



Stalin's "Loss of Sensation": Subversive Impulses in Soviet Science-Fiction of the Great Terror

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Abstract

Stalin's rise to power was largely concomitant with the rise of cinema. The history of the nascent field of cinema art is dominated by names like Eisenstein, Kuleshov, and Aleksandrov, alongside Western icons like Edison, Méliés, Keaton, Chaplin, Griffith, and others. In these earlier stages of the industrial era, it is no surprise that early Soviet filmmakers experimented with science-fiction as much as their Western counterparts. However, a cursory survey reveals that early Soviet science-fiction, aesthetically similar to both Méliés' works and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (although predating the latter by a few years), was all but quashed by censorship under Stalin's nascent regime. Astonishingly, however, even during the height of the Great Purge, at least two Soviet science-fiction films emerged that seem to have eluded the censor. *Gibel sensatsii* (Loss of Sensation, 1935) and *Kosmicheskiy reys: Fantasticheskaya novella* (Cosmic Voyage, 1936) both seem to have found modest audiences in the Soviet Union without suffering the demise of immediate censorship. While both *Loss of Sensation* and *Cosmic Voyage* are distinctly science-fiction, they remain generic anomalies, sui generis in their own right, for their otherwise unconventional content. This paper proffers a comparison of the two films to elucidate the political, historical, and ideological context which gave rise to these films and to explore the films for evidence of dissent or subversion in their science-fiction narratives that appears to uphold conservative Soviet ideology but that, by virtue of the already subversive generic conventions of science-fiction, contain criticisms of Stalinist ideology.

Keywords: *Kosmicheskiy reys*, *Gibel sensatsii*, Soviet Union, censorship, cinema, subversion.

Stalin's rise to power was largely concomitant with the rise of cinema. The history of the nascent field of cinema art is dominated by names such as Eisenstein, Kuleshov, and Aleksandrov, alongside Western icons such as Edison, Méliés, Keaton, Chaplin, Griffith, and others. In these earlier stages of the industrial era, it is no surprise that early Soviet filmmakers experimented with science-

fiction as much as their Western counterparts. However, a cursory survey reveals that early Soviet science-fiction, aesthetically similar to both Méliés' works and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (although predating the latter by a few years), was all but quashed by censorship under Stalin's nascent regime. *Aelita* (1924) was met with profound criticism from Kuleshov and the proletariat media



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(Hildreth) and *Aero NT-54* (1925) was banned three years after its limited release ("Aero"). Even Kuleshov's work met an unfortunate fate. Although credible sources are difficult to acquire in English, the first and last reels of his *Luch Smerti* (1926) have apparently been lost. Considering the censorship these early silent films suffered, it would be reasonable to assume that Soviet science-fiction would entirely dissolve under Stalin's leadership. In "The Illusion of Happiness and the Happiness of Illusion," Richard Taylor states that "the new Soviet Constitution of 1936, which serves implicitly as a guarantee of the superior rights afforded to minorities in Stalin's earthly paradise, reflected in the contemporary slogan, attributed to Stalin, 'Life has become better, life has become happier'" (1996, p. 606). With such an illusion of happiness (as Taylor's title indicates) at the fore of Stalinist propaganda, and an environment in which only socialist realism or buoyant, escapist musicals managed to evade censorship, science fiction cinema had little hope of developing under Stalin, particularly because much science-fiction is inherently apocalyptic. It frequently represents the death of contemporary life in favour of fantasies of some future reality (Jameson, 1982, p. 151), a concept contradictory to the present-tense utopia that Stalinist ideology maintained. Astonishingly, however, even during the height of the Great Purge, at least two Soviet science-fiction films emerged that seem to have eluded the censor. *Gibel sensatsii* (*Loss of Sensation*, 1935) and *Kosmicheskii reys: Fantasticheskaya novella* (*Cosmic Voyage*, 1936) both seem to have found modest audiences in the Soviet Union without suffering demise through immediate censorship, although according to cinema blogger David Jeffers (2007), *Cosmic*

Voyage was censored after a limited release on the grounds that its animated sequences were contradictory to the aesthetic of socialist realism that was substantially privileged under Stalin. While both *Loss of Sensation* and *Cosmic Voyage* are distinctly science-fiction, they remain generic anomalies, sui generis in their own right, for their otherwise unconventional content. In this paper, I will compare the two films to elucidate their political, historical, and ideological context and to explore the films for evidence of dissent or subversion in their science-fiction narratives that appear to uphold conservative Soviet ideology but that, by virtue of the already subversive generic conventions of science-fiction, contain criticisms of Stalinist ideology.

In order to understand these films, this analysis will employ a combination of typically Western science-fiction-focused cultural analyses in concert with Žižekian psychoanalytical approaches. In *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, Annette Kuhn (1990) defines science-fiction cinema as a form of fantasy that foregrounds "the conflict between science and technology on the one hand and human nature on the other" (p. 5). Certainly, this seems to be central to the narratives of both *Loss of Sensation* and *Cosmic Voyage*. More significantly, she suggests that science-fiction "proposes estrangement or uncertainty through narrative viewpoint" (Kuhn, 1990, p. 6) as part of what she refers to as "its 'cultural instrumentality'", the cultural work accomplished by the genre (Kuhn, 1990, p. 1). While Kuhn's ideological analysis, along with analyses of other theorists concerned with science-fiction (including Fredric Jameson, Ryan and Kellner, Joshua Bellin, and Vivian Sobchack), are aimed



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primarily at capitalist culture, they provide an equally valuable framework for analysis of Soviet science-fiction. In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Slavoj Žižek (1997) exemplifies this theoretical application, simultaneously extending his critique of fantasy into the theoretical realm of psychoanalysis and against all ideological edifices, including Stalinism (*Plague*, pp. 1-2). Together these theories reveal an ideological subterfuge at work in *Loss of Sensation* and *Cosmic Voyage* against what Lilya Kaganovsky (2008) defines as "the perverse logic of Stalinism," in which every male member of Soviet society was required to relinquish his Oedipal masculinity to the cultural construction of a Stalinist super-ego embodied in the single figure of Stalin himself—a sort of universal subjectivity-castration required to prop up the ostensibly 'communist' cult of a single personality (pp. 146, 147, 150, 152, 153). Such an interpretation is deeply informed by Freud's (1922) contention in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* regarding the subject's "relation to his [symbolic] father; what is thus awakened is the idea of a paramount and dangerous personality, towards whom only a passive-masochistic attitude is possible, to whom one's will has to be surrendered,—while to be alone with him, 'to look him in the face', appears a hazardous enterprise" ("Primal Horde," p. 3). These two films mutually reveal and critique such ideological contradictions in this "perverse logic" and help to explain the demise of science fiction narrative under Stalin's rule. In fact, the explicit critique in *Cosmic Voyage* may explain its abrupt censorship following its limited release.

Of course, the science-fiction movies that survived censorship painted Soviet ideologies into their fantasy futuristic narratives. The explicit ideological

agendas of *Loss of Sensation* and *Cosmic Voyage*, which aligned with proletariat heroism and the emerging space program respectively, make the reason for their survival clear. These films acted as fantasies of valorization under Stalin's rule. However, such obvious explanations are the first indications of a 'common sense' naturalization of their place and importance within the Stalinist cinema canon, and invite closer scrutiny of their ideological and cultural import. Such an analysis reveals that *Loss of Sensation's* main character, Jim Ripl, might be read as a proxy for Stalin and a repressed and covert critique of the contradictions of Stalinist ideology. Ripl's autocratic drive towards the creation of utopian labour conditions is ultimately destructive to his social and political environment and to both the security and economic prosperity of the proletariat he claims to represent. While the film's ontological thematic message is congruent with the Stalinist ideological mandate, the characterization required therein exposes "the perverse logic of Stalinism" (Kaganovsky, 2008, p. 146). This "perverse logic" finds an even stronger articulation in *Cosmic Voyage*. If the subversive cultural instrumentality of *Loss of Sensation* is to undermine the perverse logic of Stalinism, the less subtle instrumentality of *Cosmic Voyage* works to expose it.

In *Loss of Sensation*, these ideological fantasies are deeply embedded in its aesthetic and narrative content. While other contemporary examples of Soviet cinema, such as *Chapayev* (1934) or *The Party Card* (1936) are unquestionably sophisticated in their editing, mise-en-scene, and narrative constructions, *Loss of Sensation* is noticeably less polished. In fact, *Loss of Sensation* owes much to the silent film era of acting, long eclipsed by the



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aesthetic of socialist realism, possibly due to the neglect of the science-fiction genre under Stalinism since 1922 that left it unable to evolve from the conventional boundaries of its predecessor with as much sophistication. Long scenes are underscored with a sort of intertitular musical soundtrack that frames bombastic facial performances. In *Loss of Sensation* and *Cosmic Voyage*, the viewer is unfortunately left to speculate that perhaps the silent-film era aesthetic of the *mise-en-scène* was an intentional choice to mitigate the films' apocalyptic science-fiction underpinnings by associating such fantasy with an abandoned and archaic artistic style—a backward-looking aesthetic patina over an otherwise offensively forward-looking narrative fantasy.

An opening observational-style montage reveals scenes of industrial steam ships in the harbour and a vagrant populace lounging in its midst. This stock footage represents the only on-location *mise-en-scène* with any significant depth of field, but it is otherwise difficult to discern what this footage is intended to signify. It might be read as an American proletariat left idle in the face of industrialism signified by the industrial steam ships against which they remain lethargic. The images carry an aesthetic similarity to newsreel footage of unemployed American workers suffering from idle hands during the Depression.¹ Another interpretation might read these opening scenes as ones in which the workers enjoy reasonable leisure in a natural industrial work setting, before the onset of the narrative disrupts this Marxist fantasy of labour in its idyll. The music underscoring the opening credits that immediately precedes these scenes favors the latter: abrupt flourishes of clashing cymbals and jazz-horns alarm the

listener at regular intervals—punctuations of musical anxiety disrupting the otherwise peaceful orchestration. In any case, it is the only scene in the film with such a clearly naturalistic setting, working as a framing introduction against which the remainder of the narrative is opposed.

In that context, the narrative of *Loss of Sensation* reveals that science student Jim Ripl participates in an experiment in which proletariat labourers are subjected to assembly line conditions of toil that break them both physically and emotionally. Inspired by the mechanics of the assembly line itself (and a strange set of marionette dolls in a decadent bourgeois nightclub), Ripl decides to invent an entirely mechanical worker to save the proletariat from their debilitating work. Following his graduation, he introduces a prototype robot to his proletariat family and their social circle. He is chastised by his uncle for his lack of foresight—these robots will not save them from their mundane work, but rather rob them of their employment, a distinct echo of Marx's description of the *grundrisse* (Modleski, 1999, p. 691). Dejected, Ripl abandons his family and friends, and takes up with a Nazi-like fascist military authority to realize his dream of manufacturing an army of robot workers. In the process he becomes increasingly isolated and atrabilious. Eventually, of course, the robots get away from him, and in his efforts to demonstrate their benevolence to the proletariat workers, he accidentally injures one of them. The military authorities reprogram the robots to crush the proletariat uprising that the robotic replacement of human labour has spawned. Ripl is injured in the process, and rendered incapable of defending the proletariat from the technological monstrosity he has unleashed upon them. Underestimating

¹ In her online article "Walkabout: The Bush's and Brooklyn's Industry City, Pt 5," Suzanne Spellman states, "For thousands of workers, Bush Terminal, in Sunset Park, was Brooklyn, for the first half of the 20th century. This massive complex of warehouses, factories, rail yards and shipyards was the largest employer in the borough, employing tens of thousands of people. The Great Depression caused the Terminal to go into receivership, but in spite of that, the massive entity continued on; factories produced, although at lower levels, and ships and trains loaded and unloaded. Life went on" (2012).

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the ingenuity of the proletariat workers, however, the fascist authorities are eventually foiled in their militant designs.

J. Hoberman (2012) reports that the film is "a most likely unauthorized adaptation of Karel Capek's expressionist drama *R.U.R.*", the [1920] play that introduced the word (and concept) "robot".² However, there is only minor similarity between Capek's plot and the movie narrative. Rippl's lumbering industrial monstrosities bear no similarity to the human-like androids of Capek's play. One of Capek's androids observes that he has a larger head than a female android, but otherwise they look human enough to confuse Helena as to who is human and who is not. The robot-human distinction in *Loss of Sensation* is unambiguous. The awkward mechanical operation of the robots, apparently a limitation of budget and technology, would have been obvious to even early science-fiction audiences. As they teeter and sway in a narrow upright posture, their non-articulated, conjoined, and wheeled legs render them utterly unthreatening. To find them a threat, one would have to willingly succumb to their embrace, as one member of the proletariat mob of workers literally does in the scene where he is injured. Otherwise they would be easy to overpower simply by knocking them over or putting the slightest obstacle in their path. The visual depiction of the robots openly contradicts their signification as a threat, but their looming and bulky appearance effectively codes them as the industrial menace they are intended to represent. The Frankenstein theme of technology threatening humanity in an apocalyptic uprising is present in both *R.U.R.* and *Loss of Sensation*, and both the play and the movie focus on the dehumanizing and alienating effects

of fascist authority on the proletariat. However, the play attributes the selfish abuse of authority at the proletariat robots who eventually effect a human apocalypse. The only human they allow to survive is a proletariat worker incapable of repairing their built-in twenty-year self-destruct failsafe. In the movie, the robots are put in the service of a fascist authority to aim their malevolence at the human proletariat. Eventually, the brilliant cooperation of the human proletariat succeeds in reprogramming the robots, turning them against the fascist authority and averting the apocalypse.

Hoberman (2012) also reports that the film was "Initially a joint German-Russian venture [by] Mezhrabpom". Such a collaboration is somewhat surprising considering the contemporary popularity, and endorsement by Stalin, of such films as Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), in which German soldiers become the irrationally evil villains of the tale. Similar to *Alexander Nevsky*, however, and contrary to its German collaborative inputs, *Loss of Sensation* conflates its capitalist plutocrats with a visual stereotype of Nazi-like fascist military authorities (perhaps not entirely unjustly). According to Hoberman's MoMA review (2012), the narrative is apparently "Set in an imaginary America of top-hatted plutocrats and medal-bedecked operetta generals", although the film makes no explicit reference to the United States. The IMDB website for the movie describes the setting as "an unnamed English-speaking capitalist land" ("Gibel"), although, of course, no one in the film speaks English. The association of capitalist plutocrats and Nazi generals is achieved primarily through the sumptuary presentation of these characters. A scene in which Rippl reveals the upgrade model to the military-industrial fascists who have contracted

² *R.U.R.* is a 1920 Czechoslovakian play (suitable fodder for Soviet cinema adaptation, although it is ironic that *R.U.R.* was originally written and produced in the same era that early Soviet science-fiction was almost entirely banned), in which *R.U.R.* are the initials which designate *Rossumovi Umli Roboti* (*Rossum's Artificial Robots*; Roberts, 2006, p. 168). The phrase "Rossum's Universal Robots" has become the standard English substitution for the original Czech phrase (Kussi, 1990, p. 33). The clumsily placed RUR logo on the second generation Rippl robots is little more than an intertextual allusion. Although the lead character in *Loss of Sensation* is named Rippl, a name starting with 'R,' like the Rossum of Capek's play, no explicit articulation of a product named Rippl's Universal Robots is made in the film.



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him is peopled with a strange mix of tuxedoed private interest investors and high-ranking military officials. The scene also foreshadows the terror the robotic monstrosities will come to represent for the working class. Upon seeing the demo model, one of the servant butlers turns tail and flees in wide-eyed panic. The officials in the scene variously sport such stereotypical Nazi-era German sumptuary icons as high-collared military jackets (complete with medals and badges representing rank) and round spectacles or monocles. Their primary representative, Rippl's less ingenious former fellow student, Hamilton Grim, maintains a rigid posture and physical gait reminiscent of the goose-stepping movement and Hitler-hailing physique of German military agents in myriad examples of both newsreel and fiction film. Later, during the robotic attack on the proletariat populace, Grim follows along in a tank to control the onslaught, armed with a Mauser C96 M1896.³ Such an iconic weapon works in concert with the physique and sumptuary representation of the fascist authorities to code them as anti-communist fascist Nazi capitalists.

Following this trajectory of representation, it is strange that *Loss of Sensation* maintains a thematic ideology similar to its closest aesthetic kin, a German-made science-fiction film by Harry Piel entitled *Der Herr Der Welt* (*Master of the World*, 1934). Copies of this film in its entirety are scarce, but the allmovie.com website (2016) for it provides a relatively succinct synopsis of the film which highlights its substantial thematic and narrative similarities to *Loss of Sensation*:

After a long absence, Dr. Heller (Walter Janssen) returns to his laboratory, where he learns that his demented chief assistant (Arlbert Waeschler)

has developed a robot. Dr. Heller approves of this, but he's less happy with the fact that the robot is equipped with a death ray. His objections don't carry too much weight, however, inasmuch as Heller is quickly dispatched by the homicidal robot. The story briefly goes off on another tangent as Heller's widow Vilma (Sybille Schmitz, of *Vampyr* fame) falls in love with handsome mining engineer Baumann (Siegfried Schuerenberg). Ultimately, both Vilma and Baumann must contend with thousands upon thousands of killer robots, who've been programmed to take over all jobs -- and, eventually, the world. ("Master")

It is in these two films' narrative closures that their ideological differences become clear. *Master of the World* features a conclusion that is wholly opposite to that of *Loss of Sensation*: "After the robot destroys itself and blows up the lab, we see that mining is now being done by robots while the former miners live idyllic lives in little villages" (Hnicolella, 2010). *Loss of Sensation* offers no such utopian conclusion. The denouement of the film shows the robots, now assisting the proletariat in the military overthrow of the fascist authorities, in an apocalyptic landscape, visually reminiscent of the bleak no-man's-land conflict zones of World War I. Based on the proletariat's rejection of the robots as utopian replacement labour, one can assume that an extrapolation of this happy ending might include the dismantling of the robots and the restoration of proletariat labour in their proper and 'natural' working environments. The film does not explicitly offer this conclusion within its narrative, focussing rather on the sheer danger of innovative technology within industrial environments.

³ Mauser is a German arms manufacturer that produced mass numbers of handguns for use in World War I.



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The fear of industrial technology, and its threat to the proletariat worker, is the film's explicit thematic ideology. This message is so powerful in the film that it probably represents the sole reason the film evaded censorship, a claim that cannot be made so readily about *Master of the World*. When one considers "how much Adolf Hitler relied upon his scientists during WWII, the anti-technology stance of *Der Herr Der Welt* (Ruler of the World) is amazing" ("Master"). In contrast, the anti-technology stance of *Loss of Sensation* is more explicable. In his lectures at the University of Victoria, Soviet cinema historian Serhy Ekelchik (2014) reports that there was a substantial anxiety in Soviet culture regarding the replacement of human labour with dangerous technology, again a subtle reference to Marx's concept of the *grundrisse*: "During the Great Terror there was a pervasive sense of paranoia about saboteurs, spies, etc. Machines were growing too fast and were too complex for many uneducated workers. Industrial accidents were blamed on 'wreckers'". Some movies attempted to ameliorate this fear through the Stalin cult. André Bazin describes a scene from the movie *The Vow* (1937) in which "The first agricultural tractor made in Russia arrives at ... Red Square" and promptly breaks down (Bazin, 1978, p. 25). The distraught mechanic is at a loss to identify the problem, but with nearly omniscient genius, a curiously present Stalin makes a cursory perusal of the engine and promptly diagnoses and solves the problem.

In "Technophobia," Ryan and Kellner focus on the fear of technology inherent to much Western science-fiction cinema of the 1970s. While the context and ideology they describe is entirely disparate from that of *Loss of Sensation*,

the cultural work accomplished by the films is substantially similar. In this regard, *Loss of Sensation* is significantly prescient. It, along with *Master of the World*, preconceives the motif of anxiety from technology as an ideological construct in Western culture by some thirty-five years. Ryan and Kellner claim that technology in science-fiction is antithetical to nature: "From a conservative perspective, technology [in Western science fiction cinema of the 1970s] represents artifice as opposed to nature, the mechanical as opposed to the spontaneous" (1990, p. 58). Jeremy Hicks and Katerina Clark highlight how such films as *Chapaev*(1934) feature a dynamic in which the spontaneity of such characters as Chapaev must be constrained by a party mentor to achieve the consciousness (as opposed to false consciousness as articulated by Marx) required under Stalinism (Hicks, 2004, p. 53; Clark, 2000, p. 15). In *Loss of Sensation*, the mechanical remains the artifice opposed to the nature of the human worker, but is opposed to consciousness rather than the spontaneous. The opening scene of the narrative proper attempts to characterize the protagonist, Jim Rippl (an apparent Soviet attempt at a typical American name), as a compassionate (albeit ambitious) science student, concerned for the workers labouring under the mechanical conditions of a Moloch machine—an interconnected series of circular conveyor assemblies within each of which workers are expected to endure an ever-increasing tempo of production. Rippl's concern is contrasted against the disregard of the melodramatically opportunistic bourgeois factory manager, who increases the production speed to the point of physically and mentally exhausting a number of the workers. When several of the workers attempt a minor revolt, they are threatened with dismissal.

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The factory manager sneers that he had expected the proletariat to be a hardier breed. Observing the horror of these labour conditions inspires Rippl to invent his mechanical automatons to do the menial labour assigned to the exploited proletariat. As expected under a thematic of threatening technology, eventually these mechanical automatons displace the workers and attempt to annihilate them, exactly as Rippl's collectively-conscious uncle had predicted.

Only the conscientious efforts of the proletariat collective succeed in halting the mechanical menace, while Rippl becomes increasingly individualized and isolated from the social collective. Immediately following his departure from his family home, the *mise-en-scène* abruptly adopts a darker tone. In the dark streets, Rippl stands alone in anticipation of a message from his fascist contractors. A single headlight from a messenger's motorcycle frames the stoic expression of his face in the darkness of the night, suggesting a demonic evil has impregnated his person.⁴ As Rippl becomes increasingly distant from the proletariat collective, he slowly descends into madness, and eventually loses all connection with his family. His uncle openly criticizes his mechanical prototype and prompts his dejected departure. Later, Rippl attempts to seduce his sister into appreciating the value of his robots with an invitation to a private demonstration of the newer model. When he activates one of them, he momentarily loses control of it, and it corners her against a wall of the factory floor. Terrified of the monstrous technology, she flees. Ultimately his isolation results in a complete break from family and collective as he tries to replace his natural social relations with the machines. In an otherwise bewildering scene, drunk and dejected, Rippl

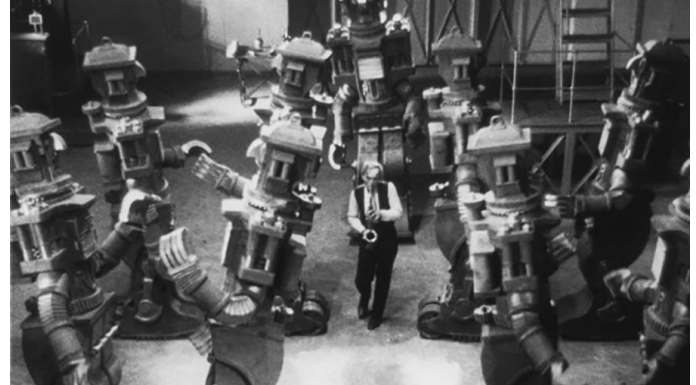


Image 1: *Loss of Sensation* (Hoberman, 2012)

animates a three-dimensional chorus line of robots who dance to the riffs of his saxophone (Image 1).

However, Rippl's individualized evil and insanity is set in contrast against the always-collective proletariat to which his robotic creations represent a threat. When they find themselves facing a factory lock-out, they speak as members of a proletariat mob, expressing fear and frustration over their loss of employment. The group that learns to build their own robotic control device, although much smaller, remains communal, maintaining residence in the domestic space from which Rippl has excluded himself. At the heroic climax, when control of the attacking robots is appropriated by their device, the single heroic manipulator of the control panel is framed within a window of the domestic space, accompanied by a number of accomplices from the collective. Even when the framing focuses on the concentration of this single operator, he turns and nods in deference to his accomplices, reminding the viewer of his subordination to the group. The ontological theme of the film thus valorizes the collective proletariat against an otherwise undifferentiated fascist regime, including the highly individualized Rippl, and the unnatural misuse of technology.

⁴ Similar scenography is employed in *The Party Card*. Andrei Shcherbenok (2009) describes the way in which the heroine, Anna, "is progressively taken in, mesmerized by Pavel's manly posture, a series culminating in a thunderstorm scene where Pavel's face is demonically illuminated by lightning" (p. 768).



Stalin's "Loss of Sensation", *continued*

Beneath the ideological ontology, however, lurks a subversive critique of Stalinism that one might expect from such a genre as science-fiction fantasy. Ideology as it is applied to discussions of Soviet Stalinism is often reduced to his cult of personality and how art of the era, particularly cinema, was always in the service of reproducing the cult. Such reductive essentialism effaces subversive motivations; artists disenchanted with the ideological contradictions and the cult of personality may have deployed subterfuge to challenge the status quo. In "Culture, Power, and Mission to Moscow: Film and Soviet-American Relations during World War II" (2001), Todd Bennett observes how "These popular interpretations exemplified the inability of propagandists, even Stalinist opinion makers, to regulate the multiplicity of public meanings made from cultural artifacts" (p. 509). Bennett (2001) describes the way in which such a film as *Mission to Moscow* (1943) that depicts or reproduces American landscapes prompts viewers to take "from it imagery of capitalist life-styles that both fulfilled their own desires and ... provided a basis for quiet opposition to the Kremlin" (p. 510). Perhaps over-confident with the efficacy of his censorship to eradicate any subversive impulses in cinema, Stalin may have suffered his own 'loss of sensation' to the subversive impulses within this rare example of a science-fiction film that miraculously survived the censor.

It would be difficult to claim that director Alexandr Andriyevsky intentionally imbued the thematic underpinnings of *Loss of Sensation* with a critique of Stalinism. Information regarding the director is virtually non-existent. *The Internet Movie Database* lists his other directorial credits, and an alternate

name which is merely his name with first initial, but his biographical information is blank ("Alexandr Andriyevsky," n.d.). Nevertheless, the science-fiction fantasy genre of the film might speak for itself in that regard. In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Žižek (1997) argues that "fantasy relates to the inherent antagonisms of an ideological edifice" (p. 1) and that the "materialization of ideology in external materiality reveals inherent antagonisms which the explicit formulation of ideology cannot afford to acknowledge" (p. 4). Žižek (1997) uses the example of "the great projects of public buildings in the Soviet Union of the 1930s" to reveal "the truth of Stalinist ideology" (p. 2). Žižek highlights how the architecture encodes the patriarchal oppression of the system: hiding in plain sight so to speak. Rather than masking ideology, as with the Althusserian ideology of state apparatuses, it exposes its symbolism so as to render criticism against it unsophisticated. Žižek (1997) concludes that the Stalinist truth is one "in which actual, living people are reduced to instruments, sacrificed as the pedestal for the spectre of the New Man, an ideological monster which crushes actual living men under his feet" (*Plague*, p. 2). The "materialization" of the political "edifice" within the narrative thematic of *Loss of Sensation* works to reveal the "inherent antagonisms" in Stalin's "explicit formulation of ideology" (Žižek, *Plague*, pp. 2-4).

The inherent contradictions of Stalinism required a form of collective social repression. Shcherbenok, Kaganovsky, and Bazin all articulate the inherent contradiction between Stalin's personality cult and the Marxist economic ideological edifice his administration attempted to champion. Numerous theorists have discussed and explained the way



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in which such social repression often returns as symbolic articulation in cinematic art.⁵ In the third section of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), he offers a compelling description of the way in which the repression of desires (and, by extension, the fears that emerge from them) that would cause displeasure will inevitably re-emerge in aberrant forms. The repressed never re-enters "consciousness smoothly and unaltered" (Freud, *Moses*, p. 95). Applying this rationale to *Loss of Sensation*, it becomes clear that the film demonstrates a subversive critique of Stalinism. In the case of *Loss of Sensation*, the aberration of repressed anxiety regarding Stalin returns as the character of Ripl in a horrific cinematic science-fiction fantasy.

The Ripl character works as a repressed proxy for Stalin. Ripl's scientific efforts to improve the working conditions of the proletariat can be read as a metaphor for the economic 'science' that Stalin's regime attempted to implement with "the fragile stability" of collectivism (Shcherbenok, 2009, p. 756). Ripl's faith in his own genius to develop technology that would ultimately be used for military purposes is likewise similar to Stalin's faith in his own military genius. In the scene in which Ripl introduces his revised robot prototype, the mixture of German-like capitalist plutocrats and military authorities embrace Ripl, and his technological genius, as their prodigy. Such a depiction of Ripl understands Stalin's self-depiction as genius that he would later articulate himself. "Stalin himself, in his own abridged 'Biography,' wrote: '... Stalin's genius gave him the ability to guess the enemies' plans and to foil them'" (Bazin, 1978, p. 26). However, such a belief in one's own genius typically masks

anxieties and paranoia regarding one's own lack.

Ripl's increasing paranoia and isolation, and his contradictory drive to improve proletariat working conditions with technology that will render them obsolete, is congruent with Stalin's increasing isolation and paranoia during the Great Terror and actually anticipates Stalin's behaviour during World War II. As Kaganovsky noted (2008), Krushchev stated only a few years after the release of the film, during World War II, "Stalin hid in the Kremlin, failed the people, lied about [Soviet] abilities, resources, casualties" (p. 152). In *Loss of Sensation*, Ripl hides within the factory from the proletariat mob behind one of his robot army with which he attempts to communicate with them. His efforts to placate the mob utterly fails when a misplaced command from his control panel results in the tragic injury of one of the workers.

Furthermore, Ripl's injury and convalescence towards the end of the film code him as the requisite emasculated male under "the perverse logic of Stalinism" (Kaganovsky, p. 146). Kaganovsky (2008) describes the use of injury in cinema as a device for demasculinizing male heroes in deference to the myth of Stalin's paterfamilial authority: "[T]he Stalinist male subject must acknowledge again and again that power lies elsewhere" (p. 146). Referring to the character Aliosha in *The Fall of Berlin*, Kaganovsky (2008) states that "The male subject ... has to take failure onto himself, has to accept castration in order to keep it out of Stalin's knowledge" (p. 152). Kaganovsky proceeds to unpack the psychoanalysis of his thesis:

In the final sequence of *The Fall of Berlin*, as

⁵ A significant text which effectively unpacks Freud's concept of the return of the repressed is Valdine Clemens's *the Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from The Castle of Otranto to Alien*, SUNY Press, 1999. Contemporary criticism has employed the concept based on a distinction between basic and surplus repression, explored by Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Vol. 496, Beacon Press, 1974; and again in Gad Horowitz, *Repression: Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich, and Marcuse*, University of Toronto Press, 1977.



Stalin's "Loss of Sensation", *continued*

Stalin ascends from the sky in his white airplane, ... [Aliosha], with a freshly bandaged head, makes his way through the crowd to the great leader. The fear that was present in the initial meeting is gone, but it has been replaced by the bandage—the physical sign of lack, the symbol of the incommensurability of penis and phallus, of masculinity with the structures of power. (p. 153)

Loss of Sensation inverts this psychological dynamic and turns it against the structure of power. Rather than deference to authority, the authority itself is injured—replaced by the voice of the people—a fantasy of proletariat power and a repressed representation of the inefficacy of Stalin's totalitarianism. As his robots ravage the proletariat landscape, Ripl—barely recovered from his injury—attempts to blockade them. His broken saxophone elicits no response from the robots, and his weakened body quickly succumbs to their power. The scene initially shows Ripl, wide-eyed as the butler that the robots had so frightened during their unveiling, merely falling out of the frame. What follows, however, is a somewhat gruesome visual depiction in which his body is trampled by the robots. The camera angle moves upwards and above, framing the broken body of the would-be genius, abject and prostrate on a pile of dirt—a godlike perspective on the punishment of his arrogance and hubris and a similar point of view to that of the diegetic proletariat workers from their lofty window as they prepare to take control of the robots.

The scene dramatically indicates a repressed desire to see anyone who would position themselves as a totalitarian genius and the paterfamilias of the people trampled underfoot by the aberrant

offspring of their own aspiration. In a similar vein to the paternal status of Stalin upon which his mythology insists (Kaganovsky, p. 147), Ripl maintains a delusional paternal love of the people, particularly contrasted against the evil capitalist factory manager in the opening scene of the narrative proper. Through the death of Ripl (the would-be father), the film maps the Oedipal fantasy onto contemporary socio-economic politics. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes the way in which the repressed desire of the male child to dispatch the father who obstructs union with the mother remains in the unconscious:

King Oedipus, who killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, is only the fulfilment of our childhood wish. ... As the poet brings Oedipus' guilt to light in the course of his investigation, he compels us to recognize our own inner life, where those impulses, though suppressed, are still present. (2008, pp. 202-203)

Although the landscape is ostensibly capitalist or American in its ontology, the Soviet source of the film invites a psychoanalytical understanding of the landscape as a repressed projection of mother Russia, a concept deeply inscribed into Stalin-era Soviet culture, as evidenced by the popularization of the "Song of the Motherland" in the 1936 Soviet film *Circus*. As the mechanical offspring of the father penetrates the landscape, the proletariat son dispatches the father and takes possession of the ravaged landscape—a metaphor for the mistreatment of mother Russia under Stalin. This repressed assault on the father is extended to Stalin's administration as well. In a conclusion that would make the creators of the Keystone Cops proud, the plutocrats and military fascists are comically herded against a concrete wall by the



Stalin's "Loss of Sensation", *continued*

robots, and summarily dispatched—a symbol of Stalin's sycophantic administration, stripped of their leader and their power in a scathing satirical indictment of their risibility and a fantasy of their overthrow.

Loss of Sensation represents Stalin's own 'loss of sensation': indoctrinated by his own power, he failed to recognize subversive critique from within a film he permitted to evade censorship. His own political delusion provided a veil to conceal the artistic return of repressed dissatisfaction with his leadership under what was ostensibly his own purview. Ripl's descent into madness might be read as congruent with Stalin's increasing delusion. Quoting Nikita Krushchev, in his now infamous secret speech at the twentieth party congress following Stalin's death, Bazin (1978) retrospectively associates Stalin's star-status isolation from the collective with increasing delusion:

Krushchev states: "Stalin would say almost anything and believe that it was so ..." ... But what is really amazing is that Stalin started to inform himself on Soviet reality through the cinema's myth of him. Once again Krushchev confirms this. Not having stepped foot in a village since 1928, "it was through movies that he [Stalin] knew the countryside and its agriculture and these films greatly embellished reality." (p. 26)

Bennett (2001) confirms Bazin's interpretation of Stalin's delusionary isolationism:

Stalin became somewhat obsessed with cinema. In part that was because, unlike the real world, the fictional one depicted on screen was highly susceptible to manipulation, and, thereby, to the full attainment of ideal outcomes. As he withdrew

into the make-believe world, Stalin lost some touch with reality 'in the sense of seeing actual factories, collective farms, villages, and even streets of Moscow.' And more and more of his view of the world was determined by what he saw on the screen. (p. 505)

Bazin (1978) goes so far as to liken the chairman to a Hollywood star, primarily due to his literal representation in cinema contemporary with his administration (p. 22).

However, if *Loss of Sensation* indicates Stalin's loss of suspicious sensation against cinematic subterfuge, *Cosmic Voyage* indicates his loss of aesthetic sensation and an acceleration of dictatorial censorship. Rather than viewing the movie as either a cinematic artwork or a valuable document of internal criticism, Stalin's regime censored the film after only a brief run. According to David Jeffers (2007):

[Although] *Cosmic Voyage* enjoyed great popularity among all ages in January 1936 ... [w]hen party officials interpreted animated scenes of the cosmonauts hopping from place to place on the lunar surface as frivolous and contrary to the spirit of 'socialist realism,' the film was abruptly pulled from circulation, the responsible animator's name was stricken from the credits, and *Cosmic Voyage* was virtually forgotten until a revival screening in 1984.

In addition, Richard Taylor (1996) points out how active fantasy-generation was for Soviet audiences: "There was a different phenomenon at work here, an actual willingness to be deceived, a boundless desire to be seduced" (p. 619). Thus, the film's popularity, in the face of its much less subversive



Stalin's "Loss of Sensation", *continued*

critique than that in *Loss of Sensation*, helps to explain its censorship beyond the official party line that its animated sequences were too frivolous.

Furthermore, if the aesthetic of *Loss of Sensation* was backward looking, that of *Cosmic Voyage* is even more so. It is a black-and-white silent film, using conventional intertitles for narrative exposition, even though both conventions had long been superseded in Soviet cinema by colour and sound. Reminiscent of Melies' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) in both narrative and aesthetic, this film returns to the very earliest origins of cinematic narrative, and was perhaps too explicitly close to this otherwise particularly Western influence. *Cosmic Voyage's* aesthetic is also astonishingly similar to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). Filmed in Germany during the Weimar period, *Metropolis'* aesthetic similarity to *Cosmic Voyage* indirectly codes the Soviet space program as *kindred* with German fascism, rather than associating such fascism with ambiguously American plutocrats as in *Loss of Sensation*, evacuating the distance between German fascism and Soviet Stalinism made apparent in the comparison between *Loss of Sensation* and *Master of the World*. Numerous online blog entries attempt to rationalize this aesthetic as a budgetary constraint that favoured an intentional mandate to leave funding available for as wide a distribution as possible and as part of a narrative construction to appeal to a growing youth audience. If it was intended for younger audiences, its indoctrinating potential was simply too contradictory to the perverse logic of Stalinism. The narrative might appear to celebrate the potential of the fledgling Soviet space program, but a closer examination reveals a rather ostentatious

psychoanalytical critique of Stalinism and Stalinist masculinity.

The film opens with an establishing shot of a futuristic world of monolithic technology (an early indication of the way in which *Cosmic Voyage* inverts the technophobia so prevalent in *Loss of Sensation*). The scene depicts an obviously phallic edifice and its contiguous rocket-bridge whose equally monolithic architecture is reminiscent of the iconic soviet sickle, another clear example of the Stalinist architecture to which Žižek refers (*Plague*, 1997, pp. 2-4). Shortly thereafter, an avuncular Professor Sedikh takes adolescent Andryusha to marvel at his space-plane "invention," a word redolent with both fantasy and desire. In the scene that follows, the starry-eyed boy is framed from above, looking upwards in a rapturous gaze eyeline—matched with the professor's spectacular phallic rocket that will be used to 'penetrate' the mysteries of space (Image 2).



Image 2: *Cosmic Voyage* (Shumyatskiy, 1936).

Entirely awed by the professor's techno-phallus, the boy unsubtly remarks, "Yeah, this is wonderful!" according to the unascribed intertitular translation in one of several YouTube postings of the film



Stalin's "Loss of Sensation", *continued*

(Shumyatskiy, 1936). The moment is unambiguously Oedipal: the adolescent boy is clearly desirous of the professor's phallic object that he cannot possess; he has already been dismissed by his older brother and told to return to school in the face of his fascination with the space program. Doubly-castrated by both his brother and the professor, the young boy's Oedipal reverence is all-too-obvious. Taken together, these two early scenes, the representation of the sickle and the phallus-rocket, demonstrate substantial Oedipal symbolism, but little of the sophisticated Bazinian montage that Bazin hailed as socialist.

In sharp contrast to the upward-looking reverence of the boy, the camera angle suddenly adjusts to a position above the rocket, rendering the cinema viewer master of the image from an omniscient vantage. While the rocket remains stationary within the diegesis, the tracking motion of the camera creates the illusion of the rocket thrusting left into the empty space of the off-screen abyss, a sort of psychological cinematic gap. In "From Reality to the Real" (2009), Žižek describes such an artistic construction of a symbolic gap as the necessary condition of desire on which tenable subjectivity depends, "a fictional space, 'another scene,' where alone the truth of our desire can be articulated" (pp. 340-1, 344). In more specifically Oedipal terms, Freud (2008) describes any such symbolic construction of an ambiguously enclosed empty space as a vaginal representation in the wish-fulfilment of dreams (*Dream Psychology*, pp. 50, 58). Žižek (2009) goes on to ask, "Can we not recognize in this paradox the very nature of the psychoanalytical notion of drive, or more properly the Lacanian distinction between its aim and its goal? The goal is the final destination, while the

aim is what we intend to do, i.e., the way itself" ("Reality to Real", p. 334). Under these theoretical conditions, the "final destination" of the rocket is ostensibly the moon, whereas "the aim" is clearly an Oedipal domination of the feminized subject. Perhaps this almost masturbatory celebration of technology (as opposed to the fear of it in *Loss of Sensation*) was all too garish. Just as blatant is the subsequent moment of meta-cinematic self-deprecation. Both Professor Sedikh and young Andryusha chastise a narratively unnecessary cinematographer for his unwelcomed filming of them at the moment of their arrival; after all, no-one wants to be filmed when they are on the verge of a masturbatory *jouissance* with their techno-phallus.⁶

Enter the 'damsel,' Professor Marina. Peering around the corner with a furtive glance, she is anything but an egalitarian representative of a Stalinist utopia, her professional credentials notwithstanding. Contra ostensible Soviet egalitarianism, gender roles are sharply delineated in the film. In addition to Marina's passive femininity, Sedikh's wife is represented as responsible for mundane domestic chores, subservient to his patriarchal scientific authority: he stands idly by while she prepares a suitcase for him, complaining all the while that she is packing too much. Much like the strange saxophone scene in *Loss of Sensation*, it is odd how the predominantly visual narrative emphasizes the process of packing suitcases. After spending several bewildering minutes on the packing at Sedikh's suitcase at his home, the viewer is regaled with a similarly mundane visual hesitation at Andryusha's residence. In his exploration of cinematic fantasy, Joshua Bellin (2005) reports that "Tzvetan Todorov views fantasy as that which

⁶ Žižek (1997) defines Lacan's concept of *jouissance* as "the abyss of traumatic/excessive enjoyment which threatens to swallow us up, and towards which the subject desperately endeavours to maintain a proper distance" (Žižek, *Plague*, p. 223).



Stalin's "Loss of Sensation", *continued*

engenders a momentary hesitation concerning whether an inexplicable event is real or not" (p. 14). Such an interpretation might be applied to this odd visual detour, and although it remains somewhat unsatisfying, there seems to be no other salient analysis. The hesitation prompted by these depictions of packing before the space flight merely foregrounds the fantastical nature of the events onscreen, rather than working in a process of ideological subterfuge to confuse reality with the narrative. Finally, at the last moment, Sedikh invites Marina to join him on the journey as his science officer. She unambiguously welcomes the *jouissance* of "to the moon" with him and promptly insists, in a sexually charged double entendre, "I'm ready!"

At this point, the cinematography affords a significant change of perspective. An arguably vaginal hangar door opening slowly spreads open to reveal the rocket aimed squarely at the viewer; the formerly off-screen space into which the rocket might have penetrated becomes the viewer's subjective point of view. Such positioning locates the viewer within the vaginal abyss and identifies the viewing audience with the feminine-receptive, entirely congruent with Kagonovsky's (2008) understanding of the requirement of Stalinist logic to define the entire populace as passively emasculated under Stalin's patriarchy. The rocket advances directly upon the viewing position in a more direct penetration than even that of the famous *Arrival of a Train at Le Ciotat*. At the moment of contact, the scene cuts to black and resolves into climactic explosions and fireworks as the phallic-rocket is launched into space.

Much of the rest of the narrative plays out with

equally garish Oedipal symbolism, its technical innovation notwithstanding. In all of this Oedipal *jouissance*, Sedikh might readily be read as a mytho-propagandistic proxy for Stalin, exemplifying the perverse logic of Stalinism. Although Jeffers (2007) claims that Sedikh bears a striking resemblance to Tsiolkovsky, the scientific advisor to the film to whom it is dedicated, Sedikh, in his role as an avuncular figure to young Andryusha, is also reminiscent of Freud himself. With his long beard, and aspirations of scientific innovation, he is easily read as a symbolic Darwin/Freud visual composite. This visual stereotype obviates his contrast against Karin at the moment of their face-to-face meeting at the base of the elevator shaft below the revered "space plane." Karin appears very much the plutocrat as represented in *Loss of Sensation*, complete with well-fashioned suit, clean shave, and patriarchal cane. The explicit allegory of good Bolshevik accosted by plutocratic diplomat is clear enough, and in that vein, Sedikh flagrantly challenges Karin's authority. Karin then proceeds to his own space rocket, equally phallic in design, but comically smaller — an unsubtle editorial on his lesser phallic virility. Rather than in horizontal idyll, able to penetrate the empty off-screen space, it is inexplicably mounted nose down, aimed squarely at the concrete floor where no such spatial penetration could be possible (Image 3).

From within its innards Karin retrieves an ill-fated bunny whose poor, weak heart could not survive the exigencies of space travel, to which Karin compares Sedikh's elderly state of vulnerability. Sedikh is unimpressed and offers a rhetorical retort, insisting that he is not a rabbit.

However, Sedikh does not do well as a Stalin proxy.



Stalin's "Loss of Sensation", *continued*



Image 3: *Cosmic Voyage* (Shumyatskiy, 1936).

As the film proceeds, revolutionary disobedience cedes to weakness and inefficacy. According to Freud in Chapter X of *Group Psychology* (1922), such is the inevitable fate of any patriarch, at least on the phylogenetic level, a truth that the keepers of Stalinist doctrine were not eager to expose. In the film, Sedikh takes pause when it is pointed out that he is too elderly for space travel. Already associated with infirmity via the bunny, he is further associated with the feminine when Karin's second experimental animal cosmonaut, a "pussycat," is introduced in the arms of Sedikh's assistant Marina, the only female character in the narrative thus far, who gently caresses it with the same romantic fondness she has already expressed for Sedikh. Already before the journey begins, Sedikh's masculinity and patriarchal authority are called into question. While this works as a critique of Stalinism, it hardly sustains the perverse logic of Stalinism as described by Kaganovsky (2008). In Oedipal terms, immediately following Marina's introduction, she ascends in a phallic elevator shaft towards the revered rocket, and promptly enters a slit-like door in the side of the phallic ship—an inverted and aberrant Oedipal penetration. Once on board the ship, therefore, the characters play the double role

of an unsophisticated English homophonic pun: both revolutionary 'sea men' and fertile semen.

Once metaphorically reduced to seamen/ semen, things begin to go wrong for the crew and Sedikh. Eventually the cosmonauts journey into space and land successfully on the moon, at which point Sedikh's patriarchal mastery begins to face the imminent crisis intimated earlier in the narrative. When a cliff wall collapses, he tumbles headlong with the avalanche into a lunar crevice where he is immobilized under an oddly-phallic fallen boulder. Meanwhile, young Andryusha and Marina prance gaily about in the low-gravity environment. In psychoanalytical terms, it is in the moment of Sedikh's infirmity that the adolescent boy and heroic beauty achieve their orgasmic *jouissance*. Subsequently, these underlings discover Karin's "pussycat" alive on the moon during Sedikh's invalidism, suggesting the mutual weakness of the two, before rescuing the aged patriarch. Ultimately Sedikh is depicted as elderly and infirm, emasculated at the height of his triumph, a pussycat after all. While this narrative development works to foreground the egalitarian and communitarian strength of child, woman, and patriarch alike, it remains incommensurate with the mythology of masculine patriarchal strength required by Stalinism. Just as Ripl's broken body in *Loss of Sensation* transfers the perverse logic of Stalinism back onto a Stalin proxy, so too does Sedikh's infirmity make the same reflexive move. However, as a Stalin proxy, Sedikh is a too obvious one, boldly exposing the true nature of his patriarchal weakness, surviving only by the aid of his subjects contra Freud's (1922) primal horde theory in which the father isn't supposed to need

Stalin's "Loss of Sensation", *continued*

anyone, especially not the subjects who defer to the myth of patriarchal authority ("Primal Horde", p. 2).

The censorship of *Cosmic Voyage*, then, demonstrates the contradiction of the perverse logic of Stalinism in its purest form. If the film's explicit ontological project is to celebrate the Soviet space program, it works instead to expose a space program riddled with weaknesses—a damaged oxygen tank and elderly cosmonaut who almost dies—as well as the perverse logic of Stalinism that Stalin was only too eager to keep under strict censorship. Moreover, any aim to celebrate the Soviet space program was eclipsed by the film's psychoanalytically-informed ideological project that directly celebrates technology without an explicit Stalinist endorsement. Such a short-circuit of the access to Oedipal *jouissance*, eliminating an acceptable Stalinist interlocutor, was intolerable to the regime. Read in this way, ironically, the lack of a diegetic Stalin proxy, like the one so subversively present in *Loss of Sensation*, is the very reason for *Cosmic Voyage's* censorship, even though the Stalin proxy in *Loss of Sensation* clearly inverts the perverse logic of Stalinism. While Ripl was ultimately punished for his technological hubris, reverence for the phallic technology is too strong in *Cosmic Voyage* to have evaded Stalin's megalomaniacal stranglehold on all phallic representation for long. The men in *Cosmic Voyage* do not surrender their masculinity to any representation of Stalin, but rather to a utopian future technology that is not specifically coded as

in the service of Stalin's cult of personality.

Stalinist-era cinematic art, like all art, finds a way to express the repressed social contradictions of the environment in which it was created. Under the repressive conditions of Stalinist ideology, the science-fiction of *Loss of Sensation* displaces its critique onto the character of Ripl and reveals a repressed dissatisfaction with the contradictions of the Stalin cult. Stalin made explicit efforts to quash any such criticism, in the case of science-fiction by attempting to almost efface it entirely, but his 'loss of sensation' regarding the importance of such fantasies as a mode of keeping the populace satisfied with the contradictions of their social reality may have been detrimental to the fantasy of happiness and utopia he was trying to sustain. On the ideological level, the ontology of *Loss of Sensation* champions the proletariat masses against the threat of industrial technology. However, on the psychoanalytical level, the repressed contradictions of Stalinism find strange expression in a science-fiction film Stalin was unable to recognize as a subversive criticism of his own leadership. Ironically less apocalyptic than *Loss of Sensation*, and more celebratory of the potential of Soviet space technology, *Cosmic Voyage* was only too explicit in its contradiction of the perverse logic of Stalinism, and appears to have been the film that rang the death knell for Soviet science fiction under Stalin. Other than *Mysterious Island* (1941), an only vaguely 'science-fiction' fantasy, no faction of the formerly Soviet cinema industry has produced another significant or notable science fiction film to date.



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