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Physical Culture and the Embodied Soviet Subject, 1921-1939: Surveillance, Aesthetics, Spectatorship

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Physical Culture and the Embodied Soviet Subject, 1921-1939: Surveillance, Aesthetics, Spectatorship (Abstract)

My thesis examines visual and written culture of the interwar Soviet Union dealing with the body as an object of public observation, appreciation, and critique. It explores how the need to construct new Soviet subjectivities was realised through the figure of the body. I explore the representation of ‘physical culture’ (*fizkul'tura*), with reference to newspapers, specialist *fizkul'tura* and medical journals, and Party debates. This textual discourse is considered alongside visual primary sources – documentary and non-fiction film and photography, painting and sculpture, and feature films. In my analysis of these visual primary sources I identify three ‘categories of looking’ – surveillance, aesthetics, and spectatorship – that I claim structure representations of the embodied Soviet subject.

My introduction incorporates a brief history of early Soviet social psychological conceptualisations of the body, outlining the coercive renovative project of Soviet subjectification and introducing the notion of surveillance. My first and second chapters explore bodily aesthetics. The first focuses on non-fiction media from the mid- to late-1920s that capture the sporting body in action; this chapter introduces the notion of spectatorship and begins to unpack the ideological function of how bodies are observed. The second further explores questions of bodily aesthetics, now in relation to *fizkul'tura* painting and Abram Room's 1936 film, *Strogi i unosha*. My third chapter looks at *fizkul'tura* feature films from the mid-1930s to explore how bodies were related to social questions of gender and sexuality, including marriage and pregnancy. My final chapter focuses on cinematic representations of football from the late 1930s and the relationship between bodies on display and onlooking crowds. These two chapters together indicate how the dynamic between the body and its spectator (whether individual or in a group) was reimagined in the late interwar years; the body's aesthetic appeal is now of little importance compared to its ability to constitute a public subjectivity through the manipulation of emotion, trauma, and pathos.

Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

This dissertation is 80,485 words long (including footnotes and references, but excluding abstract, preface, contents, acknowledgements, glossary, and bibliography).

Cover image: Aleksandr Deineka, *Kupal'shchiki* (1935)

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Stills from feature films are used courtesy of the State Cinema Foundation of the Russian Federation (Gosfil'mofond). Stills from newsreels are used courtesy of the Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents (RGAKFD). Newspaper clippings are used courtesy of the Russian State Library.

*

I have known Emma Widdis for a while, but it is as my supervisor over the past three or so years that she has demonstrated just how patient, perceptive, and supportive she can be. I count myself lucky to have worked with her for so long. Having encouraged my interest in early Soviet culture as no one else could, I hold her solely responsible for getting me into this mess. In the end, I think it was worth it. I hope she realises how grateful I am.

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My relationship with academia has not always been an easy one, to put it mildly. So I'm particularly grateful to the people who have helped me get my head

around why anyone would bother to do this kind of thing in the first place. Giovanni Menegalle has been just as sardonic or sincere as I've needed him to be and kept me company in a number of hostile environments. Hannah Proctor has shown me how to be radical, impractical, and smart. Darius Lerup and Rhys Williams have been welcome comrades in Austerity Cambridge, giving me beds to sleep in, conferences to speak at, smokes to share, and reasons to be cheerful.

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As small as the gesture may be, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Jean Stewart and Len Goff.

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Пометавшись беспомощно по комнате, Самбикин пошел в ванну, разделся там и с удивлением оглядел свое тело юноши, затем пробормотал что-то и залез в холодную воду. Вода умиротворила его, но он тут же понял, насколько человек еще самодельное, немощно устроенное существо — не более как смутный зародыш и проект чего-то более действительного, и сколько надо еще работать, чтобы развернуть из этого зародыша летящий, высший образ, погребенный в вашей мечте...

— Andrei Platonov, *Schastlivaia Moskva*

The best world is the body's world
filled with creatures filled with dread
misshapen so yet the best we have
our raft among the abstract worlds
and how I longed to live on this earth
walking her boundaries never counting the cost

— Adrienne Rich, *Contradictions: Tracking Poems* (18.)

Introduction

I. Physical culture and the embodied Soviet subject, 1921-1939: surveillance, aesthetics, spectatorship

For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political
existence

— Michel Foucault, 'The Right to Death and the Power over Life'¹

1. The view from the balcony

In 1931 the artist Aleksandr Deineka produced a small oil painting titled *Na balkone*.² The canvas is open to the elements, the scene uncluttered and bright; sun, sea, and wind are in effect. The pastel blue of the water and the white of the towel speak to purity and freedom, a setting in which attention is paid to the body and its sensations. A girl fresh from swimming or sunbathing commands the frame: her skin's deep, ochre colours are carefully shaded and seemingly reflected back onto the railings behind her, lending a sense of depth to an otherwise perspective-free image. She is bronzed, liberated, and attractive.³

Yet Deineka disrupts his own idyll. The body is decentred, with the blank shape of the towel occupying the centre of the frame. The face is expressionless. The girl has carefully defined breasts but no genitals to speak of and no pubic hair. Is there supposed to be an

¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Right of Death and Power over Life', in *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 133–60 (p. 142).

² I have used the Library of Congress standard transliteration throughout for all citations, titles, and proper names.

³ *Voda, solntse*, and *vozdukh* were commonly referenced together in the 1920s and 1930s as the holy trinity of vigorous, healthy living. See, for instance, *Doma ot dykha. Sbornik statei i materialov (1920-1923 gg.)* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1923), pp. 5-10.

eroticism to the scene? If so, are we comfortable with it? Finally there is the way that this body fades into yellow-grey nothingness up the length of the left side of the frame — not only at odds with the rude naturalism of the scene as a whole but unprecedented and unrepeated in all Deineka's work. The girl is laid bare but seeping out of the frame, rooted in the world of light and water whilst only half-present. *Na balkone* is a painting that both stages and disrupts the act of looking at a body; the gaze is troubled.



Figure 1. Aleksandr Deineka, *Na balkone* (1931)

I return to Deineka at length in Chapter Two. I cite *Na balkone* in opening because its combination of bodily definition and indistinction, openness and opacity raises some questions that are central to my work. Produced during the First Five-Year Plan, in a moment of enormous political and cultural shift, Deineka's painting obliquely asks: *what is a Soviet body supposed to look like* (is there an inherently 'Soviet' body type, or even perhaps a particularly 'Soviet' form of beauty)? *How is a Soviet body supposed to be looked at* (what are the rights and responsibilities of the observer before the body on display and the collective

at large)? And perhaps most importantly, *to what ends is this looking carried out* (what is at stake in the act of bodily observation, what is at risk and what can the Soviet collective hope to gain)?

In this thesis I attempt to follow the flesh of *Na balkone* as it fades out of the frame, interrogating those moments in interwar Soviet culture when bodies and looking were both problematically and productively intertwined. Doing so requires that the third question above be paid particular attention. To what ends are bodies observed? Why does it matter how the Soviet body is presented and received? Why might flesh need to be contained, not allowed to fade out of the frame? The interwar years represented the first sustained period of construction and institutionalisation in Soviet society and culture. Reflecting on his 1926 visit to Moscow, Walter Benjamin wrote: ‘Now it is made clear to every Communist that the revolutionary work of this hour is not conflict, not civil war, but canal construction, electrification, and factory building.’⁴ My contention is that the body and its observation are constitutive of a parallel process of construction or formation, one that has become the theme of many academic works: that of Soviet subjects. The revolution was to be incarnated in embodied subjects as it was in power lines and chimney stacks. How the embodied subject looked, felt, and acted became questions of utmost importance in complex and often abortive efforts to lend the revolution flesh.

I approach this issue of incarnation and subjectivity primarily through the lens of ‘physical culture’, or *fizkul’tura*. Physical culture/*fizkul’tura* is a valuable but unwieldy analytical category, encompassing as it did not just sports and exercise but practically all points of contact between the Soviet body and the Soviet public sphere, including but not limited to hygiene and health, labour practices, sexual politics and gender roles, bodily aesthetics, and the general ethics of collective living.⁵ Simply by framing the body in terms of swimming and sunbathing, *Na balkone* is legible as a ‘physical culture’ work. If this hybridity makes it difficult for the researcher to come to terms with *fizkul’tura*, it also points to the need to account for complexity of association and representation, the fine grain of discourse, when tracing the kinds of questions outlined above. An awareness of

⁴ Walter Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 97-130 (p. 130).

⁵ On the sport/*fizkul’tura* distinction, see Susan Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society: Propaganda, Acculturation, and Transformation in the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1-2.

the conceptual scope of *fizkul'tura* allows us to draw links between early Soviet discourses on a wide range of issues, from psychology to gender, aesthetics, and violence.

Rather than the institutional or political history of *fizkul'tura*, however, this thesis presents readings of its representations in visual culture — fiction and non-fiction film, photography, painting, sculpture. I do so in order to tackle in detail my central concern: *looking at bodies*. Theoretical and administrative debates about the role of *fizkul'tura* in Soviet society represent a fascinating source base for historians, highlighting a plethora of socio-political anxieties and desires. But an analysis that also takes in its framing in visual media deepens our understanding of just what was at stake in the relationship between private bodies and the public sphere: it can highlight the principles and ideals animating the dream of a fully functional Soviet collective. I therefore explore the works of administrators, filmmakers, and critics side-by-side, understanding them as mutually productive. Just as the institutions and actors of *fizkul'tura* incorporated a wide range of discourses and practices in their outlining of Soviet corporeality, so a blending of textual and visual analyses allows us to delimit the properties of Soviet corpo-fantasy. As is so often the case, it is the discrepancies between reality and fantasy that provide the richest grounds for discussion.

In this thesis I show how bodies were imagined, projected, and policed, from the end of the Civil War to the eve of the Second World War. I show how the body in its material messiness was frequently figured as fundamentally problematic to the project of revolutionary construction. As the most intransigent of all cultural sites, the body is a locus for personal and collective anxiety, collapse, and trauma. Yet it is also potentially a site of transcendence. Through *fizkul'tura* and its visualisation, it was possible for the body to be rendered productive of Soviet values and persons. Notwithstanding their pathological, corruptive potential, bodies could be put to productive ends; through pathos, empathy, enthusiasm, and jubilation, the complexly objectified body could serve a sense of communality.

2. The field of study

Recent years have seen a growing number of secondary works dedicated variously to *fizkul'tura*, to the history of sensation and perception in Russia, to the place of the body in

early Soviet culture, to the formation of Soviet selfhood, and to the intersection of visual cultures with each of these. I trace an interdisciplinary line through this field in order to understand the intersection of bodies and looking, of physical and visual cultures, in the context of Soviet subjectification. What is meant by ‘subjectivity’ in the early Soviet context is a difficult and expansive topic. Below is a concise review of the literature that informs my work.

Efforts to bring about the New Man or Person — the *novyi chelovek* — have long been a standard topic for historians of the interwar Soviet Union. In the early years of the regime, the Bolsheviks required Soviet people to populate the Soviet state, and this impossibly broad brief became an integral aspect of art in every medium, Party-aligned and heterodox theories, propaganda, and popular culture. The most famous expression of this comes from Trotskii, in his *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (1924): ‘Social construction and psycho-physical self-education will become two aspects of one and the same process [...] Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his body will become more harmonised.’⁶ Since the transformative process envisaged was theoretically without end, the issue of the *novyi chelovek* became in effect that of ‘Soviet(self)hood’: what will it mean for a person to *be* Soviet? What qualities will they possess, and how will they experience — and react to — the world around them? There was in effect no aspect of human life — including every kind of bodily process and sensation — upon which the question of revolutionary transformation could not be brought to bear.

‘Sovietness’ and ‘the self’: these are unwieldy categories, and have provoked much groundbreaking research in part because they have proven so polyvalent. The ever-expanding literature responding to the issue of the *novyi chelovek* encompasses social, emotional, and sensory histories, psychology and other medical practices, psychoanalytic approaches to film and literature, increasingly sophisticated analyses of ‘everyday life’ (or *byt*), and much besides. Just as the Soviets themselves pursued an enormous array of transformative and disciplinary projects with one guiding principle — to *bring about Soviet people* — so at heart many histories of the interwar Soviet Union attempt to answer the same twin questions of ‘Sovietness’ and ‘the self’. What one historian today understands as ‘subjectivity’ another reads as ‘emotional affect’ or ‘identity’, but the underlying concern is the same: to define the terms and conditions of Soviet(self)hood. When I speak in this

⁶ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. and ed. William Keach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), pp. 206-207.

thesis about Soviet ‘subjectification’ I refer to the questions of what it meant to *be*, to *feel*, or to *look* Soviet, even when the primary or secondary sources might not speak explicitly in the same terms. Secondary works dedicated to various aspects of Soviet selfhood or subjectivity, and how political and cultural actors attempted to bring about such states of being, provide the basis for my own research.

My work is in part an addition to the longstanding historical project to account for the formative power of Soviet *values*, the principles structuring the discourse of Soviethood. Influenced by the pioneering work of Sheila Fitzpatrick and others,⁷ social and cultural historians have in the past three decades explored categories of Soviet experience such as utopianism,⁸ class identity,⁹ social etiquette and morality,¹⁰ and gender division.¹¹ In response to and reaction against this diffuse tradition, many social historians now understand Soviet ‘subjectivity’ in terms of its discursive production and delimitation. The work of Stephen Kotkin, Igal Halfin, and Jochen Hellbeck, for instance, speaks to the textual or linguistic constitution of subjectivity in the socio-political context of Stalinism.¹² This is a broad church of historical inquiry with which I share a belief in the importance of considering side-by-side the experiential and discursive categories of Soviet living. Throughout this thesis attention is paid to the ways in which physical culture was talked and written about, how the notion of an embodied Soviet subject was formed through party-political, popular, and journalistic discourse.

⁷ Of Fitzpatrick’s many works, see: Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978); *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992); and Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites (eds.), *Russia in the Era of NEP* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

⁸ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁹ Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); David L. Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Lynne Atwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women’s Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999); *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex Role Socialization in the USSR* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); Anne Gorsuch, “‘A Woman is Not a Man’: The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928”, *Slavic Review*, 55:3 (1996), 636-60.

¹² See, inter alia: Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, ‘Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin’s “Magnetic Mountain” and the State of Soviet Historical Studies’, *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 44:3 (1996), 456-463; Igal Halfin (ed.), *Language and Revolution: Making Modern Political Identities* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Eric Naiman, ‘On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them’, *Russian Review*, 60 (2001), 305-15.

Parallel with and indebted to these histories are works that draw out the relationship between Soviet selfhood and artistic/cultural production. Here the focus is most often on the instrumentalisation of the cultural sphere as part of the transformative project of the *novyi chelovek*. Frequently these works detail the intersections between discursive categories and the material conditions of ‘real’ Soviet life, analysing the discrepancies between word and deed that disrupted the process of subjectification; often this requires that the sphere of ‘everyday life’, or *byt* be taken seriously as an object of study.¹³ The sites of ‘public’ culture — such as workers’ clubs, social housing, or organised demonstrations — have proven particularly productive for scholars looking to understand the extra-textual forces at play in delimiting Soviet selfhood.¹⁴ When studies such as these are successful, the body of the Soviet subject is situated productively in relation to the ‘facts’ of Soviet culture. I consider this school of writing particularly important precisely because it is characterised, whether explicitly or implicitly, by a cultural *materialism*, a sense that the physical interaction between the individual and the culture at large could prove just as significant to subjectification as the discursive realm. My contention is that we can arrive at an understanding of the *embodied* Soviet subject only through such an instrumentalist reading of artistic production and reception.

(It should be noted also that the above two branches of historical work have largely traded in the interwar years. In this they inform my own timeframe: 1921-1939. This period is of such interest because it represents the extensive early era of Soviet *cultural experimentation and maximalism* (whether avant-garde or Stalinist) when it came to human transformation. Inasmuch as this lends it a unitary character, this near-two-decade stretch also contains the sharp political and cultural division separating the NEP from Stalinism/the advent of socialist realism. I have chosen this timeframe precisely because it allows for the juxtaposition of ruptures and continuities in medical, aesthetic, and *fizkul'tura* discourses.)

¹³ See for instance: John E. Bowlit and Olga Matich, *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (eds.), *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

¹⁴ On workers and leisure: Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ‘The Shaping of Soviet Workers’ Leisure: Workers’ Clubs and Palaces of Culture in the 1930s’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 56 (1999), 78–92. For an architectural example, see Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999). On public parades and demonstrations, see Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); Choi Chattergee, *Celebrating Women: Gender, Festival Culture, and Bolshevik Ideology, 1910-1939* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002).

The materialism in these histories, and their sense of subjectivity as necessarily ‘embodied’, have been brought to the fore in two closely related fields: emotional and sensory history. Amongst the most promising recent developments in Soviet studies, these disciplines interrogate the point at which the thinking and feeling individual comes into contact with the world, without relying on objects of cultural production to stage this encounter. In the words of the historians of emotion Mark D. Steinberg and Valerie Sobol, their field explores ‘the knotty intersections of body, self, society, culture and power.’¹⁵ Sensory history in particular remains a tantalising and inchoate field as far as Russia and the Soviet Union is concerned, with scholars beginning only recently to explore the ways in which political discourse and artistic experimentation were understood and shaped in terms of sensory experience.¹⁶ For the likes of Oksana Bulgakova and Anna Toropova, cinema has provided productive ground for analyses of the categories of sensual experience deemed valuable to the Soviet project, a confluence with particular significance to my own work.¹⁷

How do emotional and sensory histories influence my work? First, they tend to highlight the points at which discursive and bodily categories interact and disrupt each other. In their concerns with how the Soviet subject ‘felt’ the world around them, they refer to extra-textual phenomena; the sources available to historians of the early Soviet Union, however, remain overwhelmingly textual and descriptive. Thus these disciplines reveal the difficulty inherent in trying to understand the process of subjectification in terms of the body, and the importance of employing a range of sources in doing so — textual, visual, theoretical, artistic. Second, they deepen our understanding of the role of cultural materialism and artistic production in forming Soviet subjects; they suggest new

¹⁵ Mark D. Steinberg and Valerie Sobol, ‘Introduction’, in Mark D. Steinberg and Valerie Sobol (eds.), *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), pp. 3–18 (p. 6). On the emotional history of Russia see also Jan Plamper, ‘Introduction’, *Slavic Review*, 68:2 (2009), 229–37; Jan Plamper, Shama Shakhadat, and Mark Eli (eds.), *Rossiiskaia imperiia chuvstvo: podkhody k kul’turnoi istorii emotsii. Sbornik statei* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010); Anna Toropova, ‘An Inexpiable Debt: Stalinist Cinema, Biopolitics, and the Discourse of Happiness’, *Russian Review*, 74 (2015), 665–83.

¹⁶ A recent introduction to the potential for a sensory reading of Russian history is Matthew Romaniello and Tricia Starks (eds.), *Russian History through the Senses, from 1700 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). Examples of more focused research include: Claire Shaw, ‘“We Have No Need to Lock Ourselves Away”: Space, Marginality, and the Negotiation of Deaf Identity in Late Soviet Moscow’, *Slavic Review*, 74:1 (2015), 57–78; Irina Sirotkina, *Shestoe chuvstvo avangarda: tanets, dvizhenie, kinesteziiia v zhizni poetov i khudozhnikov* (St Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt Peterburge, 2014); Igor’ Chubarov, *Kollektsionnaia chuvstvennost’: teorii i praktika levogo avangarda* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo VShE, 2014).

¹⁷ Oksana Bulgakova, *Sovetskii slukhoglaz: kino i ego organy chuvstva* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010); Anna Toropova, ‘Educating the Emotions: Affect, Genre Film, and Ideology under Stalin’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2012).

ways of reading film, fine art, even literature in terms of the embodied subject. Finally, and most importantly, in their emphasis on sensory or affective experience they point to the need to account for the *types* or *categories of looking* — surveillance, aesthetics, and above all spectatorship — around which my work is structured. These are introduced in section 4. below.

There are three authors who have proven particularly influential on this thesis. Eric Naiman, Christina Kiaer, and Emma Widdis have all made invaluable contributions to our understanding of the body in early Soviet culture. Naiman's *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (1997) accounts for the problematic position of bodies within the Soviet world-building of the 1920s, and suggests ways of reading 'utopia' and 'ideology' in conjunction.¹⁸ In Naiman's words, 'ideology and the literature that can shape it are not purely reflective of material realities but affect the perception of those realities in ways that then have an impact on the development of material realities themselves'.¹⁹ Utopian cultures, such as that of the Soviet 1920s, are thus engaged in a constant process of self-abnegation and renewal; within this, the body of the new Soviet person plays a crucial role. Naiman's stated aim, to highlight 'the ideological uses made of the body at a concrete historical moment when theory is put into practice' and 'the discursive marks made on the flesh when it is forced to "mediate" between the Ideal and the Real' informs much of my own analysis.²⁰

The significance of Kiaer's work, first on Constructivism and more recently on Aleksandr Deineka, lies in her insistence on the sensual-bodily encounter between Soviet subject and Soviet culture.²¹ Her innovative reading of Constructivism as an attempt to produce socialism through a transformed commodity relation is informed by an acute materialism: Kiaer shows us how the sensate body was understood as the malleable substrate of Soviet subjectivity, manipulated through its interactions with cultural material. Her work on the peculiar bodies in Deineka's early-1930s paintings (one of which we have already encountered) takes these ideas more in the direction of affect

¹⁸ Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²¹ Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*; 'Lyrical Socialist Realism'; 'Collective Body: The Art of Aleksandr Deineka', *Artforum*, 51:3 (2012), 243–49; 'Was Socialist Realism Forced Labour? The Case of Aleksandr Deineka in the 1930s', *Oxford Art Journal*, 28:3 (2005), 321–45.

theory, but the principle remains: the Soviet subject is an embodied one and will not be brought into being without sensitivity to sensory, material encounters.²²

Finally, Emma Widdis's recent work on cinema in relation to sensation, feeling, and subjectivity has shaped my appreciation of both the centrality of experiential categories, and the role that film and other visual culture can play for scholars of the interwar period.²³ Widdis outlines the 'cinematic project' of formulating an 'alternative Soviet psychology', characterised by a 'reanimated sensory engagement with the world'.²⁴ Since subjectivity is formed through sensory contact with the world, ideologically informed changes to the conditions that create sensation — including the conditions produced by the consumption of film — can inculcate a new Soviet subjectivity.²⁵ This emphasis on the visual representation of subjectification has proved vital in my analysis of categories of looking. Theoretical similarities aside, I have also been influenced by Widdis's methodology, which contextualises films in terms of both their critical and popular reception, and contemporaneous extra-cinematic discourses around sensation and selfhood.

What, then, of physical culture itself? There are a number of secondary works dedicated to *fizkul'tura* and the role of the body in early Soviet society, but none that bring my particular frames of reference to bear. Those that deal with *fizkul'tura* in the broad sense of the term can be divided into two major groups: histories of *fizkul'tura* and sport, and histories of *fizkul'tura* and medicine. First, there are those studies that set out the administrative and institutional histories of *fizkul'tura*, answering the question of *how* the Soviet body was organised. For most of the twentieth century only a few efforts were made to explain the practical functioning of *fizkul'tura*, usually from a rigid totalitarianist viewpoint: Henry W. Morton and James Riordan were for a long time the standard texts.²⁶ In common with most other fields, the opening of archives in the 1990s allowed

²² This thesis skirts the issue of affect theory without engaging with it in depth: my own approach centres on new ways of describing and analysing those cultural moments to which affect theory might otherwise be applied. On the issues surrounding the use of affect theory in historical discussions of bodily or non-cognitive experience, see: Jonathan Flatley, 'Glossary', in *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 20-36; Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry*, 37:3 (2011), 434-72.

²³ Emma Widdis, 'Socialist Senses: Film and the Creation of Soviet Subjectivity', *Slavic Review*, 71:3 (2012), 590-618; *Socialist Senses: Film, Feeling and the Soviet Subject, 1917-1940* (forthcoming).

²⁴ Widdis, 'Socialist Senses', p. 616.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 596-97.

²⁶ Henry W. Morton, *Soviet Sport: Mirror of Soviet Society* (New York: Collier Books, 1963); James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

historians outside and within Russia to appreciate new complexities not just in the practicalities of *fizkul'tura* organisation but also in the ideological underpinnings of this cornerstone of Soviet lived experience. Susan Grant and Robert Edelman in particular have provided evidence of how fertile this historical ground is.²⁷ These institutional histories have also addressed at length the links between *fizkul'tura* and the military in the Soviet Union, an angle that I do not explore at length here.

Second, there is now a substantive literature on the theories and practices of Soviet health and hygiene, much of which is directly relevant to the theme of *fizkul'tura*. This literature is largely concerned with bodily *coercion*. The consensus is that from a public health point of view the construction of the *novyi chelovek* required the rational organisation of the individual body and the maintenance of hygiene at a population level. Scholars have therefore dedicated themselves to detailing this rationalisation, emphasising the instrumentalist, utilitarian, and positivist aspects of Soviet medical culture. This has taken the form of general histories,²⁸ as well as more detailed accounts of issues of sexual and reproductive health,²⁹ and the intersection of public health and the psychological sciences.³⁰ In the words of one author, 'the rationalised body was more essential to the socialist utopia than even the state; the creation of the body Soviet was the creation of the socialist utopia.'³¹ There is a clear link between these 'medical histories' and the biopolitical theories of population-level governmentality first formulated by Michel Foucault. In my

²⁷ Grant; Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Vitalii Stolbov, *Istorii fizicheskoi kul'tury i sporta* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 2000); B. P. Goloshchapov, *Istoriia fizicheskoi kul'tury i sport* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii tsentr "Akademiia", 2008). I draw extensively on Edelman's social historical approach to Soviet sport in Chapter Four.

²⁸ Susan Gross Solomon and John F. Hutchinson (eds.), *Health and Society in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); D. D. Venediktov, *Zdravookhranenie Rossii: Krizis i puti preodeleniia* (Moscow: Meditsina, 1999).

²⁹ Frances L. Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007); Dan Healey, *Bolshevik Sexual Forensics: Diagnosing Disorder in the Clinic and Courtroom, 1917-1939* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009); *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

³⁰ Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Hannah Proctor, 'Reason Displaces All Love', *The New Inquiry*, 25 (2014) <<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/reason-displaces-all-love>> [accessed 17 September 2014].

³¹ Starks, p. 4.

third and fourth chapters I draw on Foucault and a number of scholars who apply his work on biopolitics to the Soviet context.³²

Conversely, while studies of the body as a cultural figure are certainly forthcoming, these are often found wanting when it comes to an appreciation of the theoretical and ideological contexts within which images of the body would have been produced. The few cultural or artistic histories of *fizkul'tura* produced in English do not account for the Soviet self and how it might be understood in relation to ideological and visual imperatives. Mike O'Mahony's *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture — Visual Culture* (2006) is a survey that covers the 1910s up to the 1980 Moscow Olympics, drawing out some trends in figuration and subject matter but failing to explain how these shifts relate to conceptualisations of the body and selfhood;³³ the same is true of the recent exhibition (and accompanying catalogue) 'Sovetskii sport', held at the Institute of Russian Realist Art in Moscow,³⁴ and an edited volume by historians in Frankfurt.³⁵ There have been excellent studies on the cultural figure of the body outside of *fizkul'tura*: these include those that focus on literary or other textual sources,³⁶ and those that focus on cinema.³⁷ Yet the true potential of an analysis that takes in physical *and* visual culture in an attempt to bring to light new aspects of Soviet subjectivity remains unrealised. Central to my work is a dual claim: that *fizkul'tura* deserves rigorous conceptual analysis as a staging ground for Soviet subjectification that elucidates many of the concepts and problems raised by social, cultural, sensory, emotional, and medical histories; and that such an analysis properly conceived will pay close attention to visual culture, including but not limited to cinema, as a space in which the body is reimagined for the onlooker.

³² Foucault, 'The Right to Death'; Toropova, 'An Inexpiable Debt'; Sergei Prozorov, 'Living Ideas and Dead Bodies: The Biopolitics of Stalinism', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 38:3 (2013), pp. 208–27.

³³ Mike O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture — Visual Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2006).

³⁴ Nadezhda Stepanova and Andy Potts (eds.), *Sovetskii sport. Zhivopis', grafika, fotografiia i skul'ptura iz sobraniia instituta russkogo realisticheskogo iskusstva, gosudarstvennykh muzeev i chastnykh kollektsii* (Moscow: Skanrus, 2014).

³⁵ Nikolaus Katzer, Sandra Budy, Alexandra Köhring, and Manfred Zeller (eds.), *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2010).

³⁶ See for instance: Naiman, *Sex in Public*; Rolf Hellebust, *Flesh to Metal: Soviet Literature and the Alchemy of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Keith A. Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004); M. Zolotonosov, *Slovo i telo: seksual'nye aspekty, universalii, interpretatsii russkogo kul'turnogo teksta XIX-XX vekov* (Moscow: Ladomir, 1999).

³⁷ See for instance: Widdis, 'Socialist Senses'; Toropova, 'An Inexpiable Debt'; Bulgakova; Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctions: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity Under Stalin* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

A study such as this should at its outset acknowledge the chimerical nature of ‘genuine’ historical subjectivities. We cannot hope to account for real people and their actual lived experiences or psychologies. We will certainly not arrive at genuine subjectivities through analyses of cinema or painting. Instead we can trace developments in the conceptualisation and imagination of bodies and selfhood in cultural texts, and the aesthetic and ideological contexts in which these representations were produced. We can define the evolution of Soviet bodily ideals and map their apparent irreconcilability with aspects of the material world. In doing so we can refine established historical periodisations. The relationship between the 1920s and the 1930s, between the NEP era and Stalinism, has long been a matter of debate. By examining bodies, visual culture, and subjectification side by side I am able to reinforce certain received notions about a socio-cultural rupture between the two decades, but I also draw out a number of continuities requiring further comment. In matters of bodily aesthetics, gender and sexuality, and social psychology there are continuities that span the breadth of the interwar period; the same questions reframed and never satisfactorily answered.

3. Sources and methods

In 1935 the English journalist Huntly Carter reported on a trip to Russia where he had been charged with assessing the popular mood regarding cinema. The film that made by far the strongest impression on Carter was a documentary short depicting a recent *fizkul'tura* parade on Red Square, titled *Schastlivaia iunost'*.

The parade was a picture, never to be forgotten [...] For youth was indeed streamlined, leaning on health, vigour, enthusiasm, conveying that sense of fitness, well-being, speed, movement, a sense of conquest of natural forces, that comes from the well-trained, lithe and supple body. One saw masses of warm radiating flesh [...] a poem of physical perfection.

Here was the Soviet culture at its best, and here was the People as the Cinema.³⁸

In Carter's ecstatic response we can discern a number of ideas that will recur throughout this thesis. There is the iteration of qualities that had come to define the

³⁸ Huntly Carter, 'The Soviet Cinema and the People: Their Social Unity', in *Playtime in Russia*, ed. Hubert Griffith (London: Methuen and Co., 1935), pp. 95–118 (p. 118).

nominal aims of Soviet *fizkul'tura* — rude health, social enthusiasm, discipline. There is the 'conquest of natural forces', a common rhetorical device of the 1920s and 1930s that reaffirmed the need for a radical transformation of human life. And bookending these remarks are two lines that equate bodies (Parade), collective identity (People), and their visual representation (Cinema).

In short, Carter's description points to a reading of early Soviet culture in which bodies and images are mutually constitutive of the conquest of nature and the formation of a *novyi chelovek*, a Soviet subject. In this thesis I apply this notion to a wide range of textual and visual sources in order to elucidate different categories of looking and their role in subjectification. In Chapter One, I also look at non-fiction film and photography; in Chapter Two, painting and sculpture; it is in Chapters Three and Four that I shift my focus solely to fiction film. I do this because my aim is less to add to the literature on Soviet cinema than it is to elucidate certain 'categories' of seeing and the production or disruption of subjectivities. Widening my net, as it were, allows me to account not only for the 'People as the Cinema', but for the 'People as the Photograph' or the 'People as the Painting' as well.

My methodology draws on the observations of Francesco Casetti on cinema as a disciplinary model situated within a 'network of social discourses':³⁹ I argue that his formal argument as to the interaction between film and discourse can be expanded to include other manifestations of the cultural *image*. For Casetti, cinema is influenced by its social and political context, yet it also 'gives an image [...] to its surrounding reality — both actual and possible'.⁴⁰ As such, its function in relation to ideological demands is as 'an optimal interpreter of a latent tension [...] [that is] nonetheless a non-neutral witness.'⁴¹ For my purposes, the 'latent tension' is that experienced by Soviet subjects compelled to transform their understanding of their bodies and their bodily presence in the world. What I trace in my work is the dynamic between the nexus of political and medical discourses that create the new Soviet body and visual representations of these discourses' affective power. In drawing on Casetti, I am also responding to the question of whether visual representations can meaningfully be appropriated and instrumentalised to such ends; whether, for instance, a medium such as cinema can fulfil its ideological 'promise to be a

³⁹ Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity*, trans. Erin Larkin with Jennifer Pranolo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 169-186.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

site in which the various solutions offered may become models to which one must conform [...] [when] the problem lies in mastering a series of elements that seem to exceed all sides.⁴²

Of course, these questions did not escape Soviet thinkers themselves. Throughout this thesis I make references to native iterations of Carter's equation of body, people, and image, and to the idea of a cultural project combining coercion with renovation. To cite two examples: in a 1925 review of an exhibition by the Association of Revolutionary Russian Artists (AKhRR), Anatolii Lunacharskii stated that it was 'imperative that the artist [...] [conceive] in his blood and nerves' in order to foster greater social cohesion, or 'самопознание народов'.⁴³ In 1928, Sergei Tret'iakov argued for a cinema that would make Soviet audiences *feel* as well as think, an *emotsionalizator* as much as an *intellektualizator*, and an agent of bodily exertion: 'Полтора часа киносеанса мы должны превратить для них в те десять минут утренней зарядковой гимнастики, которые приводят спортсмена в бодрое, напряженное состояние.'⁴⁴

One consequence of the diversity in my primary sources and my intention to look afresh at *fizkul'tura* and subjectification is that I do not make extensive reference to theories of cinema or vision. Certainly, a version of this thesis could be written which was structured very firmly around recent film theory. The question of film spectatorship and desire has been at the heart of much film theory since Laura Mulvey's seminal 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975).⁴⁵ Expansions upon and polemics with Mulvey's psychoanalytically-informed account of scopophilia, voyeurism, and film phantasy now constitute a significant body of theoretical work,⁴⁶ whose application in Soviet cinema studies I reference at points.⁴⁷ However, it is not my intention primarily to elaborate on a theoretical position as regards film or any other medium. Instead, I try to highlight

⁴² Ibid., p. 176.

⁴³ Cited in Angelina Lucento, 'The Conflicted Origins of Soviet Visual Media: Painting, Photography, and Communication in Russia, 1925-1932', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 56:2-3 (2015), 401-28 (p. 401).

⁴⁴ S. Tret'iakov, 'Chem zhivo kino?', *Novyi LEE*, 5 (1928), 23-28 (p. 28).

⁴⁵ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), 6-18.

⁴⁶ See for instance: Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988); Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁴⁷ Most relevant for my work are Kaganovsky; Andrey Shcherbenok, 'Russian/Soviet Screened Sexuality: An Introduction', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3:2 (2009), 135-44; Anne Eakin Moss, 'Stalin's harem: the spectator's dilemma in late 1930s Soviet film', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3:2 (2009), 157-72; Tat'iana Dashkova, *Telesnost' - ideologiya - kinematograf. Vizual'nyi kanon i sovetskaia povsednevnost'* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2013).

examples of productive primary sources through which I can posit a particularly *Soviet model of looking or spectatorship*; that is, one that is ‘Soviet’ before it is ‘Lacanian’, ‘queer’, or ‘affective’. In this sense my research contributes to an intellectual history of Soviet bodies and Soviet vision rather than a theoretically-informed account of visual media. If my work does subscribe to a particular theory of film, then it is above all that proposed by Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener in their attempts to outline the relationship between cinema, perception, and the human body.⁴⁸ Elsaesser and Hagener describe the mutual transformation of spectator and screen in terms that mirror my own.

The idea of the body as a sensory envelope, as perceptual membrane and material-mental interface, in relation to the cinematic image and to audio-visual perception, is thus more than a heuristic device and an aesthetic metaphor: it is the ontological, epistemological and phenomenological “ground” for the respective theories of film and cinema today.⁴⁹

Elsaesser’s and Hagener’s line here chimes with earlier work by Linda Williams and others that attempts to move beyond the singularity of vision expressed in Mulvey’s ‘gaze theory’ and towards a reading of film that accounts for both perception and expression, for the fact that film ‘is an act of vision with both a subjectivity that views and a view that is seen.’⁵⁰ The intended relationship in interwar Soviet film between screen and viewer, or between onscreen spectators and onlooking audience is at the heart of my discussion in the second half of this thesis. As Williams argues in her rebuttal of ‘monolithic’ gaze theory, ‘fantasy can engage with the complex effects of spectatorship, but we need a better understanding of how the categories of sexual difference, and desire itself, are culturally variable.’⁵¹

My primary textual sources can be divided into three groups. The first are texts by medical professionals on the dynamic between mind, body, and society, and the psychological and physical risks and benefits of *fizkul’tura*. These include clinical psychologists as well as medical sociologists, gynaecologists, and theorists of sexual deviance. Disciplinary differences aside, these professionals share a common concern for

⁴⁸ Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Linda Williams, ‘Introduction’, in Linda Williams, ed., *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 1-22 (p. 9).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

the ways in which mental ‘disorders’ — violence, substance abuse, sexual perversion — originate in individuals and social groups, and how management of the body can prevent this.

The second group comprises theorists and administrators of *fizkul'tura*. These were people who debated the form and function of Soviet physical culture, and who attempted in spite of immense practical and political difficulties to put in place structures for the management and honing of Soviet bodies. They were Party ideologues and bureaucrats, athletes, journalists, and commentators. These *fizkul'tura* specialists drew on the work of the medical professionals in their arguments, formulating a kind of applied socio-psychological thought based in part on the more rigorous work of doctors; in turn, medical professionals promoted *fizkul'tura* as a means of sublimating extraneous bodily urges and regulating bodily and mental processes.

The final group consists of the myriad critics and journalists who contributed to the interlinked discourses around *fizkul'tura*, the body, and its visual representation. These include film and art critics and theorists, sports correspondents, and propagandists. In specialist and general interest publications they responded to my primary visual sources or else helped to create what Casetti calls the ‘network of social discourses’ within which visual representations of the body proliferated. In the 1920s in particular the *fizkul'tura* press constituted a significant proportion of the specialist journalism available to the Soviet public: from established names that would run for decades — *Fizkul'tura i sport*, *Sovetskii sport* — to short-lived NEP-era publications that staked claims to discursive territories still in the process of formation — *V pomoshch' fizkul'taktivistu*, *Kul'turnyi front*, *Za novyi byt*. Taken together these three groups of writers form the discursive context for the visual culture at the heart of my thesis, reinforcing or challenging ideas about the Soviet body and the Soviet subject as they were reflected on screen or canvas.

4. Categories of looking

I structure my readings of physical and visual cultures around three core ‘categories of looking’: surveillance, aesthetics, and spectatorship. I identify these as central to the re-imagination of Soviet bodies. I began this introduction by posing three questions: *what is a Soviet body supposed to look like? How is a Soviet body supposed to be looked at? And, to what ends is*

this looking carried out? These questions speak to the importance of the body in the creation of Soviet peoples, and we cannot hope to answer them without close attention to the functions and intersections of categories of looking.

I frame my analysis around these categories because they enable us to think through the complex dynamic at play between private and public experiences of the body.

Surveillance is my term for the types of vision that contribute to a collective and personal system of regulation of body and mind, behaviour and consciousness, and includes both external observation and subjective self-disciplining. I draw on Peter Holquist's work on Bolshevik surveillance measures and their European context; for Holquist surveillance should be understood not simply as a system for the revelation of information, but as a means of societal *transformation*.⁵² Again, the renovative project is also a coercive one. The surveilling gaze is one that monitors the body, alert to its destructive agency as regards Soviet subjectification. It represents a disciplinary visual mode, and is most strongly associated with the social psychological discourses that I outline in Part Two of my introduction, below; it is also at the heart of many *fizkul'tura* theorists' concerns about the proper formation of healthy Soviet citizens.

Aesthetics refers to a complex series of attempts to delimit Soviet bodily beauty. The aesthetic gaze shapes and is shaped by a discourse on the desirable outward appearance of the Soviet citizen; it operates parallel to disciplinary modes, but deals instead in terms of pleasure and attraction. Nonetheless, the aesthetic gaze retains a regulatory aspect, as the body of the *novyi chelovek* is *compelled* to assume beautiful characteristics. In this way the aesthetic gaze fixes the desired contours of personal and collective embodiment. In Chapters One and Two I trace out the development of a distinctly Soviet bodily aesthetics based on a mutuality of exposure and sacrifice. This aesthetics is formulated first in the productionist theories of the mid-1920s Levyy front iskusstv (LEF) and then carried forward in painting and film into the 1930s, where it is transformed in the Stalinist artistic context into a particular brand of neo-classicism.

Tying these two categories together is **spectatorship**, the ways in which bodies are observed and understood within the Soviet public sphere. Spectatorship is in a sense the principal theme of my thesis, since it is fundamentally rooted in collective/communal

⁵² Peter Holquist, "'Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context', *The Journal of Modern History*, 69:3 (1997), 415-450, esp. p. 417.

experiences, and hence speaks most compellingly to the ideological exigencies of Soviet subjectification. There is already a substantive literature on the intrusion in this period of the public project of Sovietisation into the private sphere.⁵³ I am more interested in what might roughly be termed the already-public realm: activities where the body is explicitly displayed and observed. This is why spectator sports provide such productive ground for analysis. Spectatorship is addressed throughout my thesis, but comes to the fore most prominently in Chapters Three and Four, where I read *fizkul'tura* feature films in terms of their staging of the acts of bodily performance and observation.

There is another term that is central to my thinking and which recurs throughout my primary sources, similarly refracted through a range of loose synonyms: my preferred version is *obshchestvennost'* (mutuality, communality, public-mindedness). Other terms will be encountered in the discussion that follows which might in another context serve the purpose that *obshchestvennost'* does for me — *vzaimootnosheniia*, for instance, or *otvetstvennost'* — but none that capture so well the sense of what I would call a *totalised* (that is, fully socialised) communality. Taking an inductive approach to my primary sources, it is also true that *obshchestvennost'* is simply the more recurrent term used by those engaged in Soviet world-and-subject-building. It is the quality that is cited, again and again, as crucial in redefining physical culture, modes of thinking, or artistic expression along specifically Soviet terms. It becomes a proxy for the collective project of Soviethood. Once identified within a canvas, for instance, *obshchestvennost'* can make a mediocre painting of a football match into a statement of pure Soviet identification.

As will be shown, *obshchestvennost'* is a term which arises in many different contexts; it is always a precious and nebulous quality. Of course, such an uncertain quality is the subject of a great deal of debate, and the definition of *obshchestvennost'* changes over time; staying alert to these permutations helps me to trace the evolution of my other principal themes. I do not draw on one explicit definition of the term, preferring to maintain a sense of *obshchestvennost'* as something always ambient or atmospheric in relation to the concrete artefacts of cultural production. At this introductory stage, though, the definition given by Vladimir Ushakov in his 1935-40 edition of the *Tolkovyĭ slovar' russkogo iazyka* is as good a summation as any: 'Общественное мнение [...] Общественный темперамент, склонность к общественной работе [...] Соответствие общественным требованиям,

⁵³ Kiaer and Naiman (eds.).

интересам.⁵⁴ As I encounter it in my sources, I understand the word *obshchestvennost'* to indicate a discursively constructed entity or quality that refers both to the discourse and to the entity or quality itself.

5. Timeframe and structure

The period covered in my research, from 1921 to 1939, has been chosen to reflect the broad sweep of Soviet interwar history: from the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, through NEP-era reconstruction, the First Five-Year Plan, and the early years of socialist realist consolidation. This eighteen-year period saw the simultaneous institutionalisation of medical, sociological, and *fizkul'tura* theory and practice, as well as the gradual development of aesthetic models pertaining to the body. The choice of timeframe may seem counterproductive, inasmuch as the transition from the NEP to Stalinism is situated in the middle of my chronology. However, over the course of my research I have come to realise that in matters of the body — from aesthetics to questions of gender and sexuality, from psychology to theories of *fizkul'tura* — there are under-appreciated continuities stretching from the First to the Second World War that reveal more than they conceal. This being said, my thesis is not strictly chronological. Chapters One and Two deal with sources from the early 1920s to the early 1930s, while Chapters Three and Four shift the focus to the mid- and late 1930s; however, I consistently make reference to material from across the interwar era throughout, in part to emphasise through implication that I am more interested in outlining the evolution of certain ideas than I am in contributing to the historicist policing of periodisations.

The thesis is structured as follows. My Introduction is split into two sections: a standard scene-setting, above, followed by a brief history of social psychological theories of the body. This two-headed opening is justified by the important intellectual context provided for my later claims about the body and the collective. As I demonstrate, *fizkul'tura* was informed by the debates undertaken by psychologists and other medical figures; the ways in which visual representations of physical culture were received was in

⁵⁴ D. N. Ushakov, ed., *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka*, 4 vols (Moscow, 1935-40), vol 2, pp. 728-29 (p. 728). For a contemporary introduction, see Vadim Volkov, 'Obshchestvennost': zabytaia praktika grazhdanskogo obshchestva', *Pro et Contra*, 2 (1997), 77-94. Volkov defines *obshchestvennost'* as the 'Russian variation' on the conception of civil society.

turn informed by this dual medical-*fizkul'tura* configuration. It is therefore impossible to fully appreciate the ways in which the body was understood in physical and visual culture without reckoning with the discursive history that had originally situated it in relation to society. Models of surveillance, aesthetics, and spectatorship all derive from arguments first undertaken along social psychological lines.

My first and second chapters proper explore bodily aesthetics and relate these to the problems that the body poses to the formation of Soviet subjectivities. In these two chapters I trace a line in aesthetic theory between Boris Arvatov and LEF's mid-1920s productionism and the 'return to classicism' that typifies the 1930s, as well as introducing questions of spectatorship taken up in more detail later in the thesis. Chapter One builds on the mind-body dynamic and the importance of bodily surveillance established in the second part of the Introduction, showing how aesthetic and disciplinary categories of looking became intertwined in the mid- to late-1920s with what Arvatov calls 'social-aesthetic monism'. In this chapter I show how non-fiction media — newspaper clippings and newsreels — worked both to stage desirable bodies and to refine the gaze of their observer. In this discussion of aesthetics, non-fiction images, and subjectivity, two points become clear: the self-reflexivity of media is crucial in creating an image of Soviet spectatorship; and that *fizkul'tura* and *obshchestvennost'* are closely linked in visual culture, with the communal aspects of sport — the presence of the crowd, the discipline of the team, the bond between spectator and athlete — brought to the fore. Bodies must be observed, but passive or alienated observation is insufficient.

Chapter Two continues this exploration of questions of bodily aesthetics into the 1930s, now in relation to *fizkul'tura* painting by Aleksandr Deineka, Aleksandr Samokhvalov, and others, and Abram Room's unreleased 1936 film *Strogi iunoshka*. I examine how figurative painting allowed for the dynamics between living, feeling bodies to be brought out to a degree lacking in non-fiction images, arguing that this represents the ongoing entrenchment of *obshchestvennost'* as the vital signifier of properly Soviet bodily experience. Through Deineka in particular I am able to demonstrate that the avant-garde aesthetics of a figure like Arvatov are recast rather than renounced in the oft-commented 1930s turn to classicism. However, these images also work to highlight the deficiencies of a Soviethood constructed around aesthetic categories. *Strogi iunoshka* poses the question of whether it is sufficient for a body to be beautiful: staging moral quandaries alongside athletic prowess, Room's film implies that the aestheticised body often houses an empty

subject, devoid of emotional attachment to the collective, regardless of whether its *fizkul'tura* is conducted in the spirit of *obshchestvennost'* or not.

My third chapter looks at the evolution of *fizkul'tura* in feature films from the 1920s to the 1930s, showing how emotionality was brought to bear upon physical and visual culture. For subjectivity not to get lost in the kind of pure bodily communion encountered in Deinekian painting, *feeling* — in the sense of 'emotionality' (*emotsional'nost'*) or subjective investment — had to be introduced into the act of observing bodies.⁵⁵ It is here that spectatorship, understood in terms of the emotional bonds formed in an act of public looking and performance, becomes the main focus of my argument. I concentrate on three examples from the mid-1930s — *Schastlivyi finish* (Pavel Kolomoitsev, Ukrainfil'm, 1934), *Lavryi Miss Ellen Grei* (Iurii Zheliabuzhskii, Vostokfil'm, 1935), and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* (Igor' Savchenko, Rot-Front/Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1936) — that thematise athletics and sexual relationships in order to explore the ways in which bodies as aesthetic objects were related to broader social questions of gender, marriage, and pregnancy. I comment on questions of cinematic genre/style, and introduce a biopolitical theoretical line that informs my fourth chapter in particular.

This fourth and final chapter is about football. Here I bring together several threads that have run through my discussion: social psychological questions around pathology and public disorder, and the concomitant fixation of surveillance; the proper form and function of *fizkul'tura* within the broader project of Soviet subjectification; a biopolitical concern, exhibited in Stalinist-era texts in particular, with policing bodies on both individual and population levels. This chapter opens with an explanation of the social history of football, showing how it came to be associated in interwar Russia with *khuliganstvo*. I argue that within certain visual representations of football, this violent or destructive quality was repurposed to serve the cause of *obshchestvennost'*; again, this comes down to the careful staging of spectatorship, the ways in which Soviet subjects are shown to empathise with the players suffering on the pitch before them. In two exemplary feature films — *Zapozdalyi zhenikh* (Kote Mikaberidze, 1939) and *Vratar'* (Semen Timoshenko, 1937) — I examine the relationship between bodies and onlooking crowds. In combination with Chapter Three, this final chapter shows how the dynamic between the body and its spectator was reimagined in the late interwar years; the body's aesthetic appeal is now of

⁵⁵ The differentiation between Soviet conceptions of 'feeling'/'emotion' lies outside the scope of this thesis; see Widdis, *Socialist Senses*.

little importance compared to its ability to constitute a public subjectivity through the production of trauma and subsequent pathos.

My thesis can be thought of in terms of two rough halves: the extended Introduction and Chapter One deal with medical discourse, aesthetic theory, and non-fiction media; Chapters Two through Four turn to the disparate ‘fictions’ of painting and feature film. To indicate this shift, I have named each of the final three chapters after an exemplary *fizkul'tura* figure: **The Bather**, **The Runner**, and **The Footballer**. These figures, defined by their actions and the reception of their bodies, function as avatars for the principal concerns of their respective chapters, helping me to frame the arguments of each in appropriately corporeal terms.

II. Social psychologies and problematic bodies

1. Making brains communist

Any account of Soviet psychology must necessarily reiterate the materialism that ran through so much cultural and scientific thinking in the 1920s and 1930s. Most ideologues, artists, and medical professionals of the interwar Soviet Union took seriously Marx's dictum from the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.'⁵⁶ Here I explore how the materialist implications of this statement were worked out in the Soviet psychological sciences, in order to contextualise my subsequent claims about physical and visual cultures.

The primacy of Marx's 'social existence' requires that the physiological operations of the body be situated in their social context — not only the physical 'facts' of social life (cohabitation, collective labour, and so on) but also the principles governing public behaviour. This confluence of bodily and communal experience was explicitly acknowledged by Soviet ideologues as a constitutive element of the revolutionary project. Nikolai Bukharin announced to the First Soviet Pedological Conference in 1927 that 'the cultural revolution has a socio-biologic equivalent that reaches down to the very physiological nature of the organism.'⁵⁷ Four years earlier, in *Literature and Revolution*, Trotskii described the goal of the *novyi chelovek* in the same terms: 'to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type.'⁵⁸ For this particular synthesis of the social with the biological to be realised it was necessary for Soviet science to elaborate a mind-body dynamic that accounted for the fundamental primacy of the social sphere. The broad discipline that resulted, and which I outline below, we can term social psychology.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 10.

⁵⁷ Cited in Alexander Etkind, *Eros of the Impossible: The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia*, trans. Noah and Maria Rubins (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 265.

⁵⁸ Trotsky, p. 206.

⁵⁹ In the primary and secondary literature a number of terms are used to refer to the field at hand: psychology, social psychology, Marxist psychology, behaviouralism, social or human sciences, and so on. There are both ideological and chronological reasons for these shifts and progressions, and I try to

Here I offer a selective account of mid-1920s social psychological discourse relative to the new ideological paradigm of Soviet power. Here the body is consistently posited as an obstacle to efforts to construct new forms of individual and collective consciousness, with a nexus of bodily processes, impulses, and behaviours threatening the formation of Soviet subjectivities. Key here are the pseudo-philosophy of *materialist monism* and the juxtaposition of *observation and surveillance*. I argue that the trope of the problematic body was formed in part through the attempts of intellectuals to respond to a set of irreconcilable philosophical and ideological demands within the NEP-era. The resulting professional or disciplinary anxieties led these thinkers to focus on notions of *control* of both bodily behaviour and the mind. As a result, psychology shifts from a science that observes or describes the individual within the collective to one that functions as a mode of surveillance and, ultimately, coercive transformation.

Clearly, the notion that psychological sciences work to discipline and coerce subjects is neither new, nor specific to the Soviet Union. For one, Soviet psychologists borrowed liberally from their pre-revolutionary Russian forebears;⁶⁰ in turn these Tsarist thinkers were part of a much wider disciplinary turn, originating in mid-nineteenth-century France and Italy, that sought to understand the new forms of subjectivity produced by modern urban living.⁶¹ There is a much broader set of theoretical paradigms to consider here too, most obviously in the work of Michel Foucault.⁶² The enduring concern in Foucault's work with the relationship of power to knowledge and the construction of discourses is of course applicable to the Soviet example.⁶³ However, since my thesis is not primarily a medical history, I do not dwell on Foucault here; in Chapters Three and Four, I do make reference to another of Foucault's theoretical innovations in my discussion of the biopolitical turn in Stalinist culture. Likewise, what follows is in no way an exhaustive

use 'social psychology' as a catchall term unless the source in question makes a point of doing otherwise.

⁶⁰ On the liberal heritage of Soviet psychology see Beer. Examples of pre-revolutionary socially-minded psychology and psychiatry include: Vladimir Bekhterev, *Vnushenie i ego rol' v obshchestvennoi zhizni* (St Petersburg, K. L. Rikker, 1898); Sergei O. Iaroshevskii, *Materialy k voprosu o massovykh nervnopsikhicheskikh zabolevaniakh. Obozrenie psikiatrii, nevrologii i eksperimental'noi psikhologii* (1906).

⁶¹ Among the most influential texts were: Gustave Le Bon, *La psychologie des foules* (Paris: 1895); Scipio Sighele, *La folla delinquente* (Turin: 1891), translated into Russian by A. P. Afanas'ev as *Tolpa prestupnaia* (St Petersburg: F. Pavlenkov, 1893). On this broader European trend see: Robert A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage, 1975).

⁶² Among Foucault's many works, see in particular: *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique – Folie et déraison* (Paris: Plon, 1961); *Naissance de la clinique – une archéologie du regard médical* (Paris: PUF, 1963); *Histoire de la sexualité. Vol I: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

⁶³ This has been at heart of social histories of Stalinism, for instance, for around two decades: see Kotkin; Halfin (ed.); Hellbeck.

history of Soviet psychology, rather an attempt to draw out the evolution of certain Soviet discourses. In doing so I draw on a number of more detailed histories of the psychological and psychiatric sciences in Russia.⁶⁴

Daniel Beer has shown at length how the modernising drive of pre-revolutionary liberal intellectuals was carried through into the Soviet era;⁶⁵ still, in the NEP era the parameters for psychological inquiry were scrutinised anew. In a post-revolutionary context that saw the rapid propagation and institutionalisation of new, often contradictory psychological schools, a new cohort of *social* scientific theorists and practitioners attempted to definitively delineate their fields according to a series of common (if poorly-defined) ‘Marxist’ ontological principles.⁶⁶ For psychologists, perhaps the most crucial of these was *materialist monism*. Whilst this often amounted to nothing more than a pseudo-philosophy, the paradigm can be roughly put: matter determines consciousness, but both can be described and explained by a single science.⁶⁷ Further to this act of description/explanation, medical science had also to *transform* its subjects — in this case the human body and mind.

The prescriptions of materialist monism, such as they were, make clear the tensions that underlie the work of Soviet psychological modernisers. We can draw out and contextualise several of these tensions by considering three brief texts by exemplary NEP-era thinkers. Konstantin Kornilov’s *Sovremennaiia psikhologiia i marksizm* (1924), published shortly after his appointment as head of the Institute of Psychology in Moscow, demonstrates his attempts to construct a theoretical basis for psychology that ties it to certain philosophical aspects of crude Marxism.⁶⁸ Having been recently promoted to a position of considerable status and scrutiny, Kornilov is also at pains to delineate his new Marxist psychology from the work of his contemporaries; hence his text also contains critiques of the influential but crude reflexologist doctrines of Ivan Pavlov and Vladimir Bekhterev. Vladimir Borovskii’s ‘Chto takoe psikhologiia’ (1927) published three years later in the journal *Krasnaia nov’*, is another theoretical work that similarly aims for an

⁶⁴ See for instance: Etkind; Beer; David Joravsky, *Russian Psychology: A Critical History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Loren R. Graham, *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Irina Sirotkina, ‘The Ubiquitous Reflex and Its Critics in Post-Revolutionary Russia’, *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 32:1, (2009), 70-81; Hannah Proctor, ‘Revolutionary Thinking: A Theoretical History of Alexander Luria’s ‘Romantic Science’’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2016).

⁶⁵ Beer, pp. 166-191.

⁶⁶ On the process of institutionalisation amongst Soviet psychologists, see Etkind, pp. 269-270.

⁶⁷ I take this definition from Widdis, ‘Socialist Senses’, p. 596.

⁶⁸ Prof. K. N. Kornilov, *Sovremennaiia psikhologiia i marksizm* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1924).

ideologically-informed exposition of psychology, defined in opposition to certain pre-existing schools, including that of Bekhterev.⁶⁹ Borovskii, at the time employed at the Laboratory for Comparative Psychology and Animal-Behavioural Research in Moscow, talks in terms of 'behavioural' psychology.

Figures like Borovskii and Kornilov represent the more strictly scientific basis from which a wide range of discourse flow. Works by Aron Zalkind and Martyn Liadov demonstrate how social psychologists' vocabulary and theoretical frameworks were appropriated and applied to the lives (and bodies) of 'real' citizens, reacting to everyday stimuli and difficulties. Zalkind, a former psychoanalyst who would later replace Kornilov as head of the renamed Institute of Psychology, Pedology, and Industrial Psychology, wrote two articles under the heading 'Mozg i byt (o ratsionalizatsii byta umstvennogo rabotnika)' in 1928.⁷⁰ He prescribes material solutions to the problem of psychological exhaustion amongst Party workers; this practical angle, as well as the date of publication, make Zalkind's work a useful companion piece to that of Kornilov and Borovskii, moving us beyond the purely theoretical at a time when the discursive terrain was again shifting.

Unlike Borovskii, Kornilov, and Zalkind, Liadov had no scientific training and no documented grounding in psychological theories: he was instead a professional ideologue and revolutionary, with a history of political organising (notably in the Caucasus) and Party careerism. From 1923-1929 — that is, throughout the NEP — he was employed as rector of the Sverdlov Communist University, the most prestigious school for future Party administrators. As such he was in a position of considerable influence, with direct contact with and authority over those cadres that would later manage the bureaucracy of the Soviet state. His *Voprosy byta* records speeches he made to students at the university between 1924 and 1925.⁷¹ Here, he indicates the origins of the petty-bourgeois mentality (*meshchanstvo*) and indicates ways in which it can be overcome in the everyday life of Soviet citizens. What Liadov represents for my purposes is what we might term 'popular science', a third stratum of ideologically-informed discourse after Borovskii and Kornilov's theorising and Zalkind's practical advice. His text reads much like Zalkind's, yet he lacks the latter's scientific training; what he indicates is the way in which the vocabulary and

⁶⁹ V. M. Borovskii, 'Chto takoe psikhologiya', *Krasnaia nov'*, 4 (1927), 155-175.

⁷⁰ A. Zalkind, 'Mozg i byt (o ratsionalizatsii byta umstvennogo rabotnika)', *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, 19, (1928), 52-57; A. Zalkind, 'Mozg i byt (o ratsionalizatsii byta umstvennogo rabotnika) (okonch.)', *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, 20 (1928), 42-51. On Zalkind's early and late career, see Etkind, pp. 272-282.

⁷¹ M. N. Liadov, *Voprosy byta (doklad na sobranii iacheiki sverdlovskogo kommun. un-ta)* (Moscow: Izdanie kommunisticheskogo universiteta im. Ia. M. Sverdlova, 1925).

rhetoric of academic debates ‘trickled down’ into the discourse of less rigorously scientific yet much more politically influential figures. Liadov provides a juncture between the academy and ideology, abstraction and instrumentalisation.

Soviet psychology was bound to reject the subjective ‘introspection’ of its pre-revolutionary forebears — considered individualistic and hence bourgeois — in favour of a more materialist understanding of mental processes. However, Soviet science was also required to be more sophisticated, socially-minded, and unitary than the tradition it inherited, which meant that crude or reductive materialism (what Kornilov labels ‘physiologisation’ (*fiziologizirovanie*)) as regards subjective phenomenon was also unacceptable.⁷² The mind of the Soviet citizen thus represented a complex object of study for social psychologists and ideologues that was always-already in a contradictory and unclearly defined relationship with the body.

2. Reactions, reflexes, and responsibilities

Borovskii, Kornilov, Zalkind, and Liadov are of interest precisely because their work situates the body in relation to the *non-bodily*, the mind, or consciousness. In their elaborations of the mind-body dynamic, and their reference to Marxist sociological principles, these four authors, and the professional psychologists in particular, return to a number of key issues: the need to situate the psyche or consciousness, or else at least to avoid eliding them altogether in physiological concepts such as the reflex; an anxiety over the precise sociological function of their new science; a desire to distance themselves from introspection as an instrument of self-consciousness; and an understanding of body, mind, and social world as exerting a reciprocal and potentially disruptive influence upon each other.

Borovskii is explicit on this latter point in positing the methodology of an anti-reductivist psychology. It is worth quoting from him at length. He first outlines how behaviour is inevitably an expression of the influence upon the body of the environment, or ‘stimuli’. It is important to note here the use of the term *vzaimootnosheniia*, as it indicates the mutually constitutive dynamic between body and environment.

⁷² Kornilov, p. 34.

Жизнь – это непрерывный обмен веществ и энергий между организмом и его средой. На каждое изменение среды организм отвечает (реагирует) видимым или скрытым образом [...] на изменение соотношения между внешними и внутренними условиями [...] Мы изучаем поведение, как взаимоотношение между ситуацией и реакциями на ее изменения. Изменения ситуации, поскольку они как-либо влияют на организм, мы иначе называем *стимулами* или раздражителями. Тогда мы можем сказать, что поведение – это сумма взаимоотношений между стимулами и реакциями.⁷³

He then extrapolates this understanding of stimulated behaviour to the social level, where the behaviour of each individual becomes a constituent part of the shared social environment. It is precisely this extrapolation that gives his behavioural psychology its socially useful application. 'Далее эта самая реакция одного индивида может оказаться стимулом для реакций других индивидов [...] [мы изучаем] иначе, какие реакции при каких условиях имеют *биосоциальную ценность*.'⁷⁴

Borovskii thus recognises the potential for a psychology alive to the notion of *vzaimootnosheniia* to describe and mould the individual and thus the collective. Implicit to this is also an understanding of behaviour as a potential agent of disorder, as we shall see below. The concept of the 'biosocial' is one that recurs a few times in NEP-era authors, although it is far from being a governing trope in social psychological or *fizkul'tura* discourse. It is used to refer simply to the fundamental link between the individual body and social structures, and does not seem to have any greater conceptual complexity behind it; it captures something of the thinking behind 'biopolitics', for instance, without referring to a thoroughly developed line of theoretical thinking.

If we turn to Liadov, we find this notion of 'биосоциальная ценность' recast in light of the need to transform everyday life. Like Borovskii, he is alert to the importance of interrelationships in situating the individual and their experiences within a wider collective context. To the question of what constitutes 'старый быт', and conversely what 'новый быт' should look like, Liadov is blunt: 'мы почти ничего нового пока не создали и вряд ли ясно представляем себе, какой быт является нашим идеалом.' What can be stated with certainty, however, is where the essence of *byt* resides: 'в отношении людей друг к

⁷³ Borovskii, p. 159. Unless otherwise indicated, all emphases in citations are retained from the original source.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 160.

другу.⁷⁵ *Byt* is a manifested relational system, a kind of psychological reflection of one's material/social circumstance. Liadov lays out, for instance, the way in which *meshchanstvo* emerged in medieval times at that point at which labourers began to live in private family households. This atomisation of the social world produced a form of everyday life that is framed in psychological terms: that of 'oppositonality' (*protivopostavlenie*) or the 'concept of conflict' ('понятие борьбы'), an antagonism between isolated individuals.⁷⁶ If Liadov shares with Borovskii the conceptualisation of the individual as constitutive of and constituted by her social environment, he also reproduces implicitly the notion of behavioural stimulation by defining *meshchanstvo* psychology in terms of a wilful or unreflexive response to 'desire' and 'stimulation' (*zhelaniia* and *pobuzhdeniia*).⁷⁷ Liadov calls to replace this unreformed cycle of stimulation and reaction with a behaviouralism based on the principle of collective responsibility, or *otvetstvennost'*. The notion of responsibility located 'в отношении людей друг к другу', like Borovskii's *vzaimootnosheniia*, should be read as an expression of the guiding principle of *obshchestvennost'*. It also indicates that Liadov conceives of psychology in terms of regulation. In this he is not alone, as we shall see below.

If behaviour is a social phenomenon, one that goes beyond the realm of neurological physiology, then subjective processes must be delineated and situated within the new psychology. Kornilov's conceptualisation of *psikhika-soznanie* is tied to his attempts to frame psychology in terms of distinct Marxist principles of class agency and development: his somewhat crude formulation is that psychology is simply biology plus sociology, and thus its object (the psyche/consciousness) can and should be refigured by the sociological insights of Marxism.⁷⁸ In this vein, consciousness is replaced as the basic substrate of psychology by *class* consciousness: rather than extrapolating from individual experience to the social world, Kornilov proposes that Marxist psychologies advance 'от социальной, классовой психологии к профессиональной, групповой и, наконец, уже к индивидуальной психологии.'⁷⁹

Zalkind's work stands apart in its explicit discussion of both the beneficial and deleterious ways in which the body affects the mind, specifically in this case the mind of a

⁷⁵ Liadov, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 4-7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁸ Kornilov, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

Party worker.⁸⁰ In this his work is closer to Liadov's. Yet, as Etkind notes, Zalkind had himself been a prominent practising psychoanalyst before the Revolution, and during the NEP era he continued to publish theoretical works on the field.⁸¹ He is useful then because he moves the debates that Borovskii and Kornilov exemplify onto the question of mutually constitutive collective and individual *disorders*. His psychological paradigm is closer to the behaviouralism of Borovskii — he thinks in terms of stimuli and bodily reaction — but he stands out in his focus on the brain as a physiological organ. Inasmuch as it is the 'location' of Party workers' political self-consciousness, the brain for Zalkind is the epicentre of the body's political ambiguity: whilst a corporeal component like any other, it is unique in that it guides revolutionary activity and can therefore also derail it. In his terms: 'плохой мозг дает плохую революцию [...] Революция — это не бред сумасшедшего: делать ее надо с горячим сердцем, но холодным мозгом.'⁸²

'Mozg i byt' is one of numerous works that Zalkind published during the NEP on problems of the body; as Hannah Proctor has shown, Zalkind had been particularly preoccupied with the 'половой вопрос' since the early 1920s.⁸³ Her description of his conceptualisation of sexual energy in terms of 'the constant tension between pleasure and unpleasure [which] must be regulated through sublimation, repression, and cathexis,' speaks to the problem represented by Borovskii's cyclical system of behavioural stimulation and reaction: if the mind is to be tempered (if we are to achieve the desired 'холодный мозг'), then all bodily processes must be purified and instrumentalised. At every stage, Zalkind links external stimuli to the mental constitution of the Party worker, situating the individual subject within a demanding world of psychological exigencies. This is a catalogue of bodily functions that in its explication is simultaneously a prescriptive call for what Zalkind terms 'rationalisation' (*ratsionalizatsiia*);⁸⁴ that is, the uncluttered recycling of ideologically sound perception and behaviour through the mind, the body, and the social world. These bodily functions include: movement ('Равномерные, ритмизированные движения [...] являются вместе с тем крупным источником

⁸⁰ Zalkind's term is 'умственный работник', literally 'intellectual worker', although the term refers to any Party functionary engaged in bureaucratic or functionary work, as well as ideologists and propagandists.

⁸¹ Etkind, pp. 272-279.

⁸² Zalkind, 'Mozg i byt', p. 52.

⁸³ Proctor, 'Reason Displaces All Love'. See also, for instance, Aron Zalkind, *Polovoi vopros v usloviakh sovetskoi obshchestvennosti* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1926).

⁸⁴ Zalkind, 'Mozg i byt', p. 53.

систематизации самых мозговых процессов’);⁸⁵ breathing (‘оздоровленное дыхание ‘мозговика’ даст ему неисчерпаемые творческие преимущества [...] Отсюда общий рост личности’);⁸⁶ and sex (‘Серьезно работающий мозг требует в половом вопросе *экономии*’).⁸⁷

A shared preoccupation with sexuality and its rationalisation is the strongest link between Zalkind and Liadov, who frames his own calls for a kind of *ratsionalizatsiia* in terms of his general principle of *otvetstvennost’*. Rather than responding unreflectively to sexual stimuli, the Soviet citizen should understand that this stimulation is itself a part of a broader social experience, and temper their reactions accordingly. Thus the purely physiological world of *pobuzhdeniia* is replaced by that of *tovarishchestvo* and ‘человеческие чувства’: this is a socially-situated sexual behaviouralism.⁸⁸ Interestingly, given Proctor’s definition of Zalkind’s work precisely as a moralistic rereading of psychoanalytic concepts of the libido, Liadov is explicitly anti-moralistic: ‘Возрождать старую мораль не хотим. Создавать новый катехизис тоже не будем.’⁸⁹ Perhaps, given that his audience consists precisely of the people whose sexuality he is calling to be reformed, Liadov is loathe to do away with pleasure altogether (‘Мы не аскеты’, as he rather disingenuously claims).⁹⁰ Yet this manoeuvring requires him to introduce a *temporal* element into the behaviouralist schema that Borovskii, for instance, would have no need for. ‘Сегодня — радость [...] А завтра — чувство неудовлетворенности’.⁹¹ This temporal projection away from the actual process of stimulation and reaction stands as another example of the ways in which writers such as Liadov strain to fold the social world into their understanding of both the mind and the body, when both are always on the point of fatally contaminating that same social world.

From the above reading of four NEP-era figures, we can discern a clear line of thought, linking bodily stimuli, psychological formation, and collective responsibility. The body and psyche are understood as mutually constitutive of subjectivity; subjects should in turn be governed by the principle of *otvetstvennost’* — a social psychological term that is equivalent to the *obshchestvennost’* encountered in later artistic sources. We can also see that

⁸⁵ Zalkind, ‘Mozg i byt {okonch.}’, p. 42.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

⁸⁸ Liadov, pp. 34-35.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 35.

the concern for *ootvetstvennost'*/*obshchestvennost'* is often interchangeable with an anxiety to impose discipline on mind/body. This is not surprising: when the individual and the collective are so inescapably mutually constitutive, the slightest contamination of one can lead to the dissolution of the other. One branch of social psychology was concerned in particular with the diagnosis and prevention of this potential *disorder*. 'Psychopathology' rose to its level of highest prominence during the moral panic surrounding 'hooliganism' in the late 1920s, when antisocial behaviour, sexual licentiousness, and substance abuse amongst the young were perceived as having reached epidemic levels.⁹² The specialists who committed themselves to analysing this social affliction — while recognisably operating in the orbit of social psychology — brought a variety of disciplines to bear in their attempts to understand and correct the disjunctures in the body politic; in the words of one such expert, 'Социальная психопатология является дисциплиной смежной между многими науками — социологией, правом, психофизиологией и психиатрией'.⁹³

Notably, there is no crude materialism in the psychopathology of the late 1920s. Iakov Bugaiskii, who published one of the most comprehensive introductions to the subject, claimed that hooliganism had actually increased in direct correlation with an increase in living standards, falling unemployment, and so on; to his mind, this was a 'преступное деяние особого рода' requiring innovative thinking.⁹⁴ Likewise, in a survey of French thinkers on criminal 'degeneracy' (*vyrozhdaemost'*), Khristian Rakovskii criticises Western European thinkers who sought to ascribe anti-social behaviour to factors such as hunger or poor ventilation.⁹⁵ Any explanation of public disorder must look beyond environmental conditions to the emotional-psychological dynamic between citizens: in other words, *obshchestvennost'*. Indeed, the word is used in several texts: Bugaiskii warns that hooliganism has become 'бичем нашей общественности';⁹⁶ party sociologist Aleksandr Oborin describes criminality as 'прямая демонстрация против советской общественности'.⁹⁷

⁹² On the hooliganism epidemic see Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 167-181.

⁹³ Ia. Bugaiskii, *Khuliganstvo kak sotsial'no-patologicheskoe iavlenie* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1927), p. 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30-33.

⁹⁵ Kh. Rakovskii, *Etiologiia prestupnosti i vyrozhdaemosti* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1927), p. 79.

⁹⁶ Bugaiskii, p. 7.

⁹⁷ A. Oborin, *Protiv grubosti i samodurstva* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1928), p. 12.

Whether framed explicitly in these terms or not, the operative idea behind the turn to *obshchestvennost'* here is again one that we have encountered before: that of contagion, *zarazitel'nost'*, a failure to maintain a socially productive self-other relationship. One psychologist who specialised in the treatment of sexually violent criminals, Nikolai Brukhanskii, explains a mass brawl between the families at a workers' wedding outside Moscow in these terms: 'Заразительность: критическое отношение отдельного человека все более и более ослабевает; он не в состоянии уйти из-под власти, от психологии толпы.'⁹⁸ For Bugaiskii it is therefore no surprise that, as he puts it, 'первоначально хулиганство выражалось в озорстве, шуме на улицах и в общественных местах.'⁹⁹ It is precisely these kinds of spaces that promote both individualistic grabs for attention, and the insular logic of imitative behaviour that easily descends into violence or disorder. 'И, действительно, толпа, окатываемая водой, представляет забавное зрелище, и принять участие в организации такого спектакля — это тоже игра.'¹⁰⁰ One result of this line of thinking is the idea, prevalent at the end of the 1920s, that since hooliganism is a response to social environments it can and should be judged and addressed in social environments. For instance, Grigorii Avlov published in 1927 a short play that recounts the trial and sentencing of two young hooligans that was intended for performance in Komsomol cells and at workers' clubs, with the explicit reasoning that the types of anti-social acts depicted could only be processed in a group setting.¹⁰¹

3. A stadium is not a theatre

One of the most important 'group settings' in Soviet society was, of course, *fizkul'tura*. As I demonstrate at length in my discussion of the social history of football in Chapter Four, sport and other forms of physical culture in no way escaped the anxious disciplinary gaze of the social psychologist. When Bugaiskii states that hooliganism emerges from 'общественные места', he could very well be referring to the stadium. Brukhanskii even

⁹⁸ N. P. Brukhanskii, *Ocherki po sotsial'noi psikhopatologii* (Moscow: M. i S. Sabashnykh, 1928), pp. 5-14.

⁹⁹ Bugaiskii., p. 66.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁰¹ Gr. Avlov, *Sud nad khuliganami* (Moscow: Doloi negramotnost', 1927), esp. pp. 3-9. For other suggested responses to hooliganism, see the handbook compiled by Vladimir Tolmachev for the Commissariat of Internal Affairs: V. N. Tolmachev (ed.), *Khuliganstvo i khuligany. Sbornik* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo narodnogo komissariata vnutrennikh del RSFSR, 1929).

explicitly cites spectator sports as a psychopathological concern: ‘«Азарт», «спорт» — красной нитью проходят через хулиганские дела.»¹⁰²

How would it be possible for *fizkul'tura* to be a positive, productive force in the social psychological terms that I have outlined here? What would it mean, crucially, for *fizkul'tura* to be *obshchestvennaia*? Like other cultural spheres, sport was subject to a rash of experimental formulations in the early to mid-1920s as factions within the new Soviet state fought for predominance. Despite considerable debate as to how exactly Soviet sport would manifest itself over time, there were certain points of broad agreement among its early administrators and theorists. *Fizkul'tura* was from its inception understood to act upon both mind and body.¹⁰³ As I have suggested, *fizkul'tura* theorists and administrators, many of whom had backgrounds in medical disciplines, were heavily influenced by the kinds of debate being waged by the likes of Zalkind. Indeed, Zalkind's 'Mozg i byt', with its prescriptions regarding bodily processes from posture to breathing, is in many ways a certifiable *fizkul'turnyi* text, contextualising the refinement of the body in terms of social progress. We can see this rhetoric in a number of prominent NEP-era *fizkul'tura* ideologues. The secretary of the All-Union Council on Physical Culture (VSFK), Boris Kal'pus, emphasised the 'влияние «спортивного» отношения к физическим упражнениям на воспитание психических качеств человека: воли, решительности, смелости, хладнокровия, уверенности'.¹⁰⁴ *Fizkul'tura* was to be a fundamental tool within *prosvetshchenie* campaigns aimed at rationalising and modernising the everyday behaviour of Soviet citizens. In 1925 at the third congress of the Red Sport International, a parallel grouping to the Comintern, Kal'pus and the Rector of the Moscow State Institute for Physical Culture, A. Zikmund listed the enlightening potential of properly administered *fizkul'tura*:

Физические упражнения служат одновременно разрешению социальных, производственных, психо-физиологических, педагогических и эстетических

¹⁰² Brukhanskii, p. 34.

¹⁰³ For contemporary accounts that offer some overview of the discourse around the future of *fizkul'tura*, see: N. A. Semashko, *Puti sovetskoi fizkul'tury* (Moscow: Fizkul'tizdat, 1926); A. Zikmund, *Osnovy sovetskoi sistemy fizkul'tury (tsel', sredstva, metodika i praktika provedeniia)* (Moscow: Novaia Moskva, 1926).

¹⁰⁴ B. Kal'pus, 'Sport i fizicheskaia kul'tura', *Krasnyi sport*, 1 (1924), 7–11 (p. 8).

задач пролетариата [...] ЦЕЛЬЮ в данном случае является совершенствование физической природы членов рабочего класса.¹⁰⁵

Obshchestvennost', otvetstvennost', a general sense of collective purpose: these were all key to this early theorising. At times this was crudely put in terms of class solidarity. Konstantin Mekhonoshin (deputy at the time to Health Commissar Nikolai Semashko) prioritised one thing — 'классовая солидарность [...] на ее базе создаются новые формы спорта'¹⁰⁶ — while Mikhail Kedrov warned the Red Sport International against any slippage in strict proletarian discipline: 'необходимость самого беспощадного разоблачения раскольнической деятельности «вождей» и борьба за установление единства рабочего спортивного движения'.¹⁰⁷

More common and more suggestive, however, were appeals to communality not only on a general class level, but also between spectators and athletes. From the mid-1920s to the beginning of the 1930s it was common for the *fizkul'tura* intelligentsia to complain about an increase in what might be termed unilateral spectatorship and performance. Amongst the various terms applied are *teatralizatsiia*, *teatral'nost'*, *paradnost'*, and *pokazatel'nost'*. This discourse was influenced in part by the translation into Russian in 1925 of the French doctor Georges Hébert's *Le sport contre l'éducation physique*, which decried all competitive sport as a distraction from the truly beneficial business of corporeal pedagogy. Hébert's work was undoubtedly one of the first to popularise amongst *fizkul'tura* specialists the pejorative notion of 'theatricality'; the translation of his book ends as follows: 'До сих пор, вместо того, чтобы создавать людей, мы старались создавать чемпионов! Вместо того, чтобы заниматься педагогическим делом, мы занимались постановкой зрелищ!'¹⁰⁸ As one writer put it in the pages of *Krasnyi sport*, provincial sports in particular were organised on the bases of 'показательность и демонстративность'; athletes were reduced to the role of performing artists and little attempt was made to encourage less gifted members of the community, with the result a lamentable 'театрализация спорта.'

¹⁰⁵ A. Zikmund and B. Kal'pus, 'Tezisy III kongressa K.S.I. po nauchno-metodicheskim i tekhnicheskim voprosam proletarskoi fizicheskoi kul'tury' (1925). RGASPI, f. 537. op. 1. ed. khr. 15. l. 1-86 (ll. 3, 31).

¹⁰⁶ K. Mekhonoshin, 'Krasnyi Sport', *Krasnyi sport*, 1 (1924), 5-6 (p. 6).

¹⁰⁷ M. S. Kedrov, *Raskol'nichestvaia deiatel'nost' sotsial-demokratov v rabochem sporte i nasha taktika. Doklad na V plenumе ispolkoma Krasnogo Sportinterna* (Leningrad: Krasnaia gazeta, 1929), p. 53.

¹⁰⁸ Zhorzh Eber, *Sport protiv fizkul'tury*, trans. G. A. Diuperron (Leningrad: Vremia, 1925), p. 98.

The answer was clear: 'Подальше от театрализации, ближе к подлинному спорту, ближе к природе!'¹⁰⁹

At the end of the decade Nikolai Antipov, who would go on to serve as Chairman of the All-Union Council of Physical Culture from 1931-1933, summarised in book form the concerns of the administrative circles among which he had moved in the mid-1920s. *Fizkul'tura* was, in his eyes, at a standstill: the numbers of *kruzhki* organising sport in the provinces was falling after some years of faltering growth; there was no universal system dictating collective action; the training of champions — or 'работа с одиночками' — had led to myopic specialisation on the part of coaches and athletes alike.¹¹⁰ The failure to engage communities in 'action' (*deistvie*) over 'observation' (*sozertsanie*) had left non-elite sports enthusiasts in a double bind: they were guilty not only of passively observing from the sidelines, but also of fighting amongst themselves.

[Т]еатральность (Большинство стадионов и площадок устроено таким образом, что на них действует небольшая группа лиц, а массы могут только смотреть [...] массы являются только зрителями [...] «свой, свои»; поскольку «болельщиков» бывает достаточное много с обеих сторон, то, если крики не помогают, пускаются в ход иногда кулаки.)¹¹¹

This, clearly, was not *obshchestvennost'*. At stake was *fizkul'tura*'s capacity to act as an agent of Soviet subjectification. As the rest of this thesis will indicate, its visual representation sought in response to capture or provoke a more productive relationship between spectator and athlete, between the twin experiences of observing sport and performing it.

4. Drunks, nervous wrecks, and other empty subjects

The connections between *fizkul'tura* and the broad project of social psychology were far from incidental; just as administrators and ideologues borrowed from medical discourses in their polemics, so psychological rhetoric reflected the terms of the debates about how the Soviet body should be interpolated into the rationalising mode of *fizkul'tura*.

¹⁰⁹ S. Popov, 'Ob odnom iz vrednykh ukloнов v sportivnoi rabote', *Krasnyi sport*, 5 (1924), 4–5.

¹¹⁰ N. K. Antipov, *Sostoianie i zadachi fizkul'turnogo dvizheniia* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1930), pp. 4–7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

In 1924, a *fizkul'tura* propagandist named Dmitrii Kradman wrote a short book on the place physical culture might play in the creation of properly Soviet subjects. His explanation is explicit in citing *fizkul'tura* as a potential site for the 'incarnation' (*voploshchenie*) of living socialism.

Революция разбудила и всколыхнула многие стороны массы, двинув ее в могучем порыве к осознанию всего окружающего, к знанию, к новой культуре, к философии социализма и реальному его воплощению. Ближе и осязаемее всего при материалистическом понимании жизни для человека его тело — от него, от его состояния, исходит действенность, масса пролетарских тел создает «социально-биологическую действительность.» Тело почувствовалось раньше всего. Нам нужна физическая мощь, как источник социально-психической мощи [...] [чтобы] этот футбол, спорт и пр. воспитывал не просто решительность, которая может быть просто подлостью, а решительность революционную.¹¹²

Kradman's text speaks once again to the high stakes involved in the management of Soviet bodies: for materialists, social reality itself derives from the state of the body. We can take the metaphor of *voploshchenie* quite literally. It follows from this that the construction of a socialist society populated by socialist subjects will proceed exponentially more smoothly if the bodies of said subjects can be relied upon to behave. It is at this point, where *discipline* comes to the fore, that the debates around spectatorship and participation, passive isolation versus active engagement in *fizkul'tura* overlap tellingly with the arguments of psychologists. According to the Marxist schema, science can only be properly instrumentalised as a modernising force if it is tied to the socio-economic world; such a link allows it to move from 'pure' empirical description to applied transformation not just of individuals, but also of the body politic as a whole. In terms of psychology, as Borovskii states, it is only when we study the relationships between individuals that our work gains in '*биосоциальная ценность*'.¹¹³ However, the tension surrounding the precise position and function of the psyche in Marxist social psychology also speaks to a professional or disciplinary unease about the different variables involved in this transformative project. To retain a disciplinary authority over such divergent variables,

¹¹² D. A. Kradman, *Fizicheskaia kul'tura kak chast' kul'turno-prosvetitel'noi raboty* (Leningrad: Gubono, 1924), pp. 3-7.

¹¹³ Borovskii, p. 160.

these thinkers turned to a conception of psychology as a means of *control* of mind and body, individual and social. As I have previously stated, the renovative project is thus also a coercive one. This is something which Trotskii had already implied in his positing of the ‘social biologic type’: ‘Social construction and psycho-physical self-education will become two aspects of one and the same process.’¹¹⁴

The sociological, materialist monist conceptualisation of the mind-body dynamic allowed for its three constituent elements — the mind/consciousness, the body, the social world — to influence and be influenced by each other, as Borovskii lays out. If woman is a social animal, and matter determines consciousness, then mental processes are to a greater or lesser extent the result of external stimuli upon the subject, that is to say, from its social environment. Behaviour, as the objectively observable corporeal expression of said mental processes, is then enacted within that same sociality. It is important to note here the degree to which ‘the body’ and ‘behaviour’ are indistinct if not directly interchangeable in this rhetoric: for instance, what Borovskii outlines as the subject of his ‘*наука о поведении человека*’ is equivalent to the kinds of bodily processes that Zalkind and Liadov seek to ‘rationalise’.¹¹⁵ On the line are bodily impulses, processes, fragilities, and their physical manifestation in the social world. There is an ineluctable logic to this form of materialism — the material conditions of society form the subjectivity of the individual, who then acts upon society, altering its material conditions — that seems to justify the previously-noted anxiety that characterises social psychologists of the period. The contamination of the process of subjectification and socialisation at any point with deviant (bodily) behaviour will create a negative spiral of worsening physical and moral conditions. The body becomes a mediator in a kind of feedback loop. In Liadov’s own words, the question for those looking to prove their credentials as standard bearers for a ‘психология будущего общества’ is as follows: ‘Что тут регулирует наши отношения?’¹¹⁶

Zalkind’s prescriptive text is a fine example of the coercive/renovative project. However, the form that this coercion takes is not simply one of external pressure or reprimand. The subject must take responsibility upon herself. It is here that it is useful to turn to *fizkul’tura* and the arguments put forward by Kradman, Antipov, et al. For this is really a question of observation/spectatorship. An idea at the heart of much psychological

¹¹⁴ Trotsky, p. 206.

¹¹⁵ Borovskii, p. 157.

¹¹⁶ Liadov, p. 22.

discourse is introspection, or *samonabliudenie*. All of the psychologists cited thus far, from Pavlov to Kornilov, are opposed to simple *samonabliudenie* as a scientific method.¹¹⁷ Borovskii, for instance, claims: ‘самонаблюдение не научный инструмент, а кривое зеркало’;¹¹⁸ Liadov makes this methodological claim into a metaphor for the broader task of reforming *byt* when he claims that only a Menshevik would passively observe the world of *otnosheniia* without trying actively to transform it.¹¹⁹ However, the projects of psychological coercion that these thinkers set out do in fact imply that a remarkable degree of self-awareness is required on the part of the individual. This is a question of *surveillance*, where *samonabliudenie* is transformed into a collective and personal system of regulation of body and mind, behaviour and consciousness. The blurring of the lines between observation and surveillance, and the notion of the self-disciplining body move us from the irreconcilable ‘fact’ of the problematic body to the ways in which it was targeted and addressed. As mentioned above, this observation draws on Peter Holquist’s definition of surveillance as both a system for the revelation of information and a means of societal transformation.¹²⁰

Borovskii explicitly states that psychology properly conceived allows for the continual close surveillance of those around you. The shift away from *samonabliudenie* is underlined in his rephrasing of the demand ‘Know Thyself’ (‘Изучай самого себя’) into that of ‘Know Thy Neighbour’ (‘Изучай своего соседа’). His crooked mirror has become a transparent window.¹²¹ Elsewhere, Zalkind appropriates and reworks the concept of *samonabliudenie* in his call for *samoregulirovanie*, the means by which personal bodily and mental functioning is automated beyond the point of conscious introspection: ‘мозг получает, наконец, снова свою способность к саморегулированию [...] не надо возбуждать аппетита — он сам является.’¹²² What is distinctive here is that the new modes of collective being — whether Borovskii’s observation of others or Zalkind’s socially-beneficial homeostasis — are figured as *perpetual*. They become qualities of the subjectivity at hand. The constant nature of social psychological self-control is thus guaranteed by its being internalised or, in Zalkind’s term, automated. The threat of the problematic body makes the need for such internalisation completely logical: given the mutually constitutive nature of individual and

¹¹⁷ On Pavlov’s and Bekhterev’s rejection of *samonabliudenie*, see Joravsky, p. xiv.

¹¹⁸ Borovskii, p. 155.

¹¹⁹ Liadov, p. 22.

¹²⁰ Holquist, p. 417.

¹²¹ Borovskii, p. 158.

¹²² Zalkind, ‘Mozg i byt’, p. 54.

social disorders and the always-potentially disruptive influence of the body, such an internalised system of self-discipline turns out to be the same thing as self-preservation.

5. Filmic case studies

This thesis as a whole looks at bodies and their visualisation, with this social psychological discourse informing the argument if not explicitly addressed. There are however occasions when visual culture and social psychology are brought into close contact, and which bear brief consideration now — if only to lay the ground for the frequent jumps between textual and film culture that I will be making throughout. Two feature-length semi-documentary films from 1929, *Za vashe zdorov'e* (Kul'turfil'm, dir. A. Dubrovskii from a screenplay by A. Tiagai), and *Bol'nye nervy* (Kul'turfil'm/Sovkino, dir. N. Galkin from a screenplay by N. Galkin and L. Sukharebskii; only a German-intertitled version survives) deal directly with the surveillance and discipline of the minds and bodies of errant Soviet citizens.¹²³ Both films mix documentary footage, including scientific tests performed for the camera, with fictionalised, semi-narrative scenes; both were also made under the supervision of professional medical doctors. In *Za vashe zdorov'e*, an alcoholic factory worker is treated in a state clinic, where he is subject to electroshock therapy and hypnosis (the actor playing the patient, A. Chistiakov, actually underwent the treatments, becoming the first person to be hypnotised onscreen in Russia). *Bol'nye nervy* tells the story of Baturin, the director of a NEP-era business who comes down with *nevrasteniia* due to his unhealthy working conditions and habits. After a month in a *dom otdykha*, in which he is subject to a strict regime of *fizkul'tura*, dietary restrictions, and medical lectures, he returns healthy to his wife and daughter.

Both films are at pains to document what might be called the logic of dissolution, how Borovskii's *vzaimootnosheniia* or Liadov's *otvetsvennost'* are corrupted by abuse of the individual body. Galkin's film in particular plays almost as if Zalkind's 'Mozg i byt' had been adapted for the screen. Baturin certainly suffers from a 'плохой мозг' in need of

¹²³ Both *Za vashe zdorov'e* and *Bol'nye nervy* were produced by Kul'turfil'm, a subsidiary of Sovkino dedicated to producing films in line with *prosveshchenie* campaigns that specialised in blending documentary and dramatised material. On Kul'turfil'm see Oksana Sarkisova, 'The Adventures of the Kulturfilm in Soviet Russia', in Birgit Beumers (ed.), *Dictionary of World Cinema: Russia 3* (London: Intellect, 2016); and her *Screening Soviet Nationalities: Kulturfilms from the Far North to Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

rationalisation; the film is a catalogue of the ways in which negative bodily stimuli degrade the mental constitution of the worker. Baturin inhabits a world of both frantic hyper-modernism (the neon lights of the opening shots and the fast-paced turnover of his office bureaucracy) and frustrating, rickety infrastructure (the cramped and freezing trams, his airless, untidy office). Nervous illness is for him a question of private-personal experience. His understanding of his place amongst and responsibilities towards the social body is confused. This is both spatial and temporal. His office is a swinging door, swamped with requests and demands from co-workers; on the tram his personal space is invaded, the presence of others is felt as a physical pain. At home, he has no space in which to suffer by and for himself, as his young daughter stands watching him, imitating his anxiety, pacing around the room behind him in aimless circles. He reads political literature at the ‘wrong’ time (in bed, agitating himself further), and works late into the night in a windowless room, detached from natural rhythms of work and leisure. As a result of this confusion in terms of self and other, Baturin becomes fragmented, doubled. He dreams of work, his two selves (private and public) colliding; shots are layered on top of one another to show his decentred sense of subjectivity (Figure 2).

Fizkul'tura is a crucial part of his therapy, which sees his ‘two selves’ reforged into one *obshchestvenno*-minded worker/father/husband. We witness Baturin engaged in swimming, gymnastics, and pole-vaulting, intercut with footage of a doctor speaking directly down the lens: ‘Gymnastik und Sport sind die besten Mittel für gesunde Nerven. Die verschiedenen Sportarten dienen je nach der Eigenart oder Entwinklung besonderer Nerven- und Willenskräfte.’ Baturin is thus reborn, but only after responding to the omnipresent ideological prodding of the state: personal renovation and public coercion intermingled. The final intertitle of the doctor’s ‘lecture’ reads ‘Selbstbeherrschung!’ But we have already seen, quite literally (in one of the film’s documentary asides), the hands of a state physician toying with the brain of a deceased worker (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Fragmented subjectivity: Baturin in *Bol'nye nervy* (1929)



Figure 3. A hands-on approach to workers' health: *Bol'nye nervy* (1929)

Za vashe zdorov'e goes to great lengths to visualise the corruption and rehabilitation of the social body. In one staged sequence, drunkenness leads a husband to rape his wife; the resulting child is born disabled, the *voploshchenie* of the social sickness that led to its conception. This perversion of conception/birth — the literal formation of new Soviet subjects — is reiterated in an experiment where chicken eggs are injected with vodka, hatching into sickly, damaged chicks (the intertitles: 'Неизлечимые / Водка отравила молоко матери'). At another point the dangerous distinction between false sensation and empirical observation is illustrated by showing two drunk men kissing, accompanied by

the intertitle: 'Обманчивое чувство веселья.' A healthy understanding of others, even if they are right in front of one's face (or kissing it), is shown to be a vulnerable thing.

It is the corruption of vision that drives this film. In the rehabilitation clinic the body is subjected to the corrective gaze of the state. In a scene of mass hypnosis therapy, a trained doctor, one Livshits, speaks directly down the camera (Figure 6), confronting the viewer — who had up to this point been complicit in judging the alcoholic worker — with the fact that they too are answerable for their actions. In a sense this sequence is an idealisation of the reach and efficiency of the corrective institutions of psychology and medicine: so total is the control embodied in Livshits that a man has a needle passed through his arm without awaking. 'Никакого ощущения вы не чувствуете': in this induced atmosphere of absolute sensory rationalisation, the doctor's words become a kind of speech-act. In the climatic moments, Livshits informs the room of hypnotised patients that they will no longer feel anything but revulsion towards alcohol (Figure 5); then, he instructs them to raise their hands at the word *otvrashchenie*. Either unwittingly or with an artificially absolute sense of willing, they are 'voting' for their own (embodied) sense of revulsion (Figure 4). In these two films the anxieties — and solutions — raised in the work of social psychologists are staged within narratives of rehabilitation, the corruption and reconstruction of the subject and his sense of *obshchestvennost'* played out in an unerring blend of fact and fiction.



Figure 4. Absolute sensory rationalisation. Hypnosis therapy in *Za vashe zdorov'e* (1929)



Figure 5. REVULSION (*Za vashe zdorov'e*)



Figure 6. Dr Livshits meets our gaze (*Za vashe zdorov'e*)

6. Interiors and exteriors

Above I described the self-surveillance and regulation desired by Zalkind as automated; perhaps the patients of Dr Livshits are the closest example of truly thoughtless bodily discipline. The concept of automation at play here suggests a kind of psychological machine aesthetic. We might then link the behavioural theories of Borovskii and Kornilov and the sexual discipline of Zalkind and Liadov to industrial psycho-technics of Aleksei Gastev and his Scientific Organisation of Labour institute (*Nauchnaia Organizatsiia Truda*),

or else the *Sistema trudovoi gimnastiki* devised by Gastev's colleague Ippolit Sokolov.¹²⁴

These contemporaneous sources would allow us to examine the ways in which the body proved problematic within the world of Soviet labour.

My focus, however, is different. On the basis of the above observations I ask instead what the relationship was between ideas of the body, its observation (whether in the form of surveillance or otherwise), and conceptions of what a Soviet subjectivity might be. In their discussions of NEP-era sexuality Bernstein and Proctor go some way towards formulating a response to the question of subjectivity by stressing the role of negative definition. For Bernstein, 'sexual normalcy [...] was defined negatively as the absence of a series of deviant and dangerous behaviours';¹²⁵ Proctor cites Zalkind's rhetoric on sex as 'draining both revolutionary activity and sex (assuming the two are mutually exclusive) of any definable *qualities*.'¹²⁶ Yet neither moves beyond these statements to the question that such negatively defined subjectification posed for those who faced it firsthand. This is significant, since it is in the question of subjectivity that the need for perpetual/automated self-discipline becomes particularly difficult. If subjectivity is understood to refer to the individual consciousness as situated within a wider material and social world, then for our social psychologists the concept is already subsumed within their understandings of the mind: that combination of subjective and physiological phenomena that processes stimuli from the external world. The coercive project in social psychology represents an attempt to render this mind-reaction both predictable and reliable: in Borovskii's words, 'Психология, во-первых, должна научиться понимать людей [...] надо уметь 1) предсказать поведение человека и 2) направить его в должном направлении.'¹²⁷ Yet conceptualising the mind as a fundamentally reactive phenomenon means placing it beyond the realm of control: whilst the external world may in some circumstances be controllable (for instance, in Zalkind's demands for properly ventilated office space), the desired degree of behavioural predictability will only be achieved once the subject has internalised the 'correct', ideologically informed patterns of reaction. This amounts, in the

¹²⁴ For instance, Gastev speaks to the notion of a collectivist/anti-individualist psychology in his 'O tendentsiakh proletarskoi kul'tury', *Proletarskaia kul'tura*, 9-10 (1919), 42; he later set out a more programmatic approach to transforming the body to make it more suitable for Soviet labour in *Kak nado rabotat': prakticheskoe vvedenie v nauku organizatsii truda* (Moscow: VDSPS, 1924). Sokolov in turn designed his *Sistema* in order to rationalise bodily motion during labour: Ippolit Sokolov, *Sistema trudovoi gimnastiki* (Moscow: VSEVOBUCH, 1922). See also Sirotkina (pp. 75-76) on the origins of Sokolov's work in experimental choreography.

¹²⁵ Bernstein, p. 7.

¹²⁶ Proctor, 'Reason Displaces All Love'.

¹²⁷ Borovskii, p. 158.

end, to a total emptying out of the subject, since subjectivity was in the first instance merely the individualised — personal, reflexive, circumstantial — processing of stimuli.

Looking ahead, we can ask how best to relate this social psychological thinking to the world of *fizkul'tura* and categories of looking. In the first instance, I argue, this can be achieved by reframing the mind-body relationship in terms of interiority and exteriority; or, how the subject understands and relates (interior) to its presence, whether bodily or otherwise, within a collective (exterior). To take the example of exercise: improved cardiovascular capacity and attractive muscle tone (exteriority) cannot be pure or pragmatic ends in themselves. Rather the body is adapted in accordance with the demands of symbolic modes such as 'labour' and 'defence', and as such psychological claims are made of the subject, ones that relate to its interiority. Liadov makes explicit reference to the psychological expediency of *fizkul'tura*, and to both 'internal' (*vnutrennie*) and 'external' (*vneshnie*) qualities.

Когда я вижу стройную фигуру физкультурника – это идеал, я вижу будущего здорового, гармонически развитого человека. У него нет никаких прикрас, кроме внутренних качеств, которые я должен понять и узнать. Я должен проработать с ним долгое время, чтобы понять и изучить его. По внешнему виду я могу только куклу понять и влюбиться в нее.¹²⁸

'Harmonious development' means that 'health' becomes a social and not merely a physiological state; the *fizkul'turnik's* external beauty reflects an internalisation of desirable 'qualities'. Yet this ideal vision is made possible by the notion of a featureless figure, one possessing 'никаких прикрас'; indeed, to possess 'features' is inhuman, doll-like. Unless having toned muscles is somehow understood to be inherently Soviet, the issue remains. It is worth noting here Bernstein's description of *fizkul'tura* as a fundamentally *reactive* method of subjectification, one that can never be immediately socially productive.¹²⁹ Furthermore, what about those instances in which these two aspects of being – interiority and exteriority – are not in fact reconcilable? The infinite variety of sensations that the world can stimulate within the individual – hunger, pain, cold, desire, nausea, exhilaration – cannot always and automatically be abstracted into the projection of a collective identity external to the subject. There is therefore no way to ensure that subjectivity is expressed in

¹²⁸ Liadov, p. 39.

¹²⁹ Bernstein, p. 152.

a way befitting the new Soviet citizen; this, then, may ultimately explain why psychological ‘normalcy’ in this period is so often defined negatively, as the *absence* of harmful behaviour. There is no positive attribute beyond the suppression or sublimation of the negative. These questions are addressed further in the conclusions of my first and second chapters.

Liadov’s reference to the ‘exterior’ raises an issue that might at first glance not seem entirely relevant to questions of psychology and subjectification: that of aesthetics. Yet there is no disjuncture here. Given that the body and the mind are mutually constitutive, that the body is expected to maintain strict discipline, that the dynamic between bodies is of the utmost importance, and that the act of looking at bodies — whether with a disciplining or admiring eye — is central to the maintenance of Soviet *obsbchestvennost’*, it stands to reason that beauty be on the agenda. In my first chapter proper, I continue the thread of this Introduction, showing how the arguments presented by our social psychologists about the formation and maintenance of Soviet subjectivities were mirrored in the works of other thinkers and filmmakers from the NEP-era who were concerned more with the aesthetic refinement of the body than its clinical perfectibility. I then proceed to examine non-fiction photography and film, drawing out the ways in which bodies are pictured as part of a process of aesthetic appreciation that can never lose touch entirely with the ideological exigencies of the period.

Aesthetics, non-fiction, subjectivity

Каждый человек должен уметь квалифицированно ходить

— Boris Arvatov¹

1. Общественная эстетика, общественная физкультура

How to approach the question of the beautiful Soviet body? In this and the following chapter, I show how *fizkul'tura* was enlisted in the working through of questions of bodily aesthetic and visual media. Broadly speaking, sports and *fizkul'tura* properly undertaken were understood as sites of performative bodily mutuality in which the qualities of beauty and social responsibility could be tested. From its earliest formulation this conceptualisation was framed in terms of class and psychology as well as aesthetics: as Aron Zikmund and Boris Kal'pus put it at a 1925 congress of the Red Sport International: 'Физические упражнения служат одновременно разрешению социальных, производственных, психо-физиологических, педагогических и эстетических задач пролетариата.'² In other words what was at stake was nothing less than Soviet subjectification: how individuals were socialised into Soviet ways of living.

The interplay of subjectivity and *obshchestvennost'* within sports and *fizkul'tura* is what informs the choice of primary material for this chapter: photography and non-fiction film that stages both bodies and their spectators. I look at material from 1925-1934, offering a reading of the evolution of non-fiction media at the close of the NEP era and in response to the early strictures of Stalinism. Within the frame of camera shot or canvas, they insist upon the figure of the onlooker as an integral part of the world of *fizkul'tura*, part of the action rather than part of the scenery. This reflexivity around the act of looking informs each medium differently. Non-fiction film and photography were used to inform viewers both how to use their own bodies, and how to appreciate those of other citizens. Before

¹ Boris Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo* (Moscow: Proletkul't, 1926), p. 110.

² A. Zikmund, and B. Kal'pus, 'Tezisy III kongressa K.S.I. po nauchno-metodicheskim i tekhnicheskim voprosam proletarskoi fizicheskoi kul'tury' (1925). RGASPI, f. 537. op. 1. ed. khr. 15. l. 1-86. (l. 3).

turning to these sources, however, I first outline the aesthetic discourse that informs my visual analysis. In this chapter and the next, I draw out a decade-long line of thinking about bodily beauty that extends from mid-1920s avant-garde theorising through to Stalinist neo-classicism. What unites the thinkers dispersed over this period is their determination to formulate a distinct Soviet aesthetics — that is, as always, one in which the social/collective world predominates. In the following chapter, **The Bather**, I bring out more clearly the intersection of such an aesthetics with spectatorship. Here, my starting point is the work of Boris Arvatov.

One of the founders and primary theoreticians of the *Levyi Front Iskusstv* (LEF), Arvatov wrote several texts between 1923-1930 in which he outlined his conception of *proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo*, or productionist art.³ His most explicit engagements with aesthetic theory are a short 1925 article, 'Byt i kul'tura veshchi', and his most substantial tract on the subject published one year later, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*.⁴ Here we find the clearest formulation of a radical collectivist aesthetics that can be traced through visualisations of the body more than a decade later.⁵ Arvatov's text was an attempt to theorise a total collectivisation of artistic production and reception; as a result, 'art' as such ceases to exist, becoming inseparable from industrial production. Individualism is subsumed into the rational organisation of artistic labour, the products of which are the material substrate of everyday life.

[Р]аньше художники создавали иллюзорную красоту в картинах и статуях, изображали жизнь или внешне украшали ее, — теперь им надо бросать эстетику созерцания и любования, оставить индивидуалистически-вдохновенные мечты о жизни и, вместо этого, взяться за строительство самой жизни, ее материальных форм [...] [Буржуазный художник] был мастером, но природы, социальных и технических законов своего мастерства не знал и не понимал.⁶

³ A detailed account of productionist art is beyond my scope here; an excellent recent appraisal is Igor' Chubarov, *Kollektivnaia chuvstvennost': Teorii i praktika levogo avangarda* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo VShE, 2014), pp. 147-192.

⁴ Boris Arvatov, 'Byt i kul'tura veshchi', in *Almanakh Proletkul'ta* (Moscow: Proletkul't, 1926), pp. 75-82; *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*.

⁵ Other examples of LEF-associated aesthetic theorisation include: Nikolai Chuzhak, 'Pod znakom zhiznestroeniia (opyt osoznaniia iskusstva dnia)', *LEF*, 1 (1923), 12-39; S. Tret'iakov, 'Tribuna LEFa', *LEF*, 3 (1923), 154-164. On Arvatov as aesthetic theorist in the context of the evolution of Constructivism, see Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 7-38.

⁶ Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*, pp. 89, 105.

This collectivisation and rationalisation involves a shift from personal inspiration ('импульсы независимой личности') to communal deference;⁷ from private display to public space;⁸ and from passive observation to active and organised *doing* ('буржуазное искусство организует материалы жизни вне их практического применения, организует их не для действия, а для созерцания.')⁹

The ultimate goal for Arvatov is a complete collectivisation — or democratisation — of the right and agency to determine and appreciate 'beauty': 'Каждый человек должен уметь квалифицированно ходить, говорить, устраивать вокруг себя мир вещей с их качественными свойствами и пр.' The socialist vision depends upon this mutuality between selves and the world; in bourgeois society it is obstructed by what he calls the 'монополия касты специалистов по искусству'.¹⁰ Thus the task at hand for the proletariat is to break the monopoly on beauty. Only in this way will they be free to experience the world anew.

Задача пролетариата — разрушить эту грань между художниками, монополистами какой-то «красоты», и обществом в целом, — сделать методы художественного воспитания методами всеобщего воспитания общественно-гармонической личности [...] Достигнуть полного ощущения реальности [...] добиться такого социально-эстетического монизма, когда каждое явление, каждая вещь и строится, и воспринимается, как живой целесообразный организм [...] Так — и не иначе — может быть проведен в обществе конкретный монизм мироощущения и практики, — то, что принято называть «радостью», «творческой полнотой», «гармонией» жизни, «красотой».¹¹

In Arvatov's 'общественно-гармоническая личность' there is an echo of the notion of 'social-aesthetic monism', encountered in the works of Konstantin Kornilov and Vladimir Borovskii in the Introduction (above).¹² For the committed productionist, the transformation of artistic production entails the transformation of the aesthetic subject. Once the proletarian subject has contributed to breaking the monopoly on beauty, both she and the objects with which she interacts will achieve heightened *tselsoobraznost'*, or

⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 110-113.

¹² Vladimir Borovskii, 'Chto takoe psikhologiiia', *Krasnaia nov'*, 4 (1927), 155-75; Konstantin Kornilov, *Sovremennaia psikhologiiia i marksizm* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1924).

goal-orientation/expediency.¹³ It is Arvatov's invocation of (Soviet) subjectivity here, figured in sensual/corporeal terms, that links his aesthetic theory to his contemporary theorists of *fizkul'tura*. As we have observed elsewhere, the mid-1920s saw a proliferation of texts linking *fizkul'tura* to the formation of properly Soviet citizens.¹⁴ The LEFist search for a truly collectivist aesthetics segues into a more pragmatically instrumentalised understanding of *fizkul'tura*.

However, just as for Arvatov the 'общественно-гармоническая личность' can only be the result of collective/communal activity, *fizkul'tura* that is itself not *obshchestvennaia* cannot hope to produce subjective *obshchestvennost'*. What does it mean, then, for *fizkul'tura* to be mutual/collective/communal? Frequently appeals to communality along these lines referenced the connection between spectators and athletes. Arvatov had railed against art that was made 'не для действия, а для созерцания', because it was *activity* that allowed for renewed *miroobchushchenie*. To resign oneself to passive observation was to waste art's great transformative power. It is striking how analogous statements often are from *fizkul'tura* theoreticians and organisers of the period. Like art, *fizkul'tura* had the potential to forge new subjectivities, new forms of *miroobchushchenie*; and, as with art, for this to be realised meant *fizkul'tura* becoming a space for active rather than passive engagement. As I show below and in subsequent chapters, *fizkul'tura* with its modes of looking and doing was thought about and represented in ways that, if not directly analogous, spoke to the contemporary reconceptualisation of the social role of art.

We saw in the previous chapter that in the mid-1920s the *fizkul'tura* intelligentsia was often concerned with combatting the rise of 'passive' spectatorship: the tendency on the part of citizens to watch sport from the sidelines instead of participating in what was potentially a powerfully socially cohesive activity. This perversion of 'genuine' *fizkul'tura* was figured as 'показательность и демонстративность'. The response: 'Подальше от театрализации, ближе к подлинному спорту, ближе к природе!'¹⁵ This attack on *teatralizatsiia* was a recapitulation of ideas that had already found expression amongst social psychologists — recalling the shift from *samonabliudenie* to active self-discipline —

¹³ On this core term in Constructivist theory, which encapsulates the movement's rejection of art for art's sake, see Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), esp. pp. 21-120.

¹⁴ See, inter alia: N. D. Korolev, *Fizicheskaia kul'tura v povsednevnoi zhizni trudiashchegosia* (Leningrad: Leningradskii gubernskii sovet professional'nykh soiuзов, 1926); N. A. Semashko, *Puti sovetskoi fizkul'tury* (Moscow: Fizkul'tizdat, 1926); A. Zikmund, *Fizkul'tura i byt* (Moscow: Proletkul't, 1925).

¹⁵ S. Popov, 'Ob odnom iz vrednykh uklovov v sportivnoi rabote', *Krasnyi sport*, 5 (1924), 4-5.

and would itself be echoed a few years later in Arvatov's writing. Just as *fizkul'tura* ideologues favoured participation over passive observation, Arvatov calls for *deistvie* in place of *sozertsanie*.

What was on the line here was *fizkul'tura*'s capacity to act as an agent of Soviet subjectification and Soviet beauty, where in practice these were not entirely distinguishable: certainly, de-formed subjectivities risked falling short of Arvatov's aesthetic qualifiers of 'harmony' and 'joy'. The visual representation of physical culture thus had to function as a means to capture or provoke a more productive relationship between spectator and athlete, between the twin experiences of observing sport and performing it. A crucial and often overlooked aspect of this representation was non-fiction material: amateur and journalistic photography, newsreels and documentary footage, instructional film and photography. The crudest but most persuasive justification for taking this material into account is that it was more widely consumed (and, in the case of photography, produced) than fictional work. Every newspaper and journal featured photographic illustration, and the increasing availability of camera equipment to amateur enthusiasts meant a proliferation of still images of sporting bodies. In terms of film, as Graham Roberts has remarked, documentary footage was more widely distributed and consumed than any feature film: 'The fact is that newsreel was part of almost every cinema programme from the mid-1920s. Audiences, via club showings, were far more likely to have seen *Turksib* or any number of documentary shorts than the masterpieces of Dovzhenko or Eisenstein'.¹⁶

In her work on the 'documentary moment' in early Soviet culture, Elizabeth Astrid Papazian highlights the dual qualities of non-fiction material that so appealed to Soviet practitioners: objectivity and instrumentality. These allowed non-fiction imagery to serve as a kind of scientific substrate for the realisation of *fizkul'tura* ideals, projecting and promoting *obshchestvennost'* in spectatorship and performance; this was particularly true in the period up to 1932. In her words, objectivity and instrumentality 'suggested an answer to the key question of how to revise the relationships between the artist and the world, between art and politics, and between artist and audience.'¹⁷ As Devin Fore has argued in

¹⁶ Graham Roberts, *Forward Soviet! History and Non-Fiction Film in the USSR* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 1-2.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Astrid Papazian, *Manufacturing Truth: The Documentary Moment in Early Soviet Culture* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), p. 14.

his work on factography and LEF, non-fiction visual materials represented the ‘exemplary’ response to fundamental generic questions posed by 1920s theorists.¹⁸

2. Non-fiction images in the search for *obshchestvennost'*

In the sections below, I identify three ways in which non-fiction material is employed in the service of *obshchestvennaia fizkul'tura*. These aspects feed into the creation, through sporting bodies, of a beautiful Soviet subject. They are: 1) *fizkul'tura* as testing ground for the technics of documentary media and the delimitation of Soviet ‘realism’ — this is most common in the second half of the 1920s; 2) the educational and discursive role of non-fiction media in creating technically and aesthetically aware citizens — a concern throughout the period; 3) documentary film as a reflexive exercise in engagement with its participants — an aspect that comes to the fore from the latter years of the First Five-Year Plan.

Documentary technics and realism

As the youngest media of the period photography and film were, as Raymond Williams had it, ‘like socialism itself [...] seen as a harbinger of a new kind of world, the modern world’.¹⁹ In Benjaminian terms, the relatively easy technical reproducibility of photography in particular meant it could be taken up by working amateurs, bypassing what Arvatov defined as bourgeois, specialist cadres.²⁰ While this gave the media the potential to be truly revolutionary, their practitioners needed quickly to adopt ‘laws’ alongside ‘mastery’, as prescribed by Arvatov: ‘[буржуазный художник] был мастером, но природы, социальных и технических законов своего мастерства не знал и не понимал.’²¹ The unusual contortions and configurations of sporting bodies provided fertile ground for photographers and filmmakers to test themselves and the documentary capacities of their media.

¹⁸ Devin Fore, ‘The Operative Word in Soviet Factography’, *October*, 118:10 (2006), 95–131.

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, ‘Cinema and Socialism’, in *Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 107–118 (p. 107).

²⁰ See Benjamin’s classic essay, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in his *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 217–252.

²¹ Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*, p. 105.

Around the time of Arvatov's essay, the specialist photographic press began to press the case for *fizkul'tura* as a productive subject for amateur photographers looking to improve their technique. G. Nauman considered the sporting body the perfect testing ground for a 'science' of Soviet photography.²² The prominent critic Adrian Piotrovskii proposed *fizkul'tura* as an antidote to the dull pictures of children and rivers that the editors of *Sovetskoe foto* received from subscribers. Criticising the quality of contemporary photojournalism, he notes: 'в большинстве случаев видим атлетов, замерших в каких-то неестественно-напряженных позах. В их фигурах не чувствуется жизнь, не чувствуется движение, и они производят впечатление манекенов, которым придали ряд нелепых положений.'²³ It is the *movement* inherent to *fizkul'tura* that makes it a valuable testing ground for both photography and photographers; the task is to capture the grace and technique of the rapidly shifting body without reducing it to awkward freeze-frames. This point was taken up a year later in the pages of *Fotograf* in a longer essay by Aleksei Sidorov, who argued that sporting bodies ceased to be 'mannequins' only when their photographer worked with the spectator in mind: 'В человеческих движениях качество и эстетическое оформление наиболее, конечно, развито там, где движение сознательно ставится целью зрелищного порядка [...] Движение есть процесс [...] Есть прыжок, а не прыгун.'²⁴ If we consider, for example, two images from a 1928 issue of the journal *Spartakiada*, we see how Sidorov's and Piotrovskii's concerns were played out in practice in the late 1920s.²⁵

²² G. Nauman, 'O sportivnoi s"emke', *Sovetskoe foto*, 6 (1926), 166–68.

²³ A. Piotrovskii, 'Fotografiia i fizkul'tura', *Sovetskoe foto*, 4 (1926), 99–103 (p. 100).

²⁴ A. A. Sidorov, 'Iskusstvo dvizheniia i fotografiia', *Fotograf*, 7–8 (1927), 198–202 (p. 200).

²⁵ Images from: D. R. Konstantinovskii, 'Ob izuchenii massovogo fizkul'turnogo zrelischa', *Spartakiada*, 2 (1928), 6; L. G., 'Trenirovka legko-atletiki', *Spartakiada*, 2 (1928), 9–11 (p. 10).



На Красной площади в день общесоюзного парада физкультурников 1928 г.

Figure 1. 'On Red Square on the day of the 1928 Moscow *fizkul'turnik* Parade'. *Spartakiada*, 2 (1928)



Хороший момент старта. Соревнование рабочих спортсменок на Грюневальдском стадионе.

Figure 2. 'A good moment on the starting line. Competition of working sportswomen at the Griuneval'dskii Stadium'. *Spartakiada*, 2 (1928)

The first image retains a sense of *dvizhenie* by capturing the moments before the human pyramid is complete (Figure 1): the supporting crowd, the precarious top figure, the

hunched, braced stances all speak to the body in action rather than frozen in posed triumph. The second image captures the moment immediately after a posed moment of tension (Figure 2); rather than an accumulation of tension, it conveys its release, the ‘хороший момент’ at which technique and strength burst into life. We get a sense here of what Sidorov means when he says: ‘психологическая реакция зрителя важнее, чем реалистическое изображение.’²⁶ These moments before or after posed bodily stasis — the fully-formed human pyramid and the runners ‘on their marks’ — are less instantly legible but more suggestive of the dynamism of *fizkul'tura* as felt by its spectator. These are the ‘узловые моменты’, in Piotrovskii’s words, that test the technical proficiency of non-fiction media.

The relevance of *fizkul'tura* to documentary media was heralded into the 1930s. In *Sovetskoe foto* in particular, variations on Piotrovskii’s and Nauman’s arguments were printed until 1936, with later authors specifying the issues raised for photographers by particular sports — skiing, ice-skating, athletics, and others.²⁷ The issue of documentary technics and *fizkul'tura* was also raised with regard to non-fiction film, although here the question of amateur proficiency was understandably less pronounced. The critic and filmmaker Vladimir Shneiderov wrote in *Kino* in 1935 on the need for both *khudozhestvennoe* and *dokumental'noe* cinema to link their production practices to the particular demands of *fizkul'tura*, criticising filmmakers for resigning themselves to their and their actors’ weak physical condition and poor technical knowledge: ‘Авторы кинопроизведений подчас сознательно избегают возможности показать хорошо работающее тело.’²⁸ Shneiderov’s article was accompanied by panels ascribed to famous sportspeople detailing the ways in which the techniques of fiction and non-fiction film could be refined through careful attention to sport. One of these was the champion swimmer Anton Shumin, who complained that the only educational films about swimming worth watching were imported from abroad.²⁹

It should be noted that swimming is the most common sport in newsreels that do seek to use the documentary capacity of film to capture sporting technique. For instance, a 1930 edition of *Sovkinozhurnal* featured a piece on the training regime of champion long-distance

²⁶ Sidorov, p. 202.

²⁷ See, for instance: B. Konev, ‘Snimaite lyzhnyi sport!’, *Sovetskoe foto*, 1 (1935), 24–26.

²⁸ V. Shneiderov, ‘Nuzhen tolchok’, *Kino*, 33 (1935), 3.

²⁹ ‘Sozdamim khudozhestvennyi obraz fizkul'turnika’, *Kino*, 33 (1935), 3.

swimmers Faizulin and Malin, taking the viewer out into the otherwise unreachable Black Sea (Figure 3).³⁰



Figure 3. Hot chocolate in the Black Sea. *Sovkinozhurnal* 35/298 (1930)

An undated documentary short from the 1930s entitled *Moskva segodnia* employed the newly developed means of underwater cinematography to demonstrate to its audience the correct technique for backstroke kick, neatly slotted into an otherwise unremarkable piece of propaganda filmmaking (Figure 4).³¹

³⁰ *Sovkinozhurnal* 35/298 (1930), RGAKFD I-2136.

³¹ *Moskva segodnia* (undated), RGAKFD I-3792-II. The first underwater camera in the USSR was built by F. A. Leontovich in 1933.



Figure 4. Backstroke for the masses. *Moskva segodnia* (undated)

Diving was a particularly popular discipline for newsreel filmmakers throughout the period. Its dramatic, acrobatic nature provided ample opportunity for slow-motion footage that attempted to make its tumbling bodies legible to the casual viewer, as for instance in an edition of *Sovkinozhurnal* detailing a 1929 gala between Muscovite and German athletes at the Dinamo *vodnaia stantsiia* (Figure 5).³²



Figure 5. Slow-motion gravity. *Sovkinozhurnal* 43/222 (1929)

³² *Sovkinozhurnal* 43/222 (1929), RGAKFD I-2066-“b”.

These works were being produced during the First Five-Year Plan, at a time of general cultural reassessment. At the same time as non-fiction film was responding to the critiques of the likes of Shneiderov, documentary photography was subjected to a rigorous reassessment, as attempts were made to reconcile its increasing availability to untrained amateurs and entrenched journalistic stylistics with the growing need to define the medium in terms of socialist realism. By 1935, when Shneiderov was staking his claim for a *fizkul'tura* cinema, the art critic Leonid Mezhericher could demonstrate quite clearly in *Sovetskoe foto* how the ideas of Nauman, Piotrovskii, and Sidorov had been adapted to the new criteria. Mezhericher draws a line under photography informed by the debates of the 1920s: 'фотография обычно приводится примером именно *нереалистического*, чисто *технического* способа изображения действительности [...] О произведениях фотографии говорят как о продуктах плоского, бездумного *натурализма*'.³³ His delimitation of 'technical' or 'naturalist' images allows Mezhericher to suggest the potential for a new school of photography — one that takes the documentary technics espoused in previous years and rejects the chimera of absolute mimesis in favour of artistically inflected reality in its revolutionary development.³⁴ His example is of photojournalists covering the construction of the Moscow Metro. If they capture workers' filthy conditions, then they are naturalists. If they capture the 'дело чести и героизма' contained within that filth, then they are (socialist) realists.³⁵ As we will see, Mezhericher's definition of 'realism' contra 'naturalism' spoke to a burgeoning desire in the mid-1930s to relinquish the 'documentary moment' in favour of a beauty not understood in terms of clear, straightforward, or lifeless technics.

Non-fiction and the education of technically and aesthetically aware citizens

Parallel to *fizkul'tura*'s capacity to refine the technics of documentation was documentary media's capacity to refine the practice of *fizkul'tura*. In the *fizkul'tura* special interest press, photography was often incorporated into articles. Almost every issue of publications such as *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, *Fizkul'tura i sport*, and *Krasnyi sport* throughout the period in question ran features advising their readers on the proper

³³ L. Mezhericher, 'O realizme v sovetsom fotoiskusstve', *Sovetskoe foto*, 1 (1935), 4–7 (p. 4).

³⁴ On this see also: Katherine Hill Reischl, 'Objective Authorship: Photography and Writing in Russia, 1905-1975' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 2013).

³⁵ Mezhericher, 'O realizme' p. 7.

training and performance of particular disciplines. These were almost always illustrated with photographs of the sporting body *in medias res*. One *fizkul'tura* activist, Petr Ratov, wrote a series of articles in *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury* in the mid-1920s on the unequivocal importance of photography in the training of Soviet bodies. As he puts it: 'То, что при изучении техники того или иного вида физических упражнений фотография имеет колоссальнейшее значение, в этом, думается, ни у кого сомнения возникнуть не может.'³⁶ Ratov underlined his point with a photomontage demonstrating the correct technique for hurdlers at the starting block (Figure 6).



Figure 6. American hurdler Paddock and his imitable technique. *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 13-14 (1926)

Other examples from the same publication demonstrate how this journalistic photomontage technique could be applied to sports such as skiing and the high-jump (Figures 7 and 8).³⁷

³⁶ P. Ratov, 'Fotografiia v sporte', *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 13-14 (1926), 13. See also: P. Ratov, 'Iskusstvo dvizheniia', *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 2 (1926), 12-13.

³⁷ Images from: P. Ratov, 'Tekhnika gorno-lyzhnogo sporta', *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 3 (1926), 8-9 (p. 8); Nikolai Feit, 'Mekhanika pryzhka', *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 13-14 (1926), 5-8 (p. 7).

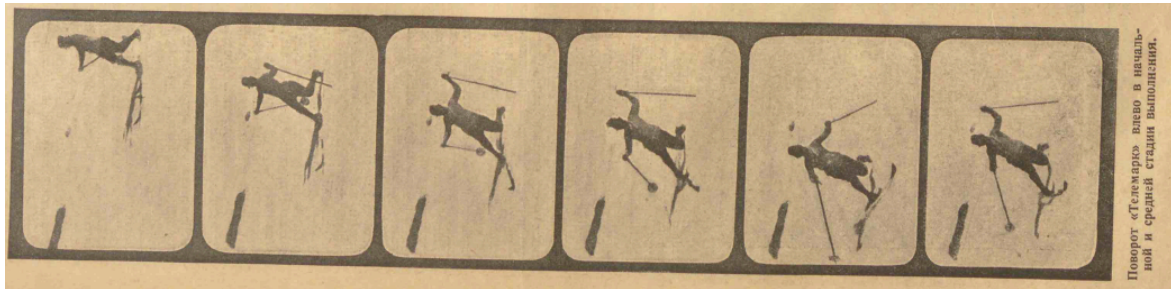


Figure 7. How to ski. *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 3 (1926)



Figure 8. How to high-jump. *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 13-14 (1926)

It was non-fiction film and newsreels, however, that possessed the greatest potential to transform the Soviet public. The administrative realisation of this potential seems to have coincided with the cultural revolution that accompanied the First Five-Year Plan from 1928; the cause of this realisation was the planning of the First All-Union Spartakiada, held in Moscow in August of that year. The Spartakiada was an enormous undertaking that attempted to bring together athletes from every Soviet republic as well as foreign delegates competing in dozens of disciplines; alongside this were parades, lectures, and radio broadcasts.

The screening of non-fiction film was intended from the beginning to form an integral part of the event. Throughout the Spartakiada, an exhibition was held in Moscow's Leninskie Gory on the theme 'Ten Years of *Fizkul'tura* Achievements'. This was to feature displays of sporting equipment, an anthropological section, performances by a '*fizkul'tura* orchestra', and, in the words of the exhibition's acting director, 'Кино-передвижка,

волшебн. фонарь, экран и фотоаппарат, плакаты, альбомы, диапозитивы и проч.³⁸

Instructions issued to the commission responsible for staging the exhibition make it clear that film screenings there were intended to be *metodologicheskie* — that is, technical and educational in character. As well as footage of sporting bodies in action, this section of the exhibition was to feature films:

в смежных научных дисциплинах, поскольку они имеют отношения к физической культуре в широком смысле этого слова / педагогика, педология, психотехника и профотбор, антропология, антропометрия, биология, физиология, рефлексология, евгеника, врачебный контроль и самоконтроль, гинекология, кардиология, здравоохранение, гигиена и проч.³⁹

Fizkul'tura was being positioned here as part of a broader project for the biological and psychological rationalisation of the Soviet subject.

The wide range of material broadcast at the exhibition speaks to the administrative effort to make the Spartakiada as broad-ranging as possible, in subject matter and public reach. Aron Zikmund, Rector of the State Institute for Physical Culture, unsuccessfully lobbied the event's organising committee for funds to use stadia in the capital as giant open-air cinemas during the Spartakiada; Zikmund hoped to bring in crowds of thousands for showings of both popular feature films and documentaries 'научно-показательного содержания'.⁴⁰ While Zikmund's dream of tens of thousands of *fizkul'turniki* engaged in simultaneous entertainment and technical education went unfulfilled, the Spartakiada was ultimately accompanied by a series of film screenings in more modest surroundings. The schedule — which included documentaries on healthy living and the proper practice of *fizkul'tura* alongside avant-garde works (Pudovkin's *Konets Sankt-Peterburga* and Eisenstein's *Oktiabr*'), *bytovye* dramas (Iutkevich's *Kruzhbeva*) and light-hearted sports comedies (Artkino's *Besprizornyi sportsmen*, Dobbelt's and Nikiforov's *Sportivnaia likhboradka*) — suggests that Zikmund's message was not entirely lost on the organising committee.⁴¹ Likewise, plans were made to screen popular feature films as part of

³⁸ Gausman, Letter to the Exhibition Commission of the Spartakiada Organising Committee, 26 July 1928. GARF, f. 7576. op. 1. ed. khr. 44. l. 15.

³⁹ 'Instruktivnye ukazaniia organizatsii, uchastvuiushchim na vystavke Dostizhenii fizkul'tury za 10 let' (1928). GARF, f. 7576. op. 1. ed. khr. 44. l. 21.

⁴⁰ A. Zikmund, Letter to the Agitprop Commission of the Spartakiada Organising Committee (August 1928). GARF, f. 7576. op. 1. ed. khr. 44. l. 62.

⁴¹ 'Plan kul'turnogo obsluzhivaniia uchastnikov Spartakiady po linii kino' (1928). GARF, f. 7576. op. 1. ed. khr. 44. l. 41.

fizkul'tura-friendly evenings that would also involve lectures by medical doctors on reflexology and the respiratory system.⁴² Non-fiction film took its place amongst the many visual resources put to work educating the Soviet citizen, physically, psychologically, and culturally.⁴³

By the end of the First Five-Year Plan, non-fiction film's role in the physical education of the people had been reimagined along rather Zikmundian lines. Now the emphasis was firmly on the *mass* nature of this media. As one writer put it in the pages of *Fizkul'taktivist*: 'Не рабочий должен прийти к физкультуре, а физкультура должна идти туда, где происходят наиболее массовые скопления рабочих [...] Использовать всевозможные собрания, вечера, кино и сборища для организации.'⁴⁴ In keeping with the broader cultural shift towards centripetal Stalinism, non-fiction film was now envisioned as one arm of a centralised, radial power structure that would, ideally, govern each regional centre according to generalised laws. It is instructive to compare planning for the 1928 Spartakiada with that for the 1932 iteration; four years on, senior administrators were bemoaning the fact that the programmes of 1928 had not been expanded upon and that, as a result, the *massovoe* aspect of *fizkul'tura* film was underdeveloped. Gregor' Cherniak, a member of the organising committee in 1932, wrote an internal memo in which he chastised his colleagues for their failure to realise in time the educational potential of film. Cherniak proposed a new *kino fizkul'tury* in which films would be planned and produced according to a simplified, educational model: 'фильм делится на 3 части (не механически, а по существу) - 1) значение того или иного вида спорта для организма человека; 2) показ и подробный анализ техники этого спорта на примерах лучших мастеров; 3) области применения в труде и обороне.'⁴⁵ The minutes of a meeting of the All-Union Council for Physical Culture held the same year include a decree calling for a similar reworking of the relationship between film and *fizkul'tura*; this time explicitly

⁴² 'Nauchnye doklady i demonstratsiia kino-fil'm fizkul'turnogo soderzhaniia' (1928). GARF, f. 7576. op. 1. ed. khr. 44. l. 104.

⁴³ The non-fiction film of the period to feature *fizkul'tura* and which is now most celebrated is, of course, Dziga Vertov's *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (VUFKU, 1929). I have chosen not to comment on Vertov's work here since *Chelovek* is far from being centred on *fizkul'tura*, Vertov being preoccupied as much with the fundamental questions of documentary technique and theory as he is with any particular aspect of Soviet everyday life. Mike O'Mahony is amongst those to comment on *Chelovek*'s portrayal of *fizkul'tura*, and he does so with explicit reference to the 1928 Spartakiada: Mike O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture – Visual Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2006), pp. 31-33, 71.

⁴⁴ A. Gil'd, 'Vovlech' massy', *Fizkul'taktivist*, 30 (1930), 8–9.

⁴⁵ G. I. Cherniak, 'Osnovy plana kino-raboty po mirovoi Spartakiade' (1932). GARF, f. 7576. op. 24. ed. khr. 1v. ll. 9-12.

predicated on the idea that film could be used to transmit centrally-approved technical standards to the Soviet periphery.

Кино как наиболее наглядный вид учебы и инструктажа, в данном случае окажется незаменимым средством в деле перестройки физкультурной работы, так как благодаря своей массовости, единственно, сможет охватить всю ту громадную аудиторию [...] По линии привлечения общественного внимания [...] По отражению, фиксации и подведению итогов социалистических достижений и побед, представленных на самих празднествах для последующей демонстрации⁴⁶.

At this time newsreels, too, were increasingly employed in the service of technical education. Rather than footage from competitive matches or galas, it became common for newsreels to feature reports from training camps; the emphasis was thus on training and technical refinement, rather than the result of any particular encounter. Examples include reels devoted to *pokazatel'nye boi* amongst Moscow boxers, with doctors present and spectators looking on with quiet attentiveness;⁴⁷ an item on a Voronezh *kolkhoz* undertaking training for GTO qualifications, with workers' sprints and long-jumps carefully timed and discussed by fellow participants;⁴⁸ and a report on the run-up to the 1932 Spartakiada from Uzbekistan, demonstrating how the choreography of *fizkul'tura* parades and the science of Crimean-style sanatoria have been exported to the East.⁴⁹

The mass-participatory, radially-organised nature of *fizkul'tura* in these early-1930s sources is also accompanied by an increase in shots of onlooking crowds of spectators, an aspect of non-fiction media that would ultimately assume a great deal of significance. Given the two aims of non-fiction media laid out above — teaching Soviet citizens how to *look at* and how to *emulate* technically adept bodies — this shift to the spectator is not surprising. What is noteworthy is how, over the second half of the rough decade under consideration, the onlooker/emulator comes to be incorporated into the image; this is what I address below and in subsequent chapters. Across *fizkul'tura* media — as in practically every artistic field — 1932 marked a transitional point after which artists and producers were increasingly caught up in the construction and codification of socialist realist culture.

⁴⁶ 'Fizkul'tura i kino. Predlozhenie VSFK' (1932). GARF, f. 7576. op. 24. ed. khr. 1v. ll. 1-7 (l. 1-2).

⁴⁷ *Sovkinozhurnal* 35/229 (1929), RGAKFD I-2058.

⁴⁸ *Soiuzkino zhurnal*, 'Za sotsialisticheskuiu derevniu' 21 (1931), RGAKFD I-2362.

⁴⁹ *Soiuzkino zhurnal* 42/452 (1932), RGAKFD I-2286.

The shifting focus of non-fiction media and its intended effect was one small part of this intractably complex process.

Documentary, spectatorship, reflexivity

Fizkul'tura and non-fiction media, then, had a symbiotic relationship, with the close observation of each informing and improving the practice of the other, creating in the process a self-perpetuating image of the technically proficient, demonstrative sporting body. Yet perhaps the most important aspect of photography and documentary film with regards to the search for *obshchestvennost'* was their reflexivity. The subjects of these documentary media are aware of their being captured on film; the performance and recording of *fizkul'tura* in these circumstances become a zone of engagement in which identities were formed in the space between the objective standards of sporting achievement and the subjective field of Arvatov's *mirooshchushchenie*.

Photography's role here is relatively limited. As shown above its development with regards to *fizkul'tura* was closely linked to the journalistic criteria of illustration and education; as a still medium it was most often bound up in technical debates about the recording of stillness and *dvizhenie* before being subsumed into the question of (socialist) realism contra naturalism. There was little room for meta-medial awareness in the dry, didactic *fizkul'tura* press. A full consideration of the role of reflexivity in sports photography would require research into private archives, which might reveal the extent to which amateur practitioners chose to follow the advice of Nauman, Piotrovskii, and Sidorov in capturing bodies in action. One telling example of this is the collection of private photos, taken in the early 1930s, of the champion swimmer Liusia Vtorova recently uncovered by Christina Kiaer. Kiaer posits these images — particularly one featuring Liusia posing topless in the style of Ivan Shadr's famous 'Devushka s veslom' sculpture from Gorkii Park — as an unusual kind of art historical source caught between the nascent genre of the 'snapshot' and posed, public portraiture. She also raises the question of reflexivity, reading into this self-consciously stylised pose an effort by Liusia to arrange herself suggestively within the frame.⁵⁰ Kiaer's comments — tying together the question of

⁵⁰ Christina Kiaer, 'The Swimming Vtorova Sisters: The Representation and Experience of Sport in the 1930s', in Nikolaus Katzer, Sandra Budy, Alexandra Köhring, and Manfred Zeller (eds.), *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2010), pp. 89-109 (pp. 95, 107).

public beauty, self-aware bodies, non-fiction media, and eroticism — are all the more tantalising given that Liusia Vtorova was the inspiration for several of Aleksandr Deineka's 'lyrical' paintings, which we will meet in the following chapter. (When the art critic Nikolai Shchekotov praised *Igra v miach* for avoiding Western-style subjective fancy and *lubochno-pouchitel'nost'*, lauding Deineka for the objective, real-life feeling contained within his work, he perhaps did not realise quite how close to the bone his comments were.)⁵¹

It was in newsreel footage that reflexivity was most fully realised. In many reels, particularly those produced before 1928, it is the *fizkul'turniki* themselves who are rendered self-aware: the intrusion of the unfamiliar technology of the camera into the quotidian routine of training and competition visibly disturbs the sporting body, adding a performative aspect to what had been a distinctly self-contained activity. A few examples: participants in a meeting of *fizkul'turniki* on Vorovskii Square in Moscow in May 1924 repeatedly turn away from their instructor's demonstrations to look back at the camera filming them for the newsreel *Goskinokalendar'*;⁵² the same newsreel in 1925 travels to the countryside and reports on a provincial football match in which the goalkeeper, sitting leaning on his goalpost, notices he is being filmed and begrudgingly pulls himself to his feet;⁵³ competitors at the 1926 national boxing, wrestling, and weightlifting championships waiting to be announced to the crowd in the wings of a gymnasium seem suddenly aware that they are stripped to the waist when they notice the presence of the *Sovkinozhurnal* film crew.⁵⁴

By the end of the First Five-Year Plan it was increasingly common for newsreels to devote almost as much time to recording the spectators of sporting events as they did to relaying the sport itself. Spectators were shown arriving at competitions; wide-angle shots were used to take in the full length of bustling stands inside stadia; crucial moments in the sporting action — the scoring of a goal, sprinters crossing the line — would be immediately followed by close-up shots of individual spectators' reactions, whether joyful, anxious, aggravated. One edition of *Soiuzkinozhurnal* from 1934 features a report on the opening match of the spring football season at the stadium of the 'Stalin' factory; besides

⁵¹ N. M. Shchekotov, 'Sovetskie zhivopistsy. Vystavka "Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let"', *Iskusstvo*, 4 (1933), 51–143 (p. 121).

⁵² *Goskinokalendar* 20 (1924), RGAKFD I-176.

⁵³ *Goskinokalendar'* 54 (1925), RGAKFD I-12841.

⁵⁴ *Sovkinozhurnal* 16/35 (1926), RGAKFD I-828.

the presentation of the teams and the goals scored we witness an elderly spectator squinting through opera glasses at the action and a father trying in vain to get his infant child to focus on the game rather than the camera.⁵⁵ A report produced by the journal *Krasnyi sport* in 1931 on preparations for the World Spartakiada in Berlin features sports from shot-put, discus, and motorcycle racing to tennis and football, and in each instance individual members of the crowd are shown reacting to the bodies on display: shouting ‘*davai!*’ pointing out refereeing errors, bending their necks to take in action on the far side of the stadium.⁵⁶ One fan at the final of the football tournament looks knowingly into the camera and breaks out in a grin.



Figure 9. A self-aware football fan. *Krasnyi sport* (1931)

Undated newsreel footage from the 1930s documenting the various rounds of the national football cup, from provincial qualifiers to the final in Moscow, also makes plentiful use of spectators as material. As the tournament progresses the stadia become larger and less provincial, the crowds larger and more diverse. From small boys sitting in a

⁵⁵ *Soiuzkinozhurnal* 14/513 (1934), RGAKFD I-2462.

⁵⁶ *Krasnyi sport* (1931), RGAKFD I-3752-III.

tree watching a *kolkhoz* game we move to stylishly dressed women concerned at the roughness of the play in a stadium holding several thousand (Figure 10).⁵⁷



Figure 10. A better class of fan. *Iz veka v vek na futbol'nom share* (1998)

In a neat moment of meta-filmic reflexivity, one cameraman, filming on behalf of the newsreel, manages to capture the arrival at the ground of a rival documentarian — who bears a strong resemblance to Dziga Vertov's brother and cinematographer Mikhail Kaufman (Figure 11).

⁵⁷ The original newsreels have not been preserved, but the footage, acquired through the archives of the clubs in question, can be found in a 1998 documentary on the history of football in the Soviet Union: *Iz veka v vek na futbol'nom share* (1998), RGAKFD I-32032-I-III.



Figure 11. The professional spectator arrives. *Iz veka v vek na futbol'nom share* (1998)

These moments of documentary reflexivity, in which athletes, spectators, and cameramen alike become aware of their performative functions, are central to our discussion of *obshchestvennost'* and sporting bodies because they point towards the onscreen process by which collective imagination was created. In their moments of mediated/documented self-recognition, athletes and spectators cease to exist on one side or other of the divide that distinguishes sporting performers from their audience; in that instant they can understand themselves as part of the collective undertaking called *fizkul'tura*. Joshua Malitsky has written on the role of documentary media in the formation of 'social imaginaries':

The relation between understandings and practices is pivotal because some self-understandings are not formulated in any kind of explicit frame. Instead, they are embedded in the narratives, symbols, modes of address, and systems of cognition that subtend and make possible everyday activities [...] Nonfiction film helps people grasp society as a set of identifiable categories while simultaneously prompting people to see themselves as belonging to new kinds of collective agency.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Joshua Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film: Building the Soviet and Cuban Nations* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 11-13.

With Malitsky, I argue that the ‘decisive goal’ of these newsreels, revealed most tellingly in their moments of participatory reflexivity, ‘was not only to participate in the accelerated development of subject construction but also to instil the desire for Soviet [subjectivity].’⁵⁹

Perhaps the most acute non-fiction examples of Malitsky’s ‘accelerated development of subject construction’ are scenes captured at Black Sea Spartakiadas in the 1930s (Figures 12 to 15).⁶⁰ These were local events organised by and for the garrisons of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol and other Crimean towns. They consisted of a mix of regular Spartakiada events — parades, light athletics, swimming, wrestling — and specially designed disciplines targeted at sailors. These were meant to reproduce familiar drills and naval tasks, an early example of the militarisation of *fizkul'tura* festivals that would become commonplace in the late 1930s: swimming races in full kit or carrying rifles, climbing rigging against the clock, competitive lifesaving, and so on.



Figure 12. The Black Sea lads live it up. *Sovkinozhurnal* 45/308 (1930)

These events are fascinating because of the intense *obshchestvennost'* that must have been instilled in competitors and spectators alike before the cameras even arrived. All the athletes and their audiences share the same strictly enforced military identity; they are competing and spectating in locations they have spent most of their adult lives, and the

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁰ The images here are taken from: *Sovkinozhurnal* 45/308 (1930), RGAKFD I-2146; *Soiuzkinozhurnal* 43/452 (1932), RGAKFD I-2287.

events are designed to resemble practices with which everyone is intimately familiar. The potential mutuality of *fizkul'tura* is strongly manifested, the distinction between spectator and *fizkul'turnik* blurred to a rare degree.



Figure 13. Stripping away the distinction between competitor and fan. *Sovkinozhurnal* 45/308 (1930)

Under the Crimean sun, hundreds of topless, shaven-headed men form the fleshy canvas on which one form of idealised Soviet subjectivity is conveyed. The camera lingers on the crowd more than the competitors (who respond most heartily to the naval themed events, laughing at the spectacle of labour-turned-game), but it makes little difference. These men delight in their mutual exposure, mutually organised and enacted.



Figure 14. You can keep your hat on. *Soiuzkinozburnal* 43/452 (1932)



Figure 15. The fleshy canvas of Soviet subjectivity. *Soiuzkinozburnal* 43/452 (1932)

3. The non-fiction subject

The three intersections of non-fiction media and *fizkul'tura* outlined above — *fizkul'tura* as testing ground for the technics of documentary media and the delimitation of Soviet 'realism'; the educational and discursive role of non-fiction media in creating technically and aesthetically aware citizens; documentary film as a reflexive exercise in

engagement with its participants — can be understood as the testing ground for the creation, through sporting bodies of a ‘beautiful’ Soviet subject. As Malitsky argues in relation to documentary film, the visualisation of collectivity that this medium strives towards can be understood as the conjunction of ‘subjective’ imaginations and ‘objective’ political and social processes.⁶¹ Being recorded by a camera fixes the citizen in a place between subjective investment in the sporting body (whether as athlete or audience member) and awareness of the objective conditions of Soviet sociality. This transforms both the view through the camera lens and the act of spectatorship into what Sarah E. James has called ‘a new and politically educated kind of seeing’; one that ‘dissolves private intimacy in a socially embedded and mutable experience’.⁶²

What does it mean for subjectification, understood in terms of ‘becoming’, to be so closely intertwined with bodies? Again, the particular character of non-fiction media can be instructive here. Photography and film both produced images that fixed particular moments within the tumultuous project of Soviet world-building, whilst allowing for a sense of dynamism and transformation — or ‘becoming’ — to persist. In her reading of the ‘documentary moment’ up to 1932, Elizabeth Papazian highlights non-fiction media’s ability ‘both to record a changing reality faithfully and to affect (“produce”) it.’⁶³ In 1928, Osip Brik — friend and colleague of Arvatov at LEF — had lauded photography over painting in similar terms. Painting, Brik argued, resembled iconography in that it captured its object in static isolation from the world; photography, on the other hand, gave a sense of the true nature of things by recording them ‘in constant motion and in constant connection with others.’⁶⁴ The issue for documentarians, whether they understood their work in terms of a LEFist ‘factography’ or not, was that the process of transformation could not be taken as an end in itself. Becoming Soviet was the ultimate aim; fixation on the formal qualities of non-fiction media risked lapsing into directionless fact-for-fact’s-sake.⁶⁵

The benefit of *fizkul’tura* was that it added a solid sense of direction to the process of transformation or becoming. The *fizkul’turniki* dealt in quantifiable achievements, and

⁶¹ Malitsky, pp. 27–28.

⁶² Sarah E. James, ‘A Socialist Realist Sander? Comparative Portraiture as a Marxist Model in the German Democratic Republic’, *Grey Room*, 47 (2012), 38–59 (p. 41).

⁶³ Papazian, p. 210. On this see also Fore, ‘The Operative Word’.

⁶⁴ Osip Brik, ‘Ot kartiny k foto’, *Novyi LEF*, 3 (1928), 29–33.

⁶⁵ On this tension in Brik’s work and that of other LEFists, see Alastair Renfrew, ‘Facts and Life: Osip Brik in the Soviet Film Industry’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 7:2 (2013), 165–88.

could always aspire to better themselves by jumping higher or running faster. These achievements were not only quantifiable, they were generalisable. If *fizkul'tura* was conducted in the spirit of *obshchestvennost'* then there was no meaningful distinction between participants and spectators; the act of spectatorship became simply an exercise in the refinement and communality of one's own body.⁶⁶ By pushing bodies to better themselves in clearly delimited ways, *fizkul'tura* offered one potential way out of the dead end of factography and into Soviet subjecthood.

Thinking in terms of bodies also helps us to understand the evolution of non-fiction media as part of the much broader cultural shift that occurred between 1928 and 1932. Papazian's and Brik's definitions of the particular qualities of non-fiction material — its ability to record and produce change, its ability to fix moments within processes of transformation — bear clear relation to what would later be understood as the aim of socialist realism: to 'depict reality in its revolutionary development.'⁶⁷ Studies of nonfiction media concur that the years 1928-1932, during which socialist realism was a nascent aesthetic strategy and cultural Stalinism still a relatively blank canvas, represented the peak of documentary filmmaking and photojournalism. Papazian argues that the huge destructive and creative forces unleashed in this period by the First Five-Year Plan necessitated a frenzy of recording and documentation, before mature Stalinism saw these media submitted to ever tighter centralised control.⁶⁸ Margarita Tupitsyn makes a similar claim for what she calls photography of 'typicality' — that is, photography that was intended to convey objective, factual imagery from Soviet life: 'The status attained by photography and photomontage between 1928 and 1932 was comparable only with that of painting and graphic arts in the brief period immediately following the Revolution.'⁶⁹ Similarly to documentary film, the fall from grace was sharp for Stalinist photography.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ This generalisation worked on spatial or geographical terms too: the greater the individual *fizkul'turnik's* achievements, the closer they came to competing in national competitions, the stronger their metonymy with the centripetal capital. Indeed, several newsreels and documentaries record the preparations of provincial or national republic athletes before travelling to Moscow for prestigious tournaments. See, for instance: *Soiuzkino zhurnal* 42/452 (1932), RGAKFD, I-2286; *Soiuzkino zhurnal* 22/521 (1934), RGAKFD, I-2470; *Erivan' na stroike. Agit-massovyi fil'm v 1-ch* (Armenfil'm/Soiuzkino, 1932), RGAKFD I-4007-"b".

⁶⁷ The phrase is from Zhdanov's speech at the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress, available at: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwritercongress/zhdanov.htm> [accessed 11th October 2016].

⁶⁸ Papazian, pp. 6-17.

⁶⁹ Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924-1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 126.

⁷⁰ Tupitsyn argues that photography declined in status so sharply because of its practitioners' inability to move beyond the 'zero degree' of formalism. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Earlier we saw how the debate on photography and 'realism' was informed by the advent of socialist realism, with the critic Leonid Mezhericher distinguishing between 'плоский натурализм' and genuinely 'realist' images that no longer strove for absolute mimesis. Photography could indeed aspire to 'realism', and in the period after 1932, as Tupitsyn shows, the most successful photographers were those that followed Mezhericher's advice and actively rejected fragmentation and naked documentarianism. It was painting, and to a lesser extent sculpture, however, that proved themselves most suited to the task of reintroducing a sense of holism to revolutionary transformation. Mezhericher had employed the example of the construction of the Moscow Metro, calling on photographers to go beyond the basic material facts of the process and instead to capture the 'дело чести и геройства'. When it came to bodily beauty, *chest'* and *geroistvo* proved to be the preserve of Deineka and his contemporaries. In Papazian's words, 'documentary served as a precursor of the similar socialist realist concern with the representation of the path to the future and the ideological transformation of the [viewer]'.⁷¹

By 1935, the terms of engagement had decisively changed. Mezhericher and his colleagues at *Sovetskoe foto* no longer had time for 'neutral', 'purely' factual photography. The great Constructivist designer and famous photo-essayist Aleksandr Rodchenko was a particular cause of frustration for his anachronistic adherence to old methods of capturing bodies in action. Morozov criticised one print in particular, 'Pryzhok v vodu' (1935) (Figure 16): 'in the depictions of swimmers or instructors of Soviet sport the reader wants to see a beautiful trained body. In Rodchenko's photograph, the character is killed by biological detail.'⁷² Rodchenko's mistake was twofold: not to appreciate that beauty was now the order of the day; and not to recognise that by 1935 beauty demanded, as one art critic put it, that *biologiia* (hairy legs and bent toes) be subordinate to 'social consciousness'.⁷³

⁷¹ Papazian, p. 210.

⁷² Quoted in Tupitsyn, p. 154.

⁷³ Shchekotov, p. 121.



Figure 16. Aleksandr Rodchenko's 'Pryzhok v vodu' (1935): 'killed by biological detail'

We have seen how, from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s, non-fiction media laid the ground for a response to Arvatov's call for a de-monopolised aesthetics, by revitalising the acts of performing and spectating *fizkul'tura*; we have also seen that by the end of this period, the 'fact' of bodies onscreen was no longer sufficient. Arvatov had called for a renewal of *praktika* in the broadest sense ('Каждый человек должен уметь квалифицированно ходить, говорить, устраивать вокруг себя мир вещей с их качественными свойствами и пр.'), but also for a radical new form of 'то, что принято называть «радостью», «творческой полнотой», «гармонией» жизни, «красотой»'.⁷⁴ Non-fiction could account for *praktika* but not for *miroosobshchenie*.

In the next chapter, moving our focus from non-fiction visual media to painting and sculpture, we are attempting to grasp something of the affective aesthetic experience which Arvatov equates with 'joy', 'harmony of life', and so on. In a recent article Angelina Lucento draws on the writings of Anatolii Lunarcharskii to position painting as a constant

⁷⁴ Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*, pp. 110-113.

‘competitor’ to non-fiction media throughout the 1920s.⁷⁵ As early as 1925, in a review of an AKhRR exhibition dominated by photography, Lunacharskii warned against an over reliance among artists on this new medium: ‘It is imperative that the artist *create* his own picture, so that it would be appear to have been conceived in his blood and nerves [...] and not a reflection, like a photographic shot.’⁷⁶ Lucento also cites a speech given in the early 1930s in which the Commissar for Enlightenment warned artists: ‘We must strive to attain an exact knowledge of the experience of the person from his external manifestation. Human feeling, frame of mind, is very immediate and can be difficult to consider, but the way in which it is reflected physiologically, in the pose, through the very entirety of the construction of the figure, has a great indicative meaning.’⁷⁷ If Lunacharskii was swimming against the tide in 1925, by 1932 his position had gained precedence.

Mechanical media, such as film and photography, were recognized as vital to both the development of social connections and collective spectatorship. Figurative painting, on the other hand, was recognized as crucial for the maintenance of the collective's awareness of the human body as an organic, rather than industrial organism. Such a corpus was considered both the site of proletarian consciousness and the source of sensual, comradely social relations [...] by the early 1930s, in the cultural sphere at least, the new Soviet human was conceived of as an entity, whose capacities for perception and thought were rooted in the substance of his/her flesh.⁷⁸

‘Fixation’ through non-fiction had reached its peak; now was the time of ‘embodiment’ through painting.

⁷⁵ Angelina Lucento, ‘The Conflicted Origins of Soviet Visual Media: Painting, Photography, and Communication in Russia, 1925-1932’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 56:2-3 (2015), 401–28.

⁷⁶ Anatolii Lunacharskii, ‘Diskussiia ob AkhRR’e’, *Zhizn’ iskusstva* 33 (1926), 3; translation from Lucento, p. 401.

⁷⁷ Lucento, p. 411.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 404, 428.

The Bather

Человек, дожив до того момента, когда нельзя
Его больше любить, брезгуя плыть противу
Бешеного течения, прячется в перспективу.
— Iosif Brodskii, 'V Italii'¹

1. Beautiful in a new way, in our way

In April 1933, the art critic Nikolai Shchekotov published in *Iskusstvo* his essay-review of the 1933 retrospective exhibition *Fifteen Years of Artists of the RSFSR*, held first in Leningrad, then in Moscow.² Shchekotov's lengthy exploration of the stylistic and thematic evolution of Soviet painting and sculpture is not easily summarised, but in his remarks on portraiture a number of ideas recur. A distinct epoch, in Shchekotov's view, requires distinctive portraiture — that is, the artistic rendering of 'types' (*tipy*); the inadequacies of Soviet painterly representations of faces, bodies, and personalities thus represents a serious problem:

Через такие типические портреты, мы, зачастую, подходим вплотную к раскрытию общественных отношений той или другой эпохи [...] Мы страшно нуждаемся [...] не только в индивидуальных, но и типовых портретах [...] Надо было бы думать, что именно такие «оригиналы» для портретной живописи захватят художника, идущего в ногу со своим временем.³

Conversely, the best portraiture on display reflects for Shchekotov the pinnacle of Soviet painting. He finds grounds for optimism in the final rooms of the exhibition, showcasing younger artists; the most encouraging of all is Aleksandr Deineka.⁴

¹ Iosif Brodskii, 'V Italii', in *Uraniia* (Moscow: Azbuka, 2010), p. 204.

² N. M. Shchekotov, 'Sovetskie zhivopistsy. Vystavka "Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let"', *Iskusstvo*, 4 (1933), 51–143. For a detailed account of the exhibition see Masha Chlenova, 'Staging Soviet Art: 15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR, 1932–33', *October*, 147 (2014), 38–55.

³ Shchekotov, pp. 79, 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106. On the critical reaction to Deineka's works in the *15 Years* exhibition, see Christina Kiaer, 'Lyrical Socialist Realism', *October*, 147 (2014), 56–77.

Deineka showed three new paintings at the *15 Years* exhibition: *Mat'* (1931) (Figure 1), *Igra v miach* (1932) (Figure 2), and *Kupaiushchaia devushka* (1933). These works came closest to Shchekotov's notion of the individual-typical portrait, one in which figuration might reveal the 'общественные отношения' of the age. Of *Mat'* he writes: 'это сильный образ энергичной, самостоятельной, свободной женщины, в которой биология опосредствована высоким социальным сознанием.' Of *Igra v miach*: 'это удачная попытка найти образ по новому, по нашему красивой женщины-работницы'. Crucially, Deineka's canvases materialise a specifically Soviet topicality. 'Это не лубочно-поучительная [картина], но философия в действии, поскольку художник вмешивается в жизнь разрешенной советской тематики.'⁵

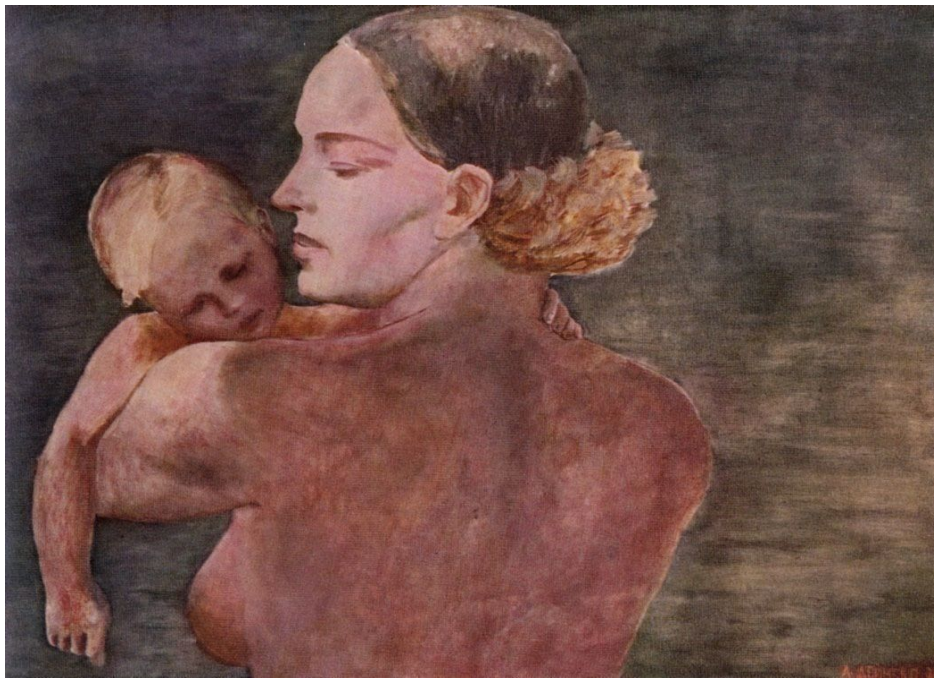


Figure 1. Aleksandr Deineka, *Mat'* (1931)

⁵ Shchekotov, pp. 120-121.

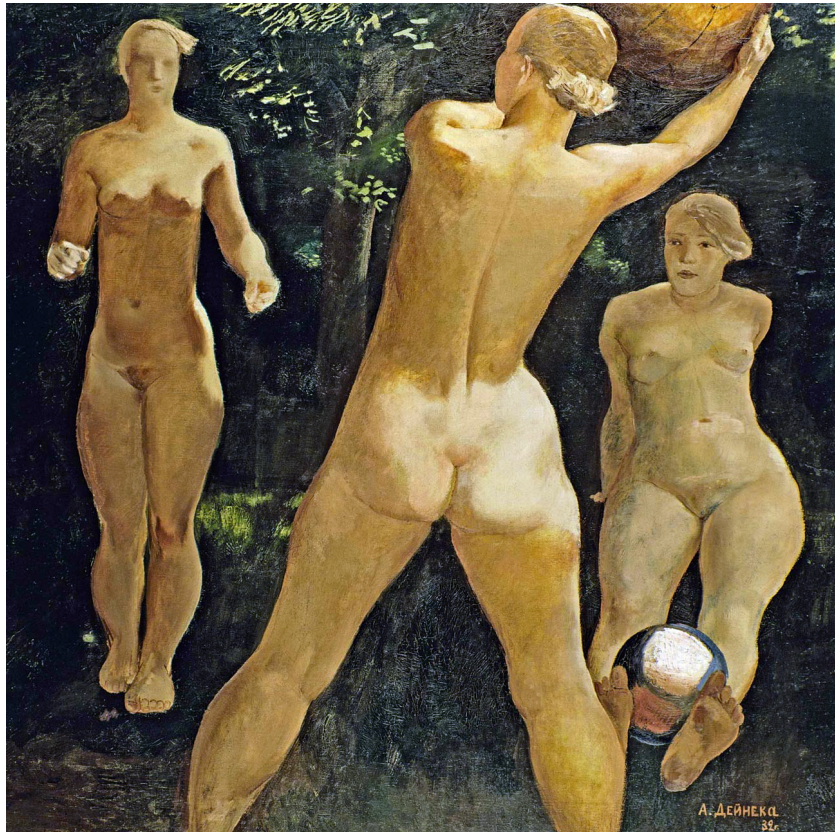


Figure 2. Aleksandr Deineka, *Igra v miach* (1932)

The most intriguing and, to my mind, important aspect of Shchekotov's reaction to Deineka is his claim that these women represent the 'образ по новому, по нашему красивой женщины-работницы.' What Shchekotov means by this is left implicit. What is this 'new beauty'? Shchekotov hints at the answer: Deineka's figures are both personal and typical, marrying 'biology' to 'social consciousness'. Their bodies exist on the canvas in the space between 'советская тематика' and personal affect. The gist of his response to Deineka's bodies is echoed in other reviews of the exhibition. Two months after Shchekotov's piece, *Iskusstvo* ran another essay-review of the retrospective by Abram Efros. Efros criticises those artists who value composition at the expense of 'живые особенности людских фигур, типов'; he praises those who capture 'настоящая живописность и жизненность'. And in reference to Deineka he provides a neat definition of the task at hand to complement Shchekotov's: '«советский портрет», — а такое понятие существует уже совершенно так же, как понятие «советский пейзаж», — ставит именно эту двуединую задачу: общественно-личного изображения человека.'⁶

⁶ Abram Efros, 'Vchera, segodnia, zavtra', *Iskusstvo*, 6 (1933), 15–64 (pp. 52–59).

As we will see below, Shchekotov's and Efros's rhetoric was typical of contemporary art criticism. Their concerns were not limited to the field of painting. Three years after the *15 Years* exhibition, Abram Room completed his feature film *Strogii iunoshka*, to a script by Iurii Olesha.⁷ Censors refused the film a cinematic release, but Olesha's and Room's work represents perhaps the most holistic cinematic engagement of the period with the questions of 'new beauty', the dual public-personal nature of subjecthood, and Efros's 'живые особенности людских фигур'. It refines and dramatises the issues raised by Shchekotov and Efros. Olesha's screenplay also provides another answer to the question of Shchekotov's 'new beauty', when the Komsomol hero and would-be adulterer Grisha remarks: 'Красота — это дело диалектическое. Возникает только между двумя.'

This chapter traces the line between Shchekotov's remark on beauty 'по новому, по нашему' and Grisha's dialecticism, and shows how the aesthetic project proposed in the previous chapter by Boris Arvatov was transmuted into new media. It demonstrates how, by the time Room's film fell victim to mid-1930s anti-formalism, the conceptualisation of beauty had consolidated around the core notion of mutuality/sociality (*obshchestvennost'*); how Stalinist beauty came to be conceived, in Oksana Bulgakova's words, as neither fully 'phrenological' nor 'intuitive',⁸ but rather somewhere in between, in the subjective niche that Shchekotov terms 'философия в действии'. In this space between phrenology and intuition lies the potential Soviet subject. I also highlight the discursive context that explains the significance of Grisha's remark and *Strogii iunoshka* as a whole. In doing so, I further explore the central theme of spectatorship, of looking at bodies, that informs the thesis as a whole.

Christina Kiaer has provided the most compelling reading of Deineka's career at the juncture of the *15 Years* exhibition. In two recent articles she has argued that he was at the forefront of what she variously calls 'haptic', 'emotional', or 'lyrical' socialist realist painting⁹: a point in the early 1930s when 'socialist realism' was relatively inchoate, and certain artists were able to combine a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation or elision with a return to figurative canvas painting. The result, as seen in work by Deineka and associates such as Aleksandr Samokhvalov and Sergei Luppov, was 'lyrical' art — centred

⁷ *Strogii iunoshka*, dir. Abram Room (Ukrainfil'm, 1936, unreleased).

⁸ Oksana Bulgakova, 'Sovetskie krasavitsy v stalinskom kino', in *Sovetskoe bogatstvo. Stat'i o kul'ture, literature i kino. K shestidesiatletiiu Khansa Giuntera*, ed. Marina Balina, Evgenii Dobrenko, and Iurii Murashov (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2002), pp. 391–411 (p. 397).

⁹ Kiaer, 'Lyrical Socialist Realism'; Christina Kiaer, 'Collective Body: The Art of Aleksandr Deineka', *Artforum*, 51:3 (2012), 243–49.

in ‘feeling, emotion, and sensuality [...] a proposal for the critical value of deploying emotion as a social force, and for the social value of communicated emotion.’¹⁰

For Kiaer, Deineka’s lyrical *Mat’* and *Igra v miach* represent a singular achievement: they mark ‘a moment in 1933 when socialist realism had the potential to become a radically collective project of artists working at the boundary between private emotion and publicly oriented feeling to create a shared visual language of socialism.’¹¹ Whilst I will draw on Kiaer’s analysis, I argue that these works are better understood in terms of a longer discursive and aesthetic history that includes canvas painting but also photography, non-fiction film, sculpture, and cinema. Deineka’s lyrical ‘moment’ was in fact one stage in a broader process in which critics, theorists, artists, and filmmakers explored how bodily beauty might function in the context of Soviet emphases on collectivity.

I argue that the valences of Deineka et al’s bodies are only truly apparent if we understand their chronological position, between Arvatov’s *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo* and Room’s *Strogi iunoshka*. If the LEFists stand for the left wing of the artistic avant-garde, Room’s and Olesha’s film plays on and into the Stalinist aesthetic ‘return to Classicism’. Whilst the disjuncture between Arvatov and Room may seem pronounced, I understand them as connected by their attempts to untangle the question of new, Soviet beauty; the ‘живые особенности’ of Deineka et al represent the mid-point in this evolution. The paintings and sculpture of the 1930s and Room’s film see LEFist aesthetic theory relocated into the visualised body: Arvatov’s proletarianised beauty becomes Shchekotov’s beauty ‘по-новому, по-нашему’, which becomes Grisha’s ‘дело диалектическое’ realised ultimately in a Soviet reworking of what one critic called the ‘культ человеческого тела [...] далекий идеал древней Эллады.’¹²

As described above, Arvatov’s, Shchekotov’s/Efros’s, and Grisha’s ‘beauties’ all depend upon a notion of collectivity/mutuality/sociality (*obshchestvennost’*). This deferral to *obshchestvennost’* is the common thread that runs through the approximate decade in question, and is what makes sports and *fizkul’tura* central to the visual working through of bodily aesthetics. Broadly speaking, sports and *fizkul’tura* properly undertaken were understood as sites of performative bodily mutuality in which the qualities of beauty and

¹⁰ Kiaer, ‘Lyrical Socialist Realism’, pp. 59, 76.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 60.

¹² M. Raikhinshtein, ‘E. Manizer-Ianson. “Metatel” nitsa diska’. Gips. 1935. O. K. Somova. “Metatel” nitsa diska’. Gips. 1935. T. F. Smotrova. “Metatel” nitsa granaty’. Gips. 1935.’, *Iskusstvo*, 5 (1935), 143–49 (p. 143).

social responsibility could be tested. From its earliest formulation this conceptualisation was framed in terms of class and psychology as well as aesthetics.

The interplay of subjectivity and *obshchestvennost'* within sports and *fizkul'tura* also informs the choice of primary material for this chapter. In common with the previous chapter, what unites my sources here is that they all 'stage' both bodies and their spectators. Within the frame of camera shot or canvas, they insist upon the figure of the onlooker as an integral part of the world of *fizkul'tura*, part of the action rather than part of the scenery. This reflexivity around the act of looking informs each medium differently. Just as non-fiction film and photography were used to inform viewers both how to use their own bodies, and how to appreciate those of other citizens, 'lyrical' *fizkul'tura* paintings are defined by their attempts to visualise the communion of athletes, and *Strogi iunosha* structures its narrative of adulterous desire around what I will call a 'dialectics' of attraction and surveillance.

Why then is this chapter dedicated to **The Bather**? Aquatic sport (swimming, diving, water polo) is one of the most common subjects for both documentary footage and *fizkul'tura* paintings;¹³ *Strogi iunosha* opens with the heroine Masha emerging, Aphrodite-like, from a lake. The degree of exposed flesh involved in swimming allows for a rarefied degree of mutual bodily admiration: as Oksana Bulgakova notes, nudity generally disappeared from Soviet applied art in the early 1930s, except when it came to depictions of sport.¹⁴ But the Bather is also a figure who embodies the problematic aspects of subjectification as realised through bodily aesthetics. Commenting on Deineka's *V obedennyi pereryv v Donbasse* (1935) (Figure 3), Kiaer writes:

Although the boys in Lunchbreak in the Donbass represent a collective of young workers sharing leisure, there is no 'comradely' interaction between them; their faces are blank and mask-like, forestalling psychological or emotional access, for

¹³ In the Russian State Archive for Cinema and Photo Documents (RGAKFD), 228 newsreels and documentary items dated 1920-1939 are listed as featuring depictions of sports or *fizkul'tura*. In these, swimming is the third most frequently portrayed activity with 36 occurrences (after football (59) and *fizkul'tura* parades (49)); diving is fifth (22 occurrences). *Vodnye stantsii* are the second most common location (25 occurrences) after the generic 'stadium' (70). Unlike, for instance, parades — which become much more frequent from the mid-1930s onwards — depictions of swimming and *vodnye stantsii* are quite evenly spread over the period 1926-1936.

¹⁴ Bulgakova, p. 393.

the viewer or for each other [...] we do not know, yet, what a community of socialist leisure will look like. They are embryonic.¹⁵

Here Kiaer refers to a notion that has gained some currency in recent works on Soviet subjectivity, namely that this subjectivity is always contingent and inchoate. As she herself has put it elsewhere: ‘a central characteristic of Soviet subjectivity was the desire to be a Soviet subject [...] All Soviet subjects were would-be Soviet subjects.’¹⁶ I will suggest that *The Bather* is always both striving for a greater degree of bodily grace and technique and frustrated by her environment. She aims for self-transcendence but fails, leaving spectators with the aesthetic valence of her body but, problematically, not much else. The exposure of flesh always risks impeding ‘psychological or emotional access’. *The Bather* represents private subjectivity, collectively forestalled.



Figure 3. Aleksandr Deineka, *V obedennyi pereryv v Donbasse* (1935)

¹⁵ Christina Kiaer, ‘Was Socialist Realism Forced Labour? The Case of Aleksandr Deineka in the 1930s’, *Oxford Art Journal*, 28:3 (2005), 321–45 (p. 341).

¹⁶ Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman, ‘Introduction’, in Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (eds.), *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 1–22 (p. 17).

2. Staging spectatorship on canvas

What were the qualities of ‘embodiment’ on canvas? How exactly might artists of sporting scenes attempt what Arvatov had called ‘социально-эстетический монизм’?¹⁷ How could they resolve the tension between *deistvie* and *sozertsanie*? One of the aspects of painting that set it apart from non-fiction media in attempts to convey the new, Soviet beauty of Shchekotov et al was its ability to manipulate figuration, to exaggerate or diminish, magnify or distort the sporting scenes in hand. This was what Lunacharskii referred to as the ‘poetry’ of painting in comparison to photography, the sense that a canvas had been ‘conceived in [the artist’s] blood and nerves’.¹⁸ This would require the counterposition of two aspects of spectatorship which we have already encountered in several primary and secondary authors: the sporting body and the social imperative, what Shchekotov calls *biologiia* and ‘социальное сознание’.¹⁹ Staging spectatorship in these terms, as an intersection between individual, sensitive bodies and the infrastructure of public life, is one way for the Soviet artist to create a truly Soviet portrait, the ‘общественно-личное изображение человека’.²⁰ In this it also represented an indirect response to Arvatov’s earlier demand, that Soviet culture should ‘разрушить эту грань между художниками, монополистами какой-то «красоты», и обществом в целом’;²¹ *fizkul’tura* spectatorship, properly imagined, presented an opportunity for anti-monopolistic public culture.

In my discussion of non-fiction media, I argued that documentation of sporting action was part of a project to create collective experiential categories, in which, in Sarah E. James’s words, ‘a new and politically educated kind of seeing [...] dissolves private intimacy in a socially embedded and mutable experience’.²² Below I focus on works by Deineka and his contemporary and fellow ‘October’ alumnus Aleksandr Samokhvalov, before bringing in other artists of *fizkul’tura* active in the first half of the 1930s to show how by the middle of that decade a discernible compositional model had emerged that

¹⁷ Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*, p. 113.

¹⁸ Cited in Angelina Lucento, ‘The Conflicted Origins of Soviet Visual Media: Painting, Photography, and Communication in Russia, 1925-1932’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 56:2-3 (2015), 401-428 (p. 401).

¹⁹ Shchekotov, p. 121.

²⁰ Efros, p. 59.

²¹ Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*, p. 110.

²² Sarah E. James, ‘A Socialist Realist August Sander? Comparative Portraiture as a Marxist Model in the German Democratic Republic’, *Grey Room*, 47 (2012), 38-59 (p. 41).

allowed for *obshchestvennost'* and social-aesthetic monism between pictured athletes, pictured spectators, and the extra-pictorial viewer.

3. Aleksandr Deineka: the space between bodies

One way to appreciate the evolution in Deineka's work during the First Five-Year Plan is to consider three 'pairs' of his *fizkul'tura* images, with the individual paintings in each pair thematically linked but separated by several years. Over this period Deineka was a member of several artistic groups: OST (the Society of Easel Painters, 1925-1928), 'October' (1928-1932), and the Russian Association of Proletarian Artists (RAPKh) (1933 onwards). In Kiaer's words, Deineka's initial membership of OST indicates that 'his avant-garde critique of bourgeois realism was combined with an insistence on the revolutionary potential of figurative painting'²³; for much of the *piatiletka* itself he was engaged in producing poster art with 'October', introducing elements of graphicism and monumentality into his figurative works.²⁴ Considering works from both sides of this chronological divide, then, allows us to consider the evolution of the sporting bodies that were always a feature of Deineka's output as a matter of syncretic stylistics as well as in terms of their treatment of spectatorship and *obshchestvennost'*.

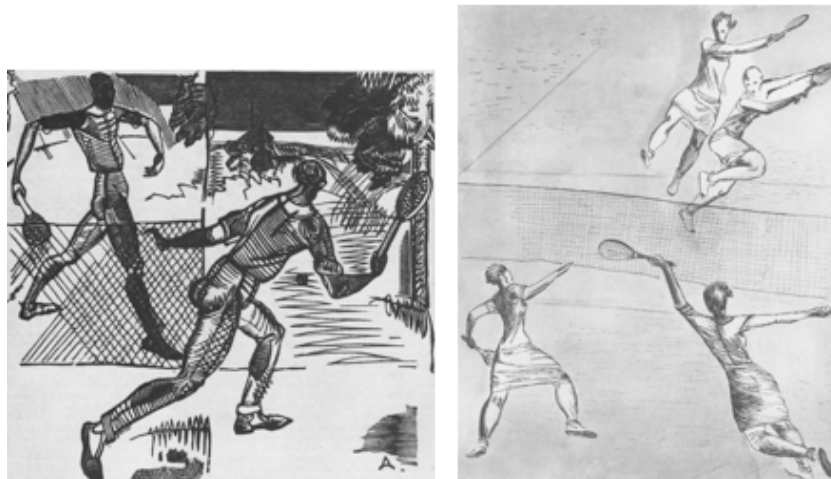


Figure 4. Aleksandr Deineka, *Tennis* (1923) / *Tennis* (1931)

²³ Kiaer, 'Was Socialist Realism Forced Labour?', p. 325.

²⁴ 'October', which also counted Gustav Klutsis and Sergei Eisenstein among its members, has been described as one of the last outpost of the avant-gardists before the advent proper of Stalinist cultural edicts. See *ibid.*, p. 329.



Figure 5. Aleksandr Deineka, *Futbol* (1924) / *Vratar'* (1934)

In these two pairings (Figures 4 and 5) we see segmented, deconstructed bodies become fleshed out, and coherent. The two earlier pieces (1923's *Tennis* and *Futbol*) speak to Deineka's concern in the 1920s to prioritise formal novelty over the potential social affect of his work. In 1919, while still resident in his native Kursk, he wrote: 'Картины современности — сон, яркий детский сон, который не может уложиться в рамках реальности [...] сказки пролетариата, творящего свою яркую жизнь.'²⁵ Writing in *Iskusstvo* in 1933, when Deineka was working on *Vratar'*, Boris Nikiforov commented that his output between 1924-1927, while suitably attentive to the healthy world of *fizkul'tura*, was nonetheless characterised by its 'довольно абстрактной социальной характеристикой. В этих работах еще очевидно преобладают академические задачи изучения человеческой фигуры.'²⁶ It was this abstraction or rejection of the 'рамки

²⁵ A. Deineka, 'Iskusstvo nashikh dnei', *Izdatel'stvo kurskogo professional'no-proizvodstvennogo soiuza rabotnikov iskusstva*, 8 (1919), 12.

²⁶ B. M. Nikiforov, 'Aleksandr Deineka', *Iskusstvo*, 3 (1933), 85–107 (p. 96).

реальности' that led one member of the Federation of Unions of Soviet Artists (FOSKh) to declare the figures in Deineka's 1920s works 'degenerate'.²⁷

How then is the change realised in the later works? For Nikiforov, Deineka adopts a more differentiated approach to each individual body, a result of his newfound concern for the emotional or affective potential of the image: 'Вместо графического контраста черного и белого тонов появляются разнообразные цветовые сочетания, соответствующие тому или иному эмоциональному характеру образа.'²⁸ This line was echoed in the same magazine later that year when Abram Efros praised Deineka for moving away from disjointed 'posterism' (*plakatnost'*) towards a more holistic figuration ('он снова берет свои сюжеты большим и единым охватом.'²⁹ Iakov Tugendkhol'd, a writer sympathetic to OST, wrote reproachingly in 1928 that its members, Deineka included, had been guilty in the mid-1920s of 'глухой чернотой фона, лакированной поверхностью [...] своеобразная амальгама иконописного с американским.'³⁰

Superficially, the development encapsulated in these two sets of images is a standard one from 1920s formal experimentation to 1930s 'realism'. But there is another vector mapped out in the comments of Nikiforov, Efros, et al; namely, that it might be possible to draw out a correlation between the 'fleshed-out' body, the social characteristics of *fizkul'tura*, and the emotional character of artworks, if the bodies on display could be read as the living bodies of comrades, not as formal quirks. Deineka's gradual induction into what we might reasonably call socialist realism is more accurately described in terms of a shift towards bodily *obshchestvennost'*. And yet in these works he is not quite there. In the same meeting of FOSKh in 1932 that saw Deineka branded degenerate, two delegates — Vogman and Murzaev — expanded on the formalism-realism distinction. Vogman looks for the 'диалектическая установка' in Deineka, arguing that his paintings lack the 'момент конкретности'³¹. Murzaev agrees: 'О том, что Дейнека по существу до сих пор не дал конкретного произведения на советскую тему [...] то это потому, что бытовая сторона включает и политическую сторону и эмоциональную сторону рабочего

²⁷ Doklad t. Lezvieva, Stenogramma sobraniia agit-massovogo sektora FOSKh po obsuzhdeniiu doklada Dosuzhego "O tvorchestve khudozhnika A. A. Deineki" (1932). RGALI, f. 2942. op. 1. ed. khr. 26. l. 3.

²⁸ Nikiforov, 'Aleksandr Deineka', p. 97.

²⁹ Efros, p. 57.

³⁰ Ia. Tugendkhol'd, 'Iskusstvo i sovremennost' (o khudozhnikakh OST)', in *Bor'ba za realizm v izobrazitel'nom iskusstve 20-kh godov; materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniia*, ed. V. N. Perel'man (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1962), pp. 216–22 (p. 218).

³¹ Doklad t. Vogmana, Stenogramma sobraniia, l. 7.

класса.³² Treatment of 'Soviet themes' lacks concreteness and dialectic rigour when the definitive figure for *fizkul'tura* is omitted: the spectator.



Figure 6. Aleksandr Deineka, *Lyzhniki* (1926) / *Beguny* (1934)

The above two works (Figure 6) share a compositional technique that Deineka frequently employed in depictions of group sports events, particularly skiing and running: the participants are set in profile, their forms overlapping one another, as though they were being pulled horizontally through the space of the canvas, with little heed paid to perspective — perhaps a result of Deineka's long apprenticeship in *grafika* and poster art.³³ The earlier painting, in keeping as we have seen with many of Deineka's *fizkul'tura* paintings from the 1920s, is without setting. The whiteness of the unpainted surface may be taken as snow, but beyond this there is no 'grounding' the skiers. In contrast to *Tennis* and *Futbol*, this is at least a 'directional' image, the figures pictured clearly expending energy along a particular vector from left to right. The muted colour scheme, featureless facial profiles, and rigidly two-dimensional bodies, however, remain. The later work exhibits the basic technical differences that distinguish, for instance, *Vratar'* from *Futbol*: the more naturalistic and varied colour scheme, the more clearly indicated location, the attention to bodily proportion and definition. Most crucially of all, there is a spectator. Now the muscled flesh of the runners is exposed to someone exterior to the action of the race; an extra layer of significance has been added. The woman is not in the stands, or part

³² Doklad t. Murzaeva, Stenogramma sobraniia, l. 14.

³³ Other examples include: the ink illustration 'Lyzhnaia vylazka' published in *Krasnaia nov'*, 13 (1929), 5; the later mosaic developed from the watercolour 'Lyzhniki' of the same name (1950); the oil paintings 'Beg' (1930) and 'Beg (Kross)' (1932).

of a crowd, but seemingly present on the track, part of the same flattened plane as the race itself. She is viscerally involved. While her body is turned at a different angle to those of the runners, she has her head turned to follow them out of the frame, destabilising/decentring herself in relation to the sporting action. She bears a discernible expression: anxiety, perhaps?

The presence of the spectator creates a new relationship between dynamic/sporting and static/observing bodies. It is what gives *Beguny* that vital, if difficult to define quality of *emotional'nost'*. The slippage into the space between bodies was a response to a changed agenda: as Emma Widdis amongst others has shown, the idea that 'emotion' was a required aspect of Soviet art was increasingly prevalent from the end of the 1920s onwards.³⁴ Putting the spectator on canvas became a way of meeting these demands. Most of the critics who praised Deineka's 'lyrical' style make mention of 'emotion' at some point: Nikiforov cites his 'большая эмоциональная зарядка';³⁵ Tugendkhol'd sees him as a proponent of a 'более эмоционально-насыщенный реализм';³⁶ the critic Aleksandr Zamoshkin, who wrote at length on Deineka, Samokhvalov, and Soviet monumentalism in general, approved of the artist's 'эмоционально-насыщенный образ, здоровая лиричность'.³⁷ This emotionality is perhaps what Shchekotov means when he notes that Deineka seems to *know* his subjects, that his bodies on canvas are 'жизненные впечатления'.³⁸ Kiaer's lyrical 'moment' of 1931-33 was, I would argue, part of a longer shift from the artist towards a new understanding of how bodies might be shown to interact. In the discussion above of non-fiction media, we saw how Osip Brik lauded photography's ability to capture the relation of objects to a ceaselessly dynamic world; in Deineka's post-'32 work, we begin to see instead how that dynamism is less a function of the world and more a relationship between living, feeling, emoting bodies. The question is no longer how to represent *obshchestvennost'* but how to *create* it through representation.

³⁴ See: Emma Widdis, 'Socialist Senses: Film and the Creation of Soviet Subjectivity', *Slavic Review*, 71:3 (2012), 590-618 (pp. 592-599).

³⁵ Nikiforov, 'Panno dlia zdaniia Narkomzema. Khudozhniki A. Deineka i F. Antonov', *Iskusstvo*, 4 (1934), 51-60 (p. 53).

³⁶ Tugendkhol'd, p. 222.

³⁷ Aleksandr Zamoshkin, 'A. Deineka' (1935). RGALI, f. 614. op. 1. ed. khr. 125. l. 15-20 (l. 19). This was one of a series of articles on contemporary artists which Zamoshkin wrote for the journal *Literaturnyi kritik* but which were never published.

³⁸ Shchekotov, p. 122.

4. Aleksandr Samokhvalov: legitimate eroticism

Aleksandr Samokhvalov studied under Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin at the Higher Artistic and Technical Institute (VKhUTEIN), graduating in 1923. Like Deineka, he was engaged from the mid-1920s in the production of graphics, in particular illustrations for books, and worked in theatres in Leningrad and Novosibirsk. He was a founding member of the 'Krug khudozhnikov', an offshoot of the Higher Artistic and Technical Studios (VKhUTEMAS) of which he was a member from 1926-1929, when, like Deineka, he joined 'October'. Natan Strugatskii, the most observant contemporary commentator on Samokhvalov's career, cited his two-year stint in that group as the period of his greatest ideological and creative growth, thanks to what he calls Samokhvalov's constant 'борьба против лефовских тенденций [...] против принципов "гегемонии архитектуры", против установок на вещицкий конструктивизм.'³⁹

Samokhvalov, like Deineka, spent the years of the First Five-Year Plan moving away from graphicism and towards a more holistic and emotionally resonant corporeality. His departure from 'October' in 1932 to join the Leningrad branch of the Union of Soviet Artists coincided with a spike in his public profile, as Samokhvalov established himself as a portraitist of the new Soviet woman; his *Devushka v futbolke* (1932), which would go on to win a gold medal at the Paris International Art Fair in 1937, and his watercolour series *Metrostroevki* (1933-1934) gained him critical and popular acclaim. In 1930, Samokhvalov had been sent by Gosizdat to Ivanovo-Voznesensk to produce watercolour studies of female agricultural workers; in 1931 and 1932, he made two four-month trips to the 'Leninskii put' commune to immerse himself in the world at hand. 'Изучения и наблюдения', in Strugatskii's view, allowed Samokhvalov to develop what he calls the 'синтетический реализм' of his post-'October' portraits: 'Стремление к типическому обобщению, к реалистической сомкнутости — вот что лежит в основе творческого замысла этих портретов [...] их индивидуализирующей конкретности (emphasis in original).'⁴⁰ The concept of socialist realism as a 'synthetic' (or syncretic) realism combining romanticism with verisimilitude has, of course, been prominent in the English-language literature since the translation in 1992 of Régine Robin's *Le Réalisme socialiste: Une*

³⁹ N. Strugatskii, *Aleksandr Samokhvalov* (Leningrad and Moscow: Ogiz Izogiz, 1933), p. 38.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 7, 12.

esthétique impossible.⁴¹ Certainly we can see in Samokhvalov's portraits what Robin calls socialist realism's 'awkward cohabitation [...] [of] mimesis as the aesthetics of representation [...] [with] the epic, heroicization, monumentalism, the collective gesture of mobilization.'⁴²



Figure 7. Aleksandr Samokhvalov's women of the 1930s: *Devushka v futbolke* (1932), *U lebedki* (1934), *Devushka na beregu v krasnoi kosynke* (1932)

Where Deineka imagined scenes of communal life, Samokhvalov gathered evidence from socialised living and then focused in on individual women (Figure 7). In this sense, Efros was right to define Samokhvalov contra Deineka as a portraitist first and foremost, who compensated for his lesser creative talent with a stronger grasp of the individual: '[Самохвалов] умеет уже найти тот золотой разрез, в котором есть подлинная мера типичности и даже портретности, с одной стороны, и обобщения, даже монументализма, — с другой.'⁴³ Recall that Deineka had been criticised in certain quarters precisely for a lack of *konkretnost'* — or 'подлинная мера типичности', as Efros has it.

When it came to depictions of *fizkul'tura* and the dynamics between exposed bodies, however, Samokhvalov's strengths as a portraitist became weaknesses. *Devushka v futbolke*

⁴¹ Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); see esp. pp. 60-74.

⁴² Ibid., p. 71.

⁴³ Efros, p. 59.

is the most iconic example of a tendency to borrow the properly Soviet trappings of *fizkul'tura* and use them as ornamentation in the appreciation of a certain type of female body — and Samokhvalov certainly ‘had a type’, as almost all his 1930s works featuring women attest. As Kiaer notes, *Devushka v futbolke* retains a degree of sexualisation on the part of the artist, implying personal or narrational ends, that is lacking from, for instance, the more ambient intimacy of Deineka’s *Igra v miach*.⁴⁴ If Samokhvalov’s art after 1930-1932 turned towards ‘synthetic realism’, then his portraits of isolated sportswomen betray a fetishisation of sturdy, thick-thighed female bodies carried over wholesale from his work in the 1920s (Figure 8). The way in which these women meet the gaze of the extra-pictorial spectator, if not solely reducible to ‘eroticism’, nonetheless demands a strong emphasis on personal visual gratification.



Figure 8. Aleksandr Samokhvalov’s *fizkul'turnitsy*: *Devushki* (1927-8), *Spartakovka* (1928), *Devushka s iadrom* (1933), *Posle krossa* (1935)

Fizkul'tura, with its socially-acceptable array of exposed flesh, allowed Samokhvalov to pursue what we might call an insular eroticism, one centred on subjective validation. But it also allowed him, at points, to use his skills as a portraitist in service of a Deinekian ‘эмоционально-насыщенный образ’, a ‘здоровая лиричность’. As we saw with Deineka’s *Beguny* above, the inclusion of spectators can radically alter the dynamics of a sporting scene; however, this only holds if the composition pays heed to the issues of mutuality and community, something which Samokhvalov the consummate portraitist clearly found

⁴⁴ Kiaer, ‘Lyrical Socialist Realism’, p. 69.

difficult to incorporate. If we look at three *fizkul'tura* paintings by Samokhvalov from the period 1925-1935 we can see how he was ultimately able to produce works of a kind with the best of Deineka.



Figure 9. Aleksandr Samokhvalov, *Sovetskaia fizkul'tura* (1925)

For Strugatskii, the theme of *fizkul'tura* presented Samokhvalov with a '*новую идейную задачу, поставленную перед ним действительностью*' (italics in original).⁴⁵ Unlike Deineka in 1925, Samokhvalov in *Sovetskaia fizkul'tura* (Figure 9) does not deconstruct the body, presenting us rather with several fields of sunlit skin in naturalistic tones. But this is not a successful *fizkul'tura* image in terms of the presentation of spectatorship/*obshchestvennost'*. The actual sporting action (what seems like a football match played by women in what would become Samokhvalov's trademark black-striped *futbolka*) is set to the side in the middle ground, obscured, interrupted, seemingly squashed by the domineering spectacle of the red flag planted in the Soviet-branded globe. A variety of activities are ongoing, with no fixed attention paid to the dynamics of any individual one,

⁴⁵ Strugatskii, *Aleksandr Samokhvalov*, p. 30.

yet despite the busy composition the scene is somehow arranged without any one athlete observing the movement of another. Not only are there no spectators external to the action, these figures are unaware even of each other. This is demonstrative rather than inclusive action. Only one figure — the second athlete from the right supporting the globe — appears to be looking in the direction of his comrades, but his glance seems furtive, even voyeuristic, and does not help to embed us, the viewer, within the scene.



Figure 10. Aleksandr Samokhvalov, *Na stadione* (1931)

The figuration in *Na stadione* (1931) (Figure 10) is if anything more abstracted, recalling the flat profiles of Deineka's *Lyzhniki*. Nonetheless, this is a more promising update of the stadium scene left underrepresented in *Sovetskaia fizkul'tura*. The location is conveyed with much greater precision, the three elements of the athletics stadium (running track, field, audience) occupying clearly defined fore-, middle-, and backgrounds. This brings the sporting action forward, with discus, running, hammer-throwing, and rowing all on display and unobscured. At this point, though, Samokhvalov has not yet mastered the art of capturing the Deinekian 'space between bodies'. In part this is to do with a hangover from his stylings in the 1920s, identified amongst others by Zamoshkin: as much as he reaches towards 'ритмичность и цельность', there is a schematism to Samokhvalov's

arrangement of figures.⁴⁶ Each group of athletes forms a self-contained set isolated from the others. Some of those holding oars seem to be looking towards the field, but the foreshortened sense of scale, as well as the undifferentiated black block of the crowd, confuse any sense of interpersonal dynamics.



Figure 11. Aleksandr Samokhvalov, *Na stadione* (1935)

1935's *Na stadione* (Figure 11) is perhaps the finest example of Samokhvalov's capacity to combine realism and romanticism, ordinary characters and intense emotionality.⁴⁷ I would argue that it is his most successful *fizkul'tura* painting by some distance. It is as if the scene in the 1931 work of the same name had been cleaned out and calmed down. With the possible exception of the diving board in the near background, the scene is fundamentally naturalistic; the bodies are well-proportioned, with attention paid to the play of sunlight on skin. The setting is simple and legible, with no undifferentiated masses or distortion of scale. Although there are four different sports on display, the scene feels minimal and uncluttered, with each activity clearly visible.

⁴⁶ Aleksandr Zamoshkin, 'A. N. Samokhvalov' (1935). RGALI, f. 614. op. 1. ed. khr. 125. l. 21-25 (l. 24).

⁴⁷ Strugatskii, *Aleksandr Samokhvalov*, p. 63.

It is the treatment of spectatorship that is most striking. Instead of the undifferentiated blue-black blobs of the previous painting, we are presented with a deserted stand that is mostly hidden from view. Rather than emphasising the mass nature of sports spectatorship, Samokhvalov presents us with a solitary figure looking down across the playing field, individualising the experience of observation, lending it *konkretnost'*. The figure is also a *fizkul'turnitsa*, wearing the same black two-piece and red cap as the foregrounded discus thrower; there is no essential distinction between her and her comrades on the field. The spectator is implicated in the action and so are we, the viewer; rather than being distanced from the athletes we are placed at ground level, sharing the grassy space. Finally, we see how Samokhvalov's eroticism is legitimated — redeemed, even — by the *obshchestvennost'* of properly-imagined *fizkul'tura*. The two foregrounded women — one relaxing and observing, the other engaged in activity — both retain the traits of Samokhvalov's sexualised individual portraits (thick thighs, cropped hair, compact, muscular abdomens). Unlike those works, however, neither is looking directly out of the frame towards the viewer: one is concentrating on her own body, muscles tensed, full of kinetic potential; the other turns towards her, flanked by a man likewise in a state of easy undress. The distinction between observer and participant has broken down. Samokhvalov relaxes the unilateral gaze in this work, ceding the sexualising focus of his portraits, opening up the potential for bodies to affect each other — and the viewer — as equals.

Mike O'Mahony has suggested, after Strugatskii, that *Devushka v futbolke* be read as a reference to the iconographic tradition, in which Samokhvalov immersed himself whilst working to restore the frescoes of the Georgievskii Cathedral in Ladoga in 1927.⁴⁸ For O'Mahony, the 'romantic' or 'synthetic' realism that Strugatskii finds in Samokhvalov is related to the notion of an iconographic 'transfiguration' of the flesh. As individual iconographic representations of saints and martyrs become, through worship, the embodiment of transcendent forces, so the individual woman in a truly 'общественно-личный портрет' attains a degree of typicality, or sociality. I would suggest that this reading diminishes the erotic aspect of Samokhvalov's portraits: rather it was *fizkul'tura* and its ethos of *obshchestvennost'* that allowed him, at points, to attain the psychological/emotional clarity that Strugatskii ascribes to him as an artist of the coming

⁴⁸ Mike O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture – Visual Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2006), pp. 41-42; Strugatskii, 'Aleksandr Samokhvalov', p. 6.

future: ‘глубокое чувство классового и личного достоинства, повышающееся сознание ответственности за себя и других, крепкая вера в себя, в свои силы [...] Вот эти черты, типические черты будущего.’⁴⁹

5. Bathers: on site/in sight

How then does the representation of spectatorship play out in images of bathers? Above I suggested that swimming was an important subject matter for non-fiction media as well as painting because the degree of bodily exposure involved allowed for a rarefied degree of mutual bodily admiration amongst practitioners and spectators. Two points in particular emerge from a consideration of ‘swimming paintings’ of the early to mid-1930s, both of which are relevant to and expand upon the issues raised by Deineka’s and Samokhvalov’s works. First, the setting — the *vodnaia stantsiia* — takes on a heightened importance in swimming paintings. Second, the compositional importance assigned to the spectator in the likes of *Beguny* and *Na stadionе* is pushed even further: at points the ‘real’ action of swimming/diving is subservient to the portrayal of the bodies and attitudes of onlookers, with the presence of water allowing artists to play on the way in which bathers’ bodies tend constantly to disappear from and reappear in view. Illustration of these points works to demonstrate the essentially quixotic or even chimeric nature of the *obshchestvennost’* in Deinekian *fizkul’tura* as much as it underscores the value of his contribution to the nascent field of Stalinist artistic subjectification.

Sergei Luppov is a figure often neglected in discussions of early socialist realism,⁵⁰ but his *fizkul’tura* scenes tell us much about the evolution of spectatorship on canvas in the 1930s. Having graduated from the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in 1917, Luppov (like Deineka) spent most of the 1920s teaching and producing graphic art, in Slobodsk and then Moscow. A participant in every exhibition of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR) until he joined the Union of

⁴⁹ Strugatskii, *Aleksandr Samokhvalov*, p. 64.

⁵⁰ Several of Luppov’s works were featured in the recent exhibition *Soviet Sport* (Moscow, Russian Institute of Realist Art, February-May 2014); he does not, however feature in the bibliography of the accompanying book, *Sovetskii sport. Zhivopis’, grafika, fotografiia i skul’ptura iz sobraniia Instituta russkogo realisticheskogo iskusstva, gosudarstvennykh muzeev i chastnykh kollekttsii*, ed. Nadezhda Stepanova and Andy Potts (Moscow: Skanrus, 2014). It seems that there was a single retrospective dedicated to Luppov in the Soviet period. See: L. N. Petrova, *Luppov, Sergei Mikhailovich. Katalog vystavki* (Moscow: b.i., 1969).

Artists in 1932, Luppov frequently returned to the theme of sport as both competition and leisure. In the 1930s, Luppov painted a number of 'bathing scenes', in which he followed a similar course to Samokhvalov above, coming to centre the spectator and ground the image within concrete locations, the infrastructural space of legitimate *fizkul'tura*.



Figure 12. Sergei Luppov, *Sport* (1930) / *Vodnaia stantsiia* (1937)

Both *Sport* and *Vodnaia stantsiia* (Figure 12) are set in *vodnye stantsii* which have been embedded within cityscapes. In the earlier work, however, this architectonic aspect is offset by the centring of perspective on a trio of divers. Angling the image to account for the outstretched limbs of the two female divers makes the canvas subservient to these aerial contortions; the city, the *stantsiia*, the indistinct spectators and the distant rowing boats — now seemingly toiling uphill — are all destabilised in favour of the moment of highest bodily tension. We as viewers are not of a kind with the spectators within the painting: our perspective (angled, mid-air) could not be shared by anyone within the scene. The divers' bodies are dark and heavy, obscuring the fore, middle, and backgrounds. This, and the extra-scenic perspective contribute to a work that leans much more heavily on participation, the dynamism of actually-sporting bodies, than on the experience of spectatorship.

Luppov radically recentres the scene seven years later. The setting is ostensibly the same. Now, though, it is the onlookers rather than the divers who ground the image. As in Samokhvalov's *Na stadione* the viewer is implicated into the action, placed at the side of the

water. The focal point is the left foreground, where two bathers relax and observe their comrades; the centre of the frame is occupied by more bathers-spectators, with one figure flexing his muscles. In *Sport* perspective is dictated by the kineticism of the diving bodies; here it is stabilised by the still bodies and clear lines of sight of the non-participants. The central trio of divers, a split second away from entering the cold blue of the water, leaping away from the centre of the image, no longer dominate the frame — indeed they are beneath the eye-level of their spectators and us, the viewer. That the hierarchy of participation and spectatorship has collapsed is further emphasised by the figure of the instructor in the central foreground. Megaphone aside, there is nothing to distinguish this man in trunks and swimming cap from any of the other bodies on display: the sense is of a rotating cast of muscular comrades, with any one of them capable of taking up the megaphone and continuing the process of mutual appreciation and improvement.

The increased importance of the spectator in sporting scenes coincides with an emphasis on both unreleased kinetic potential and the split second before the *fizkul'turnik's* body is obscured or removed from view — in these cases by water. Depicting bodies crouched at the water's edge (like the central figure in *Vodnaia stantsiia* or the competitors in Kirill Kustodiev's *Na starte* (1933) (Figure 13)), in mid-air (the divers in *Vodnaia stantsiia* or *Na stadione*), or at any point of release (Samokhvalov's discus throwers, for instance, are coiled and ready to spring into action) becomes an understated way to intensify the spectatorial gaze within the sporting frame through the implication of its disruption. Bathing scenes, with their abundance of flesh on display, require these moments of kinetic potential to focus the eye.



Figure 13. Kirill Kustodiev, *Na starte* (1933)



Figure 14. Aleksandr Deineka, *V basseine* (1935)

One of the clearest examples of this technique is Deineka's 1935 inked miniature, *V basseine* (Figure 14). The rippling outlines of the three bathing women here link them to their watery environment, lending their bodies an obvious liquidity, disrupting in particular the supposedly static poses of the two figures to the left. The diving figure who grounds them (and us) as spectators is pictured at the very point of entry into the water; she has concentrated the uncertainty of her companions' bodies into a streamlined verticality of movement, as underlined by the comparatively dark shading of her profiled limbs. This fixity of purpose and posture is conveyed at the climatic moment, frozen at the point of highest velocity, left unresolved in its suspension just prior to the clean entry into the water that will remove her body from view. The point at which her fingertips meet their own reflection is a focal point that fixes in place the triangle of participant-spectators; Deineka does not even need to picture the pool, or the water, to tie this minimalist scene together.

V basseine was made in the same year as the oil painting *V obedennyi pereryv v Donbasse*, with which this chapter opened. The contrast between these two bathing scenes indicates that Deineka continued to explore different approaches (across different media) to the question of visualising *fizkul'tura*. Kiaer describes the boys of *Pereryv* as lacking in "comradely" interaction [...] their faces are blank and mask-like, forestalling psychological or emotional access, for the viewer or for each other.⁵¹ Kiaer is not wrong as regards *Pereryv*, but nor is her reading generalisable when one considers a broader range of *fizkul'tura*/bathing paintings from the period. *Pereryv* is one example of a trend in painting that tested different models of how one form of Soviet subjecthood might look — or feel. The placing of bodies on canvas need not necessarily produce this 'forestalling'.

⁵¹ Kiaer, 'Was Socialist Realism Forced Labour?', p. 341.



Figure 15. Aleksandr Deineka, *Vodnaia stantsiia Dinamo* (1934)

Indeed, the previous year Deineka had completed another painting that evinces even more clearly the emerging artistic model of spectatorship: *Vodnaia stantsiia Dinamo* (1934) (Figure 15). This is perhaps the archetypal image of The Bather as representative of *obshchestvennost'*. Here we have a fully-realised landscape that balances the architecture of work (the harbour in the distance) and leisure. The inclusion of the plane flying out of frame ties this scene to the Soviet world beyond — to other landscapes and other spectators. The displacement or decentring of the sporting action itself that Luppov effects in *Vodnaia stantsiia* is taken even further here. The divers themselves are part of a middle distance obscured and squeezed into a thin vertical strip of canvas by the dark mass of the embankment that hosts the spectators. The architecture/infrastructure of leisure blocks our view of that leisure's enactment, making the six onlooking figures the real subject of the painting. This is the gesture that makes this image so representative of attempts to fix *obshchestvennost'* on canvas: the onlookers are clearly also bathers themselves, their bronze flesh exposed; but, this fact being established by a combination of location, figuration, and

backgrounding, there is no need for them actually to be shown participating in sport. They and the distant divers are, somehow, indistinguishable.⁵²

What are the implications of Deineka's closing the circle between spectator and participant? In many ways, *Vodnaia stantsiia Dinamo* responds to the demands of those critics who were also engaged in the search for properly Soviet painting. Here we have confirmation of Shchekotov's praise for Deineka's embodied virtues ('Это не лубочно-поучительная [картина], но философия в действии, поскольку художник вмещивается в жизнь разрешенной советской тематики');⁵³ we recognise the truth behind Nikiforov's claims that, 'в лучших физкультурных рисунках Дейнеки удачно найден образ советского физкультурника: это рабочий на отдыхе, а отнюдь не профессиональный буржуазный рекордсмен.'⁵⁴ Materialist, archetypal, and communal: the hallmarks of the best of Deineka's *fizkul'tura* scenes.

Yet certain problems persist. A more pessimistic reading to the scene is certainly tenable, with the domineering structure of the embankment a symbol for the persistent frustration of attempts at spectatorship, communality, and so on. As in *Beguny, Na stadione*, and *Vodnaia stantsiia*, the viewer is implicated into the scene, our perspective matching that of the *fizkul'turniki*. But now we no longer even get to see the faces of these onlookers. Turned towards the action, they deny us reciprocity. In making the bodily communion of these figures so pronounced, has Deineka sacrificed the potential for *emotsional'nost'*? Is it in fact feasible to insist so intensely upon bodily *obshchestvennost'*, as he does here, whilst also maintaining a level of individualisation sufficient to invoke an emotional stake within the scene? Are these spectators smiling, frowning, crying? How are we to know what their relationship is with the divers, outside the shared identity of *fizkul'turnik*? *Vodnaia stantsiia Dinamo* is a painting about *fizkul'tura* but not necessarily one about Soviet people, and it lacks the psychological qualities that Strugatskii's attributes to the best of Samokhvalov's work ('в психическом строе, в поведении, в новой морали, в новых отношениях — глубокое чувство классового и личного достоинства, повышающееся сознание ответственности за себя и других'); qualities that, it appears, are only rarely encountered within a single frame. As we will see below, such a disconnect between the sporting and

⁵² The scene is also, of course, highly reminiscent of the newsreel footage of Black Sea Spartakiada celebrations, which we encountered in the previous chapter; there too the emphasis was on mutuality of exposure, the blurring of the line between spectator and competitor.

⁵³ Shchekotov, p. 121.

⁵⁴ Nikiforov, 'Aleksandr Deineka', p. 86.

emotional valence of characters — the blocking of access to their full selves or subjectivities — ultimately represents one of the most intractable problems for those engaged in creating Soviet subjects through art.

6. Mortality and beauty

In 1935, the year of *Vodnaia stantsiia Dinamo*, the English journalist P. E. Hall visited the Soviet Union to report on sport for an edited volume detailing *Playtime in Russia*.⁵⁵ His descriptions of football matches coincide with the experience of spectatorship and participation that is found in the *fizkul'tura* images above. Of the crowd, he writes: 'they were all players and watching others is only an occasional diversion.'⁵⁶ Inside the stadium is 'a world where "match" and "sprint" and "goal" leaped the barrier of languages, and tennis whites, shorts, spiked shoes and the rest obliterated differences of dress. There were as many girls as men among the participants, and more participants than onlookers'.⁵⁷ He notes too (with some surprise) that after a training session the athletes all go off to the cinema together.

Hall's observations chime with the above comments on the growing role of spectatorship in *fizkul'tura* painting, as a vector for the required Soviet traits of *obshchestvennost'*, *emotsional'nost'*, *konkretnost'*. Samokhvalov, Deineka, Luppov, and Kustodiev all depict athletes-who-are-also-spectators; what is more, they implicate us, the viewer, into the scene as additional participant-spectators. *Fizkul'turniki* are not individual idols to be venerated, but part of an infrastructure of work and leisure, with stadia and *vodnye stantsii* figured into the composition, multiple sports included in a single scene, and sporting bodies decentred within the frame. In the most successful *fizkul'tura* paintings from the early years of socialist realism, it is not admirable bodies that are portrayed, but admirable relations between bodies; the body's potential to structure the socialised space around it. As Kiaer says, 'it is as if the depiction of social processes or the social totality demanded by the thematic model of Soviet painting had been replaced by the body itself as

⁵⁵ P. E. Hall, 'Sport', in *Playtime in Russia*, ed. Hubert Griffith (London: Methuen and Co., 1935), pp. 184–204.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

a totality'. Deineka's bronzed bathers are 'transitory figures on their way to larger spaces', the body latent with social purpose.⁵⁸

Reading Deineka in conjunction with the likes of Samokhvalov expands upon the important critical intervention of Kiaer's 'lyrical moment', with its focus on the emotional affect of *individualised* bodies. Conversely, it also calls into question the notion that these images can be understood in terms of collective *discipline* or regimentation, as has recently been suggested by Boris Groys, whose short monograph on Deineka posits his *fizkul'tura* paintings as 'allegories for corporeal immortality [...] the immortality of the machine.'⁵⁹ In this reading, *emotional'nost* is replaced by spiritual machine-hood. What we see are not bodies engaged in communal feeling, but 'formalised' parts of an immense, *unfeeling* mechanism of bodily perfection, the totalising impulse of the avant-garde extended into the 1930s: 'Immortality is understood here not as an extension of an individual lifespan, but as the exchangeability of individual bodies, due to their lack of "inner life".'⁶⁰ Groys speaks of 'serialisation' with regard to Deineka's sporting bodies, and in one sense he is right to do so:⁶¹ as I have shown, there is an interchangeability to these figures who are both spectators and participants, coworkers and friends. This is not, though, a result of their ever more regimented and toned exteriors, but precisely because they both have and share the common 'inner life' of the Soviet citizen. I have described this as the animation of the space between bodies. It is what Kiaer describes as the 'social value of communicated emotion',⁶² or the painterly equivalent, almost a decade later, of Arvatov's 'конкретный монизм мироощущения и практики, — то, что принято называть [...] «красотой».'⁶³

This meta-corporeal figuration should, then, be at the heart of our interpretations of Shchekotov's concept of beauty 'по-новому, по-нашему'. We should also bear in mind Katerina Clark's remarks on the 'return' of the aesthetic in the neo-classicist 1930s.⁶⁴ While her focus is on architecture, Clark frames her discussion of, for instance, the 'beautification' of Moscow in terms of broader attempts to define (and integrate into production) a properly 'Soviet' aesthetic theory. In her words, the 'foregrounding of the beautiful' was bound up in a 'system that cut across discursive boundaries. This meant the

⁵⁸ Kiaer, 'Lyrical Socialist Realism', p. 71.

⁵⁹ Boris Groys, *Alexander Deyneka* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2014), p. 49.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁶² Kiaer, 'Lyrical Socialist Realism', p. 76.

⁶³ Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*, p. 113.

⁶⁴ Clark, pp. 105-135.

aestheticization of politics, or more accurately [...] the aestheticization of metapolitics, of the model that subtended and justified practices in the political arena.⁶⁵ The codification and subsequent recognition of beauty is a technique for the transcendence of individuality; in this, Stalinist aesthetics borrows from the Enlightenment aesthetics of Kant, as described in Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*:

Within the dense welter of our material life, with all its amorphous flux, certain objects stand out in a sort of perfection dimly akin to reason [...] Because these are objects which we can agree to be beautiful, not by arguing or analysing but just by looking and seeing, a spontaneous consensus is brought to birth within our creaturely life [...] in some sense very like a rational law.⁶⁶

Arvatov had equated his 'concrete monism' with 'гармония жизни'; Clark could easily be describing *Na stadionе* or *Vodnaia stantsiia Dinamo* when she writes that in the Soviet 1930s, 'the beautiful was represented as being the "harmonious" [...] that which marries the subjective to the objective in concrete actuality.'⁶⁷ The body of a comrade is an actuality about which one can *feel*: 'this is/we are beautiful.'

This begs an awkward question: what does this communal bodily aesthetic feel like for the viewer who encounters it within an artwork? There is no 'monism' here if art and life remain incommensurable. We can begin to respond to this by considering a notion which Kiaer borrows from Devin Fore: that of 'supercharged' mimesis.⁶⁸ As well as conveying the body's physical attributes, Deineka also hints at its force, energy, and sensory experience, what would elsewhere be called its affect. In an article on Dziga Vertov's 1928 film *Odinnadtsati*, Fore offers another way of reading such mimesis-beyond-mimesis in Russian revolutionary culture. He borrows from psychoanalysis the notion of 'overdetermination' to describe the way in which Vertov's images contain multiple and simultaneous spatial and temporal layerings that bind the audience with the figures onscreen.⁶⁹ I would argue that the sporting bodies of Deineka et al lie somewhere in this nexus of 'supercharging' and 'overdetermination': they bring together and confuse the space of the field, the stadium, the swimming pool with that of an indistinctly 'Soviet' *tabula rasa* in which they

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 106.

⁶⁶ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 17.

⁶⁷ Clark, p. 122.

⁶⁸ Devin Fore, 'The Metabiotic State: Dziga Vertov's "The Eleventh Year"', *October*, 145 (2013), 3–37.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

might become whatever they want to be; they exist within distinct units of time — the few seconds spent plunging towards the water, or leaping for a football, or rotating towards a throw of the discus. Inasmuch as they possess any semantic significance, it is inchoate, dependent on the viewer's reaction to these strangely beautiful bodies.

Fore's description of temporal flows and layerings has its own intellectual history. For Marx, the commodity was an object that possessed value only inasmuch as it represented 'coagulated labour time' ('geronnene Arbeitszeit').⁷⁰ The commodity is thus a *temporary formation*, a confluence of semantic elements that are more fluid and thus possess greater potentialities than their objective/physical manifestation. This sense of the temporary semantic formation, the unstable constellation, I argue, can be paraphrased or appropriated for the overdetermined, becoming-Soviet bodies of Deineka, Samokhvalov, et al. Rather than 'geronnene Arbeitszeit', might we think of the suspended bodies as representing 'geronnene Spielszeit'? Are they beautiful inasmuch as they are coagulations of various positive 'states' — such as joy, health, vigour, collective activity? The danger in conceiving of bodies as related to commodities in this Marxian way is that it blurs the lines between subjectivity and objectivity. Are the *fizkul'turniki* of these canvases people or things? If they are the former, then we can respond to their bodies with eroticism, empathy, even love: but if they remain visual objects then our relation to their beauty cannot progress beyond a problematic form of fetishism. Whether the 'dialectical matter' of beauty resolves itself on the side of subjectivity or objectivity informs my reading of Abram Room's *Strogi iunosha* and Stalinist (neo-)classicism.

7. *Strogi iunosha*: the values of visibility

The neo-classical Stalinist aesthetic turn, and the function of the body within it are addressed as perhaps nowhere else in Abram Room's 1936 film *Strogi iunosha*, from a screenplay by Iurii Olesha. Through this film we can draw out the line from Arvatov's productionist theorising to mid-1930s conceptions of beauty. *Strogi iunosha* is a meditation on unconsummated adulterous longing, voyeurism, and athleticism; the juxtaposition of *fizkul'tura* with explicitly sexualised flesh gives the act of looking at bodies, and the sensations of shared bodily experience particular thematic importance and semantic

⁷⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992), pp. 128-130.

complexity. Opacity and perception are central to the film, and in particular its preoccupation with bodies: at work, at play, lusted after, spied upon. Both characters and audience are asked whether public and private bodily interactions are justified by the ‘fact’ of visibility. In a world in pursuit of *obshchestvennost’*, is it enough simply to be seen? Olesha and Room achieve this through explorations of transparency and obscurity, and through filmic play on the trope of statuary that brings the resurgent neo-classicism of the period to bear on the narrative.

In this cinematic take on bodily observation and communality, Olesha and Room invoke the notion of a ‘dialectical’ beauty even as they question its viability. The central concern of the film, in my reading, is whether the gazes of different characters meet the demands of properly dialectical (that is, properly Soviet) beauty. In a way that Deinekian canvas painting clearly cannot, the film portrays bodies moving in and out of sight, contrasts motion with stillness, and allows for the emotional impact of particular bodies to alter over time. In doing so it asks to what extent bodies are productive agents in the Soviet world, and what qualities the Soviet subject might require in order ultimately to move beyond the fragilities and compromises of the body itself.

Two households and their indignities

How does sight function in *Strogi iunosh* within what Michel Chion has called cinema’s ‘hierarchy of perceptions’?⁷¹ The film explores two worlds — each with its flaws and virtues — and their commensurability. On one side is the world of the celebrated surgeon Stepanov: this is the realm of sensory confusion. On the other is the world of the young Komsomol engineer Grisha: this is the realm of sensory clarity. Stepanov’s young wife Masha is the agent that passes between the two and brings them into contact and conflict. Each man’s home is carefully arranged to underline the initial distinction. Stepanov’s grand estate is languid, sprawling yet guarded, a place where the senses are dulled and befuddled. His *nakblebnik* Tsitronov snoozes in the summer sun in a deckchair amidst abundant flora, unaware of his surroundings, and on several occasions Room obscures our view of characters by filming their interactions through the elaborately wrought railings of the villa’s Art Deco gates; this motif of vision compromised by luxury

⁷¹ Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 5.

or indulgence is reinforced by Stepanov's and Tsitronov's rich dining, smoking, and drinking, all of which render them immobile and ill-tempered.



Figure 16. Masha the Bather (*Strogi iunosba*)

The initial effect of this is to inculcate a sense of just how problematic the observation of bodies can be. The opening shot, of Masha as Bather, emerging from a lake (Figure 16), is revealed as the point of view of the leering Tsitronov; Masha's physical beauty and its expression through, for instance, swimming will need to be redeemed through the rest of the film, as will our gaze as implicated audience. When Stepanov wishes to spy on his wife with Grisha, out for a car ride in the roads beyond the villa, he has to use Tsitronov's binoculars to do so (Figure 17): as he has artificially stunted his senses, so he must artificially magnify them in order to penetrate the fug surrounding his home.



Figure 17. Tsitronov teaches Stepanov to be a voyeur (*Strogi iunosba*)

Grisha's shared apartment is open-plan, with white walls and wide windows beyond which the vistas of Moscow are clearly visible. Where Stepanov's estate breeds sly behaviour — Stepanov's spying, Tsitronov's voyeurism — Grisha's apartment is a fundamentally open, communicative space. Mariia Belodubrovskaja has highlighted Grisha's visual associations with cleanliness: 'белые стены стадиона, белые стены в комнате Гриши [...] белая дачная станция, белые платья Маши и одежда многих других персонажей. И все это светится на солнце.'⁷² Tellingly, a telephone and a pair of headphones hang from the apartment wall by the window: the outside world is not fenced off, as it is *chez* Stepanov, but rather engages with the domestic sphere in mutual interpenetration, both visually and aurally. This sensory exposure is used to comic effect later in the film when Grisha's mother, supposedly asleep, chides him after overhearing a conversation between him and his Komsomol partners; in keeping with the communal space, her bed is in the same room, behind a curtain.

Crucially for this ideologically educated younger generation, when Grisha and his confidant Diskobol have their most emotionally intense conversation about the former's feelings for Masha, a portrait of Lenin looks down from the wall. Everything is open to rigorous inspection in the world of the Komsomol. When Grisha does attempt to hide from Stepanov late in the film, his apartment is so ill-suited to the task that he resorts to locking himself in his cupboard. This is his only true moment of dejection: his comedic betrayal of his principles allows Stepanov to mock Grisha on his own terms, with a subversion of Grisha's mantra of what a *komsomolets* 'should be' ('человек стоит в шкафу и говорит о гордости! У комсомолца должно быть чувство юмора!'). Unlike Masha at the film's close, Grisha is unable to remove himself from view. A Komsomolets must have a sense of humour; it can be hard otherwise to live with your non-negotiable publicness.

Each of these sensory worlds has its own body type. Tsitronov and Stepanov are either sleeping or eating; they are corpulent, prone to indigestion, inactive, aroused to sexual jealousy. The toned young bodies of Masha and her suitor Grisha are decked in pristine white, and before either speaks we have seen both engaged in physical exercise: the film opens with an extended sequence of Masha taking a morning swim, while before Grisha has even arrived at the Stepanov estate he is distracted by a game of tennis. Yet in themselves these physiologies are fairly superficial: they provide clear points of contrast

⁷² Mariia Belodubrovskaja, 'Ekstsentrka stilia v fil'me A. Rooma "Strogii iunosha" (1936)', *Tynianovskii sbornik*, 12 (2006), 318–38 (p. 327).

between the worlds of Stepanov and the Komsomol, but do not tell us much about the complex interaction between the two. Here we need to go one step further and consider instead, as Deineka et al have taught us, *how* the characters look at each other's bodies.

Surveillance and dreams

In *Strogi iunosha* the act of observing other characters is directly informed by the division between the two sensory worlds. Stepanov's estate is most consistently linked to the voyeuristic mode, particularly through Tsitronov. On three occasions he surreptitiously observes Masha in a compromised position – whether emerging from her swim or getting dressed in her chamber – until he is eventually expelled from the house by Stepanov. In the communal, open world of the Komsomol, conversely, bodily display and appreciation is distinguished by its mutuality, its *obshchestvennost'*. Key here are the sequences at the stadium, where the young *fizkul'turniki* in their scanty sportswear interact without concern or embarrassment. The distinction here is, of course, that *fizkul'tura* is a common endeavour, a public duty, aimed at improving the condition of the body politic through personal tempering. Indeed, it could be seen as a common effort towards sublimation of the very urges that drive Tsitronov to his private and damaging acts of looking.⁷³

In *Strogi iunosha* the ideological acceptability of looking at bodies derives from whether or not these bodies 'know' that they are being observed. In this sense, the concept of 'dialectical beauty' as introduced by Grisha ('красота — это дело диалектическое. Возникает только между двумя') is the rewording in aesthetic terms of one of the structuring tropes of the film: what might be termed a *dialectics of surveillance*, a constantly shifting interaction between observer and observed. There is a certain neatness in this framing: not only can Room's film be seen as the endpoint of the decade-long development of a brand of Soviet bodily aesthetics; the way in which the film manages this also allows us to relate it back to the mid-1920s and the formulation of another of my principle 'categories of looking', surveillance.

Grisha's definition of beauty perhaps helps to explain the seeming moral ambiguity in Room's treatment of his potential adultery. Stepanov is physically unfit and keeps

⁷³ On *fizkul'tura* as sublimation, see Frances L. Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), p. 152.

unsavoury company, and the suggestion is that he has ‘purchased’ his wife in the first place. Masha is attracted to Grisha, who seems to have a strong case, despite the objections of his conscience; the broadly sympathetic characters of Diskobol and Dasha frequently give him their full backing. Yet Masha rejects Grisha and returns to Stepanov in a final act of reconciliation. Considering this moral ambiguity as a question of bodies, we might say that, of the two potential couples, by Grisha’s own definition the only combination that would be *beautiful* — that is, communally affective, *obshchestvenno* — is that of himself and Masha; furthermore the object of Grisha’s attention is *aware* of (indeed welcomes) his gaze and as such he is not guilty of voyeurism.

However, this remains a reductively corporeal, compromised reasoning; it removes aesthetics from the public, integrated world, disregarding, for instance, the damage done to the collective by the cuckolding and broken marriage of a public figure of authority. Fortunately for Grisha, Masha absolves him in the final instance. Since theirs has been a mutual attraction, hers has been a knowingly observed body: as such, it can *willingly* remove itself from view. The film ends with Masha reconciling herself with the qualities of her husband, leaving Grisha and the *komsomoltsy* behind as she returns into the gated world of the estate. The final shot of the film, with the doors of the marital home closing behind her, completes in a sense the motion of the opening sequence: Masha emerging from the lake and walking into the garden in front of the house. If the film begins with Masha as Bather, her body exposed in a world of voyeuristic and adulterous gazes, then it ends with that same body clothed and neutralised by its removal from view within the collective institution of marriage.

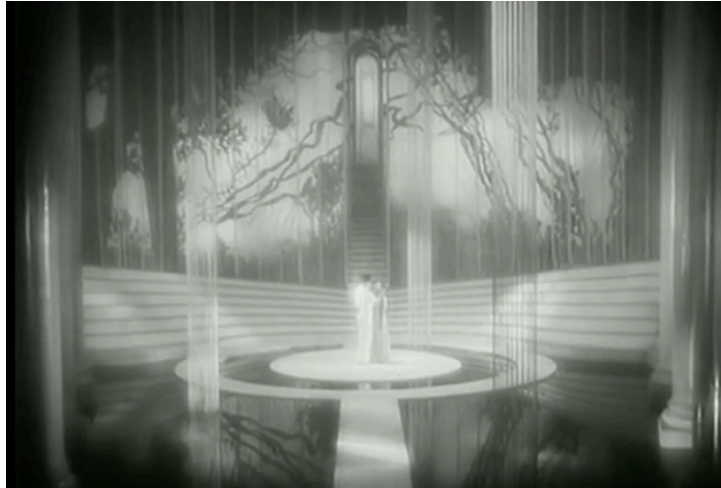


Figure 18. Grisha's dream: synaesthetic bodies (*Strogii iunosh*)

Grisha is cast as the positive inverse of the voyeur Tsitronov: both aestheticise Masha's body, but the *komsomolets* does so as part of a mutual relationship of attraction. As if in recompense for his ultimate rejection, the dream sequence in which Grisha is united with Masha at Stepanov's grand party affords him one moment of 'pure' aestheticisation of her body: unilateral, private, isolated from the pursuit of *obshchestvennost'*. In the unmonitored dream space Grisha's wonder at Masha's body can have no public effect. His dream is like an anti-ideological counterpart to scenes by Luppov or Deineka. The mirrored walls of the ballroom reflect the image of the young couple back upon themselves: the aesthetic effect of Masha is totalised (Figure 18). She does not act, but is reduced to pure sensation, a synaesthetic experience for Grisha: 'вот вам движение, слушайте! Вот ее поцелуй, слушайте!' Arkadii Bliumbaum sees this dream-Masha as an instance of 'воплощенная музыка', a pure aesthetic object free from the detachment of representation.⁷⁴ In the 'real' world, Masha collapses the dialectic of surveillance by removing herself from her bodily relationship to Grisha; in the dream, Grisha resolves the same dialectic by assimilating entirely his partner-in-attraction. That neither scenario truly satisfies the aesthetic criteria of the time — Arvatov's 'concrete monism' allied to new forms of communal living — indicates just how complex and problematic the question of bodily attraction could be.

⁷⁴ Arkadii Bliumbaum, 'Ozhivaiushchaia statua i voploshchennaia muzyka: konteksty «Strogogo iunoshi»', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 89 (2008), 138-89.

Do Greek statues talk?

Structuring our reading of the film around the mutual gazes of Masha and Grisha, we are left with the question as to whether a relationship based on mutual bodily observation and admiration can ever be sufficient. This is the question at the heart of arguably the central sequence of *Strogi iunoshka*, the exchange between the *komsomoltsy* at the stadium, where they discuss the moral and intellectual qualities of the new Soviet youth. In some ways this sequence is a waking counterpoint to Grisha's dream, in that it is the most public instance of bodily observation and aestheticisation. In the decree confirming the film's censoring, this scene was cited as particularly problematic, its juxtaposition of classical imagery and Komsomol conceits seen as a muddle of aesthetic and ideological priorities;⁷⁵ Nikolai Topchii, reviewing the film in *Radian'ske kino*, attacked Olesha and Room for turning 'a living Komsomol member, full of vital boiling blood, the blood of youth [...] [into] a passionless, well-groomed young man whose gaze is turned inwards', just one amongst many 'still-born images of pseudo-classical youth.'⁷⁶ Topchii's reference to the 'pseudo-classical' is telling. To appreciate the implications of *Strogi iunoshka*'s play on statuary, athletics, and the social role of morality and the intellect, we need to consider in more detail the ways in which the Stalinist 'aesthetic turn' was accompanied by a renewed enthusiasm on the part of critics and artists for the artistic heritage of classical cultures.

Arvatov had himself spoken approvingly of classical sculpture a decade earlier. From his (anachronistic) LEFist perspective, the plastic art of antiquity spoke to the avant-garde desire to bring art to bear on lived experience. He cites the public ritual of the ancient Olympic games as an example of the complete integration of art into life, with Greek statuary a reflection of the desire to resubstantiate this unity: 'в древней Греции скульптура так называемых красивых тел появилась с того момента, когда распались олимпийские игры, т.е. организация, вырабатывавшая реального квалифицированного человека.'⁷⁷ As Bliumbaum states, Arvatov reads antique plastics 'через призму противопоставления эстетических объектов и жизненных практик [...] Революция должна стереть это различие.'⁷⁸ In other words, Soviet society needed to

⁷⁵ Mark Tkach, 'Postanovlenie tresta Ukrainfil'm o zapreshchenii fil'ma "Strogi iunoshka"', *Kino*, 28 (1936), 2.

⁷⁶ Cited in Milena Michalski, 'Promises Broken, Promise Fulfilled: The Critical Failings and Creative Success of Abram Room's "Strogi iunoshka"', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 82:4 (2004), 820–46 (p. 836).

⁷⁷ Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*, p. 123.

⁷⁸ Bliumbaum, p. 155.

reflect the aestheticised labour of Hellada, with its integration of rhythms and harmonies into the practice of the common good.

During the First Five-Year Plan many critics began to echo Arvatov's earlier remarks, with the emphasis now transferred from his unfancied avant-garde productionism to concerns for a new Soviet 'monumentalism'. In practice this meant a renewed engagement with sculpture, statuary, and other large-scale public works. Sculpture allowed for the most direct comparison with extant classical works, could be tested in small-scale models before being installed in public, and could be integrated into larger architectural or urban ensembles, such as parks, facades, and factory complexes. In the 1930s, such architectural ensembles were expected to 'provide in monumental and simple images a powerful expression of the epoch's ideological content.'⁷⁹ Arvatov's notion of Hellada, the lost world of rhythmic, aestheticised labour, no longer held; the lesson now being learnt from 'antique plastics' was how to make the public field of vision both decorative and discursive. In Clark's words, 'the ornamentation or "mask" that Stalinist architects put on their buildings was not to be individual or "arbitrary" [...] but integrated into a coherent system. No decorative detail, not even the slightest curlicue, could be considered random or politically neutral.'⁸⁰ The rhythms and harmonies of Arvatovian idealised labour became a morphology of public imagery, a 'grammar of building.'⁸¹

Among art critics there was a general consensus after 1932 on the vitality of monumentalism/classicism.⁸² Introducing a series of unpublished articles written for *Literaturnyi kritik*, Aleksandr Zamoshkin argued in teleological terms: 'Через всю историю нашего многогранного советского искусства проходит стремление к монументальному творчеству'⁸³. This was a reflection of both the grand scale of the Soviet project, and the need for a revitalised sensory engagement with the world on the part of the revolutionary population ('Ощущение материальности предметов составляет необходимые предпосылки монументализма.'⁸⁴ This sentiment was echoed by

⁷⁹ "'О некотorykh voprosakh sovetskoi arkhitektury", stenogramma vystupleniia tov. Angarova na obshchemoskovskom soveshchanii arkhitektorov 27 fevralia, 1936 g.', *Arkitektura SSSR*, 4 (1936), 9.

⁸⁰ Clark, p. 109.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 119.

⁸² On classical references in the sphere of *fizkul'tura* outside of cultural representation, see discussion of Nikolai Podvoiskii's 'red Spartan' sports organisation in Irina Sirotkina, 'Teatr kollektivnogo entuziazma: Meierkhol'd, Podvoiskii i rozhdenie zhanra fizkul'tparadov', *Teoriia mody*, 33 (2014), 105-24.

⁸³ Aleksandr Zamoshkin, 'Poiski monumental'nosti' (1935). RGALI, f. 614. op. 1. ed. khr. 125. l. 34-47 (l. 34).

⁸⁴ Ibid., l. 36.

architectural critic Igor' Grabar' in *Iskusstvo*, who claimed that the communally- and monumentally-minded Soviets were uniquely positioned to learn from ancient cultures: 'Едва ли часто бывали в истории искусства моменты, столь благоприятствовавшие здоровому росту и расцвету скульптуры, как наши дни в нашей стране.'⁸⁵ In the same publication Ivan Khvoinik argued for a 'заострение внимания молодежи на пластике человеческого тела, разрабатываемой на классической основе';⁸⁶ his reasoning (again reframing Arvatov along Stalinist lines) was that classical works would help Soviet art move away from 'formalist' preoccupations with asceticism and disproportion and towards 'реализм крупного стиля и большой социальной емкости [...] реализм верный действительности.'⁸⁷

The Soviet artist, then, was perfectly positioned to requisition the classical interplay of public affect and monumental scale. In the words of the architect Aleksandr Shchusev: 'Эпоха требует от нас создания таких вещей, которые бы обслуживали эти массы, а не отдельных лиц, развивали пролетарскую общественность и вели ее вперед.'⁸⁸ Once again, *obshchestvennost'* was key. Mikhail Raikhinshtein, one of the most enthusiastic of *Iskusstvo's* classicist critics, argued in impassioned terms for a proletarian renaissance of 'Великолепная Греция с ее культом человеческого тела [...] далекий идеал древней Эллады':⁸⁹ a public sphere in which the citizen would be confronted by images and models of legibly beautiful bodies ('не создание нашей мечты, а наши товарищи').⁹⁰ Ancient Greece came to symbolise the public potential of plastic art; as Shchusev had it, 'нам ближе демократические Афины'.⁹¹

It should be noted that Deineka himself played a significant role in the discursive construction of Russia-as-Greece. He was often talked about as the premier monumentalist amongst popular Soviet artists,⁹² and occasionally cited explicitly as an artistic classicist.⁹³ He himself spoke of his love of Greek sculpture, again in terms that reconfigured Arvatov's avant-garde classicism of art-into-life. In a reminiscence published

⁸⁵ Igor' Grabar', 'Aktual'nye zadachi sovetskoi skul'ptury', *Iskusstvo*, 1-2 (1933), 155-57 (p. 157).

⁸⁶ I. E. Khvoinik, 'Molodye kadry sovetskoi skul'ptury', *Iskusstvo*, 4 (1933), 159-84 (p. 174).

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

⁸⁸ Cited in Igor' Grabar', 'Pervaia vstrecha arkhitektorov so skul'ptorami. Otchet o zasedanii MOSSSKhS 9 fevralia 1933 g.', *Iskusstvo*, 1-2 (1933), 158-60 (p. 159).

⁸⁹ Raikhinshtein, 'E. Manizer-Ianson. "Metatel" nitsa Diska"', p. 143.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 146.

⁹¹ Cited in Grabar', 'Pervaia vstrecha', p. 159.

⁹² Nikiforov, 'Aleksandr Deineka', p. 100; Boris Ternovets, 'Novye freski A. A. Deineki' (1936). RGALI, f. 2701. op. 1. ed. khr. 16. l. 19-24 (l. 18).

⁹³ Efros, p. 57.

in 1947, he wrote: ‘Я люблю большие планы и жизненность образа в вещах — поэтому я влюблен в греческую скульптуру, где гармония правды жизни и цельного видения прекрасного идентичны.’⁹⁴ Like Raikhinshtein, Deineka was an anti-idealistic classicist, a prominent proponent of the notion that Stalinist art could not settle for a simple formal replication of Greek models. In a 1937 speech, for instance, he warned against painting *kolkhozniki* ‘по законам классической композиции [...] Группы праздных богов не могут быть обязательным для колхозника примером хорошего тона.’⁹⁵ He argued instead for a concerted effort to draw on Soviet *byt* and to integrate sculpture into public space: his example is a statue of a *fizkul'turnik* in Sverdlovskaya metro station, which speaks to him not of some pure compositional ideal, but ‘скорее от любви нашей к спорту и прекрасного отношения к скульпторам и большого к ним доверия.’⁹⁶

While cinema unsurprisingly had a less direct relation to resurgent classicism than, say, sculpture, it could and did play on the growing presence of classical tropes within Soviet life and the relation between these tropes and ideas of bodily beauty. Oksana Bulgakova has shown how Stalinist film can often be seen to play on classical *topoi*, notably the opposition between ‘бытия и кажимости’.⁹⁷ Once again questions of visibility and transparency are brought to the fore. Bliumbaum’s reading of *Strogiĭ ĭunosha* pays close attention to its recycling and reworking of classical themes in relation to Olesha’s stated aim in the mid-1930s to write stories of youth and beauty; the result is a curiously monochrome world.

В известном смысле это «светлая», «гармоническая» античность, не знающая дионисийского «ужаса» [...] Попытка «протащить» страдание в новый мир явно предпринимается Олешей в рамках превращения «буржуазных» ценностей в «человеческие».⁹⁸

This reading is compelling. Is the film’s engagement with the classical turn limited to *kazhimost'*, the world of outward appearances, visibility? Did Olesha and Room manage to integrate ‘правды жизни и цельного видения прекрасного’? Olesha had read, in

⁹⁴ A. Deineka, ‘12 avtobiograficheskogo ocherka’, *Ogonek*, 28 (1946), 60–69 (p. 68).

⁹⁵ Aleksandr Deineka, ‘Rech’ na otkrytii vystavki’ (1937). RGALI, f. 634. op. 1. ed. khr. 713. l. 14–18 (l. 17).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 19.

⁹⁷ Bulgakova, p. 404.

⁹⁸ Bliumbaum, p. 172.

translation, the German critic Bücher on Greek sculpture,⁹⁹ prior to *Strogii iunosha* his most notable take on classical themes had been a comic ode co-authored with Valerii Stenich in 1934;¹⁰⁰ it has been suggested that the strapping young goalkeeper Volodia Makarov and the football stadium in which he plays in Olesha's novella *Zavist'* can be understood in terms of Greek classical models.¹⁰¹ *Strogii iunosha*'s treatment of classical tropes is largely confined to the world of sports and play (there is certainly no suggestion, for instance, that Grisha's adulterous longing might lead to a 'tragic' downfall). The classical statues on show are of Olympian athletes; Grisha's main confidante is called Diskobol.¹⁰² I have argued that the film is structured around a dialectics of surveillance that calls into question the inherent value of bodies' visibility. Yet in the stadium scene, Olesha's and Room's sensibility to this dialectic, to the properly-Soviet aesthetic, is abandoned. The superficial comparison at work is that between the bodies of the *fizkul'turniki* and the similarly scantily-clad pseudo-classical figures of the statuary. Leaving the athletics field to enter the changing room, Diskobol walks silently and in profile amongst a series of marble figures, drawing out the corporeal, visual parallel in the absence of sound; when the *komsomol'tsy* then begin their very earnest debate, the sense is of naked (in both senses of that word) communality, a true neo-Olympianism of bodily and moral rigour.¹⁰³ But does this communality, the mutual admiration and observation of the Komsomol enterprise truly carry any *ideological* weight? Do their posturings extend beyond pure corporeality?

⁹⁹ K. Biukher, *Rabota i ritm* (Moscow: Novaia Moskva, 1923).

¹⁰⁰ Iu. Olesha and Val. Stenich, 'Moskva v te dni byla Elladoi. Shutochnaia poema', *Literaturnyi Leningrad*, (8th October 1934), p. 3.

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, discussion of Platonic ideals in Andrei Apostolov, 'The enemy at the gate: the Soviet goalkeeper in cinema, culture and policy', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 8:3 (2014), 200-217 (pp. 202-03).

¹⁰² On the figure of the discus-thrower in Soviet sculpture, see M. Zolotonosov, *Гλυπτοῦ κράτος. Issledovanie nemogo diskursa: Annotirovannyi katalog sadovo-parkovoi skul'ptury stalinskogo vremeni* (St Petersburg: INAPRESS, 1999).

¹⁰³ It should be noted, however, that *Strogii iunosha* features very little actual *sport* as part of its classicism; as I argue here, it is more concerned with questions of the mind-body intersection than the thrill of the flesh *per se*. This is its major distinction from the quintessential classicist youth/sports film of the period — one also concerned with collective experiential categories but to quite different ends — Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (Olympia-Film, 1938).



Figure 19. Statuesque youth (*Strogi iunosba*)

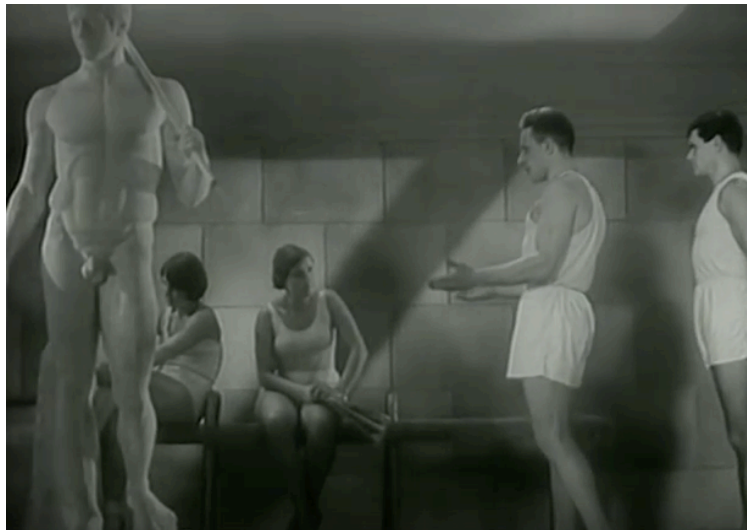


Figure 20. More statuesque youth (*Strogi iunosba*)

Emma Widdis cites the use of silence in this sequence as a way of highlighting the *faktura* of the statuesque bodies on display: in her reading, the focus is deliberately shifted to ‘visual and tactile communicative modes’, with the juxtaposition of athletes and sculpture intended to draw our attention ‘to the new, *embodied*, animate, aesthetic ideal of the Soviet youth.’¹⁰⁴ The body has become a work of plastic art within the rejuvenated

¹⁰⁴ Emma Widdis, ‘Making Sense Without Speech: The Use of Silence in Early Soviet Sound Film’, in *Sound, Speech, Music in Soviet and Post-Soviet Cinema*, ed. Lilya Kaganovsky and Masha Salazkina (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 100-116 (p. 112).

world; our observation of the body is now conjoined with our sense of its *faktura*. Such a reading elides the need for an articulated intellectuality. But it is unproductive to consider the stadium sequence without taking stock of what is *said*, the words that are attached to these bodies, preventing us from gazing upon them as pure plasticity. When the *komsomoltsy* begin their debate, they freeze into fixed positions in a series of tableaux (Figures 19 and 20): Room emphasises their sudden rigidity by placing the protagonists of the debate in three separate groupings and cutting between them as each speaks, rather than panning across the communal space or having the characters move amongst themselves. The contrast between athlete and statue that Widdis notes is in fact suspended, and this in turn alters the reception of what is being said.

In their statuesque positions, these ‘ideal Soviet youth’ begin to extol the moral virtues befitting their new society. Grisha takes the lead, pronouncing a series of characteristics with the formulaic introduction, ‘комсомолец должен быть...’ It is almost as if they have been inspired by their neo-classical surroundings and the amateur Olympianism of their athletic achievements to enact some sort of Greco-Roman public forum. Yet something is amiss here. The physical immobility, the semi-conscious stylisation, the formulaic pronouncements of abstracted moral qualities (*gorđym, reshitel’nym, smelym, akkuratnym*): the overwhelming sense is that these fine young bodies are stuck on the level of base rhetoric or framing. They need not have said anything, they could have revelled in the plasticity and receptiveness of their mutually exposed bodies. But they are not properly inspired by the classical imagery around them: we do not witness, as Khvoinik had it, ‘заострение внимания молодежи на пластике человеческого тела’;¹⁰⁵ there is no movement, as per Shchusev, ‘от академической сухости и стилизаторских условностей, реализма верный действительности.’¹⁰⁶

In choosing to add discourse to the heady corporeal context, the characters lose their animate qualities and become frustrated organs of speech. As Topchii has it, these are ‘still-born youths’. In the words of Room’s biographer, Irina Grashchenkova, ‘Grisha is a statuary image, primordially completed, devoid of individuality: indeed, an image and not a character, constructed according to a law of poetic and metaphoric reflection.’¹⁰⁷ If we are going to progress from observing these bodies, in Widdis’ phrase, ‘being in the world’ to

¹⁰⁵ Khvoinik, p. 174.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁰⁷ Cited in Evgenii Dobrenko, *The Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 233.

hearing them proclaim upon that world, then their words are going to need to retain some of that same sense of plasticity, that same sense that the world at hand can be moulded and bettered that drives the *fizkul'turnik* to run faster and jump higher. The body may be the object of a mutually appreciative gaze, but a gaze does not change the world. Arvatov had hoped that a proletariat educated into aestheticised labour might ‘сделать методы художественного воспитания методами всеобщего воспитания общественно-гармонической личности’;¹⁰⁸ Diskobol and company are hardly three-dimensional, even when they are statues. *Strogii iunosha* provides an example of how the aesthetic discourse of the LEFist 1920s had evolved through non-fiction and fine art media into a Stalinist neo-classicist line that aimed to prescribe artistic production and reception from architecture to cinema. It also shows how intractable the problem was of satisfying the contradictory demands of Soviet bodily aesthetics.

8. Cutting open empty bodies

I have traced in this chapter the evolution of beauty over the decade separating *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo* and *Strogii iunosha*. The notion of ‘new’ beauty has been shown to be part of a broader discursive move to theorise and realise *obshchestvennost'* as a structuring principle of Soviet culture. *Fizkul'tura* was a core activity of mutual observation, an arena in which Soviet citizens could merge spectatorship and participation, creating a new kind of bodily mutuality that would function as a vital component of the process of Soviet subjectification. In *Strogii iunosha* an attempt is made to combine many of the aspects of this potted history of bodily aesthetics — sports, sexual attraction, morality, collective activity and spectatorship, classical tropes — but in this sense the highly idiosyncratic film that results is typical only in its failures. Can we pinpoint what it is that remains unreformed or undervalued in all these attempts to foster beauty ‘по-новому, по-нашему’?

In the late 1920s, Olesha worked on a play about a Soviet girl who longs to leave for the West and the promise of stardom. At one point she overhears the following remark in her student dormitory:

Я бы просто запретил видеть сны. В переходную эпоху, когда нужно охранять формирующуюся психику нового человека, следует наказывать сновидцев.

¹⁰⁸ Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo*, p. 113.

Есть обстоятельства, которые разрушают психику: сновидения, отражения в зеркале [...] Это очень опасная вещь для неорганизованной психики — отражение в зеркале...¹⁰⁹

The reference here to the 'формирующуюся психику нового человека' is telling. Olesha is voicing the concern that distorted or insular modes of vision — dreams, reflections — might disrupt the creation of properly Soviet men and women: the Soviet subject is an inchoate thing that must be protected and nurtured by ever deeper forms of censorship. As we have seen, *Strogi i unoshka* also features warnings as to the negative psycho-social effect of improper vision: Tsitronov's voyeurism, Grisha's dream of pure (syn)aesthesia. This defensive impulse in Olesha's screenplay informs Evgenii Dobrenko's conclusion that 'themes of power, subordination, worship, and deification are central to [the] work'.¹¹⁰ In the introduction to this chapter I cited Christina Kiaer's and Eric Naiman's claim that 'all Soviet subjects were would-be Soviet subjects'.¹¹¹ If an institution such as *fizkul'tura* had the potential to be hugely productive for the 'формирующаяся психика', it could also contribute to its degeneration; at stake in the aestheticisation of bodies was much more than the physical form.

The notion of power (*vlast'*) is indeed at the heart of *Strogi i unoshka*. Consider the film's ending. On the thematic level, the film resolves the romantic tension between Masha and Grisha by having the former return to her husband; parallel to this is Grisha's acceptance of the value of the corpulent and opulent Stepanov to Soviet society. Despite his physical or material faults, Stepanov's is a great intellect. As Grisha tells Diskobol, 'власть гения, влияние высокого ума... это прекрасная власть.' As I have shown, the *komsomol'sy* are in great bodily shape but lack a certain vitality of intellect: a point that is forcefully made when Stepanov uses his 'superior mind' — namely his world-famous surgical expertise — to save the life of the *komsomol'ka* Ol'ga on the operating table. The operation itself, which is unusually closely-filmed, and presented almost as a spectacle (with anxious comrades looking on), is about as close to the Arvatovian-classicist ideal of aestheticised labour as we might find.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Violetta Gudkova, "Zagovor chuvstv": mechta o golose', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 38 (1999), 147-148 (p. 147).

¹¹⁰ Dobrenko, p. 235.

¹¹¹ Kiaer and Naiman, p. 17.

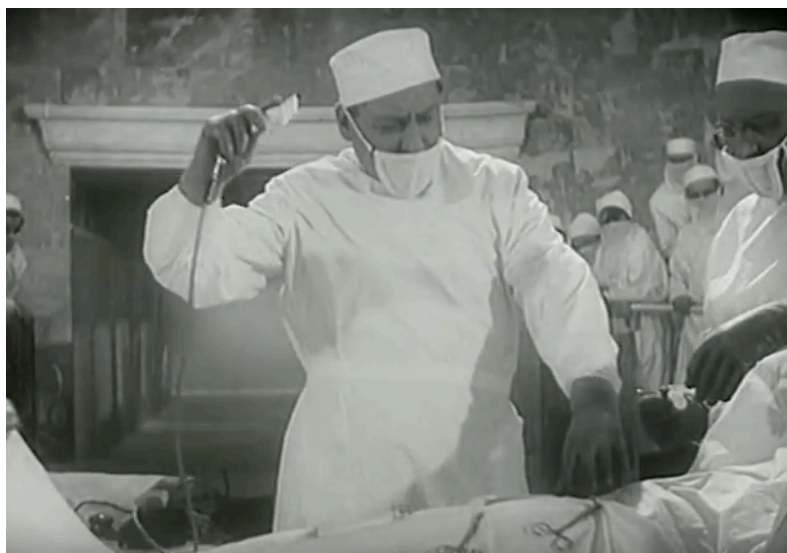


Figure 21. Stepanov: aestheticised labour (*Strogi iunosba*)

I have spoken in this chapter about terms such as *konkretnost'* and *emotsional'nost'*, used as qualifiers by which to judge the degree of *obshchestvennost'* in bodily beauty. The figure of Stepanov suggests that these qualifying characteristics, while wholesome, may ultimately be insufficient. The angst-ridden *komsomol'tsy* awaiting the results of the operation are undoubtedly 'emotional' as regards their friend. But this nervous, raw emotion is not the same as *emotsional'nost'*, which denotes something more publicly productive. Anxiety will not save her life, or help her 'become Soviet'. The *fizkul'turniki* train their own bodies but their only response to those of others is admiration; their gaze lacks the practical, pragmatic rehabilitation of Stepanov's: the surgeon can look upon another's body and then apply his mental capabilities to manipulate and improve it. If the body is a work of plastic art, then it can be moulded: here we arrive at the notion of *power*. Grisha refers to 'our leaders' — those in possession of 'superior minds' — as 'победители смерти'. Casting the body in marble does not conquer death, and by extension neither does athletic prowess; the fleshy, aesthetic ideal of 'being in the world' submits before the ideal of acting upon it.

What does Stepanov find when he cuts into Ol'ga's flesh? Once on the operating table this *fizkul'turnitsa-komsomol'ka* resembles the Bather, exposed for assessment. She has aimed for self-transcendence but has been left physically immobile and helpless; the aesthetic valency of her body is no longer at stake. Even when the exposure of flesh can be reconciled with 'psychological or emotional access', this Bather is proof that the collective

will not always need to care about personal hopes and desires. Does it matter, ultimately, whether *fizkul'tura* has made Ol'ga beautiful? In my remarks on painting above I suggested that to understand the elision of spectatorship with participation might mean reading these canvases as blurring the lines between subjectivity and objectivity. Is Ol'ga empty? Can her bones and organs disclose some inherent Sovietness?

Strogi iunosha should in the final instance be understood as a rejection of the notion that bodily *obshchestvennost'* and bodily beauty are sufficient to the Soviet cause; it points to the need to integrate into the affective corporeal world the effective power of the intellect, to foster heroes who are more than simply muscled. Stepanov himself does not represent a solution to this crisis: he is still fat and bourgeois. What would be needed to move beyond the limitations of both of the 'worlds' of *Strogi iunosha* is a combination of the surgeon's instrumental intellect with the 'Soviet' socialised emotion of the *komsomoltsy*. Stepanov is far from perfect, but he does show that, to move beyond both the objectivising fetishism of unredeemed sexuality and the reflexive but non-instrumental sphere of an *obshchestvennost'*-informed aesthetics, the body will also have to exist outside of the frame of *fizkul'tura*; in the pragmatic, malleable world. In the next chapter we will see how this being-in-the-world came to be represented onscreen, through pregnancy, labour, and comradely sexuality.

The Runner

1. On your marks

In the previous chapter, we saw how representations of the sporting body in painting, sculpture, and film evolved in relation to changing conceptions of beauty between the publication of Boris Arvatov's *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo* in 1926 and the production and censorship of Abram Room's film *Strogii iunosha* in 1936. In doing so I made reference to the 'lyrical' artistic mode; that is, in Kiaer's words, one functioning 'at the boundary between private emotion and publicly oriented feeling to create a shared visual language of socialism... [in] an attempt to rework modernist aesthetic strategies to help viewers to feel, as well as to comprehend analytically, the meanings and promises of socialism.'¹ Attempts to combine in visual works an appreciation of bodily aesthetics with the expression of 'feeling' most often resulted in the portrayal of bodies that were beautiful but lacking in inner life; the stilted pseudo-Classical *komsomoltsy* in *Strogii iunosha* being of a kind with the canvases in which 'feeling' often seems a matter of inference on the part of the viewer.

I have used *obshchestvennost'* as a kind of shorthand for the most common aspects of this desired but nebulous 'feeling': communality of experience, social consciousness, mutual aesthetic appreciation. In this chapter I use the notion of 'feeling' as a meeting of private and public concerns to explore in greater detail a number of 'sporting' films produced concurrently with paintings such as Deineka's *Igra v miach* and *Mat'* (1933). (The question of 'lyricism' and its relation to cinema has its own history; as we will see below, this is particularly pertinent for films produced within Ukraine in the 1930s.)² I look at a parallel development to that outlined in **The Bather**: now the question is not how an aesthetics of the Soviet body emerged, but how the 'inner life' of cinematic characters evolved in relation to their onscreen bodies — how the emptiness that threatened the youths of *Strogii iunosha* is counteracted. We can then ask: how is our understanding of the

¹ Christina Kiaer, 'Lyrical Socialist Realism', *October*, 147 (2014), 56–77 (p. 60).

² The terms of this debate were mostly clearly stated in the debate between Béla Balázs and Vsevolod Vishnveskii on the question of *kamernost'* in cinema: see Bela Balash (Béla Balázs), 'Monumentalizm ili kamernost'?', *Kino*, 22 (1937), 2.

dynamic between private body and public life, subjectivity and *obshchestvennost'* refined by films in which 'feeling' is fully realised as a functional component of characterisation?

Below I explore how feature films about sporting Soviet citizens evolved thematically and stylistically from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, from Chaplinesque physical comedies and simplistic romantic-athletic metaphors to romantic dramas with an emphasis on sensuality, emotion, domestic life, and psychologically nuanced individuals. This refocusing was accompanied by a retrenchment of gender-specific roles, in social and biological terms, and by a recentring of spectatorship away from the staged mutuality of Deineka et al and onto the individual, compelled to adapt the mantra of self-sacrifice and *samoregulirovanie* at the heart of NEP-era social psychology to the Stalinist context.³

The iconic figure of this chapter is **The Runner**. As films committed to portraying the sensual and emotional life of individuals, running occupied a privileged thematic position: the most bare, uncluttered athletic activity, requiring no special equipment, history, or even training; a form of *fizkul'tura* in which the individual is reduced to the expression of a basic human ability, compelled to compete against themselves as much as against their rivals, even as they perform in grand stadia before attentive crowds. As such, running is a productive trope in films in which personal, subjective development within the collective is foregrounded. The Runner is the iconic figure of private experience, publicly performed.

2. Emotional abstraction and NEP-era sports cinema

In the NEP-era, feature films that thematise sport and *fizkul'tura* can roughly be divided into two categories. Firstly, there are those that document and propagandise *fizkul'tura* for its therapeutic function: in the two Kul'turfil'm productions we encountered in the Introduction — *Za vashe zdorov'e* (A. Dubrovskii, 1929) and *Bol'nye nervy* (N. Galkin, 1929; survives only in German translation) — exemplary fictional characters are shown struggling with the scourges of alcoholism and neurasthenia; submission to state institutions such as rehabilitation clinics or *doma otdykha* prepares them for reinsertion into Soviet society as productive citizens. More common are films that instrumentalise sport and *fizkul'tura* in terms of a simple metaphor of (specifically masculine) romantic

³ See Introduction (above); Aron Zalkind, 'Mozg i byt (o ratsionalizatsii byta umstvennogo rabotnika)', *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, 19 (1928), 52–57.

competition: 'love' is something that is *won*. A rigid narrational template runs throughout these films, which are usually played as comedies with a keen moralistic edge. Below is a schematic example combining elements of the plots of eight different sporting comedies from the period.⁴

The premise is that the hero competes for and ultimately earns the affections of a single girl through an act of athletic prowess. This may represent a battle against personal inadequacy. The bumbling telegraph worker Sirotkin in *Besprizornyi sportsmen* tries to impress a sporty co-worker — played by real-life athlete L. Efremova — by joining her in training; suspecting that she is in love with her coach, he decides to train himself on the streets of the city, with comedic results. His haplessness, played out in a series of sub-Chaplin scenes of buffoonery, is the condition that need be overcome to win her over. The premise of the initially useless protagonist recurs in N. Molodtsov's *Nechaiannyi sportsmen*, where the hero Boris discovers a talent for motor racing that wins him a race and thus his sweetheart, and B. Nikiforov's *Neuderzhimyi*, in which another Boris is persuaded into joining a *fizkul'turnyi kruzhek* by the love interest Katia, ultimately proving himself an accomplished ice-skater.

Alternatively, the competition occurs between two or even three young men. In V. Shmidtgor's *Otvazhnye moreplavатели* the demure Shurochka promises her heart to whichever of three unathletic university friends wins a swimming race; only one, Vania Stepanov, realises the value of sport as a counterpart to academic study, and so earns her affections. P. Malakhov's *Dva sopernika* stages the ongoing sporting battle between Vasili and Nikolai for the affections of Natasha while the three are ensconced in a military training camp. Similarly, in *Konkurs na...* the inexperienced Nikiforov must overcome his rival Khliastikov in a skiing competition, whilst E. Ioganson's *Pryzhok* charts the differing sporting fortunes of half-brothers Andrei and Petia, initially sparked by their mutual attraction to a girl named Nadia.

In all of these films, sporting achievement and romantic catharsis are simultaneous. The worth of the hero is made quantifiable, either in his winning some kind of race

⁴ The films referenced are: *Besprizornyi sportsmen*, dir. Artkino Collective (Goskino, 1926, partially preserved); *Nechaiannyi sportsmen*, dir. N. Molodtsov (Staraia i molodaia gvardiia, 1927, not preserved); *Otvazhnye moreplavатели*, dir. V. Shmidtgor (Sovkino, 1927, not preserved); *Konkurs na...*, dir. A. Dobbel't (Trudkino, 1928, not preserved); *Pryzhok*, dir. E. Ioganson (Sovkino, 1928, not preserved); *Dva sopernika*, dir. P. Malakhov (Agitfil'm/Gosvoenkino, 1928, not preserved); *Neuderzhimyi*, dir. B. Nikiforov (Trudkino, 1928, not preserved); *Sinie vorotniki*, dir. B. Shpis (Sovkino, 1928, not preserved).

(running in *Dva sopernika*, skiing in *Konkurs na...*, ice-skating in *Neuderzhimyi*, motorbiking in *Nechaiannyi sportsmen*), or his setting a new record. If the hero does not triumph outright then he must at least demonstrate a previously unseen capacity for physical effort: for instance, the novice sailor Senia Antonov in B. Shpis's *Sinie vorotniki*, who progresses from capsizing and nearly drowning to basic competence on the water. Two other narrative tropes are noteworthy here. First, in formulaic comedy-of-errors style the hero is often entered into the defining competition surreptitiously by a rival (Nikiforov in *Konkurs na...*), or else wanders into it unwittingly (Boris in *Nechaiannyi sportsmen*); his victory is the result of immanent, inner resources, proof of character. Second, the hero most often begins the film as an intellectually rigorous but unathletic or physically unimpressive character who is distinguished by a willingness to train themselves; their moments of sporting/romantic triumph come at the expense of more naturally athletic or talented competitors who lack the humility and self-discipline of the hero (the competent but undedicated Vasilii in *Dva sopernika*, the duplicitous Khliastikov in *Konkurs na...*, the hubristic half-brother Andrei in *Pryzhok*).

It is clear that sport proves a convenient device in Soviet romantic comedies in the late 1920s, 1927-28 in particular: it allows for the potentially problematic chauvinism of masculine erotic pursuit to be refigured in terms of an activity recognised as socially productive; indeed, as Frances Bernstein notes, *fizkul'tura* was in the 1920s often cited as an effective method of sublimating unruly erotic energy.⁵ Furthermore, the notion that the hero is redeemed by sporting/romantic triumph only after overcoming their narrow intellectualism or untested physicality is in line with contemporary efforts (detailed in the second half of my Introduction above) to establish a socio-psychological monism of Soviet minds and bodies.⁶ Yet the simplicity of the 'competition' metaphor that structures these narratives makes the 'feeling' that is at stake a mere abstraction: its substance is impossible to discern outside of the mechanics of the plot. As such the inner life of the hero is not brought any further into focus. Since the metaphor of sport-as-romance is so facile and so absolute, the two moments of triumph for the hero so interchangeable, there is nothing to occupy the screen beyond the bodies involved.

⁵ Frances L. Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), p. 152.

⁶ On psychology and monism see, for instance, Emma Widdis's work on Soviet subjectification: 'Socialist Senses: Film and the Creation of Soviet Subjectivity', *Slavic Review*, 71:3, (2012), 590-618 (p. 596).

In a sense, however, these *fizkul'tura* filmmakers were in an impossible position: if little effort was made to indicate why the demonstration of sporting prowess should convince a woman to fall in love, then this is largely due to the fact that the narrational template required to sublimate the negative connotations of the erotic pursuit storyline did not allow for much in the way of emotional exposition. In *Otvazhnye moreplavateli* in particular the arbitrariness of the 'feminine' romantic logic is exposed: three friends declare their desire for Shurochka, and without pausing to judge them on merits of personality or ideology she nominates a swimming race as the arbiter of her emotional response.

3. The coming of the emotional hero

This abstracted or quantitative understanding of emotional worth as manifested through sport is largely abandoned from around 1928 onwards. Sporting cinema was never a cultural vanguard, but at a few years' remove it began to reflect a shift that had occurred in social scientific and psychological disciplines in the mid-1920s, accounting for individual consciousness and emotionality.⁷ The narrational instrumentalisation of sport becomes more varied: rather than the 'hook' on which a central romantic triumph depends, it is embedded into the plotting and used to illustrate particular character traits beyond generalised romantic 'value'; perhaps ironically, the notion of romance-as-competition was taken up in feature films *not* about *fizkul'tura* as the 1930s progressed, as Tat'iana Dashkova has noted.⁸

Rather than the abstracted competition of the earlier films, sport now became much more infrastructural, in an emotional and social sense. As much as it still served as an indicator of characters' romantic worth, it was now concurrently tied into narratives of Soviethood. In *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* (Iu. Zheliabuzhskii, Vostokfil'm, 1935) shipbuilders deal with deadlines and emergencies thanks to the focus and resilience they have learned in training as athletes: the scene of greatest tension sees the sympathetic Mukhtar carry out emergency underwater repairs on a stricken ship in a diving suit, marrying his physical strength to technical knowledge. The young heroes of Iu. Leont'ev's Komsomol caper

⁷ On this shift in psychological discourse see Introduction (above) and Irina Sirotkina, 'The Ubiquitous Reflex and Its Critics in Post-Revolutionary Russia', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 32:1, (2009), 70-81 (pp. 70-74).

⁸ Tat'iana Dashkova, *Telesnost' - ideologiia - kinematograf. Vizual'nyi kanon i sovetskaiia povsednevnost'* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2013), p. 86.

Propavshee zveno (Vostokkino, 1934, partially preserved) are first driven apart and then unified by sports, in the process overcoming the ethnic tensions between Russian and Central Asian citizens. The impetuous Mitia, smarting from defeat in a volleyball game, racially insults fellow Pioneer Murzurkan. Through the machinations of the camp leaders, Mitia comes to realise the error of his ways, and the film ends with the Pioneers marching in a *fizkul'tura* parade, unified and orderly. In the romantic comedy *Miach i serdtse* (B. Iurtsev, Mosfil'm, 1935, not preserved) Aleksandr Savchenko meets and falls for Aleksandra on the eve of a football match in which he will play a starring role; however, before he goes on to score the winning goal and cement Aleksandra's affections, the couple have to overcome their disappointment at the jobs assigned to them by a local labour committee. Football is not the only game in town.

At stake in this shifting of *fizkul'tura*'s cinematic role was the construction of the Soviet hero as an individual, psychologically and emotionally invested in the institutions and processes of Soviet society. As Emma Widdis's recent work attests, from 1928 onwards first the sensual, and then the emotional world of characters became increasingly important in Soviet cinema, as filmmakers sought to place their characters in productive interrelationship with the world: what one critic called the portrayal of 'proletarian individuality'.⁹ The representation of sport onscreen would also have to transform in line with changing expectations. No longer strictly delimited by its instrumentalisation as a metaphor for romantic conquest, sport too was now allowed its private intimacies as well as its social exigencies.

It is important to note here that attempts to represent newly nuanced characters and attempts to capture something closer to the essence of *fizkul'tura* were in fact conceptualised as working hand in hand. In 1930, G. Zamskii had called for a greater sensuality in visual representations of *fizkul'tura*, and a rapprochement between art and sport: the 'колоссальное революционизирующее значение' of both was being wasted, Zamskii argued, by artists too concerned with set-dressing.

Художник, который 95% времени проводит над конфетным этикетом или плакатом для ТЭЖЭ или Совкино, много для физкультуры не даст. Только

⁹ Widdis, 'Socialist Senses'; A. S. Piataev, 'Chto takoe individual'nost'? V diskussionnom poriadke', *Kino*, 40 (1933), 3.

длительное и глубокое изучение и обсуждение физкультурной жизни с активом физкультурников может дать положительные результаты.¹⁰

Five years later the same impulse was expressed in a full-page spread in *Kino*, as critic and filmmaker Vladimir Shneiderov attacked the state of Soviet *fizkul'tura*-on-film.¹¹ For Shneiderov the problem of capturing *fizkul'tura* in cinema was the same as that of creating nuanced, sympathetic heroes, and Soviet cinema was under-performing on both counts ('Наши герои далеко не всегда являются образцами здорового, гармонически развитого человека...') Representations of *fizkul'tura* had to be based on an intimate sense of its practice. Shneiderov's article was accompanied by a collection of responses written by famous sportsmen and women, similarly lamenting the deficiencies of cinema's attempts to represent their disciplines onscreen, and offering solutions. For Nikolai Starostin, founder of Spartak Moscow and the most famous footballer in the country at the time, cinema was guilty of a fundamental *nepravdivost'* when it came to sports, since directors and screenwriters had no notion of how it felt for athletes to train their minds and bodies: 'Демонстрация большой тренировочной работы, проводимой физкультурниками, отсутствует.'¹² The champion swimmer Anton Shumin complained of footage that was 'очень однообразно' and ignorant of technique; parachutists Nata Babushkina and Sima Blokhina noted that filmmakers, ignorant as to the mechanics involved, were unable to capture the athlete's body in motion in a manner truthful to 'нашу учебу, быт'.¹³ Shumin is also illustrative of a further connection between onscreen and real-life sporting heroes, something that becomes more apparent in relation to *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* or *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, discussed below: filmmakers often borrowed from the biographies of famous sportspeople in constructing their characters.

A cinematic understanding of the sporting body was thus imperative; without this, *fizkul'tura* would not be of a kind with the world of Soviet senses and emotions. Above I used the term 'infrastructural' to describe the new cinematic function of *fizkul'tura*. Just as the individual character was to be 'embedded' in the world — sensually and emotionally

¹⁰ G. Zamskii, 'Khudozhnik pomozhet aktivno propagandirovat' fizkul'turu', *Fizkul'taktivist*, 14 (1930), 7–9. See also: V. Nelidov, 'Avtorskie kadry po fizkul'ture', *Fizkul'taktivist*, 7 (1931), 22–25; G. Korsakov, 'Kak khudozhestvenno oformliat' shestviia i demonstratsii', *Fizkul'taktivist*, 13 (1930), 9–12.

¹¹ V. Shneiderov, 'Nuzhen tolchok', *Kino*, 33 (1935), 3.

¹² 'Sozdam khudozhestvennyi obraz fizkul'turnika', *Kino*, 33 (1935), 3.

¹³ Ibid.. Babushkina and Blokhina's complaint echoes Eisenstein's insistence, in a programme he devised for the Akamedia Kino, that first-year students there train in boxing, gymnastics, and 'общая физкультура' in order to learn precision and rhythm in their camerawork. S. M. Eizenshtein, 'Programma prepodavaniia teorii i praktiki rezhissery', *Iskusstvo kino*, 4 (1936), 51–58 (p. 52).

engaged with their labour, their domesticity, their comrades — so *fizkul'tura* was now to be imagined as an integrated aspect of society. Just as films such as Abram Room's unpreserved *Ukhaby* (Sovkino, 1928) acted, in Widdis's reading, as representations of labour's constitutive function for 'the evolution of a new kind of Soviet subject precisely through a changing relationship with material',¹⁴ so films such as *Umbar* or *Miach i serdtse* now showed *fizkul'tura* to be a structural and a structuring force, a dynamic building block of Soviet society.

4. Gender and running

With this in mind we can turn our attention to gender in three exemplary films from the mid-1930s that foreground the figure of the Runner: *Schastlivyi finish* (Pavel Kolomoitsev, Ukrainfil'm, 1934), *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* (Iurii Zheliabuzhskii, Vostokfil'm, 1935), and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* (Igor' Savchenko, Rot-Front/Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1936).¹⁵ With a renewed emphasis on the *pravdivost'* of characterisation in cinema came an attention to individuality of experience. This tallied with a much broader retrenchment in terms of gender issues concurrent with the Five-Year Plan. There is a considerable literature on the evolution (or regression) of gender roles under Stalinism.¹⁶ Whilst I largely agree with and employ the schema that distinguishes between attitudes to gender in the 1920s and 1930s, it should be noted that the films discussed below reward closer reading in part because they disrupt such clear periodisations.

The sphere of *fizkul'tura* had remained a bastion of gender conservatism during the NEP-era, the need for gender segregation never seriously questioned by any influential party. This is not surprising when we consider the extent to which sport, like sexuality, had been subject to a process of medicalisation in the 1920s. As Dan Healey has shown, the 1920s saw the Bolshevik regime hand medical professionals unprecedented authority

¹⁴ Widdis, 'Socialist Senses', p. 601.

¹⁵ The production of *Finish* and *Lavry* outside of the central film studios — by Vostokfil'm and Ukrainfil'm respectively — would seem to be fairly typical for *fizkul'tura* films of the 1930s; see also *Strogii iunosha* (Ukrainfil'm, 1936), discussed in the previous chapter, and *Zapozdalyi zhenikh* (Tbilisskaia kinostudiia, 1939), discussed in the next. This correlation may be due to the fact that films eulogising sport and youthful corporality benefited disproportionately from being shot in warmer (southern) climes.

¹⁶ See for instance Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex*; Susan E. Reid, 'All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s', *Slavic Review*, 57:1 (1998), 133–73; and work by Pat Simpson, including 'Liberation and Containment: Re-Visualising the Eugenic and Evolutionary Ideal of the Fizkul'turnitsa in 1944', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 28:8-9 (2011), 1319–35.

over legal and medical questions of sexuality: 'Medicine offered a language of modernity [...] Medicalization crucially transferred authority in sexual matters from the individual to the collective, to be presided over by its experts.'¹⁷ Sport was subject to a parallel process of medicalisation; in the mid-1920s, the institutions of *fizkul'tura* were established and dictated by 'experts' — often with medical training — concerned above all with the strict maintenance of hygiene standards and collective discipline. Medical doctors who were granted a platform in both specialist and general interest newspapers and journals, such as Nikolai Korolev, Viktoriia Gorinevskaia, and her husband Viktor Gorinevskii, repeatedly stressed the physiological discrepancies between the sexes and the need for a kind of 'gender realism' regarding *fizkul'tura*. In a 1926 article in the specialist magazine *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury* Korolev voiced a common medical opinion: 'Сглаживание же мужественности и женственности в обоих полах является одним из признаков начинающегося вырождения.'¹⁸

Two years later, Gorinevskaia published a book-length treatise on the subject of women's *fizkul'tura*. Women, she argued, should be allowed time off work during menstruation and occupy themselves only with sports that would emphasise 'гармония развития', such as swimming.¹⁹ Even when the stated aim of writers was the universalistic emptying out of gender difference into a shared 'Sovietness', the means to the end were always to be safely segregated. In the 1928 'International Women's Day Special' of the popular magazine *Fizkul'tura i sport*, Dr. Ivan Solonevich lauded Soviet sport's dual emancipatory and delibidinising effect:

Спорт смывает последние пятна той грязи, которой христианский аскетизм замазал человеческое тело. В спорте женское тело — не соблазн, «сосуд дьявольский», а рабочая машина, — такая же, как и мужское тело. Когда она работает хорошо, на нее так же приятно смотреть, как и на всякую хорошо работающую машину [...] Там, где мяч и диск — там нет места для домоштра, для рабства [...] растет другой, новый, еще невиданный тип женщины.²⁰

Anti-ascetic but completely unerotic, brave but machinistic: in these senses Soviet women would resemble Soviet men. However, this 'new type' of woman was still very

¹⁷ Dan Healey, *Bolshevik Sexual Forensics: Diagnosing Disorder in the Clinic and Courtroom, 1917-1939* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), p. 5.

¹⁸ N. D. Korolev, 'Fizkul'turnye zhenskie tipy', *Izvestiia fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 1 (1926), 2–3.

¹⁹ Viktoriia Gorinevskaia, *Fizkul'tura rabotnitsy* (Moscow: Trud i kniga, 1928), pp. 46, 52.

²⁰ I. Solonevich, 'Ot krinolina... k khokkeiu', *Fizkul'tura i sport*, 10 (1928), 17.

much a woman, and in keeping with the times Solonevich went on to prescribe certain sports as 'suitable' for female machines (hockey, skating, discus). These examples from the late 1920s show that gender was already rigidly prescribed before the advent of Stalinism proper. In a sense, the scientific/hygienist approach of Gorinevskaia and Solonevich was the precursor to Stalinist understandings of gender; crudely put, in the later period this physiologism simply acquired a moral and emotional aspect.

We should bear this continuity in mind when we turn to accounts of gender specifically concerned with the 1930s. Victoria Bonnell and Susan Reid have commented in particular on the non-filmic visual culture of the post-1932 years, and its appropriation of certain female archetypes; both agree that the retrenchment in women's issues in the period was accompanied by a sharp rise in the profile of the female figure in Stalinist visual culture, as though the discursive departure from the question of liberation required a proliferation of images of liberated womanhood.²¹ Bonnell in particular notes a distinction between propagandistic images of women in the 1920s and in the 1930s: where once women in political posters had been abstracted, representative of sloganistic ideals such as Freedom and Justice, 'Stalinist iconography' was instead 'behavioural', imagining 'particular' women within identifiable material circumstances.²² In keeping with the renewed traditionalism of the period, chief amongst these circumstances was motherhood, the *ne plus ultra* of gender-specific experience, the supreme example of an individual character's sensual/bodily experience tallying with social exigencies, and the guiding theme of both *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*, and *Sluchainaia vstrecha*.

Before turning to these two films, however, I consider their earlier counterpart, *Schastlivyi finish*. In its concerns with gender roles, the institution of labour practices, and the running theme it is very much of a kind with other mid-1930s *fizkul'tura* films. Yet despite being released in 1934, the plot is entirely in keeping with the template of the romance-competition comedies of the 1920s as detailed above. The nerdy yet conscientious dockworker Marko is the only one of his friends and coworkers who is not enthused by *fizkul'tura*. However when he falls in love with the newest member of their workforce, Ania, he resolves to give up fixing radios and take up training in order to impress her. Aided and compelled by his confidantes Boris and Vera, and his brigade commander

²¹ Reid, 'All Stalin's Women'; Victoria E. Bonnell, 'The Representation of Women in Early Soviet Political Art', *Russian Review*, 50:3 (1991), 267–88.

²² Ibid., p. 277. See Dashkova, pp. 86–121 on the equivalent traditionalisation of gender roles in film.

Lukich, he eventually manages to defeat the deceitful and self-involved Andrii, winning Ania's heart and the right to compete at the national championships in Moscow. We can see that the abstraction of emotion that underpinned films such as *Otvazhnye moreplavately* is retained: despite a slightly more convoluted plot than was allowed in earlier films, there is still no clear indication as to why, in the final reckoning, his running ability should endear Marko to Ania.

In its conflation of two sets of tropes, though, I will claim that *Schastlivyi finish* is more than a simple chronological anomaly. Rather, its particular deployment of the romantic-sporting competition lays the ground for films such as *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, in which athletic victory or defeat is less a precursor to romantic breakthrough than to the reinforcement of social norms. It achieves this by making its narrational abstraction of emotion the basis for an exploration of gender-specific anxieties and sensations: masculine not feminine, homosocial not heterosexual. Marko, Boris, and Andrii are engaged in a search for the most comfortable and compelling performance of masculinity, and they conduct this search through interrogations of their bodily interactions with others. *Schastlivyi finish* introduces the sense of crisis that emerges when the Soviet hero is left unclear as to his emotional and sensual place in the world.

5. *Schastlivyi finish*: perceptions of the male body

Разве на самом деле так легко даются физкультурные победы, как это показано в фильме «Счастливый финиш»?

Nikolai Starostin²³

Schastlivyi finish is the story of a young man leaving the world of the mind behind in favour of that of the body. In doing so, Marko ascends to a more wholesome, more socially acceptable form of masculinity: one based on honest self-sacrifice. What are the bodily/emotional parameters of this evolution? At the moment of triumph, as he is borne aloft by cheering friends having outrun Andrii, Marko comes face to face with Ania; at last, he has earned her affection, and they stand before each other as romantic equals. Yet

²³ 'Sozdamim khudozhestvennyi obraz fizkul'turnika'.

before they have even embraced onscreen, the shot fades into one in which the same pose is one of farewell — at the railway station, Marko is leaving Ania behind in order to travel to Moscow to compete in the national championships. There is no hint of consummation. What are the terms of emotional investment in this romantic comedy without romance, and what can it tell us about gender when neither men nor women express their desires beyond the blandest platonicism? It is a commonplace to assert Stalinist cinema's essential chasteness; Tat'iana Dashkova has outlined with particular clarity the ways in which eroticism is elided onscreen in the 1930s ('связь между знаками эротического и эротическим аффектом достаточно неочевидна...')²⁴ Is it enough, though, to fall back on 'chasteness' as a catch-all explanation?

From the beginning, Marko's emasculation is linked to his insufficient awareness of the world beyond the confines of his imagination and his slim frame — in an early scene, he slips and falls from the boat he is working on; unable to swim, he has to be rescued from the water by his friend Vera. His apartment is tangled with cables, criss-crossing the field of the camera, and he is frequently seen through a cloud of cigarette smoke; he first meets Ania when he absentmindedly bumps into her on the street whilst engrossed in an electronics manual. In his sun-drenched corner of Crimea, with his kindly manager and caring friends, Marko is not confronted by the lacunae in his own self-understanding until the literal collision with Ania introduces the previously absent factor of sexual attraction into his life. Ania's entrance into his field of vision awakens Marko to his and others' bodily presence in the world. Concomitant to this is the realisation that his intellectualised isolation has made him a passive observer of others. This question of passivity will subsequently be key to the film's play on masculinity. There is not yet a body behind Marko's gaze, and his admiration for Ania has no effect: he is reduced to following her, unseen, through town to the stadium that is to prove the testing ground for his character development. Here, we are introduced to Marko's rival Andrii, as Kolomoitsev establishes the love triangle that drives the narrative.

²⁴ Dashkova, pp. 80-126 (p. 115).



Figure 1. 'He didn't just triumph on the track...' Andrii the physical specimen (*Schastlivyi finish*)

In character, Andrii is the inverse of Marko: physically strong, egotistical, individualistic. He is lackadaisical about labour and erotically charged, with a pretty girl waiting on his every move ('Лучший стайер города побеждал не только на беговой дорожке...') (Figure 1). The contrast is clear: whereas Marko is delimited by his mental faculties, Andrii lives entirely through his body. As Vera tells Marko, 'У него, видно, ноги работают, а голова выходная.' Andrii thus shares with Marko an obfuscated perception of the world, an inattentiveness to what lies beyond his immediate field of vision. He defines his social value entirely in terms of his performance on the running track, and pursues whichever attractive girl presents herself to him at any given time. He is committed to this delimited vision, his focus ever more egotistical, concentrated inwards. Conversely, his meeting with Ania convinces the sympathetic Marko that he needs to expand his field of vision beyond the confines of his own intellect, to join in the bodily communality of the *fizkul'turniki*.

A key scene in the film unfolds in the stadium when the love triangle is established: it is here that Marko and Andrii commit to the narrative arcs leading to their eventual confrontation. In an image that foregrounds the intersection of vision and sexuality, Marko watches Ania watching Andrii beat Boris in a race (Figure 2). Kolomoitsev simultaneously establishes and visualises the dynamics of the romantic-sporting conflict in this simple image of cross-purposed spectatorship. Marko looks at Ania with quiet

yearning and a sense of his need to better himself, to gain a bodily presence in the world; Ania looks at Andrii with a platonic, comradely appreciation of his athletic prowess; Andrii is aware of her gaze and therefore concerned above all with his image of himself as strong and victorious. We have here an example of a cinematic trope highlighted by John Haynes in his work on Stalinist masculinity: Andrii fulfils the role of 'male pin-up', a man who appropriates for his own ends that essential quality of onscreen femininity identified by Laura Mulvey, 'being-looked-at'.²⁵ However, whereas Haynes is concerned with positive pin-ups, Andrii acts instead as a negative or parodic model against which the unassuming Marko can set himself. From this juncture onwards, Marko's task is to combine Ania's ideologically correct, objective-aesthetic appreciation of the sportsman with a romantic, emotional investment. In doing so he will also redeem her character, by putting pay to the possibility that she might be won over by athletic prowess alone.



Figure 2. Marko watching Ania watching Andrii (*Sebastivyi finish*)

The panic of watching men shower

In her discussion of the place of women in Stalinist art, Susan Reid suggests that during the 1930s, 'spectatorship' came to be understood as fundamentally feminine,

²⁵ John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 58.

symbolising 'submission.'²⁶ In a context in which the transmission of political acuity and labour skills was conceived of as patrilineal, to observe one's fellow citizens meant adopting an emasculated role. *Schastlivyi finish*, in its exploration of Soviet masculinity as a reconciliation of intellect with physical prowess, quietly subverts this schema. This is a romantic comedy in which the female gaze is elided, and male rivals are compelled most intensely by their sense of themselves as men. Despite the promise of a kiss at the end, the masculine field of vision dominates; in this sense, *Schastlivyi finish* is open to the kinds of reading inspired by Laura Mulvey's famous claim: 'The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralise the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle.'²⁷ Yet there is more to what meets the eye than meets the eye.

Unusually for a film about sport that reaches its climax in a packed stadium, the most striking scenes of spectatorship in *Schastlivyi finish* are those that take place in the grand communal changing room where the athletes prepare to train and compete, and wash themselves afterwards. This liminal yet expansive space is an arena of looking. Aleksei Bobrovnikov's set design certainly suggests that this is a zone of particular importance. What should be a functional, adjunctive room to the main arena is in fact multi-tiered, high-ceilinged, and strikingly lit; the room is often shot with a clear fore-, middle-, and background, and populated by many extras both in and out of focus. Most notable, though, is the amount of flesh captured: naked and lathered torsos and buttocks abound, a cavalcade of mutual masculine exposure (Figure 3).

Superficially, then, this is a space in which the men are at ease with what I have called their bodily presence. But the proliferation of bodies in the changing room does not allow the necessary emotional faculties to flourish. Tellingly, Marko is ill at ease here: on his sole visit, he is visibly out of place, threatened by Andrii, and eventually told to leave (Figure 4). If the stadium allows these men to compete for something beyond sheer physical superiority — either the appreciation of women, Soviet honour, or (as Marko eventually manages) both — then here bodily performance is internalised and claustrophobic: in this homosocial theatre, the men must expose themselves to one another, but without an outlet or an object of sublimation for their corporeal competitiveness. This is a space of anxiety

²⁶ Reid, 'All Stalin's Women', p. 172.

²⁷ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), 6–18 (p. 12).

about bodies that are nonetheless freely flaunted. Certainly, it is within the changing room that Andrii's ego is most threatened and aggravated: this is where he threatens to physically assault Marko, and where he sabotages Boris's running shoes, causing his rival to fall and injure himself.

Anne Eakin Moss has argued that in films of the 1930s the depiction of social groups is most often linked to femininity: male heroes are lone avatars of Stalinist values, whereas women are represented communally.²⁸ This is, predictably, understood in terms of cinema's attempt to foster what I would call *obshchestvennost'*: 'These films make women's community an object of desire by idealization and eroticization, but also inscribe the audience *into* the community and ask the spectator to identify with it.'²⁹ In this reading, the public display of (female) flesh is one of Stalinism's most powerful 'affective techniques of inclusion'.³⁰ With this in mind, we might read *Schastlivyi finish*'s proliferation of *male* flesh as an indication of something gone awry in the collective; rather than the 'passive and fecund' bodies of female community,³¹ these showering men walk a fine line between mutual appreciation and competitiveness or outright aggression. Again, the particular configuration of bodies and vision in this *fizkul'tura* film has the potential, at points, to undermine conventional psychoanalytically minded readings. For instance, Haynes argues that the musicals of Grigorii Aleksandrov are constructed in such a way as to counteract the Oedipal crisis; since trauma derives in the first instant from the child's recognition of sexual difference, Aleksandrov enacts an 'hysterical effacing of difference itself' (for instance in the famous lullaby scene from the end of *Tsirk* (1936)).³² How then to square the therapeutic 'effacing of [sexual] difference' with the tension created when men watch other men shower?

²⁸ Anne Eakin Moss, 'Stalin's harem: the spectator's dilemma in late 1930s Soviet film', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3:2 (2009), 157–172.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³² Haynes, p. 108.



Figure 3. Intimidating figures (*Schastlivyi finish*)



Figure 4. Marko is ejected from the homosocial arena (*Schastlivyi finish*)

This homosocial anxiety speaks to the film's primary concerns: the need to reconcile mind and body, to construct a form of masculinity not prone to aggressive insularity, and to do so in a way that can be publicly witnessed. What then is the positive form of masculinity that the film offers in contrast? Rather than being driven by their bodies, trapping themselves within homosocial panic, Boris and Marko succeed in finding more ideologically sound and emotionally wholesome forms of interpellation. Boris trains under the watchful eye of his brigade commander, Lukich. Revealed to be a former athletics

champion himself, Lukich represents the paternalistic ideal of the film: calm, patient, attuned to both the physical and technical requirements of Soviet society and thus able to oversee both construction projects and *fizkul'tura*. It probably does not hurt that he bears a certain resemblance to Lenin, a bust of whom also looks down on his training ground for good measure. Marko, meanwhile, is mindful of and motivated by the need to better himself, to expand his personal horizons beyond the 'merely' intellectual. The romantic arc of the narrative, such as it is, derives from the fact that this project of self-improvement happens to coincide with the need to 'rescue' Ania from the boorish Andrii. This, then, is the psychological refinement of the sporting-romantic competition trope of the 1920s that *Schastlivyi finish* enacts.

'What is to be done, Comrade Apollo?'

The narrational insignificance of the female gaze is most strikingly conveyed in Marko's decision to undertake his training regime in secret. Ania only witnesses his athleticism in the final instance, when he has already become an avatar of positive masculinity. Marko is shown attempting a high jump in his cramped apartment, and learning to swim in the open ocean, but never in the stadium or in the presence of anyone but his sole confidante, Vera.³³ In itself this concealment would speak to the superficiality of his romance with Ania: rather than showing her that his true strength of character lies in his self-discipline and willingness to better himself for her, Marko denies her anything but a triumphant self-image. But his desire for secrecy goes further than this: he actually feigns injury for much of the film, walking with a cane and exaggerated limp, thus emphasising his physical dysfunction to a girl who he knows appreciates athletic men.

Why introduce this double deception, when Marko's appeal to Ania is precisely that he is not as conceited and self-involved as Andrii? In her work on the problems of masculinity in Stalinist cinema, Lilya Kaganovsky highlights the prevalence of wounded, maimed, or otherwise impotent heroes in films of the 1930s. In her Lacanian reading, this is a reflection of the need for castration — or 'decentering' — before the paternal figure of

³³ Open-water swimming in the Black Sea was a favoured training regime of elite swimmers at the time, and regularly covered in newsreel footage. See for instance editions of *Soiuzkino zhurnal* 19/554 (RGAKFD I-2532) and 20/560 (RGAKFD I-2536), both from 1935. The image of the clandestine *fizkul'turnik* is a minor trope throughout the 1920s and 1930s. See for instance the 'parallel' training regimes of Sirotkin in *Besprizornyi sportsmen* (1928) and Sandro and co. in *Kote Mikaberidze's Zapozdalyi zhenikh* (Tbilisskaia kinostudiia, 1939).

Stalin, and hence a recognition of ‘male lack as the site of ideological and erotic investment’.³⁴ A crucial aspect of becoming a ‘Soviet man’ is thus a process of self-denial, realised through the body. Marko is already unfit: feigning injury is a doubling down on his flaws as a man, what Kaganovsky cites as the necessary abnegation of the Stalinist hero. In light of the homosocial panic captured in the changing room, we might understand Marko’s behaviour as a form of self-defence. He is able to develop a platonic, delibidinised relationship with Ania whilst he gradually and furtively shifts his perspective on the world from intellectual pursuit to athletic achievement. It also allows for the film’s ideal model of masculinity: one based on mental acuity and physical self-sacrifice, the sublimation of bodily impulses into delibidinised labour and *fizkul’tura*. At one point, Marko stands before a neo-classical statue, leans on his prop cane, and asks, ‘Что делать, товарищ Аполлон?’ (Figure 5) His cane reinforces the need for self-abasement; the reference to Chernyshevskii and the epithet *tovarishch* situate the film’s romantic/sporting narrative in the sphere of Soviet ideology; the address to Apollo is an appeal to the rational and instrumental in constructing subjectivity. It may be a comic image, even a pathetic one, but this is Marko’s moment of heightened clarity.³⁵



Figure 5. Comrade Apollo (*Schastlivyi finish*)

³⁴ Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity Under Stalin* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), p. 25.

³⁵ The deployment of a Classical reference point is in keeping with what were burgeoning Stalinist bodily aesthetics in art and life. See discussion of Room’s *Strogii iunosha* in Chapter 2 (above).

We have seen that homosocial, bodily competition is helpless, that positive male characters require ideologically sound and emotionally wholesome forms of interpellation, that the hero must submit in symbolic self-castration to the paternal ideal. Lukich functions in this provincial setting as the substitute for the largely implicit figures of Lenin and Stalin, a kindly, omniscient, and demanding father, chiding Andrii and training Boris (Figure 6). It is Lukich who instructs Marko that he must discard his cane and perform against Andrii. Notably, Marko has already rejected the pleas of a gaggle of attractive, scantily-dressed girls to rush to the stadium and take the injured Boris's place at the starting line before Lukich enters. When these same girls form a ring around Marko so that he can change into his running shorts, the implication is clear: the hero sheds his clothes and his deceptions in the presence of women but at the bequest of the paternal voice. Lukich is the 'leader' identified by Liliia Mamatova as crucial to Stalinist mythology, the one required to 'приучить простого человека к бдительности.'³⁶ Or, in the Lacanian terms of Kaganovsky, the 'prerogative' of Lukich-the-father-figure 'decentres' the subject in Marko, compelling him to try and accede to a constantly forestalled fullness of self.³⁷ He wins the race because of Lukich and against Andrii, rather than for Ania. This, then, is how we are to understand that abrupt fade from stadium to railway platform and the elision of actual romance from this romantic comedy. Lukich is a provincial avatar for Stalin; having served his purpose, he is superseded by the interpellation of the capital and the Big Man himself. There is always a bigger daddy. Marko's self-negating masculinity can now be tested at the epicentre of the nation.³⁸

³⁶ Liliia Mamatova, 'Model' kinomifov 30-kh godov', *Iskusstvo kino*, 11 (1990), 103–11 (p. 107).

³⁷ Kaganovsky, p. 10.

³⁸ Haynes identifies the 'pull away' from the female love interest in terms of a masculine refusal to engage with sexual difference; whereas some onscreen heroes are pulled away to achieve great feats of labour (for instance, in *kolkhoz* comedies), in *fizkul'tura* films they are compelled to get back on the training field and run faster than before. Haynes, pp. 146–47.



Figure 6. Under the watchful eye of Lukich-Lenin (*Schastlivyi finish*)

Yet having triumphantly reconciled mind and body, could Marko not be afforded a moment of respite with Ania? The immediate turn to Moscow suggests, in the final instance, that the masculine ideal of *Schastlivyi finish* cannot hold, that its balancing of romantic longing, mental faculties, ideological acuity, and athletic prowess is too precarious. Marko must continue to outrun himself, to supersede his personal emotional investments; once again love is stuck as an abstraction, our young lovers denied any intimacy that might threaten the call of the capital. As we will see below, 1930s culture was replete with examples of local victory leading to national recognition, of ever-tightening metonymies between citizen and sportsman, and of provincial avatars of Lenin and Stalin yielding to the influence of the real thing: the coach of the nation. Aleksandr Deineka himself had grasped something of this shift a year before *Schastlivyi finish* was released with his popular poster ‘Rabotat’, stroit’ i ne nyt!’ (1933) (Figure 7). Its slogan, in the form of a quatrain, echoes the famous line from Nikolai Nekrasov’s 1856 poem of civic engagement, ‘Poet i grazhdanin’ (‘Поэтом можешь ты не быть/Но гражданином быть обязан.’)³⁹ Not everyone is to be expected to match Marko’s prodigious achievements — to be an *atlet* — but he and his friends are an example of the requirement of every healthy citizen to think of their body in terms of civic identity; to be a *fizkul’turnik*-citizen.

³⁹ Available at: <<http://www.stihi-rus.ru/1/Nekrasov/78.htm>> [accessed 19 October 2016]

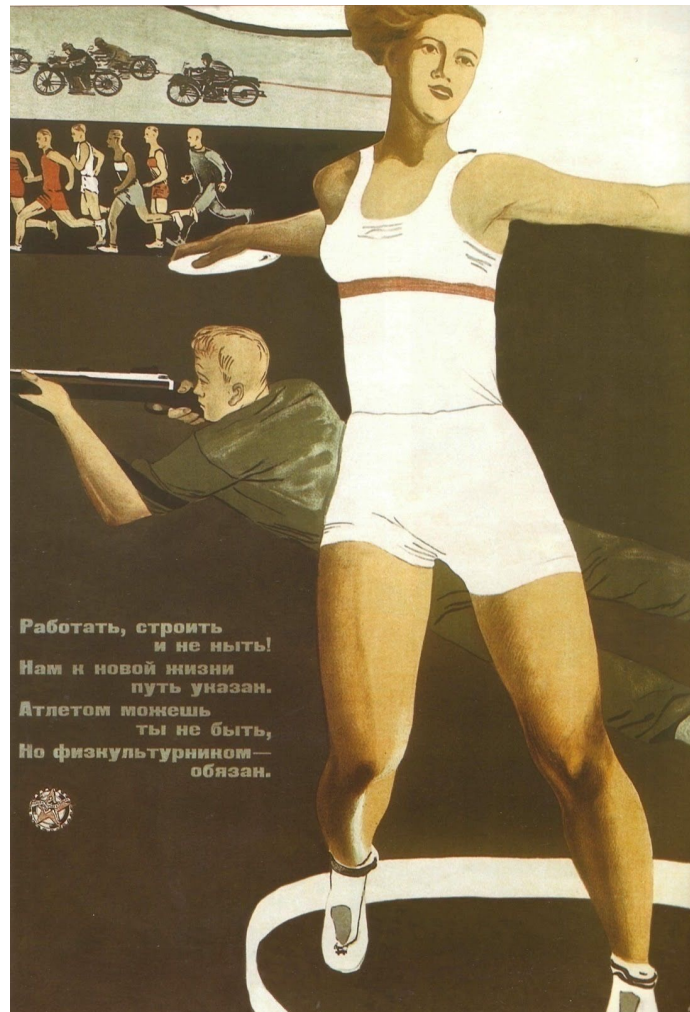


Figure 7. Aleksandr Deineka, 'Rabotat', stroit', i ne nyt'!' (1933)

6. *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha*: women on the run

Schastlivyi finish is a film about masculinity, figured as the perpetual performance of selflessness, control of the female gaze, and paternalism in work and love. It marries a 1920s-style abstraction of romantic narrative to a burgeoning desire, in the early 1930s, to investigate the inner lives of its characters. What happens when the same subject matter — running, gender roles, the mind-body conundrum, romantic intrigue — is explored through the inner lives of women rather than men? How does a filmic focus on femininity affect our understanding of *obshchestvennost'*, emotionality, and *fizkul'tura*?

Below I consider in parallel two films about female Runners: *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* (Vostokfil'm [Yalta], 1935, directed by Iurii Zheliabuzhskii from a screenplay by A. Ian) and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* (Rot-Front/Mezhrabpromfil'm, 1936, directed and written by Igor' Savchenko). Both are set in Ukraine, and both bear witness to the 1930s' retrenchment of gender and familial roles outlined above, as well as to the growing infrastructural influence of *fizkul'tura* as a normativising force in Soviet society. In *Lavry*, Tania and her husband Mukhtar are exemplary workers on the docks of Crimea as well as enthusiastic and talented *fizkul'turniki*. Tania's hopes of emulating the record-breaking time of celebrity American runner Ellen Gray at an upcoming regional Spartakiada are hampered when she falls pregnant. Desperate to have an abortion and dedicate herself to training, she leaves Mukhtar, who has insisted that she both bear his child and not allow sport to distract her from her work commitments — the local Komsomol have declared that the repair of a cruise ship will be completed by the beginning of the Spartakiada. Cut loose from the collective, Tania is denied an abortion, falls in with the disreputable layabout Mot'ka, and neglects both her health and that of her unborn child; she is then beaten in the climactic running race by a former friend who is also a proud mother. Eventually she is brought back into the collective fold and reunited with Mukhtar, who in her absence has achieved local celebrity as a parachutist.

Sluchainaia vstrecha likewise relates the story of a young woman reconciling the demands of pregnancy, work, and sporting excellence. The action revolves around the workers in a toy factory set somewhere in idyllic provincial Ukraine. Grishka, a sports instructor newly arrived at the compound, recognises the running prowess of the *udarnitsa* Irina and resolves to train her in preparation for an All-Union competition in Moscow. Coach and athlete fall in love and are soon married. When Irina falls pregnant, Grishka demands that she have an abortion in order that her training not be compromised; she declines and their marriage breaks down. Her comrades at the factory, as well as its kindly director Vasili, rally around Irina, supporting her as a young mother and rejecting Grishka. Irina is thus able both to give birth to a daughter, and to compete — and win — in Moscow. By the film's close she has also forged a new, mutually rewarding relationship with her co-worker Petr Ivanovich; Grishka is left an arrogant and dissatisfied outcast.

Despite the superficial narrative similarities, these two films represent a quite radical departure from *Schastlivyi finisb*. Where Marko and Ania share a single, chaste kiss at the climax of that film, Tania/Mukhtar and Irina/Grishka are directly and immediately

confronted with the problems of desire, sexual relationships, and familial duty. As noted above, these two films are prime examples of the trend towards the fictionalised mirroring of real-life sporting celebrities. Star swimmer Anton Shumin's marriage to his protégée and trainee Kseniia Aleshina, for instance, mirrors the situation of Mukhtar and Tania in *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* or that of Grishka and Irina in *Sluchainaia vstrecha*. P. E. Hall, an English sports journalist who visited the Soviet Union in 1935, recalls the celebrity of Mariia Shamanova; a chemist who was also the most successful female distance runner in Russia, she had retired from athletics to give birth before returning to training and setting a new record.⁴⁰ Given Shamanova's fame at the time, the clear parallels with Irina in *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, released a year after Hall's visit, are surely not coincidental.

There is thus a visceral, corporeal element to the emotional relationships in these films that runs deeper than the physical exertion of athletics. Irina and Tania only find resolution in private and public life when they recognise the secondary importance of athletic performance in the face of the social, emotional demands of family and co-workers. *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* are key texts inasmuch as they demonstrate the need for filmmakers by the mid-'30s to account for the inner lives of individualised characters, the changing role of *fizkul'tura* as a structuring aspect of Soviet public life, and the continuing search for a workable model of *obshchestvennost'*, the elusive quality of mutuality that was now expected to inform the lives of onscreen characters down to the genital level. The shift in focus from masculinity to femininity in these films is paralleled by a discarding of homosociality in favour of heterosexuality. In these sun-kissed fantasy worlds populated by bodies that are both desirable and increasingly strictly interpellated by ideological demands, how will eroticism be accommodated? How will the spectatorship of (female) bodies be made *obshchestvenno*; if necessary, how will it be policed?

⁴⁰ P. E. Hall, 'Sport', in *Playtime in Russia*, ed. Hubert Griffith (London: Methuen and Co., 1935), pp. 184-204 (pp. 194-196).

7. Nothing more than a name on a boat

хочешь решить половую проблему — будь общественным работником, товарищем.

Nikolai Semashko⁴¹

Sex is a material reality for the couples of *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha*. The ‘sexual problem’ was a constant issue for the Party; it was also one that they approached with a remarkably consistent ideological and institutional arsenal. Both Frances Bernstein and Dan Healey demonstrate how the rationalistic, modernising institutions and programs of NEP-era *prosveshchenie* campaigns provided the material basis and moral legitimation for Stalinist conservatism in matters of sexuality and gender.⁴² Bernstein in particular draws out the dual principles driving the burgeoning discourse on ‘sexual hygiene’ by the end of the First Five-Year Plan: the maintenance of personal sexual health in both physical and psychological terms, and the reproduction of healthy offspring.⁴³ As we shall see, both of these principles are active in these films. Yet ‘sex’, in and of itself, is absent. We should be mindful here of a point made by Andrey Shcherbenok: a ‘Soviet kiss’ is not the same as a ‘Hollywood kiss’. Drawing on Dashkova, Shcherbenok argues that whereas a kiss in American cinema of the 1930s functioned metonymically to convey the ‘fantasmatic scene’ of intercourse, ‘Soviet cinema tends to immerse the off-screen sex act in such a tangle of emotions and meanings that its fantasmatic corporeality fades from view.’⁴⁴ Feeling trumps friction.

Lavry Miss Ellen Grei and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* can be read as visual reiterations of problems that had preoccupied Soviet culture for over a decade. As I have indicated above, a strict gender essentialism was central to the theory and practice of *fizkul'tura*, and the same is true of its onscreen representations. Men and women in these films experience sexuality in quite different ways and to quite different ends. For one thing, sexual desire itself is strictly gendered as masculine. In both films it is men who have explicitly erotic designs on women — namely, Mot'ka and Grishka. For each, the sexualising gaze is

⁴¹ Cited in Vladimir Bekhterev, *Znachenie polovogo vlecheniia v zhiznedeiatel'nosti organizma* (Moscow: Narkomzdrav RSFSR, 1928), p. 25.

⁴² Bernstein, pp. 1-7; Healey passim, esp. p. 159.

⁴³ Bernstein, p. 130.

⁴⁴ Andrey Shcherbenok, ‘Russian/Soviet Screened Sexuality: An Introduction’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3:2 (2009), 135–44 (pp. 137-138).

reflective, and constitutive, of a socially pernicious personality. Julian Graffy has described Grishka as the concentrated centre of *Sluchainaia vstrecha*'s 'darkness', an agent from beyond the idyllic world of the toy factory who acts to highlight its latent ugliness;⁴⁵ it is his sexual desire for Irina (and the pregnancy that results) that darkens the mood. Mot'ka in *Lavry* is a less threatening figure than Grishka — weak, disoriented, and stupid, he enters the frame haphazardly, his gait lazy, his hands in his pockets, never seemingly intent on going anywhere in particular. He is often framed alongside or behind some sporting action, a clueless bystander. He is also the only character to experience attraction to another; when he does act, it is out of thoughtless desire for Tania, and he embarrasses himself (for instance, painting her name on the side of a boat in the process of being repaired) (Figure 8). In his final close-up he is framed as a grinning non-entity between the wife he has failed to woo and her returning husband (Figure 9).⁴⁶ His is a reactive, empty body, making him a closer relative to the sub-Chaplin clowns of the 1920s *fizkul'tura* comedies than the bright young workers that populate the scenes around him.



Figure 8. Mot'ka and the vandalism of sexual attraction (*Lavry* Miss Ellen Grei)

⁴⁵ Julian Graffy, "'An Unpretentious Picture'? — Igor' Savchenko's *A Chance Encounter*", *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 6:3 (2012), 301–18 (p. 311).

⁴⁶ This final framing shot of the three characters recalls the visualisation of the love triangle between Natasha, Fogelev, and Ilia at the close of Boris Barnet's *Devushka s korobkoi* (Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1927).

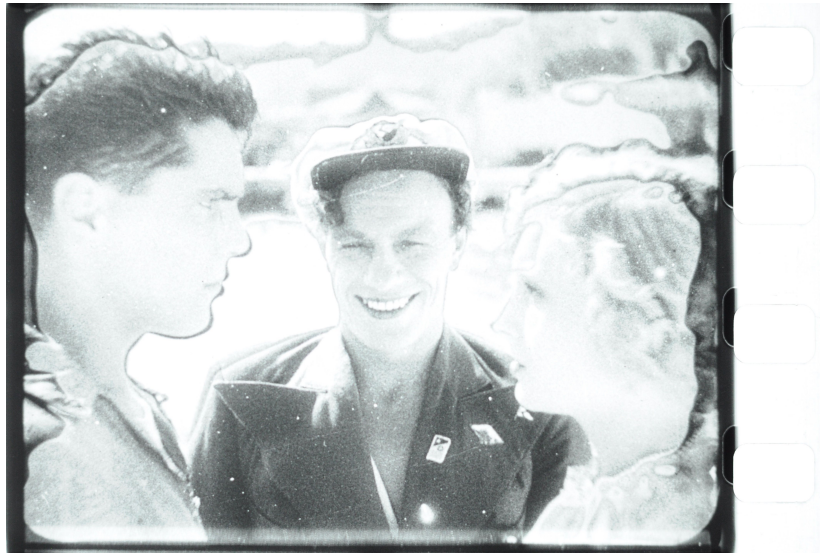


Figure 9. Mot'ka's final exclusion (*Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*)

While the severity of its consequences might vary, masculine sexual desire is not a complex thing. The 'simplicity of male desire' — here its simple negativity — is noted by Healey;⁴⁷ men were the agents of a spermatic economy whose libidinal flows were uncomplicated and could/should be straightforwardly stifled or sublimated — for instance, through sport. The danger posed to *obshchestvennost'* by masculine sexual desire was, then, that it was in its crudeness too easily abstracted into the unthinking pursuit of gratification. Much like the titular American sprinter Ellen Grey, whose magazine profile she idolises, Tania becomes a mere referent for attraction, a name on a boat.

Mot'ka's clownishness is further exploited to expose the sinister implications inherent in this idea of masculine desire. At one point he believes he has discovered Tania's address. Holding a dishevelled bouquet, he rings the bell and tells the maid he is there to see the young lady of the house; the camera dwells in medium close-up on his expectant grin as it turns to incomprehension when the maid returns with a girl of five or six. It cuts to a wide angle shot of the plush, petit-bourgeois lounge, the guileless sailor with his flowers opposite the innocent child in her white dress. The scene is a contrived comedic skit, but this framing is more disturbing than amusing: the visual punchline of the scene has Mot'ka wooing a pre-pubescent child. Like the dissatisfied outcast Grishka — who is ejected from the stadium by the police after Irina's triumph and trudges disconsolately into the distance (Figure 10) — Mot'ka is ultimately expelled from the collective with which he has failed to

⁴⁷ Healey, p. 78.

reconcile himself. Unlike Grishka, and perhaps reflective of his status as clown rather than outright villain, his departure is on his own terms. He chooses to leave on the *Krasnyi sport*, the ship which Tania's and Mukhtar's labour collective have been repairing throughout the course of the film (Figure 11). Tania gives him a portrait of herself as a memento, or else as a reward for having relieved the Odessa collective of his unhelpful presence. Carried out to sea, he is allowed to indulge in his simple, idolatrous desire.



Figure 10. Grishka is cast out (*Sluchainaia vstrecha*)



Figure 11. Mot'ka sails away (*Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*)

If masculine sexual desire is direct, active, and problematically simplistic, then what is the feminine relationship to sex? In answering this we have to reckon with the chasteness of these films, as highlighted by Dashkova.⁴⁸ There is no onscreen sexual contact, and women are never depicted as desiring subjects. As Pat Simpson has noted, one aspect of Stalinist representations of *fizkul'turniki* inherited almost untouched from the 1920s was 'hygienism', a fixation on cleanliness and probity whereby women were expected to submit 'to a double level of containment and body discipline — *fizkul'tura* followed by 'hygienic maternity'.⁴⁹ If we are to approach the question of feminine sexual desire in *Lavry* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, we have to do so indirectly, recognising the way in which feminine sexual self-awareness is recast obliquely as the female characters' understanding of their body as something to be 'shared' in broader, less explicit terms. *Obshchestvennost'* once more comes to the fore as an analytical category against which we are encouraged to judge these women and their understanding of their own bodies. As Dashkova notes, 'на «общественный» характер любви указывает, в частности, отсутствие приватности в любовных сценах'.⁵⁰

We have already seen that Tania's narrative is one of self-isolation from the collective, followed by reconciliation. We can reframe this indirectly in terms of desire. To some degree Tania's flaw is that she does not understand her own body as something that could

⁴⁸ Dashkova, pp. 80-126.

⁴⁹ Simpson, 'Liberation and Containment', p. 1328.

⁵⁰ Dashkova, p. 89.

be enjoyed by or shared with others. She intends to make of herself a singular, iconic image, like that of Ellen Grey in the sports journal over which she obsesses; as such, she seeks to expunge her body of the taint of others. (We should note here Zheliabuzhskii's play on still images throughout the film: from the photo portrait of Ellen Grey that kickstarts the narrative to the image of Tania that Mot'ka carries away with him in the closing shots, via the frequent framing of print media such as newspapers and letters, and the inclusion of a keen amateur photographer among the supporting cast). Tania's desire to have an abortion represents her attempt to reverse the irreversible act of having compromised her body through intimacy with Mukhtar. In this idyllic Crimean community, though, private intimacy is merely a microcosm of social intimacy, and to abandon the embrace of her husband is also to abandon her co-workers. In this sense she is guilty of abusing the emotional infrastructures that have made her who she is, a skilled worker, secure wife, and talented athlete. Tania's detachment from her own desirability is a result of her objectivising her body *too much*; she understands it purely in the quantitative terms of the runner and not as a friend or lover. To paraphrase the psychologist Vladimir Borovskii, whom we encountered in the Introduction, she fails to recognise her body's 'био-социальная ценность'.⁵¹

If Tania acts in fear of the desirability and 'shareability' of her own body, then Mukhtar is at the centre of several scenes that provide a contrast to her detachment. He is an emotional as well as a physical role model, the onscreen representative of another trope identified by Dashkova: 'показ любви через работу, то есть не просто параллелизм, а *перекодирование* любовной линии в трудовую [...] демонстрирует духовное единение пары и, путем метафорического переноса, прочитывается как эротическая.'⁵² He welcomes and defends the *odinakovost'* of labour and family units. He does this not in terms of his sexuality, but by putting his body on the line for the sake of the collective. In one sequence, Mukhtar dons a diving suit to salvage a damaged boat, in front of cheering crowds of coworkers reminiscent of a sporting event. Later he strips to his pants to lead the Spartakiada parade. At the climax of the film, he attempts a perilous parachute jump over the bay in order to delight and inspire the people below. Mukhtar appreciates the (desexualised) public desire for his body. His acts of display indicate how the onscreen spectator and the offscreen audience are positioned in relation to the emotional-sporting

⁵¹ Vladimir Borovskii, 'Chto takoe psikhologiiia', *Krasnaia nov'*, 4 (1927), 155–75 (p. 170).

⁵² Dashkova, p. 86.

narratives being played out. In my final chapter I return to the notion of bodily sacrifice as constitutive of the Soviet experience of spectatorship.

Irina in *Sluchainaia vstrecha* is an uncomplicated character; indeed, in contrast to men such as Grishka and Mot'ka, the transparency of her motivations is precisely an indication of her positive social standing, as Julian Graffy has observed.⁵³ The simplicity of her character is a reflection of her complete commitment to the collective, which is structured around both labour and leisure: as one intertitle tells us, communal exercise in the stadium and river takes place 'Каждый день после работы...' (Figure 12) So, while she entertains Grishka's initial flirtations as he tails her around the running track during training (Figure 13), she only submits to him later in the film, when he publicly declares that he will live within the community as her personal trainer. Irina is at ease with her own desirability as she is with her athletic prowess, but she understands these as secondary to the collective that supports her. It is worth noting also that the drama of Grishka's eventual non-departure is resolved by an act of collective sacrifice on the part of Irina's comrades: their pledge to Vasili, the patrician director of the factory, to take on her workload so that Irina can devote time to training is what convinces Grishka to stick around. While hardly a more complex figure than Grishka, Irina is legitimated by her appreciation of the social structures sustaining their briefly-shared sporting and erotic goals.



Figure 12. Irina and her sympathetic supporters (*Sluchainaia vstrecha*)

⁵³ Graffy, p. 308.



Figure 13. And her unsympathetic admirer (*Sluchainaia vstrecha*)

Notwithstanding her talent as a runner and her attractiveness, Irina is completely subsumed within the *obshchestvennost'* of the commune. As a result, and despite her being nominally the heroine of the film, she is often a background character and at points retreats entirely from the action. The film's troubled production history reflected this, with the initial title of *Irinkin rekord* changed on its release to *Mesiats mai*; only after the film was withdrawn from circulation and recut in response to criticism did it acquire the title *Sluchainaia vstrecha*.⁵⁴ If the film has a 'hero' then it is surely Petr Ivanovich, who mediates those scenes that allow the Irina-Grishka narrative to unfold (he leads the collective request that Vasilii sign Irina off for training, stands up to Grishka after he demands that she have an abortion, and confides in Vasilii in his efforts to expel Grishka from the commune) and ultimately becomes the surrogate father of their baby. While Irina does not entirely neglect the desirability of her body, she understands this within the lyrical, sentimental terms of the provincial commune setting; her beauty is simply of a kind with the natural delights of the woods where couples are shown romantically strolling, and the social delights of a smoothly-run labour-leisure collective. In Emma Widdis's words, 'Irina turns away from the physical discipline of heroic achievement and embraces the [...] pleasures of pregnancy [...] Erotic fulfilment is replaced by an alternative model of

⁵⁴ Emma Widdis has informed me that the indefatigable Petr Bagrov of the state Gosfil'mofond archive has recently uncovered a new version of Savchenko's film, opening up the possibility of yet more refraction away from the director's initial treatment.

sensory plenitude.⁵⁵ Desirability and sexual satisfaction are never for her ends in and of themselves.

The totality of Irina's (and Petr Ivanovich's and Vasili's) identification with the collective and the simplicity of character that results were, however, indirectly identified by critics as failings, inasmuch as they reduced the drama onscreen to something superficial and sentimental. According to Ol'ga Afanas'eva, the film's lyrical stylings create the impression of a 'ходульной приподнятости и неестественности с небольшими искусственно пришитыми эпизодами из реальной жизни.'⁵⁶ Afanas'eva's comments were in keeping with a wider trend in film criticism in the mid-1930s attacking cinematic 'lyricism' for its lack of engagement with the richness of Soviet reality. Vsevolod Vishnevskii coined the term 'камерное кино' in his attacks on directors such as Mikhail Romm and Iulii Raizman, criticising their fondness for elegant domestic interiors that lacked heroic *monumental'nost'*;⁵⁷ in response, Béla Balázs argued that the scale of Soviet achievement in reaching into all areas of life could in fact only be captured on the human or individual scale.⁵⁸ In this Balázs joined the ranks of film critics and theorists arguing for the portrayal of *feeling subjects* onscreen.

For critics incensed by *kamernost'* and lyricism, Savchenko's film was indicative of a deleterious trend. V. Tarov cited *Sluchainaia vstrecha* in these terms: 'Пора решительно выступать против работ, легко и беспечно скользящих по поверхности нашей богатой действительности.'⁵⁹ Writing in *Kino*, K. Linovskaia explicitly linked the film's superficiality to its monochromatic characterisation: 'Картина поверхностная [...] В картине живых людей нет.'⁶⁰ Reading these two films in terms of romantic narratives driven by physical attraction, then, strands us in a world of *poverkhnost'* rather than one of *deistvitel'nost'*; particularly when the desired female leads, Tania and Irina, are detached from or unconcerned by the social function of their body image. To get beyond this superficiality and draw out the more profound links between sex, femininity, and *obshchestvennost'* requires us to look at the 'bio-social' concerns of these films beyond flowers and flirtation: pregnancy, spectatorship, and citizenship.

⁵⁵ Emma Widdis, 'Child's Play: Pleasure and the Soviet Hero in Savchenko's *A Chance Encounter*', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 6:3 (2012), 319–31 (pp. 324–8).

⁵⁶ O. Afanas'eva, 'Sluchainaia vstrecha', *Rabochaia Moskva* (18 October 1936), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Vsevolod Vishnevskii, 'Protiv kamernoi kinematografii', *Kino*, 20 (1937), 2.

⁵⁸ Bela Balash (Béla Balázs), 'Monumentalizm ili kamernost'?', *Kino*, 22 (1937), 2.

⁵⁹ V. Tarov, 'Besslavnoe proshloe i budushchee. O fil'me "Sluchainaia vstrecha"', *Vecherniaia Moskva* (13 October 1936), p. 3.

⁶⁰ K. A. Linovskaia, 'Sluchainaia vstrecha', *Kino*, 49 (1936), 3.

8. Working mothers and man-children: avoiding the issue

At the head of this chapter I noted that the 1930s have often been considered a period of retrenchment in terms of gender issues. In this reading, motherhood is the *ne plus ultra* of gender-specific experience, the supreme example of an individual character's sensual or bodily experience tallying with social exigencies. Whilst there is much to debate in any rigid discursive periodisation (as I have indicated more than once, the rhetorical and institutional continuities between the 1920s and 1930s as regards sexuality and gender are significant), the issue of pregnancy/maternity was certainly brought to the fore in the mid-1930s by a raft of legal and cultural interventions. Perhaps most notable was the recriminalisation of abortion; the Central Executive Committee resolution on the matter was carried on 27th June 1936, four months before the release of *Sluchainaia vstrecha*. As we will see below, this stark biopolitical interdiction on the part of the state was tied to a refiguring of Soviet citizenship that was formalised in the 'Stalin Constitution' adopted in November of that same year.

Lavry Miss Ellen Grei and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* are prime examples of the cultural manifestation of this 'maternal turn'. In these films, pregnancy serves to take characters and viewer beyond the *poverkhnost'* of beauty and even sex itself, towards more profound questions of femininity and what we have called 'био-социальная ценность'. In this they stand out from the broader *fizkul'tura* cinema, which shied away from pregnancy. As far as I have been able to ascertain, *Lavry* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* are the only surviving *fizkul'tura* films to tackle the issue of pregnancy, although Julian Graffy has drawn out links between them and other films of the period: Iulii Raizman's *Letchiki* (Mosfil'm, 1935), in which the heroine Bystrova comes to act as surrogate mother to another woman's child; Fridrikh Ermler's *Kresti'iane* (Lenfil'm, 1935), with its animated sequence imagining the heroine as mother to Stalin's child; and Grigorii Aleksandrov's hit musical *Tsirk* (Mosfil'm, 1936), which again deals with questions of surrogacy and the collective responsibilities of parenthood.⁶¹ Outside of the cinema, art historian Pat Simpson has demonstrated how the mid-1930s fit within a longer-term evolution in Soviet understandings of motherhood. Her reading of canvas art from the 1920s to the end of the Second World War outlines 'an apparently enduring commitment within Soviet culture to a broadly eugenic evolutionary

⁶¹ Graffy, pp. 313-5.

ideal of the healthy New Soviet Woman.⁶² Within this, the cleanliness and rude health of the female body is stressed, whether as mid-1930s mother-citizen, or as 1940s incarnation of the Motherland.

To understand the function and character of motherhood in *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* we need to examine two aspects that risk being elided: the experience of being pregnant, of carrying a child and projecting that child into the future; and the fact of children and their function within the collective. The first is curiously elusive. In neither film is pregnancy represented onscreen, despite being the central narrational device. *Lavry* ends with Tania reconciled to her pregnancy and to Mukhtar but with the reality of bearing a child yet to have an impact on their lives. As we have seen, Irina in *Sluchainaia vstrecha* retreats from the narrative into her pregnancy; after Grishka leaves the toy factory we cut straight to the scene of Irina's triumphant race some years later. Widdis describes this as the retreat into 'the corporeal chaos and private pleasures of pregnancy.'⁶³ Whilst it is correct to highlight the way that the nominal female lead recedes from the film, replaced onscreen by a homosocial reckoning between Grishka, Petr Ivanovich, and Vasilii, the 'corporeal chaos and private pleasures of pregnancy' here are something of a projection. The sense of Irina's *being* pregnant is completely lacking; all that we get is the statement of a physiological fact relating to a hypothetical time frame: she cannot carry to term and continue to train as an athlete. It is as if the film doubles down on the absence of metonymically-referenced sex identified by Shcherbenok, by also removing pregnancy from the viewer's 'fantasmatic' field of vision. This elision plays out in the scene in which Irina informs Grishka of her pregnancy and he demands she seek an abortion. The confrontation is shot as a series of singles, husband and wife counterposed rather than framed together in a way that denies the union that led to the situation at hand. The camera lingers on Grishka and his angry gesticulations shot in full, cutting only briefly to close-ups of Irina's static face (Figures 14 and 15). Grishka dominates the exchange.

⁶² Simpson, 'Liberation and Containment', pp. 1319-1320.

⁶³ Widdis, 'Child's Play', p. 324.



Figure 14. Grishka rejects the pregnancy (*Sluchainaia vstrecha*)



Figure 15. Irina reacts to rejection (*Sluchainaia vstrecha*)

In *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*, the fact of pregnancy is likewise missing. Zheliabuzhskii distances the viewer from Tania's 'predicament' by filtering the physicality of pregnancy

through textuality.⁶⁴ His film lacks a dramatic scene of revelation such as that between Irina and Grishka; instead, Tania informs Mukhtar of the situation *in absentia*, leaving him a written note. Zheliabuzhskii chooses to show us this note being written out in full in close-up, firmly concentrating our attention on the verbal release of information rather than the characters' sensory experiences (Figure 16). One of the few other references to Tania's physiological state also comes in text, in intertitles relating dialogue between Mukhtar and friends, expressing concern that his errant wife is not eating or sleeping properly given her condition. When Tania visits a clinic to request an abortion, she is denied: 'Ваши мотивы неосновательные и мы вам операцию делать не будем.' The charge of *neosnovatel'nost'* refers in the first instance to Tania's lack of social conscience in abandoning her husband and comrades, but it could just as well relate to the film's insubstantial portrayal of pregnancy. As with Irina, we witness Tania's emotional response to the *news* of pregnancy but not her experience of pregnancy itself.

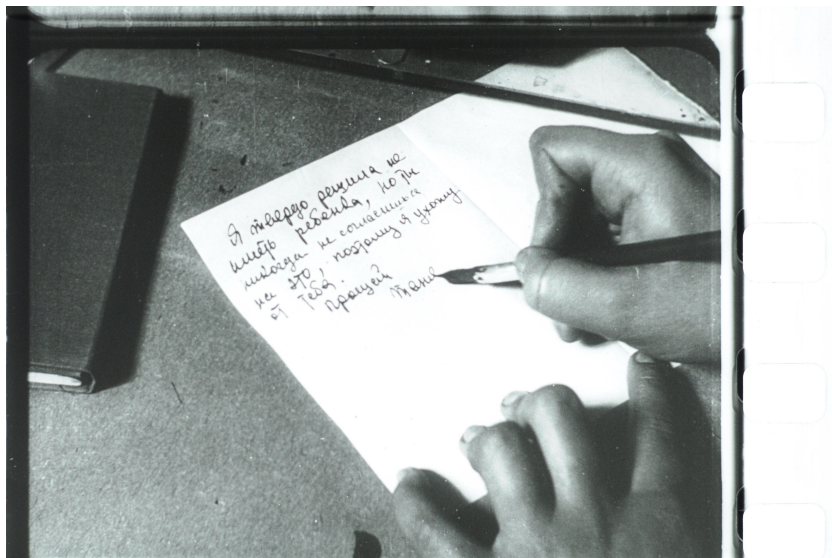


Figure 16. Tania's farewell in writing (*Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*)

Describing NEP-era depictions of maternity such as Sergei Tret'iakov's 1926 play *Khochu rebenka* and Abram Room's 1927 film *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, Hannah Proctor writes that:

⁶⁴ I am grateful to Julian Graffy for the observation that *Lavry* was surely one of the final silent films produced in the Soviet Union; whether Zheliabuzhskii was knowingly playing on the question of text and speech with this technological evolution in mind is unclear.

The female protagonists of these narratives are poised between times; their children remain incorporeal, like communism itself. The physical experience of pregnancy and childbirth are similarly absent, detaching motherhood from the messy present-tense materiality of both the body and the domestic sphere. Although the desire to have a child is presented as a biologically rooted female yearning, pregnancy seems to occupy the mind rather than the womb, functioning as a kind of transcendent link to the future.⁶⁵

Chronological disparities notwithstanding, Proctor makes a valuable point here as regards onscreen maternity of the 1930s. The elision of the ‘messy present-tense materiality’ is best understood as the result of a kind of temporal realignment, one that privileges the always-already-born child over the unborn child. The biopolitical significance of the pregnant body is not in the female-specific experience of carrying to term, but in the universal act of bringing forth new citizens into the population; as such, the gestation period itself is either avoided, as we have seen, or retroactively represented through the already-born child. If NEP-era children were ‘incorporeal, like communism itself’, then by the mid-1930s they were present in abundance, proof of the Stalinist claim that socialism was a *fait accompli* in the Soviet Union. The emotional response of the viewer is not directed towards the body of the glowing mother-to-be, but rather on the child already present, and on the social structures that support women and children in their particular fragilities.

Children thus come to stand for the whole process of fertilisation, pregnancy, birth, and parenthood. Both Graffy and Widdis comment on the role of infantilisation or ‘infantilism’ in *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, a film ‘marked by the ubiquitousness of children and toys and by the childlike qualities of the adults.’⁶⁶ Not for nothing does the action unfold in a toy factory in which the adults are institutionalised like schoolchildren, allowed out to play at the end of each day. The greatest show of wonder at the toys produced involves not children but the workers themselves, in the scene in which Petr Ivanovich convinced Vasilii to allow Irina time off work with a display of fantastical new contraptions, including a remote-controlled zeppelin. Vasilii himself, like Lukich in *Schastlivyi finish*, is a typically paternalistic Stalinist director who calls the local youths his ‘consultants’ and acts as foster

⁶⁵ Hannah Proctor, ‘Women on the Edge of Time: Representations of Revolutionary Motherhood in the NEP-Era Soviet Union’, *Studies in the Maternal*, 7:1 (2015), at: <<http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk>> [accessed 8th October 2015].

⁶⁶ Graffy, p. 306.

father to vulnerable orphans. In the scene in which his kindly wisdom is most highlighted — when Petr Ivanovich comes to him for advice regarding Grishka — Vasilii is holding a baby (not his own) in his arms throughout (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Vasilii as the universal father (*Sluchainaia vstrecha*)

For Graffy this ‘cult of the child’ allows Savchenko more easily to emphasise the totalised harmony that characterises Stalinist sociality: there is no ‘estrangement’ between generations, between work and play, between industry (the factory) and nature (the sun-dappled woods and lake).⁶⁷ For Widdis the omnipresence of toys and games is indicative of the film’s attempts to map out a new model of bodily pleasure within the strictures of Stalinist comedy: ‘the tactile and magical pleasures of toys’ neutralise the threat that adult passions might otherwise pose.⁶⁸ Two notions are implicit in both authors’ readings of the film: first, that the Stalinist idyll functions only when the figure of the child is fully incorporated into its symbolic order; second, that the bodily facts of attraction, sexuality, pregnancy, and birth cannot be allowed to contaminate the *mise en scène*. The maintenance of *obshchestvennost’* thus depends on the sublimation of precisely those gendered and sexualised experiences that the biopolitical bent of Stalinism aimed to regulate. Relevant

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 311.

⁶⁸ Widdis, ‘Child’s Play’ p. 328.

here is Oksana Bulgakova's observation — one in keeping with the readings of Dashkova and Shcherbenok — that the relationships between men and women in films of the era are centred on 'production' more than on 'eroticism'.⁶⁹ The viewer is prompted to understand any sex that might occur as always-already subsumed into a tight network of emotional-social dependencies. Filmmakers may have turned to questions of maternity in an attempt to add emotional or sensual heft to their romantic narratives, but the old charge of *poverkhnostnost'* still applies. When Grishka angrily protests Irina's decision to keep their child, he asks her: 'А зачем тебе ребенок? Хочешь я тебе куклу куплю?' No doubt this line is supposed to underscore his callous nature, but it does in fact point to the structuring of emotional repression — and the concomitant superficiality of social interactions — that dominates the film as a whole.

9. The citizen-spectator

To understand how issues of sexual desire, pregnancy, and parenthood are at least partially resolved in *Lavry* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, we have to look at those moments in which the infants of *fizkul'turnitsy* do in fact appear. Both films feature a climactic race in which the heroine pits herself against local rivals. Both have faced the same dilemma and reacted differently: Tania has tried to run despite her pregnancy, whilst Irina is returning to athletics after retreating into pregnancy and motherhood. Their results, of course, correspond directly to their decisions. Irina wins her race in record time, takes her young daughter in her arms, finally dismisses Grishka (who has come to see what his former wife is capable of), and runs a lap of honour before the jubilant crowd, child and new husband Petr Ivanovich in tow. Tania loses to a co-worker who also happens to be the mother of a young child, and is reduced to watching as her conqueror celebrates with her own husband and toddler, who shouts: 'Папа, смотри! Мама первая!' (Figure 18) What is at stake in these mirrored scenes of athletic victory and dejection, cohesive and broken family units?

⁶⁹ Oksana Bulgakova, 'Sovetskie krasavitsy v stalinskom kino', in *Sovetskoe bogatstvo. Stat'i o kul'ture, literature i kino. K shestidesiatletiiu Khansa Giuntera*, ed. by Marina Balina, Evgenii Dobrenko, and Iurii Murashov (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2002), pp. 391–411 (p. 399).



Figure 18. Victorious family units (*Lavry Miss Ellen Grei - Sluchainaia vstrecha*)

Let us unpack the visual structure of these parallel scenes. In each a distinction is established between two sets of spectator: the crowd and positive individuals, and the negative individuals of Mot'ka and Grishka. The crowds are portrayed as a uniform, animated mass, good-natured in their enthusiasm, celebrating the generalised atmosphere of athletic achievement rather than their particular favourites. The effect is emphasised with shots of uniformed sailors and policemen integrated into the collective (Figure 20). Both directors employ frequent low angle shots that stretch the image of the crowd across the frame, and both favour a fixed shot from ground level that allows for the runners to move through the frame whilst keeping the crowd in focus at all times (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Framing the crowds (*Lavry Miss Ellen Grei - Sluchainaia vstrecha*)



Figure 20. The uniformed masses (*Lavry Miss Ellen Grei - Sluchainaia vstrecha*)

In each instance attention is also drawn to an individual spectator already established as a positive character: Petr Ivanovich in *Sluchainaia vstrecha* and Mukhtar's photographer friend in *Lavry*. These figures are foregrounded against the crowd and given their own reaction shots (Figure 21); these are partisan observers used to tie the general mood of goodwill created by the crowd shots to the emotional narrative of the films as a whole.



Figure 21. Individualised emotional spectators (*Lavry Miss Ellen Grei - Sluchainaia vstrecha*)

Mot'ka and Grishka are unsympathetic spectators. We witness each arriving separately from the other principal characters, inserting themselves into the pre-existing, happy homogeneity of the crowd. Both are anxious, moving awkwardly through the frame;

Grishka is smoking (much to the amusement of one bystander who remembers him as the stern *fizkul'tura* instructor from the toy factory who forbade tobacco). Both men are invested in the performance of a single female athlete, whence their anxiety and their alienation from the crowd around them; both, too, are dissatisfied with the results of their respective races, Mot'ka because his beloved Tania has lost, Grishka because his ex-wife has won without his involvement.

The distinctions drawn between these 'positive' and 'negative' spectators bring to the fore the connections being made between the figure of the athlete, the collective, and the emotional sphere. The crowd in these sequences is a positive manifestation of the idealised Stalinist public. Its relationship to the bodily exertions of individual (female) athletes is universalised: the crowds here would celebrate regardless of who won, since any expression of sporting ability would, by virtue of the construction of public space, be a 'Soviet' one. As for those individualised spectators who are in fact invested in the performance of one particular athlete, this emotional particularism is vindicated: given the unity of family and labour units in these films, the *fizkul'turnitsa* in question was always already a coworker and comrade *before* they became either a romantic partner or a star athlete. (Luckily for Petr Ivanovich, he inherits a child, so he and Irina do not need to have sex.) Watching the race need not have anything to do with either the female athlete's sexual attractiveness or their sporting achievements. In this succession of medium-depth shots, premised on proximity but not intimacy, the spectator's gaze is once again directed towards public female bodily performance and away from any over-identification with the individual body as such.



Figure 22. Irina and Mukhtar, avatars of the community (*Sluchainaia vstrecha* - Lavry Miss Ellen Grei)

Mukhtar-the-husband in *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* in particular is a confusing figure unless the above is taken into account. He does not seem to care too deeply that his pregnant wife has left him, and dedicates considerably more effort to repairing boats than he does to winning back her affections. His actions — or lack of them — are more coherent if we read him as the symbolic counterpoint to Tania's individualism. His narrational role is precisely to embody on the everyday level the emotional *obshchestvennost'* that is replicated *en masse* in the stadium scenes. Mukhtar is the centre of several scenes that provide a contrast to Tania's detachment, where the *odinakovost'* of labour and family units is demonstrated with a degree of self-congratulation. At a *fizkul'tura* parade (put together with footage that is either drawn from or remarkably similar to newsreels from Black Sea Fleet Spartakiadas from the period),⁷⁰ Mukhtar leads the identically-dressed processions bearing a flag, a self-aware avatar of the community (Figure 22). He embodies his own sense of belonging.

These scenes of unity are crucial because the incorruptibility of the collective is precisely what allows its members to compete against one another, indeed to 'defeat' one another without any disturbance in the positive emotional atmosphere. Petr Ivanovich fulfils a comparable role to Mukhtar in *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, although in a less overt fashion. It is he who confronts Grishka after the latter's conflict with Irina (Figure 23), and who seamlessly replaces the villain within the labour-family unit of the commune. When Grishka asks Vasilii about Petr Ivanovich at the final race, the director's reply is simple but loaded: 'Петр Иванович у нас, на месте.' The definitive symbolic erasure of the villain from the collective occurs not when he is thrown out of the stadium, but when Petr Ivanovich takes Grishka's own son from Irina's arms in front of the estranged husband, with the crowd looking on: a neat visual representation of the way in which interpersonal connections are refigured in accordance with collective harmony (Figure 24).

⁷⁰ See Chapter Two, above. Examples of newsreels which may have served as inspiration for this sequence include: *Sovkinozhurnal* 45/308 (1930), RGAKFD I-2146; *Soiuzkinozhurnal* 43/452 (1932), RGAKFD I-2287.



Figure 23. Petr Ivanovich intrudes on Grishka's domestic life (*Sluchainaia vstrecha*)



Figure 24. Petr Ivanovich erases Grishka's fatherhood (*Sluchainaia vstrecha*)

The problem with Tania, conversely, is that she yearns for the iconic form of distinction associated with Ellen Grey, one that would entail an unconditional elevation above the crowd. Looking at the American's portrait, Tania exclaims: 'Я не хуже ее! Мы даже похожи...' Later, refusing to train with her old *fizkul'tura* buddies, she tells herself: 'С этими девчонками мне состязаться нечего: послезавтра я покажу свой класс!' Her individualistic counterpart amongst the spectators is of course Mot'ka, who requires the woman he idolises to outdo all others to satisfy his personal, sexualised desire. Mot'ka is berated by Mukhtar's photographer friend for being so invested in the actions of a single

athlete — and another man's wife at that: 'А ты чего о чужой жене беспокоишься? Болельщик несчастный!' The race winner, who already has a child and has managed to reconcile familial and athletic concerns, is integrated into the emotional unity of the collective by her having committed to her husband and her pregnancy: in a sense, the very fact that the toddler exists justifies its own delight at her victory ('Мама первая!')

In these climactic stadium scenes, spectatorship is being linked to the *emotional obligations* of Stalinist citizenship. Golfo Alexopoulos has drawn attention to the reconceptualisation of citizenship during the mid-1930s.⁷¹ As it was formalised in the 'Stalin Constitution' of November 1936, Soviet citizenship was repurposed as an increasingly 'didactic and disciplinary' category based around explicitly formulated 'social obligations'.⁷² Among these was the requirement that women recommit themselves to a traditional childrearing role:⁷³ the recriminalisation of abortion in the summer of 1936 is a clear example. However, as Alexopoulos notes, the reconfiguration of citizenship around social obligation was not limited to the physiological; it extended to the emotional structures of collective living as well. Work was now explicitly framed as an obligation rather than the formal 'right' as it had been understood in earlier Soviet legalistic discourse, and the same reframing applied to the 'personal capabilities' of each individual. 'Personal capabilities', in Alexopoulos's reading, stood for emotional and social commitment to the collective — in practical terms something very similar to what I have called *obshchestvennost'*: 'Each citizen had to uphold the USSR Constitution, obey the laws, respect the rules of socialist communal life ('социалистическое общежитие'), observe labor discipline, and honestly perform his or her social obligation.'⁷⁴ In Stalin's words, the Constitution created a 'почетная обязанность' and a 'священный долг,' requiring that all citizens be 'active' and, crucially, *happy*.⁷⁵ The act of spectatorship was one way in which citizens were able to fulfil these myriad social-emotional obligations, to be in — and cheer on — the collective.

Cinema had a role to play in the fulfilment of this 'happiness obligation'. In a recent article Anna Toropova offers a psychoanalytically informed reading of Dziga Vertov's *Tri*

⁷¹ Golfo Alexopoulos, 'Soviet Citizenship, More or Less: Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7:3 (2006), 487–528. On the category of citizenship and its relationship to questions of subjectivity see also Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁷² Alexopoulos, pp. 488–490.

⁷³ Simpson, 'Liberation and Containment', p. 1328.

⁷⁴ Alexopoulos, p. 519.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

peoni o Lenine (Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1932) that relates the formal categorisations outlined by Alexopoulos to a broader and more diffuse project of Stalinist biopolitics.⁷⁶ 'The establishment of a popular conception of "happiness" which merged self-realization with restless obligation was in no small part facilitated by Stalinist cinema[']s[...] discursive logic'.⁷⁷ In the case of *Lavry Mios Ellen Grei* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, Irina and Tania's rival repay their debts to the state through the rearing of children. The self-abnegation involved in choosing to fulfil the social obligation of carrying to term is represented negatively, by the absence of pregnant women from the screen. Toropova describes the 'symbiosis of self-realization and bloodshed on the Soviet screen' as indicative of the 'painful pleasure [...] with which happiness became entwined in the Stalin era.'⁷⁸ Are we in fact to read the pregnancies of these two films as 'painful pleasures', whose affirmation of social commitment is tempered by a degree of bodily transformation and tribulation that is too traumatic to be shown onscreen? As Kaganovsky has shown, Stalinist cinema was not afraid to portray self-sacrifice before the state in the form of, for instance, crippling war injuries;⁷⁹ the fact that it could not put the fact of pregnancy onscreen speaks to just how complex the knot of issues surrounding sexuality and the public body was by the mid-1930s.

This reading of the libidinal economy of happiness/abnegation, in which only obeisance on the part of characters permits them the expression of selfless public happiness, goes some way towards unpacking the stadium scenes; it also helps us to understand the darkneses at the heart of each film. In an essay first published in *Ekran i tsveta* in 1997, Sergei Kudriavtsev describes *Sluchainaia vstrecha* as 'a typical lyric comedy [...] [in which] the triumph of socialism and the new way of life is not even possible without the existence of evil everywhere and all around.'⁸⁰ Graffy too points to a 'darkness' at the heart of the film's cult of the child, with the toy factory figured as a prison where the warden has replaced labour with play and punishment with infantilisation.⁸¹ The 'threat' posed to 'carefree existence', the 'evil' or 'darkness' of *Vstrecha* is, I would argue, a reflection of the consequences of failing to meet the affective standards of citizenship; and, given that these are films about sport, this failure is ultimately crystallised in a moment of insufficiently

⁷⁶ Anna Toropova, 'An Inexpiable Debt: Stalinist Cinema, Biopolitics, and the Discourse of Happiness', *Russian Review*, 74 (2015), 665–83.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 666–67.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 668.

⁷⁹ Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*.

⁸⁰ Sergei Kudriavtsev, *Svoe kino* (Moscow: Dubl'-D, 1998), p. 173.

⁸¹ Graffy, p. 311.

‘Soviet’ spectatorship on Grishka’s part. His inability to watch the race as a Soviet citizen is proof enough of his personal flaws. When he is thrown out of the stadium he is pictured humbled and small beneath a muscular statue that seems, symbolically, to be casting him out of the institutional *obshchestvennost’* represented by Soviet *fizkul’tura* as a whole.

It is the ending of *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*, however, that speaks most starkly to the confluence of bodily self-sacrifice, personal abnegation and social cohesion. While his wife has been absent, Mukhtar has been training as a parachutist and has won the right to make the jump over the Sevastopol docks that will mark the climax of the Spartakiada. Meanwhile, Mot’ka, whose motivation at this point is unclear at best, forges a letter from Mukhtar to his errant wife warning her that if she does not attend his skydive, he will not open his parachute out of despair. Horrified, Tania rushes to the harbour where a crowd has gathered, but cannot find Mukhtar before his plane takes off. The jump itself goes off without a hitch, and when Mukhtar and Tania meet afterwards on the waterfront, she has realised in her terror at what might happen that she still cares for her husband. They are reconciled and Tania is welcomed back into the symbolic fold.

The episode is played for laughs, another misadventure stemming from Mot’ka’s buffoonery, but comes across more as an unsettling summation of the film’s biopolitical concerns over bodies and what happens to them publicly. In terms of the ‘священный долг’ of citizenship, suicide represents perhaps the ultimate capitulation, worse still than the abortions proposed by Tania and Grishka.⁸² Mukhtar’s not opening his parachute would turn this community’s most symbolically resonant and eagerly anticipated moment of spectatorship into a violent farce. Tania’s rehabilitation into the *odinakovost’* of family and workforce is a result of the revulsion that this possibility provokes. At the crucial moment, when Mukhtar jumps from the plane, she refuses to be a spectator. She covers her eyes (Figure 25). This is her moment of greater self-abnegation because it sees her deny herself the experience of being part of a joyful spectating crowd. Tania’s redemption derives from her feeling the terrifying inverse of the child’s joy that its mother has won a race: when she turns away, she experiences for a second the sensation of her husband becoming the most abject corpse of all. From this moment of terror onwards Tania can begin to feel happiness again, as she has always been obliged to do.

⁸² On the ideological reading of suicide under Stalinism see: Thomas E. Ewing, ‘Personal Acts with Public Meaning: Suicides by Soviet Women Teachers in the Early Stalin Era’, *Gender and History*, 14:1 (2002), 117–37; Kenneth M. Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective: Suicide and the Promise of Soviet Socialism, 1921–1929* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

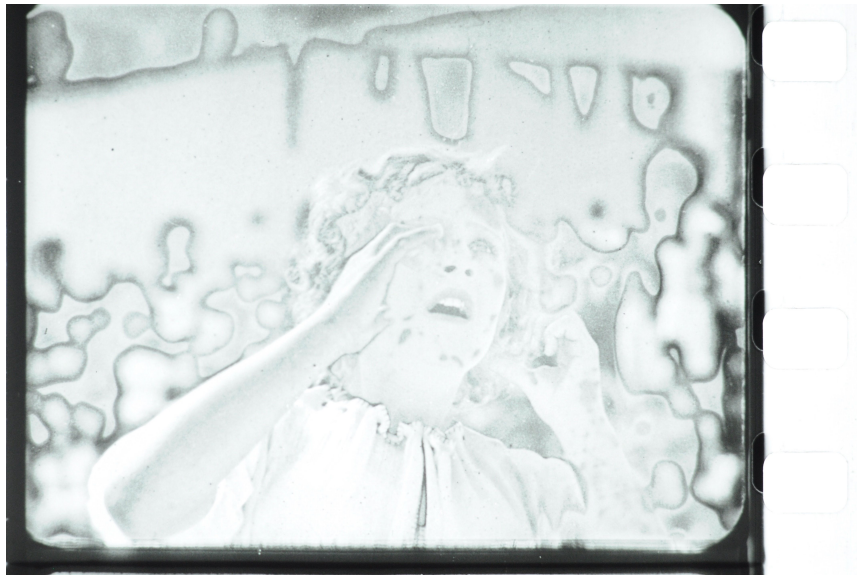


Figure 25. Tania can't bear to look (*Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*)

10. Death and the maidens

In these films that dramatise the inner life of the Runner, the dynamic between private body and public life, subjectivity and *obshchestvennost'* is realised more fully than in any earlier *fizkul'tura* film because 'feeling' is fully realised as a functional component of characterisation. More than that, it is revealed to be part of the emerging system of social and affective obligations that constitute Stalinist biopolitics. Critics may not have cared for them, but *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* were not censored like Room's *Strogi iunosha* despite their thematic and stylistic similarities. In the previous chapter we saw how attempts to combine aestheticisation of the body with the creation of coherently Soviet subjectivities fell short in painting and film; bodies were shown to be 'empty' beneath their impressively toned exteriors. As it turned out, one way to deal with the threat of empty bodies was to put babies inside them, to get biopolitical, to get to grips with the strictly gendered bodily experiences that define men and women in relation to the social world: to give flesh to the notion of a 'био-социальная ценность'.

Films such as this were, though, intended as comedies. If, as we have seen, the 'lyrical' style of filmmaking led to criticisms of formal *poverkhnostnost'*, then the weighting of

narratives with concerns like abortion could also prove detrimental to directors' attempts to construct emotionally relatable heroes. In a review published in *Kino*, Boris Alpers lamented the fact that Zheliabuzhskii had failed to reconcile himself to the kinds of small details that sustain comedic narrative:

нам не хватает умения играть с деталями, едва ощутимыми сюжетными ходами [...] авторы прежде всего нагружают эту изящную спортсменку рядом громоздких «проблем». Девушка эта не только обязана раскрыть на своей судьбе разницу между советским и буржуазным спортом, но и призвана разрешить проблему материнства, аборта, личной жизни и общественного долга и т. д.⁸³

In the middle of all this existential confusion, Alpers claimed, 'Tania' disappears. And as we have already noted, Irina in *Sluchainaia vstrecha* is a supremely simplistic character who retreats from the narrative as soon as she is faced with a crisis. What would a physically strong and emotionally aware hero onscreen really look and sound like? Why was bringing these types to life within positive depictions of communal life such a cinematic chimera?

To answer this we may have to look at the relationship between happiness and violence, or even death. It is here that we can trace the particularities of Stalinist *biopolitics*, and unpack visual representations of bodily exertion and social joy. For a regime so persistently associated with the most egregious and violent interventions on a population level, the exact relationship of Stalinism to biopolitical theory has gone curiously under-examined. This is a point made by Sergei Prozorov, who across several articles has attempted to define the terms of the argument.⁸⁴ His major contention is that Stalinist biopolitics is simultaneously extremely positive or productive while also functioning as 'an equally extreme thanatopolitics'.⁸⁵ In contrast with the 'ideocratic' Soviet thinking of the 1920s, Stalinism is 'biocratic': it takes as its 'central question [...] the construction of socialism as a lived reality'.⁸⁶ It does not correct what is, but literally 'makes be'.

⁸³ B. Alpers, 'Lavry Miss Ellen Grei', *Kino*, 36 (1935), 3.

⁸⁴ Sergei Prozorov, 'Living Ideas and Dead Bodies: The Biopolitics of Stalinism', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 38:3 (2013), 208–27; Sergei Prozorov, 'Foucault and Soviet Biopolitics', *History of the Human Sciences*, 27:5 (2014), 6–25.

⁸⁵ Prozorov, 'Living Ideas', p. 209.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

The relationship between this line of argument and the infantile world of, say, *Sluchainaia vstrecha* is not as tenuous as it might seem. The visual representation of aesthetically pleasing, athletically able, and ideologically sound bodies was an issue of great significance in interwar Soviet culture and one that was never resolved in any kind of sustained manner. By the height of mid-1930s Stalinism, as my analysis of films such as *Schastlivyi finish*, *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*, and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* has shown, the scope of different concerns that had to be reconciled in such representation was almost unworkable. Socialist realist art was, of course, supposed to contribute towards the productive side of the biopolitical project: that is, the ‘construction of socialism as a lived reality.’ But the destructive aspect of that same biopolitical project was such that any realised model of Soviethood would contain the necessity of its own negation. As Prozorov explains, the innovation of Stalinism lay in

the biopolitical redeployment of the revolutionary idea of communism as the transcendence of the existent order of things in the immanentist terms of a positive order of socialism that is to be constructed [...] The ultimate paradox of socialist biopolitics is that the combination of the immanentism inherent in any biopolitical project and the orientation toward transcendence that defines the communist revolution necessarily leads to the immanent negation of the very reality that is to be made socialist [...] the paradox of Stalinist biopolitics consists in the fact that its complete realisation would coincide with the complete annihilation of the lived reality to which it applies itself.⁸⁷

Ultimately, the only thing that is guaranteed to the Stalinist body is its own death. It is nonetheless compelled to *be alive*, to exist as positive proof of the reality of socialism. Under these conditions, attempts to portray the body are likely to fall back on one or another characteristic — beauty, sexual desire, the ability to bear children — and lose sight of both the small details that contribute to the construction of believable characters and/or the broader themes and social imperatives that Soviet culture required. The experience of watching *Lavry* or *Vstrecha* is one of a kind of incomplete, dissatisfying spectatorship; or, an inability to project oneself into the mutually satisfying emotional spectatorship conjured up onscreen. The elision of potential fantasmatic sex scenes (in Shcherbenok’s words) into pregnancies which themselves remained unstaged leaves the viewer with a sense of bodily

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 212, 219.

proximity but not intimacy. The psychoanalytically-informed reading of Stalinist film proffered by Kaganovsky is left wanting when applied to these strange, unfunny unromantic romantic comedies. Kaganovsky describes situations in which the male cinematic hero is rendered abject in order that he — and the viewer — might learn to ‘enjoy the symptom’ of their own symbolic castration.⁸⁸ *Lavry* and *Vstrecha*, conversely, present us with images of women who occupy *exalted* positions, who represent in their fertility and athleticism an holistic image of selfhood. And yet our witnessing of this wholesomeness is forestalled, hovering between outright bodily indulgence and sociological detachment, presenting the richness of life in a way that is singularly lifeless.

Is there a way of overcoming this bottleneck that does not end up in the replication of ‘thanatopolitics’, the continual recapitulation of negation or death? I argue that the answer to this question lies in the depiction of violence and mass disturbance. If Stalinist art could find a way to show the wounding or damaging of bodies and combine this with the kind of positive communal agitation that we see in the spectators of the running films’ stadium scenes — if it could somehow create an image of happy bodily violence — then it might be possible for negation and *obshchestvennost’* to coexist, tentatively, within the cultural sphere. This is the subject of my final chapter.

⁸⁸ Kaganovsky, p. 110.

The Footballer

Если надо гол забьем,
Если надо влезем в драку,
Если надо песнь споем
Про команду нашу.

— Russian fan chant

1. Necessary damage

In the above chapters I have examined representations of the body across a range of media, and shown how each new image raises issues that it ultimately cannot address. Non-fiction media helped us to appreciate the ways in which bodies are required to be public, and that spectatorship must also figure as part of the act of representation (Chapter One); from *fizkul'tura* paintings and *Strogi iunosh*a we saw how aesthetic valence should not be prioritised at the expense of emotional investment and the correct alignment of values and instrumentality (Chapter Two); and 'running films' like *Schastlivyi finish*, *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei*, and *Sluchainaia vstrecha* demonstrated that individuals should understand the 'био-социальная ценность' of their publicly-displayed bodies just as spectators' engagement with these bodies should derive from collective experiential categories (Chapter Three). In all this, the core concern is the creation and maintenance of *obshchestvennost'*, that nebulous ideological imperative of sociality, mutuality, communality. As indicated in my Introduction, the bodies I have discussed represent one aspect of an extremely broad issue: the relationship of the Soviet body to the Soviet mind/consciousness/personality, and how this relationship influenced (or jeopardised) the process of Soviet subjectification.

In this final chapter, I bring together some of the key concepts that have structured my discussion thus far — spectatorship, emotionality, *obshchestvennost'* — and consider in depth

issues that were raised in my reading of 1930s ‘running films’. Could the emotional obligation underwriting claims to citizenship within the Stalinist biopolitical project be meaningfully addressed through depictions of the body, and how might this be reconciled with the threat of violence represented by Mukhtar’s fake suicide note? To answer these questions we may need to understand ‘violence’ (broadly conceived) as constituent of, rather than a threat to *obshchestvennost’*. If, as I have demonstrated throughout, representations of pristine, beautiful, wholesome, or orderly bodies always fell short of the demands posed to Soviet artists, might the imperfect, damaged, or disorderly body not ultimately prove for them a more powerful agent of social cohesion? This reading bears comparison with Lilya Kaganovsky’s work on the formation of masculinity in Stalinist cinema, and I cite her at length later in this chapter.¹ However, Kaganovsky deals largely with male bodies damaged in war or construction, rather than in playing a game. Responding to these questions thus requires us to consider in some detail the function and conceptualisation of violence in pre-war Stalinist culture and the dynamic between personal and social (dis)order outside of typical frames of reference.

Here I turn to football in interwar Soviet culture. My sources include feature films with footballing heroes, discussions of the game in the specialist and general press, and examples of the official or expert discourse on football as a part of Soviet *fizkul’tura*. By far the most popular form of *fizkul’tura*, I will show how football was from its beginnings associated with social and personal disorder, unchecked emotion, and the rejection of hegemonic cultural formations: it was an ineradicable aspect of Soviet social life that required careful manipulation if it was to put to good use. In the cultural sphere at least, football could be reimagined in such a way that its disorderly or violent potential produced moments of collective catharsis, reinforcing rather than threatening the body politic. My analysis thus far has demonstrated many continuities — in matters of sexuality and gender politics, bodily aesthetics, and *fizkul’tura* administration — that problematise the notion of a clean break between NEP-era and Stalinist culture. The instrumentalisation of violence and disorder discussed in this chapter speaks to another continuity: that between concerns in the 1920s over social pathology and hooliganism, and the discourse on Stalinist selfhood commonly understood, after Katerina Clark, in terms of ‘spontaneity’ or ‘elementality’

¹ Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity Under Stalin* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

(*stikhiia*) and ‘consciousness’ (*soznanie*).² In the recapitulation of social psychological tropes we also see the implicit return of surveillance as an operative category of looking. But where the figure of surveillance had represented for the likes of Aron Zalkind a *technical* means of rationalising the mind-body dynamic,³ by the late 1930s it had become part of an expanding repertoire of *emotional* techniques of social cohesion.

The iconic figure of this chapter, then, is **The Footballer**. An individual defined by his role within a collective unit, the Footballer treads a fine line between heroism and villainy, acting in an environment in which he can at any moment suffer injury or inflict it upon others. His sport has great tactical and technical potential but can easily descend into chaos. A defining feature of this physical and psychological balancing act is that it is played out in front of a mass of spectators, who are provoked by the game itself into a state of heightened emotional investment; whether the intensity of the occasion is socially productive or destructive depends, as always, on the nature of the bond between athlete and onlooker. The Footballer and his fans are on the line.

2. An abundant soil for all kinds of machinations

Football, perhaps more than any other form of sport, spoke to problems that had animated theorists and practitioners since the first years of the revolution. As I indicated in my Introduction, fierce debate raged in the early NEP years as to the management and development of *fizkul'tura*, as factions within the new Soviet state fought for predominance. The foreclosure of this experimental period was, however, comparably swift and comprehensive in comparison with other cultural fields. As early as July 1925 the Central Committee issued a decree on the centralisation and rapid expansion of *fizkul'tura* in order to foster ‘a high-performance, competitive approach that could inspire proper values.’⁴ The institutionalisation of *fizkul'tura* was thus required to accommodate both competition in the traditional sense, as well as the unyielding popular desire to *spectate* as well as to participate.

² See her reading of the master narratives of socialist realist fiction: Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).

³ A. Zalkind, ‘Mozg i byt (o ratsionalizatsii byta umstvennogo rabotnika)’, *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, 19 (1928), 52-57; ‘Mozg i byt (o ratsionalizatsii byta umstvennogo rabotnika) (okonch.)’, *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, 20 (1928), 42-51.

⁴ Cited in Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 34.

This context suggests that even before the First Five-Year Plan or the Cultural Revolution *fizkul'tura* occupied a position of uneasy compromise: between mass participation and the construction of a Soviet model of spectatorship; between inspirational, exemplary performers and unexceptional crowds; both a threat and potential ally in the drive for enlightened citizens. Its hybrid character was demonstrated by the way *fizkul'tura* was positioned in relation to other aspects of the Soviet cultural project. The most high-profile example was the First All-Union Spartakiada, held in Moscow in 1928. The Dinamo stadium, at the time the biggest sporting venue in the country by far, was constructed specially for the event, a clear sign of the significance afforded to mass public spectatorship. Yet as we saw in Chapter Two, the Spartakiada combined this mass spectacle with parades, lectures, and radio broadcasts, and an exhibition on the theme 'Ten Years of *Fizkul'tura* Achievements', featuring an anthropological section and performances by a '*fizkul'tura* orchestra'. Regardless of its scale or scope, sporting action itself was insufficient. This ongoing balancing act around *fizkul'tura* made it a cultural field in which the lines between social cohesion and dissolution were often blurred.

Football occupied a particularly problematic place within this hybrid world. It is not an exaggeration to state that the sociological and cultural genealogy of football in the early Soviet Union placed it in outright opposition to the notion of a didactic, utilitarian manipulation from above. By far the most popular sport, it was also the one most closely associated with working-class support. Throughout the interwar period, football was understood as both a breeding ground for, and an offshoot of autonomistic socio-cultural movements, spontaneous organisation and lawlessness, and public and personal antisociality; it was also linked to the worst excesses of NEP-era speculation and commodification. How did a sport that brought so many Soviet citizens together come to represent such a perceived threat to *obshchestvennost'*? In answering this question I draw extensively on the work of the historian Robert Edelman, who has synthesised much of the pre-existing English and Russian-language scholarship on Soviet sport in his social histories of football, and the team Spartak Moscow in particular.⁵

The organisational history of football as a popular sport is one of parallel development, if not direct opposition to official structures. Initially introduced into urban areas in the

⁵ Edelman, *Serious Fun*; Robert Edelman, 'A Small Way of Saying "No": Moscow Working Men, Spartak Soccer, and the Communist Party, 1900-1945', *The American Historical Review*, 107:5 (2002), 1441-1474; Robert Edelman, *Spartak Moscow: A History of the People's Team in the Workers' State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

late nineteenth century by British, German, and French nationals, the first stadia used for the game were small and privately owned, often attached to factories or offices where foreign specialists were employed, with crowds numbering only in the small hundreds.⁶ However, by the outbreak of the First World War workers had taken to playing their own games of football on the streets of Moscow, Petersburg, and other urban centres, transforming the self-consciously gentlemanly sport of their social superiors into something spontaneous and self-generative: 'wild' (*dikiĭ*) football.⁷ Intra-city leagues were established, with matches played out on urban hinterland, the boundaries between 'street' and 'sport' made porous. In a series of unpublished articles written in the mid-1930s and intended to form a short history of Soviet sporting societies, the journalist Vladimir Alkalaev described how these 'wild' leagues sprouted up along railway lines and outside factory gates.

Так называемые «дикие кружки», которые стихийно, как грибы после дождя, возникали летом и распадались осенью. Эти кружки [...] организовывались в дачных местностях из дачной молодежи и рабочих [...] Вообще же роль диких кружков был более значительной, чем можно было бы думать и многие из теперешних работников физкультуры и мастеров получили свою первоначальную подготовку и спортивную закалку именно в этих диких кружках.⁸

In her discussion of hooliganism amongst revolutionary youth, Anne Gorsuch notes that 'the streets' had since the beginning of the century posed a particular problem to authorities intent on imposing 'proper values'; they were an *unmonitored* and *unstructured* (we might say 'unsurveilled') environment in which the 'crudeness' of the unreformed working-class persisted without supervision.⁹ In the Presnia district of western Moscow where Spartak was born, violent crime and racketeering were indeed common;¹⁰ in his memoirs, one of the four founding brothers of Spartak, Petr Starostin describes Presnia as a criminal and dangerous district.¹¹ Presnia was also known for the 'recreational' mass fist fights arranged by workers every winter, ritualistic occasions that functioned

⁶ Some striking archival photographs of the early days of Russian sport, including football, are in Tat'iana Andreeva and Marina Guseva, *Sport nashikh dedov. Stranitsy istorii rossiiskogo sporta v fotografiakh kontsa XIX-nachala XX veka* (St Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 2002).

⁷ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, pp. 16-18.

⁸ V. Alkalaev, 'Sportivnye obshchestva i kluby' (1936). GARF, f. 7576. op. 24. ed. khr. 7. l. 1-51 (l. 10).

⁹ Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 139-147.

¹⁰ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, pp. 26-32.

¹¹ Edelman, 'A Small Way', p. 1449.

simultaneously as entertainment, seasonal celebration, and as an arena for the tending of social grievances accumulated throughout the year.¹²

Football's autonomism was maintained throughout the First World War and the Civil War. With the fledgling Soviet state under existential threat, factories and co-operatives continued to organise their workers into teams and get on with the business of playing. In 1918, 19 teams were able to compete in the Moscow city championship, and an exhibition match against a Petrograd side was organised, advertised, and played despite the obvious logistical difficulties involved.¹³ In the immediate post-war period workers began to take over the pre-revolutionary sporting infrastructure abandoned by the bourgeoisie. Under the NEP — with living standards improving, the return of 'leisure' as a viable aspect of everyday life, and the proliferation of small business and advertising — football became a mass phenomenon. The informal groupings of *dikii* football were consolidated into recognisable teams with distinct identities and fan bases. That the strongest teams were effectively professional outfits, their players remunerated with 'gifts', was an open secret. Mikhail Sushkov, who played for several Moscow teams in the 1920s, captured the almost-nefarious atmosphere around football at the time when he described it as 'an abundant soil for all kinds of machinations.'¹⁴ By 1928 the average attendance at matches in Moscow and Leningrad was 19,000, dwarfing that for other sports; the Dinamo stadium built for that year's Spartakiada staged athletics, cycling, and parades but was only full when football was being played.¹⁵ The construction by the end of the decade of stadia seating 20,000 or more in Leningrad, Kiev, Tbilisi, Baku, and elsewhere was at least in part a response to the need to accommodate ever-larger crowds of football fans.¹⁶

That all of the above happened largely without direct state intervention is telling: certainly no other cultural form could regularly attract such large numbers of willing spectators or participants without some degree of interpellation from the party apparatus.

¹² On these fights see Daniel Brower, 'Labor Violence in Russia in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Slavic Review*, 41:3 (1982), 417-431 (pp. 425-427).

¹³ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 43-45; *Serious Fun*, p. 44.

¹⁴ Cited in Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, p. 54.

¹⁵ Some estimates put the attendance at the final of the football tournament at 50,000: see Edelman, *Serious Fun*, pp. 40-47.

¹⁶ As Edelman notes (*ibid.*, pp. 38-39), the construction of the Dinamo and other large stadia in the Soviet Union should be understood in terms of a global trend in the 1920s towards the mass spectacularisation of sports: for instance, 1928 also saw the opening of the Yankee Stadium in New York (capacity 63,000) and Wembley Stadium in London (capacity 100,000). On the question of mass spectatorship and public space in interwar France, see Joan Tumblety: 'Rethinking the Fascist Aesthetic: Mass Gymnastics, Political Spectacle and the Stadium in 1930s France', *European History Quarterly*, 43:4 (2013), 707-30.

By the time of the inauguration of a centralised national league in 1936, football had evolved with a unique degree of autonomy into a mass spectacle in which a large number of Soviet citizens were strongly emotionally invested; it had done so largely thanks to the enthusiasm of the working-class fans and players who had taken to the game in the unmonitored, unstructured zone of the streets. The 1925 decree of the Central Committee had stated that *fizkul'tura* was to 'inspire proper values'. Such a straightforwardly instrumentalist understanding could not easily be reconciled with what football had become. The diffuse *dikost'* attributed to street culture was concentrated inside the stadium: the volume and rowdiness of the crowd made this an equally difficult space to monitor and control. This was something acknowledged early on by the All-Union Council for Physical Culture chair Boris Kal'pus. In a 1924 article he recounted how the party administration in one *guberniia* had realised how popular football was, and had altered the rules in an attempt to make the game more conducive to 'proper values'. Matches were won not by scoring goals, but according to the 'корректность, ловкость, красота игры и сыгранность команд.' The result? In Kal'pus's words: 'получился полный абсурд.'¹⁷

Official concerns about footballing *dikost'* were not wholly unfounded. Violence and disorder at football matches was indeed a common occurrence in the increasingly large and difficult to police crowds of the 1930s. Recorded examples range from the relatively benign — groups of twenty or thirty teenagers would rush the ticket barriers hoping to watch games without buying a ticket¹⁸ — to the outright aggressive. Followers of Spartak, many of whom would have been able to remember the Presnia neighbourhood of the 1910s and 1920s, seem to have been particularly given to a 'working-class tradition of fanship [that] was often violent and little concerned with "sportsmanship"'.¹⁹ After just two months of the inaugural season of the national league in 1936, the Football Section's disciplinary committee had dealt with 43 incidents of 'hooliganism' at matches (drunkenness, fighting, verbal abuse), and invasions of the pitch by angry fans following poor results were reported in almost all large towns.²⁰ Violence on the pitch was also not unusual, from mass brawls in Moscow derbies to players kicking each other in the head in Simferopol and

¹⁷ B. Kal'pus, 'Sport i fizicheskaia kul'tura', *Krasnyi sport*, 1 (1924), 7-11 (p. 10).

¹⁸ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Edelman, 'A Small Way', pp. 1447, 1455.

²⁰ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, p. 69.

assaulting the referee in Leningrad.²¹ There was particular animosity, as we shall see, between fans of Spartak and those of their Moscow counterparts Dinamo.

By the mid-1930s, the disorderly atmosphere of football was a source of constant aggravation for *fizkul'tura* officials. In 1936, on his accession as chairman of VSFK and the All-Union Committee for Physical and Sports Affairs (VSKFSD), Ivan Kharchenko published a short book in which made special note of football's propensity for a 'целый ряд нетерпимых безобразий'. The sport's rapid rise in popularity correlated with an increase in all manner of disorder: 'Грубость, недисциплинированность, а порой даже хулиганство, кое-где стали массовым явлением.'²² The solution to this problem was clear, and put in terms that recalled the decree eleven years previously on 'proper values': 'надо ликвидировать среди игроков пьянство, неопрятность, грубость, ругань, некорректность...'²³ Kharchenko's displeasure echoes one of his predecessors on the VSFK, Nikolai Antipov, who in 1930 had argued that football's popularity had necessarily made it a source or site of aggression: 'Поскольку «болельщиков» бывает достаточное много с обеих сторон, то, если крики не помогают, пускаются в ход иногда кулаки.'²⁴

A cartoon published the same year in *Za novyi byt* shows Antipov's *kulaki* in action, and does a good job of summarising official concerns over the game (Figure 1).²⁵

²¹ Ibid., p. 53.

²² I. Kharchenko, *Sovetskii sport na pod"eme* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1936), p. 18.

²³ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁴ N. K. Antipov, *Sostoianie i zadachi fizkul'turnogo dvizheniia* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1930), pp. 10-11.

²⁵ F. Zavalov, 'Tovarishcheskoe "istiazanie"', *Za novyi byt*, 11-12 (1930), 9.



Figure 1. 'Comradely "confrontations"'. *Za novyi byt*, 11-12 (1930)

We also get a sense of the prevailing mood around football in match reports from the specialist *fizkul'tura* press, in how the action was described, and which qualities among players were lauded or criticised. What would the positive, 'Soviet' form of football look like? Two brief observations suffice here. First, an inordinate amount of attention was afforded to referees and to the concept of authority on the field of play. As early as 1924 concerns were raised as to whether Soviet referees were sufficiently well-trained to manage the violent passions associated with football. In a series of articles published in *Krasnyi sport* ahead of the autumn season, V. Gridin and Georges Duperron (a Russian-born French merchant who helped popularise the sport in Petrograd) fretted over what was to come. Gridin thought Soviet referees were insufficiently impartial, and that this was contributing to fights and drunkenness in the stands.²⁶ In the next issue, Gridin explicitly took referees to task, reminding them that football was an inherently disorderly game and

²⁶ V. Gridin, 'Podgotovka k futbol'nomu sezonu', *Krasnyi sport*, 7 (1924), 6–8 (p. 8).

that it would collapse into *grubost* without their close attention: 'При слабом судье футбол превращается в скандал [...] дает возможность сравнивать футбол с боем быков.'²⁷

Duperron agreed that the odds were stacked against referees from the off: 'Все они приходят на игру [...] уже в нервном настроении.'²⁸ Twelve years later, Kharchenko was repeating much the same line. Referees were too weak-willed for a game as intense as football, he wrote. 'Вегетарианским нравам в среде футбольных судей необходимо положить конец.'²⁹

The second notable trend in the sports press was to fixate on those elusive positive qualities that might come to define properly 'Soviet' football. These were neatly summed up by Nikolai Starostin, another of the founding brothers of Spartak Moscow (on whom more below) in an article assessing the first season of the national league: 'стиль советского футбола характеризуется неудержимым напором [...] Необходимо больше и глубже изучить теорию, улучшить технику и — что очень важно — приобрести настоящую культуру.'³⁰ There was a moralistic edge to the selective reporting in the sports press on the presence or absence of 'настоящая культура' at games: one correspondent at a match between Spartak and Dinamo attempted to posit the Soviet fan as a neutral onlooker who would be appalled at any misconduct. 'Московский зритель справедлив. Он хочет видеть настоящее соревнование. От чемпиона Союза — «Динамо» — он требует хорошей игры, а, главное, этики.'³¹ In a VSKFSD publication two years later, a (conveniently) anonymous *fizkul'turnik* describes a noteworthy comrade thus: 'Василий не только отличный футболист, но и хороший товарищ. Он скромнен, аккуратен... играет не только тактически правильно и технически хорошо, но и, что особенно важно, абсолютно корректно.'³²

Even the most optimistically-minded reports and interviews never failed, though, to reiterate the need for constant vigilance, for constant improvement in the behaviour of fans and players. Football in the 1930s was presumed guilty until proven innocent, often with good reason. Actually-existing football was fundamentally *compromised*, somehow inherently opposed to the notion of a didactic or utilitarian manipulation from the realm of

²⁷ V. Gridin, 'O sud'iakh i sudeistve po futbolu', *Krasnyi sport*, 8 (1924), 8–11 (pp. 8, 10).

²⁸ G. A. Diuperron, 'O sudeistve', *Krasnyi sport*, 9–10 (1924), 11–12 (p. 11).

²⁹ Kharchenko, p. 20.

³⁰ Nikolai Starostin, 'Futbol'nyi god', *Vecherniaia Moskva* (1st November 1936), p. 3.

³¹ 'Futbolist', 'Vtoraia nich'ia "Dinamo"', *Vecherniaia Moskva* (7th October 1936), p. 3.

³² V. Durov and N. Krainii, *Znamenostsy sovetskogo sporta* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1938), p.

‘official’ culture. Considered in terms of the concepts that have structured my thesis overall — spectatorship, emotionality, *obshchestvennost’* — football clearly had the potential to do huge damage; the scale of its popularity and its history of spontaneity in both organisation and disorder seemed almost designed to undermine the kinds of positive models of spectatorship and emotional connection that I have outlined elsewhere.

Indeed, the particular dynamic created between football players and their spectators was often posited as inherently unhealthy, disordered, even psychotic. The *kulaki* that Antipov laments are the result of the intense dynamic he posits between onlooker and action; for Duperron, the football crowd is defined by its atomised and irrational emotional outbursts (‘у нас же крик подымается обычно без всякого толка и лишь на основании личных симпатий и антипатий’);³³ Gridin underlines the dialectic of disorder that runs between stands and pitch in his description of the task facing the referee: ‘нужно помнить, что судья держит своим свистком в руках не только игроков, но и зрителей. И здесь надо быть немножко психологом.’³⁴ Pitch invasions, where the aggravation of the crowd was transferred onto the field of play, were symbolic of the supposedly self-sustaining cycle of violence specific to football. Edelman cites a 1935 issue of *Krasnyi sport* that attributes the ‘low cultural level’ of matches to ‘the closed atmosphere of the sporting crowd.’³⁵ As the stadium could become an arena for the enactment of violence, so the bodies of individual players and fans could become microcosmic sites of disorder.

These concerns were captured in the ‘Football’ entry in the first edition of the *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, published in 1935:

Большая эмоциональная насыщенность игры неизбежно связана с известной страстностью, нередко переходящей в азартность, заражающей и зрителей, требует особого внимания к воспитательной работе [...] травматические повреждения при футболе [...] чаще всего связаны с недостатком техники, с подменой ее грубой силой и с общей недисциплинированностью игроков.³⁶

With these misgivings out of the way, however, the encyclopaedia can move on to the positive qualities (or ‘proper values’) that football, carefully administered (played in short

³³ Diuperron, p. 12.

³⁴ Gridin, ‘O sud’iakh’, p. 9.

³⁵ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, p. 54.

³⁶ N. Bunkin, ‘Futbol’, *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, first edn., in 65 volumes (vol. 59: Frantsoz-Khokusai, 1935) (Moscow: “Sovetskaia entsiklopediia”, 1926-1941), pp. 352-354 (p. 352).

bursts only, on no account should women be permitted, doctors must be on hand at all times) might demand of and instil in participants: ‘чувство коллективности, взаимное понимание игроков [...] инициатива, хладнокровие, решительность [...] смелость.’³⁷ In its call for expert supervision and strict gender segregation, its concerns over class solidarity, and its invocation of the ‘proper values’ that could be derived from sport, the entry bears the trace of those 1920s *fizkul’tura* thinkers searching for a true Soviet sporting model. Conversely, the warnings over *azartnost’* and *strastnost’* speak to the lived experience of football and football spectatorship in the years since.³⁸ What we have is thus a succinct summary of the seemingly impossible position occupied by the sport by the time of the Second World War.

3. Shoot Stalin from the pitch, hang Trotskii from the goalposts

Describing the ‘ephemeral and complex’ social relations of the football stadium, Edelman argues that, if ‘not the sites of pure Bakhtinian carnival, the Soviet stadium was also not the Circus Maximus.’³⁹ As a coda to the above discussion of football’s socio-cultural history, and as an illustration of the compromise Edelman posits — between joyous collective participation and sadistic observation — we can turn to a bizarre series of events in the life of Nikolai Starostin, founding member of Spartak Moscow, football superstar, and prisoner of the gulag.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 353.

³⁸ One way of assessing just how threatening football was in 1935 is to compare its entry in the Encyclopaedia to that of a violent contact sport/martial art like boxing. The entry for boxing, published eight years previously in 1927, is remarkably similar to that for football. Again, there are warnings over *azart*; again, the importance of ‘врачебный контроль’ is stressed; again, the attendant positive qualities include *smelost’*, *reshitel’nost’*, *tochnost’*: N. Bunkin, ‘Boks’, *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, first edn., in 65 volumes (vol. 6: Bessarabiia-Bol’m, 1927) (Moscow: “Sovetskaia entsiklopediia”, 1926-1941), p. 698. A social and cultural history of Soviet boxing has yet to be undertaken in English, and would represent a difficult undertaking: official literature is monotonous and uninformative, determined to emphasise party control over a form of sport both brutal and, like football, with close ties to spontaneous, underground organisation on the part of the urban working-class. Boxing was in fact banned outright in several Soviet republics in the early 1920s. Aleksandr Deineka and Sergei Eisenstein, among other, were keen amateur boxers, with the latter incorporating a fully equipped boxing ring into his stage design for a production of Jack London’s *The Mexican* in 1920.

³⁹ Edelman, ‘A Small Way’, p. 1457.

A child of the Presnia neighbourhood, he was raised with his three younger brothers (Petr, Andrei, Aleksandr) and two sisters (Vera and Klavdiia). After a successful career as a player in NEP-era teams, Starostin and his friend, Komsomol chairman Aleksandr Kosarev, were instrumental in the foundation of Spartak Moscow in 1935. Unlike the most prominent Moscow teams, Dinamo and TsDKA — which were founded, run, and staffed by members of the NKVD and the Red Army respectively — Spartak was from the outset intended as a civilian club, whose members were nominally drawn from co-operatives involved in food production, leather-tanning, and textiles. This distinction from the organs of state force, combined with the Presnia's long tradition of football fandom, some astute coaching, financial support, and the Starostins' talent as players soon led to Spartak becoming the most popular team in the capital.⁴⁰ Nikolai went on to star for the Soviet national team, and became arguably the most famous sportsperson in the Union. The history of Spartak and the Starostins has been subject to a great deal of myth-making in both Soviet and post-Soviet times. They have been cast, as the subtitle of Edelman's history of the club has it, as 'the people's team in the worker's state', a quasi-oppositional force that pitted 'authentic' popular enthusiasm against the instrumentalist arm of the state, represented above all by Dinamo: the carnival to state-sponsored circuses. Iurii Oleshchuk, an anthropologist who began attending Spartak games in the 1930s, labelled them the 'родная команда простолудей'.⁴¹ It is not my intention to interrogate this history here, but rather to use the neat symbolic distinction between Spartak and the organs of state to draw out something of football's uneasy or compromised position in relation to Stalinist governmentality.

Ahead of the 1936 iteration of Physical Culture Day, Kosarev proposed that, alongside the usual *fizkul'tura* parades across Red Square, the onlooking party dignitaries — including Stalin, who had never indicated any interest in the sport — should be treated to a demonstration of football.⁴² A full-size 'pitch' of green felt was stitched together by Spartak volunteers and laid across the cobblestones. Fearful that Stalin would grow bored, or that stray balls might cause a disturbance, Kosarev decided that the game should be played according to a script; so, after Dinamo refused to participate, a Spartak eleven played out a pre-determined, 45-minute, 4-3 victory over their own reserve side. The

⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 1454, 1459-60.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1454.

⁴² For details of the build-up, playing, and aftermath to the match, see Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, pp. 115-135; Jim Riordan, 'The Strange Story of Nikolai Starostin, Football and Lavrentii Beria', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 46:4 (1994), 681-90.

‘match’ represented perhaps the ultimate attempt to redeem football (and Spartak) in the Stalinist context, by bringing it to the public-political heart of the Union and the scrutiny of the party hierarchy. The potentially violent spontaneity of the sport was abandoned, with Kosarev’s script imposing something of the rigid collective organisation of the *fizkul’tura* parade onto proceedings. The unmonitored working-class support of the stadia was replaced by a small, dispassionate elite. The event proved a popular enough addition to the day’s programme to be repeated in subsequent years (Figure 2).

Regardless of this relative success, however, the Starostins and Kosarev remained suspect. Ahead of the inaugural national league season in 1936, Central Committee member and former head of the Georgian Communist Party Lavrentii Beria was made director of the Dinamo sports society, of which he had long been an ardent fan. He would hardly have needed fan rivalry to feel animosity towards the Spartak management in any case: Kosarev was a close associate of NKVD head Nikolai Ezhov and thus an indirect political rival to Beria. From 1937, it seems likely that the Starostins and their close friends were under constant police surveillance.⁴³ By the time Beria was appointed as Ezhov’s deputy in August of 1938, the position of the Spartak elite was almost untenable.

A month earlier, Nikolai Starostin had attempted one final time to redeem football as a public spectacle, to double down on Kosarev’s intentions two years previously to make the game into a utilitarian, performative, and ideologically rigorous component of officially endorsed *fizkul’tura*. My archival research reveals that he sent a letter, via Kosarev, to Viacheslav Molotov on July 7th in which he outlined his proposal for an extraordinary reimaging of the staged football match.⁴⁴ Claiming that standard *fizkul’tura* parades lacked *sharzh*, he suggested something more enlivening: a football-theatre hybrid in which a ‘fascist’ eleven would take on the workers’ state. In some detail, he describes how each member of the fascist side would represent a well-known enemy of the people, as well as including short refrains specific to these villains, to be sung or otherwise proclaimed as the ‘game’ was being acted out. The goalkeeper was Trotskii. His refrain was to be: ‘Опора верная команды/Гнусный пес из подлой банды,/Диверсант, шпион, гадина/Будет для него другая переключина.’ At the conclusion of the spectacle, Starostin suggested, Trotskii should be hanged from his own crossbar, the goal becoming an impromptu

⁴³ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, p. 117.

⁴⁴ Nikolai Starostin, ‘Sekratriu TsK VLKSM - Tov. Kosarevu A. V. zasluzhennogo mastera sporta gr. Starostina Nikolaia. Dokladnaia zapiska’. 7 July 1938. RGASPI, f. 82. op. 2. ed. khr. 970. l. 57-63.

gallows.⁴⁵ The defensive line of the fascist side was to include 'Peressolini' (a preening caricature of Mussolini) and an alcoholic Russian aristocrat.⁴⁶ General Franco was to play on the right wing. The attacking line was to comprise Hitler ('Чванлив и туп... Всегда в офсайде./На грубость всякую мастак/Зато лишь держится в инсайде,/Что сжечь до тла сумел... Рейхстаг'), Goebbels ('Играть не может головой/И цвета красного боится/Но так как близкий друг с судьей/То всем на голову садится'), and Goering ('Слабоват... технически.../Глуповат... тактически.../Маловат... физически.../Туговат... психически...').⁴⁷ Finally, in a bizarre tribute to the Soviet obsession with the rigour and authority of the referee, Starostin's match was to be officiated by Neville Chamberlain, his refrain: 'Вид беспристрастный сохранит.../Но возмущайся зритель... вой.../Все-равно он "подсвистит"/Он им глубоко парень свой.'⁴⁸ Starostin's vision of a fascist team who could be humiliated on Red Square seems intended to externalise the problematic aspects of football — from the ill-discipline of the players to the behaviour of the crowd and the effectiveness of the referee — neutralising its threat through performance. His suggestion fell on deaf ears. Molotov dismissed the idea outright; in a letter to Zhdanov and Kosarev, he suggested that Starostin had gone too far, managing to make football something that was *so* aggressively 'Soviet' that it made little diplomatic sense: 'с какой стати мы начнем ругать правительства чуть ли не всех стран мира и балаганить на эту тему? Это — не умно и вредно для дела.'⁴⁹

In November that year Beria replaced Ezhov; within a few weeks Kosarev had been arrested and executed.⁵⁰ The Starostins were no longer in a position to use political theatre pieces to counterbalance the dubious gains that football had brought them. After several further years of surveillance, the four brothers and a number of friends were arrested on 20th March 1942. Among the charges levelled at them was that the brothers had plotted to use the 1937 Physical Culture Day performance to assassinate Stalin on Red Square. This charge, apparently the fabrication of Spartak athletics coach Vasilii Steblev,⁵¹ was absurd (and eventually dismissed), but perhaps fitting. Nikolai Starostin's arrest marked the definitive symbolic failure of football to reconcile itself neatly to the instrumentalist

⁴⁵ Ibid., l. 58.

⁴⁶ Ibid., ll. 59-60.

⁴⁷ Ibid., l. 61.

⁴⁸ Ibid., l. 62.

⁴⁹ Viacheslav Molotov, 'Tov. Zhdanovu, Tov. Andreevu, Tov. Kosarevu'. 10 July 1938. RGASPI, f. 82. op. 2. ed. khr. 970. l. 64.

⁵⁰ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, p. 118.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 128-129.

demands of real life *fizkul'tura*. If football was to play a productive role in the construction of Stalinist *obshchestvennost'* then it was not going to happen on the felt-cobblestones. Nikolai spent the next ten years in a succession of labour camps.



Figure 2. An exhibition match on Red Square - Trotskii not included. *Iz veka v vek na futbol'nom share* (1998)

4. Hooliganism, psychopathology, disorder

I have shown how throughout the 1920s and into the era of high Stalinism football was associated with violence, the threat of public and personal disorder, and spontaneity of emotion and deed: qualities that threatened tentative models of Soviet spectatorship and *obshchestvennost'*. In order to appreciate the valence of football as it was represented in cinema in the 1930s, it is worth returning briefly to the history of Soviet thinking on antisociality, and the loose collection of phenomena labelled 'hooliganism'. This draws on the discussion in my Introduction on the social psychology of the NEP era, particularly in reference to the notion of 'psychopathology'.

There is a substantial literature on the discursive and judicial concern with *khuliganstvo* in the second half of the 1920s.⁵² Certain material conditions of the NEP — the return of private enterprise, the perceived moral licentiousness of post-revolutionary youth, the importation of foreign leisure habits such as nightclubs and dancing — were blamed for a perceived epidemic of criminality and other anti-social behaviour that was widely discussed in the general press. As the discipline most directly engaged with hooliganism, psychopathology was therefore at its peak at the same time — and, it could be argued, for the same reasons — as football clubs and fan culture were experiencing rapid expansion. The specialists who committed themselves to analysing the disorder afflicting Soviet society brought a variety of disciplines to bear in their attempts to understand and correct the disjunctures in the body politic. As a result, the accounts offered by these thinkers do vary; however there are a number of common threads, which we can identify as precursors to later Stalinist understandings of disorder.

As demonstrated in the Introduction, a common feature of psychopathological works was their insistence that public disorder be understood not just in terms of environmental conditions, but with reference to the emotional/psychological/affective dynamic between citizens: in other words, *obshchestvennost'*. Thus hooliganism is 'бичем нашей общественности';⁵³ criminality is a 'прямая демонстрация против советской общественности'.⁵⁴ This turn to *obshchestvennost'* is often related to 'contagion' (*zarazitel'nost'*), a sociological trope since the mid-1800s. This is the fear that the psychological malfunctions provoking negative behaviour can be unwittingly transmitted from one individual to another. One psychologist who specialised in the treatment of sexually violent criminals, Nikolai Brukhanskii, explained contagion in these terms: 'Заразительность: критическое отношение отдельного человека все более и более ослабевает; он не в состоянии уйти из-под власти, от психологии толпы.'⁵⁵ Violent or disorderly acts may be the outward manifestations of a kind of unregulated individualism, but they can only be properly analysed relative to social living. So, for Brukhanskii, the compulsion under Soviet rule towards active engagement in social life can prompt a

⁵² See, for instance, Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Gorsuch; Joan Neuberger addresses many of the factors that would contribute to later *khuliganstvo* anxieties in her *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵³ Ia. Bugaiskii, *Khuliganstvo kak sotsial'no-patologicheskoe iavlenie* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1927), p. 7.

⁵⁴ A. Oborin, *Protiv grubosti i samodurstva* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1928), p. 12.

⁵⁵ N. P. Brukhanskii, *Ocherki po sotsial'noi psikhopatologii* (Moscow: M. i S. Sabashnykh, 1928), pp. 5-14.

reaction from those who, ‘по существу, еще находятся на ступени индивидуалистического бытия’; the result is anarchic outbursts.⁵⁶ Hooliganism is an amorphous and imitative phenomenon that results from young people’s inability to engage with their surroundings on an emotionally mature level; in Brukhanskii’s words, their inability to inject *volia* into their own ‘primitive’ psychological processes (‘У молодого человека не хватает достаточно сил [...] поэтому он усиленно рефлектирует и производит ряд несообразных действий’).⁵⁷

Another psychopathologist, Iakov Bugaiskii, relies even more heavily on the notion of imitation and social interaction. For him, *khuliganstvo* is completely distinct from the sphere of rationality: ‘хулиганский поступок характеризуется бесцельностью поведения, бесполезностью.’⁵⁸ We should understand hooliganism, he argues, in terms of the insular and arbitrary dynamic of situations of increased social pressure. Hooligans are people trying to draw attention to themselves within a crowd;⁵⁹ or else they are like children playing games who have made the logic of ‘play’ into something vindictive and harmful to others.⁶⁰ For Bugaiskii it is therefore no surprise that, as he puts it, ‘первоначально хулиганство выражалось в озорстве, шуме на улицах и в общественных местах.’⁶¹ It is precisely these kinds of spaces that promote both individualistic grabs for attention, and the insular logic of imitative behaviour that easily descends into violence or disorder. ‘И, действительно, толпа, окатываемая водой, представляет забавное зрелище, и принять участие в организации такого спектакля — это тоже игра.’⁶² Antisocial behaviour, in Bugaiskii’s analysis, is another form of spectator sport, the shadow version of a game like football in which all pretences of discipline or regulation have been abandoned. The twin notions of contagion and the ‘game’ of antisociality should make it clear to us how spectator sports and psychopathology might feed into one another. Conversely, they also point towards a socially productive reading of a phenomenon like football: imitation/contagion is cited in these pathologising texts as a mode of dissolution, but formally speaking this is a neutral mechanism. Indeed, *obshchestvennost’* could be thought of in terms of the positive instrumentalisation of imitative or contagious action.

⁵⁶ Brukhanskii, p. 25.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁸ Bugaiskii, p. 56.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 59.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 66.

⁶² Ibid., p. 62.

The importance of *obshchestvennost'*, the notion of behavioural contagion, the question of imitation and emotional fragility: what I have outlined here as indicative of the late NEP-era discourse on hooliganism is clearly of a kind with that surrounding football well into the 1930s. We need only turn back to the *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* and its description of the risks of the game: 'Большая эмоциональная насыщенность игры неизбежно связана с известной страстностью, нередко переходящей в азартность, заражающей и зрителей...' ⁶³ The 'общественные места' mentioned by Bugaiskii could easily include the stadium. Brukhanskii even explicitly cites spectator sports as a psychopathological concern: '«Азарт», «спорт» — красной нитью проходят через хулиганские дела.' ⁶⁴

The question now is how we can appropriate the above framing when talking about cultural production in the 1930s, long after the hooliganism panic had subsided and the terms of social psychological discourse had shifted. My approach here is to think in terms of the distinction in Stalinist culture between *stikhiia* and *soznanie*, where *stikhiia* stands as a substitute for the kinds of psychological phenomena associated with *khuliganstvo*, and *soznanie* is defined negatively as their desired absence. The real life football match of the 1930s, in this reading, was in constant danger of resolving the dichotomy in favour of *stikhiia*, or spontaneous transgression. But, as Katerina Clark has most famously shown, Stalinist cultural forms can be seen as arenas in which the distinctions and passage between *stikhiia* and *soznanie* are played out. ⁶⁵ If there was space for football's legitimization, then, it lay precisely in its fictionalisation and representation. The point here is not to draw any neat line between artistic imaginings of the sport and its actual existence as a problematic site of popular entertainment, but to examine the idealised football match within its broader cultural context. In this way we might understand how the very real problems posed by football could be resolved according to the utopianism of the Stalinist project, violence and 'большая эмоциональная насыщенность' repurposed in imagined forms of play and spectatorship.

⁶³ Bunkin, 'Futbol', p. 352.

⁶⁴ Brukhanskii, p. 34.

⁶⁵ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*.

5. Bodies on the line

Let us first consider a literary example from the late NEP era. Iurii Olesha's *Zavist'* (1927) was published at the height of the perceived *khuliganstvo* epidemic, and features in Volodia Makarov arguably the most famous fictional footballer of the time.⁶⁶ *Zavist'* thematises and problematises the nature of the 'onlooker' or spectator in Soviet society: its protagonist, Kavalerov, cannot bring himself to participate in the world-building of public culture, preferring instead to observe from the margins. The basic structure of the narrative is one that pits passive observation of the world against active participation in its transformation. The extended sequence in which Kavalerov attends a football match between a Soviet side and an elite, bourgeois German outfit is, superficially at least, set up to contrast him with his antagonist Makarov: a physically potent young worker who is Kavalerov's rival for the affections of the demure Valia, and who is playing in goal for the Soviet side. Sure enough, Makarov's robust performance on the pitch — his metonymic participation in Soviet life — marks the point in the narrative at which Kavalerov loses all hope of winning Valia. Yet Olesha's description of the match and of the dynamic flowing between players and crowd is far from straightforwardly celebratory.

The scene is set by the bluster of the weather, which seems to be joining in the taunting, partisan atmosphere ('яркий, сквозной, просвистанный ветром со всех сторон.') The internal logic of the crowd is one of disorganisation and *grubost'*: 'люди спорили, кричали, скандалили из-за пустяков'.⁶⁷ No sense of loyalty or ceremony can prevail in these conditions: rather than appreciating team play, the crowd cheers for the German star Goetske, drowning out the music of a brass band attempting to instil a more ordered sense of fun.⁶⁸ The relationship between spectator and player is primitive and unsublimated; the crowd is deindividualised and rears up as if about to collapse under the weight of its own violence. 'Вся публика, вся живая покатость трибун становилась как будто отвеснее, — каждый зритель приподнимался, выталкиваемый страшным, нетерпеливым желанием увидеть наконец-то самое интересное — вбитие гола.'⁶⁹ This 'terrible desire' dehumanises the players. At the half-time interval, the spectators are surprised to notice, as if for the first time, the violence inflicted on their behalf: 'Зевакам

⁶⁶ Iurii Olesha, *Izbrannoe. Zavist' i drugie* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1969).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

новостью были подробности роста или сложения того или иного игрока, жесткость ссадин, тяжелое дыхание, полное смятение одежды. Издали все производило более легкое, праздничное впечатление...⁷⁰ There are strong echoes here of Bugaiskii's view of the crowd as generative of imitative antisocial behaviour ('толпа, окатываемая водой, представляет забавное зрелище, и принять участие в организации такого спектакля — это тоже игра.')⁷¹

In the midst of this 'страшное, нетерпеливое желание', though, Olesha does offer another model of spectatorship and fandom. Valia, in love with Makarov, overcomes the generalised *prazdnichnoe* reading of the game. When her hero's goal is threatened she screams, 'как будто сейчас же, немедленно, должна была увидеть что-то ужасное и преступное.'⁷² The distinction between her response to a goal being scored ('ужасное и преступное') and that of the crowd ('наконец-то самое интересное') derives from the emotional relationship between this particular spectator and this particular player. Valia's personal investment in Makarov's body imparts compassion to her act of spectatorship, experienced as fear for another's safety. If the onlooker is able to feel compassion for the body-on-the-line, to share in its suffering, then the scene becomes one of unification. Valia has a moment of unexpected intimacy with a fellow spectator, as she buries her face in her neighbour's shoulder in concern at what might happen to *her* goalkeeper. While the crowd around her is at war with itself, Valia experiences a brief moment of communion.

Here we can turn to the work of Keith Livers on the body in Stalinist literature.⁷³ Livers argues that many characters' narrativised apotheoses derive from a 'dialectical synthesis' of *stikiia* and *soznanie* rather than the strict accession from one to the other: 'the hero's ascent to transcendent consciousness necessarily passes through the trauma of transgression as he or she moves from ignorance to sublime gnosis.'⁷⁴ Acts of spontaneity or transgression can therefore in fact be productive, ultimately reaffirming the boundaries that delimit the collective. Valia's *soznatel'nost'* depends upon the threat of violence against Makarov, the sense of something 'ужасное и преступное' in the air; it is an offshoot of the *stikhiinost'* of the overall affair. Even if *soznanie* is ultimately to exert its influence over

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 135.

⁷¹ Bugaiskii, p. 62.

⁷² Olesha, p. 131.

⁷³ Keith A. Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004).

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 157.

unreformed *stikhiia*, for Livers the *utopianism* of Stalinist culture lies precisely in its claims to a synthesis of these Dionysian and Apollonian realms.⁷⁵

In this reconfiguration of the Dionysian/Apollonian distinction the body plays an unsurprisingly prominent role. For Livers, in the 1930s, ‘perhaps even more than in the preceding decade, the body [...] stands in the foreground as the ideological and mythological arena in which the Stalinist dream of the realised utopia is violently played out.’⁷⁶ For the sake of our discussion there are two aspects of this ‘violent playing out’ that should be emphasised. First is the body itself: on the line, at risk of injury or humiliation within the disorderly atmosphere of the match. Makarov is a fine example of the compulsion to synthesise corporeality and rationality — in the words of the *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, *smelost’* and *khladnokrovie* — in order to survive the ordeal. Second is the crowd and its reaction to this display. Livers’ contention is that the dialectical synthesis can only ever be realised momentarily; the Stalinist body is therefore a ‘masochistic signifier’, inasmuch as it must constantly ‘strive to occupy a position that is unlikely or even impossible.’⁷⁷ However, this masochism can be elevated into something productive by the compassion of the spectating crowd, the impossible compulsion of the individual becoming a shared burden.

In keeping with the dialectical nature of the Stalinist utopia, masochism properly appropriated becomes a means to foreclose further suffering. Rather than the unstructured sadism of ‘recreational brawls’ or football hooliganism, where violence is enjoyed in and of itself, the masochistic football experience sees players and fans *empathise* with the infliction of pain and thus achieve a kind of catharsis: masochism becomes what I call mass-ochism; that is, collectivised sentience of the positive potential of pain. The violent sensation is no longer displaced onto the body of a disconnected other, but rather becomes a shared moment of what Livers calls ‘the trauma of transgression’ accompanying the passage into *soznanie*.⁷⁸ This appropriation of violence into a reforging pathos depends upon a renewed awareness of the body of the other: this sense of community is what is implied when Edelman refers to the football stadium as halfway towards being a ‘Bakhtinian carnival’. In its Stalinist iteration, the carnival no longer represents Bakhtin’s anti-purist escape, but rather an attempt to shore up a monological system of signification that is threatened from

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 158.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 3, 5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 167.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 153.

within. In Livers's words, 'it is in the stadium that the mythical extremes of chaos and order are merged to produce the Stalinist superbody.'⁷⁹ The arguments outlined here around mass-ochism and dialectical synthesis draw upon and point to a number of theoretical approaches to violence and pain. Before turning to two cinematic examples of football, disorder, and communal identification, I outline here three such models that inform my readings of the primary visual material.

First, we can consider Elaine Scarry's theorisation of the 'body in pain'.⁸⁰ For Scarry, pain is defined by its 'aversiveness', 'inexpressibility', and 'unshareability'; she focuses on the way in which pain resists articulation through language, having 'no referential content' and 'no object'.⁸¹ As such, almost all attempts to inscribe the experience of wounding in fact end up as descriptions of or allusions to something external to the act itself. 'Pain is not identical with [...] either agency or damage, but these things are referential; consequently we often call on them to convey the experience of pain itself.'⁸² The infliction of pain is equivalent to the 'unmaking' of the victim's world, but Scarry maintains a parallel concern with 'making'. Sometimes the consequences of pain's infliction make overt what is at stake in its very inexpressibility; by inversion they expose the nature of expressibility.⁸³ We might think back here to Olesha's stadium. The crowd's 'легкое, праздничное впечатление' of the violence inflicted on their behalf derives in part from the 'unshareability' of the player's experiences; but given the right configuration, this is mutable into something emotionally positive, the expressibility of Valia's love for Makarov. Both unruly crowd and anxious girlfriend are reacting to the same essential qualities of pain itself. Representations of wounding in literature or film are in Scarry's reading attempts to externalise the 'self-contained loop' of pain, to create a 'socialised sentence' through the imagination of what it means to be hurt: a sentence that pertains both between the characters on screen or page and amongst the audience bearing witness to them.⁸⁴

Moving on to theories specific to the Stalinist cultural context, we can think about Evgenii Dobrenko's idea of the socialist realist hero as representing the rationalisation of

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

⁸⁰ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 3-5.

⁸² Ibid., p. 15.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 19-23.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 169-170.

violence.⁸⁵ For him, ‘there is no doubt [...] that behind the revolutionary metaphors of “conquest” and “transformation” of nature (the creation of a “second nature”’) lay an attempt (translated into the language of political-ideological realia) to rationalise violence.’⁸⁶ The metaphor of ‘reforging’, favoured in the 1920s and during the First Five-Year Plan, indicates a commitment to ‘pedagogical violence’, the public re-education of intransigent criminal elements. By the advent of the Terror in the mid-1930s, however, the prevalent metaphor is that of ‘transformation’, which speaks instead to *concealed* violence.⁸⁷ According to the Stalinist logic of socialism ‘achieved’, oppositional elements must necessarily cease to exist; criminals are now shot rather than reforged. For Dobrenko, this ‘routinization of terror’ requires a cultural reaction: the socialist realist master narrative of the hero’s accession through *stikiia* to *soznanie* represents the subsumption of the concealed violence of the real world. ‘Transformed by socialist realism, the person disciplined by it lives, as it were, beyond the gulag: the camp disappears into the triumph of the hero, and reality continues to develop by the laws of the transformed world.’⁸⁸ Dobrenko’s reading of the ‘disciplining realia’ of cultural production ties into Scarry’s idea of the ‘socialised sentence’ of artistic representations of pain. Within the specific context of Stalinism, Dobrenko argues that social violence disappears into the injured body of the represented protagonist, and that this is a necessary process for the production of a (non-horrifying) sense of communality. As we will see, this is an important notion when considering representations of football in particular.

Finally, we should consider Lilya Kaganovsky’s work on the cinematic ‘unmaking’ of Soviet man.⁸⁹ (The similarity in Kaganovsky’s and Scarry’s titles seems coincidental — Kaganovsky certainly does not cite the latter author extensively — but does indicate something of the importance of violence done to bodies in socialist realist culture.) Kaganovsky’s psychoanalytic reading of masculinity in Stalinist cinema understands the wounding or incapacitating of male heroes as enacting a necessary limitation upon and affirmation of Soviet subjectivity.⁹⁰ For Kaganovsky, ‘castration’ (figured through any act of wounding) represents, in the Lacanian tradition, a ‘symbolic lack’ that simultaneously denies the individual access to the symbolic order structured around the phallus and

⁸⁵ Evgenii Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. x-xxi.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

⁸⁹ Kaganovsky.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 4.

reasserts this separation as a personal failing. Wounding is thus a potent example of the Oedipus complex's resolution into a dual prohibition/imperative ('you may not be like this'/'you must be like this').⁹¹ As a result, Kaganovsky argues, the male socialist realist protagonist is 'always attempting to accede to a fullness of being (being *like* the father) forever foreclosed to him';⁹² his apotheosis arrives when he learns to accept his wounded/castrated condition. Stalinist narratives are driven by the "wish fulfilment" of the *inadequacy* of the male subject', with male characters reconciling themselves to an 'obscene enjoyment of lack (both physical and psychic)'.⁹³ Kaganovsky's analysis is important for my discussion since it provides a model for understanding just how it is, in Dobrenko's words, that violence 'disappears' into the fictional individual: how the formal and theoretical mechanisms at work here interrelate.

The mass-ochistic synthesis of *stikhiia* and *soznanie*, the 'socialised sentience' of the inexpressibility of pain, the rationalisation of social violence, and the symbolic importance of enjoying one's wounded state: these are the parameters that inform my reading of football onscreen and its reconciliation of disorder with *obshchestvennost'*. Below I explore two films about men and football. First, I look at Kote Mikaberidze's *Zapozdalyi zhenikh* (Tbilisskaia kinostudiia, 1939, from a screenplay by V. Karsanidze and K. Gogodze), a knockabout *kolkhoz* romance containing a serious lesson on the necessity of harnessing *stikhiinost'* in the accession to full Stalinist subjecthood. I conclude with a reading of Semen Timoshenko's *Vratar'* (Lenfil'm, 1936).⁹⁴ Adapted for the screen by Lev Kassil' from his own hugely popular children's novel *Vratar' respubliki*, this film provides perhaps the best extant example of cinema's engagement with the complex knot of issues that have animated this chapter: *fizkul'tura*, spectatorship, *obshchestvennost'*, violence, the Stalinist subject.⁹⁵ In both of these films we are consistently reminded of an idea that has recurred throughout this thesis in a variety of different formulations, and which is succinctly phrased by Scarry: that 'the graphic image of the human body substitutes for the object of belief that itself has no content and thus itself cannot be represented'.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 7-9.

⁹² Ibid., p. 8.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 10, 22.

⁹⁴ I conclude with *Vratar'*, despite *Zhenikh* being the later film, because it offers more room to develop my principal themes. In any case, as late-'30s *fizkul'tura* romantic comedies, the two films are of a kind regardless of the chronological gap.

⁹⁵ Lev Kassil', *Vratar' respubliki* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi izdatel'stvo detskoi literatury, 1937).

⁹⁶ Scarry, p. 198.

6. *Zapozdalyi zhenikh*: romantic aggression

Kote Mikaberidze's *Zapozdalyi zhenikh* is not a film which one would automatically associate with questions of violence and masochism; released a decade after his mixed-media feature *Moia babushka* (Goskino Gruzii, 1929), perhaps the highpoint of the Georgian avant-garde, it is certainly a striking demonstration of the shifting demands placed on directors with the advent of Stalinism. This is a *kolkhoz* romantic comedy saturated with the tropes of plenitude and collective happiness. In a preview article anticipating the film's release, Vladimir Dalin was bluntly optimistic: 'склонность к веселой шутке, остроте, юмору, лежащая в самом характере грузинского народа [...] Радость коллективной жизни и коллективного труда [...] являются основным лейтмотивом'.⁹⁷ The plot is a simple one. Sandro and his mother move into a new home in a *kolkhoz* vineyard. It is obvious to all that this middle-aged only child needs a wife-*khoziaika*. But Sandro is too shy to tell his sweetheart Maro how he feels. Maro suspects that Sandro has another woman — he spends a lot of time with a visiting *fizkul'turnitsa* — but it turns out that he is simply mad for football and has been training with his friends in private. The sport helps him overcome his shyness, particularly after his team of ageing workers beats a team of younger locals, and confess his feelings to Maro.

The vineyard does not need an injection of hooliganism, but it does require some form of disruption. Everything in this microcosmic Stalinist utopia is agreeable: the sun never sets; the vineyard is overflowing with juicy grapes and the tables groan under the weight of every lunch; the *kolkhoz* director also dispenses flawless advice on matters of the heart. There is not even any unrequited love: Sandro and Maro are smitten with each other from the moment they meet, and the narrative turns simply and slowly on their innocent inability to express this fact. This is what also rids the film of any potentially troubling eroticism: as Tat'iana Dashkova has noted, the chasteness of Stalinist film is often a consequence of the *certainly* of the emotions of display.⁹⁸ Unlike in *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* there is no heroic task of labour to undertake alongside the romantic narrative; there is also no centrifugal impulse drawing characters towards Moscow, as there is for Marko in

⁹⁷ V. Dalin, 'Zhizneradostnaia komediia', *Iskusstvo kino*, 9 (1938), 26–27 (p. 26). A version of the screenplay was published in the same issue: K. Gogodze and V. Karsanidze, 'Zapozdalyi zhenikh', *Iskusstvo kino*, 9 (1938), 8–26.

⁹⁸ Tat'iana Dashkova, *Telesnost' - ideologiya - kinematograf. Vizual'nyi kanon i sovetskaia povsednevnost'* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2013), p. 87.

Schastlivyi finish (why would anyone leave this paradise?). In fact there is no sense of direction at all, just a not-really-a-problem to be worked out in no hurry. As Sandro's mother tells him: 'Тебе некуда спешить, и я хочу видеть свою внучку!'

What needs to change in order for this small wrinkle to be ironed out of the collective fabric? Tritely put, Sandro needs to believe in himself, to recognise himself as worthy of attention. He is already a Stakhanovite, an admired member of the *kolkhoz*, in the proximity of his dream girl. What he needs is a slight adjustment or *refraction* of his self-image so that he can also become a lover-husband-father, completing another circuit in the harmonious social functioning of the vineyard. As his elderly friend Luka puts it, Sandro suffers from 'плохое зрение'. He is conscious of his position within the collective, but not of his potential to excite and seduce. What Sandro needs is a deeper synthesis of his inherent *soznanie* and his untapped *stikhiia*. Football acts as the catalyst: its *azartnost'* makes it comedic and liberating. Edelman notes that in Russia football was associated with the rejuvenation and celebration of spring thanks to the timing of the sporting calendar.⁹⁹ In *Zapozdalyi zhenikh* it allows Sandro to adjust his 'плохое зрение' just enough to become the boisterous man he needs to be. He is quickly established in the film as physically awkward, prone to pratfalls (Figure 3); this *nelovkost'* is the result of his possessing an elemental (*stikhiinyi*) bodily energy that he does not know how to direct.



Figure 3. Sandro's pratfalls (*Zapozdalyi zhenikh*)

⁹⁹ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, p. 44.

Throughout the film 'плохое зрение' relates to the visualisation of the body. As the above examples demonstrate, Sandro most often occupies the centre of the frame, providing the movement within a fixed shot featuring a generous amount of backdrop; he is an object of observation, like an animated part of the set dressing. When the camera is tighter to him so that he dominates the frame, then this is counterbalanced by blocking that partially obscures him: for instance, he will hide among the vines whilst working in order to snoop on a co-worker's conversation, cringe and turn away from the camera because he is embarrassed in Maro's presence, or conceal his true emotions by pretending to be engrossed in a book. Sandro can be observed, but not too closely; he is an obscurantist unable to 'see' himself. At one point Luka teaches him how to embrace Maro by holding up a children's picture book to camera, a brief moment of *mise en abîme*, framing Sandro's inability to frame himself (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Lessons in love (*Zapozdalyi zhenikh*)

This inadequate visualisation is restructured by football. When Sandro, Luka, and the other older workers discover that their younger comrades, led by the dashing Shota, have formed a football team, they decide to try this sport out for themselves. The result is embarrassing. In the editing script (but not in the final cut) Sandro and Luka consult a

rulebook in their attempts to understand why their version of football has descended into chaos: ‘Сандро вырвал мяч у Луки. Оба тяжело дышат. У обоих лица мокрые от пота. Сандро говорит: / Это не игра. Это не футбол. Так в футбол не играют. Это драка...’¹⁰⁰ Attuned to his body through sweat and bruises, Luka realises that the energy the older men have unleashed could be powerful if it were just slightly more structured, enacted within the boundaries of an *igra* rather than a *draka*: ‘Тире по книжке у... нас... ничего не выходит!... Теория без практики... не получается... живой человек нужен... Руководитель!’¹⁰¹ Again what is needed is merely a slight adjustment in these men’s self-visualisation, for them to see themselves not as careening individual bodies but as a team. This is provided by a visiting (white, blonde, Russian) *fizkul’turnitsa*, a positive parallel to Grishka in *Sluchainaia vstrecha*, who takes these hapless enthusiasts under her wing (Figure 5). In her presence, bodies come together onscreen into tight knit units. The camera is still fixed in the middle distance, but now the frame contains a collective (Figure 6).



Figure 5. From rabble...

¹⁰⁰ Kote Mikaberidze and F. Vysotskii, “‘Zapozdalyi zhenikh”. Rezhissersko-montazhnyi stsenarii’ (1938). RGALI, f. 2450. op. 2. ed. khr. 639 (l. 32).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., l. 32.



Figure 6. ... to collective (*Zapozdalyi zhenikh*)

The climactic meeting between Sandro's team of elder statesmen and Shota's young guns is staged like a light comedy version of Olesha's match. Our hero wins out, of course, despite him and his comrades possessing no real footballing ability. His team are perhaps more suited to the unpretentious atmosphere. The two goalkeepers are shown preening and posing for the crowd; Luka turns up drunk and stumbles around seeing double of teammates and rivals alike — his own comedic 'плохое зрение' (Figure 7). The crowd is shot in an unremarkable manner similar to those in *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* and *Schastlivyi finish* — low angle framing, toggling between neat rows of bodies and individual examples — but here they are animated to a degree that would have seemed problematic in these earlier films. Supporters of each team rise to their feet to gesticulate and protest when they feel wronged by the referee; there are arguments among fans of the same team; at one point a particularly aggrieved fan shoves his neighbour in his heavily-bandaged jaw without realising (Figure 8). To a certain extent this scene displays precisely that primitive *azartnost'* that characterised the anxieties of the *fizkul'tura* administrators about football. What with the antics of the goalkeepers, the comedy stylings of Luka, and the lack of technical sporting ability on display the notion that *teatral'nost'* and *fizkul'tura* should not mix has been at least temporarily abandoned. This is an occasion in which boisterousness wins out over technicality. 'Football' here is instrumentalised, the game itself of secondary importance to Sandro's self-realisation. It is as if his 'плохое зрение' is transferred for the

duration of the match to the other players and the spectators, just long enough for the game to serve its narrativial purpose.

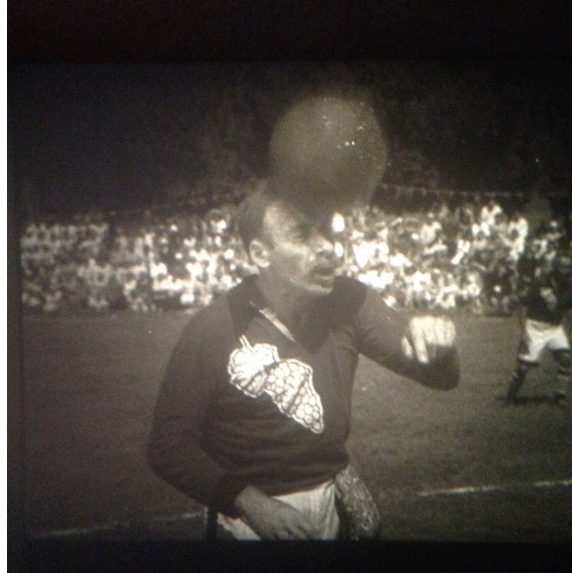


Figure 7. Shota takes one for the team (*Zapozdalyi zhenikb*)



Figure 8. *Grubost'* in the crowd (*Zapozdalyi zhenikb*)

Sandro's predominance over the game and his growing sense of confidence are reflected in the way in which his body is reframed. Where before he occupied the centre of a fixed frame, as if fixed in position by the objectifying camera, now the movements of his body dictate the shot. He will run with the ball towards the camera, which tracks backwards as if in response, keeping his whole body in shot. The use of close-ups is

determined by where, how, and whom Sandro is kicking, lunging, or otherwise extending himself. This is a visual representation of his emotional evolution: from the passive observer who attempted to hide his emotions behind a book, he is now assuming an active, even aggressive role as one who provokes emotional reaction on the part of spectators. Again we are reminded of Bugaiskii's description of the feedback loop at play between actor and observers: 'толпа, окатываемая водой, представляет забавное зрелище, и принять участие в организации такого спектакля — это тоже игра.'¹⁰² Sandro's physical outbursts organise the spectacle of the unruly crowd, as well as the movement of the camera.

Before our eyes, Sandro is acquiring the qualities that the *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* had attributed to the truly Soviet football player: *smelost'*, *reshitel'nost'*, *dvizhenie*. That his doing so depends upon a dynamic between player and spectator that is generative of disorder is made explicit in Gogodze's and Karsanidze's initial *literaturnyi stsenarii*. Where the film has Sandro surging up the pitch to score a predictable, last-minute winning goal, the screenplay sees him resorting to gamesmanship and foul play. At one point he argues with the referee to have a goal against his team ruled out, only to be told: 'Ирра правильная. Вы проиграли, Сандро.'¹⁰³ And rather than winning the game for his team, in the earlier iteration Sandro nearly throws it all away in his aggression by fouling Shota and conceding a last-minute penalty. He depends upon his goalkeeper Almaskhan to save the game, and by extension his chances with Maro. At this moment Luka switches from drunken jester to moral arbiter: 'Осрамились, и во всем виноват ты.'¹⁰⁴ In the final film Luka is himself guilty of a little *kbitrost'*, when he fakes a head injury. The violence done to him is imaginary, but the concern it provokes is real, with his children running onto the pitch in panic (Figure 9). Since, as Scarry shows, pain has no referential content, it is almost impossible to turn it into a trick or joke. As with *Zavist*'s Valia, for Luka's children there is only the *uzhasnoe* and none of the *prazdnichnoe*. Occasionally the overpowering sunniness and Georgian jollity of the affair give way to hints of the unease and potential damaging disorder underlying Sandro's transformation.

¹⁰² Bugaiskii, p. 62.

¹⁰³ K. Gogodze and V. Karsanidze, "'Zapozdalyi zhenikh". Literaturnyi stsenarii. 1-i variant' (1938). RGALI, f. 2450. op. 2. ed. khr. 637 (l. 51).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., l. 53.



Figure 9. Shota's fake injury, and his children's real concern (*Zapozdalyi zhenikh*)

Before production began, officials demanded that the scenes involving football be shortened. After reading Gogodze's and Karsanidze's original treatment, the head of the Committee for Cinematographic Affairs recommended: 'Линия футбола, в котором выступает Сандро, должна быть значительно более мотивирована желанием Сандро выступить перед любимой девушкой в качестве победителя и героя, победив даже молодого Шота.'¹⁰⁵ While grounding Sandro's desire in its proper social context was important, it was also not advisable to indulge at length in the disorder of the football for its own anarchic sake. This vineyard utopia must be disrupted, the vision of certain of its members refracted just enough to slip the final pieces of the emotional puzzle into place. This does not mean, however, that the holistic sense of order can be abandoned. This recalls Kaganovsky's conception of the 'wish fulfilment of the inadequacy of the male subject':¹⁰⁶ Sandro is compelled into rigorous bodily action, but prohibited from following this logic to its end point, which would see the unruly theatricality and partisanship of the football match become a governing principle within the collective. *Zapozdalyi zhenikh* is a minor film, but its instrumentalist imagining of football, its hints of violent disorder, and its play on the emotional link between spectator and player all point towards the more pointed biopolitical and theoretical concerns raised two years earlier in Timoshenko's *Vratar'*.

¹⁰⁵ 'Zakliuchenie po literaturnomu stsennariiu "Zapozdalyi zhenikh"', in 'Proizvodstvennyi otdel. "Zapozdalyi zhenikh". Materialy po kartine' (1938). RGALI, f. 2450. op. 2. ed. khr. 641, ll. 1-3 (l. 3).

¹⁰⁶ Kaganovsky, p. 10.

7. *Vratar'*: worrying and truly happy

Nearly a decade after Volodia Makarov, the public was introduced to another fictional goalkeeper: Anton Kandidov. The creation of sports writer and children's novelist Lev Kassil', Kandidov represented a watershed in the cultural production of *fizkul'tura*. In the words of Marina Kostiukhina, the 1936 film *Vratar'*, which Kassil' scripted with Mikhail Iudin, and his own 1938 novel *Vratar' respubliki* 'определил спортивный формат целой советской эпохи: формат литературный [...] и воспитательный (на книге Кассиля воспиталось не одно поколение советских спортсменов). В основе этого формата — идеология и семантика футбольной игры.'¹⁰⁷ Lev Iashin, the great Dinamo Moscow and Soviet national goalkeeper of the 1950s and 1960s, and probably the most celebrated Russian footballer of all time, claimed that he had watched Timoshenko's film upwards of thirty times as a child.¹⁰⁸

Kassil' had an intimate understanding of the practice of Soviet football: he worked as a sports correspondent for *Izvestiia* from 1932-1937. His journalistic as well as his fictional writing on football was influenced by foreign melodramas detailing the rise and fall of antiheroes from professional boxing or gymnastics, victims of the perils of fame in the bourgeois world.¹⁰⁹ His understanding of the socio-cultural function of sport and his representation of it in writing seem to have been directly opposed to the instrumentalism and disciplinarianism of high-profile *fizkul'tura* administrators. Kostiukhina describes the style of *Vratar' respubliki* as a mix of 'обильная метафорика и гиперболизация (ворота — триумфальная арка, стадион — Колизей) [...] Вергилий соседствует в них с Уолтом Уитменом и Маяковским.'¹¹⁰ Kassil' himself was open about his appreciation of the individualistic and aesthetic qualities of 'poetic' sporting excellence as opposed to what he saw as the staid practicalities of *fizkul'tura*:

Спорт [...] одно из самых наглядных и великолепных проявлений
человеческой воли, когда все телесные силы человека подчиняются
всепоглощающему стремлению к самосовершенствованию [...] [разница

¹⁰⁷ M. S. Kostiukhina, '«Vratar' respubliki» L. Kassilia: k probleme sportivnogo formata v sovetskoi detskoj literature', in Marina Balina and V. Iu. V'iugin (eds.), «Ubit' charskuuiu...»: *paradoksy sovetskoi literatury dlia detei, 1920-e-1930-e gg.* (St Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2013), pp. 135–51 (p. 135).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 135 (n.).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 136-139.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 139.

между спортом и физкультурой] какая есть, например, между общедоступной грамотой и поэзией.¹¹¹

The above might suggest that Kassil' was awkwardly out of step with the prevailing mood around *fizkul'tura* by the mid-1930s. Yet his melodramatic novelistic education, his hybrid writing style, and his keen awareness of the bodily spectacle of the elite sportsman combined to produce an unusually perceptive appreciation of the emotional dynamics that underpinned both the playing and watching of football. Kassil' was alive to the play between *stikhiia* and *soznanie* well before he wrote *Vratar' respubliki*. To take just one example from his journalistic career: in the autumn of 1932 Kassil' reported on an annual marathon relay race through Moscow, competed by members of the city's largest sports societies (including Dinamo and Spartak).¹¹² His description of the event pays as much attention to the onlooking crowds as to the runners, capturing the agitation produced by this public sporting spectacle that seems to bring the streets — that old, risky zone of unmonitored emotion — to life.

Эстафетный бег — заражающее и прекрасное зрелище. Москва засмотрелась. Встали трамы и авто. Но пассажиров не так волновала задержка, как исход бега. Толпы зрителей, споря и тревожась, ожидали бегунов на этапах [...] Каждый бегун нес, так сказать, двойную нагрузку. Это был не только спортсмен — это был агитатор [...] На стадионе такого не встретишь...¹¹³

Kassil' was both an observer and a champion of *spectatorship*, and of sport's disruptive, ebullient potential.

Kassil' began to compile notes in the mid-1930s for a novel based on his experiences reporting for *Izvestiia*. Before he had finished his own literary version of the Anton Kandidov story, he was approached by Semen Timoshenko to collaborate on a projected film about the world of Soviet sport, to be produced by Lenfil'm.¹¹⁴ Kassil' put his book on hold and, together with Mikhail Iudin, reworked his narrative into a screenplay. The final film features most of the same characters as the novel published two years later, as well as the same basic narrative — Kandidov's rise to and fall from grace as a goalkeeper and his

¹¹¹ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 137.

¹¹² Lev Kassil', 'S "vol'shebnoi palochkoi"', *Fizkul'tura i sport*, 28-30 (1932), 8-9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁴ See Aleksei Tremasov, 'Narodnyi vratar' sovetskogo kino', at <<http://tremasov.ucoz.ru/publ/1-1-0-7>> [accessed 1st December 2013].

eventual reconciliation with his friends at the Gidraer factory — but is a great deal simpler and takes its characters in different directions. My focus here is the film and its visual patterning of violence, joy, and community.¹¹⁵

In this version of the story Anton Kandidov is an impulsive and physically imposing young man working on the Volga barges with his friend Grusha.¹¹⁶ His potential as a goalkeeper is spotted by Evgenii Karasik and Nastia, workers and residents at the local Gidraer factory, when they see him unloading a haul of watermelons. Anton and Grusha move to Gidraer, where the physically weak and overweight Evgenii is the chief engineer in the construction of a new hovercraft. Anton quickly makes a name for himself as a goalkeeper for Gidraer's team, and he and Nastia fall in love. But fame goes to Anton's head; he fails to contribute to the hovercraft project and argues with Evgenii and Nastia; soon he leaves Gidraer for their more glamorous rivals in construction and football, Torpedo. Determined to win their comrade back over, Evgenii decides to replace Anton as Gidraer's goalkeeper ahead of the climatic match of the league season, which sees Torpedo and Gidraer face off. During the match, Karasik tries his best to match Kandidov's efforts to no avail, until he suffers a broken rib during a goalmouth scramble and is carried from the pitch. When he wakes up to see Nastia and Grusha watching anxiously over him, he is overcome with energy, sprints back onto the pitch, and runs through the entire Torpedo team before finally scoring against Anton. Incensed, Anton strikes a Gidraer player in the face and is dismissed by the referee. Gidraer are victorious, Evgenii and Grusha realise their love for each other, and with a little help from the engineer's pet project — a talking robot — Anton and Nastia are finally reconciled and the collective rejoined. The final sequence sees Anton playing in goal for the Soviet national side against the foreign 'Black Bulls'. He too takes a blow to the ribs, before picking himself up, saving a last minute penalty, and running the length of the pitch to score the winning goal. His redemption is complete.

¹¹⁵ Keith Livers offers a thorough analysis of the much more convoluted narrative of the novel and its resolution in a scene of 'ritualistic' football violence: see Livers, pp. 153-187.

¹¹⁶ Anton's surname is, of course, an unsubtle reference both to his 'candid', outspoken nature, and to his character's narrative function within Kassil's picaresque as a kind of Stalinist (as opposed to Voltairian) *Candide*. A closer analysis of the utopian aspects of the text/film might unpick the distinction between the 'rational' / Enlightenment and 'irrational' Stalinist worlds inhabited by their respective *Kandidy*.



Figure 10. Iurii Olesha (left) and Lev Kassil' (right) take in a game. *Iz veka v vek na futbol'nom sbare* (1998)

Sympathy, brutality, fraternity

Vratar' can be read in simple terms as a negotiation between *stikhiia* — represented by Kandidov — and *soznanie* — represented by Karasik. Kandidov is certainly an elemental force, associated through his introduction with the currents of the mighty Volga, preternaturally gifted as an athlete, impulsive. In his initial treatment, Kassil' describes the character thus: 'Богатырь. Волгарь. Великолепен, импозантен, честолюбив, простодушен, обаятелен внешне [...] Он стихийен и это будет подчеркнуто: его появлением в фильме сопутствуют наводнения, бури, мятели, толпы...' ¹¹⁷ Karasik, meanwhile, is corpulent and clumsy but wise to the emotional needs of others and technically gifted. Keith Livers sees the novel *Vratar' respubliki* as a prime example of the 'dialectical synthesis' of *stikhiia* and *soznanie*: side by side, Kandidov and Karasik form what he calls a Stalinist 'transbiological family' combining the positive qualities of both the 'excessive son' and the 'restraining father figure'. ¹¹⁸ Their comradely reunion, more than the romantic one between Kandidov and Nastia, is what closes Kassil''s narrative. As with Olesha's frenzied crowd, the crucial aspect of this reading is that *stikhiinost'* is not

¹¹⁷ Lev Kassil', 'Materialy k stseneriiu "Vratar' respubliki"' (1936). RGALI, f. 631. op. 3. ed. khr. 173. l. 1-20 (l. 2).

¹¹⁸ Livers, pp. 19, 157.

superseded but worked into characters' apotheoses: Karasik cannot win the day for the good folk of Gidraer without bursting from his sick bed and charging up the pitch.

Recognition of this dialectical synthesis does not, however, elucidate in any great detail the dramaturgical role of violence in the film or its visual patterning. The most important instances of this arrive in short succession towards the end of the film: Karasik is injured, Kandidov strikes an opposition player, Kandidov is injured himself in a later match. Yet Timoshenko foreshadows these with a steady stream of visual warnings. Kandidov in particular is subject to a series of signs as to what will befall him. In the film's opening scene, he sees a steamer with 'Pushkin' painted on the side, and notes that the poet achieved global infamy ('Вот мировой парень был...'); the word *mirovoi* is later used by the members of Torpedo to entice him to join their team — he can become a global star. A central tenet of the Russian romantic myth of Pushkin is his bloody death in a duel, and it is unlikely that the film's indirect association of infamy with violence is purely coincidental. The signs mount for the headstrong Kandidov: he suffers a nosebleed after a ball to the face in training; during an argument Nastia rips up a portrait of his face on the cover of a sports magazine; during the match itself a goalpost is snapped in half by the force of a strike,¹¹⁹ and an old man is shown in the crowd wearing both a football shirt and a bandage around his head (Figure 12). That these are also, broadly, moments of physical *comedy* suggests that the narrative as a whole is geared towards a neutralisation or instrumentalisation of violence rather than leaning too heavily on its own threatening subtext.

¹¹⁹ In October 1936, a match between Spartak Moscow and TsDKA Moscow was abandoned after a pitch invasion left the goalposts snapped in two: see Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, p. 97.



Figure 11. The referee's establishing shot (*Vratar*)



Figure 12. The wounded spectator - the ghost at the feast (*Vratar*)

The Gidraer-Torpedo match itself is built into this visual patterning. Notably, the referee is announced by the match commentator ('Внимание! Появляется рефери. Судья матча. Управитель игры. Блюститель закона и порядка'), and afforded his own establishing shot, alone with his assistants in the green expanse of the pitch (Figure 11). The simultaneous importance and fragility of authority, 'закон и порядок' is thus made clear. The game itself, as lead-up to the climactic moments of wounding, should be read as a play on the distinction between inflicting and suffering injury within the context of a

visual system of sympathy established throughout the film. Kandidov and Karasik are set against each other as rival goalkeepers. Each is the archetypal body-on-the-line, his team's last hope against enemy attacks. Two earlier sequences in the film have shown us both Kandidov and Karasik training in the Gidraer yard, standing in goal and attempting to save shots from coworkers. In these parallel scenes Kandidov is shot from the front, with the camera placed between the player kicking the ball and the goalmouth; all we can see is the ball entering the frame and Kandidov springing to stop it (Figure 13). He is a figure focused on to the exclusion of others; the viewer adopts the perspective of the player trying in vain to beat him. (This effect is only heightened when Kandidov later appears on the cover of a sports magazine, which he proudly waves in Nastia's face.) Conversely, Karasik's training session is shot from behind the goal. The attacking players are in shot, and we follow the flight of the ball from their feet to the back of the net, bulging in front of us (Figure 14). This simple use of framing establishes a clear line of sympathy between the viewer and Karasik ahead of the crucial on-pitch encounter.



Figure 13. Kandidov unsympathetically hogs the frame (*Vratar*)



Figure 14. Kandidov invites perspectival sympathy (*Vratar*)

This weighting of sympathy is subtly maintained during the match itself. Over the course of the fifteen-minute footballing sequence, Timoshenko and his cinematographer Vladimir Danashevskii use an impressive array of shots and edits to convey the dynamism and disorder of the play: close-ups of bundles of legs kicking at the ball; panning shots that mimic the point of view of a spectator in the stands turning their head to follow the play; fixed frames into which bodies move, collide, and then leave again. In this context, it is almost exclusively Gidraer players who are afforded steady tracking shots. The most obvious example is the long shot that follows Karasik up the pitch as he charges towards the winning goal (Figure 15). These tracking shots build on the sympathy established when Karasik was just an aspiring loser facing potshots from local children. The structure of the sporting action — what football fans would call the ‘run of play’ — is uncovered through identification with Gidraer players and Karasik in particular.

Kandidov in contrast is framed during the match as the self-conscious avatar of his team’s success or failure, as indicated by a lingering shot of him fingering his side’s badge, sewn into his kit (Figure 15), his position as goalkeeper keeping him detached from the ruckus of the game, as opposed to the pressed-upon Karasik. The visual patterning of sympathy and teamwork contra individualism comes to the fore in the dual moments of violence that close the match. Karasik puts his body on the line for his team and is inadvertently wounded as a result. When he is lying prone on the field he is surrounded by concerned teammates. Kandidov strikes an opposition player at no benefit to his side and is

dismissed. When he finally concedes a goal, and is lying distraught in his goalmouth, he is alone (Figure 16), just as he is as he storms out of the stadium, disappearing into the depth of the frame. John Haynes has drawn attention to the way that the high-angle crane shot used to capture Kandidov lying alone and fleeing the stadium effects ‘an unsettling mixture of pathos and superiority.’¹²⁰



Figure 15. Karasik loses himself in the game; Kandidov stands apart as self-aware avatar (*Vratar*)



Figure 16. The wounded Karasik attracts concern; the beaten Kandidov is abandoned (*Vratar*)

Yet the relationship in these sequences between community/*obsbchestvennost*’ and violence/pain is more complicated than the simple trope of self-sacrifice for the communal

¹²⁰ John Haynes, ‘Film as Political Football: *The Goalkeeper* (1936)’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3:1 (2007), 283–97 (p. 291).

good suggests. There is more at stake here, particularly when we factor in the onlooking crowd and the flow of emotions between pitch and stands. In line with Kassil's description of sport as poetry — a wonderful expression of human will — and the dialectical relationship of *stikhiia* to *soznanie* in the Kandidov-Karasik rivalry, 'pure' rationality has little place in *Vratar*'. His engineering prowess aside, Karasik is certainly not a *reasonable* man, even if he does act as the embodiment of *soznanie* within his community. He is thoroughly emotional: nervous around Grusha, excitable around Nastia, reacting angrily to Kandidov's transgressions. Like Marko in *Schastlivyi finish*, what he requires in order to accede to a fullness of character is to reimagine himself as a *bodily* being, to refuse to acquiesce to his physical deficiencies.

He manages this in the end thanks to the compulsion provided by the emotional spectatorship of Nastia. With Gidraer trailing 1-0 at the half-time break, Nastia enters the team's changing room and demands an improved performance in the second half: 'Позор [...] Все на вас смотрят... Мальчики, я вас очень люблю!' When Karasik complains that he does not possess the requisite knowledge to play well ('Я действительно *не умею* играть'), she replies: 'Ты будешь для меня.' Nastia in this instance represents the emotional demand of the collective, something superseding athletic ability and rational thought. Here we get a sense of the biopolitical terms of the film, the 'happiness debt' outlined at the end of the previous chapter; I will return to this below. The team are roused, break into song, and go on to win. Crucial here is the fact that Nastia and their other comrades *will be watching* ('Все на вас смотрят'): Karasik and company will have to respond visibly to the emotional demand. In fact, the importance of having one's fragile, at-risk body *witnessed* by one's comrades was played out before the match even began. With the rest of the Gidraer team stranded after the hovercraft bringing them to the match breaks down, Karasik decides to run out onto the pitch to face Torpedo alone. Kassil's description of this moment in the directing script is telling: 'Оглянувшись назад и решительно побежал на поле. Огромный стадион. Очень мал Карасик [...] Смех. Хохот. Оглушительный хохот 120 тысяч человек [...] У Насти навернулись слезы.'¹²¹ The rest of the Gidraer team do eventually arrive, after having hitched a ride in an airplane and parachuted into the stadium in true daredevil style. Before the match has even begun, Karasik and then his teammates have repaid the emotional debt of their besotted spectators by risking their vulnerable bodies on their behalf.

¹²¹ Lev Kassil' and Mikhail Iudin, "'Vratar' respubliki". Otryvok iz stsennariia', *Kino*, 28 (1936), 3.

The foul that sees Kandidov sent off is pure *grubost*, unreflective and sadistic. Inspired as it is by the need to have Nastia and company witness his emotional debt to them, Karasik's injury is in fact restorative. His pain causes consternation in the crowd (Figure 17), with Nastia and Grusha running to his side in the infirmary (Figure 18); the violence suffered by Karasik reinforces his value to them. Moments later he is barging past opponents, itself a form of violence (he has probably committed a number of fouls), but since he is now embodying the positive values of *initsiativa* and *smelost* the violent act becomes comedic, even joyous. Karasik thus reconciles his unimpressive physique with enthusiasm and energy, fusing the *soznanie* he has always possessed to a newfound *stikhiia*. As he makes his charge up the pitch, Nastia and Grusha break from the crowd to follow him up the touchline despite a policeman trying to restrain them; they track him in parallel with the camera. Spectatorship and sporting action are in emotional and visual unity: mass-ochism achieved. The script here reads: 'У болельщиков уже начинаются конвульсии [...] истерически кричат с трибун',¹²² but this is not Olesha's undifferentiated, primitive, 'живая покатость': this is something like an entire crowd of Valias, with Nastia and Grusha its avatars, repeatedly captured in close-up and mirroring their stricken comrade's movement towards the 'преступное и ужасное' act of humiliating Kandidov.



Figure 17. Mass concern (*Vratar*)

¹²² Ibid., p. 3.



Figure 18. Individualised concern (Nastia and Grusha) (*Vratar'*)

This kind of *obshchestvennost'*, in which the 'entire polis is ritually reconstituted',¹²³ derives ultimately from the combination of bodily sacrifice and emotional debt, and how these are observed by spectators. In this context, which necessitates at least the risk of injury if not outright aggression, it is perhaps not surprising that Gidraer's plan to 'recapture' Kandidov is framed in quite violent terms. 'Чтобы вернуть Антона,' Nastia declares, 'надо победить его.' Karasik takes up the challenge: 'Я чувствую, что я забью ему гол, товарищи!' For Kandidov to once again become part of the mass-ochistic spectacle of community, he must be targeted in a way that borders on sadism. Throughout the film, Kandidov is referred to as the 'сухой вратарь' due to the fact that he has never conceded a goal. It is this virginal state that must be violated, desecrated with the stain of communality. Kandidov has assumed the properties of his own front-page photograph in the sports magazine (just as Tania had aspired to do with the portrait of Ellen Grey) (Figure 19): he has become an iconic figure, a 'мировой парень'. It is the detached purity of this state that makes it unacceptable, indicating as it does his departure from the logic of bodily sacrifice. As in *Zapozdalyi zhenikh*, we are confronted here with an image of perfection that needs to be disrupted without being destroyed; it is enough to prove Anton mortal to bring him back.¹²⁴

¹²³ Livers, p. 176.

¹²⁴ In Kassil's novel, the question of Kandidov's 'virginal' state is played up by a scene in which he is invited during a European tour to become the goalkeeper for the football team of the Vatican: an earthly variation on St Peter guarding the pearly gates. Kassil', *Vratar' respubliki*, pp. 119-120.

In any case, it would be no good for Kandidov's goalkeeping prowess itself to be called too deeply into question, since this is what allows for his redemption in the film's final sequence: the USSR versus the Black Bulls.¹²⁵ It is no surprise that he suffers the same injury in this match as Karasik had in their previous encounter: a blow to the ribs. The crowd's response, of course, is pure concern: we see Karasik himself rise to his feet in alarm, all too empathetic towards his stricken friend. The identification between the players on the pitch and their spectators is absolute, figured in the enacted metonymy of the 'national side'. As such, Kandidov's mass-ochistic, self-sacrificial injury revitalises him just as it did Karasik. He gets to his feet, saves a penalty kick, and runs the length of the pitch to score the winning goal. He is the mirror image of his friend, bound as they now are by the collectively conscious experience of injury. The symbolism may be crude, but this is nonetheless as clear an example as one is likely to find of Scarry's 'socialised sentence'. Self/other distinctions break down, and the collective body results.



Figure 19. Kandidov delights in his own image (*Vratar'*)

¹²⁵ John Haynes notes that the Black Bulls players were drawn from the ranks of the Dynamo Kiev Masters team, and so may well have been recognised by the audience — presuming that they were football as well as film fans. Haynes, p. 293.



Figure 20. Kandidov in goal for the USSR: representing something greater than himself (*Vratar'*)

Community, comedy, catastrophe

What are the implications of this model of *obshchestvennost'*, delimited as it is by the time of the match, the space of the stadium, and by the need for bodily suffering? Where do its tensions lie? *Vratar'* is defined by a constant play between staticity and eruption, fixity and novelty. In a sense, the Gidraer community is totally static and self-sustained. Every member has an essentialised role. When Kandidov is first spotted on the banks of the Volga, one worker tells Karasik, 'Вратаря настоящего у нас нет...' Kandidov's function in his future collective is determined before he even agrees to join. When he decides to leave, his comrades are overcome with an almost pathological desire to return him to his proper place, to *his* team. Unlike in other *fizkul'tura* films, there is no transition between romantic partners and no switching of familial roles. Indeed, the romantic inflexibility of Kassil's and Iudin's script was a source of annoyance for some: several speakers at a discussion of the film at Dom Kino in Moscow in December 1936 became fixated on the fact that Grusha desired Karasik and not the strapping Kandidov. One was moved to ask: 'Может ли девушка любить толстого человека? Это действительно мрачная проблема.'¹²⁶

¹²⁶ 'Stenogramma disputa v dome kino po obsuzhdeniiu fil'ma "Vratar' respubliky". 14 dekabria 1936 goda.'. RGALI, f. 2923. op. 1. ed. khr. 10 (l. 25).

Of course, the affirmation of local loyalties, especially when figured in terms of labour units, was not a necessarily negative trait. Indeed, the transfer of players between teams had been a source of great irritation for *fizkul'tura* activists and administrators since the mid-1920s, when the NEP first opened up the possibility for a quasi-open market in athletes. The Council of Physical Culture's records for the year that *Vratar'* was released feature dozens of complaints to regional and national officials on the matter: fans stating the inappropriateness of athletes moving between teams; factory directors asking for permission to release or register workers for use in their sports teams; athletes writing in to plead for special allowances or to attack managers for failing to allow them to move.¹²⁷ There is even an example of a 'real-life' Kandidov, one S. Artem'ev, who writes in self-exculpation after having spent several years moving between different football teams in search of success:

Переходя из одной организации в другую я не только повредил своим техническим результатам, но и незаметно для себя отвык от трудовой и общественной жизни [...] Прошу разрешать мне выступать за Общество СПАРТАК в коллективе которого я вырос с детства и который считаю для себя родным и близким.¹²⁸

The story of Anton Kandidov's return 'home', and the rigidity of that home's social structures was thus partly a response to a well-known and widespread *obshchestvennost'*-deficiency in Soviet football.

Yet this sense of staticity and inflexibility is itself shown to be insufficient to sustain community. The 'reforging pathos' and 'ritual reconstitution' identified by Livers depend entirely on the energy, disorder, and risk of the football match. Communal life ritualistically reasserts itself against its own mummification into lifeless iconicity. As Marina Kostiukhina puts it in her reading of *Vratar' respubliki*: 'в романе Кассия [...] статичность взрывается. Апофеоз свободы — мощный рывок вратаря через все поле.'¹²⁹ In the film it is first Karasik and then Kandidov who makes this dash for freedom. A description from the novel of Anton leaping into action to make a save demonstrates this constant contrast between passivity and energy. Anton is an irresponsible player, loafing

¹²⁷ 'Materialy o perekhodakh sportsmenov iz odnoi organizatsii v druguiu' (1936). GARF, f. 7576. op. 14. ed. khr. 3a.

¹²⁸ Ibid., l. 91.

¹²⁹ Kostiukhina, p. 145.

around until the moment that a ball is kicked towards him. ‘Только в самую нужную секунду все эти как будто расслабленные мышцы и взгляд, полный умышленного пренебрежения, собирались, сжимались, концентрировались в великолепно отточенном безошибочном броске.’¹³⁰ And it is of course these moments of *vzryv* that animate the crowd and hence fulfil the communal emotional debt. There is something incommensurable at the heart of the *obshchestvennost’* in *Vratar’*, which perhaps explains why only a football game — the ‘amphitheatre of self-renewal’ — can generate and contain it.¹³¹

We can approach this question of staticity/fixity and eruption/novelty from another angle by considering the critical response to the film regarding genre and style. Roughly speaking, a tension was highlighted between the lyrical style and the comedic genre. In common with many other films of the period (such as Raizman’s *Letchiki*, for instance), the film’s ‘lyricism’ — as evidenced by its spacious, brightly-coloured interiors, idyllic exteriors, preponderance of clean white sets and costumes, and simplistic romantic storylines — was criticised for its sterility and inflexibility, what one critic called its ‘искажение действительности’.¹³² ‘Lyricism’ in this reading signified lifeless spaces occupied by soulless characters: in the case of *Vratar’*, the scenes that act as filler between the sporting action. In an annual review of cinematographic trends published in *Iskusstvo kino*, Sergei Bronshtein cited *Vratar’* (alongside *Sluchainaiia vstrecha*) as one of a number of films from 1936 guilty of ‘cold’ and uninhabitable *mise en scène*.

Слащавы и трафаретны павильоны «Вратаря» (“Ленфильм”) [...] холодны и огромны, независимо от того, кто в них должен обитать, выписаны в стандартных белых тонах, обставлены неудобной мебелью и кажутся нежилыми. Это мы имеем во «Вратаре», в фильме «Настоящий товарищ» (“Украинфильм”), в «Случайной встрече» (студия “Рот-фронт”) и во многих других картинах.¹³³

These sterile interiors were populated by unmotivated, uninteresting figures; in *Kino*, Sergei Ginzburg again linked *Vratar’* to a whole range of other ‘lyrical’ romantic comedies and concluded: ‘Во всех этих фильмах нет образов, а имеются лишь персонажи,

¹³⁰ Kassil’, *Vratar’ respubliki*, p. 147.

¹³¹ Livers, p. 168.

¹³² Nikolai Aduiev, ‘Fantastika i pravdopodobnost’’, *Kino*, 26 (1936), 3.

¹³³ S. Bronshtein, ‘Tekhnicheskoe kachestvo nashikh fil’mov 1936 g.’, *Iskusstvo kino*, 5 (1937), 58–64 (p. 59).

действующие лица.¹³⁴ The clearest summation I have seen of lyrical lifelessness comes from a participant at the Dom Kino roundtable discussion in December 1936. At this meeting, Aleksandr Stolper — who had by that point written Nikolai Ekk's 1931 film *Putevka v zhizn'* — called *Vratar'* the culmination of a stylistic development that he traced from Aleksandr Macheret's *Chastnaia zhizn' Petra Vinogradova* (Moskinokombinat, 1934) through to the (clearly much-maligned) *Sluchainaia vstrecha*.

У нас появился / я не могу назвать это даже стилем / С МЕСТА: Жанр сладкой лирики [...] Из чего складывается этот стиль? В первую очередь из огромных палац, из молочно-белых декораций, из цветущих деревьев и насквозь фальшивых людей [...] это — лирическая комедия, ни драма, ни комедия, ни рыба, ни мясо. Что же это такое? / С МЕСТА: Филе. /смех/ Но с той лишь разницей, что филе бывает вкусное.¹³⁵

If its lyrical formal qualities were associated with blandness, inflexibility, fixity, then what about the film proved popular or moving? Again, the critical response was practically unanimous: the staging of the football match was a triumph, a comedic, exciting example of dynamic filmmaking. Danashevskii was praised for his camerawork here ('блестяще по динамике и экспрессии сделавший «футбольную» половину «Вратаря»', as Bronshtein had it) as much as he was criticised for the interior scenes elsewhere.¹³⁶ In an edition of *Iskusstvo kino* published a few months earlier, I. Berezark claimed that the footballing scenes 'saved' the picture.¹³⁷ For Ginzburg, the match between Gidraer and Torpedo was captivating in its energy and narrative compression, the way in which it followed the 'logic' of the game and the particular emotions associated with football spectatorship: 'Они смотрятся с тем большим интересом и вниманием, которым зритель уделяет настоящим состязаниям. Здесь у зрителя возникает настоящий спортивный азарт, он превращается в футбольного «болельщика»'.¹³⁸ This sense of the 'logical' or expedient staging of the match was highlighted again in the Dom Kino discussion, where one otherwise disgruntled participant described Danashevskii's and Timoshenko's work as

¹³⁴ S. Ginzburg, 'Vo vlasti plokhikh traditsii. O kartine «Vratar'»', *Kino*, 61 (1936), 2.

¹³⁵ 'Stenogramma disputa', l. 1.

¹³⁶ Bronshtein, p. 62.

¹³⁷ I. Berezark, 'Vratar'', *Iskusstvo kino*, 1 (1937), 27–29 (p. 28).

¹³⁸ Ginzburg, p. 2.

revelatory ‘cine-football’: ‘Это впервые применено в кинотехнике, в кинофутбольной технике.’¹³⁹

Here the fundamental importance of spectatorship is laid bare, inasmuch as the film ‘succeeds’ only at those moments in which the film-viewer is rendered coterminous with the match-viewer; when, in Shcherbenok’s terms, our ‘perception of [the characters]’ relations has been so deeply grounded in their intersubjective network’ that we know how it feels to be amongst the onscreen crowd.¹⁴⁰ The football sequence, with its play between crowd, team, and cinema audience, shows how our understanding of spectatorship and film can move beyond the unilateral, dominating gaze proposed by Laura Mulvey as structuring the relationship between viewer and screen,¹⁴¹ and towards a more expansive and inclusive reading of fantasy and visual pleasure. As Judith Mayne has written, cinema is ‘fantastic’ inasmuch as it allows for the staging of desire. But whereas in Mulvey’s classic text, this desire would be read singularly as that of the (male) viewer, Mayne insists that ‘it is not necessarily the enactment of a single character’s desire. Its pleasures are the pleasures of mobility, of moving around among a range of different desiring positions’.¹⁴² In *Vratar* this ‘mobility’ should be read as the immanence and interchangeability of emotional commitment produced by *obshchestvennost’*. The crowd, the players, and we the viewers are all in it — the act of spectatorship — together.

The staged football worked so well precisely because it was dynamic, driven by an irruptive sense of motion and the unfolding of unexpected but ‘logical’ action. In other words, it was the only successfully ‘comic’ part of this ostensible comedy; indeed, Berezark argued that the film as a whole could only have functioned if Timoshenko had made a pure ‘футбольная комедия’ based on these ‘ясные и логичные кадры’.¹⁴³ Football fitted so well into the comedic frame for the same reasons that made it a useful staging ground for the emotional debt and bodily sacrifice that underpinned social renewal: it was characterised by disorder, *nepredskazuemost’*, *vzryv*. And yet this may ultimately have been the problem. As critically maligned as it was, the film’s sterile formal lyricism in fact captured quite well the immutability of community that motivates Karasik and company to conquer and return

¹³⁹ ‘Stenogramma disputa’, l. 22.

¹⁴⁰ Andrey Shcherbenok, ‘Russian/Soviet Screened Sexuality: An Introduction’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3:2 (2009), 135–44 (p. 139).

¹⁴¹ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), 6–18.

¹⁴² Judith Mayne, ‘Paradoxes of Spectatorship’, in Linda Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 155–83.

¹⁴³ Berezark, p. 29.

Anton; in any case, the narrative is wholly structured around the reaffirmation of this community, without which the viewer is left with nothing but crazy football antics. But the comedic joy that reanimates this community and prevents it from falling into lifelessness depends on football's disruption and novelty, the 'апофеоз свободы' identified by Kostiukhina. Somewhere in the middle of this play between *obshchestvennost'* and disorder the film is destined to fall short.

Vratar' and the critical reaction to it represent a generic, culturally attenuated framing of the core questions — of bodies on display, of violence and emotional/social cohesion — that have structured this thesis. In its own minor way, it asks: can Soviet cinema handle a body 'acting out', moving in unexpected and dynamic ways, displaying aggression? How will the staging of spectatorship and the emotional dynamic established onscreen between onlooker and actor allow it to constrain those moments in which 'статичность взрывается'? These are questions of particular importance in the high-Stalinist 1930s, when socialism was declared an immanent phenomenon — something that could be *felt* — and life had 'become more joyous'.

In his review of the film, Berezhark touches on precisely these issues. Like many of his contemporaries, he is concerned that Soviet comedy does not adequately reflect the sensations of 'joyous' life. The happiness debt is going unpaid onscreen. Berezhark frames the question explicitly: can screenwriters and directors allow for *nepredkazuemost'* — nominally the guiding principle of comedy — in their depictions of Soviet life? If they cannot, then they risk losing the vivacious, even disorderly essence of actualised socialism. 'До конца обдуман, по-своему рационалистичен каждый их шаг. Это, конечно, неправильно. На самом уж деле в нашей бодрой, радостной жизни много неожиданного и смешного.'¹⁴⁴ Berezhark's demand for a true 'футбольная комедия' rather than the psychologically flat 'комедия нравов' that Kassil' and Timoshenko serve up should be understood in these terms, as an insistence on the importance of a little chaos in the mix. Timoshenko seems to have appreciated this to a greater extent than the final cut of *Vratar'* lets on. In a handwritten note from the set of the film, he sketches out some ideas about Karasik's character and the source of the film's potential comedy: 'для самих героев — открыты все пути развития человека [...] Он и здесь выходит победителем неожиданно для зрителей и для самого себя. В этой неожиданности источник

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

глубокого комизма, подлинного нашего советского комизма.¹⁴⁵ With this in mind, the persistent association in the film of Karasik with his pet robot, the mindless automaton, seems more and more like an admission of failure.

As for Kassil', the extent to which he intended to push the connection between disorder and social reconstitution is made clear if one looks at his early plans for the *Vratar*' screenplay.¹⁴⁶ At a point at which his ideas about the Kandidov narrative on both page and screen were still relatively inchoate, and his proposals for the film not yet clipped by budgetary and technical restrictions and Timoshenko's better judgement, the story is effectively an accumulation of catastrophic events, with the final moment of social consciousness almost an afterthought. Kandidov's *stikhiinost*' dominates. Kassil''s treatment opens with a hurricane and with Kandidov crashing his hovercraft through the wall of the local Anti-Flooding Commission.¹⁴⁷ To pay for the repairs, Kandidov suggests staging a football match and charging for entrance; what transpires is pure *azartnost*' and *grubost*'. The pitch is a grass patch with jumpers for goalposts, the referee has a car horn instead of a whistle, goats invade the field. Kandidov is knocked unconscious and a fight breaks out, with the referee transforming, in Kassil''s words, into a boxing umpire: 'Назревает драка. Зрители бегут с криком: НАШИХ БЬЮТ! ТОША, НЕ ВЫДАЙ!!!'¹⁴⁸

That all this is just the prelude to Kandidov joining the Gidraer collective indicates just how much disorder Kassil' imagined was needed in order to inculcate *obshchestvennost*'. Not that the *stikhiinost*' lets up once the goalkeeper meets the engineer (here called 'Nobka' rather than Karasik) et al. Anton chafes at Nobka's plans to build a series of robots, the lifelessness offending his vivacity ('Им нужны роботы бескровные и бессердечные, вам трудно здесь, Антон!')¹⁴⁹ Later, he harangues Nobka before he leaves to join the rival team: 'Я человек глубокой воды, а вы меня на мелководную машину посадить хотите! Эх, можете вы разве понять живую душу, вам автоматы нужны!'¹⁵⁰ The play between robotic inflexibility and elemental energy is completely explicit here, the collective seemingly irreconcilable. Its ritual reconstitution on the field will require an extra degree of violent disorder, which Kassil' duly delivers: Kandidov in this version not only knocks Nobka unconscious on the pitch, but is eventually sent off for attacking the referee,

¹⁴⁵ RGALI, f. 1966. op. 1. ed. khr. 298. l. 1.

¹⁴⁶ Kassil', 'Materialy k stsenariiu', ll. 5-35.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., l. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., l. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., l. 23.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., l. 24.

symbolic embodiment of all authority.¹⁵¹ In front of the spectating crowd, Anton has staged a physical assault on the collective and its binding ties, but this outrage is meant to serve as a prelude to his inevitable redemption. What is a tenuous and momentary conflation of disorder and *obshchestvennost'* in the final film is stretched to breaking point here.

It is in Kassil's proposed ending, though, that the distinctions between the body and its spectator, between *obshchestvennost'* and crude individualism, between the unexpectedness of comedy and the threat of destruction are fully collapsed. Here we can bring the discussion full circle, appreciating the role that theories of violence and biopolitical control have to play in our readings of seemingly facile films. Unable to reconcile himself with his former comrades, Anton decides to commit the ultimate violence to communal unity and kill himself. He locks the doors and windows in his room and turns on the gas. Nobka and Nastia try to ring him but he cannot reach the phone. As he lies dying and alone, Anton is able to assess the quality of his own expiration, to act as the spectator to his own terminal body-on-the-line moment; at the point of death the presence of another is no longer even required in order for the emotional debt to the collective to be felt. 'Эх, Антон, и помираешь ты не по-советски, а на заграничный манер! Чорт, прямо с комфортом помираю!'¹⁵² At the very last moment, he is inspired to live.

Он падает на пол, как боксер на ринге.

И как на ринге, вдруг, слышит он, сквозь уже потемневшее сознание, девять ударов, как счет судьи. Это бьют часы.

Они бьют девять ударов.

Счет нокаута!

И, когда последние силы находит в себе Антон Кандидов — выпрямляется во весь рост и обрушивается на стекло окна.

Свежий воздух врывается в разбитое окно.

Свет! Солнце!

Над водой несется глиссер и сверкают на нем буквы:

¹⁵¹ Ibid., ll. 31-32.

¹⁵² Ibid., l. 35.

«ВРАТАРЬ РЕСПУБЛИКИ».¹⁵³

In this startling sequence, the dual compulsions of bodily sacrifice and social constitution are played out for the highest of stakes. Mukhtar's non-suicide in *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* (see Chapter Three) is sufficient to reunite a husband with his wife. The supposed social dissolution in that film is really a matter of distorted self-image on the part of an individual, and does not require that real blood be spilt. By contrast, Anton's debt to the Gidraer collective is so grievous that it cannot be repaid through the kind of performative anxiety that *Lavry's* Tania displays. Thus in Kassil's original telling, Anton has to die. Here we have a kind of recapitulation of the Stalinist biopolitics outlined by Sergei Prozorov, with which we ended the previous chapter. Since the Stalinist project — including its cinema — consisted in the actualisation of socialism as a lived reality, it could not 'correct' but only 'make be':¹⁵⁴ and since an errant figure like Kandidov will not be permitted in the conditions of immanent socialism (in the terms I have used, what we might call totalised *obshchestvennost'*), then he should not be permitted to linger in the background. 'If the existing reality [...] is from the outset construed as obsolete and dying, then [...] the only thing that socialism promises this dying reality is the actualization of its death.'¹⁵⁵ In this sense, Anton has no choice but to end his life.

This is the 'thanatopolitical' aspect of Stalinism, which should be understood alongside Evgenii Dobrenko's reading, encountered above, of the 'rationalisation of violence'. For Dobrenko, the socialist realist master narrative of the hero's accession through *stikiia* to *soznanie* (or rather his dialectical synthesis of the two) represents the subsumption of the concealed violence of the real world: 'Transformed by socialist realism, the person disciplined by it lives, as it were, beyond the gulag: the camp disappears into the triumph of the hero, and reality continues to develop by the laws of the transformed world.'¹⁵⁶ The social violence implicit in such a rigidly guarded community as Gidraer is transmuted into the bodily violence that Anton does to himself.

Yet as much as Anton must die, he must also live: the collective body must forever be reconstituted, refined, redoubled. It cannot be allowed to suffer a wound as definitive as death. Kenneth M. Pinnow has written on the way in which the new conceptualisation of

¹⁵³ Ibid., l. 35.

¹⁵⁴ Sergei Prozorov, 'Living Ideas and Dead Bodies: The Biopolitics of Stalinism', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 38:3 (2013), 208–27 (pp. 211, 217).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁵⁶ Dobrenko, p. xvi.

citizenship that emerged under Stalin, and which was codified in the 1936 Constitution, was incompatible with suicide (in comparison with the NEP-era medicalisation of self-harm as a curable anti-social trait with identifiable catalysts).¹⁵⁷ In the football match we saw how Karasik's publicly witnessed injury was revitalising, pushing him to score the winning goal; somehow, Anton has to make his own suicide similarly rejuvenating. In this narrative's conjunction of bodies and spectators, order and chaos, Anton has to kill himself, and he has to live, and each demand is as important as the other. In this he is an echo of Pavka Korchagin, the hero of Nikolai Ostrovskii's epochal socialist realist novel *Kak zakaliлися stal'* (1934), whom Kaganovsky discusses at length as an example of the Stalinist hero's compulsive 'refusal to die' in the face of his own unending bodily sacrifice; like Korchagin, Kandidov in the final instance returns to life and the collective, even as his 'act of "returning" to [the] Stalinist ranks marks the distance between the fantasy of inclusion and the reality of dis/memberment.'¹⁵⁸

Perhaps most striking of all, Kassil' frames this acting out of un-Soviet death and Soviet life in terms of sport. Even football, with all its concomitant disorder, is no longer a pungent enough metaphor for Anton's suicide. In this climactic moment of eruption and rejuvenation, Kassil' turns to boxing, an *intentionally* violent martial art. Of course, Anton is 'boxing' against his own unwelcome character traits. Symbolically speaking, Anton has been obliged on behalf of the collective to punch himself in the face to the point of death and then to get back up. In this way, he pays off the biopolitical happiness debt that was unsuccessfully addressed in the 'running' films of the previous chapter while just about surviving as a living body. Although its formulation in the final film version of *Vratar'* is nowhere near as brutal, the story of Anton Kandidov's redemption on paper and onscreen highlights what Anna Toropova calls 'the symbiosis of self-realization and bloodshed on the Soviet screen [that] points to the painful pleasure [...] with which happiness became entwined in the Stalin era.'¹⁵⁹

Football in the Soviet 1920s and 1930s was synonymous with disorder and the improper expressions of unchecked emotion, with spontaneity and individualistic passions,

¹⁵⁷ Kenneth M. Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective: Suicide and the Promise of Soviet Socialism, 1921-1929* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 232-37. See also Thomas E. Ewing, 'Personal Acts with Public Meaning: Suicides by Soviet Women Teachers in the Early Stalin Era', *Gender and History*, 14:1 (2002), 117-37.

¹⁵⁸ Kaganovsky, pp. 19-41 (p. 41).

¹⁵⁹ Anna Toropova, 'An Inexpiable Debt: Stalinist Cinema, Biopolitics, and the Discourse of Happiness', *Russian Review*, 74 (2015), 665-83 (p. 668).

and with the supposed psychopathological tendencies behind the hooliganism epidemic. Timoshenko's film indicates how the problematic nature of real-life football could be subsumed in fictional works into a process of recognition and reconciliation. Kaganovsky speaks of the need for the Stalinist hero to experience 'obscene enjoyment' in the face of his own mutilation,¹⁶⁰ and the world of Gidraer is one in which violence is oddly happy. Violence sparks romance and friendship, and leads to moments of great sporting excitement. At least momentarily, it allows for participant and spectator, life and death, disorder and cohesion to become coterminous. On the footballing scenes in *Vratar'*, Berezark writes: 'все сцены игры захватывают, волнуют зрителя и, главное, заставляют его по-настоящему веселиться.'¹⁶¹ Here, at last, is a thread running from the rough streets of Spartak's Presnia through the young lovers of *Zavist'* to Karasik and Kandidov's unlikely triumphs. Like Valia, Grusha, Nastia, Evgenii, and their real-life forebears, the Stalinist spectator is 'truly happy' only when they are gripped by fear; only then can they enjoy, obscenely, the sensation of their own emotional and bodily debts to the socialist world.

¹⁶⁰ Kaganovsky, p. 10.

¹⁶¹ Berezark, p. 29.

Conclusion

1. Comrades and corpses

I began this thesis with the body of the naked girl in Aleksandr Deineka's *Na balkone* (1931). I proposed 'following' her flesh as it seemed to seep out of the frame, tracing the lacunae in transmission and observation that frustrate visual representations of the Soviet body. My attempts to do so have taken me back to the earliest years of *fizkul'tura* theorising; through the establishment of a social psychological mind-body dynamic under the NEP; the iteration of a bodily aesthetics from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s; questions of Stalinist emotion and social cohesion, gender roles and sexuality; and finally into a consideration of violence, disorder, and their uneasy resolution or redemption into something called *obshchestvennost'*.

My work has brought together several core objects of study (the body, *fizkul'tura*), structuring concepts (*obshchestvennost'*), and analytical modes (surveillance, aesthetics, and above all spectatorship). I have argued for an understanding of Soviet subjectification in which the corporeal is constitutive of the psychological, the emotional, and the sociological — embodied subjectivity — and the interrelationship between physical and visual culture is recognised as crucial to establishing just what it means to 'become Soviet' in the first instance. Taking in the whole of the interwar period has allowed me to demonstrate how aspects of Soviet embodied subjectivity such as beauty, gender identity, and socialised emotion were established slowly, often over more than a decade, belying the assumption that the 1920s and 1930s were marked more by disruption than continuity.

Taken together, my readings of visual and physical cultures have posited a particularly *Soviet model of looking or spectatorship*, one centred on *obshchestvennost'*, the corporeal and emotional unity of the collective. In defining this model I have tried to respond to the three key questions which I raised in opening in relation to *Na balkone*: *what is a Soviet body supposed to look like? How is a Soviet body supposed to be looked at? And to what ends is this looking carried out?*

First, we can say that while the body is supposed to appear clean, orderly, and sensually attuned, these exterior distinctions are in fact of secondary importance compared with the body's willing exposure to the gaze of others in the first place. We saw this in Boris Arvatov's conception of 'социально-эстетический монизм', in newsreels where the rationalised body acted as an exemplary model, in Deineka's and Samokhvalov's *fizkul'tura* canvases, and amongst the conscientious *komсомолты* of *Strogi iunoshka*. But the attractive and available body is not in and of itself a guarantee of properly Soviet subjectivity.

Second: the Soviet body is supposed to be looked at communally and with a sense of mutuality — in other words, in the spirit of *obshchestvennost'*. This is the lesson of *Strogi iunoshka*, with its play on voyeurism and desire. It is also the operative idea behind *fizkul'tura* paintings that blurred the line between sporting participation and observation, as well as the 'running' films of the 1930s, which made the crowd as much a part of sporting performances as the athletes themselves. But not all forms of looking are equally valid, and within the onlooking crowd it is always possible for spectatorship to be distorted by personalised, socially incoherent passions.

Finally, the ends to which the spectatorship of bodies is carried out is always *obshchestvennost'*. Only when *obshchestvennost'* is realised in the act of spectatorship can the play between body and onlooker become constitutive of the actualised Soviet community. This is the premise behind my discussion of 'running' and 'football' films of the 1930s, as well as the biopolitical bent behind Stalinist conceptions of emotional citizenship; it can also, though, be traced back to the social psychology outlined in my Introduction, and the conviction there that Soviet communal living could be brought about through *constant attention to one's own body*, to its dangerous impulses and erraticisms. Even in the absence of others, some kind of Soviet 'spectatorship' is possible. *Obshchestvennost'* is always an ongoing concern.

This thesis has dealt in large part with bodily *ideals*: self-rationalising physiologies, perfectly muscled torsos, star athletes who are also faultless mothers and wives. In a world-building state such as the early Soviet Union, ideals are meant to be realised. The problem with bodily ideals is that their immanence or absence is so keenly felt; everyone inhabits a body that is visible, tangible, sensible to others. The importance of embodied subjectification was hence that it would ground Soviet world-building in the most granular, universal material details of life itself — in the veins, organs, muscle fibres of

every citizen. The embodied subject would be more than a *novyi chelovek*: she would be a *zhivoi chelovek*. This idea is the thread running through my chapters on **the Bather**, **the Runner**, and **the Footballer**, where the threat of ‘empty’ (that is, lifeless) subjectivities is addressed through explorations of *emotional individualisation and emotional spectatorship*. Accounting for embodied subjectivity helps us to appreciate the resurgence, post-NEP, of ‘consciousness’ in psychology and the emotionally complex individual hero in cultural production.

Just how ‘alive’, though, were these new, embodied subjects? In my final two chapters I have turned to biopolitical theory in order to address various issues raised by *fizkul'tura* cinema of the 1930s — emotional debt, citizenship, sexual politics. Drawing on Sergei Prozorov, I have argued that, in the Stalinist context, biopolitics is notably ‘positive’ or ‘productive’; in contrast with the ‘ideocratic’ Soviet thinking of the 1920s, Stalinism is ‘biocratic’, taking as its ‘central question [...] the construction of socialism as a lived reality.’¹ This positive/productive line provides a theoretical counterpart to the visual figure of the embodied subject. My contention throughout this thesis has been that the body and its observation can be understood as constitutive of a process of Soviet construction or formation. The embodied subject was one of many ‘building sites’ for the interwar state, one aspect of a process that Walter Benjamin noted in 1926: ‘now it is made clear to every Communist that the revolutionary work of this hour is not conflict, not civil war, but canal construction, electrification, and factory building.’²

However, simultaneous with this emphasis on ‘construction’ is a tendency towards *destruction*, what Prozorov calls ‘an equally extreme thanatopolitics.’³ Since in its biocratic form the Stalinist project does not ‘correct’ but literally ‘makes be’, it is compelled towards the negation of the immanent results of its own productive impulses whenever these are anything less than ideal. And the Soviet body, as I have demonstrated throughout, is never ideal, inasmuch as it ascends only momentarily to a state of certifiable *obshchestvennost'*. This is why, as I have stated elsewhere, the only thing that is ultimately guaranteed to the embodied subject is its own death. Images of the prone, helpless, lifeless body have recurred in my readings of 1930s films in particular: the *komsomol'ka* Ol'ga on the

¹ Sergei Prozorov, ‘Living Ideas and Dead Bodies: The Biopolitics of Stalinism’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 38:3 (2013), 208–27 (p. 212).

² Walter Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 97–130 (p. 130).

³ Prozorov, p. 209.

operating table in *Strogii iunosha*; Evgenii Karasik in *Vratar*’ lying unconscious on the football pitch; and, most tellingly, the dual ‘fake’ suicides of Mukhtar in *Lavry Miss Ellen Grei* and Anton Kandidov in the first treatment of *Vratar*’. These last two are the only instances in which we the viewer are threatened with the image of a corpse, but by the end of the interwar period the intersection of physical and visual cultures and subjectification placed intolerable pressures on the imagined body. The image of the embodied subject collapses under its own weight, even as it is compelled to *live*, to exist as proof positive of the immanence of socialism. In 1936, Benjamin, who had recognised the centrality of productive forces to the interwar Soviet state, reflected on the generation that had survived the First World War — the generation that would go on to build the Soviet state and its citizens — in terms that capture something of the vulnerability of the corporeal substrate of Russian revolutionary ideals:

A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood in the open air, amid a landscape in which nothing was the same except the clouds, and at its centre, in a forcefield of destructive torrents and explosions, a tiny fragile human body.⁴

2. Utopia incarnate

The Revolution is the biggest and most real person on earth.

— Andrei Platonov, ‘Anatolii Lunacharskii’⁵

If the Soviet embodied subject was not entirely a chimera, it was at least near impossible to represent visually. Trotskii’s famous formulation of the project of the *novyi chelovek* — ‘Social construction and psycho-physical self-education will become two aspects of one and the same process [...] Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser

⁴ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the work of Nikolai Leskov’, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 83–111 (p. 84).

⁵ Andrei Platonov, ‘Lunacharskii’, *Krasnaia derevnia*, 26 (1920), 2. Translation from Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 73.

and subtler; his body will become more harmonised'⁶ — was not something that lent itself to the photograph, the canvas, or the screen. Does it make sense, then, to conclude that the cultural project I have outlined in this thesis was at heart *utopian*?

If 'utopianism' is read simply as a desire for the unattainable, then it is true that this thesis has highlighted the sheer irreconcilability of demands placed on the Soviet body. In my discussion of social psychology in the Introduction, for instance, I emphasised how medical professionals were required to reconcile body, mind, and society within a convincingly Marxist and monist science. These psychologists emphasised *control* in an attempt to fix the subjects of their discipline; the impossibility of maintaining this externalised form of coercion in perpetuity led them in turn to promote a form of automated self-control without spatial or temporal boundaries. One might ask whether the truly utopian aspect of this field of early Soviet culture lay in intellectuals' attempts to control others, or in their attempts to have others control themselves. *Strogi iunosh* deals in utopianism inasmuch as it posits the incommensurability of two versions of Soviethood: one based on bodily beauty and mutuality, the other on instrumentalist intellectual capacity. In *Zapozadalyi zhenikh* and *Vratar'* we saw how, after Keith Livers, the 'utopianism' of Stalinist culture could be said to lie in its claims to a dialectical synthesis of Dionysian *sitkhia* and Apollonian *soznanie*.

Rather than stating flatly that the ideal Soviet body was unattainable, however, it is more productive to consider the specific interrelationship between the Soviet utopian project broadly conceived, and the *body itself* as agent and substrate within it. Here we need to turn back to Eric Naiman's *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, still the most comprehensive commentary on the matter. Naiman reads the NEP era precisely as one of revolutionary 'incarnation' (*voploschenie*); he cites one critic associated with Proletkul't, A. Mgebrov, who declares that the revolution represents 'the unmediated possibility for [man] to incarnate everything through himself.'⁷ This is problematic, since for Naiman utopia is 'anti-cultural' — in a constant attempt at self-purification it represses the extant 'biological, historical, or personal "facts"' that constitute its essential metonymies — and as such abhors the very forms through which it gains immanence.⁸ (There is a clear link here between Naiman's repression of 'facts' and Prozorov's biopolitical

⁶ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. and ed. William Keach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), pp. 206-207.

⁷ Naiman, pp. 4, 67.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 16.

‘thanatopolitics’.) As a result, utopian cultures such as the early Soviet Union are engaged in a constant process of self-abnegation and renewal. Utopia must be given a body, but every body is already itself a contamination of utopia.⁹ In Naiman’s words: ‘the dream of utopia is apt to display disturbing defects when compelled to assume political and economic flesh [...] [hence] the discursive marks made on the flesh when it is forced to “mediate” between the Ideal and the Real’.¹⁰

In the final instance, then, the printed, painted, and filmed bodies of this thesis might convey nothing more nor less than the frustration of utopian ideology incarnated. Where does this leave scholars wishing to explore further the conceptual underpinnings of early Soviet bodies? Responding to this question allows me in closing briefly to point to lacunae in my own research. In writing this thesis I experienced something I imagine is common for scholars of the Soviet 1920s and 1930s: the sensation that no matter what cultural current or concept I settled on, Andrei Platonov had already captured its essence somewhere, in his inimical, quasi-mystical style. In order to work through a wide variety of visual primary sources and to elaborate my core themes of surveillance, aesthetics, and spectatorship, I have had to disregard literature almost entirely; suffice to say that studying literature from the same period could reveal much about embodied subjectivity, as Rolf Hellebust in particular has already amply demonstrated.¹¹ Platonov would be at the heart of any more expansive study of revolutionary *voplosbchenie*. As Hellebust himself has shown, *voplosbchenie* for Platonov is not (as it is for Naiman) a ‘phase’ of the revolution: the whole revolution is one great act of incarnation, a material insertion of meaning into a hitherto unredeemed world.¹² Platonov’s characters are constantly trying to ‘overcome their insubstantiality’, to affirm the solidity of matter in the context of their individual existential emptiness,¹³ and Platonov dwells at length on their bodily sensations: the resonant beating of the heroine Moskva Chestnova’s heart in *Schastlivaia Moskva* (1934),¹⁴ for instance, or the weary legs of the nomads in *Dzhan* (1932).¹⁵

⁹ Ibid., pp. 17-20.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹ Rolf Hellebust, *Flesh to Metal: Soviet Literature and the Alchemy of Revolution* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹² Ibid., pp. 124-130.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 126.

¹⁴ Andrei Platonov, *Schastlivaia Moskva*, in *Schastlivaia Moskva: roman, povest', rasskazy* (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), pp. 9-110.

¹⁵ Andrei Platonov, *Dzhan*, in ibid., pp. 111-234.

A study of embodied subjectivity that took Platonov as its starting point would likely have to contend with the theological resonances of his singular celebration of *voplosbchenie*. Platonov's is a messianic vision in which the revolution and the utopia it engenders allow for spirit and matter to exist in union, blowing away all concerns that the world's spiritual (or ideological) progress might be derailed by the irrationalities or excesses of the body. This is a pre-Hellenistic Christian view of *bodily worth* that is reiterated over hundred of years of Orthodox theology. Thus there might, for example, be a way to map out a kind of spiritual parallel to the monism in social psychological discourse of the 1920s, in which the immediate pre-revolutionary predecessors are not nineteenth-century French sociologists but nineteenth-century Russian religious philosophers like Nikolai Fedorov and Vladimir Solov'ev. What would it mean to read early Soviet bodies in terms of the doctrine of kenosis, for instance — to interpret the materialism and biopolitics of NEP-era and Stalinist ideology on spiritual terms?¹⁶ Both Platonov and his Christian forebears, after all, were committed to transforming the *human* world in the light of an irreducible ideal. As Roman Jakobson once said, there can be 'no resurrection without incarnation, without flesh — immortality cannot be otherworldly'.¹⁷

This theological-utopian bent, however, would require a much more strictly textual approach. This thesis's visual sources illustrate more readily the aspirations and failures of those who saw the Soviet body as a site of potential transcendence or corruption. As much as we can discern in the visual culture several specifically Soviet 'categories of looking', the body remains intransigent in the face of its own perfectibility. It can be moulded, perhaps, but not controlled; as Deineka indicates in *Na balkone*, it is always escaping outside the frame, outside the gaze. Given the ideological, aesthetic, and emotional demands which they made of the body in the interwar Soviet Union, it is perhaps not surprising that the reach of *fizkul'tura* theorists, filmmakers, ideologues, and athletes themselves exceeded their grasp. In an article praising the People's Commissar for Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii, published in 1920, Platonov wrote: 'the Revolution is the biggest and most real person on Earth'. Given the scale of the world-building task at hand, the individual embodied subject could never hope to function as a tenable synecdoche for this towering, millenarian figure. It could not encompass or inspire so much. It could never be real enough.

¹⁶ On this see Hellebust, pp. 149-151.

¹⁷ Cited in Elena Tolstaia-Segal, 'Ideologicheskie konteksty Platonova', in *Andrei Platonov: Mir tvorchestva*, ed. E. B. Shubina (Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel', 1994), pp. 47-83 (p. 62).

Conceptual glossary

Azart — Passion or fervour. Usually understood as a fundamentally antisocial phenomenon resulting from excessive emotional and/or sensory stimulation (for instance, the thrill of a football match), and characterised by irrational, individualistic behaviour. It is associated with *stikhiinost'*, or, conversely, with the absence of *soznatel'nost'*.

Biosotsial'naia tsennost' — Biosocial worth or value. A term introduced by social psychologist Vladimir Borovskii in his 'Chto takoe psikhologiiia' (*Krasnaia nov'*, 4 (1927), 155-175), it points to the constitutive interrelationship between the individual body and social structures, and the need to account for the social effects of one's bodily actions. Hence it is a useful category in thinking about *fizkul'tura* and *obshchestvennost'*. The notion of the 'biosocial' can be related to biopolitical theory but is not a programmatic line of thinking.

Emotsional'nost' — Emotionality. The quality of being receptive to and productive of emotions. This is an important aspect of Stalinist conceptualisations of subjectivity in particular, where *emotsional'nost'* is usually understood as fundamental to social cohesion, indicating as it does an awareness of the needs and desires of others and the ability to address these through the demonstration of one's own emotional capacity.

Fizkul'tura — Physical culture. The catchall term for cultural forms that engage, exercise, rationalise, and refine the body. This includes sports and calisthenics, but practically all points of contact between the Soviet body and the Soviet public sphere can be described in terms of *fizkul'tura*: hygiene and public health, labour practices, sexual politics and gender roles, bodily aesthetics, and so on.

Novyi chelovek — The New Man/Person. The archetypal Soviet citizen, and the projected end point of much political, social, and cultural transformation in the early years of the Soviet Union. The postulated qualities of the *novyi chelovek* were prone to change, but in the interwar period the following were routinely emphasised: physical beauty and strength, rationalised bodily processes and impulses, *obshchestvennost'* in word and deed, responsiveness to Party ideological demands, and the sublimation of sexuality.

Obshchestvennost' — Mutuality, communality, sociality. A nebulous but crucial term that recurs in multiple contexts across political and cultural fields. It indicates awareness and appreciation of one's social group, attention to the effects of one's behaviour on the collective, a willingness to engage in collective projects, an openness to sharing information. *Obshchestvennost'* can be thought of as a kind of diffuse intimacy, a sense of connection to others that can be activated at any time. It is often posited as synonymous with 'Soviethood' (the collection of qualities that define the *novyi chelovek*), and used as a kind of yardstick against which to measure the ideological rigour of works of art.

Soznanie / Soznatel'nost' — Consciousness. Ideological acuity, selflessness, focus, rationality of action. Alongside *stikhiia / stikhiinost'*, it is frequently understood as one of the twin poles of Stalinist subjectivity. Identified by Katerina Clark (*The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (2000)) and many others as the endpoint of the socialist realist master narrative, which sees the hero transcend his initially spontaneous or elemental state and achieve 'consciousness'. Stalinist culture can also be read as staging the dialectical synthesis of consciousness and elementality/spontaneity.

Stikhiia / Stikhiinost' — Elementality or spontaneity. Undirected energy, primal strength or vigour, irrationality. Alongside *soznanie / soznatel'nost'*, it is frequently understood as one of the twin poles of Stalinist subjectivity. Identified by Katerina Clark (*The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (2000)) and many others as the starting point of the socialist realist master narrative, which sees the hero transcend his initially spontaneous or elemental state and achieve 'consciousness'. Stalinist culture can also be read as staging the dialectical synthesis of consciousness and elementality/spontaneity; in this reading, *stikhiinost'* is not abandoned entirely in the accession to *soznatel'nost'*, since it is itself a source of desirable qualities such as bravery, initiative, and physical self-sacrifice.

Voploshchenie — Incarnation. The act or process of giving physical form to ideals or ideological imperatives. The desire to define the bodily qualities of the *novyi chelovek*, for instance, can be understood as part of a broader project of revolutionary 'incarnation', whereby 'Soviethood' is brought into being. Eric Naiman defines the 1920s as the Soviet state's era of incarnation in these terms, relating the concept to the inherent crises of utopian social thought (*Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (1997)). *Voploshchenie* also has theological connotations, notably of a pre-Hellenistic Christian view of bodily worth, that are of particular importance to Russian Orthodox Christian thought.

Zarazitel'nost' — Contagion. A trope in social sciences, social psychology, and psychopathology that was popularised by mid-nineteenth-century French and

Italian thinkers, it refers to the tendency for irrational or antisocial behaviour to become dispersed throughout groups of people. This is sometimes understood as occurring via a mechanism of imitation. Although it is largely used to refer in pathological terms to social behaviour that works against *obshchestvennost'*, indicating the failure to maintain a socially productive self-other relationship, contagion is technically a formally neutral mechanism.

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