

THE DONBASS AS A SPACE OF SOCIALIST ENTHUSIASM, MEMORY, AND TRAUMA: CINEMATIC AND LITERARY IMAGES

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This essay is written in the genre of psychogeography, employing sources from Soviet and post-Soviet films and novels that portray the Donbass as an industrialized space of both collective amnesia and collective memory, conjuring up the surreal territory of the “mining-metallurgical civilization.” The modern context of the Donbass as an area of armed conflict comes up only when related to the industrial past of this region. The problem of Donbass identity in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union is discussed in terms of its integration into the new reality of an independent Ukraine. The essay is about several Soviet films that show the Donbass as a space of labor heroism, a site in the memory of the Great Patriotic War, and contradictory first postwar years of the late Stalinist era. This analysis covers several important films about this space where spy stories and the struggle to improve productivity are complemented by scenes of building a new life on the basis of “cultural” principles.

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THE DONBASS—UKRAINE’S “MINING-METALLURGICAL CIVILIZATION”?

The famous Russian writer Aleksei Ivanov, who hails from the Ural city of Perm’ and has penned a range of popular ethnographic fantasy novels, reconceptualized the three-century history of the mining and industrial habitat of the Urals a few years ago. He did this by referring to the particular way that human life is organized there, revealing the complex interactions between the surrounding space, natural environ-

ment, industrial machinery, factory shops, and the interests of the state and business. He suggested a term to describe the special way of life he encountered in the industrial heartland of Russia, calling it a “mining-metallurgical civilization.” In doing this he attributed an original social, cultural, economic, and even spiritual identity to this civilization (Ivanov 2014). This was the first major attempt at a poetic and mythological reevaluation of a large part of provincial Russia as, prior to this, the master narrative was saturated with references to Moscow and Saint Petersburg as the capital cities of the country.

Meanwhile, we can find other examples in the post-Soviet space of large spatial clusters that owe their growth and flourishing to the industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century and the rapid industrialization processes of the Soviet period. One of the main clusters is located in the Donbass: a large region in southeastern Ukraine that has attained recent global notoriety thanks to the outbreak of major armed conflict there and the tragic death of passengers on a Malaysia Airlines flight from Amsterdam on July 17, 2014. The conflict remains active at the time of writing and there is little clarity on how this situation will be resolved. Therefore, this essay steers clear of this topic. What is of interest in this study is how the real and imaginary Donbass correspond to one another or, in other words, how the identity of the Soviet “mining-metallurgical civilization” is evolving at the current moment.

The image of the Donbass as the center of the Soviet working class was actively constructed by Soviet cinematographers and literature. This led to the emergence and strengthening of a certain mythology of the Donbass as a “worker and miner region.” In other words, a certain unique identity came out of this. During the period in which the USSR collapsed, the Donbass played an important role, becoming the center of the first wave of a strike movement that swept over perestroika-era Soviet Union. Following this, the Donbass was often an important player in the internal political conflicts of post-Soviet Ukraine. Now the region is again a “hot spot,” and the mythology and legacy of this “pride in the Soviet working class” are still employed for political ends. Here I will examine how this mythology rose and collapsed.

This essay is written in the genre of psychogeography and employs sources from Soviet and post-Soviet films and novels that portray the Donbass as an industrialized space of both collective amnesia and collective memory, conjuring up the surreal territory of the “mining-metallurgical civilization.” As a genre, psychogeography allows one to analyze cinematographic and literary texts, including how they affect the viewer emotionally (Coverley 2006), how space is represented, and how certain texts help form the social mythology of a certain place. Psychogeography can be viewed as a means to reconfigure the optical lens of perception, liberating one from stereotypes and opening the way for intellectual formation across a space (Ellard 2015). Soviet cinematography created a particular emotional space in the Donbass, one that evolved alongside the various transformations of the Soviet system itself, especially with regards to everyday life and the language of cinema. After the demise of the socialist project, the emotional geography of the Soviet Donbass continued to live on in industrial architecture and leftover infrastructure as a legacy of the now deceased Soviet empire. This influenced people’s consciousness and became the fo-

cus of literature that worked toward fusing the remains of the Donbass's spatial mythology into psychological trips of a depressed industrial region (Highmore 2005). These games with the geographical subconscious of the Soviet project emerged from the cultural sphere and mass media, becoming an important factor in mobilizing mass consciousness. This, in turn, became an impulse explaining the powerful shift toward military conflict in the region. Thus, psychogeography and an analysis of emotional representations within a space allow one to gain a better understanding of current events.

While this essay will not examine the current protracted conflict, I still hope this analysis will assist in understanding some of the causes and deeper reasons behind these problems, rather than simply reducing them to the political context. The Donbass space is delineated by the Donets Basin, which contains huge reserves of coal and began to be developed in the eighteenth century. Its fuller industrial exploitation did not happen until the second half of the nineteenth century, when capitalism started to accelerate in the Russian Empire. The Donbass area covers the central part of Donetsk Oblast, the southern part of Lugansk Oblast, eastern regions of Dnepropetrovsk Oblast of Ukraine, and the western part of Rostov Oblast of the Russian Federation.

At the beginning of its industrial development, Donbass emulated the example of the British iron, steel, and coal industries. During this period of industrial growth, which began in 1869, the Donbass attracted hundreds of thousands of workers from all regions of the Russian Empire. To a significant extent then, the Donbass was an important melting pot for the Russian working class (Wilson 1995).

As with many parts of the former Russian Empire, control over the Donbass repeatedly changed hands in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and during the Civil War. Despite the accelerated industrialization of the USSR in the late 1920s and the construction of new industrial enterprises in the Urals and the European part of Russia, the Donbass was still a vital resource-extracting, industrial complex in the country prior to the Second World War (Kuromiya 1991).

The Donbass became the first and the largest center of the new independent workers' movements emerging in the latter part of the perestroika era (Friedgut 1990; Borisov and Clarke 1994). In 1989 Donbass miners launched a massive strike demanding improved living and working conditions, as well as wider economic and political reforms. This strike is to this day the largest and most spectacular example of a workers' movement in the post-Soviet space.

The industrial potential of the Donbass remained extremely important for the post-1991 independent Ukraine. During last decades, the Donbass has changed the vector of its geopolitical preferences several times. As evidenced by interviews with the leaders of the miners' strike committees during the period of 1989–1990, their improvised program of strike demands included the removal of the Communist Party's monopoly on power, a movement towards free enterprise, and even considered the possibility of Ukraine breaking away from the Soviet Union. Within a mere three to four years of the end of the USSR, the mood of the miners' leadership and the people

of the region had shifted to become one of the most pro-Russian regions of the independent Ukraine (Siegelbaum and Walkowitz 1992).

In contrast to the countries of Eastern Europe, where the course of reforms brought about a rapid erosion of the state-owned industrial sector, this did not happen in Ukraine and the Donbass was preserved with a huge concentration of active and functioning Soviet-era industrial stock, whose specialization in coal mining, metallurgy, and heavy industry became even more pronounced in the post-Soviet era (Swain 2006; Lyakh 2007).

THE ANTHILL OF INDUSTRIAL ENTHUSIASM

I will examine several Soviet films that depict the Donbass as a space of labor heroism, a site in the memory of the Great Patriotic War, and example of contradictions of the first postwar years of the late Stalinist era. This analysis covers several important films about this space, including the famous documentary *Enthusiasm: The Symphony of Donbass* (*Entuziazm: simfoniia Donbassa*; 1930, dir. Dziga Vertov), which shows the first stage of industrialization and the “Great Turn.” Also considered is *Miners* (*Shakhtery*; 1937, dir. Sergei Yutkevich) where spy stories and the struggle to improve productivity are complemented by scenes of building a new life on the basis of “cultural” principles. The second part of the film *The Big Life* (*Bol'shaia zhizn'*; 1939–1946, dir. Leonid Lukov) shows the processes of postwar reconstruction in the Donbass, while *On the Day of the Festival* (*V den' prazdnika*; 1978, dir. Petr Todorovskii) is shot through the eyes of a veteran pensioner and former miner on Victory Day who meets people of all ages and attitudes. Finally, we have *Mirror for a Hero* (*Zerkalo dlia heroia*; 1987, dir. Vladimir Khotinenko), a film as metaphor, drawing a line under the Soviet history of the industrial Donbass and raising the issue of how the Soviet period should be perceived in the historical life of the country as a whole.

The film *Enthusiasm: The Symphony of Donbass* is well known to researchers of the Soviet film avant-garde: it was the first documentary made with a spoken audio track and was directed by one of the major innovators of 1920s cinema, Dziga Vertov. The direction, editing, and camera work in this film have already been the subject of other scholarship in the context of cultural studies and film studies (MacKay 2005; Ichin 2010); I will not discuss the formalist techniques used by Vertov in this film here. Instead I would draw attention to the spatial dimensions of the film, which consists of three narrative parts: the transition to a new socialist way of life through the remaking of Orthodox churches into clubs and cinemas, a demonstration of the working rhythm in mines and metallurgical plants in the Donbass, and the process of collectivization.

The first narrative section of the film is presented in a structuralist fashion, creating a binary opposition between the “new” and the “old” way of life in the Donbass. Actually the entire space shown in this part of the film consists of the church that before the viewer's eyes is converted into workers' clubs. This is a naked space where the old world is transformed into the new, perhaps bearing a resemblance to

the space depicted in Andrei Platonov's novels such as *The Foundation Pit* or *Chevergur*, at least until the disappearance of the human presence in these stories.

The second part of the film treats us to the intoxicating rhythm of industry by demonstrating the furious pace of work in the Donbass mines and metallurgical plants, where people appear to play the role of worshippers to the cult of heavy industry. Vertov reduces all of life in the Donbass to that of the mines and metallurgical plants, as we do not catch even a glimpse of a clerical or engineering office. In the mornings people are seen wandering toward the clattering factory floor with packed breakfasts in their hands. The smoke, fumes, and bustle of the workers in these dark spaces are akin to some kind of infernal brewery at work in the deepest depths of hell.

Throughout this part of the film the Donbass is not a place of life, except for the short sequences covering the training of workers in simple Taylorist labor movements in the cramped mine. This training takes place in the open air in an undefined wasteland. A chain of men dressed in casual suits appears from outside the frame and moves directly toward the audience. Then the men lie down in the same chain on the ground side by side, with long hammers for cutting coal in their hands, and they perform a synchronized movement exercise of this technique. After this, they leave the frame with their backs bent; in all probability this was a walking exercise in half-bent position to practice for the tight spaces of the mine. Vertov's film was received rather coolly by audience of the time; the formalistic and innovative cinematic language he employed proved to be too complex both for the toiling masses and for the party leadership. However, the value of this film lies in the fact that Vertov was able to show the total anonymization of a space that is subordinated to the goals of building socialism. The Donbass of Vertov is a utopian space of intensive work, where machines and people merge into an orchestral production, where there is no individuality and the most recognizable forms of this are disappearing into oblivion along with the remnants of the "old way of life" such as the Orthodox Church. The rest is part of a great machine, composed of human bodies and mechanisms subject to the general rhythm of labor. It is reminiscent of the alienated space of industrial production presented in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927). The Donbass of Vertov is also the personification of industrialization at breakneck pace, where, due to this speed, it is impossible to determine where this space is located, as this is essentially unimportant and we are reduced to a two-dimensional simplified world.

Sergei Yutkevich's film *Miners* is one of a number of Soviet films from the mid-1930s that represented an artistic shift away from the famed constructivist methods in editing and aesthetics of the 1920s towards a new genre of socialist realism. As with Vertov's *Enthusiasm: The Symphony of Donbass*, this film is also focused on the struggle between old and new; however, in this case the old is no longer presented by the generalized image of the old world such as religion. Instead it finds its embodiment in a new specific group of class enemies, the so-called specialists-wreckers.

The film has the following narrative structure: "enemies of the people" have been unearthed at one of the Donbass mines; they owe their existence to the support of the mine's incompetent management which is contaminated with Trotskyist ideas and prevents the introduction of new production methods. An engineer arrives at the mine and

exposes the conspiracy fostered by these enemies of the people and helps local worker-activists to implement new methods in coal mining. The specialist also brings about an improvement in the living conditions of ordinary miners. In the concluding scene of the film the NKVD officers, under the watchful eyes of the indignant workers, carry an engineer-wrecker off the mine site. Then, the former director of the mine (who has been exposed as a Trotskyist) attempts to justify himself in the face of his party comrades. This differs from the Vertov film, where the new socialist reality is presented as an objective law of historical progress, with the masses merely being expected to follow their calling to build socialism. In *Miners*, the new socialist present is shown to emerge from the specific actions from a particular group of people. "Positive heroes" overcome the resistance of certain people referred to as "wreckers" and "enemies of the people." In doing this, the heroes solve vital problems to improve the organization of labor and life in a particular mine. In other words, the constructivist demand for the universal revolutionary transformation of the world has turned into a world of intrigue, plotting, and scheming by a small number of people, the activists and managers of the mine. Thus, avant-garde and revolutionary "Culture 1" gives way to conservative, traditional Stalinist "Culture 2," according to the process described by Vladimir Paperny (2002).

The way the Donbass space is portrayed in the film is also very interesting. There are relatively few scenes of working life in the mine, with the main action taking place in the deliberately bright and spacious offices of the Soviet top managers and the interiors of the apartments and dormitories of the film's heroes. If one was able to ignore the film's soundtrack and subject matter and merely focus on the surroundings, the impression is that of watching a play about the life of the Russian intelligentsia in the late nineteenth century. Bright rooms are adorned with classic bourgeois furniture, the director's office remains solid and respectable, and everywhere one finds flowers in classical vases on display. A party is held at the home of an amateur gardener, one of the kind-hearted eccentrics of the old intelligentsia, and it closely resembles the kind of spread laid out by poorer members of the Russian intelligentsia in the late nineteenth century. There is not even a hint of the recent revolutionary burst of innovation in architecture and design of the Soviet avant-garde period. Instead we see the dominance of renaissance classics and what the researchers of the Stalin era have termed *kul'turnost'* (Volkov 2000; Gurova 2006; Weinstein 2009), which can be understood as the deproletarianization of the Soviet working class through the empowerment of everyday habits and tastes that had been characteristic of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. This reinstatement of bourgeois taste arose in the wake of a struggle against left-wing revolutionary art and established itself for the long term as the main aesthetic of the Soviet way of life. One could say that what one sees in Stalinist cinema is the visual sterilization of the Donbass spaces.

It is in this regard that another important film of the Stalinist era covering the miners of the Donbass also deserves our attention. These are the first and the second parts of the movie *The Big Life*, the first of which was released in theaters in 1939, prior to the German invasion of the USSR, while the second was released in 1946, just after victory. Both of the film's parts concentrate on the labor, leisure time, and overall lives of the miners and were intended to reveal the successes of socialist construc-

tion. The film is populated by the typical characters of the working environment: the diligent hero with a heart of gold, the cheerful rogue with a guitar who has been reformed into a shock worker of socialist labor, the manager with a philosophical slant, the wise and responsible party leader, and the energetic and friendly young female workers. Over the course of the film a *perekovka* (reeducation) of backward workers occurs and all conflicts are happily resolved. Gone are the deus ex machina plot devices involving the NKVD sweeping away the enemies of the people into a black car; in their place we now have astute bureaucrats who do not acquire the status of wreckers.

The second part of *The Big Life* was filmed right after the war and revolves around the reconstruction of the Donbass coal industry after the massive destruction caused by the German invasion. The same typical miner characters break new records in production while achieving domestic bliss on the home front. Although the film shows many houses that were burned down during the fighting, the main action takes place in spacious interiors with a classical style reminiscent of the landed estates of the nineteenth century. The film ends with a large miners' ball in the local Palace of Culture, which strongly evokes aristocratic cultural activities rather than those of the working class. It appears that the film's director was keenly aware of the conservative turn in popular Stalinist-era culture, where architectural styles, military and school uniforms, and other aesthetic elements began to resemble their predecessors from the Russian Empire.

In spite of the director's efforts, Joseph Stalin disliked the second part of *The Big Life*, and the film's director was exposed to harsh criticism. The film was derided as mere "entertainment" and "devoid of ideology" by the chief party ideologue of the country at the time, Andrei Zhdanov. Stalin drew attention to the fact that the main characters of the film were portrayed as drunkards. The main complaint about the film, however, was the incorrect way the space of the Donbass mines and coal recovery process were presented. Senior film critics from among the Soviet political elite noted that the reconstruction of the Donbass was shown in the film to rest "not on the basis of the mechanization of labor-intensive work, but on hard manual labor" (Zhdanov 2005). Indeed, the plot of the film follows how, with mine equipment and machinery destroyed, the miners began work to restore and restart the extraction of coal through the kind of brute physical efforts in operation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Thus, the space of the Donbass was shown in too realistic a manner, and this brand of socialist realism actually displeased Stalin and Zhdanov. As a result, the film was left on the shelf to gather dust and was released only in 1958, after both Zhdanov's and Stalin's deaths. Later, the film was reedited by the director, and a new version was released in 1963. *The Big Life* was the final part of a Soviet canon of films that portrayed the work of the miners and the space of the coal industry as a special feat of labor. This ideology has subsequently come to dominate the mining subculture of the Donbass region.

The film *On the Day of the Festival* can be regarded as the prologue to the film *Mirror for a Hero*, which was shot a decade later. *On the Day of the Festival* can be seen as a stopover on the road leading to the breakdown of the Soviet ideological and symbolic world that occurred during the perestroika period. The film is limited in its

temporal and spatial framework; all the action takes place during the Victory Day holiday on May 9 commemorating the defeat of the Nazi Reich, and is set in the mining town of Torez and the Saur-Mogila memorial complex dedicated to the fallen Soviet soldiers of World War Two. The film's protagonist is Panteleimon Grinin, a retired miner, veteran, father of three grown children, and widower. On the day of the holiday he decides to bring his children together and introduce them to the new love of his life, a hairdresser called Zinaida. Not all of the children respond positively to the old man's story of newfound love. Another plot line focuses on coal mining, wherein Panteleimon uncovers financial irregularities and bribes at the mine and reports them to the local newspaper. However, during the course of the film, Panteleimon learns that his son, who is a mine surveyor, is involved in illegal schemes at the mine. This is a big disappointment for the old miner, who feels that he has been unable to pass on his ideals to the children.

The space of the film *On the Day of the Festival* is one of family, the memory of the war, and the socialist way of life within one city during the Brezhnev era of stagnation (*zastoi*). The socialist city is shown to be a world of consumer affluence and order where urban amenities are successfully provided. The miners live in constructivist Khrushchev-era five-story apartment blocks (*khrushchevki*), which can be seen as modern housing for the middle class. On the day of the holiday the family gathers in the spacious apartment of one of the sons of the protagonist, a successful office clerk. The apartment is filled with objects and furniture, all of which suggest material prosperity. This includes crystal ware, a living room cabinet set, and a color television. By the mid-1970s, with the postwar reconstruction long since completed, the Soviet Union was witnessing a consumer revolution. The idea of building communism at the level of the private individual was replaced by the simple pleasures of obtaining a car and buying a new refrigerator. The space that emerged was one of the Soviet middle-brow class, to which the miners also belonged due to their high wages. The Stalinist *kul'turnost'* had germinated and produced a Soviet bourgeoisie, which, in turn, affected working class consciousness. As a result, the main character in this space of bourgeois prosperity resembles an eccentric trying to preach old-fashioned ideals rather than helping his children to acquire scarce goods by using the special perks he enjoys as a war veteran. Soviet ideology thus decomposes, and the symbol of this degeneration can be found in the crystal vase, a physical manifestation of the concentration of the Soviet middle class during the stagnation era. The main character is awarded this vase at the ceremonial meeting in honor of Victory Day. He then proceeds to cruise through the city and its surrounding areas throughout the night, holding this ridiculous, heavy, yet fragile object in his arms.

The memory space of the war is found in festive celebrations at the huge memorial complex located on a high mound at Saur-Mogila. In 1943 bloody battles were fought for the capture of this mound, resulting in the death of over 25,000 Soviet soldiers.¹ In the 1960s and 1970s a memorial complex to the victims was erected on

¹ In the summer of 2014 the memorial complex of Saur-Mogila was destroyed during the course of fierce battles for the hill between fighting units of the self-proclaimed Donetsk Republic and the Ukrainian Army.

the site. It is this place that becomes the main memory space of the war in *On the Day of the Festival*. The camera pans over the forest steppe surrounding a huge hill, and we see tens of thousands of people who have gathered to honor the memory of the victims. This resembles both a pilgrimage and a giant open-air folk festival with family picnics scattered all around. It is worth underscoring that by 1978, 35 years had passed since the end of the war and, therefore, many war veterans were still alive and in good health. Their numbers were reinforced by the presence of the widows of soldiers and others who had witnessed the fighting with their own eyes. While those who had experienced the war firsthand viewed this space and the holiday as sites of tragedy and loss, the younger generation of Soviet postwar “baby boomers,” in contrast, treated Victory Day as a joyful spring vacation. They enjoyed the festival without a strong reference to the events of the war; they came to the vast expanse of the Saur-Mogila to spend time with their families and friends. Of course, the ritual of remembrance for the dead is respected and takes place. However, it no longer takes center stage, as the holiday is perceived as a day of collective outdoor festivities. In the 1970s the idea of a generation gap around remembrance of the war was even reflected in official Soviet literature and film. An excellent and telling example of this can be found in the film *Belorussian Station* (*Belorusskii vokzal*; 1971, dir. Andrei Smirnov), where the lack of understanding between the veterans and the new generation is well illustrated. In the evening of the same day, Panteleimon returns to Saur-Mogila to view a memorial torchlight procession. He finds young men walking around in circles wearing Second World War uniforms and is captivated by the strange and eerie ritual. Such torchlight processions were led by Pioneers and Komsomol members in the 1960s and 1970s and represented the main means of ceremonial commemoration of those who fell in the war. *On the Day of the Festival* was filmed at the height of the Brezhnev stagnation era. This was a contradictory period that combined the achievement of relatively high levels of material well-being with the steady corrosion of socialist ideals in society, ideals that became empty signifiers in late Soviet bourgeois society. The space of the film is divided into two parts: that of the prosperous bourgeois present and that which reminds us of the war and takes on a more mythological character. In the present, one looks to buy a new personal car and live in a new home in a comfortable city. In the past we have widows, the burial mounds and graves of the fallen, and memorial torchlight processions. Between these symbolic spaces there is a growing gap, and the main character is doing his best to hold them together. The film *Mirror for a Hero* will show that this is an impossible task.

MINER GODS DO NOT WANT TO DIE

The Donbass is a nostalgic Soviet space, a shattered world of industrial socialism, and highly militarized zone of conflict, whose media image allows it to form the backdrop for a postapocalyptic series.

It should be recalled that one of the most important feature films of Gorbachev’s perestroika era, *Mirror for a Hero* by Vladimir Khotinenko, is set in the Donbas. The theme of the film is the impossibility of breaking with the past: the main character is

the successful scientist and psychologist Sergei Pshenichnyi, who comes to his father in a mining village in the Donbass to ask him to move to the suburbs to be closer to him. By accident, Sergei and a casual acquaintance, a former mining engineer, fall into the past and find themselves in 1949, in the same miner's settlement but at the apogee of the late Stalinist period, where official pomp and imperial style reached their peak, expressed through classical decorations and paintings on the plywood walls of the factory assembly hall, alongside the postwar poverty of the miners and their fear of the repressive state machine. The plot of the film is based on the idea that the hero of the film has to live again and again the same day—May 8, 1949—and meet the same people, hear the endlessly repetitive bravura speeches of radio announcers, and participate in the establishment of a city park.² The organization of space plays a key role here: the protagonist spends his nights in an abandoned half-ruined technical facility assembled of sheets of rusty iron. The mining world consists of man-made mine dumps, which form the hilly terrain of the south half-steppe space. The main office of the plant is a temporary building made of plywood boards, the misery of which is stressed by the stylized design of a classic nineteenth-century mansion. The mining town itself seems to be the embodiment of the myth of the eternal return—the semiagrarian, semiproletarian patterns of suburban community where nothing changes and new generations live the same life as the ones before them. The mines are narrow, dark, and hazardous spaces of industrial hell, where the share of manual labor is very high, as is the risk of being buried under landslides. Technologies are primitive and production is based on manual labor.

Spaces of the mining settlement of the late 1940s are real, but at the same time imaginary: the heroes of the film, trapped in the past, live the same day over and over. It seems that they are in a Stalinist Disneyland where all the roles and replicas are written and repeated endlessly and any attempt to change anything is unsuccessful. *Mirror for a Hero* is a film which shows relations with the past as traumatic and contradictory—the protagonist's intense agonizing nostalgia of meeting with his own young parents, recognizing himself in a boy with a short haircut, the son of a miner, is superimposed on the absurdity of Soviet postwar life with his sincere but poor enthusiasm, latent fear, and expectation of a quiet humdrum life after a terrible war. The village, the mine, the main office of the plant, and the waste heaps create an impression of abandonment and temporariness, but all have their own life, which seems to a traveler from the 1980s quite miserable yet emotionally intense and in some ways better in its naive belief in the possibility of a better world—something that had become difficult to expect from a Soviet person in the years preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Donbass in this film represents a magnetic space of Soviet industrial utopia that forgets its creators and aims and transforms into a loose set of standard staging where people are stock characters tied to the script, which is determined by the time and the place. The mine, the main office, the huts with their poor in their own cozy little world, the railways, the waste heaps with endless trails among them—all of this smells of dry grass, fuel oil, rotting feathers, warm rusty iron,

² Several years later, a similar plot was used in the Hollywood movie *Groundhog Day*.

chalk dust, oil paint. Together all this creates the world of the Donbass, which is unlike the world of the mines of the Ruhr Basin or of the coal camps at Wells.

Mirror for a Hero is based on a story by a socialist realist Soviet writer Sviatoslav Rybas. The idea of the story was to demonstrate the heavy but selfless work of the postwar Donbass miners, as seen through the eyes of the intellectuals of the 1970s. But even here, through the clichés of the Soviet production novel, one can notice a perception of Soviet space as ruined, unfinished, abandoned, as this dreary world was seen by the protagonist of the story:

It will take about a decade and by the sixties life will go away far from the post-war period. He saw something that was dear and near to him in these poorly dressed people, these simple-houses in these ruins, sheathed in scaffolding. (Rybas 1984)

Rybas's story was written in the early 1980s, and the film, shot in 1987 when the Soviet Union was already restructuring, only vaguely intersected with the plot of the original story. Besides, the level of miners' wages, which were very high in the Soviet Union, began to decline due to rising inflation and the trade deficit: the strikes of 1989–1990 became an important factor in the destabilization of the political and economic life of the country, and at that time television devoted a lot of time to showcasing controversial, often sad stories of daily life in mining settlements, where frequent accidents at mines with a fatal outcome became regular sacrifices.

POST-SOVIET DONBASS: THE RUINATION OF SOVIET INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

The real Donbass of the 1990s and early 2000s was a strange territory of the ruined post-Soviet universe, within which the meaning of existence associated with the heroic proletarian miners' work glorified by Soviet propaganda was lost. Mines were closed; miners went on strike or went to work in Russia; the younger generation joined urban gangs; the practice of *kopanka*—small-scale illegal coal mining operations in the abandoned and depleted mines carried out under dangerous conditions—became widespread. Prior to the war of 2014 Donbass was full of *kopankas* controlled by criminal syndicates and corrupt local authorities. These illegal mini-mines are tangible symbols of how the post-Soviet space was regressing into an archaic mode of production, returning to the practices of the initial period of the industrial revolution, when work in the mines looked like indulgence in a sultry, dangerous, black, claustrophobic hell.

The imaginary space of the former Soviet Donbass is best illustrated in the book *Mark Shader* (in Russian, *Mark Sheider*) by surrealist Dnepropetrovsk (now Dnepr) author Dmitrii Savochkin, which was influenced by the style of American author Chuck Palahniuk (Savochkin translated Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club* into Russian).

Mark Shader was published in 2009 by the Russian publishing house AST (Savochkin 2009). This novel is an alcohol-and-drug road story about cities and towns of Western Donbass, told on behalf of several protagonists—a miner, a policeman re-

sponsible for the organization of security at a mine, a drug addict named Hanna, and so on. The heroes of this novel are immersed in the mystique of the post-Soviet miners' world, inspired by their consumption of a special miner's drug (invented by the author of the novel) called *natsvai*.³

A policeman and a miner–distributor of *natsvai* search for the underground spirit of Donbass—the enigmatic Mark Shader (a play on words—the Russian name for a mineral surveyor is *marksheider*, from German *Markscheider*). Both take a strange psychedelic trip through the subconscious mind in search of the true Donbass but again and again stumble upon traces of the Soviet mega-civilization, manifesting itself in material objects: the dull architecture of typical houses, ruined iron fences and gates, running interior village hotels, coal black slaughter:

I stand in front of the old, dilapidated gate of the mine and think that it will take three hundred years until the Soviet Union is gone away from here forever. He was blamed for being unproductive, for poor performance, but these dilapidated factory gates, it—the Soviet Union—had made a huge set. And also, it seems that it manufactured the gates already shabby because I have never seen brand-new gates at mines. It also produced a huge number of warped asphalt, Khrushchev-era apartment blocks, and gray, weak-willed people. People who live in these houses and work behind these fences. (Savochkin 2009)

Savochkin's novel was published in 2009; however, from the standpoint of the modern reader the novel reads like a warning that the Soviet space only appears to be an extinct civilization of ruined symbols. In fact, it turned out that the structure of the material and symbolic systems do not simply die out, fade into oblivion—they continue to live, taking on strange and sometimes terrible shapes. Similarly, the space of the Donbass could not escape the clutches of the Soviet world, which has gone through ugly mutations in its transition to new economic relations—"wild capitalism," best illustrated by the *kopankas*:

Against the backdrop of a ruined, exhausted, and starving country Donbass looked like a fiefdom of the gods. "All the man-gods are already underground," says a road girl.⁴ Their remains are still found in Donbass. All these monuments, beautiful parks, and unfinished housing estates. "The best human intentions are buried here," says the road girl. Thick layers of coal have already been developed, there are now a lot of other energy sources, which are much cheaper, and on top of all the Soviet Union, that very Soviet Union that so nurtured and cherished Donbass miner, has ceased to exist. Mines became unprofitable, enterprises got closed, and monstrously multiplied descendants of displaced criminals have nothing else to do but drink and cut each other with kitchen knives. The Earth would not withstand such a number of freeloaders. (Savochkin 2009)

³ In Central Asia, a homemade stimulant called *nasvay*, made of tobacco, quicklime, and other additives, is popular. This mixture is chewed to produce a stimulating effect.

⁴ A "road girl" is a prostitute who works on intercity highways. The main clients of road girls are long-haul truckers.

As a result, the Donbass has become a hot spot on the map of Europe, a point where the space of the Soviet miners' myth was both stage and a full-fledged player in the war in eastern Ukraine, which started in the spring of 2014. It is noteworthy that the ideology of fragmented self-proclaimed republics (Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic) are carnivalized pastiches of different left-wing and, at the same time, conservative ideas—a nationalist, quite "miners'" understanding of a just society, saturated with simplistic clichés of Soviet propaganda and nostalgia for a mythical socialism, when "there was respect for a working man." Paradoxically, the miners' strikes of 1989 were against "real" socialism, which the working class no longer liked but which had been the goal of the revolutions of the past.

CONCLUSION

The mythology of the post-Soviet Donbass includes symbols, names, and attempts to create its own "history" from an "explosive mixture" of Eduard Limonov's militarized left nationalist rhetoric, boring stereotyped mantras about the Donbass as a region of miners' glory, an aesthetic originating in the mass pulp fiction from the genre of alternative history. All these elements shape the behavior of the leaders of the conflicting parties' paramilitary forces. Some of them come up with operetta uniforms, resembling those of both the Red Army and Latin American revolutionary movements, while others build self-made or strange armored vehicles out of old Soviet military equipment. Battles unfold among sunflower heaps and fields. All this together makes up a cinematic postapocalyptic thriller. World news broadcast updates from the Donbass conflict right after the news about fighting in the Middle East, which enhances the effect of an alien, sluggish third world war, which somehow includes both remote-controlled drones from American science-fiction movies of the 1980s and Soviet antitank guns from the Second World War. And all this takes place on the background of a slightly modified Soviet world—gunners and snipers hiding on rooftops of Brezhnev's nine-story buildings; and hospitals and houses of culture, built in the style of Stalinist baroque or the simplified modernism of the "thaw" period, are destroyed. Savochkin's novel unwillingly comes to mind as one is watching the events. It is about the decline of the Donbass miners' civilization, which, although it emerged as a capitalist project of the British businessman and engineer John Hughes in the nineteenth century, attained a complete and, in its own way, perfect shape during the Soviet industrial breakthrough. The degradation of the Soviet space in the territory of Donbass began long before the destruction of the USSR, which is well illustrated in the routine lives of the characters in *Mirror for a Hero*, forced again and again to relive May 8, 1949, as a painful dream.

Thus, the history of the Donbass as an "imagined" space found expression in films and novels. On the one hand, this history is about the birth and rise of an important myth about the world of mining, an industry that played a foundational role in the Soviet system. On the other hand, it is also about the eclipse and gradual demise of this myth. Running parallel to this collapse was the fading mobilizing ca-

pacities of Stalinist socialist ideology. The signs of this collapse could be noticed in the rupture between generations in the film *On the Day of the Festival* and again in *Mirror for a Hero*, where the children appeared to be totally alienated from the values of their parents. All the same, parents and children were forced to mechanically live together in the groundhog-day monotony of Soviet life. The miner strikes of the Donbass during perestroika were a call to demolish the ugly and timeless humdrum of Soviet stagnation. However, the Soviet working class was itself a product of the Soviet system and, as it turned out, would end up walking off the stage of history together with the USSR. Savochkin's novel *Mark Shader* closes the Soviet project of the Donbass as an "imagined space" and opens new horizons for a post-Soviet historical surrealism, where a wild new capitalism mixes with the geniuses of a decaying mining civilization, resulting in a strange and dangerous cocktail. In general, the mining regions, and primarily the Donbass, became a prime example of what happens to a space and the people who inhabit it when there is a civilizational decline, a retreat of the meanings, ideologies, and structures that support social, cultural, and economic stability.

The goal of this essay is to offer a unique atlas of emotions (Bruno 2002) and shed light on cultural representations in Soviet cinema and post-Soviet literature. My approach to this is the method of psychogeography (Edensor 2010), which can be interpreted by looking at cinematic texts, identifying the emotional submersion in the Donbass landscapes of the Soviet period reflected in the language of cinema. This is important in understanding the mythology behind the Donbass as a "mining country," a status the region held for many decades. This mythology became all the more important in the post-Soviet period when the region's significance as a mining hub was vastly reduced. For a long time the region was seen as a depressed space of *kopanka*, unemployment, and hardship. In reality the region is not integrated with the nation-building projects of independent Ukraine, even while it has been actively exploited by the new capitalism. The emotional landscape of the Donbass was radically remolded over the course of the military conflict: the old place names were attached to new myths. Furthermore, a new territory has appeared that includes powerful spaces of aggression and grief. Films and books are being made about these spaces that continue to develop the complex psychogeography of the Donbass.

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ДОНБАСС КАК ПРОСТРАНСТВО СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОГО ЭНТУЗИАЗМА, ПАМЯТИ И ТРАВМЫ: КИНЕМАТОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ И ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЕ ОБРАЗЫ

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Эссе подготовлено в ходе проведения исследования «Социологический анализ коллективной памяти о позднем советском периоде: контексты музеефикации и коммодификации» (№17-01-0058) в рамках Программы «Научный фонд Национального исследовательского университета “Высшая школа экономики” (НИУ ВШЭ)» в 2017 г. и в рамках государственной поддержки ведущих университетов Российской Федерации «5-100».

Эссе посвящено исследованию Донбасса как мифологического пространства, ставшего объектом культурного конструирования советским кинематографом и постсоветской литературой. В центре внимания автора символическая эволюция советской мифологии Донбасса, которая начинается со сталинского кинематографа, представленного фильмом «Шахтеры» (1937) и кинодилогией «Большая жизнь» (1939–1946), продолжается в минорном фильме периода застоя «В день праздника» (1978) и заканчивается метафоричным фильмом «Зеркало для и героя» (1987), затронувшим сложные вопросы семейной и коллективной памяти о травматичных страницах советского прошлого. Каждый из фильмов отражает этапы трансформации Донбасса как особого индустриального шахтерского мира – от истеричного энтузиазма 1930–1940-х годов через разочарование и равнодушие 1970-х до мучительного возвращения к прошлому и его ревизии в период перестройки. Перед распадом СССР Донбасс стал пространством бурных политических перемен и зарождения мощного шахтерского забастовочного движения, но в 1990-х годах пережил тяжелые времена экономического кризиса и деиндустриализации. Безработица, рост преступности и обнищание значительной части рабочего класса стали частью повседневности Донбасса этого времени. Новый эмоциональный облик Донбасса нашел отражение в психоделическом романе Дмитрия Савочкина «Марк Шейдер»: это Донбасс подпольных шахт-копанок, наркоманских трипов и сложных отношений с «шахтерскими богами» советского времени. Важным итогом анализа, выполненного в жанре психогеографии и культурологии эмоций, стал вывод о связи пространственной мифологии с актуальными политическими контекстами, объяснение которых часто кроется в исторических и культурных мифологиях региона. Эссе не фокусируется на современной военной и политической ситуации в этом регионе, но является рефлексией относительно эмоционального и идеологического прошлого Донбасса.

Ключевые слова: психогеография; постсоветское пространство; советский кинематограф; исследования культуры; шахтеры; Донбасс