

THE SPECTACLE OF MASCULINITY IN SPORTS
AND DANCE. GRIGORII ALEXANDROV'S *THE CIRCUS*
AND ABRAM ROOM'S *A STERN YOUNG MAN*
– a Paradigm and a Pariah

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It is hard to imagine two more different motion pictures produced in one year (1936) than Abram Room's *A Stern Young Man*, banned due to unsatisfactory ideological and aesthetic content, and Grigorii Alexandrov's *The Circus*, which became the golden classics of Socialist Realism, repeatedly rerun during the entire Soviet epoch. And yet they share at their core similar values and ideas. Both films project the mechanisms of totalizing masculinisation during the Stalinist revolution and use the same vehicle of ideological propaganda and gender reconstruction – bodily expression – exemplified by the culture of sports in *A Stern Young Man*, and the aesthetics of dance in *The Circus*. Both exploit the same model of communication – a spectacle in which the stadium and the circus ring are used as the platforms for the projection of the new Soviet establishment. The semiotics of the stadium and the circus ring exhibit the same feature – spectacular showmanship and transcendence over nature – ideally rendering the essence of the Soviet culture of the 1930s, with its elimination of boundaries between mythicization and verisimilitude and the exaltation of myth. The ability of a human being to perform beyond their normal limits in the sports or circus arena¹

¹ Sports and circus were extremely wide-spread in the 1930s in the Soviet Union. Images of athletes and circus performers were one of the favorite themes of the Soviet Constructivist photo-collagist Alexander Rodchenko. However, interestingly enough,

mirrors the kinship of real and imaginary condensed in Zhdanov's² formula 'a combination of the most matter of fact, everyday reality with the most heroic prospects'.³

It is through the male body that mastery over nature is sought in both films. However, conveying the same idea of masculinisation, the two films suggest different versions of masculinity constructs – central, official hegemonic masculinity in *The Circus*, resulting in its celebrity and use as a paradigm, and the marginalized masculinity projected in *A Stern Young Man*, which led to the eventual prohibition of the film.

The objective of this study is to show how body culture and movement were used in Soviet discourses of masculinity constructs and were tools of the projection of propaganda of the Soviet establishment.

A number of contemporary Slavic scholars, including Elliot Borenstein, Eric Naiman and John Haynes provided book-length narratives on the social, artistic and linguistic re-masculinization taking place in the early Soviet period. The present study concentrates, however, solely on the involvement of bodily expression in the construction of masculinities under the Soviet regime.

For several reasons, between the years after the NEP and before WWII, Soviet society witnessed a noticeable elevation of men's status. On the one hand, revolutionary expansion of women's involvement in productive labor during the rapid industrialization of the first five-year-plan intended to improve women's social status by providing the expected economic independence, yet on the other hand, it failed to liberate them from their household obligations, thus actually imposing a 'double burden' for women.⁴ Stalin's mobilization of internal and external warfare, as well as the distribution of skills within in-

the reception of those works was reversed – the circus collages were criticized for the grotesque features, while sports posters were widely reproduced.

² Andrei Zhdanov, chief representative of the Party's Central Committee.

³ From Zhdanov's speech during the First Writers' Union Congress in 1934. Cited in: K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London 1981, p. 34.

⁴ For a discussion of women's involvement in the Stalin's industrialization campaign see T. Schrand, *Socialism in One Gender: Masculine Values in the Stalin Revolution*, in: *Russian masculinities in History and Culture*, eds. B. Evans Clements, R. Friedman, D. Healey, Palgrave: New York, NY 2002, pp. 194-209.

dustry, promoted aggressive masculine policies and asserted male primacy in Soviet society.⁵ Simultaneously, there was an elimination of the feminine from artistic productions of the time.⁶

The masculinity-validating dimensions of sports made it extremely prominent during the Stalinist era, when sporting culture became one of the most powerful social constructs of masculinity after NEP. Since the time of its origination, the institution of sport has always been an ample site for the legitimization and glorification of male power, prioritizing such traditionally masculine qualities as physical power, fighting skills, strength, aggression, and the elimination of all things effeminate.

Affiliation of sport and manliness was articulated already in the 19th century theory of spermatic economy, according to which the human male possessed a limited quantity of sperm, which could be invested in various enterprises. Physical activity was thought to regulate energy, regenerating the body, and thus helped to use sperm efficiently, avoiding its waste on women and masturbation.⁷

Sport played an extremely significant role in the development of the Soviet Union and served as an important mechanism of the projection of propaganda of the Soviet establishment. Besides the traditional functions of physical culture in society, Soviet sports culture had a number of idiosyncrasies that contributed to making it predominantly the masculine practice: political utilization of sport, its involvement in the military education and State's defense structure, and the connection between physical exercises and increasing the levels of productivity.

The construct of hyper-masculinity through sports during the Stalinist period was hinged upon the military-heroic trope. Among the paradigmatic qualities of a Soviet athlete were those recognized from military parlance: aggression, violence, strength, and self-sacrifice for the common objective. As well, there was the creation of a military male camaraderie ethic: sports team (military unit) primacy and loyalty, devotion to a coach (military leader), and the heroism of the athlete (soldier). Sports 'heroes' came to replace war and revolutionary heroes.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 199.

⁶ For a discussion of 'comradship' and the exclusion of women from the literature of the early Soviet period see E. Borenstein, *Men Without Women. Masculinity & Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929*, Duke University Press: Durham and London 2000.

⁷ D. Mrozhek, *Sport and American Mentality: 1880-1910*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press 1983.

Starting from 1945, biographies of athletes have been elevated to the status of the socialist realist hagiography, as witnessed by „Sovetskii Sport” spawning a genre of article dedicated to tracing an athlete’s life from the early phase of his sporting career to the winning of championships.⁸

It is important to mention that there has always been an emphasis on the interconnection of physical and mental education in the Soviet physical culture. Athletic prowess symbolized not only physical superiority, but morality as well. The concept was coined – ‘the hygiene of mental labor’.⁹ Sportive practice was heralded to instill moral values, willpower, capacity for well-directed work, discipline of the body (which really meant disciplined submission to the social institutions and Party orders), asceticism and competitiveness. In 1931 the All-Union Physical Education Complex *GTO (Ready for Labor and Defense)* was established to extend the scope of sports participation in the country and to propagandize the basic knowledge of first-aid and civil defense to every Soviet citizen.¹⁰

Naturally, the film media and literature turned to rendering sports activity. By the beginning of the 1930s, Sovkino produced around 20 films dedicated to *Spartakiada*¹¹, held in Moscow in 1928: *Boks (Boxing)*, *Zaschita i napadeniie (Assault and Defense)*, *Zimnii sport (Winter Sports)*, *Lyzhi (Skiing)*, *Put’ k zdorov’iu i krasote, Path to Health and Beauty*, *Futbol (Football)*, *Spartakiada rabochikh (The Workers’ Spartakiada)*, etc.¹²

Yuri Olesha, the author of the script for *A Stern Young Man*, was one of the first Soviet writers who introduced the theme of sport into Soviet Literature.¹³ Sport became a perennial motif throughout his career. As Shklovsky has observed, ‘The world of Olesha is the world of sports and the circus.’¹⁴ Nor is the sports writing

⁸ J. Gilmour and B. Evans Clements, ‘If You Want to Be Like Me, Train!’: *The Contradictions of Soviet Masculinity*, in: *Russian masculinities...*, op. cit., p. 211.

⁹ Cited in: C. Kelly, *The Education of the Will: Advice Literature, Zakal, and Manliness in Early Twentieth-Century Russia*, in: *Russian masculinities...*, op. cit., p. 132.

¹⁰ J. Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne 1977, p. 129.

¹¹ The world’s first Spartakiade was organized in Moscow in 1920.

¹² *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ po fizicheskoi kul’ture i sportu*, t. 1, Moskva 1961, pp. 176-182.

¹³ V. Peppard, *The Poetics of Yury Olesha*, University of Florida Monographs Humanities Number 63, University of Florida Press: Gainesville 1989, p. 16.

¹⁴ Cited in: *Ibidem*, p. 15.

of Olesha limited only to fiction. In the 30s and 40s he wrote articles on sports for the newspapers *Vecherniaia Moskva* and *Moskovskii Bolshevik*.¹⁵

Olesha's 1934 script for *A Stern Young Man* is not his first work featuring sporting images. In his earlier novel *Envy* he also explores the imagery of sporting prowess and beauty of the male body. The text abounds with detailed physical descriptions of the male physicality, 'Two elongated muscles, one on top of the other, distinctly visible, like peas in a pod, lay from his shoulder down along his arm. Bending his elbows, he lifted both hands to his head to fix his hair, and his slightly raised torso, with its chest muscles that had stretched at the armpits toward his shoulders, became triangular.'¹⁶

In *Envy*, however, bodily and sporting images overlap primarily with the theme of a man-machine. A football star, Volodia Makarov (a precursor of the character Grisha in *A Stern Young Man*) is represented in the novel as a perfect physical specimen who, through his preoccupation with sports and labor, is striving to become a man-machine. Volodia says, 'I am a man-machine. You won't know me... I've begun to envy machines - that's what it is! Am I not as good as a machine? After all it was we who thought it up and built it, and it turned out to be twice as ferocious as we are. Set it going, and it takes off! Works right through a job without a shiver of wasted motion.'¹⁷

The protagonist of *Envy*, with his enthusiasm for sports and technology, was conceived as the ideal New Soviet Man. The character turned out to be undeveloped and after the publication of *Envy*, Olesha was criticized for the creation of the ambivalent, super-rational mechanical man who was not realistic enough to represent the builder of the New Order.¹⁸ In *A Stern Young Man* Olesha continues to exploit sports in search for a New Soviet Man. Moreover, the tasks became much clearer since the script was written right after the First Writers' Union Congress was held in 1934, and Socialist Realism acquired a canonical form. One of the cornerstones of the new trend alongside 'partymindedness', was to launch a model for 'the positive hero' – an emblematic figure whose biography was a model for readers to emulate.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 16.

¹⁶ Y. Olesha, *Envy*, New York: Penguin 1993, p. 301.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 304.

¹⁸ R. Salys, *Understanding Envy*, in: *Olesha's Envy. A Critical Companion*, ed. R. Salys, Northwestern University Press 1999, p. 18.

¹⁹ K. Clark, op. cit.

In *A Stern Young Man* Olesha duplicates a construct of a New Soviet Man through athletics and creates an improved version of Volodia Makarov. The eponymous hero of the film is Grisha Fokin – a young athlete and a member of Komsomol²⁰ organization (Olesha declared in his Speech at the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934 that he would try to look forward, to write about young people as the hope of the future).²¹

The plot of *A Stern Young Man* is a straightforward narrative of the love triangle, in which the athlete Grisha Fokin falls in love with Masha, the wife of the famous surgeon Stepanov. Grisha acts out a quintessential iron-will revolutionary, who, in the best traditions of the Socialist Realism hagiography, lives an ascetic life and abandons a loverelationship, for it seems anti-Soviet for 'komsomolets' to steal the wife of a celebrated surgeon whom Grisha considers a genius.

In *A Stern Young Man* the emphasis is placed on sport as a mental, as opposed to physical, practice (contrary to *Envy*). Grisha Fokin is much more articulate than his predecessor and is honored for establishing the complex of the GTO moral rules. If Volodia's ultimate aspiration was to become a man-machine, Grisha strives toward intelligence, creativity and consciousness – the qualities that cannot be generated in machines. As a sports hero, Grisha seeks to move beyond sport – beyond the competitive mastery of the physical world. He aims to gain control over other spheres of life through sporting heroism. Olesha clearly corrects the mistakes of the previous years – the impossibility of converting the body's (phallic) power into ideologically-correct material in *Envy* has evolved into construction of a truly model sports hero in *A Stern Young Man*.

In order to prioritize Grisha's ideological consciousness, Olesha even breaks one of the codes of the master plot of the Soviet novel – he destroys the hierarchy inside 'the Great Family' which consists of *fathers* who are represented as strong, determined leaders enlightened politically and their worthy *sons* – citizens of extraordinary potential who are yet limited in their ability to assume leadership roles due to their immaturity.²² Olesha breaks the dichotomy of spontaneity attributed to sons versus consciousness characteristic of fathers.²³ In his own ver-

²⁰ Union of Communist Youth.

²¹ M. Michalski, *Cinematic literature and literary cinema: Olesha, Room and the search for a new art form*, in: *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, eds. C. Kelly and S. Lovell, Cambridge University Press: 2000, p. 229.

²² K. Clark, op. cit.

²³ Ibidem.

sion of the Great Family Grisha has already crossed over to the status of a 'father' and is given the highest ritual authority of an ideological mentor. He partakes in the upbringing of other Komsomol members who lack consciousness. Olesha deviates from the paradigm even further, reversing the hierarchy and attributing the symbolic role of 'sons' to the older generation represented by the surgeon Stepanov, who has been educated and enlightened under the guidance of a highly conscious and ideologically pure Grisha.

As within the ritual coach-player/ 'father-son' relationship, in which the trainer alongside teaching the basic rules of the game itself, imposes dating restrictions over his team, Grisha not only educates the athletes in Communist virtues, but exercises astonishing personal control over them. Among the spiritual qualities developed by him the most important one is chastity (as a model positive hero he adheres to the rule, renouncing his love to Masha). The moral complex GTO created by Grisha is pronounced throughout the narrative and each of the rules has further explication.

Sport for Olesha is an exclusively masculine activity. All athletes in his fiction are males, who experience the same pattern of the failure to achieve satisfactory relationship with a woman (Volodia never marries Valia, Grisha abandons his love relationship with Masha). Olesha's favorite sport, soccer, more than any other physical activity, is the quintessentially male game which promotes traditionally masculine qualities of physical power and violence. However, it is not only in sport that women are cast out in Olesha's fiction – in general, women are marginalized in his oeuvres and transformed into abstractions, machines, prizes in male competition, or they become an excuse to confront other male characters. Olesha was among the dramatists at the 1931 mock trial accused of neglecting female roles in their plays.²⁴ He wrote in *Envy* 'the revolution is a masculine time, a time of settling men's accounts'.

In his all-male project, *A Stern Young Man*, the male body becomes the main tool through which the construct of the new ideology is pursued. The glorification of the strong athletic body is an invariant theme of the play. For a film script Olesha's text contains numerous unfilmable passages rendering male physicality. The first detailed description of the male body in the script provides a prime example:

²⁴ R. Saly, op. cit., p. 10.

Light eyes, light hair, a thin face, a triangular torso, a muscular chest – such is the modern type of male beauty. This is the beauty of the Red Army soldiers, the beauty of the young men who wear on their chests the GTO badge. It comes about from frequent contact with water, machines and gymnastic equipment.²⁵

Abram Room appeared to be ultimately faithful to the visual world of Olesha. Moreover, the cinematic medium gave him ample opportunity to privilege the male body through the possibilities of the *mise-en-scene* and montage. The young athletes are depicted through Room's technique of slow-motion, which produces a statuesque quality.²⁶ He uses the technique of filming white-on-white²⁷ and low angles and to exaggerate the bodies of the athletes. He frequently juxtaposes athletes with clay sculptures in the same frame.²⁸ The film consists of long non-narrative sequences in which Grisha or another athlete, Diskobol (a discus thrower), demonstrate different kinds of physical exercises.

In the stadium sequence the camera films in close up shots the semi-nude body of Grisha riding the chariot. The scene is made in the spirit of the classical antiquity of Rome or Greece where the body in its canonical form was invented. The focus is on his legs, muscles, and manly arms. He emerges as a Greek hero, complete with the requisite traditional horses, in an idealized sunny landscape. The stadium is a powerful signifier of the new state's grandeur and mass unity in Olesha's work. In 1936 right before the banning of *A Stern Young Man* he wrote a short story *Stadium in Odessa*, in which the narrative progresses as an anticipation of the sight of the stadium, 'It is impossible to imagine a more marvelous sight. The knack of comparison proves powerless. What does it resemble? I don't know. I've never seen it before. It's a picture of the future. No it's not that. It's the border, the transition, the realized moment of transition of the present into the future. A green soccer field. We watch from a distance from above. How clean and thick this green color is. You want to determine what produces this optical effect. Where does such transparence and clarity come from?'²⁹

²⁵ Y. Olesha, *The Complete Plays*, eds. and trans. M. Green and J. Katsell, Ardis: Ann Arbor 1983, p. 191.

²⁶ M. Michalski, *op.cit.*, p. 242.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

²⁸ The name of one of the main protagonists Diskobol refers to a famous statue Discobolus sculpted by Myron in 5c BC.

²⁹ Y. Olesha, *Complete Short Stories & Three Fat Men*, trans. A. Anderson, Ardis: Ann Arbor 1979, p. 124.

As traditional symbols of celebration of men's interests, these gigantic amphitheaters highlight the masculine myth in Olesha's oeuvres. The sports stadium is the main venue in *A Stern Young Man* where young athletes gather to train and discuss important Komsomol issues.

The type of masculinity constructed by Olesha in *A Stern Young Man* relies greatly on the valorization of the male body with imbued homoerotic overtones, which caused incongruity in representation of the Soviet sports hero.

One of Olesha's most evident contributions toward the homoerotic subtext of the novel comes at the very beginning of the script:

There is a type of male appearance which has developed as a result of the evolvement in technology, aviation, sport. From under the leather peak of a pilot's helmet, a pair of gray eyes, as a rule, look out at you. And you may be sure that when the pilot takes off his helmet it will be fair hair that will be gleaming before you.³⁰

Scrupulously adopting Olesha's script, Room brings the male body into the central focus many times. Often the story line is interrupted by shifting the main focus onto the location and physical appearance of Grisha. The narrative contains several instances of reorientation of the gaze – switching the object of the male gaze from female to male. When Grisha meets his neighbor, a young girl who looks in the mirror and finds herself unattractive, the viewers' gaze is transferred from her body to Grisha's, objectifying the male's look:

³⁰ Y. Olesha, *The Complete Plays...*, op. cit., p. 191.

He sees that the neighbor is seated before the mirror.

The neighbor.

The mirror.

SON [GRISHA]: Why do you look in the mirror so often, Katya?

NEIGHBOR: Because I'm not good looking.

SON: That doesn't matter, Katya... when another person approaches and says: 'I love you,' then the first one immediately becomes beautiful.

He picks up the mirror.

Looks into it.

Asks:

- Mama, am I good looking?

MOTHER: But of course, you are.

SON: But nobody has yet said to me: 'I love you.'

NEIGHBOR: But you're good-looking, all the same.³¹

In this scene masculine beauty is objectified twice under the viewers' and narcissistic gaze. In other cases the male body is stripped and exposed to the homoerotic gaze.

An enormous sky.

Below on the tarmac stands a group of jumpers with a pole.

Among them is Grisha Fokin.

A young man goes up to the resting group with a discus.

From below Fokin sees a discus thrower coming.

Fokin looks.

A discus thrower.

The discus thrower. He is stripped. A pair of brief shorts is all he has on.³²

In the introductory chapters it is possible to identify a distinctively homoerotic subtext, which is apparent due to the absence of physical description of the female characters in the script. The dual subjectivity of the narrative is hinged upon reconfiguration of the male gaze. The viewer has been invited to experience an altered gaze and thus a variation of the traditional power construct – a gaze that objectifies the very type of young athletic male and makes the viewer deviate from the conventional heterosexual interpretation.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 197.

³² Ibidem, p. 198.

I argue that masculinity suggested by Olesha in *A Stern Young Man* deviates from the official hegemonic construct promoted in the artistic productions of Socialist Realism. The construct of masculinity in *A Stern Young Man* is built much more on the attractiveness of the male body than on physical force and intimidation and fails to represent the Soviet institutional expectation of the single dominant hegemonic masculinity. After the prohibition of *A Stern Young Man* Iurii Elagin wrote, the 'cruel fate of this motion picture and of the author probably was due as much to the remarkable physical appearance of the hero, which emphasized *the basic thought* to the audiences.'³³ By 'basic thought' the critic meant the homoerotic physicality of the young men.³⁴ Clearly, the athletes' heterosexuality in *A Stern Young Man* is suspect. Despite the fact that there was no place for women in the relationship of Soviet men with the 'great fathers' of the Soviet State, heterosexuality was imperative at the time of sexual revolution in the Soviet Union, when Stalin bolstered the old oppressive structure with re-criminalization of homosexuality and abortions.

Olesha provides a pattern in which sporting practice does not instruct men in aspects of power or in the development of force exclusively. His engagement of men with sports leads to glorification of the male body. This type of masculinity could not be accepted by the Soviet regime, if not because of its reference to homosexuality, then because of its embarrassing similarity with the Hitler Jungen.

If women play a marginal role in Olesha's script, a female dancer is a central protagonist in Grigorii Alexandrov's *The Circus*. The film can be treated as a story of woman's liberation, the master plot for which was launched by the work of Alexandra Kollontai, *Vasilisa Malygina*.³⁵

The narrative of *The Circus* introduces the crucial moment in the fate of an American female dancer and leads to her eventual triumph of becoming a Soviet Citizen. The musical is a classic of Socialist Realism and reproduces its master plot with the characteristic overcoming of difficulties, acquisition of socialist consciousness under the guidance of wise mentors and transcending of villainy. The main protagonist of *The Circus* is Marion Dixon, an American

³³ Cited in: J. T. Heil, *No List Of Political Assets: The Collaboration of Iurii Olesha and Abram Room on Strogii Iunosha*, Verlag Otto Sagner: Munchen 1989, p. 69.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 69.

³⁵ For a discussion of Kollontai's work see E. Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1997.

artiste who escaped middle-America (Kansas) because of the societal prejudice toward her as the mother of an illegitimate half-black baby. On a train she meets a German entrepreneur Kneischitz who makes her the star of 'The Flight to the Moon' act in the Moscow circus. In Moscow Dixon encounters a young Soviet engineer Martynov with whom she falls in love. She is willing to leave Kneischitz, but he threatens to reveal her secret. Dixon writes a letter to Martynov declaring her love, however through the villainy of Kneischitz, the wrong person receives the letter, which causes misunderstanding – Martynov thinks that he has lost her. Marion is forced to leave with Kneischitz (their contract with the Moscow circus is over), but at the last moment her Soviet friends resolve the misunderstanding and save her and her black child from Kneischitz. The final sequence demonstrates the ethnic diversity of a harmonious Soviet country whose citizens are welcoming Dixon and the child – the film was made in 1936 to glorify the new Stalinist constitution, which guaranteed superior rights to minorities in the Soviet state.

The Circus represents another ideological construct projected through the bodily culture. However, if athletic prowess and the male body are the chief tools in constructing masculinity and ideological enlightenment in *A Stern Young Man*, dance and aerial circus acts become the dominant metaphors for the reconfiguration of gender patterns and constructing of hegemonic masculinity in *The Circus*.

The construct of masculinity is even more artistically challenging in *The Circus*, for it takes place indirectly, running alongside the metaphoric liberation of a woman.

The metaphor of the female emancipation mirrors the consequences of Stalin's doctrine of 'socialism in one country'³⁶ that privileged the masculine after granting women economic independence. The basic trope of the film operates similarly: dance functions as an emancipatory force until the man enters to confirm his superior status.

The narrative opens and closes with Dixon's dancing performances, which dramatically and symbolically juxtapose the opposition of woman oppressed under capitalism and woman liberated under socialism. The opening performance 'The Flight to the Moon' aims at representing women as a perverse bourgeois temptation. As an imported circus act, conceived and choreographed in the West

³⁶ T. Schrand, op. cit.

'The Flight to the Moon' supposedly communicates the values of the capitalist patriarchal institution that converted women into objects of desire. Marion is highly associated with the consumer culture and a butterfly image, which is emphasized by a long shot of the mirror and the box with female accessories shown before the performance. She wears a very short, glistening, tight-fitting dress exposing her legs in white glossy stockings. The dress is sleeveless, the top is heavily bejeweled. Jewelry and feminine clothes were considered signs of ideological contamination and inducement of temptation for proletarians.³⁷ In the Soviet discourse of the gender consequences of capitalism, women were identified as 'pleasure machines', inciters of sexuality, whose dangerous, animalistic nature linked them with Gothic monstrosity.³⁸ Marion is dressed in black, wears a black wig, a hat and high heels. Her performance represents a glorification of the feminine erotic body, symbolizing sensuality and lack of intellectual prowess. Female physiology was a symbol of corruption induced by capitalism. The male audience is shown voyeuristically focused on the performance (Martynov and the circus manager exchange looks while watching the dance, later Martynov is shown gazing at Marion). She dances joyfully, flirtatiously with numerous kicks, hops and skips, while the movements of her hands imitate playing musical instruments. The piece contains the elements of tap dance. At the end of her performance she sinks down inside the cannon and is fired up to the Big Top of the circus thus being reduced to a 'human cannon-ball'. The performance ends leaving Marion with Kneischitz who beats her and throws away the clothes that he bought her, in order to emphasize her status of a mere commodity. The transformation of a woman oppressed by men and the capitalist system begins when she encounters Martynov – a loyal and determined Soviet hero who becomes her mentor and whose character portrayal is the complete opposite of the Nazi entrepreneur Kneischitz.

Through identification with capitalism, women were constant reminders of ideological backwardness for the Soviet establishment. Hence, placing her into a technologically miraculous act 'The Flight to the Stratosphere' (a Soviet improved version of 'The Flight to the Moon'), accompanied by a man, served to represent the breakthrough to Soviet liberation and acquisition of an ideological consciousness.

³⁷ E. N a i m a n, op. cit., p. 183.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 183.

As a result of the rapid industrialization campaign, which started in 1929, liberalization for Soviet women meant partaking in traditionally masculine quests. The expansion of women's industrial employment forced them into traditionally masculine spheres. The liberating 'Flight to the Stratosphere' intended to undertake two big steps towards women's emancipation: to pull a woman out of domesticity imprisonment (a sign of female ideological backwardness since the times of NEP³⁹) and out of fashionable clothes (a sign of ideological contamination, that should be replaced by hygienic, simple, comfortable clothing)⁴⁰. Borenstein points out that domesticity and traditional femininity had no place in the world of factories, which explained why women in the novels (artistic productions) were under the ever present threat of transformation into bodiless abstractions.⁴¹ The masculinization of the Soviet society not only drew the feminine into the masculine order, it absorbed the feminine within the totalizing masculine structure. Even the men of *Envy* encroached upon the sacred female domain of the kitchen and wanted to subsume it under a hyper-rational, coldly masculine plan.⁴²

Gender leveling was one of the central projects of women's emancipation. The ideal Soviet woman into which Marion should eventually turn should maximally remind one of a man. She should even look like men and wear masculine clothes. 'The Flight to the Stratosphere' attempts to promote the androgynous society in which woman, with her monstrous physiology and sensuality, is transformed into a genderless creature. In 'The Flight to the Stratosphere' Marion and Martynov are dressed in identical aviators' costumes. They both wear helmets. They are almost indistinguishable in form, and ideally in content. Marion finally transcends female backwardness, for not only is she already on a par with the average man, but she invades the quintessentially masculine field of military sport and makes a parachute jump.

'The Flight to the Stratosphere' performance consists of three sequences. The first act features Martynov's and Dixon's aerial jumps towards the Big Top, the second segment presents the flight of Martynov, and the third part concentrates on Dixon's parachute jump and her performance.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 187.

⁴⁰ Dr. I. Kallistov, *Polovoi vopros i fizkul'tura*, „Komsomol'skaia Pravda", 29 July 1925. Cited in: E. Naiman, op. cit., p. 183.

⁴¹ E. Borenstein, op. cit. p. 3.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 126.

During her final dance Dixon is no longer dressed in a short black dress, but now wears an elegant, long white costume, which disestablishes the powerful expressiveness of her body, her desirability and lack of intellectual prowess. Her sexual attractiveness during the opening performance is contrasted with the attribution of high virtue and social awareness at the end. Her black wig is off – she has finally progressed to the light and emancipation.⁴³ She is integrated into the collective Soviet body and is surrounded by rows of other Soviet dancers – integrating into a beautiful, orchestrated functioning society represented by whirlpools, spirals and circles of the dancers. The use of lighting accompanying the ensemble piece is quite impressive. The lights come up suddenly in the form of circles metamorphosed into stars and then fades. The final dance symbolizes her eventual integration into Soviet society, and the film ends with the phallogocentric, Moscow-centric finale showing Marion and Martynov marching in Red Square at the May Day Parade with Martynov in the center of the procession.

As I have already mentioned, during the Stalinist revolution the entry of women into the industrial sphere did not improve their status. Likewise, the metaphorical transformation of the body did not actually liberate the heroine of *Circus*. The ultimate function of the emancipation trope was only to illuminate the prowess and moral superiority of Martynov and the Soviet regime in general. It is stressed by the fact that Marion's liberation occurs wholly under the supervision of the ideologically impeccable Martynov who educates her in different aspects of Soviet life. The transformation starts when she meets him for the first time. The language acquisition phase takes place during their romantic encounter in the Hotel Moskva when they are singing together Dunaievsky's *The Song of the Homeland*. Another big step towards liberation is signing the letter to Martynov with the Russian 'Masha' instead of 'Marion'.

Marion follows the path of the Great Family members as she progresses over time towards becoming a conscious Soviet citizen, the only difference being that she never crosses over to the status of her mentor.

The key scene that places a premium on male superiority is Martynov's supernatural aerialist flight, in which the construct of the superhero relies on the body metaphor. His flight demonstrates human transcendence over nature, the

⁴³ For a discussion of the metaphor of light in *The Circus* see R. Taylor, *The Illusion of Happiness and the Happiness of Illusion: Grigorii Alexandrov's The Circus*, „Slavic and Eastern European Review” Vol. 74, No. 4, October 1996, pp. 601-620.

elements (gravity), machinery, death and even the corporeal. Despite placing the male body in the central focus and reorienting the public gaze towards the male body, the type of masculinity created in *The Circus* remains valid within the official mythology. *The Circus* creates masculinity based on the archetype of the aviation hero who was the paradigmatic New Man in the Stalinist discourse. The elevation of fliers to the status of human superiority was caused by the promotion of Russian superiority, related to the ongoing rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the 30s when each achievement was a matter of national prestige.⁴⁴

This heroic triumph, the miraculous conquest of the forces involving uncommon physical strength and danger, reoriented the sense of reality and bodily limits. This is a solo act and the circus performer does not even have to prove his superiority in competition with others, because it is taken for granted in the ring and has already been established in the myth. He maintains the appearance of a superior, dreamlike being in this miraculous flight above the audience.

The aim of this study was to show how bodily expression in the films of Room and Alexandrov served as a means for the projection of the reconstructed gender patterns under the new Stalinist regime. The objective was not to highlight the priority of the masculine values during the Stalinist time, which obviously achieved a most privileged position, but rather to show that there were alternative forms of manhood, despite the totalizing claims of the State.

The promotion of fraternity created in these films is built on the representation of man as spectacle and as an object of the communal gaze. It is reinforced by the doubling of the voyeuristic potential in both narratives, for not only does the action take place on the arena, it is also positioned before the cinematic lens.

The reconfiguration of the gaze by placing the male body as the central focal point is perceived differently in the two narratives. In *A Stern Young Man* it produced a de-familiarizing effect due to the homoerotic subtext imbued in portraying male physicality. Even the valorization of sports that has traditionally sustained a hegemonic model of masculinity in many different cultures failed to suppress the impression of dual subjectivity projected in the narrative. At the

⁴⁴ K. Clark, op. cit.

same time, the similar strategy of posing man as spectacle is protected from the gender confusion in *The Circus*.

In *A Stern Young Man*, it is first and foremost the characters' enforced inactivity that leads to the perception of men as spectacles and makes them perfect 'to-be-looked-at' images. The male athletes Grisha and Diskobol predominately simply posed semi-nude in front of camera are depicted motionless:

*Suntanned. A heavy stone discus in his hands.
Discobol is sitting.*

Their bodies are isolated as objects of the gaze, put on display, stripped and located in the center within a group of admiring youth. However, the viewers' fascination is turned against them, making them just passive material for the active gaze. The film lacks the action required for representation of superheroes of the Socialist Realism.

Grisha is inert and passive, not only as a lover renouncing Masha's love, but as a Soviet citizen as well. His ultimate accomplishment on 'the road to consciousness' is the development of the complex of GTO rules – an intellectual, conceptual activity, not a feat of athletic prowess.

In *The Circus*, by contrast, the male character is endowed with all the attributes of the patriarchal superhero – he gets the girl, performs an amazing aerial feat, and demonstrates his superpower. It is his extraordinary restlessness (he pursues multiple goals in the narrative: educating Masha; constructing the aircraft; training for the performance); and engagement into a quintessentially male activity (flying) which distract spectators from perceiving him as a spectacle. Besides, the possibility of viewers' voyeuristic fascination with his look is broken by their involvement in something truly great – 'The Flight to the Stratosphere' act. The metaphoric significance of the act is multifarious: the miraculous conquering of nature; the liberation of women; the projection of the Soviet order into the Cosmos.

One of the basic codes of the Socialist realist plot – to structure the narrative around the task for a hero to perform – is fulfilled in *The Circus*. Despite the fact that the task of Martynov is purely theatrical, its symbolism concerns the sacred Stalinist sphere – aviation. Anyhow, the boundaries between fiction and life were blurred in the rendering. If there is any ambivalence left toward the image of man on display, it is disestablished by the presence of a woman and

their realized love affair. Martynov's literal and symbolic salvation of a woman has the effect of distancing the spectator from perceiving him as a spectacle and converts him from the object of gaze to the subject of gaze. Thus, the action and the presence of a woman become the two dominant strategies for protecting maleness in *The Circus*.

The structure of representation also matters in producing the contrast between the passive/looked and acting/looking characters. If in *The Circus* the action is strengthened by such narrative strategies as motivation of events by causality and tension of closure, it is weakened and slowed in *A Stern Young Man* by the absence of cause-effect logic, subjectivity of reality, the incorporation of a dream-sequence and temporal shifts.

A final remark about the validity of the new Soviet masculinity constructed in *The Circus* – it reinforces the programmatic Socialist realism dichotomy of good versus evil, capitalism versus socialism, impetuosity versus consciousness, while its ineffective alternative counterpart destabilizes this dichotomy and disrupts the structure of the Soviet master plot. These features endow it with a modus that would readily be identified as a form of the postmodern were it presented today.

Spektakl męskości w sporcie i tańcu

Cyrk Grigorija Aleksandrowa i *Surowy młodzieniec* Abrama Rooma – paradygmat i odrzucenie

Celem tego studium jest pokazanie, że traktując cielesność i ruch jako narzędzia propagandowego tworzenia radzieckiego porządku, wykorzystywano je w radzieckim dyskursie o konstruktach męskości.

Dwa filmy wyprodukowane w roku 1936 ukazują mechanizmy zinstytucjonalizowanej maskulinizacji w czasie stalinowskiej rewolucji za pomocą tego samego środka – ekspresji cielesnej – na przykładzie kultury sportowej w *Surowym młodzieńcu* oraz estetyki tańca w *Cyrku*. Obydwa filmy wykorzystują ten sam model komunikacji – spektakl, w którym stadion i arena cyrkowa eksponują tę samą semiotykę widowiskowości i zwyczajstwa nad naturą, tym samym oddając istotę radzieckiej kultury lat 30. z jej eliminacją granic pomiędzy mityzacją a pozorami rzeczywistości.

To właśnie za pomocą męskiego ciała dąży się w obydwu filmach do panowania nad naturą. Wyrażając tę samą ideę maskulinizacji, filmy proponują jednak odmienne wizje konstruowania męskości – podstawową, oficjalną, hegemoniczną męskość w *Cyrku*, celebrowaną i wykorzystywaną jako paradygmat, oraz zmarginalizowaną męskość przedstawioną w *Surowym młodzieńcu*, która doprowadziła do tego, że film ten został ostatecznie zakazany.

Wspieranie wykreowanych w tych filmach braterskich więzi i męskiej supremacji zbudowane jest na przedstawieniu mężczyzny jako spektaklu i przedmiotu społecznego spojrzenia. Rekonfiguracja spojrzenia przez umieszczenie męskiego ciała w centrum zainteresowania jest różnie postrzegana w obydwu fabułach. W *Surowym młodzieńcu* przynosi to efekt anty-oswajania wskutek homoerotycznego podtekstu, jakim nasycono portret męskiej fizyczności. Nawet odpowiednia waloryzacja sportów, która tradycyjnie podtrzymuje hegemoniczny model męskości w różnych kulturach, nie niweluje wrażenia podwójnej subiektywności prezentowanej w narracji. W tym samym czasie w *Cyrku* podobna strategia przedstawiania mężczyzny jako spektaklu jest chroniona przed zamętem związanym z kulturowym postrzeganiem płci.

Oceniając *Surowego młodzieńca*, próbuję wyjaśnić, dlaczego typ męskości promowany w filmie przez gloryfikowanie męskiego ciała, nie mógł być zaakceptowany przez radziecki reżim, władzę czynnie uczestniczącą w procesie kształtowania człowieka i bycia mężczyzną. Z kolei dzięki analizie *Cyrku* badam jak w radzieckiej twórczości artystycznej konstruowano oficjalną, państwową hegemoniczną męskość, trzymając się kodyfikacji socrealistycznej wzorcowej fabuły.

Jako że konstrukcja męskości w *Cyrku* opiera się w dużym stopniu na dosłownym i symbolicznym ocaleniu kobiety od jej ideologicznego opóźnienia, główna część analizy poświęcona jest metaforze kobiecej emancypacji przez taniec. Odzwierciedla to konsekwencje zaangażowania kobiet w pracę produkcyjną i wyniesienie statusu mężczyzny w okresie rozkwitu kultury stalinowskiej.