

CHAPTER 3

SOKUROV'S CINEMATIC MINIMALISM

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In various art forms and media, the term 'minimalism' is used to describe the transnational phenomenon of an aesthetic of reduction. The development of minimalist practices in film began after the Second World War when a modern cinema that reflects on its own temporality replaced the classic cinema of action.¹

Of special interest to me is the question whether specific strategies of minimalism can also be found in contemporary Russian cinema. What potential could minimalist film aesthetics possibly unfold in Russian culture against the historical backdrop of revolutionary maximalism, avant-garde claims of universality and rhetorical strategies aimed at overwhelming the audience in Soviet mass culture?²

The starting point of my exploration of this question is Ulrich Gregor's notice of the use of the minimalist method in the films of Alexander Sokurov that display 'events of extended phenomenological observation and only minor dramatic variation'.³ Referring to a series of examples, I will make an attempt at finding more systematic criteria to describe the forms of cinematic reduction in Sokurov's oeuvre. A tendency towards minimalism in his work will be examined in the context of the Russian-Soviet history of film, technical developments in Hollywood cinema as well as the Western avant-garde cinema of the sixties and seventies.

The film images slow down

The defining feature of the cinematic medium is movement. Contrary to the cultic origins of drama and theatre, film is the result of an advance in photographic technology to facilitate the representation of moving images. By projecting twenty-four images per second and taking advantage of the limited response time of the human eye, film is able to deliver a simulation of movement and the flow of time to its audience.

In Sokurov's work, a tendency to subvert this fundamental condition of the cinematic medium can be observed, taking the form of a minimalisation of movement, a deceleration of the film images that can eventually even have the effect of their seemingly coming to a standstill. This impression of slowness is created by an extreme limitation of cuts in favour of long, continuous shots, the restriction of camera movement as well as a restraint of character movement in a reduced dramatic composition.

Sokurov often rejects the concept of montage as a method aiming at the fragmentation of the homogeneous space of an organic work as a whole propagated by earlier revolutionary film theorists like Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Dziga Vertov et al. In his later work in particular, he criticises distraction as a mode of reception and, with his aesthetics of 'still images', strives for a restoration of the aura of art that Walter Benjamin considered to have been overcome precisely by film's mechanical reproduction.⁴ Meditative contemplation takes the place of shock-like dynamic and, in the course of this, the reduction of movement is compensated for by opening up a space that has to be filled by the perception, reflection and imagination of the audience. Similar to Andrei Tarkovsky's work⁵ and contrary to its technical characteristic, the cinematic medium here serves the purpose of contemplative immersion. Time and movement seem suspended in a cultic space of perception. In an interview, Sokurov describes his cinematic ideal of time as a continuous duration that approaches the limits of eternity:

There is a tense in the English language that I like very much: *present continuous* – if my intuition does not deceive me, this form exists in no other language. [...] It delineates such a broad space of time that one is forced to reflect on where

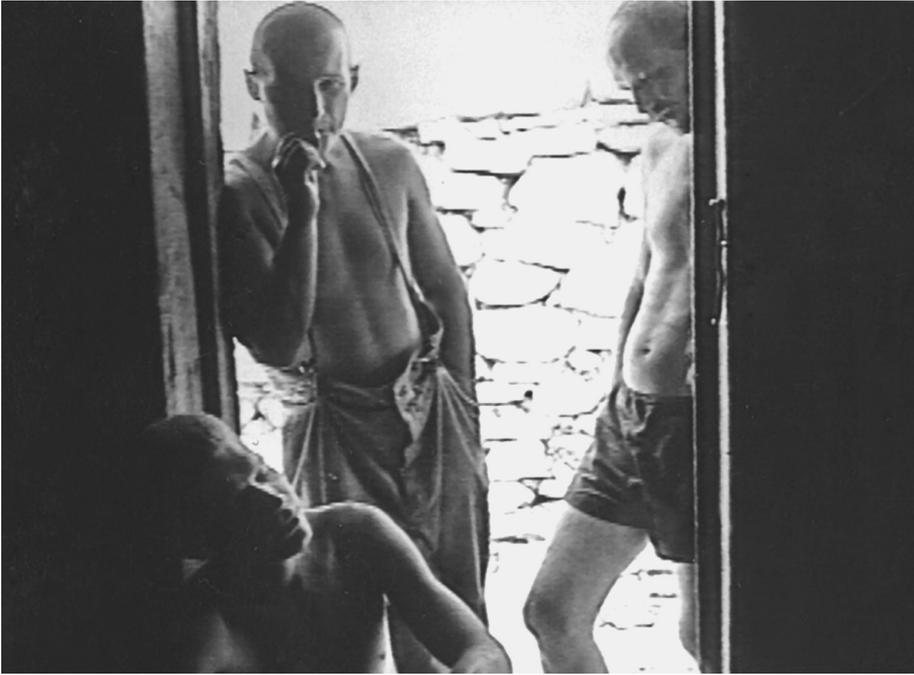
everything comes from and where it is headed. Life itself is short but death lasts a long time.⁶

By presenting an event or a condition in a very long or even in its entire duration – without compressing its representation into easily consumable temporal units – Sokurov challenges his audience to experience time in a way that is very different from the rhythms of mainstream mass media. It is not the film image that changes to draw the spectators' attention but the spectators themselves who have to change to perceive the liminal variability of the images. What we are dealing with here is an appeal to reshape the perceptual apparatus beyond the comprehension of a narrative.

A rather radical example of this from Sokurov's oeuvre is *Spiritual Voices*. In this film, the distance between beginning and ending is expanded to downright monumental proportions by means of a minimalist strategy of slowing down time.

Sokurov continues Bazin's tradition of the ontological film where – owing to the great depth of field of the images – long, continuous shots can be realised in *plans-séquences*. Bazin conceptualised film as a medium of duration: Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified, as it were.⁷ To visualise even minimal nuances of change through gradual transformation of single picture elements in *Spiritual Voices*, Sokurov makes use of electronic video technology that he adopts, contrary to a televisual utilitarianism, for his film aesthetics: 'Video – that is a world of inertness and aggression. The only thing we took from the video experience is the technology of the long, continuous shots.'⁸

Spiritual Voices shows more than five hours from the lives of soldiers who lie in wait at the Tajik-Afghan border. Barely perceptibly changing shots immerse the viewer's gaze in the barren landscape of the border region: sky, mountains, earth; the shape of a human crossing the frame; the sun slowly vanishing behind the horizon, smoke rising from a fire, the face of a sleeping young man ... These images are accompanied by music and the author's comments that also refer to the composers Mozart, Beethoven and Messiaen. This superimposition of visual and acoustic layers creates a cinematic space in which – by means of the interaction of seeing and hearing



Still from *Spiritual Voices*.

and corresponding to the title *Spiritual Voices* – the sense of sight that is directed at the physical world is devalued in favour of a more verbally orientated inner vision.

The duration of the shots in *Spiritual Voices* seems disproportionate to their narrative content. The plot of a war film is implied but not developed into an exciting staging of combat scenes.⁹ The focus is on vacuous activity, on the breaks between military actions; almost nothing happens. Sokurov explicitly opposes the conventional representation of war in film that aims solely at spectacularity:

In war, there are no picturesque explosions, sensational time lapses, people who grab their heads. There are no blinding flashes, no blood that slowly runs down a finger. And actually, there is no excitement either. [...] Long breaks between the attacks, in which there is relaxation. A great amount of vacuous activity: erratic advances, long periods of looking around.¹⁰

The film images no longer tell a story

The process of slowing down of the film images is linked with a reduction of narrative complexity – a simplification of plot structure that borders on eventlessness. Sokurov's contemplative shots amount to a rejection of the aesthetics of identification of narrative cinema whose most developed form can be found in the techniques of Hollywood cinema.¹¹ By means of precisely calculated changes of framing and point of view, especially the direction of the gaze of the shot-reverse-shot-method, the audience is drawn into the action that is supposed to grip, thrill, scare or move it to tears. Sokurov's films have a distinct effect against the backdrop of the tradition of the Soviet epic film that, incidentally, was also influenced by American film techniques. The film images of Socialist Realism tell the great secularised story of salvation that forms the basis of the ideology of Marxism and Leninism; the stillness of Sokurov's images frees them from any legible sense of history.

As a minimalist reply to the festive day chronotope that is a central element of the canonical plot of Soviet film, I would like to take a closer look at Sokurov's *Evening Sacrifice*. The festive day chronotope of Socialist Realism offers the possibility of transcending a negative everyday reality by staging the dream of the communist paradise, the bright future, as an all-encompassing festival of joy in the present. The cinematic representation of this collective festival is orientated towards a maximalist effect. By means of purposeful employment of the sensual and emotional allures of movement, rhythm, music, colour etc., the audience is infused with a 'utopian sensibility', an exceptional sensation of energy, abundance, intensity, transparency and a physically and sensually tangible community.¹²

Sokurov's *Evening Sacrifice* refrains from any such intensive treatment of the viewer's psyche. The utopian potential of transcendence is withdrawn from the film images, subtracted, and the production and emotional values of the staging of the festival are minimised in favour of an effect of contemplation. *Evening Sacrifice* is a documentary about one of the great Soviet public holidays in May, although it remains uncertain whether its images of a spring day in Leningrad were captured on the first or ninth of May. The political-ideological meaning cannot be deduced from the shots since there are no unambiguous signs or symbols referring to it.

The actual events of the festive day are left aside. None of the usual joyful faces, parades and fireworks are shown; instead, the camera focuses on the happenings on the fringes of the festival.

Evening Sacrifice is divided into two parts: In the first part, the social ritual of firing a salute is sketched out in rhythmic variations of repeating shots as an elementary process of loading, command, firing of the salvos and, finally, the empty shell casings falling to the ground; the second, longer main part focuses on the depiction of the crowd – images reminiscent of the aesthetics of film pioneers like the Lumière brothers – that, after the festival has ended, swarms past the camera across the Nevsky Prospekt in an extraordinarily slow movement of indeterminate energy. At times, the crowd seems to be approaching the audience; then again it seems to remain in one place.¹³

The isolation of the festive day chronotope from any kind of history reveals the physical dimension of actions beyond their ideological meaning in social ritual. Two different collective bodies are juxtaposed: the mechanical movements of soldiers and a crowd driven by instincts that is not – as it would be in keeping with the



Still from *Evening Sacrifice*.

convention of Soviet festive day representation – arranged in synchronised movements as a decorative ornament.¹⁴

Long, static shots from opposed but identically high points of view dissolve into each other. By intercutting these wide shots of the crowd with shorter medium shots and close-ups that capture single persons, faces and gestures, Sokurov creates a tension between the individual and the collective and explores the relationship between the single body and the body of the crowd in a time at the end of ideology.¹⁵

The film images are silent

In contention with a hypertrophic verbalisation of film in the Soviet Union's ideological culture – which, for example, found its expression in a much more intensive censorship of screenplays, the literary scripts, than their visual realisations –, the reduction of the text dimension in *Soviet Elegy*, a cinematic portrait of Boris Yeltsin, actually results in the obliteration of human speech in the silence of the film images. Sokurov robs the politician of his essential means of articulation, verbal rhetoric, and places him inside a zone of silence.¹⁶

By dispensing with language almost entirely, the extremely long, continuous shots, on the other hand, open up a space for the perception of the physical dimension of representation. The voice-over commentary is limited to very few informative sentences and contains no references to the party careers of the person portrayed in the film. The visual signs of Yeltsin's elevated status only provide a backdrop for a presentation of the most elementary situations and actions. For example, the camera accompanies him on his long way from his office through endless corridors out of the building to his car and observes the activity of walking itself. In a reversal of the ideological principle, vision replaces words: beyond the realm of signs, details, accidental and unpredictable moments come into view; beyond the realm of words, noises, sounds and tones become audible.

In his dacha, Yeltsin is shown as secluded, isolated from his political surroundings, in a way as a private citizen in front of his TV. Mikhail Gorbachev, his rival at the time, is seen on the screen at a party convention, delivering a speech that cannot be understood because the sound is subdued, the volume turned down. The

political message is erased or rather displaced by the sounds of everyday life in the dacha (steps, the clinking and rattling of dishes, and the like) as well as 'empty' white noise, a sound effect created by an active receiver. In the subsequent, extremely long shot – whose view through a window from outside also lends it the appearance of a framed picture – Yeltsin sits in front of a microphone in a reflective pose, silent and motionless, conveying the impression of a pause in the flow of information. The camera slowly zooms in on his face until we see it in a close-up. This shot lingers for an almost agonisingly long time, staring at his features, freezing the pose. Beyond verbally articulated textual clichés of political speech, the reality of the body is exposed by the means of staging.

While political leaders appear as embodiments of the process of history in the historical-biographical films of the Soviet era – the cinematic portraits of Lenin and Stalin immediately come to mind – Sokurov's silent images address this mythical fusion of the actual and the ideal, of status quo and utopian objective, and thereby reflects the relationship between ideological concepts and physical-material reality.

The 'silent' sequences can also be interpreted in the context of the long tradition of a negative semiotics, which has been of special importance for Russia since the Middle Ages with regard to the 'negative' or 'apophatic' theology that dates back to Dionysius the Areopagite and casts doubt on the ability of speech to comprehend deity.¹⁷ Even though this thought is secularised here, the point nevertheless is to demonstrate that speech can only miss its object – in this case physical-material reality – over and over again.

And yet another interpretative tradition lends itself to an examination of this example. Yeltsin's reflective pose of the head resting on a hand, the reduced movement and the freezing of the images refer to the iconography of the 'Saturnine' melancholy that developed with Albrecht Dürer's copper engraving 'Melencolia I' from 1514. Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl have fundamentally described the semantic field of the melancholic gesture:

We are here dealing with an ancient gesture, which essentially – as a gesture of mourning – has its origin in Egyptian reliefs. Besides, it expresses fatigue and creative thinking. Because of this triple meaning it was predestined for the

representation of Saturnine melancholy, which unites in itself gloom, exhaustion and thinking.¹⁸

This mood of grief, gloom and lamentation is not only predetermined by the title *Soviet Elegy*. The final, freezing shot of a sitting Yeltsin¹⁹ mirrors the gravestone sculpture of an angel – its head also lowered onto its hand in a melancholic pose – from the first sequence of the film, in which the camera slowly pans across an old, overgrown cemetery. This angel from pre-Revolutionary times resides in close proximity to the five-pointed Soviet star. A cuckoo's call serves as a reminder of the eternal cycle of life and death. This 'memento mori' is a leitmotif for a cinematic meditation on the transience and finiteness of physical existence as well as the futility of any human pursuit of perfection. The melancholic view on history, which also appears as a process of decay, is a pessimistic one.

The film images stand still

Along with the reduction of the text dimension in the silence of the film images, there is also a reduction of movement in Sokurov's work that takes the form of the images coming to standstill whereby the potential capabilities of the cinematic medium as a movement-image – described by Gilles Deleuze – are counteracted:

In short, film does not give us an image to which movement is added; it immediately gives us a movement-image. It does give us a section, but a section which is mobile, not an immobile section + abstract movement.²⁰

In the process of projection, the figurative differences between film's rapidly sequential photographs create an impression of movement, a kind of virtual intermediate image between two phase-delayed static ones.²¹

Whereas Sergei Eisenstein actually made use of this effect in his early experiments to create the illusion of a stone lion awakening and rising by assembling three still images of differently shaped statues,²² there are sequences in Sokurov's oeuvre that eliminate this cinematic movement effect from the intermediate images in favour of a display of the frozen moment of photography.²³ This is achieved by erasing the differences between the repeating images

and thus letting the 'empty intermediate images' become frames that isolate the photographs from their surroundings and give them an auratic dimension, even though the images cannot deny their technical character.²⁴

In a series of dissolves between images of similar shape whose juxtaposition produces no kinetic energy resulting from figurative tensions, *Soviet Elegy* unfolds a portrait gallery of people who played different roles in Soviet political history. The series begins and ends with Lenin; in between, 120 portraits are arranged, only partly in chronological order. Revolutionaries stand next to bureaucrats, perpetrators next to victims, famous faces next to ones that remain obscure.²⁵ The formation of an impression of timelessness is even further reinforced by a voice-over reading out the names of those portrayed like in a liturgy of a secular commemoration ceremony.

The 'mortifying' image form of photography enters into a paradoxical relationship with the cinematic medium that first made the representation of movement and of the passage of time possible. In the context of film, the use of the older photographic medium results in a special intensity of the imagination of death:

I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future.²⁶

The film images become painting

In the cinematic medium, Sokurov continues his attempts at subverting the technical quality of his own images and circumventing the processes developed in the machine age. By creating special optical conditions for capturing an object, even technical media can be used to produce a painterly effect. To achieve this goal, various choices such as the position of the camera, lighting, depth of field, processing of the filmstrip's photosensitive layer, manipulations of the camera's optics with special lenses and filters, the relationship between surface and space as well as format play a crucial role.²⁷

Most notably in his film *Mother and Son*, which premiered at the 'documenta' in Kassel in 1997 – i.e. at an art venue and not a

cinema – Sokurov reflects on the relationship between film and painting. The austere story of *Mother and Son* – a young man cares for his dying mother in a country house – is condensed to a few shots like cinematic paintings²⁸ whose atmosphere is characterised by an intricately produced but minimalist Dolby stereo soundtrack consisting of wind noise, chirping birds, soft music and whispered scraps of conversations.²⁹

The manipulative treatments of the sick body, the physical contact during care (combing, feeding, a consoling embrace) define the relationship of the son to his mother. Fatigue, sleep, absorption and approaching death are in turn elements of Sokurov's melancholic depiction of man. The last traces of movement point to total motionlessness: the torpor of death.

In his analysis of the film, Ian Christie discovers the iconography of an 'inverted pietà' – when the son carries his mother through the garden in his arms – or implies an interpretation of the last communion with nature – when the son leans his mother against a birch trunk – as an allegory of 'Mother Russia.'³⁰ Such single-frame references become exceptionally apparent because shot length dominates over the power of montage to create meaning. To Sokurov, the traditional medium of the fine arts serves as an inspirational reservoir of image motifs, shot compositions as well as perspective, light and colour arrangements. To prepare for the shoot of *Mother and Son*, he visited several museums together with his director of photography, Alexei Fedorov, to study the traditions of Russian and European landscape painting. Sokurov himself most notably cites Caspar David Friedrich's *The Monk by the Sea* (1808/10) as a source of inspiration, a Romantic painting that, in the vein of a metaphysics of absence, effectively lets man in his insignificance vanish in front of the grandness and immeasurability of nature: 'The dramaturgical context of the painting corresponds completely with that of my film.'³¹

Of particular media theoretical interest, however, is Sokurov's development of film techniques that suggest an approximation of painterly practices. Just as in traditional painting, he accentuates the artist's subjective signature, his transforming intervention in the process of painterly or graphical shaping. Sokurov converts the camera's technical images, products of a mechanical device, to approximate the pre-technical, manual, handcrafted images of



Still from *Mother and Son*.

painting³² by working on the camera lens with brushes, paint and other tools of painting as he himself describes in his comments on *Mother and Son*:

I employed very simple technical means. We used special optics but also worked on the lens itself with very simple tools like brushes, paint and the like – artistic methods originating from painting. This is also the source of the special demands placed on composition. A lot of very precise, very careful work went into the composition of every single image – just as one would work on a precious stone, by the millimetre, gently and affectionately.³³

The technical aspect of the cinematic medium is suspended by the imitation of human perception. Sokurov does not see the camera as an instrument of mechanical reproduction that records quasi-physical imprints of material reality, but rather uses it with the perceptual perspective of the subject as a point of reference. The probing exploration of reality is abandoned in favour of the traditional artistic ideal of a contemplative vision.

In this transitional condition between painting and film, Sokurov particularly reflects on the relationship between surface and space:

It was simply the first film [*Mother and Son*], in which I exerted influence on the development of colour as well as on the development of space. I did not want to create three-dimensional spaces but a surface, a picture. In the end, I wanted to be honest for once and say: the art of film lies when it claims to be able to create a three-dimensional space, a volume. A three-dimensional space on the screen is simply unachievable.³⁴

This theoretical understanding has its consequences in artistic practice. By using a special lens, the volume of space is compressed, creating the simulative effect of a painterly surface structure within the film image. In *Mother and Son*, shots often appear curiously flat. The unusual, extremely distorting perspectivity that comes with this results in dissolution of the contours separating the human body from its surroundings. In the process of dying, the body becomes an organic part of nature. The wrinkled skin of the mother is interwoven with the furrowed surface of a tree trunk in close-up. The problem of death is reflected upon in the additional dimension of representation as a transition from a state of physical objectivity into a sphere of optical illusion. With death, the human figure merges with its surrounding landscape and becomes a speck of colour in a pattern of light and shadow. Mortal reality thereby seems transformed into an aesthetic value of eternity.³⁵ *Mother and Son* emerges from the tension between the tactile quality of simulated painterly surface structure and the abstraction of visual representation, from the tension between tactile image and visual image that Heinrich Wölfflin described in his definition of the painterly:

Unified seeing, of course, involves a certain distance. But distance involves a progressive flattening of the appearance of the solid body. Where tactile sensations vanish, where only light and dark tones lying side by side are perceived, the way is paved for painterly presentment'.³⁶

In Sokurov's work, painting is not simply appropriated by film; instead, the old medium is reflected upon with the means of the new medium. This can also be observed in the short film *Robert. A Fortunate Life* (1996), a commissioned work for the Hermitage about Hubert Robert, the 18th-century artist of ruins and master of dreamy elegies. Sokurov not only shows Robert's paintings in their frames and thereby brings their status as paintings into focus. By scanning their surface structure with the camera, he also imbues them with a physical presence of their own. In the end, their architectural subject is, in a sense, turned outwards as Sokurov cinematically establishes a relationship between them and the surrounding architectural space of the Hermitage.

Similar to Sokurov's film images, Robert's renderings of ruins convey a melancholic insight into the transience of the world. Everything is directed towards death and 'in the natural death of a work of architecture there is no awakesness, only melancholy.'³⁷ In a way, the architecture of the ruins melts into nature, becomes a *nature morte*.

The desire for something long past that is no more within reach gives rise to a reflection on temporality. The idea of progress is challenged just as much as any linear model of artistic evolution. The ruin appears as a materialised symbol of failure; it mirrors a fundamental experience of modernity right up to the catastrophes of the 20th century.³⁸

From a film-historical perspective, however, Sokurov's work can also be examined against the backdrop of international avant-garde cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. One possible context here would be the structuralist film tradition that reflected on the possibilities of its medium with extremely reduced cinematic forms of expression. Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967), for example, consists of a single, forty-five minute shot showing a mostly empty room, accompanied by a rising sinusoidal tone. The camera slowly zooms in until a photo of sea waves on the opposite wall finally fills the entire frame.³⁹ Similarly, Andy Warhol's single-shot-films like the famous *Empire* (1964), which shows the Empire State Building in New York for a full eight hours,⁴⁰ can also be seen as distant relatives of Sokurov's works. However, whereas the structuralists tried to eliminate the subjective aspect of authorship in their films and the pop artists employed mass culture's reproductive and serial

techniques not only in film but also in the fine arts, Sokurov, by contrast, uses the ideals of traditional painting, the aura of the artwork and the master's signature as points of reference even within the reproductive film medium. He strongly rejects avant-garde art as totalitarian design:

This century is, after all, a time when people were convinced and capable of subordinating art to pragmatic, trivial goals. That was the first step away from classical, academic art. Modernism, the avant-garde, different forms of this direction – they are all art that requires no intellectual work. This is ultimately the path that brings art down to the level of design. That is, after all, the new ideology: design. One might also say that it is a certain kind of Stalinism, a totalitarian form of art that we see here (*he points at an immense number of reproductions – two walls filled with Marilyn Monroes by Andy Warhol*). That is a different form of totalitarianism, a form that runs much deeper, is a lot more forceful, richer, but one hundred per cent totalitarian and at the same time a terror of mediocrity.⁴¹

In his essays and interviews, Sokurov emphatically recommends using the old media as a point of reference as a remedy against the negative effects of an aggressive contemporary visual culture of accelerated, immaterial images. Nevertheless, his attitude cannot be defined as unambiguously traditionalist. In Sokurov's aesthetics, we encounter a very distinct mixture of traditionalism and experiment; following Hans-Joachim Schlegel's paradoxical phrasing for the characterisation of Tarkovsky's position, he could be described as an 'anti-avant-garde avant-gardist'.⁴²

Sokurov reacts to the cult of speed from the beginning of the twentieth century and to the effects of acceleration in the evolution of the media⁴³ with the demonstrative media anachronism of his still images, to an inflationary flood of images in the age of mechanical reproduction with the offer of a meditative, relaxed image reception, to the computer-generated visual effects of New Hollywood's aesthetics of simulation with an almost physical treatment of film images. Within a tension between film, photography and new media, the strategies of minimalism at work in his films

create a zone of interference, of interaction between old and new media that challenges us to reflect on the status of images in our contemporary media society.

Translated by Sebastian Moretto

Notes

- 1 See the two-volume edition by Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, London: Athlone Press, 1992; and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, London: Athlone Press, 1989.
- 2 On the aesthetics of minimalism in Russian culture see Goller and Witte (eds.), *Minimalismus*, which contains an earlier version of this chapter in German.
- 3 Ulrich Gregor, 'Minimalismus im Film', in Sabine Sanio, Nina Möntmann, Christoph Metzger (eds.), *minimalismus. Rezeptionsformen der 90er Jahre*, Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag 1998, pp. 51–54 (p. 53).
- 4 Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935).
- 5 See Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.
- 6 Nikolaj Nikitin and Norbert M. Schmitz, 'Ich lese lieber! Eine kritische Befragung der Moderne mit Aleksandr Sokurov' (Interview), *Schnitt* 3 (1997), pp. 14–15 (p. 14).
- 7 André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', *Film Quarterly* 13.4 (1960), pp. 4–9 (p. 8).
- 8 'Ob izobrazitel'nom reshenii fil'ma. Zapis' Dmitriia Savel'eva 1995 g', in *Sokurov 2*, pp. 506–11 (p. 509).
- 9 See Petr Shepotinnik, 'Kamni', *Iskusstvo kino* 3 (1996), pp. 4–11.
- 10 'Voina v ob'ektive kamery. Zapis' Dmitriia Savel'eva', *Sokurov 2*, pp. 512–16 (p. 514).
- 11 On the narrative techniques of Hollywood cinema see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.
- 12 On the term 'utopian sensibility', see the study on the relationship between entertainment and utopia in popular film genres: Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', in Rick Altman (ed.), *Genre: The Musical*, London, 1981, pp. 175–89, esp. p. 177.
- 13 See Dmitrii Popov, 'Kosmicheskii rakurs', *Sokurov 1*, pp. 125–28, esp. p. 127; originally published in *Iskusstvo kino* 5 (1989), pp. 75–81. Popov points to a tradition among film pioneers regarding the representation of the crowd that, according to Siegfried Kracauer, is a self-sufficient entity.
- 14 See Mikhail Iampol'skii, 'Istina tela', *Sokurov 1*, pp. 165–67. Following in the footsteps of Michel Foucault, Iampol'skii examines power relations in the dimension of physical relations in everyday life using examples from Sokurov's oeuvre.
- 15 On the relationship between individual and crowd see Dmitrii Savel'ev, 'Saliut' – 'Zhertva vecherniaia', *Sokurov 1*, pp. 97–98.

- 16 Also see Sokurov's cinematic portrait of Vytautas Landsbergis in *A Simple Elegy*. Landsbergis remains silent as well, playing a prelude by Mikalojus Čiurlionis in his office.
- 17 For a reference to this tradition of negative theology in Sokurov's work see Viktor Listov, 'Dokumental'nyi Sokurov', *Iskusstvo kino* 9 (1991), pp. 66–74 (p. 74).
- 18 Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Dürers 'Melencolia I. Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Leipzig und Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1923, p. 57.
- 19 See Mikhail Iampol'skii, 'Travma molchaniia', *Sokurov 1*, pp. 153–54. Iampol'skii interprets these extremely long, freezing shots that bear a certain resemblance to statues psychoanalytically as signs of traumatic scenes and sees them as a hysterical symptom of late Soviet society.
- 20 Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, p. 2.
- 21 See Joachim Paech, 'Das Bild zwischen den Bildern', in his *Film, Fernsehen, Video und die Künste. Strategien der Intermedialität*, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1994, pp. 163–78.
- 22 Sergei Eisenstein, 'Dramaturgy of Film Form' (1929), in Richard Taylor (ed.), *The Eisenstein Reader*, London: BFI, 1998, pp. 93–110.
- 23 On the cinematic use of photography in Sokurov's work see Oleg Kovalov, 'Elegiia iz Rossii', *Sokurov 1*, pp. 295–97. Photographic material generally takes up a lot of space in Sokurov's cycle of elegies. In *Elegy from Russia*, for example, an image of past Russia is composed from the vast legacy of the photographic classic of Maxim Dmitriev: 'the screening starts to resemble a slide show from the 'laterna magica' (p. 296).
- 24 On auratisation by means of framing see the interpretation of André Bazin's differentiation between 'cache' and 'cadre' by Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 'If we return to Bazin's alternative of mask or frame, we see that sometimes the frame works like a mobile mask according to which ever set is extended into a larger homogeneous set with which it communicates, and sometimes it works as a pictorial frame which isolates a system and neutralises its environment' (p. 16).
- 25 See the insightful analysis in Maiia Turovskaia, 'Sovetskaia elegiia', *Sokurov 1*, pp. 149–51, particularly p. 150.
- 26 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 96.
- 27 On the relationship between painting and film see Jan Marie Peters, 'Die malerische und die erzählerische Komponente in der bildlichen Formgebung der Fotografie und des Films', in Paech, *Film, Fernsehen ...* pp. 40–49.
- 28 See Anna Bohn, 'Pinsel und Leinwand. Aleksandr Sokurovs gemalte Landschaften in *Mutter und Sohn*', *Schnitt* 3 (1997), p. 16.
- 29 On this subject see Sokurov's statement: 'On "Mother and Son" I was using Dolby sound, but I don't like it because it's commercial. We had to fight the technicians because they always wanted the sound to be louder. I told them, no, it must be softer, softer. Sound is a very important part of my work. I try to arrange my work so the film is a work on two levels. So "Mother and Son" is two different pictures – one a visual film, the other a sound film. They ought to be able to exist apart from each other. If you listen to the sound on the film, it should be enough on its own'. Quoted in Ian Christie, 'Returning to zero', *Sight and Sound* 4 (1998), pp. 14–17 (p. 16).

- 30 Christie, p. 17.
- 31 *Mutter und Sohn. Ein Film von Aleksandr Sokurov* (Press booklet), For a detailed survey of the reflection on the tradition of landscape painting in Sokurov, see José Alaniz, ‘“Nature”, illusion and excess in Sokurov’s *Mother and Son*’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 2.2 (2008), pp. 183–204.
- 32 On the relationship between painting and film in Sokurov’s work see Norbert M. Schmitz, ‘Die Ruinen der Moderne’, *Schnitt* 3 (1997), pp. 12–13: ‘The really interesting feature of the encounter of painting and film here is not the leap across technical boundaries but the simultaneous confrontation of aesthetic dis-simultaneities’ (p. 12).
- 33 *Mutter und Sohn*. Press booklet.
- 34 Press booklet. For a further discussion of this topic see Sokurov, ‘Izobrazhenie i montazh’, Interview with Dmitrii Savel’ev, *Iskusstvo kino* 12 (1997), pp. 110–123 (p. 113): ‘What I think about first is: how can I transform a space that is limited by four corners into a surface. I am interested in the two-dimensionality and not the volume of space. But if I am someone who never ceases to study artistic methods of representation and eagerly observes how the professional awareness of painters develops, then I have to direct my attention above all at the “depth of the surface”. Essentially, I have to transform everything into a surface, and it is this surface I already work with as with an artistic foundation.’
- 35 See Mikhail Iampolski, ‘Representation – Mimicry – Death: The Latest Films of Alexander Sokurov’, in Birgit Beumers (ed.), *Russia on Reels. The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1999, pp. 127–43.
- 36 Wölfflin, Heinrich, *Principles of Art History*, Mineola, NY: Courier Dover, 1950, p. 23.
- 37 Quoted from the subtitles of the film print screened at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen in 1997.
- 38 On this topic also see Hartmut Böhme, ‘Ruinen-Landschaften. Zum Verhältnis von Naturgeschichte und Allegorie in den späten Filmen von Andrej Tarkowskij’, *Konkursbuch* 14: Natur und Wissenschaft (1985), pp. 117–57. Also available at http://people.ucalgary.ca/~tstronds/nostalghia.com/TheBibliography/Articles/HarmutBohme_Ruinen.pdf (accessed 8 August 2010).
- 39 On this topic see Hans Scheugl, Ernst Schmidt Jr (eds.), *Eine Subgeschichte des Films. Lexikon des Avantgarde-, Experimental- und Undergroundfilms*, 2 vols., Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1974, p. 851 ff.
- 40 See Scheugl and Schmidt, p. 1062, as well as Michael O’Pray (ed.), *Andy Warhol. Film Factory*, London: BFI, 1989.
- 41 *Mutter und Sohn*. Press booklet.
- 42 Hans-Joachim Schlegel, ‘Der antiavantgardistische Avantgardist, in Peter Jansen, Wolfram Schütte (eds.), *Andrej Tarkowskij*, Reihe Film 39, Wien, München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1987, pp. 23–42.
- 43 On the aesthetics of acceleration see Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizon: An Essay on Dromoscopy*, New York: Continuum, 2006. See especially the chapter on ‘Dromoscopy’ (pp. 101–14).