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Changing Notions of Realism in Russian Primetime TV Drama and Film

Fig. 1

By way of an epigraph: The opening scene from Ivan Vyrypaev's *Euphoria* (2006). A mentally troubled man is placed upon a motorcycle by a group of mocking children. Initially terrified, his face soon turns to dumb, pitiful ecstasy as he accelerates out of earshot... A forked road approaches. Where to now? Driven by the cruel words of others, our *bogatyr* shoots with all-consuming passion into the very wilderness that petrified him twenty seconds ago.

Introduction: Objections to a Jakobsonian View of Storytelling

In prior decades, socialist media repeatedly boasted to the outside world that nobody reads more than their citizens; nowadays, opinion polls reveal with marked frequency that more than half of Russia's public has read little or no literature in recent memory. There's no need to panic, though. What I would like to suggest is that recent television has worked to the *benefit* of the printed page; at the risk sounding wantonly contrary, I'll also show how Russia's enduring logocentrism *obliges* us, oddly enough, to embrace the moving image—to both our hermeneutic and pedagogical advantage.

The classic defense against TV's lesser genres makes recourse to Jakobson's "literariness," to the eternally productive disruptions of defamiliarization, its post-Kantian fissure between a cohesive subjectivity "and something *else*" (Holquist and Kilger 614; emphasis in original). Jakobson's bold claims that poetry could domesticate that disruption (and thus approximate a synonymy of word and object) struggle today to fend off barbed, Kleistian objections.¹ It is precisely the disagreement between these views—the persistent cleft between meaning and truth—that I'd like to suggest as a *solution* to the related rift between high and low genres, between elite and mass forms of storytelling in Russia since the 1998 default.

Let's begin by forcing that gap a little wider. Jakobsonian views of linguistic lacunae—that is, the fruitful interdependence of system and *non*-system—were later expanded via Lotman's recourse to earth scientist Vladimir Vernadskii (Alexandrov, "Biology" 349 and 358).² Whilst shunning the extremism of Vernadskii's noosphere, I myself have argued elsewhere (*Russian Television Today*, Chapter 5) that these parallels between signifying structures and ecocritical concepts were vital even for more orthodox Soviet creativity, for Gor'kii himself (Taliev 66) and for Vernadskii's contemporary, Stanchinskii. Both saw Russia's parklands or *zapovedniki* as pedagogical tools. Akin to Jakobson's interest in aphasia, in language's quiddity as revealed by its limits (Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language"),³ so the ecosphere materialized both aspirations to socialist universality and the exception or ineffable gap therein which must *constitute* that endlessness. In 1930, for example, the Academy of Sciences' journal *Nature* was accused as "the only journal where you can turn a thousand pages and never encounter the terms 'socialism,' 'communism,' 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' *etc.*" (Nemilov 64).

So what does this designation of nature as *the* gap mean now, for semantic possibility after the Kantian critical turn and its normalized questioning (Zizek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism* 27)? Staying with the artful formulation of literariness as "something else," a Lacanian assumption will serve us well, namely there is nothing that is not matter, *ergo* "not-all" is matter.⁴ This faux-idealist twist allows for a non-reductionist view of substance; it allows us to usher in Heidegger, Deleuze, and Badiou, so that we may bestow upon immaterial phenomena a positive non-presence. The "something else" of Jakobson's formula becomes a fine, post-Marxist rehabilitation of appearance (Zizek, *The Parallax View* 165-6). Badiou's view of poetry supports this: stripped of any external object of reference, a poem "declares from *end to end* its own universe" ("Que pense le poème?")

221; emphasis in original); it shifts away from meaning towards the approximation of a truth statement.

Fig. 2

This opens up what Agamben in 1999 called the “hardest and bitterest experience possible: the experience of potentiality” (178), a universalizing power he now sees embodied in Anna Akhmatova’s endless, bitter ability to say “I can” in dead-end situations. This capacity, between constituting and constituent power,⁵ is something I’ve tried to capture over several years’ work with Akhmatova’s archives in the National Library of Russia, in particular with her *Poèma bez geroia*, since there is no canonical version of the work, not one published redaction free from errors. Here, using Textarc software, we can overlay the multiple attempts to *keep* writing *Poèma bez geroia*, to prejudice a process (that is, the gap) and not a goal; to keep saying “I can.” This, to quote a line of which Badiou himself is fond, becomes Rimbaud’s *Je navigue sur l’arc des voyages qui ne commencent jamais* (Badiou, “L’Age des poètes” 32). The enunciator lessens as a concrete point, fluctuating amid endless displacements or anti-humanist becomings—the baroque, spiraling flux beyond speech that informed Lotman’s geochemical analogies.⁶

Russian literature today, popular or otherwise, is riddled with traumatic reconsiderations of this gap between meaning and truth in a materialized, lumpen idiom to the point where the alleged origin of humanist enunciation—the body itself—is frequently, literally dismembered by the competition between effable stasis and silent unrest.⁷ The enduring significance of the Petersburg text, its urban, lithic materialization of the ideal, speaks to this, as do endless, bitter mockeries of the socialist synonymy between form and content.⁸ It’s precisely this dilemma, the ever-absent object of desire created *by* language that I’ll investigate here; the diffusive trajectory from—let’s say—Pierce to a Spinozistic, environmental plenitude that marks Deleuze’s materialization of the cinematic sign, too.⁹

This trajectory has moved into *television*, purportedly Russian literature's most recent "nemesis"; it has shifted from the metonymical blocks of prose, full of audible gaps, to the intertextual filigree of TV's *visible* medium of "flow" (Williams 90).

Even today, the mythology of massed reading in USSR (Lovell 22) leaves a great number of "high literary modalities" on television (Hutchings 305).¹⁰ They inform the word-image debate in ways that bring us back yet again to Lotman, to his fourth stage of intercultural dialogue, in which imported texts "are dissolved in the receiving culture, which [then] begins to produce *new texts*" (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 147; emphasis in original). Advancing literature's troubled talk of social membership, they can move beyond deictic conceptions of enunciation altogether. In doing so, TV nonetheless still remains closer to writing than speech (since nobody answers), whilst bypassing metonymy with what Metz called "a demonstrative '*Voici*'" ("Impersonal Enunciation" 756). The question remains, however, whether television, cinema's sickly offspring, can sidestep the dangers of what Deleuze termed its "function of control and power, the dominance of [TV's] medium shot" (72) or (if we unpack his punning) its dumb and safe middle ground—the *plan moyen*.¹¹

Fig. 3: Siberian wilderness

Fig. 4: Communicative patterns of Austrian cellphone users

Fig. 5: Poster for *Relations*

The Role of Sound in Effecting Presence

As our discipline tries to name these "hybrid" characteristics of new Slavic storytelling, as constituted by TV or more mobile forms like videocasting, one problem immediately arises: Russia's size makes a mockery of any *plan moyen* with spoken aspirations to reflect the semiosphere.¹² As a recent study of Siberia's polar grandeur suggests, "Russia's huge size is not a strength; it is a disadvantage that has to be overcome" (Hill and Gaddy 25). Here, as an example of this communicative problem, is an axonometric image showing the busy attempts of Austrian cellphone users to map an inostensible, fluid,

and social identity across their own frigid emptiness.¹³ In this year's acclaimed Russian film *Relations* (*Sviaz'*, 2006), Dunia Smirnova depicts precisely two such "mapmakers," Il'ia and Nina. The permanence of physical, conjugal contact is too risky for unfaithful people with spouses at home... so they text and call. The hero, Mikhail Porechenkov, says he just wants "someone at home to talk to." He can withstand the physical absence of his lover, but the dearth of sound, of phone calls, is too much—so he drinks himself stupid in a silent, snowbound zoo, next to a caged, pacing polar bear.

This social detachment, underscored by dropped phone calls, trails into deathly silence over the film's final minutes, when the most important thing of all leaves—someone to talk to.¹⁴ Sound engineer Lev Ezhov makes this clear: the protagonists' voices are barely audible. Words uttered more than fifteen feet from the camera fade away, only to be lost completely on railway platforms or in airport terminals.

There is a marked irony here in Smirnova's contemporary reflections on absent speech and music, on the very first lack or *deficiency* that cinema experienced in its evocation of a complete and inclusive reality. Smirnova's film of slow reduction considers a medium that amplifies and extends the cinematic experience. Thanks to contemporary amplification techniques, our auditory experience nowadays is extended physically from the screen to other points around the auditorium—and then, as *passe-muraille*, beyond the walls themselves if it's too loud.¹⁵ The work of the sound engineer and composer broaden the superfield of a film most dramatically, after positioning their audience in the *middle* of the narrative. We are in the middle of what we hear, yet remain looking straight ahead. Semantic omniety is not deeply sustained by the visual.¹⁶

Fig. 6: Dolby-equipped Moscow theater

Fig. 7: St. Petersburg's Avrora theater undergoing an upgrade

Fig. 8: Provincial movie theater

Fig. 9: Rural television antenna

Who enjoys this sense of technically-engendered inclusion today? In the mid-1990s Russia had approximately 200 Dolby-equipped theaters; that number now stands at around one thousand. Yet in the world's biggest country, with its core population huddled in one Western corner, not all these cinemas are accessible. More than half of all modernized movie theaters are in the thirteen urban centers that have more than a million residents; most people, though, live in places where they're more likely to run into our polar bears than urbane lovebirds. Fifty-four percent of Russians, for example, have access to a mere six percent of technically adept cinemas. Consequently they stay at home and watch TV, where two-thirds of the nation can (just about) pick up four terrestrial TV stations with an external antenna. A quarter of rural Russia, in fact, can only see two channels—and a good 1.7 million people can't see anything at all ("K 2015 godu"). No wonder Siberia and the Urals stand directly behind Moscow in cell-phone usage.

Extension towards a Literary Realism *Redux*

The need here for *extension* is evident; the extension of an on-screen experience in ways that both address and tell stories about *fixing* the communicative gaps of a nation whose eleven time zones defy "outdated, inadequate, and low-density" telephone services on a daily basis (*CIA Factbook: Russia*). Cinematic extension deputizes for a bigger, better inclusiveness. After all, Russia's population lessens by 100 people each hour. The world's biggest country is slowly emptying. Recently suggested corrective measures—such as polygamy, drinking less, or wearing seatbelts (Eke) have yet to make a difference.

Fig. 10: DVD cover for *The Icon Hunters*

Fig. 11: Andrei Smoliakov

The synonymy of extension with veracity (with a fuller and, therefore, fairer "realism") is an old, familiar aspect of Russian storytelling, which is why 19th-century novels

are so big. The 2004 drama *The Icon Hunters* (*Okhotniki za ikonami*; dir. Sergei Popov) addressed the discrepancy between endlessness and the audible words needed to name (that is, *end*) it. Two art thieves go deep into the wilderness, hunting for a priceless icon. They travel as far as possible from the big city; distance from the metropolis becomes a distance back in time. This is, as with communication across modern Siberia, also a distance from the definable. The conman Begun (played by Andrei Smoliakov) says at one point: “Russia is inexhaustible. Everybody thinks that’s she’s a... container of some sort, but she’s... she’s *oh*, so big!”

As Mikhail Epstein notes: “This void is terrifying. Nature, the proverb notwithstanding, does not abhor a vacuum, but humans do. In Russia, we all seem to suffer from a love-hate complex towards space.” Epstein draws upon Gogol’s famous carriage at the end of *Dead Souls* and its headlong rush into the hinterlands—all at the behest of a garrulous government. “Is this a flight into space or *from* space? It is both. Having rushed into the void, people try as quickly as possible to hurl themselves out of its invisible surroundings, to prevail, to reach a firm boundary, a crowded refuge” (280).

Fig. 12: DVD cover for *The Case of the Dead Souls*

Fig. 13: Street sign in *The Case of the Dead Souls*

Television drama, keen to develop broadly-communicable metaphors of self-definition, illustrates this well. Pavel Lungin’s eight-episode Gogolian fantasy, *The Case of the Dead Souls* (*Delo o mertvykh dushakh*, 2005), plays upon the very same passage quoted by Epstein. These cherished, oft-quoted cultural clichés have enormous relevance for people who *constitute* (that is, speak of) that same culture. The danger of enthusiastic, sometimes patriotic platitudes, though, (even the adorably self-deprecating ones) is that they can fall foul of their own expansiveness, of a scale inspired *by* the world’s greatest natural expanse.

This happens in Lungin’s TV series. A government envoy travels to unknown villages in the middle of nowhere in order to bring law, order, and other loudly-spoken dictates to the

criminal case of some missing peasants, these “dead souls.” After some disproportionate wining and dining, he jumps into a makeshift wagon and declares his intention to grace this hushed backwater with Saint Petersburg’s policies. Horribly drunk, he gets ready to whip a horse into action and bring his chosen criminal back to reality. Within ten seconds, the horse has slowed to a lazy trot and its rider is sound asleep. The horse, however, keeps going... Spurred into initial action by its big-talking rider, the animal strolls off into unmapped, darkening forests. There, say two locals, beyond any maps, ravenous wolves and dreadful roads await him, “for such is the law of nature.”

Fig. 14: Talk show host Andrei Malakhov

Fig. 15: TV series *The Beloved* (*Zhelannaia*, 2003)

Fig. 16: TV series *To the Beat of the Tango* (*V ritme tango*, 2006)

Similar attempts at chasing and capturing a real, natural or engaging reality have occupied Russian TV drama for the last few years. As recently as 1999-2000 only 5% of nationally broadcast series were made domestically; today almost 100 new and different dramas appear per annum. In 2005, a total of 538 TV series, miniseries and soap operas (old or new) were shown on Russian TV; eight years prior, that cumulative figure was only 103 (Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal 89). One continuity in this snowballing state of affairs is that criminal dramas still outnumber melodramas, yet central to even the most violent stories is the “crisis of the [modern Russian] family as an institution” (Kachkaeva). So how do Smirnova’s hushed, cinematic metaphors transfer to domestic video technologies designed for *ludic* activity? (Gaver; Barkhuus, Rode, and Bell 54).

Music: Movement beyond a Troubled Lexicon

Well-funded cinema (or its replication on rural TVs) often reattempts these failed extensions of a socialist actuality, an *apolitical* dream of the great unwashed who yearned, just like the hero of Fedor Gladkov’s *Cement*, for “a world more boundless than it was for

Spinoza.” This sense of cinematic extension, of involvement in a “redone” reality is something I have often investigated via music.¹⁷ After all, an emotionally compelling tale needs to *reemploy already-familiar* feelings in order to go beyond purely linguistic means that are unable to match experiential plenitude. Language alone, faced by the inexpressible, becomes repetitious, both in its failure to designate its object, and in its fruitless returns to a plenitude *prior* to itself—as an “oceanic regression” (Adorno 90-1).¹⁸ Soviet journals, despite their bold Dargomyzhkian synonymies of music, “truth and words,” likewise made frequent, fruitless recourse to semantic devaluation, factual exaggeration, false euphemisms, and equally bogus dysphemisms (Kroupová 257).¹⁹ Rhythm, dynamics, tempo, and pitch detached themselves from the lexicon and connected instead with physiology, with a heartbeat, a pulse or inhalation (Kalinak 3-19). Music employed the repetitions of abortive speech and turned the sounds of its diminishing lexical significance into increasing *affective* or *harmonious* extension, not unlike the “utopian expansion” of Hollywood musicals or romantic comedies, for example.²⁰ For, as Badiou puts it: “love begins where politics ends” (*Metapolitics* 151).

But how real is the *Affektenlehre* here, its ability to mimic our presence in a vococentric tradition *after* linguistic specificity stops? After all, cinema’s music of affective, boundless engagement is acousmatic or non-diegetic—it’s not there. In 19th-century melodrama, dialogue was likewise punctuated by musical interludes from outside, from the pit—to help us enjoy the verisimilitude on *stage*. The tools that plaster the gaps or montage in support of a story’s continuity (*its presence*) aren’t in it.²¹

Fig. 17: Solzhenitsyn’s *The First Circle* (*V krughe pervom*, 2006)

One good example of music’s evocation of co-presence *within* absence marked the 2006 TV adaptation of Solzhenitsyn’s *The First Circle* (*V krughe pervom*; dir. Gleb Panfilov). Our shared historical experience is invited *before* (that is, beyond) the start of each episode

with songs of the late 1930s and 1940s. This decade is mapped with the strident jollity of ditties by Pokrass, Dunaevskii, Shvartsman, Lebedev-Kumach, and others, but the first and last episodes showcase the rousing anthem “Russia” of 1947 by Novikov and Alymov. Essentially an obsequious celebration of Stalin as the “ancient knight and father of the Soviet people,” this song nonetheless needs to draw upon something *greater* than the Kremlin and its residents in order really to convey that mighty paternalism. Alymov’s lyrics employ the “unfettered and beautiful land” that is Russia and then—in turn—one country is compared to the bigger sky, to the sun, and “a *boundless*, blossoming expanse of *infinite* fields” (emphasis added). The specific words of policy need to draw first upon Russia’s environment, followed by the immateriality of the heavens (of nothing in particular). This endless slippage of a spoken or sung nationalism is tied to *loss*, to anti-relational boundlessness.²²

In the more patriotic of TV dramas today, Putin’s narratives of socialist dignity *redux* are likewise designed to fill an empty nation and/or voided nature. They work both verbally *and* visually, contemplating the ineffable or undoable, and in doing so they unavoidably bump up against their representational limitations. With regard to this issue, in my study of Russian animated film I showed how the screenplays of many Soviet cartoons, facing the same problem, grew *smaller* over time (*Yellow Crocodiles*, Chapter 8). Language considered its limits; ideas of social extension grew less effable and more musical—often punctuated with quietly occasional, rhythmic noises. What Soviet storytelling wanted most of all, just like Gladkov’s hero, was an *anti-statist déliaison*, an unbonding tied to nothing. Thus, it now comes to Moscow’s TV from the middle of nowhere, one or two people at a time, as an occasional family or lonesome polar bear, because it was *supposed* to belong to nobodies—to those “who [once upon a time] had *nothing* to lose” except their chains.

Length: Movement beyond a Final Page

Fig. 18: DVD cover to *Airport* (2006)

Fig. 19: *Doctor Zhivago* (2006)

Recent attempts by Russian TV at an organic, minorized, and yet *extended* reality have experimented with both music and *length*. Here TV has a clear advantage over cinema; take, for example, this year's *Airport* (*Aèroport*; dir. Egor Grammatikov and Aleksandr Gur'ianov) that will eventually run to 120 episodes. The series deliberately chose a large group of unknown actors, allegedly not from financial considerations, but the desire for increased realism; approximately 250 thespians were squeezed into a terminal at Moscow's Vnukovo airport. By removing any big "stars," *Airport* could thus move closer to an actual "living organism" ("Na tom kontse"). This cheaper and organic serial (which, in its own words, had no pretensions to "the level of Spielberg") would in fact go head to head with a brand-new, very pricey adaptation of *Doctor Zhivago* (dir. Aleksandr Proshkin) on national TV—and do very well indeed (Vorob'eva; Shadrina, "Chto modno"). Size, it seems, does matter.

Fig. 20: Sergei Garmash and Elena Iakovleva (*Kamenskaia*)

Yet does this have a limit, too, beyond which *unmanaged*, endless TV series will no longer be convincingly real? One joke concerning the long-running detective series *Kamenskaia* (dir. Iurii Moroz, 1999-2003; Aleksandr Aravin, 2004-) certainly suggested as much. It goes as follows: the actor Sergei Garmash, having learned that *Kamenskaia* would "enjoy" a fifth series, begged to be shot dead in the fourth. Elena Iakovleva, who plays the eponymous heroine, was scared of being left with minor actors if Garmash left, and so she threw herself in front of his bullet (Shadrina, "Ne v pervom kruge")

Fig. 21: *The Zone* (2006)

One of the best examples on Russian television of a domestically produced series that addresses this problem is this year's *The Zone* (*Zona*; dir. Petr Shtein), which although initially limited to a run of 50 episodes, neither numbers nor names those episodes on screen. What results is an atypically small space (a single prison) and lots more time, all in the attempt, like *Airport*, to capture a less edited view of collective subjectivity.

The following quote, taken from Tarkovskii's film *Stalker* (1979) is used for promoting the series: "The colony is not a territory, but a test. A man can either withstand this test, or be broken by it. His ability to withstand it depends on his sense of self-worth and an ability to distinguish between importance and transience." The stories used to bring these two phrases to life were taken *from* life, from real memories of real prisoners.

The Zone begins with the suspicious suicide of a prison officer, an occurrence that takes on increasingly criminal overtones with each and every installment. As is already evident, the lines between fact and stately fustian are blurred; this is without doubt the one series in recent years that would trouble the Russian State more than any other, for the authorities are shown as malicious, scheming, and frequently lacking the honor of thieves. The role of one of the main officers was even played by a real-life ex-convict. Law and order sit side by side, because—in the words of director Petr Shtein: "Prison is a parallel world that nobody wants to acknowledge, but it *does* exist.; the line between our world and that of the prison is so fine, anyone could transgress it in a split second" ("Televidenie")

Fig. 22: *The Zone*

Shtein's tales of transgression meant that the writers had to sneak their texts past the internal censorship of the prison system (Strekhova). Their success in preserving anecdotes intact led the show's producers to declare *The Zone* the first TV series in Russia based on documentary evidence, or at least so close to actuality that the line between drama and "some kind of reality show" was invisible (Kostenko; "Serial o tiur'me"). Authorship was handed

over to (that is, extended to) a multitude of nobodies; their collective narratives, truthful only *en masse*, would undermine the predominance of anybody's singular language, especially the bare-faced hypocrisy of the Law or the loopholes in its own, frequently abused tenets.

The law responded very quickly. NTV was “asked” to broadcast the show later at night (11:30pm), but it fought its way back to primetime. Several papers said the time shift was enacted at Putin's personal request, as—perhaps—was NTV's decision to cut the total number of episodes from 100 to 50. Many people were upset by this apparent censorship, since *The Zone* was enjoying a 20% audience share, pulling in more viewers than the President's press conferences (Borodina; “Vek voli ne vidat”). Some provincial prisoners even threatened to slash their wrists if not allowed to watch the show. Conversely, prison officers wrote to the national press with a more resistant reading, angrily declaring that *The Zone* “crudely distorts reality.” It calls into question the “honor and dignity of hundreds of thousands of people who work with prisoners. These people fulfill one of the most difficult state functions: the correction of those who have *transgressed* the law” (Abdullin; emphasis in original).

Sounds, Pure and Simple: An Extension beyond Music

Fig. 23: *Hedgehog in the Fog*

And so we slip from reality's extension into transgression, which leads me to suggest that what I've said so far about an emotional actuality, based on prior research, may be wrong (or at least insufficient). A slightly different phonic approach might begin thus: In *The Zone*, several of the officers say their lives would be groundless without the existence of an assigned, opposing “enemy.” One of them, making reference to a classic Soviet cartoon, says that outside of the prison he would be “lost, just like that little hedgehog in the fog.” A brief look at that animated film of 1975 (*Hedgehog in the Fog* [*Ezhik v tumane*; dir. Iurii

Norshtein]) reminds us of a foggy, boundless realm, mapped by our spiky hero with squeaks, grunts, and whispers. These repeated noises first evoke empathy in the viewer, and then a repeated challenge to “play along.” As a result, the fault or lack is fixed and the audience answers the inclusive, repetitive challenges of the film’s socializing intent.

This may sound like radical apoliticism or solipsism, but that orchestration of noises was explicitly celebrated in the Soviet press as a coincidence of sentimental animation and the socializing work of the Party (“Trebuiutsia”). Thus, just beyond the last page of the lexicon, there developed a tradition of feasible, iterative or rhythmically emotional sounds that gradually invited viewers into a harmonious, organic state beyond any atomizing notions of selfhood. Today’s *écouterisme* masochistically toys with this object of its desire, with diffusive, organic metaphors of incorporating *all* viewers, prisoners and murderers included... and then timidly harkens to a pre-linguistic childhood.²³

Fig. 24: *Doctor Zhivago* **Fig. 25:** Eduard Artem'ev

The gap resident in excess is both sought *and* feared. No recent series has spoken to the interplay of veracity, music, the ineffable, and a transgressive extension of materialist inclusion than Aleksandr Proshkin’s \$4 million version of *Doctor Zhivago*, which aired in May 2006. The series is consistently aware of David Lean’s imposing benchmark, most evidently in the sweeping orchestral score by Èduard Artem'ev. This is the composer responsible for three of Tarkovskii’s films, *Solaris* (1972), *The Mirror* (1975), and *Stalker* (1980). More recently, his big-screen successes have included eight films for Nikita Mikhalkov, including the Oscar-winning *Burnt by the Sun* (*Utomlennye solntsem*, 1994).

Fig. 26: ANS synthesizer and sketch by Filonov
Fig. 27: Promotional images for Andrei Konchalovskii’s *Siberiade* (1978) and Leonid Gaidai’s *Diamond Arm* (1968)

Artem'ev is often called upon to make TV’s small, unconvincing screen sound bigger and more real, if not the “way it should be.”²⁴ He began doing so four decades ago with the

ANS synthesizer, recently on display in St. Petersburg's Russian Museum, where its photo-optic generator realizes the full, missing meaning in between Pavel Filonov's lines as sound. Audibly augmenting other inscriptions, the ANS would later be canonized in the soundtracks of both rural epics and screwball comedy, verbalizing the latent actuality of ineffable *paysage* and implausible slapstick. Artem'ev says this use of TV music and its affective extension was meticulously fashioned with Tarkovskii. The director would tell Artem'ev outright that he did *not* want music *per se*, but "atmosphere alone. Just the organization of [ANS] sounds and noises" (Petrov). This approach underscored Tarkovskii's so-called realism of observation, of watching (not managing) a *longue durée* in order "to prepare a person for death" (Tarkovsky 43; 203-4). These organic rhythms were, as in *Zhivago*, colored by the need to "repeat within the materialist frame the elementary gesture of idealist *anti-reductionism*" (Zizek, *Parallax View* 166). Tarkovskii's and Pasternak's phonic arrangements, their respective poetics, are a removal of specificity, even of active agency, to the point where storytelling becomes mere observation of wholeness: "an infinity of attributes" (Badiou, *Deleuze* 25).

Fig. 28: *The Zone*

We're so close to Spinozistic territory again that we can see why the number and nature of speakers in *The Zone* likewise takes on an awful significance for politics. It shies from an anti-reductionist realism just as the Soviets quickly shied from Engels' early praise for the "brilliance" of Spinoza—or Lenin's suggestions that the proletariat study the harmonious, selfless plexus of nature (Vandek and Timosko 37-8; 79). This scary maximalism is a non-progressive, affective, all embracing complexity, the ecologically complex univocity that politics could only ever imagine. It is a plurality that *creates* a core subjectivity, just as *The Zone* and *Airport* are not stories of people initiating actions so much

as multiple events making people; Tarkovskii's noises are, similarly, the music *of* organicity, not a harmony *given* it.

Fig. 29: *The Zone*

The slow deconstruction of semantic rhythms on the edge of plenitude, the extension of a reality beyond lucid prose and even music itself into “sounds and noises,” sometimes hints at an *anxiety* over any need to *transgress* them. This is the worrying realism beyond causality, since in the face of utter plenitude—with no gap any more—there can be no desire (since there's nothing left *to* desire or defamiliarize). Only apprehension remains beforehand, the quintessential state of somebody faced with an absolute, the agoraphobia of prison officers who nervously ponder childhood hedgehogs before going outdoors. Beyond their sadness is desire; beyond *desire*, however, is the post-affective anxiousness of a confrontation with everything—that is, with *too much*.

Geography Frustrates the Sounds Used to Map It

Fig. 30: DVD cover for *Esenin*

Over and over again this illogicality, the unspeakable fullness of actuality, is handed over to the paradoxes of Russia's ecosphere: its size and the synonymy of everything with nothing, shown by the eleven-episode TV biopic about *the* Soviet poet of the countryside—*Esenin* (dir. Igor' Zaitsev, 2005). Despite being funded by Channel One, the primary mouthpiece for a Kremlin-friendly worldview, this series first embraces, but then outruns any practical ideas we hear from today's Duma. It does so in ways taken *from* the musical, naturally and/or biologically harmonious metaphors of Soviet literature.

Fig. 31: Poster for *Esenin* Fig. 32: *Esenin*

The first thing Esenin looks for after imprisonment is his “dear, native” accordion; when he is attacked by his soon-to-be murderers, he uses the same tool of concord to beat

back the secret police physically. Later he says: “I love my homeland, you see? There’s no way I can live without her. I love her grey skies and landscape. It is the *landscape* that gave us Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoi, and Dostoevskii.” He stands alone on a hilltop, surveys the interminable countryside that “gave birth” to the sounds of literature and says, in our time-honored Spinozistic mode, “Forgive us, Lord.” This is a sense of idealist guilt within a materialist heritage, *heard* by a quiet poet in a state of *écoute réduite*. The real is asked for forgiveness, since it has not been done justice.

Fig. 33: Poster for *Company 9*

The uneasy rush of cinema today, funded by TV, towards scientifically, realistically “perfect” sound is best shown by the huge sums lavished on Fedor Bondarchuk’s Pinewood engineers for the revisionist epic *Company 9* (*9-ia rota*, 2005). The result was dismissed as a mess, the cacophony of a dying generation’s swansong—of a failed past (Korneev; Puchkov; Kishkovsky). Thus, we can conclude that Bondarchuk’s chase for phonic perfection and Gleb Panfilov’s hunt for Solzhenitsyn’s historically “accurate” songs both skirt a much older and bigger issue of actuality’s full re-presentation in the world’s biggest, emptiest country.²⁵

Silence: Irony and Anxiety in the Face of Absolute Plenitude

Fig. 34: *The Zone*

For all that I have said elsewhere about the nomadic or rhizomatic workings of desirous, affectively driven art forms under threat from dogmatic policy (for example, *Èstrada* 161-181), it seems that *anxiety* is now more important than the promise of any orchestrated, amicable harmonies. Hence the reason that *The Zone*, after approximately fifteen episodes, stops being scary and starts being funny; the use of irony is very widespread indeed in Russian TV drama—to show unrealistic expectations of legal justice or personal

success. Music and song underscore this.²⁶ Non-diegetic song, as we so often see amid the hopes and fears of Western romantic comedies, “exceeds the emotional range” of characters though ironic reference to their failings,²⁷ through “bisociation” or their failed words.²⁸ This irony is now sadly slipping into anxiety, as suggested by the uneasy giggling of TV prisoners.

Fig. 35: *Doctor Zhivago* **Fig. 36:** Siberian icefloes

It would seem, therefore, that the promise of *Zhivago*'s extended harmonies might never be realized. This, after all, is a TV-tale of unspeakable risk, of a realism *au Bazin* or identity beyond humanism, of long takes, deep focus, primordial pagan partisans, and a girl whose name need only be spoken aloud for “the whole of Zhivago's life, all of God's earth *and* its sunlit space to spread out before him.”²⁹ Yet there comes a point when it's just too much, which is a tragic attitude towards grand social membership from a country so anxious about its own surroundings that it dare not have children any more. Even polar bears don't reproduce in zoos; they resort to pacing, to an obsessive *fort-da* or feral music of consoling failure. Driven by the sounds of Esenin's soothsaying crows and Gogol's starving wolves that define the purportedly natural laws of the land, TV has hoped (one day) to isolate the absolute *immanence* of plenitude beyond the building blocks of language.³⁰ Since, however, language and the R/real merge only *in* the unnamable, you may as well go and drink quietly with the polar bears, too.³¹

As if that weren't bad enough, the Spinozistic diffusion I describe,³² this retro-rush for socialist plenitude, is *awfully* close to the homogenizing economies of late capitalism. Likewise, “recall the predominant attitude [today, as with Mark Foley] which replaces punishment and responsibility with illumination of the causes of our socially unacceptable behavior (‘guilt’ is nothing but a term for my ignorance of the [countless] causes which drove me into destructive behavior)” (Žižek, *Tarrying* 218). If what drives this plenitude, paradoxically, is some superego insistence that we *must enjoy*, then the ludic aspects of

domesticated visual technologies (of TV more than cinema) take on a new, ominous form. They undermine and deterritorialize the traditional, familial groups whose demise they purportedly mourn,³³ as in the sanctimonious, and yet profitable primetime news coverage of Foley's spiraling demise.³⁴ Similarly, the domesticated, scripted, scored, and lucrative reality of Russian TV is whistling its way round a nasty, tight turn. Just as Dargomyzhsky *et al* would one day abandon the mimetic potential of harmonized language, of an *opéra dialogué*, so the same fate may await an aurally-evoked or vococentric realism (Taruskin 454).

Fig. 37: Nina and Il'ia (*Relations*)

Today's reconstituted Russia, fuelled by socialist tales of expansion, *overshoots* its own limits in a *post*-Soviet habitus where family, "'neighborhood' and 'nation' only make sense in the ['diffused'] concerns of consumer capitalism" (Thornham and Purvis 158). The sounds of "patriotic" Russian cinema have been domesticated and now made mobile, for example by six TV stations on cellphone networks in Siberia and the Urals.³⁵ Their retrospective fictions and prospective fiscal praxis bring us full circle to the lonely, phone-wielding heroes of our opening movie. Il'ia and Nina's creator, Dunia Smirnova, wants next to write the very "real" story of normal people who talk only in banal clichés, yet—in her own words—she doesn't "have that [literary] skill yet" (348). Typicality, the eternal touchstone of Russian realism is walking a thin line between universality and meaninglessness. In some McLuhian fashion, then, TV's full extension of actuality, often *through* literature's most cherished goals, is leading to the amputation of language itself. Driven by the ineffable objects of its attention, TV today finds itself pondering *silence*.³⁶

Beyond Irony and Sound—Back to the Body that Makes Them

Fig. 38: Evgenii Grishkovets

Fig. 39: Igor' Vdovin of *Ezhi i Petrushcho*

This banality at the dead-end of speech is partly due to the state sponsorship of TV drama, where—to draw a parallel with the terminology of graphic design—repetition and affirmation (“Persil is Persil”) approach the tautology of authoritarian nationhood (see Nöth): “The Nation as... the Thing Itself.”³⁷ One variation of this theme is the new *naïf* style or childish reductionism in the plays of Evgenii Grishkovets, say, the music and film soundtracks of Igor' Vdovin, or the animation of *Ezhi i Petruchcho*. The latter’s creator, Andrei Andrianov, says he wants a style “that couldn’t *possibly* be any simpler. Let’s simplify things to the nth degree... so the stories’ endings are always the same.”³⁸ This traumatic, looping retrospection only aggravates the anxiety I mention, born of the object of one’s desire, the undoable, real *jouissance* of statehood.

Fig. 40: *Night Watch*

Fig. 41: Aleksei Slapovskii

Fig. 42: Web site for *Alive*

This nasty dead-end has spawned a strange shift in storytelling, a different, desperate actuality beyond the late-capitalist digimaged spectacle of Timur Bekmambetov’s *Night Watch* (*Nochnoi dozor*, 2005). A new, atomized physicality has appeared in Russian narratives, abusing itself as defense against the “*unbearable* anxiety of perceiving oneself as non-existent.”³⁹ Pathetically mirroring the transformations of 19th century literature’s Lazarus or Easter narratives (Bortnes 112), these new tales instead try to break beyond the irony of what novelist Aleksei Slapovskii has called—with reference to the most popular retro-vignettes on Russian TV—the endless “rondo” of “an old song about what matters.” The affective linkages of prior speech have failed the aching bodies upon which they were inscribed. Any pre-modern *ego affectus est* is now desperately invoked, as for example in this year’s dark comedy *Alive* (*Zhivoi*; dir. Aleksandr Velebinskii), very redolent of *The Sixth*

Sense (dir. M. Night Shyamalan, 1999) in its doubts over ostensible reality. The tag line is: “Cry, fear, laugh: if you can *feel*, that means you’re alive.”⁴⁰

Fig. 43: Zakhar Prilepin

No recent story shows how linguistic failure, furthered *by* television, has spawned new, bruised loners better than Zakhar Prilepin’s celebrated award-laden novel *San'kia*.⁴¹ Likened by approving critics to the heritage of Gor'kii and Furmanov (see Teterin); it is now shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Prilepin, a member of the National Bolshevik Party, abandons his hero in a dead-end village, where the increasing discrepancies between political promise and actuality gradually erode both his health and sanity. The novel ends in a hail of bullets.⁴²

Fig. 44: *Intergirl*

Fig. 45: Aleksandr Cherniaev

In its closing pages *Sank'ia* says he has “no choice” but to be armed, since he possesses the Truth, whilst the State does not, a stand-off he admits will lead fatally to masochistic self-abuse (Prilepin 261 and 365). This painful return (yet again) to unspeakable transfigurations (Groys 196) directly recalls the bruising of late Soviet *chernukha*, epitomized on screen in 1989 by the suicide of Elena Iakovleva’s prostitute heroine in *Intergirl* (*Interdevochka*; dir. Petr Todoroskii). This is precisely the movie reused in the equally mordant TV series of 2006 *Russian Translation* (*Russkii perevod*; dir. Aleksandr Cherniaev) to show latter-day Soviet soldiers “what’s really going on back home,” the grimmest of wakeup calls.⁴³

Fig. 46: *The Spot*

TV director Iurii Moroz, who made Iakovleva’s name *on* TV after 2000 with the detective series *Kamenskaia*, has also turned his hand to cinema this year with a film of modern-day prostitutes in *The Spot* (*Tochka*). In 1989 Iakovleva could not survive the

banality of capitalist Scandinavia—and drove her car into opposing traffic; Moroz’s heroine also commits suicide with a piercing scream, the white noise *in between* socialist rant or shoptalk (both clearly mapped on her aching, commodified torso). She unfolds her flightless arms and with a *passage à l’acte* claims that gap.⁴⁴ *Plus ça change...*

The Spot, which means both a prostitute’s street-corner and “full stop,” brings her claim and this paper to a fitting end. TV’s stories of organic inclusion, purportedly rectifiable after 2001, are now stuck in the corporate, “*ultimate* rhizomatic machine” through which any nationalist “fundamentalism” can map itself onto fiscal enterprise (Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*). What results are worsening inversions of the Lazarus narrative; feral, masochistic attempts to *possess* the gap between meaning and Truth. Their phonosematic push beyond the lexicon (the end of both debate and its abject mouthpiece) is a *result* of literature, of the unnamable (Zizek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf* 70).⁴⁵ Sixty thousand people commit suicide in Russia each year (more than any nation save Lithuania). They do because there’s nothing more to say; thus begins the desperate search beyond metonymy, the tragically rational quest round and round ostensible actuality that causes its own object. As the head of the Serbskii Psychiatry Center asked last month: “Can we really say that Maiakovskii, Esenin, or Tsvetaeva were mad?” (“Ezhegodno v Rossii”). Any pause or gap in our own answer should oblige us to bypass all condescension towards mass- or “lowly” visual media when teaching Russian literature.

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¹ In avoidance of Kleist's criticism, Jakobson's work has been mapped profitably onto the assumptions of contemporary neurology, thus objectifying and quantifying any vagaries of aesthetic categorization (Alexandrov, "Literature, Literariness and the Brain"). For additional context on the domestic ramifications of this approach, see Akhutina. The tangentially related aim of this paper is to draw upon several aspects of contemporary culturology that peruse the meaning of selfhood in Jakobsonian research. Initial seeds of doubt, prompting this perusal, were sown in Zizek's "Bring Me My Philips Mental Jacket." For a different critique of literariness, as seen by cognitive psychology and discourse processing, see Miall and Kuiken.

² Lotman's understanding of the relationship between language and the ecosphere is well formulated in *Kul'tura i vzryv* (16 and 44).

³ On the evocation of illogical lands by sounds from beyond the logic of everyday semantics, see Ross Smith.

⁴ The difference between this and saying "all is matter" is that such an assertion requires a constitutive exception—that is, the person actually making the assertion *about* matter must be "outside" it in order to reflect upon such things.

⁵ On this distinction *vis à vis* Akhmatova, see Borislav (175).

⁶ It is also redolent of some assumptions of subjectivity in modern neuroscience, namely that the subject arises from neural self-relating, from a "search that generates its object"; see Zizek, *The Parallax View* (213).

⁷ Some examples of this might be Liudmila Petrushevskaja's *Gigiena* or *Gripp*, Marina Palei's *Kabiriia s Obvodnogo kanala*, and Liudmila Ulitskaia's *Sonechka*.

⁸ The point regarding Petersburg is made directly by Andrei Bitov in *Polet s geroem*; the gap between form and content is often noted in Viktor Konetskii's naval tales (such as *Ogurets navyrez*) or in more banal ways in the recent work of Valeriia Narbikova (*Probeg — pro beg*)

and Aleksei Slapovskii (*Anketa*). It is Anatolii Korolev's tale of 2000, *Golova Gogolia*, that makes the goal-oriented workings of language synonymous with imperfections and incompleteness (*nesovershenstvo*).

⁹ This shift *en route* to an attempted multiplicity is well argued in Dawkins (10).

¹⁰ This article is especially valuable for documenting the stubborn employment of literature by TV. As a consequence of “the ironizing, distancing effects of the attributes to which it accords value, the narrativity with which it ‘overwrites’ image-centred popular genres, and the ‘high-cultural’ values it maintains (thanks to the uniquely broad remit of Soviet middlebrow culture it cites) in this ostensibly low-cultural medium, literary culture’s spectral presence interacts with that other ghost in the televisual machine—the Soviet era that it also dominated” (311).

¹¹ Close to the end of his life, Derrida published some related interviews on the subject of television. Here we find an explanation of a deconstructive attitude towards the moving image as a possible step beyond language and/or literature, its very constitution as “artificiality.” Derrida extends a new understanding of *différance* (of meaning’s difference and deferral) to television’s unions of stasis and movement (its social “events”), of both presence and absence. These ideas start to sound Badiouian, to put it mildly, whilst invoking the relationship of TV to the broadcasting of propriety and/or truth. Social truths, it transpires, do not lend themselves to any one “right or legal” representation, although TV does a better job than books and/or writing; Derrida and Stiegler (9-10).

¹² The quote here is from a broader series of dilemmas outlined by Condee (203).

¹³ Further images and project information from MIT’s “Mobile Landscape” team is housed at <http://senseable.mit.edu/projects/graz/#city>.

¹⁴ His exit is then replaced off-screen by the Boris Grebenshchikov / *Akvarium* song “Goluboi ogonek,” a brief tale of increasing desolateness. As the titles roll, the following text begins: “A black wind blows beneath the bridges. The earth is covered with black cinders. Strangers stare like wolves; one of them could be me...”

¹⁵ The term, from a story by Marcel Aymé, is used by Chion (81).

¹⁶ For an overview of how sound, and in particular music, was awkwardly incorporated into cinema for this very purpose, see Anderson. The first Russian writers and/or dignitaries to have their voices recorded are listed in Volkov-Lannit (142).

¹⁷ This approach defines the overarching approach of *Red Stars* and *Estrada?!* (both 2001), as well as *Songs for Fat People* (2002). In a similar spirit, one might investigate Gorbman, Huckvale, Karlin, and Jeff Smith’s *Sounds of Commerce*.

¹⁸ The phrase is redolent of Freud’s “oceanic feeling,” a notion employed in my studies of maudlin Soviet *èstrada* and animated cinema. This lack of spatial specificity or “anchoring,” to use another maritime metaphor, is employed by Metz (“Aural Objects” 29).

¹⁹ For further evidence of how Soviet viewers' experience of cinematic differed from that of Western audiences, see Hicks. The importance of Dargomyzhsky's claims for Soviet musicology, together with literature's equally long-lived role in Russia's operatic canon, is discussed in Gasparov (xviii-xix).

²⁰ Dyer, Richard. Keynote lecture, Southampton University (1996) as quoted in Garwood (295). For early, if not rapidly-established synonymies between the Soviet project *per se* and the "overreaching" (technical and ontological) associated by using orchestrated sound in filmmaking, see McKay.

²¹ This underscores the pertinence of Chion's term of "[orchestral] pit music" for any "lasting," as opposed to merely "punctual" harmonies (80-1).

²² The use of song has had equally consequential significance as an indicator of realms beyond policy in the following recent series (listed alphabetically): *The Children of the Arbat* (*Deti Arbata*; dir. Andrei Èshpai, 2004); *The Icon Hunters* (*Okhotniki za ikonami*; dir. Sergei Popov, 2005); *The KGB in Dinner Jackets* (*KBG v smokinge*; dir. Oleg Fomin, 2004); *Moscow Saga* (*Moskovskaia saga*; dir. Dmitrii Barshchevskii, 2004); *Penal Battalion* (*Shtrafbat*; dir. Nikolai Dostal', 2004); *A Policeman's Beat* (*Uchastok*; dir. Aleksandr Baranov, 2003); *Two Fates* (*Dve sud'by*; dir. Valerii Uskov and Vladimir Krasnopol'skii, 2002); and, most importantly, *Utesov: A Lifelong Song* (*Utesov: Pesnia dlinoiu v zhizn'*; dir. Georgii Nikolaenko, 2006). There is, in addition, a pleasing irony that the 2006 NTV-kino/Channel One drama *In the Beat of the Tango* (*V ritme tango*; dir. Aleksandr Pavlovskii) brings the importance of song *back* from the South American traditions that inspired so much of today's TV-aesthetic. An Argentinean chanteuse comes to Moscow in order to forge a career after her homeland's financial collapse, thus reversing many Russian post-"default" plotlines, a socioeconomic disaster that led to Russian TV buying stories from Latin studios in the first place. The fate of cinematic song between these two extremes (Stalinist retrospection and Putinesque optimism) is sketched in Gillespie.

²³ For more on how the sounds of horror films in particular create a masochistic of listeners' "pliable flesh," see: Stevens (Chapter two).

²⁴ The promotional rhetoric for Mikhalkov's *Barber of Siberia* (*Sibirskii tsiriul'nik*, 1998) included advertising to the effect that the film's depiction of pre-Revolutionary events was history "as it ought to have been."

²⁵ Recent 19th-century adaptations (in alphabetical order) have included: *Anna Karenina* (dir. Sergei Solov'ev, 2005); *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ia Karamazovy*; dir. Iurii Moroz, in production 2006); *Hero of Our Time* (*Geroi nashego vremeni*; dir. Aleksandr Kott, 2005), and *The Idiot* (dir. Vladimir Bortko, 2003).

²⁶ In this competition between extension and the spoken, really effable limits thereof, it is interesting to note that the two best-selling Russian soundtracks of 2006 have been the mafia TV series *The Brigade* (scored by Aleksei Shelygin) and Artem'ev's music for Tarkovskii; pushy, rhythmic presence versus an early consideration of structural absence. The ten soundtracks *in toto* are: *Brigada*; *Solaris* (and other Tarkovskii scores); *Brother and Brother 2* (*Brat* and *Brat-2*; dir. Aleksei Balabanov, 1997 and 2000); *Bimmer* (*Bumer*; dir. Petr Buslov, 2003); *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (*Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny*; dir. Tat'iana

Lioznova, 1972); *Midshipmen, Advance!* (*Vpered, gardemarinny!*; dir. Svetlana Druzhinina, 1987); *ASSA* (dir. Sergei Solov'ev, 1988); *A Cruel Romance* (*Zhestokii romans*; dir. Èl'dar Riazanov, 1984); and *Bimmer 2* (*Bumer 2*; dir. Pter Buslov, 2006). As with most soundtracks today, Shelygin's CD is punctuated by brief snippets of dialogue. The most famous of these from *The Brigade* is a desperate conversation conducted under fire as onetime school-friends, now burgeoning gangsters, consider their comradeship lest they be "rubbed out" by the world around them. This and other such fragments are more defensive than aggressively, actively creative. They are anxious: "I'm serious," says Sasha Belov; "They might shoot at me but hit you." "But Sasha...we're in this together... and in any case, we've been together since the first grade. Everything we do, we *answer* for together." These phrases, embedded in a dance remix, became a wildly popular ringtone; they are the sounds of a well-armed but very worried world.

²⁷ See Garwood; for a further investigation of ironic soundtracks, see Carey and Hannan.

²⁸ This disparity between words, deeds, and risky reality can even leave the songs altogether. When this happens and songs are quoted *by* the character, things seem sillier still. Take, for example, Hugh Grant's famous line from *Notting Hill* (dir. Roger Michell, 1999): "In the words of David Cassidy—in fact, uh, while he was still with the *Partridge Family*—uh—I think I love you." For more on this bitter-sweet aspect of sung humor, see Jeff Smith ("Popular Songs 428).

²⁹ Dudley Andrew has proffered an extension of Bazin's thought into a Ricoeurian framework, in the name of a "moderated" Deleuzianism; Peter Matthews' similarly respectful call for reinstating Bazin's reputation was quickly echoed in a Russian republication for *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* (55 [2001]). This journal, which used its debut edition to publish Bazin's article on the "myth of Stalin," has remained committed to the translation and dissemination of his ideas in Russian cinematography. Given the lamentable frequency with which Russian culturological debate often swings between the virtuality of "fabulation" and the primacy of the tangible or ostensible, Bazin and Ricoeur's level-headed insistence upon *le fidèle avec sa memoire* could prove a useful, dual prism through which to consider the workings of retrospective progression in Putin's media, the "yoking history and fiction" therein (Andrew 67). Indeed, Bazinian thought, free from the purported baggage of antecedent reality, has since been extended in English by Morgan; a related experiment in Russian can be found in Blumbaum.

³⁰ The tendency of cinematic sound in particular to create a sense of envelopment, rather than its positioning of the viewer (alone) *in* outside reality has been termed a "sonorous envelope"; see Doane (45).

³¹ Using Heidegger's notion that the "saying of language [itself] has no name," Giorgio Agamben furthered this point with Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek during discussions at the European Graduate School in August 2002 (qtd. Badiou, "On the Truth-Process" [<http://www.lacan.com/badeurope.htm>]). No work of recent cinema has underlined this gap better than Denis Neimand's film *Junk* (*Zhest'*) of 2006. In a scene with Mikhail Efremov, we see an alleged pedophile unable to justify his world (to *speak* of it), the actor unable to keep up with the rhythm of his own ADR dubbing, *and* the decision by both sound engineer and composer Igor' Vdovin to superimpose yet two more asynchronous rhythms. At the end of the scene, neither the criminal nor his listeners believe that any of this reflects reality.

This, in turn, could prompt us in the direction of Pudovkin's famous praise for deliberate audio-visual asynchronism as *escape* from the dumb deceptions of "primitive naturalism." Reality is the *breach* between them.

³² I am here drawing upon a double entendre from Bourdieu's notion of television's homogenizing "diffusion" (44).

³³ The affective, corporeal dissemination or endless ability to "surpass" that Deleuze celebrated in Spinoza can also be undercut by Badiou's assertions that his contemporary was forever working, unknowingly, in service of an opposite ontology—that is, a Platonic *singularity* or "Being as univocal"; see Deleuze, *Spinoza* (17-18) and *Difference and Repetition* (35), as quoted *vis à vis* both Spinoza and cinema in Badiou, *Deleuze* (24). This, then, needs to be considered against the backdrop of Deleuze's view of music, too, as plenitude beyond (or before) language, a "polyphony of polyphonies"; see Deleuze, *The Fold* (82.).

³⁴ We even have these lucrative TV stories of social prohibition delivered to our homes, mimicking the "pre-factory," capitalist environment of Spinoza's time when people worked in their homes: see Ayerza; Zizek, *Organs without Bodies* (34-5).

³⁵ *Tsifrovoe teleradioveshchanie* (TsTV) announced that phone-based television is soon to be unveiled in the wake of a similar Italian debut during the World Cup. Initial plans are for six channels, both state-run and commercial, to be increased to sixteen at a cost of \$5-15 per month; the ultimate goal is half a million subscribers by 2010. By the end of this year, compatible phones will be on the Russian market from Samsung, Nokia, and LG. Estimates suggest that 50-60% of cell owners in Western Europe already perceive their phones "as an extension of their TV-sets" ("V Rossii protestirovali mobil'noe televidenie" [<http://www.ostankino.ru/news/text-2981.html>]).

³⁶ This is especially true when we consider how any aesthetic employment of nature is perhaps not a type of supra-corporeal freedom but a definition or control of the outside world, coming from a declaration of nature's "scenic" qualities. Nature, which means nothing (or everything) is made to mean something in particular, and framed in manageable, comprehensible scenes or vistas. On this issue, see Byerly (53-54).

³⁷ A Brechtian notion reemployed by Zizek in *The Parallax View* (372).

³⁸ From the improvised track "Dom" on the 2006 album *Ezhi i Petrushcho: Istorii*.

³⁹ The idea, embodied itself in Zizek's ongoing discussion of purportedly masochistic "cutting" among American teenagers, is best outlined in occasion in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*.

⁴⁰ Cinema, funded by television, has worsened these fissures, notably in the canine or bestial metaphors of Iurii Lebedev and Boris Frumin's film *The Illegal* (*Nelegal*, 2006) and Ekaterina Grokhovskaia's *The Man of No Return* (*Chelovek bezvozzratnyi*, 2006) of this summer. *The Man of No Return* makes much of its "multi-heroic" structure in order to show the failure of *all* possible linkages between its members, thus subverting even the silent, unspoken metaphors of nationhood in, for example, in Karen Shakhnazarov's *Day of the Full*

Moon (*Den' polnoluniia*, 1995). Grokhovskaia's powerful "push" of television's social groupings—beyond all logic—into a narrative dead-end was summed up well in the title of one review for the newspaper *Kommersant*: "An Un-Soapy Soap Opera" (Plakhov [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.html?DocID=680321&IssueId=30115>]). For a useful assessment of Frumin's reassessment of the 1970s, see Mikhail Trofimenkov's review, also in *Kommersant*" (19 September 2005 [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.html?DocID=609869&IssueId=23512>]).

⁴¹ Some cinematic landmarks of late, en route to this isolated misery (and its concomitant need for stubborn self-reliance), might look as follows, beginning with a very grand metaphor. Gleb Panfilov's film *The Romanovs* (*Romanovy—Ventsenosnaia sem'ia*, 2000) is based around unseen or little-known aspects of Nikolai II's final hours in forested exile—and yet this modest scale is inverted in the closing, violent frames. A quiet fidelity *despite everything* made a man, his wife, and children worthy of sainthood; their nothingness in exile is reversed. Simultaneous, awkward tendencies towards both self-aggrandizement and peripherality are equally clear in Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (*Russkii kovcheg*, 2002), where the identical, tragic loss of the Romanovs (seen again at a lonely dinner table) is woven into expensive excursions through the Hermitage and, by the end of the film, Russia's entire cultural heritage.

In the same year Aleksandr Rogozhkin's *The Cuckoo* (*Kukushka*) likewise reduced and then dispatched his representatives of nationwide conflict to forests of the Soviet-Finish border. The film involves no more than a couple of soldiers and a local Sami woman, all unable to speak the same language. What first binds them and subsequently transforms them into a grand metaphor for national disaster is something slight, emotionally intense, and endlessly, unavoidably unspoken.

Armed conflict in Aleksei German Jr.'s bleak, sepia depiction of World War Two in *The Last Train* (*Poslednii poezd*, 2003) stepped back further still from recognizable space and placed its few, lost protagonists in the middle of No Man's Land, very much in the style of Tarkovskii's *Ivan's Childhood* (*Ivanovo detstvo*, 1962). His similarly tinted film of 2005, *Garpastum*, trod equivalent ground, comparing the transposable, shifting playing fields of five-a-side football to the wandering, ever-present threat of aimless warfare. All these films downplay both their locale and dialogue, yet underscore much grander (or tragically ruined) forms of temporally intense, eventful "locations" as a result.

⁴² The cinematic aspects of this novel, frequently said to resemble a series of mosaic-like close-ups begging for a screen adaptation, are well explained in Chepurina (<http://www.lito.ru/text/53751>). The book lies at the logical end of an enduring bitterness towards the status quo in Russia, especially when (unfairly) embodied by Moscow. This split attitude towards the capital and its centralized resources was famously voiced in 2005-2006 by the interplay between Oksana Robski's book *Casual* and the knee-jerk, "counter-novel" it quickly spanned: *Anti-Casual* by Natasha Markovich.

⁴³ Russian TV's master-tale of illegal bonding, *Criminal St. Petersburg* (*Banditskii Peterburg*; dir. Vladimir Bortko, Viktor Sergeev, Vlad Furman, and Andrei Benkendorf, 2000-2003) has just filmed a prequel series in Tajikistan (posing as Yemen). Its nationally-adored hero is now explained to us anew as an outsider within the Soviet army, subverting the Brezhnevian rhetoric that has defined Russian television's love-affair with the 1970s for the last few years. The series is dedicated to soldiers who "found their way in life" *despite*

the State; see the TV-serial *Russian Translation* and MacFadyen (“The Significance of Brezhnev”

[<http://www.kinokultura.com/2006/12-macfadyen.shtml>]).

⁴⁴ For more on the significance of suicide as the subject’s *direct* coincidence with the object, see Žižek’s *The Fragile Absolute* (29).

⁴⁵ On this subject, Moroz said in an interview with *Rossiiskaia gazeta* that he saw parallels between *The Spot* and the classic Soviet film of 1972, *And the Dawns are Quiet Here* (*A zori zdes' tikhie*; dir. Stanislav Rostotskii). This movie, which ends with the cruel death of its WWII female conscripts, was likened by Moroz to prostitution, in that prostitution “kills” an entire future generation. A commodified body might still “leave an unsold soul,” but once the soul gives up, “that’s the end of existence. Period [*Tochka*]” (Pepeliaev [<http://www.rg.ru/2004/09/02/moroz.html>]). In dealing with the sad logic of this and related problems, one is reminded of a French parallel and another attempt at radical, if not “revolutionary” change: the relationship between an absolute, Baconian materialism in the *Encyclopédie* that was designed for the glory of the French nation—and the subsequent, attempted regicide that terrified its sponsors. Complete inclusion was excessive. Diderot mocked the project’s pretensions to universality from the outset with blank entries—that is, a healthy admission of lacunae in *any* absolute. A similar anti-universalist stance would not go amiss in Russia, an avoidance of the *passion du R/réal* inherent in *any* drive beyond semblance, but this seems unlikely in a land devoid of independent TV since July 2003. And yet... ninety percent of Russia’s population watches TV every day; ninety *five* per cent does not wholly trust what it sees; “Strengthening Independent TV in Russia” (http://www.usaid.gov/stories/russia/cs_russia_tv.html). That might be another, concomitant gap worth worrying about.