The Dinosaur") on the mystical nature of money, which quotes Marx almost *verbatim.*

In many other instances, however, the "highlights" of socialist discourse are seemingly used in all seriousness. Moreover, some concepts, like "plan"—the catchword of the socialist economy—only exist in criminals' speech. Using the right rhetoric makes it possible to maintain the public image of diligent and conscious socialist workers, while abusing the system. One woman, whose boss makes her part of a criminal group stealing from a restaurant,

[95] Within the Soviet state economy, infringement on the state monopoly was, predictably, a serious crime, second only to high treason. However, the law, severe in respect to gold or the foreign currency monopoly, was quite lenient in relation to the alcohol monopoly. Millions of people, including the intelligentsia, produced home-made vodka—a practice frowned upon but tolerated as a necessary evil.

sarcastically admits during interrogation: “Everything is like it should be. Workplace meetings. Fullfilled the plan . . . Committed to produce . . . Sometimes one simply can’t tell black from white. We seem always to be following correct slogans.”

On the other side of the law, tropes and verbal clichés also become interchangeable, flexible, and adjust easily to any situation. This decomposition of discourse manifests the separation of official rhetoric from reality: the former turns into an artifact. For instance, Znamenskii’s repeated assertions that he is interested not in a person’s crime, but in his life, does not apply to all. While in his conversations with potentially redeemable criminals Znamenskii uses the humane discourse of the Thaw, in his interrogation of the unredeemable, the roles are reversed. When the unsuspecting brothers in “The Dinosaur” lead the police to the counterfeiter, he quotes a biblical passage about Peter renouncing Christ, to which Znamenskii sarcastically remarks: “Let’s leave the Holy Scriptures alone. The Criminal Code is quite sufficient for us.”

Already by the seventh episode it becomes clear that both the use of the Thaw model and the mixing of styles and tropes have exhausted themselves. The first six episodes feature tight narratives, clear conflicts, and dynamic characters. Episode seven (“An Accident,” 1972) opens with an action sequence: a young man is run over by a taxi and killed. The narrative, like the taxi, looses direction: the viewer is offered a lengthy moralistic lecture by a police colonel on changes in urban psychology, a lecture less than loosely linked to the plot.

Figure 16

This monologue lasts for almost five minutes and is constructed as a disembodied voice-over that accompanies quasi-documentary shots of Moscow streets and crowds (figure 16), shots that seem to be lifted out of a neo-realist movie, except for the "institutional" voice. The narrative eventually returns to the original conflict, but the narrative gap in the middle is a sign of the exhaustion of meaning.

2.4. Late Episodes and Systemic Criticism.

As memories of the Thaw's brotherhood and social harmony became things of the past, the narrative and visual emphasis in *ICE* shifts from the police team to the criminal world, a change that occurs sometime in the mid-1970s. The trio of investigators is displaced from the center to the periphery of the narrative, becoming an auxiliary tool for the depiction of the criminals. The tendency to paint criminals with brighter colors than the police was evident in the mini-series from the very beginning. For instance, starting with the first episode criminals are consistently played by famous Soviet film actors, many of them stars: Leonid Bronevoi, Armen Dzhigarkhanian, Georgii Menglet, Lidiia Fedoseeva-Shukshina, etc. The predictable scenario of scenes set in the police office contrasts with the rich arrays of details, nuances of behavior and mood, and the particularized mise-en-scène of the criminals' houses and "pads." As Demin

notes, this contrast is understandable: "in this representational system 'the way it should be' does not allow variation, while the way 'it should not be' can be as varied as you want" (114). While this criticism explicitly targets the narrow narrative schema that *ICE* sets for itself from the very beginning, Demin's comment equally applies to the ideological and aesthetic representational limitations of the Soviet detective model in general. As long as Thaw values and social illusions were alive, the police team had something to offer its viewers. But by the mid-1970s the pattern of idealistic policemen fighting conventional criminals could only fit a children's show. Within the context of new values, the conflicts and mentality of an emerging consumer society, it offered a less than convincing picture of "socialism with a human face."

The emergence of economic crime coincides with a number of other changes in the mini-series. While scripts for early episodes were published as plays, later scripts appeared as stories that made space for descriptions and characterizations. This seemingly insignificant change in literary form had an immediate bearing on the mini-series, in particular lengthening and "psychologizing" it. At the same time, the original "chamber-style" theme song is replaced by a heavily orchestrated melody, accompanied by pompous yet inexpressive lyrics.

Released in 1975, "Counter Strike" constitutes a clear break from the earlier paradigm. The episode introduces color, ending the quasi-documentary look of the mini-series, and establishes a new pattern of narrative exposition. The police team receives their assignment from their superior, colonel Skopin, who until now had remained on the periphery, functioning as an advisor to the three young professionals. Together with the team's relative independence from police authorities, their quasi-domestic meetings disappear. The office space looses its personal touch, just as Znamenskii loses his civilian clothes. The humanistic overtones of the

interrogations evaporate and turn into a routine procedure, the goal of which is not to defend the innocent but to punish the guilty.

Simultaneously with the establishment of hierarchy and institutional control, a new agency occupies a permanent place in *ICE*—the Directorate for Combating the Embezzlement of Socialist Property (OBKhSS).[96] In the episodes of the early 1970s (for instance, in "Blackmail"), a representative of this organization takes an active part in the investigation and even becomes a temporary member of the team (his last name is Tokarev and he substitutes for the absent Tomin). His role, however, is marginal both in relation to the re-education project and to the theme of police brotherhood. Episodes from the late 1970s-early 1980s consistently feature various OBKhSS officials. The movement of OBKhSS to the foreground as an institution signals the emergence of economic crime as a major social problem and re-imagines the police team as a tool of the prosecution.

In "Counter Strike," the organization and the scale of embezzlement are not just topics of discussion or confession but objects of visual representation. The group steals metal from a factory, "launders" it through a recycling office, stores it at the city garbage disposal, and distributes it to small factories and workshops that produce black-market goods. The episode meticulously takes the viewer through all the links of the chain and introduces him to all group members and their respective functions in the organization.

Furthermore, for the first time the episode establishes a link between economic crime and prosecution. This connection neither comes at the end of the episode, where it would strike a particularly grim note, nor does it come from the police. Instead, the head of the criminal syndicate ironically "enlightens" his terrified accomplices in Marxist lingo: "Quantity has

transformed into quality. The amount of stolen goods has reached the point that changes the applicable article of the criminal code—up to capital punishment."

The narrative is organized as a parallelism between the police as an institution and criminals as an organization. Viewers' first acquaintance with the criminal group takes place at their meeting, which reproduces the mise-en-scène of a work-place meeting. The members of the group discuss current business and plans for the future, the boss distributes money, and the group designs a strategy to deal with the police investigation. The boss's last words before the cut to the police HQ ("Is everything clear? Let's set to work") are repeated a second later by colonel Skopin as he dismisses the police team.

The narrative still tries to divert attention from the fact that economic crime is rooted in the Soviet economic system itself. The head of the syndicate is not only an ex-con but also a performer of "cruel romances,"[97] which marks him as a decadent and an outsider. There is also an attempt to return to the double structure of previous episodes by diverting attention to a different crime, which is more violent but implicates an individual and not the system. Midway through the narrative, the boss's aide kills one of the members of the syndicate—right after the latter repents and is ready to return to an honest life. His repentance, however, is triggered by the fear of arrest and shame, and his death, which the police are unable to prevent, marks the symbolic death of the re-education utopia.

Yet, in its attempt to return to the unproblematic black-and-white view of society by designing strategies for localizing crime, the episode defeats itself. The major site of criminal activity is the city garbage disposal located on the outskirts of Moscow. The head of the

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[96] OBKhSS is the Soviet economic police. The Directorate for Combating the Embezzlement of Socialist Property was established in the late 1960s as a part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). Recently it has been renamed the Division for Combating Economic Crimes (OBEP).

syndicate poetically describes it as "nobody's land, a holy land, the only place where one can steal anonymously." The several acres of land outside of Moscow seem abandoned and deserted. The opening shots of two of the three parts of the episode feature a wasteland of garbage, and the camera returns to it again and again. The obsessive repetition of these shots, alternating with police and criminal "meeting" scenes, eventually constructs a visual series, independent of the main narrative. The wasteland of garbage turns into a metaphor for Soviet society—a desolate place, which is periodically raided by the police. (figure 17)

Figure 17

A humble worker at the city garbage disposal leads not just a double, but a triple life. To the criminal's girlfriend he seems a "big shot": "His job is absolutely secret. Probably working on a military or a space project." In her naiveté and self-delusion, she in fact, spells out the truth: no other legitimate activity provides a decent living in the land of developed socialism.
In this respect, too, "Counter Blow" is quite revolutionary, if unintentionally so. The black-and-white images of the preceding episodes visually supported the ideology of the Thaw,

[97] "Cruel romance" is a genre of songs popular among the urban Russian population in the 1910s and 1920s. The songs usually recounted a story of tragic love and were marked by extreme emotionality.

constructing a world where material concerns are of importance only to social degenerates. Everybody lives equally badly or "normally," following the principle of "basic necessities." The simultaneous introduction of color and the switch of focus to the life of the "rich and criminal" revealed the double standard of life in the Soviet Union and thus opened a visual can of worms.

"Counter Strike" for the first time portrays the life of criminals not as an anomaly but as an alternative way of life, where spacious apartments, comfortable suburban houses, expensive cars and drinks, and fashion model girlfriends exist as a norm. There turned out to exist a world of beautiful objects—cars, furs, expensive furniture, private art collections, and unlimited money. At times, these objects function as targets of criminal activity: theft of cars, jewelry, and electronics in "An Afternoon Burglar*"* (1985); forgery and black market operations with art masterpieces in "A Herdsman With a Cucumber" (1979). This function, however, is marginal to the narratives. For the most part, these objects appear as the forbidden fetishes of a consumer society. The camera seems to revel in their existence. This visual paradigm culminates in the detailed exploration of the "top criminal's" apartment in the perestroika-era episode "Without a Knife" (1988). By Western standards, the place is a typical middle-class apartment. By Soviet standards, the living quarters of the single mother and cleaning woman is a magical palace—literally magical because the walls contain hidden gold coins. Sof'ia Rashidovna is the widow of a large-scale counterfeiter and drug-dealer, executed ten years earlier. In her present life she is the right hand of a large-scale embezzler, the head of a housing management committee.[98]

[98] The woman's patronymic is a hint at Sharaf Rashidov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan under Brezhnev. During his 23 years of unchallenged rule in the republic, he maintained absolute control over state subsidies, pocketing huge revenues from cotton production. Maintaining a relationship with the Kremlin by means of feudal loyalty and bribes, the Rashidov clan *de facto* replaced Soviet law within Uzbekistan. The anti-mafia campaign directed against Rashidov, known as the "cotton affair," was started by Iurii Andropov and continued under Mikhail Gorbachev.

A clear symptom of social disaster is the appearance of collective victims, like the inhabitants of the mismanaged apartment buildings who lack decent living conditions. Run-down buildings, overcrowded communal apartments, and dirty yards, which in early 1970s episodes serve as semiotically unmarked mise-en-scène for narratives, by the end of the series are treated as a major social problem. When the police chief assigns the protagonists to investigate the tenants' complaints, he declares that at stake is more than the embezzled hundreds of thousands of rubles; it is the very "prestige of Soviet power." Echoing him (but implicitly answering him), one of the tenants summarizes the situation quite straightforwardly: "You step over the threshold of your own apartment and it seems that Soviet power has ended."

The sheer number of episodes dealing with high-profile economic crime testifies to the scale of the problem. The same location is repeated from one episode to another—warehouse, store, housing management office. In none of these are we dealing with one individual, and none of the cases comes to a complete resolution. Even though the villain of "Without a Knife" is arrested, his high-placed defenders deny any knowledge of his operations, and keep their jobs. The tenants remain without water or heat. In fact, the only social institution working effectively is the prosecution, which, however, cannot resolve the situation: policing the neighborhood cannot fix collapsing roofs or provide hot water.

The boundaries of the community, clear and well defined at the beginning, gradually get erased. Individual cases multiply to confirm the 1970s unwritten commonplace: everybody steals. "From the Life of Bad Apples" (1981), an episode dealing with theft from a vegetable warehouse, offers bits and pieces of facts. The director of the warehouse, for instance, retorts to Znamenskii's inquiries about the absent data on the "vanished" train cars transporting fruit: "You know where all the numbers are tip-top? Where they steal big." A railroad official produces

another revealing admission: “Each train car should be guarded by an armed soldier.” Finally, a warehouse manager directly mentions the mafia and the “tangerine empire.” The truth-value of these statements is undermined by the fact that two out of three are involved in black-market operations, while the third is represented as a simpleton, a sort of Soviet fool-in-Christ.
Yet, their credibility is dubious only to the cardboard figures of the police. Both crimes and criminals become more complex, and narratives shun stereotypical situations. But the Experts remain unchanged, with the same approach, same idealism, and same rhetorical banalities**.** They become pawns on a social chess field, unable to change their ways and methods, limited in their freedom by the bureaucratic machine of the law, curtailed in their ability to create real tension by matching their ingenuity, humor, and mastery against those of criminals. As Sof'ia Rashidovna remarks to Znamenskii: “Life has changed but you are the same idealist you used to be fifteen years ago. When my husband was executed you tried to convince me, a young girl at the time, to change my life. I am glad I haven’t.”

Perhaps the most pessimistic aspect of the late 1970s episodes is the failure of the state in influencing young people. To explain the growth of consumerism and social alienation, *ICE* still relies on the staple Thaw motif of bad family upbringing (“fatherlessness” [bezotsovshchina] or excessive pampering). As the seduction of easy money, good food, and normal living conditions increasingly lead to the breaking of laws on a massive scale, the rhetoric adjusts to new social situations: the visual and narrative conventions of the Thaw model become a shelter for the introduction of new conflicts.

The episode “Before the Third Shot” (1978) re-introduces the issue of the citizenry’s trust of the police and replays the scenario of the “The Dinosaur” episode. Having committed a burglary in a department store, the criminal, pursued by the police, hides his gun in an

abandoned building. Learning that a group of teenagers found the gun, he orders his young accomplice (ironically, he is played by the son of Iurii Kaiurov—an actor who for many years played Lenin) to win their trust and get back the gun. The young criminal has completed his *Bildungs* journey: he has fully internalized both his "mentor's" worldview and his patterns of speech. But the teenagers who found the gun are "good Soviet children." Yet distrust of adults and cynicism in relation to the public discourse runs deep. They form a secret "society of self-mentoring"[obshchestvo pokrovitel'stva samim sebe)] and spend their time in a semi-destroyed house, competing in ironic witticisms or parodying public lectures, e.g., "Youth and the Influence of the Street" [Molodezh' i vliianie ulitsy].

Even though the police eventually retrieve the gun, throughout the narrative it functions as a fetish object. Despite the kids' rejection of adult consumerism and hypocrisy, they manifest neither trust in the humane police, nor in any positive ideals. Their fascination with the gun and the power it brings effectively neutralizes any illusions one might have about their potential for re-education: "I have never had such a real, such a strong thing. When I have it in my pocket—I am *a new man*" (emphasis added).

The last perestroika-era episode, "Mafia" (1989) finally admits to the inability of the police to keep crime under control. As the professional police brotherhood is institutionalized and the natural family falls apart, the mafia takes on characteristics of both. The real protagonist of the episode is the drug syndicate, a well-organized professional unit and a family with a (God)father at the top, a mother, and "boys"—bodyguards and hit men, who grew up believing in guns as the only real value. The focus on the mafia group, from their business methods to the inner dynamics of personal relationships, betrays a (perhaps unintentional) fascination with it. As John Cawelti remarks, "[T]he disturbing irony [is] that a 'family' of criminals might be more

humanly interesting and morally satisfying than a society of empty routines, irresponsibly powerful organizations, widespread corruption, and meaningless violence" (79).

The parallelism between the functioning of the criminal group and the police, which by this time became an established convention of *ICE*, does not work in the last episode. As the young member of the police drug force admits, the police are always one step behind. One of the opening sequences follows two teenagers mugging an old man on the street and immediately buying drugs in a bar restroom. The "pusher," who sells them drugs is approached by well-dressed men whom he takes for police undercover agents but who turn out to be a rival drug syndicate clearing the territory—a massive operation that reduces the role of the police to counting corpses. Even though the police locate at the end the drug-factory and arrest everyone, the Godfather is punished by "fate": he is killed by a group of young hoodlums.[99]

The episode strikes a pessimistic note not just through references to the scale of criminal activity (there are several drug syndicates in Moscow and its suburbs alone), but with a generally grim view of society. Besides a whole series of well planned and executed murders, there are a number of less violent, but more disturbing episodes, for instance a woman who gives birth to a "crack baby" or a former intellectual selling drugs on the street. Like the entire series, the last episode is an ambiguous cultural gesture: while opening up for discussion a previously hidden social phenomenon, it is quite conservative in its interpretation. The scale of organized crime is linked with the "chaos" of perestroika. The latter, according to the episode, virtually legitimized drug culture and facilitated the production and distribution of narcotics in Moscow.

Despite all its limitations, *The Investigation Is Conducted by Experts* is virtually the only visual text that explicitly addressed economic crime and economic crises, as well as outlined the

differentiation within Soviet society along economic, rather than ideological or moral lines. It is also a rare example of a series that dealt exclusively with contemporary Soviet life and covered the period beginning with the early 1970s, a period that still retained the illusions and the momentum of the Thaw, through the late 1980s, which marked the limits not only of social and economic stability but of the very the socialist system. In struggling with its preset ideological and aesthetic limits, *ICE* in its way documented the emergence of a consumer society in the Soviet Union and the demise of the myth of the socialist state as the guarantor of either public order or social well-being.

3. *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* and the Populist Police Procedural.

3.1. The Police and Soviet Nostalgia.

Unlike early Stagnation culture, which tries to negotiate between the myth of "socialism with a human face" and new "material evidence," the late 1970s faces the fact that state myths and life of the populace existed in different dimensions. In searching for the lost "Golden Age," cultural producers turn to the past. According to Boris Groys, post-utopian Soviet culture of the 1970s-80s focuses primarily on "restoring historical continuity" (10). For the most part, texts appeal to the cultural and moral values "ingrained" in the Russian people but "spoiled" by years of Stalinism and forced modernization. This culture preserved the utopian aspects of socialist realism (including its collectivist and ahistorical nature), while at the same time readjusting its myths to a new populist cultural narrative.

The most prominent aspect of this neo-traditionalist cultural paradigm was a nostalgic retreat from the present. The retrospective nature of late Stagnation culture in its expressions

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[99] The syndicate head is resurrected in the four-part sequel to the *ICE*, *Investigation Is Conducted by Professionals. !0 Years Later,* released in 1999. Interestingly, he is represented as an almost positive figure, compared to new Russian "thugs" and the major criminal of the sequel—a former professor of Marxist philosophy.

ranged from the proliferation of memoirs to the rewriting of various "histories," including that of the Soviet police. In *Born in the Revolution* (1974-77), a mini-series that purports to present the sixty years of Soviet history through the prism of the development of police forces, only two episodes out of ten deal with post-World War II life. One of these two is set in 1948, when the protagonist's wife is killed; the other episode takes place in the 1970s. Despite the narrative's focus on the modern technological capabilities of the police, the last episode is backward-oriented. The criminal is an aged gangster from the preceding episode. The protagonist, now a general, brings him to justice as memories of his murdered wife dominate both the visual and the acoustic series. The idea of the progressive movement of history (exemplified in the history of the country and of the police as an institution), underpinning the structure of the narrative, contrasts with the past-oriented movement of the protagonists' memory. The memory of the wife is painful but at the same time surrounded by the aura of the past as "the best of times."

The police are not alone in this nostalgic longing for the past. One of the general's antagonists, a con artist also laments the passing of the idyllic olden times, when life was populated by "real people, both among us and among you." The bleak if stable present breeds a yearning for the mythical heroic past, in which the border between "us" and "them," the police and the criminals, is erased in favor of a fictive national unity.

Retrospection, typical of many 1970s genres, performed several roles. First, just like individual memory, the mechanism of collective cultural memory was simultaneously selective (in canonizing particular historical and cultural landmarks, especially the Great Patriotic War) and socially inclusive (in the idealization of the mythical communality of the past). Second, it promoted a "discourse of appreciation," by simultaneously evoking the heritage of great achievements and linking the relative prosperity and stability of the present to the great sacrifices

of the past. Third, the idealized and fictionalized past offered a peculiar 1970s model of cultural escapism from the uncertainties of the present—uncertainties that *ICE* attempted to fit into a moralistic plot of police enlightenment. Nostalgia was one of the available models of escapism, another being spatial displacement. For example, Soviet viewers of the 1970s and 1980s favored mini-series about detective adventures in the never-never land of idyllic and, naturally, abundant, collective farms of rural Russia or prettified late Victorian London.

Within the Soviet context of the late 1970s, war mythology and mass culture joined forces to produce police narratives in which formulaic plots displayed Soviet myths as an illusion of reality, while, in fact, projecting them as a slide projector would display a series of slides, unrelated except for their sequencing. This cultural slide show had the advantage of accommodating various popular discourses about the past without necessarily clashing with or challenging them, or expressing any clear position towards them.

Late Stagnation gives rise to what Christopher Wilson in *Cop Knowledge* calls "popular proceduralism," which sought not only to humanize the police but to let it "represent the public—that is, both 'stand for' public authority and 'stand in' for citizens themselves" (61). The police heroes of these narratives are closer to a blue-collar mentality, speak an anti-procedural idiom, and manifest tension with bureaucratic practices. The most successful of the populist procedurals is *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed*, a five-episode police procedural commissioned by Central Television and made in 1979 at the Odessa Film Studios, which during Stagnation specialized in adventure movies and films for children. The director of the mini-series, Stanislav Govorukhin, at the beginning of perestroika accused the Soviet film industry of

snobbishly neglecting the box-office and of ignoring the "democratic tastes" of the public.[100] Unlike *Born in the Revolution,* which is still concerned with political and institutional continuities between the past and the present, *The Meeting Place* operates with discrete myths and discourses. Their validity and relevance to the present are determined by narrative considerations, on the one hand, and by their cultural longevity, on the other.

The mini-series is set in the summer and fall of 1945, right after the end of the Great Patriotic War. A young Soviet Army officer, Vladimir Sharapov, returns home from the front and comes to work at Petrovka 38, the Moscow equivalent of Scotland Yard. He is included in the group headed by Gleb Zheglov, which investigates murders and robberies committed by the single most dangerous criminal group, the Black Cat gang. Sharapov participates in the investigation of the murder of Larisa Gruzdeva. Although the police immediately arrest Larisa's estranged husband, a doctor, in whose apartment the police find the murder weapon, Sharapov continues to doubt the doctor's guilt. The police arrest and interrogate several lesser criminals who name a certain Evgenii Fox, Larisa's lover, connected to the Black Cat gang. Despite the evidence, Zheglov continues to consider Gruzdev an accomplice and keeps him in jail until the arrest of Fox. To attain access to the gang's hideout, Sharapov tricks Fox into writing a note to his girlfriend. Using this note as a password, Sharapov meets the woman but is kidnapped by the gang. He spends a terrifying night in their hideout, but manages to win their trust and to deliver the entire gang to the police.

The script of the mini-series is based on the 1975 novel *The Age of Mercy* [Era miloserdiia] by Arkadii and Georgii Vainer. Like most of the Vainers brothers' works, *The Age of Mercy* is an urban crime novel, combining mild social criticism and engrossing moral

[100] In the 1970s—early 1980s Govorukhin made several adventure films, as well as adaptations of such Western classics as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tom Sawyer.* See also Chapter Four on late Soviet adaptations of Victorian

dilemmas with adventure appeal.[101] The novel is written as a first-person narrative, describing Sharapov's first-hand experience of the daily routine at the Department to Fight Violent Crime [Otdel bor'by s banditizmom]—the Soviet post-war analogue to the Homicide Division. By design, *The Age of Mercy* is a procedural with some claim to historical accuracy. Each chapter starts with an excerpt from a newspaper article, which provides the narrative with details of *byt* and documents the country's return to normal life after the devastation of the war. At the same time, the first-person narrative—a tribute to the confessional mode of the Thaw—gives the events a touch of the authenticity of personal experience.

The mini-series follows the procedural plot rather closely, except for discarding several peripheral crimes that the police team investigates. As a procedural, *Meeting Place* features interrogations, tailing suspects, raids, stakeouts, and mundane procedures of evidence examination. Moreover, to the late 1970s viewer the *Meeting Place* offers pleasures not common to a Brezhnev-era production: a straight adventure plot, suspense, and some violence. The mini-series also smudges the old glossy image of the postwar years by offering a glimpse of social problems, such as the population's astounding poverty, the housing shortage, alcoholism, prostitution, the flourishing of the black market and crime.

In its politics of representation, however, the mini-series relies entirely on extra-textual structures—be it the actors' cultural image, visual tropes, or culturally agreed-upon meanings—that are superimposed on the formulaic plot of the sleuth narrative. The narrative and visual power of those elements is such that they effectively banish any procedural

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detective novels as a strategy of cultural displacement.

[101] Usually set in contemporary Moscow, the Vainers's novels manifest typical late Stagnation mechanisms of temporal and spatial displacement, as well as provide a paradigm of ethical problems determining the narrative of crime. For instance, *Minotaur's Labyrinth* [Vizit k Minotavru] combines the investigation of the theft of a Stradivarius violin from a famous musician with a subplot of the making of the violin, set in medieval Italy. The link between the two narrative layers is the opposition of an idealist genius and base envy.

authenticity, confessional immediacy, or political topicality. Because of their established status and interpretation within Russo-Soviet culture, these structures create an illusion of realism, of a "three-dimensional" picture of post-war Soviet society.

According to Horton and Brashinsky, *The Meeting Place* was the third major success of Soviet TV in what they call the detective genre, following (in time, if not in popularity) *His Highness's Adjutant* and *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (174). Their list, albeit representative, is misleading in at least two ways. First, despite their clarification that the first two were not pure detectives but rather spy thrillers, the authors reproduce the genre confusion typical of late Soviet criticism, which tended to lump together all adventure genres.

Second, the popularity claim does not address the radical difference between the two early Stagnation hits and Govorukhin's mini-series. While deeply rooted in 1970s ideology, Govorukhin's police mini-series is an openly commercial production. The choice of Vysotskii as the lead actor (a cult figure of his time), the all-star cast, the postcard images of Moscow, and the introduction of violence into the previously sterile genre distinguish *Meeting Place* not only from the two early 1970s spy thrillers, but also from *ICE*. Rather than "modernizing" the socialist realist masterplot within the genre formula, *Meeting Place* is formula-driven not just in the skillful use of genre conventions but in formalizing the socialist realist masterplot itself. Where *The Investigation Is Conducted by Experts* uses socialist realist mythology as an ideological context, *Meeting Place* realizes the mass appeal and narrative power of socialist realist tropes (such as re-education or "us" vs. "them"). Moreover, the series redefines the myth of the Great Patriotic War as a collective experience, separating it from state meanings and representing it as an absolute, non-ideological value.

3.2. Law and Order: Soviet Myths as Prime Time Material.

Following the novel, *Meeting Place* combines the plot of a police investigation with a concern for socio-political and ethical problematics. It starts as a detective variant of the socialist realist masterplot of the police duo: the older and more experienced lead detective and the rookie. Unlike the father figures of Soviet Thaw detectives, Zheglov in the novel is only a few years Sharapov's senior, although to Sharapov his boss seems older because of Zheglov's self-assured behavior and experience. Because of their insignificant age difference in the novel, their relationship is one of competition. Sharapov experiences a mixed feeling of admiration and envy, especially because his girlfriend, Varia, initially prefers Zheglov to Sharapov. Zheglov is a self-made man, a rugged individualist, a tough and street-wise policeman. Sharapov is a young lieutenant who served in military intelligence and was in charge of a penal battalion during the war. He wears a uniform throughout the series, as opposed to Zheglov who sports a commissar-type leather coat. Because Sharapov is fresh from the battlefield, where conflict is unambiguous and the enemy is clearly indentifiable, at first he approaches police work straightforwardly, as a continuation of the war struggle. And it is Zheglov who initiates Sharapov into the law, explaining to his young colleague, "One step away from the law and you ruin somebody's life."

And yet, the "mentor-youth" schema never goes beyond the level of verbal rhetoric and professional skills. As far as the system of values is concerned, the two are complete opposites. The major conflict between the partners occurs after the arrest of Gruzdev, who is suspected of murdering his wife for profit. For Zheglov, his guilt is obvious, partly because the planted gun points to him, but mostly because of Zheglov's "class instinct": the suspect is a doctor, an intellectual, i.e., a class enemy. Zheglov's interrogations of the doctor turn into acts of humiliation and abuse.

The "doctor's plot" becomes the frame for a series of confrontations between Sharapov and Zheglov concerning the methods and ethics of police work. Another controversial moment is the arrest of a pickpocket who in the ensuing commotion drops the evidence—a stolen wallet. Zheglov picks up the wallet and slides it into the criminal's pocket, blackmailing him into providing information about Fox. When confronted by Sharapov, Zheglov vehemently retorts:

> Was it you who pulled a woman, mother of three, out of the noose, from whom he [the pickpocket] stole her last money? Was it you who found butter and caviar in their houses, when the entire country was giving away its last slice of bread to the front? . . . If it were not for my lie, recidivist Saprykin would be in a hide-out now, and not in jail. But a thief belongs in jail! Let's ask a hundred people now what they like more: my lie or your truth?

Zheglovs' argument eschews the entire issue of the law and legitimacy of police action, drawing instead on the notion of "popular justice."

In Sharapov's view, "we, police, have no right to play dirty." He considers lying, even in the name of the state and the "people," unlawful and harmful. For the country that endured purges, in which millions were sent to death with the help of falsified evidence, the question of police procedures is not merely a question of technique: it is an unambiguous reference to the abuses of law and the fabricated cases of the 1930s and 1950s. Another hint at this theme is Zheglov's trick on Sharapov to teach his "disciple" vigilance: he takes a file from his desk and threatens him with a tribunal.

The straightforward political and ethical scenario notwithstanding, the mini-series deals a double hand. In the mini-series, Zheglov is played by a Stagnation cult figure, guitar poet

Vadimir Vysotskii, who at that time was 41 years old, one year before his untimely death from alcohol abuse. From the very first scene Vysotskii's rugged image establishes a paradigm of extratextual associations. The wide popularity of the mini-series owed a lot to the personal charisma of Vysotskii and his image in popular consciousness. He brought to the mini-series the language of the street, the toughness and masculinity of his stage image, and the association with the underworld and societal outsiders drawn from his multiple lyrical personae in the songs.[102] While Sharapov wins the argument with Zheglov within the narrative, it is Zheglov who expresses popular sentiments. The identifying mechanisms ensure the projection onto Zheglov of Vysotskii's aura of a truth seeker, a kind of Russian Robin who simply cannot be wrong, whether or not he cuts a few corners or rules with his iron hand.

Figure 18

Sharapov's image, too, draws on intertextual links. The actor Vladimir Konkin a few years before had played Pavel Korchagin in the 1973 TV mini-series (dir. Nikolai Mashchenko) about the iconic hero of Nikolai Ostrovskii's 1932 novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* (figure 18). The purity of revolutionary romanticism is transposed onto the hero's war experience, and

[102] Vysotskii also modeled his cinematic persona on the rough image of Charles Bronson's film characters.

through him, onto the war against crime. It is also significant that the mini-series redefines Sharapov's image, which in the novel draws on his peasant roots. Sharapov constantly refers to his "peasant stinginess" and a certain single-mindedness—the qualities which, together with his war experiences, he finds hard to combine with the new reality. The mini-series, however, retains none of these motifs, instead endowing Sharapov with politeness, gentleness, and a total disregard for material well-being. Despite his self-proclaimed lack of education, then, Sharapov implicitly becomes the bearer of the 1960s humanistic ideals of the intelligentsia, whereas Zheglov enunciates popular sentiments. On the macrolevel of the plot, however, the two are a team.

But if Sharapov's main function is to represent the legitimacy and the human face of the Soviet police, the mini-series foregrounds as his credentials his war past and personal integrity, rather than his humanistic argument. Sharapov's inexperience is constructed as a positive value, akin to spontaneity "born of battle, hardship, heroism, and adventure" of the war years (Stites 116). The glorification of what Richard Stites refers to as "wartime bonding as a salvation mechanism" is a core value of the narrative (151). Post-Stalinist Soviet discourse epitomized the forging by fire of national unity. A major moral and social division set in the mini-series is the very fact of *being there.* One of the gangsters is a former soldier from Sharapov's regiment, who through bad luck and human callousness (aka "Stalinist vigilance") ends up in a penal battalion not unlike the "Dirty Dozen" platoon. From this moment on, his life rolls downhill and he ends up in the gang. Despite all this, the war bonding with Sharapov means more to him than his bitterness or present well being. Together with the protagonist, Levchenko brings the whole gang to the set-up organized by the police.

His death at the hands of Zheglov, who shoots him during a desperate attempt to escape, becomes the last watershed between Zheglov and Sharapov. Despite Sharapov's shouts, Zheglov fires his gun. "I have killed a gangster," he explains, to which Sharapov replies, "You have killed a person." The closing scenes display not only the juxtaposition of two sets of values but also a clash of discourses—a clash that is never resolved in the narrative. Instead, *Meeting Place*, presents them as equally valid and powerful when seen from the point of view of the "unheroic" 1970s.

Equally powerful is the nostalgia for the war as the time of the ultimate transparency of conflicts, the time when everything was clear, who is "us" and who is "them." This longing, which has as many meanings as there are characters in the mini-series, is especially significant for Sharapov, who goes through a process of maturation. In the novel, the police first encounter Fox in the scene of his arrest, although his appearance is described by several people. In the mini-series Sharapov has a face-to-face encounter with him during a police raid but lets him go, confused by the medal on his officer's uniform. As Sharapov realizes that he has mistaken appearance for "essence," arresting Fox becomes for him a matter of honor above and beyond police investigation. In Sharapov's eyes, Fox is more than a criminal; he is an impostor who uses the war medal and a military uniform—signs of a sacred shared experience—as a cover for his nefarious deeds. The scene of Fox's arrest, which follows a car chase, a shoot-out, and Fox's car plunging into the river, is a moment of redemption: the water of the Moskva-river instantly transform good-looking Fox into a simulacrum of Hitler (figure 19). Having arrested his arch-enemy (i.e., having learnt to be vigilant), Sharapov successfully accomplishes his sally behind "enemy lines."

Figure 19

For Sharapov's communal apartment neighbor, an old Jew whose only son died during a bombing, the war is a purgatory, a sacrificial fire, which should give birth to an Age of Mercy, when the punitive forces of policing will be replaced by a universal brotherhood. The man's quiet voice, the discourse of a member of the urban intelligentsia, and the mise-en-scène of the kitchen talk unambiguously suggest the 1960s generation, with its belief of "purified" communism and the cult of the Great Patriotic War as the moment of truth.

The war myth, then, is neither a theme nor a historical background, but an instrument of cultural legitimation of the entire structure of meanings, and as such it is polyvalent, working in a variety of ways. Popular war mythology is also a symbolic moment that reinvests with vitality and meaning other socialist realist tropes—most prominently, the family—which by the 1970s had become highly problematic. While the novel represents the Sharapov-Varia relationship as love-camaraderie, the mini-series re-interprets it as the "wait-for-me" scenario.[103] For instance, the mini-series eliminates the scenes of potato harvesting and the komsomol meeting, both of

[103] "Wait for Me" is the title of Konstantin Simonov's 1942 poem, which became the single most popular and most recited work during the war. It succinctly expressed the major motif underlying war mythology: the survival of the man at the front and his return home is directly linked to the wife's faith(fullness). In cinema, Aleksandr Stolper's 1942 film of the same title is the canonic visual expression of this motif.

which are essential for Varia's characterization. In the first scene, Varia flirts with Zheglov and makes Sharapov jealous; in the second, she delivers a passionate speech about the role of the police in re-establishing normal life after the war. By erasing these scenes, the *Meeting Place* deprives Varia of any independence and any significance apart from the canonical aspect of the ideal wife to the hero.

By radically changing the novel's end, the mini-series accomplishes a veritable *tour de force*. First, in the novel, Sharapov who is being used by the gang as a shield, walks along the corridor in the basement of the store, notices a storage door, and hides there. In the mini-series, the police plant a sign—Varia's picture—on the closet door, which displays pictures of popular Soviet film actors, collected by a saleslady (figure 20). Sharapov is saved by his beloved's image—a cliché of 1940s films. Moreover, by positioning the picture among recognizable images of Soviet film stars, the sequence establishes a link with popular culture of the Stalin period, cleansed of its ideological overtones but preserving its mythologies and mass appeal.

Figure 20

Second, in the novel, Sharapov, heart-broken as he is after the death of Levchenko, enters police HQ and sees a picture of Varia in a black frame: Varia was killed in the line of duty. In

the mini-series, the tragic outcome is entirely redefined. From a brave comrade-in-arms, Varia is transformed into the epitome of womanhood. Even before the narrative's end, she is relieved of her police duty, gets rid of her police uniform, and assumes the traditional roles of a mother and a faithful wife, waiting for her beloved to return from a dangerous mission. True to the cultural clichés of the 1940s-1950s, her love (symbolized by her photo) saves him from inevitable death.

The final shot of the film shows Sharapov entering Varia's apartment and seeing Varia, who is holding an adopted orphan. As if the baby and the look of love on her face were not sufficient markers of the "wait-for-me" scenario, the hazy, soft focus shot of her face adds a material aura of femininity. The image contrasts sharply with the bright colors in the scene of the gang's arrest: white snow, black coats and cars, and surrendered weapons—the male world of just(ified) violence.

The Sharapov-Varia subplot is one model of the family trope, recapitulating the conflict of the Stalinist domestic melodrama. This subplot, which is central to the narrative, is, however, peripheral within the ideological and symbolic world of *Meeting Place.* The decimation of the male population by the war plays a critical role in the ideology of the *Meeting Place*, shifting the focus from individually imperfect lives to the healthy community. Apart from Sharapov's symbolic family, all other natural families in the mini-series are dysfunctional. Gruzdev has a lover and is on the verge of a divorce when his wife is killed; the woman in Sharapov's communal apartment has four children and an alcoholic husband; Fox repeatedly seduces and abandons women.

3.3. Policing the Red Pleasantville.

But where the natural family fails to offer a viable social model, the community does not. There are several surrogate communities in the mini-series. Sharapov's communal apartment offers a patriarchal model of community. People's lives are completely transparent, their joys

and griefs are public knowledge. This transparency is presented not only as entirely natural and positive, but as a means of survival, whether in the scene where Zheglov restrains the alcoholic husband or when the entire apartment gathers around the hysterical woman whose food ration cards have been stolen. Everyone contributes what one can from the scarce supplies, and the closeness of the bodies provides material evidence of the source of the nation's strength.

The gang's hideout mirrors this communal bliss and the parallelism of idyllic topoi overrides the opposition between "us" and "them." In both cases, the major occupation of people is conversation while sharing food and liquor, honest and scarce in one, impure and abundant in the other. Both communities seem frozen in time and space, but also stable, united by their day-to-day routines, having a common goal—survival. This survival depends not on outside history but on the internal coherence and unwritten laws of patriarchal society. In both communities there is an unshakable hierarchy: the gang leader's word is law for the rest of the criminals, just as Zheglov, once he moves in with Sharapov, becomes the defender and the judge of the apartment. Significantly, Sharapov's main antagonist—Fox—is marked as an outsider within the criminal community. He is an individualist and adventurer, whose "non-Russian" habits—a love of restaurants, women, and risky escapades—expose the entire gang.

Govorukhin's production, then, strives to achieve a synthesis of the binary model with an underlying vision of common communal values. Within this structure, the police squad offers a simplified cross-section of society: a Russian, a Ukrainian, and a Jew; an older driver and a very young policeman; a tough street-wise cop and a policeman with a heart of gold. While fairly stereotypically represented, members of the squad are not formulaic figures of socialist law, completely lacking the institutional characteristics the police have in *ICE*. Apart from Zheglov, members of the squad are neither quite professional, nor do they have any identifiable police

markers. None of them wears a uniform, has studied law, or knows investigative procedures. They work on sheer enthusiasm and a "natural" desire to protect their community. By portraying the police as run-of-the-mill guys, blue-collar rather than intellectual, amateurs rather than professionals, the mini-series offers a state-centered narrative without the state, policing without any of its negative sides. Even crime-busting tactics—invading private apartments or raiding commercial restaurants—are "normalized" because they are stripped of their associations with power and grounded in the "necessary" violence of the post-war years.

Policing is interspersed with scenes in which the squad participates in the peaceful and idyllically constructed life of the community: helping with potato harvesting, adopting an abandoned baby, or dancing with wives and girlfriends. The police also share the material deprivations of the community they protect, surviving on bread and tea or scrupulously counting money assigned for organizing a set-up in a luxurious restaurant.

Perhaps the most striking sign, albeit thoroughly masked in the intent to redraw the landscape of Soviet society, is the erasure of any institutional or political elite from the narrative. Hence the only official scene, which is located in the middle of the narrative, becomes the *point de caption* of a knot of meanings and the intersection of mythological structures. In his speech at the celebration of the Day of Militia, the Moscow Police general declares the growth of the crime rate to be an effect of the Great Patriotic War and virtually equates criminals with the Nazi fifth column, indirectly justifying Zheglov's premise that any means are good. The centrality of the police as mediators of conflicts and public relations, and as keepers of stability in the city is, thus, related to and justified by the war.

Unlike *ICE, Meeting Place* is explicitly centered on crime against private citizens. While the gang terrorizes Moscow indiscriminately, burglarizing stores, rich apartments, and

warehouses, worst of all, "they butcher people, kill them for nothing." In the episode of the store robbery, the gangsters kill not only the night watchman, as in the novel, but also the watchman's little grandson, adding a melodramatic nuance. Similarly, in the hungry post-war period stealing food ration cards is not an individual theft, but amounts to a crime against the community.

By the same token, the only negative police character is first of all an outsider in the police community (a philistine and a coward), an only then a traitor in the war against crime. Having won the lottery, he refuses to give away the money, which it is "shameful to keep in such a hard moment for the country." He is unwilling to share food with his hungry teammates. His image thus prepared, the actual act of betrayal comes as no surprise. When Fox finally appears in the house where the police have organized a stakeout, Petiunia surrenders and lets Fox shoot the other policeman.

The scene of Petiunia's interrogation by Zheglov and the other members of the squad is central to Zheglov's image as the living incarnation of the war myth. Zheglov is the flesh-and-blood implementation of the war trope in its popular culture form of a defender of people's justice. The interrogation scene is constructed as a trial, ending with the traitor's expulsion from the police community. In its visual composition, the scene mirrors Zheglov's trial of the doctor: the accused sit, while Zheglov towers over them or paces around the room pronouncing verdicts (figure 21). He is wrong in the first case and right in the second. In the final analysis, however, historical or narrative logic is irrelevant. What really matters is Vysotskii's solo performance, his raspy voice as a strong and passionate "avenger of the people."

Figure 21

Unlike Fox or the traitor, lesser criminals (all played by stars of the Soviet screen) get a sympathetic treatment. The scenes of their apprehension and interrogation provide comic relief and seem digressions from the linear narrative, an excuse for pure, non-ideological entertainment. The major attraction here, as throughout the mini-series, is Zheglov-Vysotskii's charismatic persona. Zheglov's ability to bond with criminals, to flirt with a prostitute, play pool with a con artist and win, or momentarily to shift from pompous speech to irony are instances of pleasure which, however, are not entirely innocent. Among Zheglov's many voices only one is missing—the dry official voice of state authority. The myths that his figure embodies are, thereby, rendered accessible and delivered in a form of popular spectacle.

The syrupy picture of the community is crowned by the image of Moscow as paradise on earth. In contrast to the understated identity of the city in *ICE*, Govorukhin's mini-series lavishes Moscow landmarks on the viewer: the view of Kremlin at night from the monumental embankment (figure 22), the statue of Ivan Fedorov, criminal hang-outs that are meticulously identified and visually represented: Mar'ina Roshcha, the pool in Gorky Park, the commercial restaurant Astoria.

Figure 22

Moscow is neither a symbolic site of the communist utopia, nor "the Mother of all Russian cities" —the center of the pre-revolutionary myth of Russia. It is, rather, a city-survivor, a city-victor, a city not of power but of people. This image, entirely absent in the novel, is constructed by combining cinematic landmarks of the Moscow landscape with generous references to the material and popular culture of the time, and to details of everyday life. The narrative takes the police team into the streets, restaurants, and movie theaters, to the fashion and variety shows of post-war Moscow. As Sharapov walks towards the criminal police building in the opening sequence, the camera fleshes out posters of victory**,** specifically, Viktor Ivanov's famous 1945 poster "We've Won!" (Bown 222), and a picture of Stalin in the shoe-polishers' booth (figure 23). The mini-series, thus, accurately observes period-piece rules, foreshadowing perestroika fascination with material culture and the popularity of documentaries (including Govorukhin's own switch to documentary cinema) in the late 1980s.[104]

[104] Govorukhin's documentaries [*We Can't Live Like This (*1990), *The Russia We Have Lost* (1992), and *The Great Criminal Revolution* (1993)] focus on the destruction of Russian morality and traditional way of life as the roots of the criminal mentality that swept the country with the Bolshevik Revolution.

Figure 23

What this materiality and visuality accomplish is more than merely to offer retro details. Russo-Soviet popular culture is the glue that holds together the diverse structures in the *Meeting Place.* This is the space of consensus, which does not depend on political upheavals or ideological currents. Stalin statues and portraits exist next to those of Lenin, posters calling for vigilance next to "escapist" romances. Within this space, Vysotskii-Zheglov is the figure that symbolizes popular culture as national identity, just as in his songs Vysotskii "authentically" enacted diverse discourses. Although in the mini-series he does not sing any of his songs, he does perform a few lines of Aleksandr Vertinskii's[105] 1910s hit "Lily White Negro"—an epitome of escapism and bourgeois decadence[106] (figure 24).

[105] Aleksandr Vertinskii is one of the major figures of Russian popular culture of the 1910s and one of few "continuity figures" of Russo-Soviet popular culture. His songs of lost love, decadent nostalgia, and exotic imagery dominated music halls, records, and movie screens before and during World War I. Having emigrated after the revolution, Vertinskii, however, returns to the Soviet Union during World War II and enjoys another stage in his performing and cinematic career.

[106] According to the director, Vysotskii vehemently objected to wearing a police uniform in this scene: "For him a policeman of the Stalin era was associated with the terrible lawlessness of those years" (Govorukhin 6). Even the interference of the MVD consultant could not change Vysotskii's mind. This principled position, however, only applied to the external sign—the uniform—not to the actual behavior of Vysotskii's character, with which he identified through his enacted sincerity as a people's avenger.

Figure 24

Sharapov also goes through a "musical trial" and successfully passes it. While he in the gang's captivity, the hunchback's wife notices Sharapov's well-groomed hands, odd for a driver whom Sharapov is pretending to be. After he explains that he used to play in movie-theaters, he performs a virtuoso rendition of a classical piece, which satisfies the woman, but not the gangsters. They order "real music,"—"Murka" (The Pussy Cat)—a song that emerged from the criminal subculture in the 1920s and became part of Soviet popular culture. As Sharapov plays, the camera slowly moves from one gangster to another—all of them (like the viewer) enjoying the performance—and finally lingers on a black cat. The song is Sharapov's ticket to gain the gang's trust.

Neia Zorkaia notes that *Meeting Place* harks back to the tradition of the pre-revolutionary *lubok* murder series (91). The formulaic structure of the *lubok* tradition is manifest, above all, in the plot of an old sleuth narrative, the scheme of which can be seen through the procedural plot or "retro" details. The chain of investigative links moves from insignificant "players" to big criminals, until we get to the very "lair" of evil, the image of which has long been prepared in the viewer's imagination by violent crimes as a place of almost fairy-tale horror (92). And, indeed, there we meet monsters—a hunchback, a man with a disfigured face, a vamp, all of whom, as the

hunchback unambiguously remarks, will not hesitate in ripping Sharapov apart. But this monstrosity belongs to the fairy-tale world, with its "eternal" ethical imperatives, rather than to any socially or ideologically determined binaries. In this context, Sharapov's series of trials at the end of the series acquires its own extratextual logic: trial by lying (re-enacting "people's life"), a musical trial (unity with the people through popular culture), and, finally, in the dark labyrinth of the store basement, a salvation by Stalinist cinematic images. This medium memory, that is, a link with folk/popular culture tradition, will surface even more in later detective mini-series, such as collective farm detectives about Aniskin and Victorian London detectives about Sherlock Holmes.

If the organizing principle of *ICE* is to provide solution to the crime and, together with it, the social problem presented at the beginning of each episode, *Meeting Place* has a much more ambitious goal—to make everything right in the end. Unlike *ICE*, where criminal's motivation constituted the major interest, often more important than the actual investigation and the serving of justice, in *Meeting Place* motivation is absent altogether. Crime is represented as a cancer on the body of Soviet society, an aftermath of the war, material deprivation, and loosened police forces due to insufficient human and material resources. *Meeting Place*, then, seems to leap back to the pre-Thaw totalizing picture of the social order. Unlike Stalinist narratives, however, it is not based on a class view of society. It, rather, appeals to the popular notions of moral good and evil, the system within which war mythology occupies a prime place.

Unlike the Soviet popular culture that produced it, *Meeting Place* is a redundant entertainment and constantly teeters on banality. But it is a pleasurable banality, a consciously popular genre that is in full control of its material and does not aspire to provide an ideological, didactic narrative. The mini-series picks up various structures and discourses of the Soviet

mythological pantheon, which by the late 1970s was in the process of "defoliation," smoothes them over, and incorporates them as pleasurable nostalgia.

It is no accident that the single most popular post-Soviet police procedural *Streets of Broken Lights* profusely quotes *Meeting Place.* In his recent interview to the journal *Ogonek,* Andrei Kivinov—the scriptwriter for the series and a former policeman himself—remarks that the argument about Zheglov's methods is far from closed: "Without breaking the law you cannot solve the crime" (Shenkman 45). Like *Seventeen Moments of Spring, Meeting Place* also remains a constant source of reference in other arts, for instance in the pseudo-*lubok* art of the Mit'ki[107] or in the "proletarian" ballads of the rock group Liube.

By the 1970s the police procedural emerges as a distinct television genre, with such conventions as an episodic narrative, dialogue-driven plots, and parallelism as organizing principles. Moreover, Soviet filmmakers signaled their awareness of working in a medium different from film by referring to their productions as "television spectacles." The new genre within the new medium had finally found its Russian name.

[107] The Mit'ki group is one of the non-official artistic movements that has been producing alternative art since the late 1970s-1980s. Their works are characterized by a stylized "primitivist" representation and engage a variety of plots drawn from popular Russo-Soviet culture. The group often organizes joint performances with poets and rock musicians.

Chapter Four. Detective Mini-Series and Soviet Victorianism.

For ethnology to live, its object must die.

--Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 13

1. The Classical Detective Formula and Soviet Post-Utopianism.

In the late 1970s the classical detective story returned to Soviet culture for the first time after its domination of the popular literature and film market in the pre-revolutionary period and a brief re-emergence in the 1920s in the works of the "Red Pinkertons."[108] The Soviet detective hero was an ironic and manipulative loner, no longer young but in full control of his analytical abilities. The genre emerged on Soviet television at the time when everyday life in the Soviet Union was getting less secure and provided the viewer with the sense of safety, which society as a whole and its institutions failed to provide. Television detectives brought with them safe, escapist, or exotic *locales*, isolated from the threatening and confusing Russian urban life. Brezhnev era television produced several series and made-for-TV films that adapted Western detective works or works by Soviet writers, fashioning them in a classical detective style. The two case studies in this chapter—the *Aniskin* series of TV films (1968, 1974, 1978) about a Soviet village detective and the late Soviet television adaptation of Conan Doyle's stories, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* (dir. Igor' Maslennikov, 1979-86)—are

[108] At the turn of the twentieth century, detective stories (*syshchitskie istorii*) circulated in millions of copies in newspapers, films, and the penny press. The adventures of famous Western detectives and crooks—Sherlock Holmes, Nat Pinkerton, Raffles, and Fantômas—were set anywhere from tropical islands to Russian provincial towns. A Soviet government decree of 1918 suspended the publication of serialized mass literature. In cinema, genre films were labeled bourgeois and escapist spectacle, alien to the nature of new Soviet cinema. In the mid-1920s, a group of writers—called "Red Pinkertons" attempted to exploit the popularity of the detective genre for ideological purposes. Perhaps the most well-known of their works is Marietta Shaginian's novel *Mess Mend* and the tree-part film serial based on it (dirs. Fedor Otsep and Boris Barnet, 1926). Like many other "red detectives," *Miss Mend* combines elements of the detective and spy thriller. The production came under severe criticism from ARK (Association of Revolutionary Filmmakers) for its convoluted plot, formulaic characters, and "commercial" advertising campaign. Posters for the film were designed by constructivist artists and set designers Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg. Many critics were outraged by the fact that this "bourgeois" film was better advertised and circulated than revolutionary classics like *Battleship Potemkin* or *Mother* (Youngblood 104).

representative of Stagnation's embrace of both the aesthetics and the ideological underpinnings of the Victorian detective formula. In analyzing Brezhnev era television detective series, this chapter argues that the Victorian detective formula and setting served both as a commentary on and a symbolic product of Soviet utopian views of modernity.

Unlike the spy thriller and the police procedural genres, which embodied the aspirations of an optimistic and triumphant modernity, the classical detective story appeared as an expression of anxieties about the new technological and social reality. The traditionalist and escapist spirit of the classical detective story was alien to Stalinist culture, with its projects of remaking the world and the human being.[109] Speaking in 1934 at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, which canonized socialist realism as the sole artistic method, Maxim Gorkii unambiguously singles out the detective story as the bourgeois genre *par excellence*, designed to divert the working class from political consciousness:

> This is true bourgeois literature, which reflects the real tastes, interests, and practical "morality" of its consumers with utmost clarity . . . The detective novel continues to be the spiritual nourishment of the well-fed people of Europe. As it penetrated the milieu of the hungry working class, this novel was and remains one for the reasons of the slow growth of class consciousness. (8-9)

[109] Since the 1920s many critics speculated on the ideological incompatibility of the private detective with Russo-Soviet collectivist values and the "inborn" aversion of Russians to private property and individualism. Such judgments, however, explain little in the dramatic fate of the genre. As Viktor Shklovskii astutely remarked in his 1925 essay on the plot structure of Conan Doyle's works, "Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery Story" [Novella tain], the formula is reversible:

> [I]f these stories were written by a writer living in a proletarian state, then . . . he would still make use of an unsuccessful detective. Most likely, it is the state detective who would be victorious in such a case, while the private detective would be floundering in vain. Sherlock Holmes would no doubt be working for the state, while Lestrade would be engaged in private practice (110).

While credit for the formal cultural rehabilitation of the detective genre belongs to Khrushchev's Thaw, the vast majority of works created in the 1950s-early 1960s under the rubric of the "Soviet detective model" belong to the genre of police procedural. The publication of works by Agatha Christie, Dashielle Hammet, and a score of more obscure authors, and the canonization of Edgar Allen Poe and Conan Doyle from the mid-1960s on had less to do with political liberalization than with a gradual bridging of what Andreas Huyssen calls "The Great Divide" between high and low culture. The latter process in the Soviet Union is linked to the break-up of the Stalinist political utopia (associated with modernization) and to the shift in the perception of various discourses of modernity that had defined the Russian cultural landscape well into the Khrushchev era. Discussing post-Stalinist culture, Boris Groys writes: "The barricades against bourgeois progress that were supposed to protect the country from the flood of historical change now crumbled as the Soviet Union sought to return to history. Some time passed before it was realized that there was nowhere to return to, for history itself had in the meantime disappeared" (75). The realization that Stalinism "was merely an apogee of triumphant utopianism" (Groys 76) led to a yearning for traditional genres and forms of culture.[110] Soviet television became a response to such a demand, a vehicle for traditional values and genres.

Indeed, Soviet culture successfully exploited the spy thriller and the police procedural formula despite the undeniably Western and "individualistic" origins of both genres.

[110] Groys argues that in the wake of de-Stalinization "socialist realism began to yield to a traditional realism . . . Utopian dreams of the 'new human beings' were replaced by a focus on the 'eternal values' embodied in the Russian people, who had suffered the Revolution and Stalinism, which now seemed to be a kind of fiendish and alien illusion that had come to Russia from the West" (76). Groys remarks that the neo-Slavophile tendencies, shared by Solzhenitsyn, village writers, and many late Soviet philosophers and cultural critics were far from being signs of liberalization, as they were regarded by Western observers. The collectivist essence of the "new" Russian ideology, its appeal to moralistically interpreted Christianity, its often nationalistic, anti-semitic, and anti-Western tone testify to the fact, that it was precisely at the time of the decomposition of the political Stalinist utopia that the traditionalist and conservative nature of Russo-Soviet ideology became apparent.

Psychologically, Brezhnev-era culture found comfort in the Victorian detective formula, which expresses the triumph of the status quo over the chaos of "reality." To a large degree, Victorian tastes of 1970s Soviet television originated in a socio-cultural climate similar to the one that existed in late 19th century Europe. The transformation of the gothic tale into a story of detection, pioneered by Edgar Allen Poe, coincided with paradigmatic shifts in European societies. Starting with Walter Benjamin, critics argued that the detective formula provided an outlet for the bourgeoisie' s anxieties about the transition to a modern, secular society, with new sensibilities of an urban, consumerist environment (Franco Moretti 1983, Dana Brand 1991, Benjamin 1992). The remarkably clear form of the detective story, its carefully measured elements of terror and mystery, and the eventual imposition of structure and order on the chaotic world by individual rationality not only allowed space for the imagination and vicarious transgressions of social hierarchies and decorum, but also offered reassurance that irrational human passions and excesses can be explained and contained. The figure of a private detective, who is both "inside," in the bourgeois drawing room, and "outside," in the threatening and seductive modern world, embodied the internal split of bourgeois mentality, its fears and desires. Since the Slavophile vs. Westernizer romantic controversy in the 1840s, Russian cultural producers displaced their visions of Russia's modernity either into an ideal, prettified peasant community or into utopian visions of the West. This dichotomy resurfaced in Stalinist culture, where Soviet modernization was viewed as a combination of western technology (literally, a tractor) and pastoral, idyllic, and distinctly Russian landscapes. In Stalinist film musicals, this utopia found expression in two complementary subgenres: on the one hand, Ivan Pyr'ev's collective farm musicals, on the other, Grigorii Aleksandrov's overtly American "back stage" musicals, celebrating technology and the rise of urban life. In the 1970s and 1980s television

inherited this dualistic vision of modernity. Ivan Lukinskii and Mikhail Zharov created mini-series about a rural detective, set in the Soviet Oz of a collective farm paradise. Maslennikov came up with a television adaptation of Sherlock Holmes's adventures as a version of western modernity safely removed from contemporary culture. In contrast to Conan Doyle's original and many western adaptations of the stories, Maslennikov circumscribed most of the series's action to Mrs. Hudson's living room, where a middle-aged Soviet Sherlock Holmes solved most of the cases without ever leaving the security of his armchair.

Ideologically, the detective formula was flexible enough to accommodate both nostalgic yearnings for a lost totality and patriarchal society and a probing of the system's aesthetic and ideological limits. The aftermath of the Soviet modernist project brought about reactions both from the right and from the left. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and village prose writers[111] attacked the Soviet experiment from the position of re-invented traditional Russian values. The liberal intelligentsia's opposition from the left was broader, and ranged from open political dissent to ironic verbal and visual commentary on Soviet master tropes. The marginal position of the detective genre within the Soviet cultural hierarchy allowed producers to be "more right" or "more left" in relation to mainstream television productions without encountering major problems with censorship.

Aesthetically, the moralistic and prudish Soviet television welcomed the conventions of the classical detective story—a ratiocinative detective, an isolated or exotic location, the shunning of politics. Two features, according to Cawelti, distinguish the classical detective story

[111] Village prose, which emerged in the 1950s and flourished through the 1970s, assumed the task of representing the Russian countryside and voicing concerns about the encroachment of modernization. The works of Valentin Rasputin, Vasilii Belov, and Viktor Astaf'ev portrayed the traditional Russian "way of life" in the process of becoming extinct, owing to the thoughtless use of technology, neglect, ignorance, and greed. By the late 1970s village prose dissolved as a movement. Although individual writers continued their literary and political activity, the latter often combined environmental concerns with xenophobic and anti-Semitic statements.

from both later crime formulas and other adventure genres: the transformation of crime into a game or a puzzle, the solution to which constitutes the major narrative interest of the story, and the emphasis on domestic crimes rather than political or social ones (99). The isolated setting of the classical detective, as Cawelti argues, "abstracts [the story] from the complexity and confusion of the larger social world" and "establishes a framework for the treatment of manners and local color in a fashion often reminiscent of the great Victorian novelists" (97). The latter function, in Cawelti's view, is linked to the recurrent "treatment of society in the form of nostalgic fantasies of a more peaceful and harmonious social order associated with the traditional rural society" (98). The Aniskin rural series and Holmes's living room series mapped the safe fantasy-scape that provided a "therapy" for modern Soviet viewers.

TV detective series appeared in a wave of film and television adaptations of works by late 19th century European authors. Some of those productions were remakes of already existing Soviet film adaptations of Jules Verne, and Robert Louis Stevenson, many of them produced in the Stalin era.[112] Other adaptations, like Eugene Labish's *The Straw Hat* (dir. Leonid Kvinikhidze, 1974, 2 episodes), Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (dir. Naum Birman, 1979, 2 episodes), or Stevenson's *The Adventures of Prince Florizel (The Suicide Club)* (dir. Evgenii Tatarskii, 1979, 3 episodes) were new TV productions, starring major film and television actors.

These adaptations form a significant layer of Stagnation culture not just because of their status as light genres (vaudeville in the *Straw Hat*, proto-sitcom in *Three Men in a Boat*, or Victorian mystery in *Sherlock Holmes* and *Prince Florizel*), but also in their overt escapism.

[112] Examples include Jules Vernes' *Children of Captain Grant* (dir. Vladimir Vainshtok, 1936) and Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (dir. Vladimir Vainshtok, 1937). During Stagnation, *Treasure Island* was adapted twice: in 1971 by Evgenii Fridman, with Boris Andreev in the title role, and in 1982 by Vladimir Vorob'ev. The latter is a three-episode television version of the novel.

They all deal with flaws of human nature and erratic human behavior. The narrative often consists of isolated incidents, and the plot is secondary to extra-narrative elements—musical numbers in *The Straw Hat* and *Three Men in a Boat,* ironic verbal commentary in *Three Men* and *Prince Florizel.* Another remarkable feature of these productions is their lethargically slow pace: dialogues about trifles, a camera that is more interested in detailing the carefully crafted mise-en-scène or in creating "live vignettes" than in furthering the action or conveying psychological nuances. In fact, characters are designed to be part of the mise-en-scène, whether imperial Paris, Victorian London, or Habsburg Vienna.

The genre of the classical detective story, with its focus on the details of culture but without any pronounced social significance or symbolism, perfectly fit the atmosphere of post-historical Soviet "victorianism." To be sure, the use of the detective formula varied: from seemingly straightforward adaptations (especially those that contained criticism of bourgeois society[113]) to parodies of the genre. What is common to most of late Thaw-early Stagnation "detective" productions is the exploitation of a "foreign" mass culture form to deal with the perceived cultural gap of new native heroes, models, and, ultimately, history. Like science fiction, the detective formula was valued not just for its engaging narratives but also for its "metaphoric potential."

I am examining specifically the Aniskin series and the Sherlock Holmes series because they provide a meta-commentary on the dualistic nature of the Stalinist modernization project: on the one hand, its emphasis on adopting Western technology to construct communism and, on the other hand, its anti-modernist emphasis on preserving folk roots and spirit, despite modernity's uprooting of traditional culture. Soviet mini-series of the 1970s mirrored these two

[113] For instance, *A Very English Murder (*dir. Samson Samsonov 1975*)*, based on a novel by Cyril Hare (pseudonym of Gordon Clark), follows a "locked-room" detective formula and offers a mild critique of bourgeois mores.

trends of Stalinist culture. Specifically, the *Aniskin* series adopts the discourse of people-mindedness—a central concept not just in socialist realism but in all of Russian modern history—and converts it into both the theme and the material of its plots.[114] By contrast, the *Sherlock Holmes* series constructs its detective narratives as catalogues of images, codes, and voices of the turn-of-the-20th culture, still unaware of its future development. This chapter focuses on the domestication of and ironic distancing from discourses of Stalinist modernity—of triumphant reason and technology, of reconciling traditional and modern in Soviet utopia, and of the transformation of life through art.

Despite their apparent differences (little seems to unite a Soviet rural policeman with a Victorian sleuth), both use the classical detective model to fashion their diegetic worlds as museums of twentieth century Soviet tropes. These elements, however, convey a feeling of "cultural agoraphobia"—a desire to construct a world not just separated from the larger historical and social context, but representing nothing but itself. Both productions are thus escapist (in the sense of avoiding contemporary urban Soviet life) and topical (in engaging the central cultural tendency of the 1970s—the interpretation of culture as a finalized set of practices). Both privilege stylization and imitation over originality, authenticity, or "realism." In the last analysis, an idealized Soviet village culture and Victorian London are treated in a strikingly similar manner—as a look backwards and away, to an imaginary and unattainable space of aestheticized modernity.

[114] People-mindedness originated in German romanticism of the1820s and was vehemently advocated by the leading Russian critic Vissarion Belinskii in the 1830s. The concern with the genuine spirit of the people became part of the Russian intelligentsia's mission of raising people to their "ideal state." For more on the origins of people-mindedness, see Hans Günther, "Totalitarnaia narodnost' i ee istoki," *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon*, 377-389.

2. The Aniskin Series as Socialist Realist Museum.

2.1. Aniskin and the Village Prose.

The Aniskin series is based on novellas by Vil' Lipatov[115] and consists of three films, the first of which was released in movie theaters, while the other two were made-for-TV films about a village policeman, Fedor Ivanovich Aniskin. Through Lipatov's stories the series is linked to the late Soviet "village prose" tradition. The conflict between the old and the new, which in Stalinist literature and film is always resolved in favor of the latter, in village prose is reversed: from universal modernist projects to a re-discovery of traditional Russian values, invariably located in the past. The reversal of the "Time, Forward!" paradigm[116] defines both the plot structure of village prose works (non-linear narrative, emphasis on memory and mythical connection between man and nature) and their larger philosophical agenda. A critique of modernity in its social, political, technological, and cultural implications constitutes the focus of the village prose.

Although Lipatov is rarely mentioned among village prose writers[117], his 1960s short stories and novellas clearly belong to this tradition, albeit the author's allegiances are split between an appreciation of life "in the sticks" and a recognition of its backwardness. The original Aniskin stories are set on the Narym river in Western Siberia, in a tiny village surrounded by the taiga and lakes, scorching hot in the summer and freezing cold in the winter.

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[115] Apart from village detective stories, Lipatov wrote several larger works. His novel *All This Is About Him* was reworked into a script for another television mini-series (dir. Igor' Shatrov 1978). Like the Aniskin stories, the novel is set in Siberia and is about the investigation of the murder of a Komsomol member, a remake of the Pavlik Morozov myth. Morozov was a young pioneer who in 1932, during the Party collectivization campaign, denounced his father to the secret police for hiding grain and was killed by his "kulak" relatives. Morozov became a patron saint of the Young Pioneers, his life exemplifying alligeance to the Big Family at the expense of family ties.

[116] The title for Valentin Kataev's 1932 novel *Time, Forward!* was suggested to him by Vladimir Maiakovskii. The expression, indeed, captures the spirit of the Russian avant-garde, which, at least in this particular instance, became an important part of socialist realist aesthetics. In her book *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past,* Kathleen Parthé titles one of the chapters "Time, Backward!"—a fitting slogan for the "village prose" reversal of the idea of progress. See especially 48-49.

The severe natural conditions leave their imprint on characters. In the story "Genka Pal'tsev, son of Dmitrii," for instance, Aniskin apprehends a man guilty of robbing and strangling a woman. Instead of arresting the murderer, Aniskin suggests that he leave the village. Paradoxical as it may seem, the criminal does not take him up on the offer and prefers to be arrested: no one can survive in the taiga alone. Aniskin's decision substitutes a natural punishment for a social one. In their genre, Lipatov's stories are socio-cultural sketches,[118] with a strong psychological element. Lipatov's Aniskin is an extremely fat, untidy man, who has doubts about virtually everything: his place in a changing world, his relationship with his daughter, and, most importantly, his ability to solve crimes. This last doubt, paradoxical for a detective *or* a Soviet policeman, marks an important theme in Lipatov's stories: the traps of local narrow-mindedness. Protective of the village community, Aniskin distrusts outsiders, which renders him blind to the signs that point to a villager, one of "ours," as the murderer.

The stories received mixed reviews in the press. Some critics praised the successful combination of detective plot with the realistic depiction of contemporary life of the Soviet village: "the lyrical qualities of rural prose, its unhurried pace, and reflections on the fate of the village today" (Shcherbakov 4). Many others, however, criticized the strained combination of lyricism and "edification," and wondered whether the stories were a parody of the detective genre or a parody of village prose. More importantly, many readers were disturbed by the authoritarian sides of the Aniskin character. F. Levin directly links this aspect of Lipatov's stories to the major political issue of the Thaw—the cult of personality: "[O]ne can only guess

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[117] Parthé discusses in some detail Lipatov's stories and the polemic around their publication in the journal *Znamia* (1967-68). See the chapter "Two Detectives in Search of Village Prose," 99-112.

[118] The genre of sketches became popular during the early Thaw, signaling a retreat from the monumental scale of Stalinist novels and a return to a "sincere" representation of Soviet reality.

what kind of voluntarism may result from such practice, when one person is tsar, god, and military commander" (5).

In its narrative focus and visual style, the Aniskin series draws on the Thaw-era village film, which shared some concerns with village prose but adapted them to a popular consciousness. Despite their simplified conflicts and somewhat wood-cut style, such films as Ivan Lukinskii's *Soldier Ivan Brovkin* (1955), Stanislav Rostotskii's *It Happened Once in Pen'kovo* (1957), and Lev Kulidzhanov's *When Trees Were Big* (1962) redefined the Stalinist genre of the kolkhoz film.[119] Unlike the latter's upbeat utopias of labor, love, and abundance, the village film focused on everyday life in the countryside, emphasizing its traditional and often idiosyncratic features. The most striking aspects of the Thaw-era village film are understatement and folk humor, which marked characters' spontaneity and authenticity, and served as a sign of "true" people's culture, opposed to the fake official celebration of "people-mindedness" characteristic of Stalinist kolkhoz epics. Even though village film plots often engaged topical issues of modernization in the 1950s—the Virgin Lands project[120] or bringing modern media, such as radio, film, and even television into the village—those served merely as a backdrop for a new positive hero. The protagonist of the village film is the little man, whose identity is entirely formed by the small community—the family and the village—and whose maturation involves, above all, acceptance of local communal values.

Television adaptations of Lipatov transform the original stories along two lines. First, the detective formula becomes more pronounced. What is sacrificed on the way are Lipatov's psychological sketches and instances of cultural ambiguity. For instance, the priest, who advises

[119] The most notable of the Stalinist kolkhoz musicals were Ivan Pyr'ev's *Rich Bride* (1937), *The Swineherd and the Shepherd* (1941), and *Cossacks of the Kuban* (1949).
[120] In 1954 the Communist Party called for cultivization of vast territories in Kazakhstan and southwestern Siberia. The "Virgin Lands" was the major project of modernization under Khrushchev.

Aniskin on several occasions, disappears; the poster for El'dar Riazanov's ironic detective film *Beware of the Car* is replaced by one for a "safer" melodrama *Once More About Love*.[121] Detective plots undergo a "cleansing" in their adaptation. Murders disappear, as do any indications of threat or hostility towards Aniskin on the part of the villagers. In fact, only the first film follows Lipatov's plot. The other two made-for-TV films use Lipatov's characters and settings, but introduce "safer" stories.

Second, the folklorization and stylization of language, characters, and plots completely erases the dramatic, almost tragic perception of a world in transition that characterized the stories. The TV films present an idyllic rural community, the end product of socio-political utopia. The only war that the mini-series wages is a cultural one. Instead of the diversity of human motivations and conflicts that underlie crimes in the stories, the series offers one basic opposition: people's organic culture vs. commercial culture. All other characteristics of an individual or a community are arranged along this axis: rural vs. urban, communal vs. individualist, traditional vs. modern, Russian vs. Western, physical labor vs. technology-driven laziness. All Aniskin films have one essential detail in common: they end with the elimination of money as a threat to the organic community. Every episode starts with the criminal stealing money and ends with Aniskin eliminating the criminal and money as the major culprit both from the narrative and the community.

2.2. Detective Plots: The Case of the People against Fantômas.

Aniskin's investigations reveal problems that in many ways are central to late Soviet culture, such as alcoholism, the influence of Western commercial culture, the alienation of village youth from communal values, and their yearning for leisure activities and consumer

[121] *Once More about Love* (dir. Georgii Natanson 1968) is a sentimental and tragic story of the love between a young physicist and an airline stewardess. The film features Tat'iana Doronina, whose appearance, voice, and

goods. The vast majority of these conflicts are inseparable from the modernization of the countryside. But what is presented in Lipatov's stories as an abrupt social and psychological break in the traditional life of the countryside (underscored by the old policeman's painful inner monologues) in the television version is reduced to a series of anecdotal "cases." The major loci for the resolution of the conflict of identity are the folk art museum and the local community center—the House of Culture.

The first, one-episode film of the series, *The Village Detective* (Ivan Lukinskii 1968) clearly follows the model of a village film. The film features the theft of an accordion from the House of Culture, which turns out to be a prank played by three hooligan brothers to frame the man who beat them up for harassing villagers. The characters, including the "division policeman" Fedor Ivanovich Aniskin, are quite lively if entirely transparent. The conflictlessness inherited from the village film tradition is compensated for by a series of mini-confrontations between Aniskin and the villagers. On his way to recover the accordion, Aniskin helps a local saleswoman, Dusia, grapple with her messy love life; chastises one of her lovers for excessive alcohol consumption; criticizes kolkhoz administrators for "inadvertently turning the population into drunkards" (they pay kolkhoz members three-to-five ruble bonuses for which, supposedly, one can only buy vodka). In all these instances Aniskin acts as a paternal figure of control and reason, watching over his "children." The scenes, however, are presented with humor, and Aniskin's old age and Columbo-like behavior make them quite enjoyable. Most importantly, the first Aniskin film already constructs the setting as a folksy fairy tale village, where all contradictions of the modern age are suspended.

At the same time, these mini-sketches are not entirely innocent. Although Aniskin vaguely recalls the canonical paternal figures of Thaw police films, his control over village life is

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somewhat campish acting earned her the nickname of the "Russian Marilyn Monroe."

quite authoritarian. By the end of the first film, the detective plot and innocuous bantering are transformed into a Stalinist scenario. After confronting the perpetrators in the field, Aniskin organizes a mini-trial, pronounces a speech, and invites villagers to attack the three brothers verbally. The public nature of this event and the official script, which underlies spontaneous expressions of criticism and indignation, is reminiscent of 1930s show trials. In the film, the "healing power" of the collective word substitutes for the repressive power of the state. The three perpetrators are not arrested, but also do not escape moral judgement, for they must restore their connections with the village community. Both criminal justice and the punitive role of the state are erased in favor of idealized Russian values set against a woodcut background of Russian wheat fields.

In its visual and acoustic aspects, the episode recapitulates the conflict between the accordion and the guitar, typical of 1930s culture and revived during the Thaw.[122] The hooligan brothers sing guitar couplets that are performed in a pseudo-criminal style**,** emphasizing the sharply individuated works of the performer-participant, whereas the accordion represents positive communal values. This simple opposition is complicated by the presence of television and radio broadcasts as elements of the soundtrack. While unmarked within the plot, these broadcasts acquire their value from Aniskin's reaction: he enjoys the radio broadcast of Soviet *estrada*,[123] but the classical music performed on TV leaves Aniskin indifferent.

[122] The "competition of music" as a metaphor for a deeper conflict (class, social, cultural, etc.) was first introduced in the first Soviet musical, *The Accordion* (dir. Igor' Savchenko, 1934). With the exception of wartime culture, the guitar is marked negatively in Soviet film (cf. *Spring on Zarechnaia Street,* dirs. Marlen Khutsiev and Feliks Mironer 1956) until late Thaw-early Stagnation. On the role of music in Soviet film see also Clark 1995.

[123] *Estrada* is a composite term for live entertainment. In late Soviet culture it refers to a pastiche of pseudo-folk and official pop music that came to dominate the Soviet stage after the Stalinist mass song became obsolete. While *estrada* concerts in the 1970s featured some original artists and mild social satire, for the most part they consisted of patriotic and bland "songs by Soviet composers."

The theme of *Aniskin and Fantômas* (1974), the second Aniskin film, is the corrupting influence of Western cinema on young minds. The two-episode film opens with a stick-up of the village cashier in the woods by two teenagers wearing black masks and armed with starter's pistols. Aniskin immediately traces the criminal outfits back to the French *Fantômas* film series (dir. André Hunebelle, 1964), which the village children have used to invent their own game.[124] The villain-of-the-day is the movie projectionist, who shows predominantly commercial foreign films, infesting the village House of Culture with "false ideals" and alien cheap thrills. The "armed robbery" turns out to be a red herring. The boys had intended to steal a letter that, they believed, was in the bag and that implicated one of the boys' father in drunken debauchery. Aniskin simultaneously unmasks the movie projectionist, who has tricked the boys into commiting the crime—and has pocketed the money—and acts as a mentor to the boys. His goal is to make the boys name the criminal and realize the falsity of his "friendship." While this subplot recapitulates Thaw problematics, its context conveys a more conservative message. The boys' crime has two motivations: the influence of bourgeois popular culture and the presumed disintegration of Russian moral values due to alcohol. The link between the two is quite explicit: in the absence of a strong paternal figure, children turn to alien, foreign thrills.

In the last film, *Once More—Aniskin* (1978), the conflict between genuine culture (Russian, rural, traditional) and false culture (foreign, urban, modernist) assumes a symbolic dimension. It takes Aniskin three episodes to find artifacts stolen from the village museum of folk art and from several private houses. The artifacts are unique and, allegedly, expensive, but the idea of their *market* value is introduced into the narrative by a city artist. For the village community, the artifacts are objects of beauty and local pride. Stealing them amounts to robbing

[124] Hunebelle's *Fantômas* films, starring the famous comic actor Louis de Funès, were, in fact, parodies on the original, early 20th century series by Louis Feuillade. Hunebelle's films were extremely popular with Soviet

the village of its identity. In fact, the urban criminal threatens to break all the artifacts, that is, literally to fragment the village's identity. The major concern in the episode is the threat to both folk art treasures and the community's way of life. In both cases, the threat comes from outsiders. Although the initial investigation provides only one clue (the thief is tall), Aniskin immediately proceeds to round up "the usual suspects"—a group of seasonal workers or moonlighters [shabashniki], hired by the kolkhoz to perform urgent, mostly construction-related, jobs. They are alien to the community in their rootlessness, mobility, individualism, and mercantilism. They reside outside of the village, in the liminal zone between the fields and the river—the only passageway to the city. The conflict between urban/rootless and village/stable culture can only be resolved physically, by the expulsion of the alien element from the space of the utopia: at the episode's end, the police take the arrested perpetrator to the regional center in a motor boat.

While the nature of the crimes prevents the viewer from any emotional or intellectual engagement, and the identity of the criminal is circumscribed from the very beginning, Aniskin's investigation offers the viewer a walking tour of a "Russian village," represented through simple, *lubok*-like oppositions. "The most likely person" is most certainly the one who committed the crime, but to catch him the viewer has to follow the village detective through the labyrinth of streets and fields, private houses and public buildings, and to experience first-hand commonplace (and quite often—nonsensical) dialogues, folk song performances, and gossip. In the end, the lonely criminal is confronted not by a village detective, but by an entire museum of mythical types located in the isolated village of Oz.

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audiences through the 1970s.

2.3. The Aniskin Series as Ethnographic Museum: People-Mindedness on Display.

The master trope underlying all three films is people-mindedness—the idea that all art should be understandable to the people, address people's concerns, embody folk values, and, in the last analysis, should come from the people. The oldest and the most basic of the socialist realist ideological-aesthetic postulates, it becomes the refuge of (Soviet) communal values. People-mindedness, however, is represented as the external texture of village life, captured through symbolic conflicts, transparent characters, and genre scenes. For Aniskin, conventional investigation is merely a game, a show he puts on for viewers. Reflecting on the Fantômas incident, Aniskin remarks, "Children used to play 'Chapaev' or the 'Red Imps.'"[125] This passing remark captures the transformation of the mythology of the Civil War into formulaic roles in a game: adults are transformed into misbehaving children and the Soviet village into a museum exhibit, the purpose of which is to "rescue" national mythology from oblivion.

This display is akin to one of the open-air folk museums, which proliferated in Europe in the second half of the 19th century and attempted to reconstruct a traditional culture that had been destroyed by modernization. Initially, these displays included wax mannequins dressed in traditional peasant dress and situated inside a village house. Discussing the evolution of these exhibits, Mark Sandberg notes: "The museums needed [. . .] a compensatory narrativizing technique that could perform damage control [that is, rescue the exhibits from being perceived as a monument to loss-E.P.] by re-situating objects in an 'unbroken' context . . . Within such a context, narrative coherence could substitute for cultural coherence" (325-326). Guides, often dressed in peasant clothes, accompanied urban visitors to the museum and provided them with

[125] Chapaev is the hero of the 1934 film by the "Vasil'ev brothers." "The Little Imps" are heroes of the 1923 film *Little Red Imps* (dir. Ivan Perestiani). Both films were important for building the visual mythology of the Civil War, and their heroes, indeed, entered children's games. Perestiani's film was one of the "Red Pinkerton" productions, a bona fide American-style adventure.

mini-narratives illustrating a particular mise-en-scène of the exhibit. The mise-en-scène itself often featured scenery and titles reminiscent of rural genre paintings, familiar to a cultured city audience (Sandberg 335). Such attempts at authenticity, however, could not change the nature of the museum as a simulacrum of traditional rural culture, functioning as spectacles of "the popular" for educated élites.[126]

As an "unspoiled," authentic context, the Siberian setting of the series plays an especially important role in the Aniskin museum project. In the 1970s, Siberia became the locus of the re-discovered Russo-Soviet epic spirit, glorified in numerous films and television productions: from Andron Konchalovskii's *Sibiriada* (1978) to the longest television series of the Brezhnev era, *The Eternal Call* (dirs. Vladimir Uskov and Vladimir Krasnopol'skii, 1974-77). Siberian expanses, the richness of its land, its isolation from corrupt and decadent centers, such as Moscow and Leningrad, were used to foster a new mythology, where the theme of socialist construction was integrated into the exploration of a re-heroicized Russian national character.

While exploiting the symbolic dimension of the "Siberian myth," the Aniskin series both merges it with the Stalinist myth of modernity as the garden of Eden and simultaneously domesticates it. The Siberian village in the series is the land of eternal summer, where rainy days are mentioned in connection with the investigation but never appear on-screen. The taiga, which presumably surrounds the village appears in one episode as the hiding place for the stolen artifacts. The unspoiled, traditional Russian values preserved in the Siberian village are no more than a symbolic backdrop for formulaic detective plots.

In fact, every object or person who enters Aniskin's field of vision is drawn into his investigation of people's culture. Aniskin-the-detective takes the viewer on a tour of the village,

[126] Stagnation is also the time when ethnographic museums flourished in Russia and in other republics. In 1981 the All-Russian Museum of Decorative-Applied and Folk Arts opened in Moscow. The open-air Museum of Folk

while the colorful genre scenes provide a recognizable (and, in their overt iconicity, quite pleasurable) context. Characters are embodiments of Soviet *lubok* types, whose identity is entirely defined by formulaic gestures and symbolic objects. In addressing people Aniskin appropriately reduces them to the lowest possible denominator: "Witnesses of masculine and feminine gender." The melodramatic village saleswoman Dusia always carries a twig of ashberry—as unpretentious and basic as village life itself. The "dandy" director of the House of Culture sports a bow tie, thus illustrating Aniskin's ironic remark: "You are an urban and a cultured person." The milkmaids are always busty and maternal, and the village drunkard is always dirty, rude, and greedy.

Although crimes become more serious from the first to the third episode, their representation becomes more formulaic. In addition to the picturesque "folk" cast from the first film, *Aniskin and Fantômas* features equally flat and stereotypical Soviet cinematic figures. For example, the Komsomol leader at the school where the two boys study is perky and always ready to "support the opinion of the local police chief Aniskin," recalling heroines of Stalinist musicals. *Once More—Aniskin* introduces a ne'er-do-well sailor, who got involved in theft and, thereby, betrayed the ideals and war sacrifices of his father, Aniskin's war buddy.

Despite the mise-en-scène of a traditional, patriarchal community, the last film, *Once More—Aniskin,* features no families. The streets are filled with children and the village day-care center features prominently in the last episode, yet children almost never appear with their parents. Like every other human activity, child-rearing is represented symbolically, as a name-tag on an exhibit. The messiness of family relations, which was still present in the second film, is erased in favor of a sterile environment where isolated figures represent a particular aspect of rural culture.

Architecture and Rural Life, spread over 375 acres outside of Kiev, opened in 1976.

The refusal to go beyond the surface bears on the representation of rural traditions. For instance, by the end of the series two couples plan a wedding, yet instead the last episode displays an endless parade of highly stylized rituals: courtship, lengthy demonstrations of the bridal outfit, four marriage proposals, etc. Each enactment is different, each adds or illustrates something in village culture, but none involves believable human emotions or behavior. The transparency of the narrative structure matches that of the characters, or, more precisely, the two are homologous. The flat characters can only exist in that particular flat setting and within that particular set of flat conflicts. The colored and colorful world of the last film, especially, consists of little more than genre scenes drawn from both pre-revolutionary and Soviet culture: "Village Choir," "Square Dance," or "In the Village Store (figure 25):

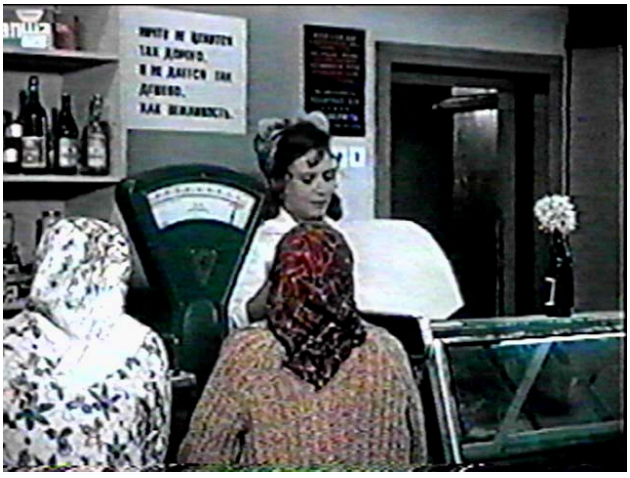

Figure 25

The last film in the series gives an interesting twist to the problem of authenticity, which lies at the center of Thaw's revision of socialist realism and the return to pre-Stalinist aesthetics. For cultural producers of the 1950s-early 1960s, sincerity of representation was the major value of a work of art, determining both its aesthetics and its politics. The call to write or make films "from the heart" and the belief in the power of honest words and images marked the Thaw as the last gasp of revolutionary romanticism. Yet, in claiming a transparency of relationship between

reality and its artistic representation, Thaw culture replicated the Stalinist aesthetic system. While the primacy of the Party's word was challenged by the admission of small personal "truths," the artistic image was still perceived as an unmediated expression of the reality of life, and the model for its transformation.

As a reaction to thwarted Thaw illusions, Stagnation culture deeply distrusts authenticity, be it in the discourse of political slogans, in personal expression, or in artistic creation. Literature and film of the 1970s present sincere characters as moralizing dogmatists or naïve dreamers. Television, which came to maturity in the late Thaw, fully embraced this perspective by the mid-1970s. In this respect the consistently stylized language of the Aniskin series, which develops out of the naïve imitation of people's speech in village film, is part and parcel of Stagnation aesthetics.

The issue of authenticity itself is central to the last Aniskin film; it is transferred from people and ideas onto objects. To Aniskin's naïve question: "Why didn't he take this pretty carafe?" the director of the burglarized art museum explains that the thief stole only authentic artifacts and left cheap imitations behind. This fact leads Aniskin to suspect that the thief obtained a copy of the museum catalogue. The problem of genuine vs. fake artifacts, however, plays a larger role in the film than merely as a clue in the criminal case. On several occasions characters burst into passionate monologues on the history and meaning of folk crafts as an expression of "folk spirit." Villagers' houses are filled with pottery and other folk craft artifacts, giving an impression not of living quarters but of a museum display (figure 26). Even the

rootless moonlighters—village outsiders—collect "art."

Figure 26

Significantly, all genuine objects in the museum and in village homes belong to the pre-revolutionary period, and the remaining representatives of craftsmen families are all octogenarians. The authentic objects thus possess an aura of uniqueness because the tradition is virtually extinct. The sacralized museum space restores the lost link between the people and their artistic traditions. Likewise, the flattened representation of folk characters and traditions simulate the lost aura of authenticity of language and images. The recovery of the stolen exhibits magically resolves a number of other conflicts. One of the suspects finally marries his beloved; another suspect, a former "moonlighter," applies to become a member of the kolkhoz; the city artist reunites with his estranged wife. Through the figure of the artist who came to the village in order to "learn of people's culture and to breathe the unique air of folk art," the series also formulaically bridges the age-old gap between intellectuals and the common man. As the core value of the community, people's culture, thus, offers a universal panacea. Utopian harmony is restored via the "least ideological" element located in the never-never land in Siberia.

In the local museum, however, authentic objects and imitations are displayed indiscriminately, revealing the post-utopian (if not postmodern) nature of the folk art museum,

the larger museum of the village, and the project of the Aniskin series. The pastiche of musical styles used in the series, in particular, is culturally eclectic. First, the soundtrack consistently contradicts the implied meaning of the scene. In *Aniskin and Fantomas*, the robbery scene is accompanied by playful music more appropriate for a cartoon. In *Once More—Aniskin*, declarations of love are framed on two occasions by "inappropriate" music: a performance of a children's song on the piano and "epic" music from a TV broadcast of a Civil War film. Second, the source of the music is often unclear: while seemingly extra-diegetic, the music could be coming out of a PA system, which was a regular presence on the village square starting in the 1920s as part of the Party's "radiofication campaign," intended to bring political consciousness to the village. In the 1970s Soviet village, the loudspeaker only broadcasts sugary pop songs that imitate folk style.

Third, "musical numbers"—individual or choral amateur performances—are integrated into each of the three episodes (figure 27) These numbers not only interfere with the detective plots, but effectively eliminate any claim to realism. As elements of *lubok* spectacle, these sequences clearly draw on Stalinist kolkhoz musicals. The continuous soundtrack, comprised of tame Soviet pop imitations of folk songs, children's songs, and sterile versions of rural couplets [chastushki] suggests an unending dream sequence—the jumbled memory of culture trying to recover its form if not its meaning.

Figure 27

2.4. Back to the Future, Russian Style: From Socialist Realism to Aethetisized Utopia.

The utopian and stylized folk features of the series are contextualized by references to Stalinist culture, which, for the de-heroicized 1970s serves as a nostalgic and heroic *alter ego.* This context is already present in *The Village Detective* in the closing scene of the trial, although the 1968 film still adheres to the visual signification of the Thaw. The mise-en-scène—the open space of the fields, haystacks, and members of the kolkhoz gathered during their work break—creates an atmosphere of spontaneity. Both *The Village Detective* and *Aniskin and Fantômas* use black-and-white film stock, which throughout the Thaw marked a departure from the "unnatural" and false optimism of Stalinist cinema's use of color stock.

By 1978 nostalgia for "authentic Russia" transforms into a longing for the lost Utopia. Neo-conservatism becomes manifest on both the visual and the narrative level in the series. The "Stalinist folk museum" makes its first appearance in the verbal frame of the last film. In contrast to the first two films' opening action sequences (crime reported or committed) and facetious musical soundtracks, the last film begins with a panning crane shot of the village and the river, establishing a paradigm of an idyll. It then presents Aniskin and his wife emerging from their house, and, finally, introduces a voice-over:

> Yes-yes, you're not mistaken. This is our old acquaintance, Fedor Ivanovich Aniskin, the local police inspector. He kept more and more people in his retentive and still young memory, though the years stooped him, turned his hair gray, and made him very short-winded. … And in the regional police department he would openly say: 'We work in the old style."

This direct appeal to the audience, the pseudo-folkish stylized and sterile language, the doubling of the visual image by verbal explication—each of these is an imitation of a fair booth barker, inviting viewers to step inside. Yet this folk spectacle is far from a naïve imitation of the folk style familiar from the first film. Rather, it is a puppet theater, with Aniskin as the master puppeteer.

A Soviet policeman, he nonetheless seems to be subordinate to no one. His status as an "elder" and the isolated location of the village make him an autocratic ruler of the community, its sole judge and jury. His detective qualities, acted out in the post-utopian Soviet village, take on a demonic air. Aniskin can see "through" people: emerging out of nowhere at the right time, he has a phenomenal memory and logical skills that are apparently enhanced by his old age. In short, as a detective Aniskin is a peculiar hybrid of Miss Marple and a Soviet NKVD investigator. The latter should come as no surprise. Played by Mikhail Zharov, Aniskin himself is a museum piece of Russo-Soviet film history, a walking memory of its life-building impulses.[127] In his late seventies, Zharov took over the production of the Aniskin series. *Once*

[127] Zharov's other screen roles include an American amateur detective in *Miss Mend*; the gang leader in the first Soviet sound film—and an early model for the "re-education" plot— *Road to Life* (Nikolai Ekk, 1931); the NKVD investigator in the Stalinist spy thriller *Engineer Kochin's Mistake* (Aleksandr Macheret, 1939); and Ivan the Terrible's guard and henchman Maliuta Skuratov in both parts of Sergei Eisenstein's classic (1945 and 1946/58).

More Aniskin, in which Zharov worked as actor, director, and scriptwriter is a peculiar *auteur* film by a veteran of Soviet cinema.

If Aniskin-the-detective serves as the guide in the ethnographic museum of people's culture, Aniskin-the-demiurge summons up the ghosts of the Soviet past. By the late 1970s, the innocent *lubok* turns into a neo-conservative museum collecting the debris of the Stalinist utopia. The series has all of the formal attributes of a sound ideological production—from the kolkhoz Party secretary to shock-workers at the local oil well. All of the major Soviet tropes—the collective as a Big Family, wartime brotherhood, redemptive labor, and the re-education of an individual—are collated, displayed, and above all, displaced into rural utopia.

Through Aniskin's figure, the Russian traditional communal and the Stalinist collective utopia merge. People allegedly have nothing to hide, and even if they do, they cannot conceal anything from the ubiquitous Master Detective. As the visual metaphor for the hallowed Russian "soul wide open" [dusha naraspashku], all doors are kept unlocked; villagers first enter, then knock. This *lubok* celebration of the Russian commune, however, invariably ends in Aniskin barging into the house and interrogating the host. The astounding lack of privacy or any laws apart from Aniskin's own gives the happy folk spectacle an ambiguous and ominous twist.

Another jocular allusion to "demonic times" is the subject of police searches. Aniskin performs these without any warrants or reasonable suspicion. In many cases, the only meaning of these scenes is their comic effect. Aniskin's "Doctor Watson" in the series is an amateur detective, Liutikov. Both his appearance—elaborate disguises and dark "spy" glasses—and his avid reading of crime pulp fiction are objects of Aniskin's ridicule. Liutikov is the village idiot, part and parcel of the stylized folk image of the series. Eager to cure Liutikov of his detective craze, Aniskin officially summons him to police headquarters and orders him to bring all his

crime literature. After confiscating the suitcase with books, Aniskin announces that Liutikov is a major suspect in the theft of money from the cashier: after all, he is well versed in the literary technique of crime. The accusation is clearly comic, and after the shocked Liutikov leaves, Aniskin starts reading one of the confiscated books. But within the neo-conservative paradigm of the series, the scene looks like a nostalgic—if "happily postmodern"— replay of Stalinist "glory days."

Like all other historical references, these glory days only emerge out of Aniskin's tenacious memory (he, incidentally, is the only person *with* a memory in the mini-series). The production pays tribute to the gerontocratic culture of Stagnation: it either infantilizes the generation of sons or casts them as social deviants. The prominence of old people (the series features a permanent cast of octogenarians) and children (Aniskin is followed by a group of kids offering their help with investigations) in the series offers a clear paradigm: cultural and communal values are transmitted indirectly to children from grandparents—the carriers of both traditional communal and Soviet collective values.[128] The first episode of the series features Aniskin's own son and daughter, both of whom are presented as weak, spoiled parasites. The daughter does not want to work at the milk farm; instead, she stays out until three in the morning and returns home with her misused "breasts showing through her shirt." While these accusations, harshly expressed by Aniskin, seem like the absurd grumblings of an old man, they also capture a tendency in Stagnation culture, not unlike such shows as *Matlock* or *Murder She Wrote,* to portray the generation of sons and daughters as failures. Chastising the visiting town

[128] In the 1970s several "veterans' films" came out: Andrei Smirnov's *Belorussia Station* (1970), Vladimir Rogovoi's *Officers* (1971), Grigorii Kokhan's police series *Born by the Revolution* (1974-77). Typically, the narrative starts in the present, with protagonists who went through the revolution and the war having a reunion or reminiscing about the past. Contemporary life and the younger generation are portrayed as lacking values. The rest of the narrative unfolds as a trip through the past, to heroic times and historical optimism. This trip typically ends with a lesson to posterity, best exemplified by a scene from *Officers*. Addressing his pre-school grandson, the general says: "There is such a profession, Ivan—defending your Motherland."

representative, a lazy and ignorant womanizer who threatens to report Aniskin to the regional party committee, Aniskin remarks: "In my time I've met government agents that you couldn't imagine in your worst nightmares."

What is missing in this neo-conservative paradigm is the stability of ideological codes that characterized Stalinism. Both visual typology and the underlying tropes manifest signs of senility. In *Once More—Aniskin,* the thief's presumed height draws Aniskin's attention to the only four tall men in the village. In Stalinist iconography, giant aviators and polar explorers were the pride of the people, symbols of the country's potential. Aniskin, himself a very tall man, however, refers to the suspects as "overgrown" [pererostki]: standing out in the gerontocratic community is abnormal and, potentially, dangerous.

The aging of the protagonist, of the narrative tropes, and of the cultural paradigms leads to a consistent misuse of the concept "young" in the series. When Aniskin pays a visit to the House of Culture where a folk song ensemble is rehearsing, he greets the troupe, whose average age is forty, with the words: "A warm police welcome to talented Soviet youth!"

The monumentalism of Aniskin's image—another bow to Stalinism—suffers from the same loss of "aura." Without his ritualistic blessing, no relationship can be consummated and no marriage can take place. His presence is required when geologists find oil in a local well. People sing songs about Aniskin. But unlike the mass songs of the 1930s glorifying Stalin, this late Soviet *lubok* features comic couplets.

The use of Soviet historical or ideological material in the mini-series never leaves the mythological pool of familiar images, themes, and style selected for their "pictorial" value. The burglaries at the Folk Art Museum and at the local artist's house take place on a sunny summer day. The intensely green fields with tranquil cows are sandwiched between the bright blue sky

and the blue river. Nature, in other words, seems lifted out of socialist realist painting, which privileged tropical landscapes. At the same time, the city artist, who moved to the village in order to "learn the unique spirit and style of folk art" is working on an epic painting, *The Youth of the Earth*, which features a Russian pastoral landscapes and decrepit buildings. As a transparent reference to the modernism inherent in the culture of Stalinism, *The Youth of the Earth* thus points to a conceptual rather than a real landscape. While the "internal" and the "external" museums ultimately collide, the 1970s television simulacrum looks like a bleak, faded copy of the Stalinist visual code.[129]

The last scene of the series reminds the viewer both of optimistic closures in classical socialist realist films and of the final "apotheosis" sequence in *lubok* literature and *balagan* performances—people celebrating, patriotic songs, verbal slogans, and the triumphant sounds of church bells and cannons (Zorkaia 136). The Aniskin "apotheosis" (figure 28) imitates Fedor Shurpin's epic painting *Morning of Our Motherland* (1946-48) (figure 29):

Figure 28

[129] As a phenomenon of modernity, Stalinist culture cultivated its own filmic displays: The All-Union Exhibition of Economic Achievements in *The Swineherd and the Shepherd*, an agricultural fair in *Cossacks of the Kuban*, a festival of folk music in *Volga-Volga* (dir. Grigorii Aleksandrov 1936). These venues functioned as utopian loci of future-in-the-present, the space of character transformation and conflict resolution.

Figure 29 (in Baum 238)

This iconic image is accompanied by Aniskin's monologue apropos his own last name. Unlike his wife, who traces the name back to a female first name, Anis'ia, Aniskin rather absurdly claims its relation to the male name "Onisim." Unexpected as it is, this gender confusion in the virile Aniskin captures the two available symbols of 20th century Russia: the male-dominated and optimistic utopia of triumphant modernization, and the backward-looking and traditional "Mother Russia." In a characteristic post-modern gesture, Aniskin chooses both and neither.[130] The final "tour" the mini-series offers its viewer—a tour through popular

[130] In combining visual monumentality with absurdist verbal commentary, the sequence is a remarkably appropriate illustration to Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov's conceptualist cycle "The Militiaman":

When the Militiaman stands here at his post
He can see all the way to Vnukovo.
The Militiaman looks to the West, to the East—
And the empty space beyond lies open
And the center where stands the Militiaman—
He can be seen from every side
Look from anywhere, and there is the Militiaman
Look from the East, and there is the Militiaman
And from the South, there is the Militiaman
And from the sea, there is the Militiaman
And from the heavens, there is the Militiaman
And from the bowels of the earth . . .
But then, he's not hiding

(Translation by Charles Rougle in Groys (1992).

Boris Groys, who describes Prigov as a "postutopian" artist, argues that the poet "plays with the possibility of identifying the power of the poetic word with the power of the state. The militiaman is portrayed as a Christ-figure who unites heaven and earth, law and reality, divine and human wills"(1992, 95). It is, however, more productive to look at the visual image that this poem creates. As a conceptualist poet, artist, and sculptor, Prigov consistently plays with the relationship between verbal and visual discourse. The words of the poem function exclusively as "painting material," building blocks that re-construct (rather than construct) the Soviet subconscious. Geographical markers in the poem do not mark space as much as erase it. The effect of the poem is the mutual

etymology—ends with a paean to the Russian peasant, whose identity, curiously, bears no traces of Soviet history. Rather, it operates with the repetitive formulas of a fairy tale: "Russian peasant Onisim plowed the land, Russian peasant Onisim defended his nation," etc. The series ends with a *tableau vivant* of the totalitarian "Big Style" happily looking at itself in the mirror of an ethnographic museum, having resolved contradictions between modernity and tradition. Aniskin safely displaces all conflicts into the utopian village, to which one can only escape via the TV screen.

3. The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson: Late Soviet Victoriana.

3.1. "Our Holmes": The Problem of Fidelity.

If escape from reality in the *Aniskin* series results in a nostalgic totalitarian *lubok*, Igor' Maslennikov's adaptation of Conan Doyle's stories for television plays an entirely different game with the audience—the game of fidelity to "their," i.e., Western, canon. In Aniskin films crime was displaced into a rural utopia, whereas in the adaptations of Conan Doyle, crime was safely displaced into the gingerbread world of Victorian England. The issue of fidelity in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* is a complex one. Western reviewers of the series praise the fact that even without English subtitles and in the absence of any understanding of the Russian dialogue they can follow the narrative with ease. In their view, both characters and sets look canonical (that is, correspond to the image of Doyle's stories in television and film adaptations) and authentic (that is, realistically representing Victorian culture).[131] To Soviet audiences in the late 1970s, the Western canon of representing Holmes on screen was unknown, while the degree of authenticity of Victorian London in the series could only be surmised from earlier Soviet

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visibility and transparency—of the Militiaman and the Earth, of the poet and his audience, of the words and the image.

[131] See, for instance, "Vasily Livanov and Vitaly Solomin: The Russian Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson,"www.bakerstreetsozen.com/Russianholmes.html

screen adaptations of Victorian writers. Hence, the reason for the undeniable appeal of the production to Soviet audiences lies elsewhere. "Our (Soviet) Holmes" was a perfect cultural product of its time: a faithful and safe adaptation of a classic *and* a remarkably accurate and ironic commentary on late Soviet Victorianism. Doyle's idiosyncratic characters and exotic plots offered perfect material for Stagnation irony and self-reflexivity. As a result, the Victorian world of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* was more contemporary and "authentic" than numerous productions that claimed to represent Soviet reality.

It is tempting to seek the relevance of Conan Doyle's stories to 1970s Soviet culture in the theme of late empire. Conan Doyle scholars agree that the author's texts reflect his awareness and concern with the increasing loss of British national confidence and, as Sir Owen Dudley Edwards notes, the bleak and melancholy atmosphere of many stories suggests the idea of conflicting and dishonored imperial ambitions (xxxii). The idea of the colonial past as a Pandora's box is symbolically present in the villains' use of exotic artifacts and creatures that originate in the colonized territories. The theme of reverse evolution in "The Hound of the Baskervilles" is yet another symbolic reminder of the grip the past has over the present, an allusion that the Soviet mini-series did not let pass unnoticed: Holmes points out to Watson the resemblance of Stapleton to the portrait of Hugo Baskerville, while muttering *sotto voce,* addressing the viewer rather than Watson: "Once you begin studying family portraits, you start believing in the migration of souls."

While the allusions to "original sin" or to "what goes around comes around," if read politically, could catch the attention of the discursively sophisticated Soviet viewer, in general the mini-series' strategy is to isolate itself from history and to seal off the narrative space from any *Realpolitik* and topical allusions. Maslennikov drops any historical references that Conan

Doyle's stories contained, and carefully avoids any motifs that would expand the hermetic world of the text. In the episode "The Bloody Inscription" (based on "A Study in Scarlet"), for instance, the history of the Mormons is transformed into a melodramatic story of two lovers separated by a villain, while the references to German socialist circles are completely eliminated (the inscription on the wall spells "revenge" in English).

Because of its "art for art's sake" strategy,[132] the production ran into problems with its very first episode. As is well known from Doyle's story, Dr. Watson spent several years with British troops in Afghanistan. When he meets Sherlock Holmes, the latter immediately demonstrates his deductive method and asks, seemingly out of the blue, when precisely Watson returned from Afghanistan. This otherwise quite innocent remark was immediately noticed by the censors in 1979—the year of the Soviet invasion of Afganistan. As a result, the soundtrack of the already finished print was re-edited: instead of "Afganistan" the viewer hears "Eastern colonies" (*vostochnye kolonii*). Such ideological "slips" never occurred again. Until the two last episodes (released for the big screen in 1986 during the more open cultural politics of perestroika) the series preserves its hermetic narratives from any political misreading.

On the surface, the dense and opaque world of *Sherlock Holmes* is the opposite of the complete transparency of the Aniskin woodcut. However, the Holmes films share with the Aniskin films a penchant for stylization and escapist displacement. The series features an all-star cast: Vasilii Livanov (Holmes), Vitalii Solomin (Watson), Rina Zelenaia (Mrs. Hudson), Nikita Mikhalkov (Henry Baskerville), all accomplished actors, who never hesitate to "overact" (not unlike the actors in the Aniskin films) and contribute to the overtly theatrical atmosphere of the series. In his recent positive review of the Soviet mini-series for the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, Charles Prepolec notes that his "only real complaint is the murky lighting that is used in

most interior shots. The Baker Street rooms have never looked quite so gloomy."[133] The ironic, tongue-in-cheek tone, the contrived acting, the consistent foregrounding of the constructed nature of the narrative, characters, and mise-en-scène create an atmosphere of spectacle.

3.2. Ironizing the Word.

On the narrative level, the mini-series plays an intricate game with the concept of narrative as a conveyor of meaning, truth, and realism. With the very first shots of the series, the viewer in introduced to elaborate play with the written word. Instead of using Watson, the naïve and subjective narrator of Holmes' adventures, the first episode opens with intertitles, superimposed on a lithograph of London, and is accompanied by the sound of Big Ben and pseudo-baroque string music. The text that appears on the screen is executed in an ironic style but with a pompous literary syntax:

> At the end of the last century, when there were no planes to chase after criminals, no helicopters to trace them from the air, not even radio to describe them—there lived in London a great detective, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who managed perfectly without all those things. He lived on Baker Street, 221B.

Such a literary frame is quite typical of 1970s Soviet TV productions, offering more than a necessary cultural and textual background for the viewers. First, it provides a safe cultural and historical distancing. Second, it is a ritualistic bow to the literary original, which invests a television text with its aura of high culture, announcing that the TV script is "based" on an already published text (which, incidentally, also enables getting scripts approved with fewer

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[132] In a recent interview, Maslennikov claimes that he has always been indifferent to politics (Goscilo 2002)
[133] For Prepolec's review see http://www.sherlock-holmes.org.uk/Television/russian_sherlock_holmes.htm

bureaucratic stages). Third, the elevated style mocks the epic pretensions of mainstream Soviet productions and comments on the logocentrism of Russian culture.

At the end of each episode intertitles reappear, recounting the plot in the same elevated style:

> The most perfidious and cruel murder that could be invented by a criminal mind at the end of the 19th century was averted. The villain fell prey to his own designs: he was bitten by a poisonous snake. And Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson again returned to Baker Street.

This closure is superfluous within the narrative, which is linear and self-explanatory. By foregrounding the invisible narrator, this verbal frame confirms the formula and encourages the viewer to rely on the verbal interpretation. This interpretation, however, is less than reliable. At the end of "The Deadly Encounter" (based on "The Final Problem") the intertitle informs the viewer of the death of the protagonist in his struggle with Moriarty and solemnly announces "the end of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson." The pompous omniscience of the off-screen narrator proves false. When Holmes rises from the dead in the next episode, the intertitles shamelessly resume "objective" reporting.

This "innocent" trick lays bare the disparity between the falsity of imposed closure and the story that exists beyond and independently of the narrator, however authoritative he may seem. Whether consciously or not, this device parodies official Soviet television, in particular the practice of reporting "newsworthy" stories. Both the selection of items and their verbal coverage had to comply with the ideological master narrative, which pre-determined the story's content, interpretation, and the place in the hierarchy of the broadcast. By the 1970s, even Soviet

schoolchildren knew the narratives of the "inevitable decline and decomposition of capitalism" and the equally "inevitable progress of socialist construction." Hence, a particular "news" story had little meaning beyond the ritualistic affirmation of "fidelity to the canon."

The same strategy of keeping the narrative strictly within the bounds of the original story but making it contemporary by imitating late Soviet cultural practices is used to undermine the symbolic authority of written documents. Every time a document—a piece of evidence or correspondence—appears in the story, the camera keeps it in the frame. The writing is invariably in unreadable English (reproducing *verbatim* Doyle's text but in stylized, old fashioned writing), while the reading of the document is in Russian. With any correspondence between the printed text and its oral performance missing, the text is objectified and desemanticized, functioning simply as an artifact. In contrast, the document's texture—from typeface to handwriting and the quality of paper—is foregrounded.

Similarly objectified are the credits and geographical names. Credits, for instance, appear as writing in invisible ink, which gradually becomes revealed, or as a code-breaking procedure with the use of a paper cutout. British geography constitutes another layer of words-objects. To the Soviet ear, English names of streets, mansions, and counties were as obscure as the mysteries themselves, and as enticing as the world of Victorian material objects and rituals.

The written and spoken word in the series often functions as a visual sign, which, instead of imposing a meaning on the image, illustrates it. It does not clarify or comment on anything, thus defying the purpose of the written text in socialist realist aesthetics. The finalizing tone of the intertitles and the "irrefutable evidence" of documents parody the teleology and cultural expectation of closure, and foregrounds the process of viewing itself as highly codified.[134] Most

[134] Leonid Gaidai's 1969 comedy *The Diamond Arm* about a naïve Soviet man who inadvertently interferes with a major smuggling operation, is one of the best cinematic examples of late Soviet "logo-cynicism." In the film, words

importantly, this idea is presented to the viewer as safely distanced by virtue of its exoticism and the mediation of translation.

3.3. Foregrounding the Artifice of "Culture."

If the Aniskin films transposed Soviet viewers into a rural utopia, the Holmes films invited them into a constructed and theatricalized world of Victorian London. Episodes closely follow Conan Doyle's plots. Hence, any significant deviations are important. The first episode, *Acquaintance*, introduces one such major difference. The episode, based on "A Study in Scarlet" and the "Speckled Band," also includes a lengthy exposition of Watson and Holmes's initial relationship, which is largely absent from Conan Doyle's text.

Structurally, this exposition anticipates a typical Holmes case: the introduction of a mystery (narrated by an unsophisticated but involved witness), misinterpreted evidence, a confrontation with "evil," and the solution of the case by Holmes. The only difference here is the addition of a more personal mystery—that of Holmes's identity. Even before Watson becomes witness to the esoteric sides of Holmes' routine, the latter shocks his roommate by admitting that he despises commonplace knowledge, "that useless garbage." But what in Conan Doyle's stories is an actual characteristic of Holmes's eccentricity, in the Soviet series is acted out in a tongue-in-cheek way. Aware of being under suspicion, Holmes offers Watson a series of clues (disguises, grotesque pictures on the desk, mysterious visitors, etc.) that lead Watson to

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enjoy a life independent of their meaning and of the subject. Without any reason, the film is divided into two unequal parts. The second short part opens with a "brief digest of the previous episode." The text of the digest, printed in tiny font, is completely unreadable and is scrolled down at a speed, which effectively prevents the viewer from focusing on the content. The film relies heavily on slapstick, dream sequences, and comic chase scenes, where dialogue is superfluous. Often dialogue appears as on-screen representation of characters' inner monologues. Ironically, these private moments are invariably filled with the official discourse of vigilance—the voice of the "Big Other"—and characters' thoughts are "heard" and responded to by the police.

The use of words as an element of design or an arabesque links the mini-series with the tradition of 1970s-80s Moscow conceptualism, in particular Il'ia Kabakovs' paintings and installations. Once placed within the visual space of the picture, conceptualist texts—lists, dialogues, or political slogans—function as objectified units of "everyday ideology."

believe that Holmes is the Master Criminal, "the Brain of the criminal world." What confuses Watson—and what is consistently foregrounded in the sequences leading to Watson's erroneous conclusion—is the incompatibility of Holmes's tastes and habits with the "lifestyle of a gentleman."

Holmes's innocent mystification anticipates the main target of the series: social rituals and the constructed nature of human beliefs and behavior. In fact, the most canonical aspects of the series—the elaborate imitation of the verbal and visual codes of Doyle's Victorian England—are the most transgressive, for they challenge the concept of realism as authenticity. Instead, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* relies on cultural stereotypes that foreground the artifice of the textual world: it is a playful stylization that pretends to be straightforward narration.

Acting is designed to create iconic types: a typical British landlady, a typical British butler, an American in England, a gothic villain, etc. Watson initially appears as a snobbish Brit, who does not tolerate any breaks in routine. His breakfast ritual, performed to stylized music, is a two-minute silent sequence, the only purpose of which is to portray a "British gentleman." Sir Henry Baskerville is played by Nikita Mikhalkov, who by no means resembles the "little, stocky man" described by Doyle, but whose own films, both as a director and as an actor, show a campish predilection for overly stylized acting, setting, and dialogue.[135] Sir Henry's integration into the Devonshire environment consists in giving up his Canadian outfits and getting used to porridge, which he is spoon-fed in bed, as a child who needs to be "born" into the new culture—an ingenious parody of the socialist realist discourse of re-education. Even the interaction

[135] Perhaps the best parallel to the style of *Sherlock Holmes* is Mikhalkov's film *Slave of Love* (1976), casting the melodramatic Elena Solovei in the role of a quasi-Vera Kholodnaia—the first Russian female movie star. The film is set in the first weeks following the October revolution, but, as in most of Mikhalkov's movies, visual and melodramatic excess takes precedence over social problematics.

between Holmes and Watson, which in its "chemistry" and "human warmth" anticipates the British Granada television production,[136] follows a set pattern—a whimsical game, which makes claims neither to realism nor to psychological depth.

Each character in the series has his or her narrative genre, which remains consistent throughout the episode or the entire series. A stable and predictable pattern of performance (as opposed to the reliability of narrative meaning) is the major element of a character's identity construction, replacing social and psychological characterization. The variables are limited to social status and gender. Once the roles and the voices of the major players have been established, the pleasure consists in their re-enactment, that is, in re-affirming the code.

Within the storytelling web of the series, police accounts and, in particular, Inspector Lestrade's arrogant conclusions, play the distinctive role of "zero degree" narratives: they are the least interesting and they tend to be closed-ended. Watson combines a military reporting style with occasional dramatic pathos. Witness stories, which take up a significant part of most episodes, serve as a means to introduce a gothic element, rare in Soviet film and television. Doctor Mortimer in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* offers three "flashbacks" in the first five minutes of the episode: he dramatically reads the Baskerville family manuscript relating the gothic tale of the hound; he presents the official police account of the death of Sir Charles Baskerville in a Devonshire newspaper; and, finally, he offers his own observations about the crime scene. All three accounts are accompanied by visual illustrations executed in the style that corresponds to the *genre* of the verbal narrative rather than to its meaning, The Baskervilles manuscript, for instance, is a gothic tale, a moralistic fable, and a history of mores, and the

[136] 34 Granada films appeared in three series: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1984-85), *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1986-88), and *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* (1991). Elizabeth Trembley praises the series for capturing the "spirit" of Conan Doyle's stories—the complex and close relationship between Holmes and Watson, and the "humanizing" of Holmes achieved by the subjective camera, which reflects Watson's point of view.

corresponding visual sequence shows the chase and the death of both the victim and the victimizer. Yet neither the verbal nor the visual text gives any clues to its meaning or relevance to the case. It is not until the visual sequence is repeated at the end of the episode that the viewer realizes that Hugo resembles Stapleton. Moreover, Dr. Mortimer's real flashback (examination of the crime scene) is not visually distinguishable from the fictional "reconstruction" of the manuscript.

Within the variety of accounts and interpretations of the same set of events, some are inaccurate, others deliberately falsified. And yet, the concept of "false narrative" or "lie" never appears in the mini-series. Rather the focus of each episode is specifically the interplay among accounts, the whimsical, almost baroque game of meanings. The moments of existential truth— the excitement of the chase, struggle, or physical danger— are underplayed in the mini-series, sandwiched between conflicting accounts of events and Holmes' finalizing explanation. When Holmes-the-interpreter gives way to Holmes-the-hound he is usually in the company of Watson or the police, who take over the pursuit, the full meaning of which they do not understand.

Distrust of authentic behavior is also manifest in the representation of criminals. Criminals fall into two categories: those who confess their stories at the end and those who do not. Those who live to tell their stories are redeemed by satisfying the need for a good narrative. The irredeemable ones are the unquestionable villains who die of their own evil devices and traps (a snake bite in "The Speckled Band," the Grimpen Mire in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the Reichenbach Fall in *The Deadly Encounter*). These villains are considerably more interesting for, like Holmes, they manipulate social codes and break hierarchies. It is no accident that the series portrays Professor Moriarty not only as Holmes's major opponent but also as his double. Like Holmes, Moriarty despises banalities and social conventions. And while his

appearance is quite "gothic," his mathematical skills, adventurous nature, and consistent "beating the state" in keeping his criminal organization secret, make Moriarty a fascinating—and quite modern—enemy.

But the major transgressor is, of course, Holmes. Conan Doyle's Great Detective is an asocial being, whose identity is unthinkable without his cocaine addiction, mood swings, and demonic cynicism about human nature. The detective of Maslennikov's mini-series is an nicely aged, ironic Holmes. Without Holmes's reactions, the stories, ranging from the gothic and melodramatic to patriotic pathos and dry reports, remain exercises in various speech genres. Holmes's idiosyncratic "thinking moments," documented by Watson in Doyle's stories, are underplayed in the Soviet series. Instead, Holmes spends more time in disguises, acting out various identities, regardless of class, social dialect, or education. This talent for social acting and Holmes's egalitarianism (he treats all people—from London urchins to the British Prime Minister—as equals) mark the most distinctive features of "our Holmes," which endeared him to Soviet viewers. If social acting was a *sine qua non* skill in the society where private and public behavior followed different codes, egalitarianism fed into the deep-rooted Russian ideal of social equity. Holmes's major strength in Maslennikov's series is not deduction but the ability to step out of the predictable patterns of thinking and behavior, and, by doing so, to expose the naturalized conventions of the culture in which he exists.

3.4. Redemption of the Visual: Modernity as Still Life.

A child of its time, the production in its own way mummifies the image, transforms it into an ornament. The purpose of this display, however, is not unlike the one espoused by Aniskin. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* sets out to re-discover the "other" modernity—visual, material, safe—and as remote from the Soviet fatigued modernity of empty slogans as Aniskin's closely supervised rural idylls.

The series attempts to defy logocentrism as the dominant cultural pattern by an appeal to the *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics. As a visual text, *Sherlock Holmes* oscillates between narrative and spectacle, representation and presentation, between sound and silent film. If the play with visual and verbal codes challenges the truth-status of the word, the elaborate visual style gravitates toward the aesthetics of early cinema. In each of the episodes verbal narrative, while essential for understanding, is secondary to the suspense and the purely visual pleasure of dark, mysterious, and exotic places.

The stylized set design and costuming, and the theatrical acting are reminiscent of Evgenii Bauer's pre-revolutionary salon melodramas and murder films.[137] In Bauer's films, the status of the narrative is never certain: while no longer what Tom Gunning called "a cinema of attraction"[138] it is not yet a fully developed narrative cinema. In *Sherlock Holmes,* the heavy emphasis on décor and "still" pictures produces an effect that is both theatrical and ironic in underscoring the intentionality of the construction. Bauer's films satisfied the voyeuristic desire for a sneak-peek of the life of the rich, giving visual expression to the decadence of pre-revolutionary Russia. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* uses an early 20th century visual style and corresponding cinematic devices both to comment on the social and aesthetic stasis and to break out of the word-driven cultural tradition.

Like Bauer's films, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* plays with lighting; with the layering of the screen achieved by the careful positioning of bodies, furniture, and objects; and with stylized, "expressive" performances. Both narrative development within a scene and the

[137] A major film director of the pre-revolutionary silent cinema in Russia, Bauer specialized in salon melodramas and murder stories. His opulent sets, elaborate shot composition, and exaggerated acting style, manifest what Richard Stites has called the "theateritis" of the Russian screen (30).

[138] Gunning characterizes the early pre-narrative era of the film medium as a period of "the aesthetics of attractions": "The cinema of attractions solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image, engaging the viewer's curiosity" (825). Two features characterize the film of attractions: first, a focus on visibility, and, second, a foregrounding of the transition from still to moving picture.

transition from one shot to another rely heavily on the visual: objects that tell more than people, lighting tricks that reveal or hide characters' emotions, privileging of long and medium shots that display elaborate sets and the choreography of bodies**.**

Whatever past and present passions and tragedies disturb the stability of Victorian London, they are safely contained within the living room of the Baker Street apartment and are framed by the iconic mise-en-scène. The opening sequence of each episode is invariably set in the Baker Street apartment, where Holmes demonstrates his deductive method to Watson, while the closing scene shows Holmes and Watson cosily ensconced in armchairs turned back from the spectator, savoring wine in front of the fire (figure 30). The restoration of the status quo is, above all, the return to the living room, to the psychologically comforting armchair, and to the art of innocent storytelling. It is significant that the landlady, Mrs. Hudson, plays a much more prominent role in the Soviet adaptations than in Conan Doyle's stories. Together with her, the Baker Street apartment becomes the locus of stability and safety, juxtaposed to the danger of open public spaces: the Mire, the Thames, the empty parks, and the abandoned mansions.

Figure 30

Another striking feature of the mise-en-scène is its physical, almost tactile nature. Some of the objects that clutter the interior shots belong to canonical "Holmes culture," like the pipe, the violin, and the various pieces of evidence that Holmes uses to demonstrate his deductive method. Other objects are introduced into episodes with the sole purpose of condensing even further the exotic, palpable texture of the series. The first conversation between Watson and Holmes occurs in Watson's bedroom as the latter is hanging his guns and sabers on the wall and Holmes is admiring the skin of a leopard, which Watson allegedly killed during his travels. The acquaintance of Watson with Holmes takes place not in a hospital ("The Study in Scarlet") but in the Baker Street living room, which appears cluttered with chemical equipment. Holmes's appearance from behind the table, accompanied by an explosion, imitates the early "trick film" of Georges Meliès.

The re-discovered fascination with filming the material world is also evident in the attention paid to technology and the means of communication: from London cabs to trains, motorcycles, cars, telegraph, and planes. Instead of adding dynamism to the chase, the examination of a "self-propelling carriage" or a steamboat slows down the narrative. Technological devices, in short, function as fascinating "novelties," stripped of any ideological meanings they had in Stalinist culture.

Figure 31

Another layer of references to turn-of-the-century visual culture are "criminological discoveries." One such allusion is the "rogue's gallery" on Holmes's desk, which simultaneously pays tribute to the cinematic gothic tale (figure 31). The camera drifts down over pictures of grotesque individuals that include Lon Chaney in full Phantom make-up and a shot of Fredrick March as Dr. Hyde. Later in the same episode, Watson wakes up to the shrill sounds of Holmes's violin. As the unsuspecting doctor picks up a glass of water, he sees a human eye staring at him from the bottom, while Holmes produces a mini-lecture on the pseudo-scientific assumption that the victim's retina has imprinted the image of his murderer as seen the moment before death. These uncanny sequences neither contribute to the narrative (in fact they delay the transition to the first "real" case) nor add anything new to the characterization. Instead, they introduce the "imitation of style" atmosphere typical of the mini-series.

Many exterior shots are modeled on tour guide or postcard images of "exotic" places. Switzerland is represented by mountains, a flock of girls in immaculate white dresses, and gentlemen in Tirol hats. The London sequences feature top hats, double-decker carriages, foggy streets, and gloomy mansions. These picturesque views are carefully stylized, yet authentic in their postcard iconicity.

Another tribute to early 20th century aesthetic practices is the use of photography as a blueprint for constructing entire sequences. Characters frequently assume monumental or theatrical poses and freeze for several seconds, so that the following sequence seems to "unwind" from a still photograph, just like early films. Stop-camera technique is especially striking in action sequences—scenes of struggle and pursuit. The first time these appear is the sparring match between Holmes and Watson in the episode "Acquaintance." Suspecting that his roommate is a master criminal, Watson challenges him to a boxing match. Despite the implied gravity of the situation, the opponents freeze for a brief moment in picturesque poses (figure 32), before engaging in a dance-like pantomime. The rhythmical composition is accompanied by Holmes's measured monologue, retracing Watson's observations, which have led to a wrong conclusion.

Figure 32

An even more striking scene is Holmes's struggle with Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Waterfall. In contrast to the sparring match, the opponents here are deadly enemies and the viewer has no illusions about the fatal outcome. Yet, the sequence follows the same slow and well-choreographed pattern. The only indicators of violence and of the intensity of their mutual hatred are the torn clothes and the strain on the opponents' faces. Like many shots,

this sequence (figure 33) bears a striking resemblance to Sidney Paget's original illustrations to Doyle's stories in *Strand* magazine (figure 34):

Figure 33

Figure 34

But even such stylized action is rare in the series, which privileges static genre scenes. Thaddeus Sholto's house in "The Treasures of Agra," for instance, is reproduced from its description in the story down to the most minor details. Sholto begins the narrative of his father's death sitting in a dark room cluttered with statues of Buddha and smoking a hookah. From a close-up of Sholto's face the camera pulls away to reveal his father's deathbed, lit by a single candle, with the two sons bending over to hear the story of the hidden treasure (figure 35).

This claustrophobic mise-en-scène opens into another, equally dense sequence—the father narrating the death of Captain Morstan. Then the camera returns to the previous setting and to the disfigured face in the window, and, finally, returns to Sholto-junior and his silent listeners.

Figure 35

Inserted as a flashback in the middle of "The Treasures of Agra" is the story of "A Scandal in Bohemia." The flashback is motivated by Watson's admission of love for Miss Morstan, which provokes Holmes' ironic remarks about women. The photograph of Irene Adler, however, triggers Holmes' memory and the viewer gets to witness the "softer side" of the Great Detective. Fashioned as a romantic memory rather than a criminal case, the flashback is actually neither. While Holmes is clearly infatuated with Irene—and the flashback contains the only sensual moments in the series—her image, as seen through Holmes's eyes, is a catalogue of romantic clichés, a living vignette. Irene barely speaks, she is ephemeral, the hat almost covers her face, and her movement is played in slow motion. Holmes's personal moment, thus, remains within the realm of exquisite stylizations.

3.5. Perestroika and the Destruction of the Museum.

The last, two-part installment of the series, "The Twentieth Century Begins," came out in 1986 in early perestroika and was released in movie theaters. Unlike all previous episodes, it opens not with a lithograph of London, but in *media res*. "The Engineer's Thumb" begins with the young engineer's arrival at the train station—a visual reference to the famous *fin-de-siècle* film *The Arrival of a Train* (Lumières 1895). The intertitles that appear after the injured engineer escapes from the house of German spies, focus on the political and cultural context rather than on Holmes's and Watson's fate.

> The beginning of the twentieth century for the English was marked by the Boer War and the by Queen Victoria's death. Thus ended the times of "Good Old England." Scotland Yard police and London criminals, armed with electricity, telephone, and welding**,** engaged in their usual business at the new spiral of civilization**.** Sherlock Holmes considered himself old-fashioned and retired in Sussex. Doctor Watson busied himself with his medical practice. Thus ended the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson.

As before, intertitles provide false information concerning Holmes's retirement. This misinformation, however, anticipates the theme of spy paranoia that is at the center of the last episode. Instead of a lithograph, the credits are superimposed on documentary footage of marching troops, busy London streets, airplanes, and trains. Next, the camera cuts to Watson, who is riding a motorcycle. When he arrives to visit "farmer Holmes," the viewer learns of

Holmes' visit to America and sees Holmes' Irish goatee. Identities and lifestyles have lost their static tranquility.

This transition from lithograph to documentary footage, and the displacement of the domestic and settled detective duo, anticipates the destruction of the aestheticized, hermetic world of the series. As an element of the plot, the museum theme first appears in "The Deadly Encounter" (1980), after news of Holmes' alleged death reaches Mrs. Hudson. His grieving landlady solemnly declares that she will never again rent out the room and will turn it into a museum of "the great man." After Holmes' miraculous resurrection and the trap he sets up for Colonel Moran, the first museum exhibit takes its place in the living room: a full-size wax figure of Holmes. The figure has but one defect: half of its "brain" has been smashed in by Moran's shot.

The museum project comes to fruition—and is immediately deconstructed—in the last episode. After Holmes moves to the countryside, his Baker street apartment, with the exception of the living room, is rented by a construction firm. The living room hosts Holmes' bust and letters sent by desperate people to this "apparently famous man of the past century," as the firm employee characterizes Holmes. It is not, however, a post-mortem museum. Its subject is alive and well, living in the countryside and keeping bees. When the Baker Street apartment again becomes Holmes's headquarters, he shares the living room with his own bust, causing shock and confusion among distinguished clients (figure 36):

Figure 36

Both the transparent allusion to "living monuments"—the practice of self-aggrandizment by the gerontocratic Soviet leadership—and direct hints at the corrupt and inadequate government (in the figures of Lord Bellinger, Premier Minister of Britain or Sir Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs) mark the destruction of the aesthetic museum. While in all previous episodes the series followed the chronology of Conan Doyle's stories, *The Twentieth Century Begins* includes several cases spanning over twenty years: "The Engineer's Thumb" (1892), "The Second Stain" (1904), "The Bruce-Partington Plans" (1908), and "His Last Bow" (1917). All these cases are combined into a single narrative united by the umbrella themes of war, espionage, political intrigue, and corruption, and thereby instantly replace stylistic play with political play.

The rule of bureaucracy, in particular, is the target of the 1986 episodes. The major representative of bureaucracy is, ironically, Holmes' own brother Mycroft, who is a far less attractive character in the Soviet version than in Doyle's late stories. In the story, Holmes and Watson are contacted by the Premier and the Secretary directly. In the mini-series, Holmes is hired by his brother Mycroft, whose position within the British government is unstated but who often represents "the British government itself." Unlike the inefficient and weak old aristocracy,

Mycroft is energetic, focused, and in tune with the new age. Next to him, both Holmes and Watson, in fact, seem provincial relics of the passing age. The "new" and efficient modernity, however, is frightening. From a sybarite and aristocrat Mycroft is transformed in the Soviet version into a faceless bureaucratic machine (figure 37):

Figure 37

Mycroft warns Holmes that since the latter is going to deal not with the criminal underworld but with politicians, he should not believe anybody or anything. Indeed, the visual gothic villains who commit exotic crimes in the last episode give way to "sheep in wolves' clothing," whose routine of being "perfect gentlemen" and law-abiding citizens mask espionage, treason, and thirst for war. Even the old and homey Mrs. Hudson works undercover. All of the technological devices that were on display in the early episodes begin to work as a means of spying and destruction. Despite their success in solving the cases, in the emerging 20th century, both Holmes and Watson are lonely. The closing sequence of the series portrays Holmes and Watson watching a moving picture, rather than the canonical sharing of wine in front of the fireplace. Together with the viewer they experience the anxiety of stepping out of the rotting shell of artifice and false stability into the expanding world beyond the living room.

Writing on the return of theatrical stylistics to Western film practice in the 1970s and 1980s, Timothy Corrigan notes: "[Theatricality] now represents not a similar set of mechanisms with which to capture images of the world, but mechanisms and styles whose artificiality and spatial limitations could expose or critique the false realism of social identities, as well as the commodified realism of movies themselves" (64). Soviet television detective stories, with their ironic and self-reflexive tone, and their blatantly theatrical atmosphere, were both products of and a reaction to the atmosphere of the "folding of reality." The *Aniskin* and *Sherlock Holmes* series marked an escape from contemporary life into *lubok* and stylization, an escape from socialist realism into a self-conscious aesthetic museum. This museum does not take itself seriously and borrows from wherever it can. In that sense, the 1970s TV screen, indeed, fulfilled the modernist promises of overcoming history. The late Soviet viewer became a detective or flâneur in a museum of visual blocks, ready-made genres, and discourses of failed modernist projects.

Soviet television spy thrillers were still burdened by the conventions and ideological clichés inherited from Soviet cinema. Police procedurals managed to articulate conventions of the mini-series as a distinctly televisual genre, but remained steeped in fragmented Soviet myths taken seriously. The detective mini-series went much further in articulating televisual genres as based on the ideology of commercial entertainment. The detective filmmakers achieved it by displaying a bricolage of styles and displacing viewers into overtly constructed, conservative, and safe never-never lands. Two dream locales became prime destinations: the eternal summer of the collective farm idyll and the safely historicized and stylized foggy West in the Victorian living room

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Conclusion. Fragmented Mythologies and New Russian Identity in post-Soviet Russia.

Soviet TV productions of the 1970s safeguarded the stability of core cultural values without necessarily perpetuating their ideological dimensions. Just as surely, by being products of the Brezhnev-era populist and "closet" market-oriented culture, TV mini-series bear signs of new conflicts and reformulations of inherited cultural paradigms. As the site of interaction and collision between the dominant ideology and alternative voices and values, Soviet television was both conformist and revolutionary in re-evaluating cultural heritage and in addressing contemporary issues.

Soviet television of the 1970s made Soviet narratives and icons polysemous. Television mini-series fragmented ideological master narratives. These narratives ceased to be action-driven, becoming instead dialogue-driven. Finally, the opposition between a Soviet "us" and capitalist "them" became blurred, adhering to the logic of narrative formula rather than ideological fiat. The multiple meanings of these fragmented icons and narratives inspired cultural producers in various media. For instance, Moscow conceptualist artists recycled Soviet ideological signs for the purposes of their individual artistic expression.[139] Post-Soviet television was a perfect medium for the circulation of diffused ideological signs. The prime advantage of this pool of narratives and signs was instant recognition by mass audiences. It is not surprising, then, that post-Soviet television series have made extensive use of this "semiotic pulp" for their own ideological purposes.

[139] Conceptualist art emerged in Russia as a reaction to the ideological demands of socialist realism. By the 1960s, the major ideological narratives and icons of socialist realism ceased to provide the metalanguage of the Soviet culture and became empty signifiers—the ready-mades for artistic recycling. Il'ia Kabakov is considered the father of Soviet Conceptualism, while Boris Groys is its major theoretician. Within the Russian conceptualism, sots art became the most important trend, with Vitalii Komar and Alexander Melamid as its best-known practitioners. See also note 130 on conceptualist poetry.

Watching Brezhnev-era television no one could anticipate the reconfiguration on every conceivable level that would took occur a decade later. The dissolution of Soviet ideology and the political system in the late 1980s-early 1990s brought along two interconnected processes that affected television more profoundly than other media: the wave of commercialization and the reinforcement of visualization. Commercialization entailed not only the privatization of television channels and studios but, more importantly, an orientation towards the market and a dependence on revenues from advertisements. Competition for audiences and focus on ratings became the driving force behind programming policies and the production of individual broadcasts. Visualization, which started in the late 1980s, has affected the entire Russian culture industry, prioritizing the commercial packaging of products, whether the latter is marketed as information, entertainment, or a political message. The new Russian television appealed to the consumer in the Russian viewer, offering him a choice of channels and programs, and to the voyeur in him as well, with its array of formerly censored themes and images. Formerly a book-loving, (high) culture-venerating society, Russia was acquiring a new identity, represented by colorful pulp fiction on the bookstands and serialized productions on the TV screen.

The end of perestroika marked the demise of the short-lived politicized and topical television broadcast, but not of the medium's status as a central player in political and cultural issues. In the 1990s, for the first time since Khrushchev's Thaw, television became a legitimate topic of critical discussions at round tables in *Cinema Art* (*Iskusstvo kino*)—the major Russian film journal. Leading Russian television and culture critics have been skeptical in their evaluations of both the content and the form of post-Soviet television. Gratuitous violence, the privileging of light genres, imitation of Western models, and a lack of professionalism are among

the recurrent themes of "serious" discussions of post-Soviet television.[140] Those critics who, like Kirill Razlogov, present a more impartial picture of the medium, prefer to talk not about the crisis of television but about "the genre of crisis." As Razlogov notes, major channels embodied the dream of television as "a unified cultural space" imbued with "the national idea." According to Razlogov, this space is constituted by homogeneous new shows and endless re-runs of Soviet films and television classics, while the national idea is "feast in the time of the plague" (99).

The discourse on serialized television broadcasts as an expression of the "National Idea,"[141] which is quite prominent in recent critical discussions, is an indication that producers and consumers have realized not just the political and economic potential of television, but also the ability of serialized narratives to express and market social models. Just as the new Soviet identity in the 1930s found it fullest expression in the epic form of the socialist realist novel, so the search for a new post-Soviet identity is linked to the search for artistic forms capable of expressing it. In this light, the explosion of serial productions, which occurred in the 1990s and which many critics and directors initially saw as a passing fad, is, in retrospect, a major event. Many TV producers and directors are optimistic about the current state of the medium and conscious of its cultural role. Anatolii Maksimov (ORT), for instance, juxtaposes television to perestroika and early post-Soviet cinema, blaming film producers for what he calls "attempted social suicide":

> Cinema was peeling off reality and, having lost its audience, lost itself. One cannot live in a world one hates. (Television) serials return the viewer to normal human life. They offer stable models of social behavior without which life loses its bases. The serial

[140] For a discussion of 1990s television see, for instance, Sergei Fomin, "TV mezhdu vkusom i stilem," *Iskusstvo kino* 9 (1999): 117-20 or Valerii Fomin, "Ale, narod!," *Iskusstvo kino* 7 (2001): 93-102.

> revolution [serial'naia revolutsiia] is the return to conservative values, but it is a revolution nevertheless.[142]

Soviet mini-series paved the way for the phenomenal success of the Brazilian "historical" soap opera *Slave Isaura* and the national obsession with the Mexican drama *The Rich Also Cry.* Once the gates had swung open, a flood of South and North American TV dramas inundated Russian TV screens. Some Russian critics argue that within a decade after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian audiences had been exposed to virtually every major American show made between the1950s and 1990s.[143] The list of previously forbidden films and television shows was so long that few Russian directors ventured to undertake making native productions. As the film industry and most TV channels became privatized, the flow of money dried out. It was cheaper and easier to buy *Santa Barbara, The X-Files, NYPD Blue,* or a Latin American "telenovela" than to find a sponsor for a domestically produced show. Consequently, until the mid 1990s Russians vicariously lived the dream lives of the rich, the yuppies, and élite FBI agents.

The situation changed in the mid-1990s, when the rise of Russian television productions was accelerated by the economic crisis of 1998. Russian TV channels had earlier paid $15,000 for an episode of a Mexican soap opera (and considerably more for an American one), which was to be broadcast twice. After the economic collapse most channels were unable or unwilling to do so (Akopov 5).

The first small-budget Russian TV productions that appeared in the early 1990s—*Goriachev and Others* (*Goriachev i drugie*), *Petersburg Mysteries* (*Peterburgskie tainy*, 1994-95)—could compete neither with glossy, expensive, and diverse foreign series, nor with

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[141] "Serial kak natsional'naia ideia," *Iskusstvo kino* 2 (2000): 5-9.

established Soviet-era classics. It was more profitable to reformat familiar 1970s series to fit into 50-minute broadcast slots or to capitalize on established auiences for Soviet shows by creating sequels. Only in the fall of 1999 did all major channels incorporate new Russian series into their prime-time broadcasts: NTV was the first channel to feature two crime series in a row, a foreign one at eight and a Russian one at nine.

What these new Russian productions demonstrated was the fact that the break with Soviet cultural tradition has been most pronounced in form rather than content. Much recent Russian television output displays a continuity with Russo-Soviet cultural models. The status enjoyed by Brezhnev-era television productions in contemporary Russia is by no means limited to monuments of a bygone culture, remembered nostalgically by some and apprehensively by others. While as a political phenomenon Soviet culture and socialist realism are no more, the cultural mythology it generated is quite vibrant. Moreover, it is only after the demise of the Soviet system that the myth-making power of socialist realist texts is becoming fully realized and used. In part, of course, the appeal of Soviet productions is the result of the instability of political and social life in contemporary Russia, which breeds nostalgia and makes any available cultural model a testing ground for new mythology. But such cultural validation also testifies to the fact that, in an attempt to rescue the waning ideological system, 1970s television productions succeeded in merging Soviet mythology with popular culture. If this is the case—and this dissertation argues that it is—the many direct and indirect references to Soviet mini-series is less a result of Russians' disaffection with the present than a sign of cultural continuity.

Even a superficial analysis of recent Russian television drama and serialized literature shows that Brezhnev-era productions continue to fulfill multiple functions in post-Soviet Russia:

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[142] "Na anketu *Iskusstva kino* otvechaiut," *Iskusstvo kino* 4 (2001): 17-24, 20.
[143] See Vladilev Arsen'ev, "Epokha serialov v Rossii tol'ko nachinaetsia," *Iskusstvo kino* 2 (2000): 10-14, 11.

they provide genre models for new TV series, they provide a sense of continuity and stability in a changing environment, they continue to supply material for urban folklore, and, last but certainly not least, they offer symbolic models for new Russian identity.

Not surprisingly, many Russian TV producers trace their lineage not to the American productions that seem to have all but taken over Russian television, but to the Soviet mini-series of the 1970s-early 1980s. Together with contemporary TV productions, Brezhnev-era mini-series have become the subject of post-Soviet identity discourse. Indeed, post-Soviet producers not only acknowledge the existence of the "Soviet school of mini-series," but openly establish their link with the Soviet tradition. This continuity rests on three major factors. First, there is the post-Soviet nostalgia for a coherent social life. Brezhnev-era Stagnation was the longest and, to the present day, unmatched period of social and political stability, as well as relative material prosperity. Television serial productions, which privilege stable structures and recycle narratives, were the ideal expression for what Stagnation culture valued most: preservation of the status quo, fear of change, and ritualized daily affirmation of the system's (and its leadership's) vitality. Second, mini-series of the 1970s revealed, better than film and literature, a yearning for strong heroes, capable of expressing Russian culture's concerns, not reducible to current politics or ideological myths. In the eyes of the audience, late Soviet policemen, spies, and melodramatic Siberian peasants were the heirs of mythical Russian heroes, protectors of the community: from Sten'ka Razin to Vasilii Chapaev. Last, but not least, the prominence of crime and spy series, i.e., narratives of control over individual and communal identity, was itself a sign of an unstable, troubled identity—the feature that recent Russian series clearly share with the late Soviet mini-series.

Ivan Zassurskii argues that by 1996 Russian TV broadcasting was transformed into a galaxy of images, with its own mythological global heroes, villains (e.g., Milosevich and the Chechens), and mystical forces (e.g., natural and industrial disasters): "The patterns of these conflicts and their outcomes determine the unspoken laws of the universe, where Mexican serials or *Santa Barbara* stand for normality and the borders are set and experienced through the bloodshed of violent cop stories or the mysticism of *X-Files*."[144] True as this may be with respect to foreign productions on post-Soviet television, domestically produced shows manifest a different pattern. Crime dramas lead both in terms of the number of show produced ratings among recent Russian television series. The most popular ones are *Streets of Broken Lights* [*Ulitsy razbitykh fonarei*, 1997-] and its numerous sequels,[145] *Criminal Petersburg* [*Banditskii Peterburg,* 2000], *Kamenskaia* (1999-2000), and *The Bourgeois's Birthday* [*Den' rozhdeniia Burzhuia*, 1999].[146] Three distinct trends have established themselves within television crime series. The first is the crime drama of absurdity, with *Streets of Broken Lights* as the prime example. Second is the crime drama in search of a new Russian identity, e.g., *Criminal Petersburg.* Third are the nostalgic television productions, exemplified by "commemorative" documentaries on the making of renowned Soviet mini-series and sequels to Brezhnev-era crime series.

In other words, the process of Russia's integration into the "McLuhan galaxy," has a national specificity, rooted as much in the present socio-cultural situation as in broader Russian

[144] Ivan Zassoursky, "Russian Media in the Nineties: Driving Factors of Change, Actors, Strategies, and the Results," http://www.geocities.com/zassoursky/artic.htm

[145] In less than a year *Streets of Broken Lights* was shown on three major channels: on TNT in the fall of 1998, the next season on ORT, getting 50% of the audience, and then on NTV, with 40% of the audience. The series is based on novels by Andrei Kivinov, who, like many popular Russian writers of detectives and police procedurals, used to work as a police officer. Sequels of the original series—*Streets of Broken Lights: Cops-2*, *Cops' New Adventures*, etc. continue to be among the top-rated Russian productions, with *The Devastating Force* (*Uboinaia sila*, 2000) as the absolute leader of the year (Poluekhtova 9-10).

cultural paradigms. Inasmuch as recent Russian crime dramas resemble their Western counterparts on the surface, they differ from them on a deeper level. First, while Russian producers and directors are aware of the conventions of the genre they work in, they often resist them, opting instead for hybrid genres: police procedural/sitcom (*Streets of Broken Lights*), gangster saga/male melodrama *(Criminal Petersburg)*; melodrama-cum-murder with mystical motifs *(The Bourgeois's Birthday)*; detective/political thriller *(Detective Dubrovskii's Dossier*, 2001*)*. Second, "Western" criminal plots often function as an umbrella for archetypal Russian heroes and conflicts, for instance, the opposition between law and justice or the irrationality of social and individual life.

The difference between the "Russian plot" and the "Western plot" clearly manifests itself in police procedurals. The "Russian plot" is most fully represented by the *Streets of Broken Lights,* which follows the populist model of the *Meeting Place.* The "Western plot" is characteristic of *Kamenskaia*, which also inherited many of the institutional concerns of the *The Investigation Is Conducted by Experts*. This difference determines everything in the series, from production costs and choice of characters and settings to the structure of each individual episode. *Kamenskaia* privileges single-line plots, not only focusing all narrative development on the crime, but often positioning its female protagonist in the center of it, either as an undercover agent or as a target/victim. In contrast, *Streets*' episodes often feature several parallel investigations and many more minor conflicts with which members of the police team have to deal. *Kamenskaia* focuses on big scale crime, which either targets state interests or involves a

[146] For data on ratings and revenues from commercials, see Poluekhtova, 11-13.

large territory,[147] but at the end of an episode the case is invariably solved. *Streets*, on the other hand, is more local in its focus, and episodes regularly end with the police team's frustration.

The best crafted and the most "Western" of 1990s crime dramas, *Kamenskaia* owes its appeal both to Aleksandra Marinina's tight and logical, if somewhat convoluted, plots, the cold-headed, analytical heroine, and to the series' genre purity. Glossy, suspenseful, well-motivated and acted, *Kamenskaia,* however, falls behind *Streets of Broken Lights* in popularity. While Marinina's novels have been unmatched in attracting diverse audiences, when transposed to the screen they failed to provide material for the viewer to identify with—something that the police team from *Streets* brilliantly accomplished. As a result, *Streets* succeeded in becoming a national show for the 1990s, just like *Seventeen Moments of Spring* were for the 1970s.

The first impression of *Streets* is the acknowledgement and a certain enjoyment of social chaos. The first episode, directed by the master of post-Soviet absurd comedy Aleksandr Rogozhkin,[148] opens not with a crime but with a sewer pipe bursting at the police precinct. The members of the police team are introduced through their participation in or comments on this carnivalistic event, which serves as a peculiar epigraph and establishes a symbolic frame for the entire show. In its verbal rhetoric the show expresses a yearning for stability, order, and the rule of law. Characters repeatedly refer to contemporary Russian life, the city, and their job as a "nuthouse" [*durdom*]. However, the structure of episodes and the choice of conflicts foreground the idea of a uniquely Russian "normalcy." The very messiness of Russian life, the extremes of Russian national character are presented as values in and of themselves, linked to cultural myths,

[147] Catharine Nepomnyashchy notes that while Marinina is not a political writer, the roots of violent crimes in her novels are often "implicitly traced to lapses in the Soviet past that are tied to the post-Soviet present by the thread of financial gain, charting a disturbing continuity between the systemic abuse [. . .] of the two periods" (177).
[148] Rogozhkin's cult films of the 1990s—*Peculiarities of National Hunting* (1995), and its sequels *Peculiarities of National Fishing* (1998) and *Peculiarities of National Hunting in Winter Period* (2000)—have loose, fragmented narratives organized around drinking and bonding as the archetypal "Russian" activities.

and feeding into an idea of national uniqueness, that constantly "spills over" genre conventions. To quote Aleksei Balabanov's film *Brother* (1997): "What is good for a Russian is deadly for a German."

An important ingredient to the success of *Streets* is the choice of cultural context. Police characters profusely quote Zheglov, Chapaev, and jokes about dumb police. Moreover, loose plots allow space for typically Russian, sitcom-like situations—e.g., the team's bonding over vodka or amateur singing—or for provocative visual displays, like the logo "The Group of Proletarian Anger," which opens one of the early episodes. Within the social (and narrative) chaos *Cops*—the title under which the series was released on video—are less servants of the law than heroes of a new kind of epic. The new heroes are cynical about many things—the government, the police authority, even moral integrity (their office prominently displays a jar "for bribes")—but not about friendship or protecting "the insulted and the injured." These are precisely the motifs that endeared *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* to Soviet audiences.

Set in Petersburg, *Streets* engages both the city's cultural mythology and its post-Soviet reputation as "the criminal capital of the country." Unlike Moscow, which is represented as the center of corruption and organized crime, Petersburg is notorious for street crime. One of the episodes describes a "typical Russian crime": two guys get drunk, start fighting, one stabs the other with a kitchen knife. This kind of plot provides no material for analytical investigation characteristic of Kamenskaia, but plenty of "evidence" for a discussion of the Russian soul. Such irrational, Dostoevskian tendencies are typical not just of the series' plots but of its mise-en-scène as well. As many reviewers have pointed out, the series is shot "from the point of view of garbage disposal": dirty courtyards instead of central streets or monuments, all five police members in one cluttered, Raskol'nikov-type room in a dilapidated building. Whenever the Neva

river appears in *Streets*, there is a three-day-old corpse floating in it. Crude or black humor abounds and is, in fact, part of the plots. One of the policeman arrests a repeat offender, but allows him to have "farewell sex" with his girlfriend in the office. In another episode, an old woman is taken for a corpse because she is sleeping in a decaying apartment covered with mold.

Part and parcel of this irrationality is "blind fate," which plays a significant role in shaping characters lives and in providing narrative motivation for criminal plots. Even *Kamenskaia,* which relies on detective conventions and privileges logical explanations, is no exception. *Criminal Petersburg* privileges fate, emotional and visual excess, and other Russia *topoi* to an even larger degree. The director, Vladimir Bortko, whose work includes a television adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog* (1988), voiced his objection to the visual debasement of Petersburg in *Streets* and claimed to show a different Petersburg, "one the most beautiful cities in Europe, capital of the empire."[149] Conceived as a three-part gang saga à la *Godfather*, the narrative, indeed, focuses on the empire—a mafia group headed by the "king of crime," Antibiotic.

In its representation of social life *Criminal Petersburg* is the gloomiest of recent Russian crime dramas. Like Mario Puzo's trilogy, it constructs the mafia as virtually the only alternative to a corrupt and inefficient state and the only stable social entity, which provides its members with a feeling of belonging, group identity, and a sense of purpose.[150] The first part of the series, "Baron," casts the renowned actor Kirill Lavrov, whose cinematic image has been associated with Soviet high-ranking officials (and Lenin),[151] as Baron, a career criminal. He only appears in the first episode to tell the story of the fake paintings in the Hermitage Museum. Lavrov's role,

[149] "Mushketery protiv bratvy," *Novoe russkoe slovo* (December 1998): 25.
[150] On the cultural functions of crime formulas, see Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and* Romance, especially 51-79.

however, is far from a mere cameo. Renowned Soviet film actors in post-Soviet crime dramas are cast either as wise and experienced policemen, or as equally wise and experienced mafia bosses (e.g., Lev Borisov as "Antibiotic'). In both cases, these characters express nostalgia for the (Soviet) times of real heroes and lament the degeneration of Russians.

While the show creates several strong and dramatic figures of the underworld, its main focus is on people who get involved in criminal activity by accident. In exploring dramatic fates, choices, and extremes of national character, *Criminal Petersburg* is, perhaps, the most Russian series of the late 1990s. The absence of social structure is mirrored in the dramatic transformations of its characters' fates. A journalist acts as a self-appointed detective and hit man, a DA officer joins the mafia to avenge his parents' murder. When he and his friend attempt to leave the gang, they are killed. As in "Pawns Die First," violent death provides symbolic redemption, which eschews judgment or, rather, takes it out of the category of law into that of moral imperatives. With its extreme violence and visual excess, the slaughter sequence combines the "inevitable" Russian ending with a re-enactment of the death of Chapaev in the famous 1934 film by the "Vasil'ev brothers." The closure focuses on the young widow who, having left the gang and having lost both of her lovers, is forced to escape to Turkey. Emigration, therefore, is constructed as fate and, paradigmatically, the biggest tragedy for Russians.

A police unit and a gang are two most common surrogate communities that function as compensation for the social incoherence in contemporary Russia. *The Bourgeois's Birthday* [Den' rozhdeniia Burzhuiia] features a third kind of community that comes close to a "corporate family" à la Dynasty. The series begins as a melodrama about *nouveaux riches*—a thirty-year-

[151] Among other roles, Lavrov has played Korolev—the head of the Russian space program in Daniil Khrabrovitskii's *Taming of Fire* [Ukroshchenie ognia] (1972) and Lenin in Viktor Tregubovich's *Trust* [Doverie]

old successful businessman, Vladimir Kovalenko (affectionately called "Bourgeois" by his friends), his girlfriend, and a close friend. The three are colleagues and work ethics plays a big role in their relationship. This nuclear "family" gradually expands to include Kovalenko's fake sister (a former prostitute), her grandmother, a paranoid psychiatrist, and an unemployed computer scientist. The new members are shoved forcibly into the family by the schemes of the series's villain. His attempts to destroy Kovalenko come with an array of motivations: revenge for stealing his girlfriend, envy at Kovalenko's financial success, and irritation at the latter's idealism in relations with people. This romantic "Mozart and Salieri" plot is complicated by two overlapping dichotomies: communal vs. individualist and Russian vs. cosmopolitan. The villain, himself a talented and charismatic personality, is a loner. An artist and a wandering spirit, the villain dwells in a gothic mansion. The romanticized, dark figure of the antagonist and obscure connections between dramatic events—murders, arsons, computer hacking—foreground fate, <u>not</u> reason as the driving force behind peoples lives.

The formation of a new community identity, however, proceeds along lines that are strangely reminiscent of socialist realist narratives. Repeated attempts by the enemy to destroy the community only bring it closer together, and the internal cohesion is based not on blood (in fact, none of Kovalenko's extended family is his relative) but on symbolic connections. The opening sequence of the first episode accomplishes a veritable *tour-de-force*. As the businessman of the year Kovalenko gives a television interview. Instead of speaking about his business success, he recounts his fairy-tale life story: an orphan, found in a basket, abandoned at a train station. His search for his lost family and the quest for his origins (hence the title of the series) give the villain the idea to set him up for fake relatives. The individualistic (and quite Western) ideology of a self-made-man, then, effortlessly combines with the orphan trope of Soviet and

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(1976).

Russian folk culture.[152] The series does not mark signs of Western life style as negative. Kovalenko and his girlfriend are obsessed with physical fitness; Kovalenko's closest friend is the butt of friendly jokes for his addiction to Snickers candy bars. Computers, Western cars, and stylishly furnished lofts are presented as objects of desire and as natural and well-deserved attributes of upper middle-class life. Underlying all this, however, is the simple and mysterious rural Russia, with its fortune-telling, spirituality, and communal bonding. The series constructs the new Russian identity from scratch by mixing honest business, surface Westernization, and a deep connection to Russian roots. Indeed, as Anthony Olcott notes:

> The unit of measurement that the western [detective] genre finds supreme—the individual—is to the Russian genre, at best a solipsism and, at worst, a criminal, actively working to destroy the Russian basic unit, an amorphously defined but acutely felt larger community (the *mir* or *obshchestvo* or *narod* or *Rodina***.** (185)

This nostalgic trend is represented by such programs as Leonid Parfenov's documentary films *Seventeen Moments of Spring: 25 Years Later* (1998) and *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed*: *20 Years Later* (1999). Both are dedicated to the two television blockbusters of the 1970s. By the 1990s both shows became part and parcel of the sensibilities of Russian popular culture. Apart from interviews with production crews, both films included interviews with political and secret police officials in charge of the shows' content and production. Those were immediately followed by campy comments by the shows' host, Parfenov, popular jokes inspired

[152] In Russian folk tales, an orphan survives hardships, but in the end turns out to be a prince. In the Soviet cultural tradition, the orphan trope was consistently used during transitional periods. In the late 1920s-early 1930s the figure of the orphan signified the erased past and adoption into the new Big Family of the Soviet people. See, for instance, Nikolai Ekk's film *Road to Life* [Putevka v zhizn'] (1931). The crisis of Soviet identity in the Thaw again actualized the orphan trope, this time in a reconstituted family which consisted of both orphaned children and "orphaned"

by the shows, and contemporary remixes of songs from the shows. These commemorative programs reinforced again the prime strategy of post-Soviet television: recycling recognizable signs and narratives of the late Soviet era and capitalizing on the energy released by the collapse of monological Soviet narratives.

Sequels to late Soviet TV productions followed these commemorative programs. The world of tele-nostalgia includes: a four-part sequel to the *Investigation Is Conducted by Experts* (1999), a sequel to *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (*Remembering Sherlock Holmes* [dir. Igor' Maslennikov 2000]), and a proposed sequel to *The Meeting Place Can Not Be Changed*. Russian capitalist television follows the ABC of marketing and lures its consumer by a recognizable brand name. That is, nostalgia has become more of a marketing strategy than an ideological concern.

Within this new market environment Russian producers try to meet the expectations of their new target audiences, above all to be sensitive to the non-western values of their Russian consumers. Many post-Soviet television series offer both new models of Russian community and new identity formulas by incorporating them into the plot. Law and crime function as external markers of deeper processes: cataloguing available identities and community types, putting them to the test as potential social models. In this respect, statements like "TV series give viewers a positive model of behavior, which counteracts the shock attack of evening news filled with war, corruption, and crime" (Akopov 8-9) are quite valid, despite the seeming contradiction. Even the extreme violence of Russian series and the recurrent theme of police, KGB, and government corruption are familiar markers that outline the borders of the "positive" new identity.

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adults, e.g., Marlen Khutsiev's *Two Fedors* [Dva Fedora], (1958) and Sergei Bondarchuk's *Fate of a Man* [Sud'ba cheloveka], (1959).

In her book on the role of television in post-war America, Lynn Spiegel describes the process of the normalization of life, which converged with the mass exodus to suburban areas and the prominence of the new family in sitcoms. Spiegel argues that 1950s family shows, which portrayed the "people next door," with all their prejudices and stereotypes, were often self-referential. These sitcoms allowed people to laugh at their own social conventions without destroying the sense of middle-class stability, domesticity, and family security. The post-Soviet crime series, in a rather paradoxical way, fills a similar cultural niche for troubled post-Soviet audiences: they function as both a mirror of fragmented social life and as a testing ground for new identity discourse.

The pastiche of American series, Latin American *tele-novelas*, Soviet mini-series, and new Russian productions strikes an observer as a model of post-modern culture. For Russian television audiences, however, who in the last two decades have experienced a break not only with socialist ideology but with the established system of cultural norms, assumptions, and illusions, this heterogeneity is re-assuring. The integration into a market economy, world culture, and history itself did not occur at the expense of erasing the past, as it had been throughout the twentieth century.

While the borders of this identity are experienced through the crime series, its center remains to be defined. Valerii Todorovskii claims that whoever succeeds in making a truly Russian soap opera will win the market (15). There is no doubt, however, that serial television broadcasts will play a major role in the "hard sell" of the new ideology. It is no accident that immediately after his emergence out of obscurity into the spotlight of presidency, Vladimir Putin was identified with Shtirlits, the Soviet "James Bond," who embodied the idea of empire. The

consistent marketing of Putin's image suggests that it is only now that television's selling of ideology, which started in the 1970s, is becoming a successful project.

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