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Title: Late Socialist Cinema as Foucauldian Heterotopia: A Dark Approach to the Socialist Past

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Abstract: Comparing the work of late-socialist-era directors Roman Balayan and Mircea Daneliuc with the postsocialist work of Sergey Loznitsa, in this paper I attempt to show that the non-linearity of postmodernism embraced by some directors in postsocialism is more indebted to the work of socialist-era directors in Eastern Europe than we might think. Furthermore, I explore the differences of what some critics have called the censorship-dominated style of the so-called “dissident cinema” of socialism and that of the postsocialist directors whose style is predicated on alleged complete freedom of expression. The goal of this comparative approach is to show that, despite the fact that socialist cinema since the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe has been freely associated with indoctrination and propaganda, socialist-era filmmaking represents not only an unforgettable episode in the history of Eastern European cinema, but one that decidedly influenced the aesthetics of what some theorists have dubbed the current nonlinear, post-digital age of contemporary film. Finally, I argue that the 1980s in Eastern Europe and Russia brought to cinema a far more philosophical, complex, and multi-layered approach and style that commented on the human condition from surprisingly less ideological positions than the more celebrated non-linear style of contemporary filmmaking does today.

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Late Socialist Cinema as Foucauldian Heterotopia: A Dark Approach to the Socialist Past

In an opinion editorial in the New York Times on the 6th June, 2018 Roger Cohen wrote:

> Bolshevism, the cradle in which Orban and Kaczynski [presidents of Hungary and Poland] were rocked, was an ideology bent on force-marching society toward some higher ideal. In fact, the reality, as the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert put it, was that it "poisons wells, destroys the structures of the mind, covers bread with mold." Something of this urge, it seems, remained in the two men. It was not enough for them to succumb to the permissiveness of the West. They needed a mission. They have decided to save Christendom, no less — and to heck with open societies. (Cohen)

Even though this quote belongs to an op-ed editorial, this view of socialist history is shared by political scientists like Jacques Rupnik, historians like Vladimir Tismăneanu, and various film scholars from Chris Robé to Dominique Nasta. With a few notable exceptions such as Boris Groys, who in his referential *Total Art of Stalinism*, identifies the origins of postmodern Soviet art in Stalin's much-hated theses on socialist realism, the last period of socialism in the Eastern bloc is unreservedly treated as a time of utmost indoctrination and jingoism that led to an almost complete oppression of the arts and an equal suppression of creative activity. Furthermore, film – one of the most visible and influential media during late socialism – was reduced in the view of these scholars and critics to a personification of what went wrong with Stalinism, while socialist realist films in particular became what the American film scholar Paul Pickowicz named when referring to China's Mao-era cinema just "a few crude and highly forgettable wartime propaganda works." (Pickowitz, 123)

In this paper I want to take a closer look at this terrifying period of alleged brainwashing totalitarianism etched into the global conscious today in the form of archival images featuring leader-worshipping pageants and military parades, and examine more closely the so-called art films that came out in the mid-eighties primarily in Russia, but also in some of the satellite countries like Romania. The main argument is that despite the tendency of

film scholars to equate this period with political dystopia and aesthetic unfreedom, the universe created in certain socialist films of the eighties was one in which the chronotope of socialism more adhered than not to Foucault's definition of heterotopia as a meeting space for disparate and even deviating behaviors and characters. (Foucault) While I am not applying Foucault's heterotopia uncritically to what was otherwise clearly a socialist and not a capitalist context, I invoke Foucault's concept to assess the ways in which late socialist cinema could indeed be conceptualized as an 'other space' (*espace autre*) constituting a parallel to the concept of space in capitalism.

To illustrate this parallelism I start by looking at Roman Balayan's film from 1983, *Flights in Dreams and Reality*, arguing that this work describes not only a space that Foucault calls heterotopic, but a space (and technique) that prefigures the non-linearity and post-digital storytelling style that characterizes the post-postmodern age in cinema.

What happens in this Soviet film which illustrates the aesthetic and topicality of late socialism? A forty-something architect in full mid-life crisis turns his life upside down when he decides to leave his wife and child behind. Contrary to common logic, instead of moving in with his much younger and more attractive lover, he proceeds to equally endanger his relationship with her when he introduces the wife to the lover, thereby entering a veritable free fall. His nonchalant approach to relationships equally affects his work environment, where, by lying to his boss and co-workers about his health, he regularly skips work to engage in what are apparently self-destructing pursuits such as drinking and partying binges, and yet another ill-fated love affair with a co-worker who indulges his idiosyncratic behavior. The narrative in the second half of the film gets muddled while following the hero on an unsuccessful visit to the countryside where he travels to purportedly see his mother but ends up beaten by street thugs and sleeping in a haystack. The finale appears to bring back some sense of logic as the coworkers from the small architectural office gather to celebrate the hero's birthday at a picnic held in nature somewhere at the edge of the city. This logic, however, dissipates as soon as the protagonist wanders off leaving the other guests behind. Balayan concludes the film with a lyrical, contemplative moment underlining not only the hero's existential crisis, but the confusion in which late Soviet society plunged in the '80s.

What does this have to do with Foucault? In ~~his well-known~~ *Different Spaces*, Michel Foucault lists a variety of milieus that could constitute

heterotopia for the 20th century subject of Western extract, and a direct product of modern society. The underlying principles of heterotopias are that these spaces concurrently bring together features that belong to different temporal or topographical orders. Moreover, these orders have to relate in one way or another to the present subject, to the person in the Western hemisphere in the 20th century who negotiates his/her relationship to these virtual sites or altogether real places. As examples, Foucault lists the cemetery and the Oriental garden as heterotopias by virtue of their being able to flatten time and place, and bring together the dead with the living as well as the geographically remote with the local, respectively. Of all other sites he mentions, such as bathhouses and prisons, which are heterotopias due to their otherness from the quotidian—due to their requiring a break with everyday activity and a ritual to enter—the easiest way to understand Foucault is when he states that heterotopias act as places which are both here and not here, as in the example of the mirror. It is this facet of the heterotopia that I wish to discuss in the case of late-socialist films. Foucault has this to say about the concept of the mirror:

> The mirror is a utopia after all, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface; I am over there where I am not, a kind of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to look at myself there where I am absent-a mirror utopia. But it is also a heterotopia in that the mirror really exists, in that it has a sort of return effect on the place that I occupy. (Foucault, 179)

I posit that late-socialist film constitutes a heterotopia by being a mirror to Western cinema. This mirror-effect is obtained when the Western subject observes herself in the inverted utopia of the Communist paradise gone awry. This observation process endows the space described in socialist film with a ubiquitousness which makes the Western spectator participate vicariously in the otherwise inaccessible world opened up by this almost ‘rabbit-hole-like’ inverted experience of the subject living in the West.

I thus see the space offered for (Western) consumption by Balayan’s (and later Daneliuc’s film) as a privileged universe which can be recreated by the subject of the capitalist West just as Foucault posits that early colonists created a heterotopia in the New World by cosmeticizing their conquered space in a religious vision that would become a perfect “other place.”

(Foucault) Likewise, the space that opens up in Balayan is a maze-like structure, a universe in which the spectator can ramble at will alongside the protagonist to discover not herself (the Western capitalist spectator) but a version of herself that could have been, that the late-Soviet space actualizes as if by flattening geographical space and bringing together the two opposing sides of the Iron Curtain. In the sense in which late-Soviet space equally brings together a time that seems to have stood still on the Soviet side of the Iron Curtain while coming "out of joint" in the capitalist West, this space equally adheres to Bakhtin's chronotope. In that, *Flights in Dreams and Reality* becomes a veritable "contestation, both mythical and real, of the space in which we live." (Foucault, 179)

While the film has clear political undertones, in that it seems to comment (subversively even) on the dubious direction of late socialism in Soviet Russia, it also introduces the theme of oneiric introspection in cinema. If such magical realism in cinema is not new, particularly in the aftermath of Tarkovsky,[1] but also other Eastern European directors such as Vera Chitlova in Czechoslovakia or Dan Piţa in Romania, the relationship between magical realism and politics stamps the late Soviet period with a particular cinematic style that favors both non-linearity and non-classical narratives.

If not a mirror image of South American magic realism, Eastern European cinema of the 1960s resonated to the literature of both Julio Cortazar and Jorge Luis Borges, who were popular in translation in socialist literatures over the entire duration of socialism. Something that is more evident, however, is that Eastern European literature developed its own absurdist and magic realist style drawing its roots from as early as Kafka, the work of Polish and Czech novelists Bruno Schulz and Bohumil Hrabal, as well as the mixture of real and fantastic that characterized the shtetl short stories of Yiddish-Polish author Isaac Bashevis Singer. To the list we should add the names of Serbian/Yugoslavs Danilo Kis and Borislav Pekic who wrote about the absurdity of political life under both the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its aftermath, and finally, those of Dada and surrealist Romanian émigrés poets Tristan Tzara and Benjamin Fondane. Indeed, Latin American magic realism has recently been—maybe exaggeratedly—traced back to a tumultuous post-WWI Europe where it has been identified as "realismo mágico" in 1927 in Italy, as well as "neue sachlichkeit" in Germany. From here this anti-realist

[1] It is interesting that Balayan's protagonist from *Flights in Dreams and Reality*, Oleg Yankovsky, would go on to star immediately afterwards in Tarkovsky's critically acclaimed *Nostalgia* produced in the same year.

trend which turned into magic realism is thought to have influenced South Americans like Asturias, Borges, Carpentier, etc. (Skrodzka, 20)

The style certainly transitioned fast to East European screens, where a certain magic realist tendency is identifiable in the early films of Czech New Wave directors Vojtech Jasný, Jiri Menzel, and Jan Nemec, but also Polish Film School representative Jerzy Kawalerowicz, and Hungarian experimental filmmaker Zoltán Huszárik. If certain auteurs such as the above-mentioned Chitlova and Piţa would be influenced by it, in the late socialist period the style would gain world-wide acclaim through the work of Krzysztof Kieślowski and Emir Kusturica, whose films found quick(er) distribution in the West.

In Balayan we witness a clear departure from classical narrative structures that is equally attributable to magic realist and absurdist influences. Through Balayan, the style would later influence Sergey Solovyov,[2] but also post-Soviet Russian directors such as Aleksandr Lungin, and more notably, Alexander Sokurov.

Most Western scholars of Soviet cinema read Russian films politically. In his book *Russian Cinema*, David Gillespie contends that “It is axiomatic that all Stalinist culture was permeated with ideology and that no film, book or painting could be devoid of its ‘socialist realist’ content and message.” (Gillespie, 113) Similarly, if he agrees that a certain “allegory” developed in the post-Stalinist period, he posits that the thaw was dichotomized between those who clamored for greater openness and those who “yearned for the certainties of the past.” (114)

Despite the prevailing consensus that assimilates Soviet cinema to indoctrination and propaganda late Soviet films created their own proprietary style in which, through symbolism and metaphor inherited from magic realism and absurdism, they dealt with social reality in a way that both subverted and affirmed the ideological goals of the Party. In fact, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to state, following Alexey Yurchak, that Soviet film in the 1980s contested the prerogatives of the Soviet regime in ways that did not interfere with that regime’s prerogatives.[3]

In his book *Everything Was Forever, Until it Was no More*, anthropologist Alexey Yurchak contends that Soviet society lived in pockets

[2] Solovyov’s most famous film, made a few years after *Flights…*, is *Assa* (1987), a film which, contemporaneous with the beginning of Perestroika, begins to attack more head-on than others have attempted before, the shortcomings of socialism, prefiguring, however, the chaos and criminality of the 1990s.

[3] Gillespie posits that perestroika was uniquely used by Russian filmmakers to contest the totalitarianism of the past, as in the films of Valerii Ogorodnikov, Nikita Mikhalkov, Mark Zakharov, etc. (Gillespie, 117-122)

of what he calls “*vnye*,” a space assimilable to a sort of ‘neither inside nor outside’ of the sociopolitical system. This space, according to Yurchak, permitted members of the Soviet society not exactly to go *against* the goals of socialism, but *alongside* them, without, however, being overpowered by neither ideology, nor the Party. In fact, Yurchak contends that Soviet citizens benefitted from ideology in the sense that they allowed the erstwhile slogans of Communism such as militating for world peace, for the friendship between nations, etc., which by the ‘80s had become worn-out, to be resignified in ways that made them more creative and significant to late-Soviet culture. This meant a series of art collectives would start to turn the constative truths of socialism, as Yurchak calls these slogans, paraphrasing Austin, into post-modern art.

It is important that we see a film like Balayan’s in this framework: Without having either succumbed to the oppression of a system which allegedly disallowed the slightest manifestation of dissent, and without directly commenting on the repressiveness of the system, *Flights* creates its own *vnye*, as it were, a particular, almost non-linear style of storytelling that is based on the character’s nonconformist lifestyle to advance an artistic response to the oppressiveness of the system.

This style of storytelling, it must be added, is derived from the very shenanigans of Balayan’s hero. If *vnye* is supposed to allow the late-Soviet citizen to take refuge in a universe that is neither oppressive nor completely political yet engaged with both the state and politics via his friends, relatives, close entourage, etc., this means that the citizen in the Soviet system is truthfully aware of his condition and actively engaged in a process of contestation. Through his very engagement in non-conformist, routine-defying behavior, Balayan’s hero, Sergey Makarov, actively challenges the state and its restrictions, whether they have to do with the work schedule or the norms imposed by a nuclear-family-type society on family life. All the while, he finds pockets of freedom in his female co-worker’s apartment, his friend’s kitchen (in which the table is inevitably used for drinking), or an artist’s studio which are his literal *vnye*, that is places that, as in Foucault’s enunciation, offer contestation to the space created by the state.

Furthermore, the overall space the film creates for Makarov is a space which audiences identify with the aimlessness of late socialism. In that, this space is home to a community of people who employ a certain style of being in the world that Walter Mignolo called in another context border-thinking. This is the main prerogative of *vnye*: the ability to both think within and

without the state or the system, and in the Russian case, it is to understand both high politics, and the way in which ordinary citizens negotiate the relationship between their status as subjects and political power. Indeed, Balayan's film is a staple of what postcolonial theory has called the ability to empower the colonial subject by negotiating her response to the oppressiveness of the colonial system.

I do not think that equating the socialist condition in the "Eastern bloc" with the colonial condition is taking things too far, either. As anthropologists Katherine Verdery and Sharad Chari point out, the similarities between the colonial and the socialist environments (that is, between the Second and the Third worlds), but also between the conditions of postsocialism and postcolonialism, allow for a singular approach of the two areas. (Verdery and Chari, 9). Indeed, inasmuch as film is concerned, it is not an exaggeration to see late socialist cinema as a descendant of Third Cinema, which militated for a revolution in world cinema and a replacement of Hollywood—that is, of a cinema of characters and dialogue—with a cinema of ideas and ideologies. It may seem strange, at first, that something akin to dissident cinema would take the form of ideas and ideologies, which is precisely what dissident cinema in the colonial/socialist world would seem to be against. What is important, however, is not to forget that socialist realism, the style that preceded late Soviet cinema, was equally influenced by Third Cinema and revolutionary ideals. As such, it would be an error to assume that all dissident or oppositional cinema in the Eastern bloc was anticommunist, and Balayan's film represents a case in point: Makarov—played with effective understated rebelliousness by veteran Russian actor Oleg Yankovskiy—does not literally contest the ideology of the state, and the reason this is so is that his hero would not have a different behavior (he would not react differently) if the state in which he lived was indeed capitalist instead of socialist. For Balayan political ideology, as in Yurchak, is a constative. But that ideology could easily be replaced: Communist or capitalist, the subject in any nation-state continues to perceive his condition as subject, therefore as a subaltern of the system, to use another postcolonial term.

In that sense, Balayan's film is neither dissident nor oppositional, yet it is challenging to state power. However, this is a power that could be painted in any ideological colors, a power, that is, that could be either Communist or capitalist. Hence, through its appeal to the universal condition of the subject (in both capitalism and Communism) the film becomes a heterotopia to which both the Soviet subject in his use of *vnye* and the capitalist one in her seeing the film as a mirror of life in Western societies can equally relate.

What makes the film dissident is not its politics but its attitude: Let us imagine for a second how the radically unconventional shenanigans of the hero would be perceived in a capitalist rather than a socialist system. Given his hero's chronic misdemeanors inasmuch as work is concerned, in a system based on the Protestant work ethic, it is certain that Balayan would come across as even more of a maverick than under socialism. The frequent tantrums Makarov throws at the workplace, his indulging behavior, his unethical view of marriage and sexual relationships, as well as his overall conflictual attitude against all of forms of authority, and particularly against those who represent or have power, make him a universal rebel, harking almost to a 1950s-style angry young man implicated in a perpetual struggle against authority. What Balayan is attempting to fight here therefore is power *tout court*, and in that he is more of a spokesman for the struggle against oppression *anywhere*; more of a poster boy for the resistance against any type of domination, be it political or societal.

Unlike a film scholar like David Gillespie therefore, who contends that Soviet cinema remained imprisoned in its inability to reveal the "Truth" of the socialist condition, or several "truths" such as those of its oppression, repression, and lack, a film like Balayan's was able to take on socialism even before dissident cinema came into its own in the late Perestroika period of the late 1980s, and of course, in the 'chernukha' movies of the 1990s.[4] It is therefore not only artists like the over-referenced Nikita Mikhalkov whose *Burnt by the Sun* allegedly gave the tone for the condemnation of the criminality of the socialist regime that we should learn to value in postsocialism. On the contrary, it is the work of courageous filmmakers like Roman Balayan who, employing not the trite realism of Mikhalkov, but a highly symbolic and metaphoric language, managed to achieve more *during* socialism than his descendants thereafter. Moreover, Balayan's work is not univalent, like that of Mikhalkov: instead of taking a condemning approach to politics, it creates its own universe in which subjects from all types of regimes can participate simultaneously as in a perfect reification of Foucault's heterotopia.

Since this is mainly accomplished through the visual language being used in the film, it is Balayan's language we should focus on here. Principally, we need to focus on the ability of metaphor and poetry to

[4] These were "dark" films that dominated most of the 90s, films that came as a reaction against the propaganda of the socialist years. They purported to describe the real consequences of socialism at the level of society. Aleksei Balabanov's *Brat* is the quintessential example of *chernukha*.

describe the human condition under socialism. Using a loose narrative structure, an unpredictable story line, and a mobile, playful camera that seems to mirror the elastic psychic structure of his protagonist, Balayan is intent on showing no less than the borderlessness of human spirit: as the title suggests, Makarov slips in and out of something that could be described as self-induced trance to avoid the platitude of everyday existence, even if this equally means neglecting his wife, child, and career. For the late Soviet subject therefore life—at least in Balayan's acception—is not bleak, desperate, and pessimistic because the Soviet regime has made it so. On the contrary, Balayan seems to suggest that what the regime permitted to the Soviet subject was precisely the ability to see through the political "oppression" (inherent to any national regime anywhere) and onto the philosophical condition of Man in general. This is what in fact confers the film its durability. By slipping out of Soviet reality and into poetry, Balayan describes therefore the ability of the modern political subject to negotiate his humanity in the face of both political adversity and existential crisis, since Makarov's shenanigans are equally motivated by his reaching a critical point in his life that could also be explained as his mid-life crisis.

The oneiric style of filmmaking employed by Balayan to describe the late socialist condition draws its roots equally from what Yurchak called the normalization period and the magic realist characteristic of Eastern European cinema in general. Normalization refers to the so-called stagnation of the Brezhnev era, when what the anthropologist calls the constative truths of erstwhile socialism have grown into adulthood: the enthusiasm of the first age of socialism, in other words, has been replaced by a cooling-off of the utopian ideals of the first Communist generation to give way to both maturity and a sense of disillusionment caused by the unattainability of the said utopia. Instead of condemning flat out, however, Stalinism for allowing this utopia to have flourished in the first place, as a majority of theorists has done in the West when discussing Soviet history,[5] Balayan maturely recurs to visual metaphor to express the equivalent of this disillusionment on film.

The last scene of *Flights* comes to mind, when the hero, as if transported by something higher than himself, takes off from the picnic and roams the fields surrounding the city. The mist rising from the soil as well as the splashed-out green of the grass under the cloudy sky give the scene an ethereal effect. This scene is where metaphor, *vnye*, and heterotopia finally come together: In his ability to transcend the condition imposed onto his

[5] As a starting point, see Emma Widdis' *Visions of a New Land*. Yale University Press, 2012.

existence by both the state and societal roles, Makarov interpellates the frustration of the universal subject under any type of political system.

Employing the above-referenced tradition of magical realism, the Russian director skillfully brings together a certain poetry and the reconfigured “truths” of the outcome of socialist realism to apply this newly-created mixture to late Soviet realities. The result is an original late-socialist style of expression characterized by symbolism, metaphor, and poetry that finds in Balayan, as well as other directors of the eighties’ generation a powerful and unjustly forgotten voice.

Furthermore, as we will see shortly, this style was shared among other luminaries of socialist cinema in other parts of the “Eastern bloc.” In order, however, to see how this style spread throughout the region in the eighties, it is first necessary to look at the “rupture” with socialism that was enacted after the collapse of Communism in the nineties.

The Aesthetics of Late Socialism in Romania

If Eastern Europe walked a similar path to that of Soviet Russia’s for most of the duration of the socialist period, things became a little different after the collapse of the Communist regime. While postsocialist directors from Eastern Europe are quick to pronounce their stylistic and thematic rupture with the socialist period, as evidenced in the writings of such scholars as Doru Pop, Dina Iordanova, and Dominique Nasta, it is undeniable that magic realist cinema, as well as New Waves cinemas such as the Romanian and the Polish are highly indebted both to socialist realism and the auteur cinema of the socialist era. It is therefore necessary when tracing the development of the non-linear tradition birthed by postmodernism to acknowledge the influences borne upon it by late era socialist cinema.

If late socialism decidedly influenced the look and feel of Balayan’s film, ramifications of so-called totalitarian politics equally inspired the last generation of socialist directors in Romania. Mircea Daneliuc’s film *Glissando* from 1982 (produced at roughly the same time as Balayan’s film) is an equally ambivalent portrait of the human condition predicated on a society in course of disintegration. *Glissando’s* hero, a passionate card player in the fascist Romania of the 1930s obsessively searches for the model depicted in a portrait he stumbles upon, whom he believes to be none other than his late mother. Obsessed with this realization, he proceeds to look for additional information on the enigmatic painter who painted the portrait. The search takes him to the country estate of a friend where the protagonist, Ion

Teodorescu, meets his future wife in the person of the French tutor of his friend's children. Embarking on an idyll with her despite his friend's open disproval of their relationship, the maverick hero, disregarding ethical rules of conduct and propriety, decides to elope with her back to the city. His search continues here, and brings him into the house of a wealthy collector who sells him a series of portraits similar to the one the hero is looking for. Developing an obsession with the paintings, the protagonist leads his wife to estrangement and his collector-friend to suicide by forcing him to take part in an increasingly higher-stake poker game that ultimately ruins him. The end of the film sees the casino cum spa cum sanatorium of the non-descript mountain resort in which the recurrent poker games are held, being literally taken over by the crowd of inpatients that are using the premises for therapeutic purposes. Not only is the building lost to the patients. The city streets seem equally to be taken over by fascist sympathizers who stage rallies attracting huge crowds while the hero succumbs to a sense of helplessness.

This convoluted—some may say quasi-illogical storyline—is but a pretext for the director to describe an apocalyptical world in which madmen (both the fascist ones in the streets and the inpatients in the sanatorium) are barely kept at bay from invading the premises of the casino, which temporarily appears as a last refuge from unreason (half of the film is set in the ruins of the bourgeois countryside property of Teodorescu's friend, while the other half in the run-down casino). As such, the suicide of the collector parallels the allegorical disappearance of the interbellum society, engulfed by a world teeming with fascist sympathizers who roam the streets and stage demonstrations in Hitler's support. While some critics have seen the film uniquely as a representation of socialist-era repression—with the fascists standing in for the Communist-styled leadership—what transpires is that the very censorship and creative unfreedom that Daneliuc repeatedly accused the socialist regime of in fact helped him produce films[6] that bespeak of a general human condition surpassingthe temporal constraints of Romanian socialism.[7] What comes through in both Daneliuc's and Balayan's films is a certain ambivalence toward the regime which, while indeed criticizing the ideological indoctrination coming from a leadership which has apparently lost touch with reality, equally offered a valuable insight into the frightening depths of the human condition. The issue that both films seems to address is

[6] His previous work, of which notable are *Microphone Test* (1980) and *Cursa* (1975), are equal masterpieces describing a society in chaos.
[7] For a discussion about Daneliuc's position on and connections with the socialist regime, see his interview with Alexandru Petria.

that depriving people of a material culture, of consumerism, vice, and ordinary daily pursuits; in other words, depriving people of capitalism (or fascism in the case of the Romanian director) renders people aimless, self-destructing, and confused – which is a dark conclusion indeed. In my view therefore neither of the directors embraces a full-on criticism of Communism as much as a critique of the human condition made more bare (and equally more disgusting) by the unfulfilled socialist project.

Many critics contend that the parable of fascism in *Glissando* can in fact be read as an allegory of late socialism, (Nasta) in which political power has lost touch with its citizens, and in which citizens have turned into mere disempowered automatons who march to the sound of loudspeakers playing the constative truths of socialism turned into lies. But if Daneliuc's metaphor can speak for both fascism and socialism against the language of oppression, what becomes evident is the fact that it is not Communism *per se* that is criticized in *Glissando*, and that fascism and socialism are far from equatable. What is, however, consistent in all political milieus is humanity's disillusionment with any kind of political power, which is something that makes both Daneliuc's and Balayan's films heterotopic. Therefore the conclusion drawn from Balayan's film equally applies to Daneliuc's: both directors bemoan the condition of the subject in any regime that purports to address the needs of its citizens.

Finally, both films use nonlinearity and poetry to tell their stories. In other words, what we have in late socialism is a purely post-modern style employed to probe the depths of a human condition that appears bleaker not because politics has made it so, but because politics—totalitarian as it may be—helps peel away the layers of consumerism that capitalism uses to hide the tragedy of the human condition. In that sense, as we will see in the end, these late socialist films constitute an original mix between Western post-modernism and Eastern magical realism, and thus offer a foresight into the postsocialist nonlinearity employed in both the fiction and non-fiction cinema of the 2000s and highly praised as superior to modernism.

Heterotopia and non-linearity

Returning briefly to Alexei Yurchak's concept of *vnye,* it becomes clearer in view of Daneliuc's film that the poetic style of filmmaking employed in late socialism is predicated upon certain "deterritorialized milieus," which the author argues described the lives of late socialist subjects. When attempting to veer interpretation of late socialism away from

the cliché that usually sees subjects of the regime as indoctrinated with a brainwashing ideology that supposedly robbed people of political, creative, and even personal agency, Yurchak posits that Soviet citizens of the Brezhnev era took refuge into certain activities they engaged in together, which paradoxically ended up not only enhancing knowledge but also creating community. As such, he gives the example of people involved in diverse clubs—from music, to film, to literature—which brought people together in a contestatory move against the impositions of the regime. The word "*vnye*" describes this state of interstitiality as well as bubble, and in that it describes a condition of freedom and creativity. By finding refuge in *vnye*, Yurchak argues, young people in Soviet Russia developed a personal, non-ideological way of engaging in creative pursuits.

As mentioned earlier, I argue that beyond their convoluted thematics, both Balayan's and Daneliuc's films in themselves constitute *vnye* by welcoming a variety of characters that cannot be easily placed either as socialist subjects or contesters thereof. Late socialist film characters are disoriented, disinterested, and apparently politically disengaged. From the aimless protagonist of Balayan to his hypocritical office boss to the women who engage in unethical behavior, as well as the purposeless and obsessive protagonist of Daneliuc's film, the world of late socialism is multi-layered. Indeed, these spaces function in a way akin to Foucault's heterotopia, in that they have the "ability to juxtaposein a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves." (Foucault, 181). In this sense, the unrestrictive character of *vnye* creates not only social inclusion but an environment particular to the late socialist world in which Communist ideology (as personified by pageants, military parades, etc.) co-existed with its very contestation. We have an example of this in Balayan's film: In the small architectural space in which he works, the protagonist's boss, a slightly older man in his fifties, represents the hand of the government, so to speak, in the way in which he attempts to pacify (although not suppress) the hero's erratic and non-conformist behavior in an almost paternalistic manner. Later in the film we realize that this respectable father figure supposed to guide the less obedient elements under his watch has feelings for the same co-worker as the hero, engaging therefore, like him, in the same unethical behavior that he condemns in the protagonist.

This ambivalence, I argue, describes the entire heterotopic atmosphere of the film. A narrative that progresses only apparently in order to reach a dead end, heroes that are only half-engaged with the values of socialism while following their individualistic pursuits in spite of society crumbling

under their feet, a plot that frequently stumbles and gets lost—so to speak—in pockets of *vnye* that do not move the narrative forward – these are so many components of what we call in post-postmodernism the post-digital, non-time-based-media world.

Finally, consider Daneliuc's Teodorescu: employing a highly unconventional storyline, the director leads his character into a labyrinth of affects, spaces, and social milieus that bespeak of confusion and directionlessness. Indeed, referencing the musical style "glissando", in which a sound is reached by sliding upward or downward between two musical notes, Daneliuc hints at his protagonist's fluctuations between helplessness and disorientation.[8] Moreover, going against all logic to estrange both his wife and his collector-friend while the world seems to be losing its bearings around him, Teodorescu seems to purposefully engage in self-destructing behavior. This behavior is further sustained by the metaphorical style employed by the director: Unsure at any given moment in which direction the plot will move next, and unsure what the protagonist's next move will equally be—as the characters' decisions are not dictated or ruled by logic—we witness a descent into a highly poetic universe combining symbolism, eccentricity, and lyricism. It is as if Teodorescu has given up hope of ever being able to live in a rational universe, and he willingly succumbs to having his life ruled by the hand of uncertain fate. This betrays powerlessness, indeed, but it also grants the character a certain empowerment: Instead of being indeed a pawn in a political universe in which subjects of the regime are unable to take control of their own lives, Teodorescu's self-destructing behavior seems to scream out against the power of the state while using his nonchalant attitude to indeed contest the power of all higher authority.

This is also, of course, the attitude of Balayan's Makarov: disregarding the effects that his carelessness will have on his family, career, and friends—indeed, on his surroundings in general—the Russian hero defies all authority, starting with that of the state and ending with the one contained in the unwritten code of traditional society norms. Balayan effectively challenges therefore all power yet constructs an environment in which his hero leads a parallel existence, which is the epitome of Yurchak's *vnye.* It is this same *vnye* that allows Balayan to use a highly metaphorical, nonlinear, and fragmented visual style, indeed, a style reminiscent of Lyotard's induction

[8] Another similarity between the two films is the aspect of interstitiality: In *Glissando* it is the protagonist's sliding between two spaces (the countryside and the casino) as well as two obsessive characters (the wife and the mother) that is being highlighted. In Balayan it is the continuous escapism of the character in the dreamscapes of his own fantasy as the title *Flights between Dreams and Reality* equally makes clear.

that postmodernism represents the end of meta-narratives, to accomplish his *coup-de-grace* against both political power as well as the style of modernism.

Nonlinearity and Postmodernism in Sergey Loznitsa's *Donbass*

How does the late socialist world in film and the style employed in filmmaking compare to that of the contemporary postdigital age? There are, of course, today many avant-garde, experimental, postmodern and post-postmodern directors who employ non-narrative techniques in their filmmaking. These directors, however, belong—or are categorized by the cinema studies establishment—as video, media or multimedia artists who often employ intermediality to cross borders between several kinds of arts. We might mention here contemporary artists such as Ho Tzu Nyen, but also artists who come primarily from a filmmaking background such as Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica. Since we have seen the way in which non-linearity and non-narrative media pertain to or affect cinema and cinema-making, let us consider briefly the way in which Balayan's and Daneliuc's films compare to Sergey Loznitsa's *Donbass* for reasons that I hope will become apparent shortly.

Produced in 2018 *Donbass* is a collage film, that is, a narrative made up of non-narrative or mini-narrative segments—vignettes if you will—that purport to describe Russia's totalitarian occupation of Eastern Ukraine. To make this point, *Donbass* combines diverse media-specific forms of storytelling: In the first place, we observe the presence of the TV-documentary style in the scene in which refugees in an underground shelter address the camera to describe their difficult living conditions. This thereafter changes into what can be described as a style proprietary to the essay film: The scene in which anti-aircraft guns are being moved around a field outside of a village without voice over commentary comes to mind. Finally, there is fiction. However, this fiction is distinctly non-linear, since it does not integrate directly into the atmosphere created previously except as a *tableau* in a series of sketches meant to tell the story through accumulation. These are, of course, the staged scenes such as the meeting between a civil servant and a delegation gifting the representative of the local government with an icon to motivate the killing of civilians, or the equally disturbing scene in which a Ukrainian is exposed by Russian separatists in a public square with a cardboard hanging around his neck as an ensign representing the evilness of Ukrainian nationalism.

What this conglomerate of scenes and styles does for the audience is break up the narrative—in postmodern style—to express the fragmentariness of a world in which occupants and locals are caught in an irrational chaos from which nationalism and ethnic hatred are featured as the only clear presence. However, the employment of postmodern techniques in this case does not so much point *verbatim* to the fragmentariness of the world they purport to describe: Behind the surface lies a clearly modernist and altogether classic message, namely that war is inhuman, nationalism is dangerous, and, despite the push of postmodernism to acknowledge the values of humanism at large, however convoluted these may be, what still dominates the nature of humanity is tribalism and primary instincts. Furthermore, Loznitsa makes obvious that it is equally politics, particularly totalitarian politics, that is to be blame for leading people astray by encouraging these primary instincts in the first place. In other words, just as in the case of Mikhalkov's *Burnt by the Sun*, postmodernism has become more univocal than the modernism it purportedly developed against.

Despite *Donbass's* critical position relative to the war in Ukraine, Loznitsa's film is therefore ideological. If post-modernism represented indeed the death of master narratives, featured the fragmentation of plotlines and the self-reflexivity of the medium, what we see with Loznitsa (and this is apparent in the career of the Ukrainian director since at least *Blockade*) is the paradoxical return to the tenets of socialist realism, in which modernism blended with classicism—according to Boris Groys—in using visuals to promote a political and ideological message. Praised for its non-linearity (Leslie Felperin calls the film "high art house") and its unorthodox treatment of storyline, *Donbass* embodies from this point of view the "epochal shift" in filmmaking that Thomas Elsaesser identifies in the transition from mimetic to a digital archive-based representational style. (Elsaesser) However, what needs to be pointed out is that *Donbass* uses the prerogatives of non-linearity to in fact promote a clear political thesis, and in that it is more linear in structure than it may appear at first glance. When compared to Balayan's film, which can hardly be said to "push" its message forward, or with the poetic style of Daneliuc, Loznitsa's film is clearly less self-reflexive, less philosophical, and even less postmodern. Although it hails from a tradition such as that employed by Balayan in making *Flights in Dreams and Reality*, a tradition that goes back to the post-socialist-realist thaw-enabled sixties of Marlen Khutsiev's *July Rain* or Georgiy Daneliya's *I Walk the Streets of Moscow*, *Donbass* cheats, so to speak, as its adherence to postmodernism is doubtful.

Why is it important to underline the similarity between Foucault's heterotopia and non-linear storytelling while relating them to late socialist filmmaking in the Eastern bloc? Because by examining more closely the art of socialist-era directors we can trace a direct connection between the current age of post-digital storytelling and the style created by socialist affect. By affect I mean, as in Zinoviev's non-disparaging term "homo sovieticus," a certain way of relating to the world that is more dialectical than the condition inspired by the ideology of capitalism according to which the lack of restrictions in political expression represents the pinnacle of creative freedom. By linking the apparently unrelated ages of post-linearity and socialist-era filmmaking we obtain therefore a methodological tool that allows us to revisit and explore the socio-political character of a period that is still massively misunderstood. Moreover, when tracing the ontology of non-linearity, the comparison between post-postmodern media and the magic realist character of late socialist-era filmmaking forces us to see the closer connections between them that obeisance to what Frederic Jameson called the logic of late capitalism precludes us from seeing.

Indeed, it is worth mentioning in closing that Jameson's capitalist hegemony has repeatedly forced us to read a majority of cultural products originating in the Eastern Bloc (aside from the dissident ones) as uniquely propagandistic. With the fall of Berlin's Wall, it is still Jameson's logic that allows any discourses to percolate to the top of the (now global) cultural establishment *as long as* they are univocally *against* the Communist project. The popularity of Loznitsa and Mikhalkov is undoubtedly due primarily to this logic. The side effect of this thinking (and capitalist media practice) is the straightforward denial of the right of existence to any non-anticommunist products originating in the topos and time of socialism. The work of Daneliuc and Balayan does not endure today for its anticommunist stance, even though in the case of the Romanian director, his ideology became increasingly anti-establishment in the 1980s. Their work endures because it exists in a space of its own, a space demarcated by the oblique lines created by the meeting between "East" and "West," and by a contestation of both socialist and capitalist practices as long as these practices subject the individual to the power of the system.

Linking the two together therefore forces us to look at sources other than Western modernism and postmodernism as roots of inspiration for the post-digital age. Just as Russian formalism is hailed as a precursor of modernism and the avant-garde, we should not let our ideological dis-infatuation with real-existing socialism in the Eastern bloc cloud our

understanding of post-digital ontology, and obscure our ability to look for other possible origins of the non-linear project celebrated universally today as embodying the future of expression in art. If socialist-era cinema of the latter period used the principles of non-linearity from an almost organic determination to respond to politics by creating its own non-ideological visuals, the so-called non-linear cinema of postsocialism represents—as in the case of *Donbass*—a paradoxical (yet unacknowledged) return to the values of an ideology that continues to be reviled on the surface, yet whose propagandist methodology in the meantime continues to be employed.

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