

Cheburashka: The Cartoon that Decelerated the Soviet Ideology

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Introduction

During the eras of Leninism and Stalinism, the Soviet Union was in a frantic pursuit towards reaching a Marxist end of history. Everything the October Revolution initially fought for—political power in the hands of the working class, freedom from the bourgeoisie exploitation of the proletariat, attaining a communist society—was unyieldingly upheld through a working class empowered by Vladimir Lenin, the father of the revolution, and then by Joseph Stalin’s national heroism and ruthless reforms, the collectivization and the industrialization. But after Stalin’s death in 1953 came Nikita Khrushchev’s Оттепель (*Ottepel*), or Thaw, followed by Leonid Brezhnev’s Застой (*Zastoi*), or Stagnation. While the prevailing ideology surrounding the communist regime continued to dominate, it was less threatening than it had previously been during the eras of War Communism and the Great Terror, and the fervor behind promoting communism and achieving peaceful coexistence dissipated especially under the declining economy of the Era of Stagnation. Khrushchev and Brezhnev did not measure up to the fear mongering and all-powerful personae of Lenin and Stalin. Thus, the Thaw allowed Stalin’s rigid currents to unfreeze, and time to slow down, accompanied by a fabricated reality claiming that everything was as it had been (the point Alexei Yurchak makes in his book, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*—performing hypernormalization in a hyperreality). The party sought to uphold its reputation of omnipotence by fusing people’s movements, speech, and being with its ideology, in what Katherine Verdery coins as the “etatization of time.”

But despite these efforts, in the ideological context of late socialism, everyday resistance sprung up not just liminally, but directly, in the modes the state believed it was wielding its control. From the late sixties to the eighties, there was a wholly different socio-temporality due to relaxed rule of Khrushchev and the ineffective era of Brezhnev. Soviet people were able to

reclaim time, combatting both a lack of purpose (that was especially characteristic of living under Brezhnev) and the power of the state. The forms of media that were previously tools of the party began to change, in that more and more subverted ideology appeared during the years before the fall of the Soviet Union. Through literature, art, and music, as well as merely the experiences of daily life, the fabric of society began to reflect this reclamation of time—in which people began to slow down their pace of life (Fishzon 572). The graduality and inconsequence of these transitions, as well as the notable context of the epoch, allowed for these ideological changes in media and reality without repercussion.

Soviet children's animation especially transformed during late socialism. The content of nationally broadcasted television shows and movies no longer exclusively centered around propagating party ideology. Rather, just as literature began to do (especially during the relaxed rule of the Thaw), animation began to convey the feelings and realities of Soviet people, garnering the beloved viewership of adults along the way (Kononenko 275). The characters of popular cartoons such as *The Mitten* (1967), *Hedgehog in the Fog* (1975), *Three from Prostokvashino* (1978), and of course, *Cheburashka* (1969), were overwhelmingly loafers and loners, and lacking *something*—a product of being children to parents who spent much of their time waiting in queues, performing socialist in a nearly post-socialist state. Perhaps what is Russia's most beloved cartoon creature today, Cheburashka, emerged in the namesake animation based off children's writer Eduard Uspensky's book, *Крокодил Гена и его друзья* (*Crocodile Gena and his friends*). Cheburashka, accompanied by his crocodile friend Gena, together in their estrangement embody not only loneliness, but a disruption in temporality. The characters are eccentric, the aesthetics doleful, and most importantly, the show grants a reprieve from accelerated time. The medium for the series, stop-motion, was significant in its serrated

movement that teetered between total fantasy of animation and real life. The lugubrious characters of the series who existed on the fringes of society were relatable to so many children of stagnation, as well as adults during the transitional time that was late socialism. The songs, notably *Goluboi Vagon* (which translates to ‘blue train car’) poignantly intimates a sentiment of desiring only a break, a stretching and slowing down of the happily inconsequential existences. The series realizes the quintessential Soviet feeling from the late sixties to the early eighties, with its display of rejection, futility, and longing for non-teleological time. By incorporating all these elements—the melancholic nature of the characters, the music, and the plot, I argue that *Cheburashka* provided an unorthodox territory, that was relatable and liberating during the uncertainty of late socialism—an alternative space that allowed for the defiance of the guardrails of progress and time.

In chapter 1, I talk about the usage of time in the Soviet Union—how the state and Soviet people occupied time in different ways—in order to provide a stark contrast between the state’s expectation of time and *Cheburashka*’s anti-Marxist time. In chapter 2, I use Alexei Yurchak’s work to describe how the impact of ideology transformed during the time of late socialism, especially through the peculiarity of the era of stagnation under Brezhnev—a period characterized by queues and idleness. It was because of this loosening of ideology in true practice that resulted in the rise of children’s animation and themes of innocence, which I explore in chapter 3. Chapter 4 is the introduction to the series of *Cheburashka*, the focus of my paper, which describes the strangeness and estrangement of the main characters, *Cheburashka*, *Gena*, and *Shapoklyak*, which in turn made them so ubiquitous and relatable to Soviet people, even today. To contextualize the unique artistic qualities of the series, I talk about the inherent jaggedness of stop-motion representing the awkwardness of time and Soviet people’s actions

during late socialism in Chapter 5. Then, in Chapter 6, through examining the plot and script of the third episode of the series, “Shapoklyak”, I examine (in Russian) the antithetical relationship that Cheburashka and Gena have with a socio-temporality concerned with accelerated progress. To conclude in Chapter 7, I analyze the song “Goluboi Vagon” and its different sentiments of desire concerning the fabric of time and society.

Chapter 1: They Pretend to Give Us Time, We Pretend to Use It

“We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us”, goes the old Soviet joke, a humorous testimony to the dissatisfaction of workers’ pay, but also alluding to the meaninglessness behind their jobs. This chapter’s title plays on the анекдот (joke), to shed light on the similar manner in which time was managed before and during late socialism.

Marxist time is defined by the conviction that the socialist revolution will overcome regular temporal constraints to manifest the freedom of labor and attain communism in the future. In his book *Time and Revolution*, Stephen Hanson follows the trail of Marxist time under each of the leaders of the Soviet Union and explains the origins for each specific socio-temporality. “The concept of communism as a collective movement for the realization of labor’s potential for time transcendence within time transformed the Hegelian charismatic-rational conception of time into a revolutionary force” (Hanson 42). To maintain this rapid teleological progress that both exists in the current moment and remains outside of it, the state employed tactics seeking to occupy time and bodies in order to maintain the perceived and visibly well-mannered execution of communist ideology. Katherine Verdery coins this phenomenon as the “etatization of time”, which she explores specifically using the example of Ceausescu’s Romania (1965-1989). In the chapter titled “The “Etatization” of Time in Ceausescu’s Romania” (from

her book, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next*), she writes about the exploitation of workers' time to combat the scarcity of resources available, despite time already being a meager resource itself. The state controlled the times when water and gas would be available, dictating domestic schedules. Transportation was unreliable and queues were unbearably long. The nationalist parades and holidays where time passed citizens by for nearly a day, just for a performative glimpse at the secular idols of the communist movement (called "ritual waiting"), in which the "etatization" of time demarcates a distance between the leaders and the people even more so than a colonization of time (Verdery 4). All of this created a specter of state control, yet the substance of these time occupations was instead one of idleness. This counterpoint is explained by Alexei Yurchak, who offers that in late socialism of Russia, these reappropriations of time allotted by the state, were quite ordinary beginning in the times of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. "They were not exceptions to the system's dominant spatial and temporal regimes but, on the contrary, were paradigmatic manifestations of how these regimes functioned during late socialism" (Yurchak 156).

Yet early Soviet ideology had a different attitude towards time. Take the example of *The Potudan River* (1937), by Andrei Platonov. The short story tells the trials and tribulations of Nikita, a young man just home from the Civil War, who reunites with childhood enchantment, Lyuba, and must cope with his inadequacies (including impotence, another metaphor for the pressure and hurriedness to perform during Stalin's era) and the shortcomings of home. It is a story of non-aligning timelines and of different, disparate tempos. Nikita and Lyuba wait for one another at different points in their life, the brutality of the river's freeze and thaw heeding no attention to their distresses. Lyuba is eager to begin their life as a couple, and Nikita passes the time by building furniture in a nearby village as Lyuba finishes her exams. But when the long-

awaited moment of their union finally arrives, Nikita finds himself in fear of Lyuba falling out of love with him and of feeling deep grief and shame because he has been unable to consummate the marriage. He runs away in shame to the bazaar, where one could go for “distracting the spirit for a little while” (Platonov 145). Here he loses any real sense of time, transiently existing in and out of consciousness. He does tasks for the watchman, dozes outside and subsists on leftover scraps. He is even falsely accused of theft and jailed, but the investigator lets him go on account of what he construes to be Nikita’s indifference to life, which really is an indignity-induced state of dazed stupor. From the early spring to the end of summer, Nikita stays at the bazaar, until one day he runs into his father. He learns from him that, after months of walking up and down the length of the river searching for Nikita’s body, Lyuba had attempted to drown herself in the just-thawed Potudan. At once, inspired by the veritable love that his wife holds for him, Nikita returns to Lyuba, and she takes him back with open arms. *The Potudan River* is a meditation on the pace of time shortly after the founding of the Soviet Union, taking place in the fraught aftermath of the Russian Civil War, but compounded by the Great Terror of the late 1930s, when the story was written. While everything was accelerated yet nothing was working, time deteriorates the false utopias that fell short after the war, and above all, the river, an emblem of both nature and time, prevails as stronger a power than any man’s will to overcome time. The sentimental story comes to a close as our heroes submit to nature rather than attempt to overcome it, and Nikita and Lyuba find their own temporality.

Between the harshest and most uncompromising times of Lenin’s War Communism and Stalin’s purges and the beginning of late socialism, nature became increasingly overshadowed by a socio-economic temporality concerned greatly with industrialization and the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). The idea of the continuous revolution in the pursuit of communism pervaded,

and when Joseph Stalin died in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev turned this idea against the Man of Steel and began to bolster the idea of “the party of the whole people” instead of a party led by the “dictatorship of the proletariat” (Hanson 176). Khrushchev’s populist appeals and his de-Stalinization policy began to encourage a more relaxed rule in the Soviet Union—hence the designation of the name “the Thaw”. The liberalization of culture was also promoted during Khrushchev’s era, and we begin to see the discourse of time frequently woven into popular Soviet media, as well as more perceptible displays of the desire for a reprieve from Marxist time, such as in Natalya Baranskaya’s novella, *A Week Like Any Other* (1969).

Instead of the flies who rise just before dawn to awake any sleeper in *The Potudan River*, in *A Week Like Any Other*, the main protagonist Olga startles rudely every morning to the blare of her alarm clock, and the time-signifier thus controls the rest of her week. Then, when a survey asks the women at her job at the science lab to calculate how they spend their time in any given week, Olga’s account is flooded with tasks she completes for her work, her family, but seldom for herself. The women discover collectively that they have on average, 48 to 53 hours at home in a week. For Olga, this as a significant amount of time, yet she wonders where it all goes (Baranskaya 49). The book is saturated in time—not being on time, making up time, losing time, long times, short times, at the same time, and no time. She is perpetually in a rush. This rush does not physically amount to anything of large significance on paper—workdays spent chasing around her boss or colleagues, chatting about the survey, preparing for literature meetings, etc. Her intensity is shown in passages where she declares, “Oh, spare time, spare time, What a ludicrous phrase—‘spare time’ ... Personally, I like to run. I run here and there, with a bag in each hand of course, up and down, to the trolleybus, the metro, from the metro” (Baranskaya 6). But later, these remarks about enjoying the rush are countered by her desires, a complete

antithesis. “I long to walk freely, with no baggage and no aim. Just to walk, take my time, peacefully, very slowly.” And suddenly, Olga’s mind ambles to reminisce on falling in love with her husband, and after she startles from her daydream, again, she finds herself late (Baranskaya 29). Written a few years after Brezhnev came into power, *A Week Like Any Other* parallels *The Potudan River* in that the main characters of both novellas are unable to cope with the mania of an accelerated life. Both protagonists understand their duties, yet there is a mental breaking point. Whereas Olga gives in by sleeping in for once, Nikita gives up at first, running away to the bazaar but later submitting himself in entirety to Lyuba and to nature’s time. These two short stories are paradigms of the temporalities under Stalin and then Khrushchev. The external fervor for being an ideal communist is evident, yet in both novellas the protagonists exhibit very different desires, contrary to what party ideology permits.

Ideologically, the definition of the self is concerned simply with the time one inputs—in work, social environments, attendance in certain State events, and so on. Or as Katherine Verdery puts it, “...Social senses of self are intricately bound up with temporal investments in certain kind of activity” (Verdery 83). Thus, the ways in which a person’s time is spent creates the individual. A person like Nikita, who has fought in the war and comes back only wishing to marry and settle down, is a man who is always doing the right thing. Olga, who takes care of her family and takes her work seriously, not even finding a spare moment to sew the hook on her belt, is an ideal of the independent woman who loves her work. While both characters are just that, characters, they are representations of the reality for many Soviets in their respective time periods. They do as they are told and thus believe that this is as they should do, but ultimately time catches up to them, or rather, they let conventional time pass them by. While Verdery claims that selves were fractured and self-realization failed because of the etatization of time,

this is refuted in how individuals were able to alienate themselves from the ways in which one occupied time, meaning that they did not truly identify with the ways in which they spent their time. Soviet individuals were regularly able, beginning in late socialism, to reappropriate the confines of work as performative acts and idle behaviors. These deterritorializations coexisted, ironically, within the state’s time, which had become malleable during late socialism. After all, “In Moscow, everybody always rushes. Even those who have nothing to do. The current haste infects everybody in turn” (Baranskaya 26). Thus, the Communist party etatized time in a way that transformed during Brezhnev on, keeping everyone in line, yet spurring negligence and a performance with no purpose. The effects of the aesthetics of late socialism are only intensified during Brezhnev’s era, in which animation, specifically *Cheburashka*, came to not just exhibit the awkwardness of navigating time and slowing it down as a desire, but reality.

Chapter 2: Ideology and Hyperreality/Fast Stagnation



Mayakovsky, Vladimir. *Хочешь?—Вступи* (РОСТА №866). 1921.
“Want? Join”

1. Want to beat the cold? 2. Want to fight hunger? 3. Want to eat? 4. Want to drink?
Hurry and join the strike group of exemplary work.”

During late socialism, maintaining the facade of well-oiled ideology was more important than people's genuine belief in it (Yurchak 37). The aesthetics of the time created a phantasmic reality full of signifiers—of socialist-realist posters and film, language, and song. There was a certain standard for the Soviet citizen, in the way they should act and spend their time, and in the words and meter of their speech—the embodiment of the New Soviet Man. This discourse did not just pervade the Soviet Union but upheld the entire system during the trying times after Stalin's death. Mikhail Epstein goes so far as to say, “Communist ideology can not be accused of lying, since it creates the very world that it describes... And any reality that differed from ideology simply ceased to exist—it was replaced by hyperreality... In Soviet land, “fairy tale became fact,” as in that American paragon of hyperreality, Disneyland, where reality itself is designed as a “land of imagination” (Epstein 55-56). Epstein is referring to the Soviet world becoming Jean Baudrillard's hyperreality, and Yurchak's coined term of hypernormalization is the behavior that Soviet people took on in this new fabricated temporality. Specifically, hypernormalization is defined within the context of the language of authoritative discourse. Where, “the process of its normalization did not simply affect all levels of linguistic, textual, and narrative structure but also became an end in itself, resulting in fixed and cumbersome forms of language that were often neither interpreted nor easily interpretable at the level of constative meaning” (Yurchak 50). Modes of ideology were no longer declarative and mobilizing, but rather stood still, a vacuous emblem stuck inside the hermetic seal of Stalin's memory. But while there may have been a hyperreality and hypernormalization, the citizens that inhabit this landscape did not become ‘hyperhumans’—an army of New Soviet Men who were intelligent,

selfless, and strong. Nor were they Homo Sovieticus either, a parody of the ideal communist man—a passive agent to the state who drinks and steals. In the vastness between the New Soviet Man (who was the state’s personification of the optimal human) and Homo Sovieticus (a farce of the unattainability and undesirability of such a human), there exists a lacuna pierced during late socialism, one which exists beyond the binary of good and bad, the staunchly accepted and the glibly ridiculed, and the people versus the state.

In 1964, Leonid Brezhnev’s era of stagnation began. Time stood still, but in a different manner. Because this was a referential time. Brezhnev was reliant on figures past, speeches past, and if not the past, then gambling on glimpses forward at the future—all on repeat. It was not the initial zeal for the revolution as was Lenin’s time, nor was it Stalin’s large promises and results *now*. It also was not Khrushchev’s secret denunciations of Stalin, with new and scandalously exciting openness towards the West. With Brezhnev, there was a sense that the bureaucratic rule would never die out despite its gerontocratic qualifier, and Soviet people would have to continue repeating the old words of ideological speak forever, like a broken record. It was these reproductions that created the specter of the Soviet Union as it had been. But the generation of “children of stagnation”, or what Yurchak calls “the last soviet generation”, was of course termed only after the epoch, contextualized within the fall of the Soviet Union (Yurchak 7). The characterization of the period for the Soviet citizens living in it, was the lack of identification with a strong political event in Russia. There was no revolution, no war, no denunciation. And since a collapse of the State was not even fathomable, everyone simply floated along. In this change of milieu, the already burgeoning field of animation that began its expansion during the Thaw, continued its rise thanks to the era’s climate. “The shift from a teleological linear time to a citational temporality in the midst of more subtle alterations within the cultural environment—

the socioeconomic background, so to speak—quietly opened up an ideological gulf that produced a catastrophic breakdown of the old order” (Fishzon 579). The ways in which certain animations displayed anti-ideological messages will be discussed later in this paper.

Beneath seamless hegemonic exteriors, countercultural actions always foment. In the Soviet Union during the late sixties and through the eighties, this was seen in the adaptation of authoritative discourse as trifling performativity. Often too small of behaviors to be classified as visibly dissident, these shifts nonetheless are the “in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony” (Halberstam 2). This dynamic change is made clear in the definitions of time within Marxism discussed above. While the earlier Soviet Union’s socio-temporality was characterized by ideological measures that were enforced and believed because of large personalities, the Soviet youth deterritorialized these occupied temporalities during late socialism. Though, as mentioned before, it is important to point out that these deterritorializations were not especially extraordinary or uncommon after Stalin’s death, as in the late Sovietism of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the teleological time that was enforced by the personalities of Lenin and Stalin disappeared (Yurchak 115). As the epoch of late socialism manifested and the final transformation from promised communist state into hyperreality loomed over the Soviet Union, forms of media that intended to transcend behaviors of hypernormalization began to appear. Animation, literally a constructed dreamworld, was no longer a propaganda tool (at least to any widely successful degree), but a vehicle for representing the realities of millions of Soviet individuals in this time of futility, and in certain cases, a showcase for anti-Marxist ideology on the silver screen.

Chapter 3: Exploiting Innocence

A wonderful intersection of ideology and time during late socialism is the world of children's animation. While ethnographies such as Yurchak's recount the linguistic aspects of conversation and day-to-day modes in which alternative discourses could emerge to deterritorialize time, animation is evidence then and now of how media upheld by the state (in the case of Soyuzmultfilm) displayed a desire for the disruption of temporality. Animation from its naissance went through many stylistic and ideological changes, influenced and restrained by the scrutiny of the Party and state committees. But after the war, animation avoided heavy-handed censorship due to works primarily being adaptations of folklore and fairytales.

Russia's stop-motion can be traced back majorly to two figures, Alexander Shiryayev and Wladyslaw Starewicz. Shiryayev was a ballet dancer and choreographer, who, inspired by the capturing of movement, created the first stop-motion animations. He used these films to demonstrate dances in an educational manner, using clay dancers on a stage and hand-drawn figures on paper. Yet, Starewicz is better known as Russia's first animator, pioneering puppet-animation by utilizing dead beetles in stop-motion. The Polish-Russian filmmaker's style was notably more bizarre than previous party aesthetics, with an eschatological and often cynical air. The embodiment of insects was a decidedly less "socially-realist" style of animation, but on the other hand, this new style presented the opportunity to canonize and repersonify the heroic figures of the past. "...Soviet consciousness is progressive. It is made and matured in history. The nonlinear workings of, say, heartfelt animation and Sartre's emotional cleansing or reconstruction of the world have no real interest and shared, objectively, established annals" (McFayden 63). Furthermore, it foreshadowed the potential for animation that would become apparent after the war. The construction of Soviet aesthetic, beginning with Starewicz's puppetry in the early 20th century, decidedly took a turn away from the realist and mass-produced works,

and instead pivoted towards creating dreamworlds. This shift becomes more evident in the opening of Soyuzmultfilm and its aesthetics after World War II.

In 1936, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) opened the state's official animation studio, Soyuzmultfilm, centralizing all regional animation divisions in order to rival Disney's superiority in the field. Disney had burgeoned into a household name, rivaling the idolization of Lenin, both iconoclasts of culture and heroes on an international level (McFayden 62). In the early days, the focus of the studio was on efficiency, much in the style of Lenin's usage of Taylorism. They used the same cel technique (cel, short for celluloid, which is the transparent sheet onto which characters were drawn) Disney utilized, which allowed for a large-scale, less specialized output of frames, but still, the Soviet Union did not have the same technology as the studios that America's Walt Disney did. During World War II, the Soyuzmultfilm studio and staff were evacuated to Samarkand, and took a hiatus. Then, it was precisely the post-war period that launched the studio's new agenda to create hope and reassurance through folklore and fairytales. Gone were the days of propaganda-infused plots in which the hero goes through a simple conflict and promptly discovers resolution. Instead, Soyuzmultfilm began to build eccentric, utopian worlds. In 1952, the studio opened its specialized 3-D film division (consisting of puppetry and stop-motion). Some of the earlier works from this branch were accused of being too naturalist and real, perhaps a result of the uncanny—puppets resembling humans, mimicking real human behavior (McFayden 78-79). But puppetry soon proved to be an extremely effective emotion-evoking medium. Viewers observed physical objects interacting truly with their backgrounds on the silver screen, yet they were also transported to magically transformed states of reality. This worked in tandem with Nikita Khrushchev's 1953 mass housing campaign, which introduced the construction of single-family

apartments in droves and with it, a more individualist society accessorized with the television as home entertainment. Thus, watching movies and television shows became more accessible for the average Soviet family. But it was under Brezhnev's *Zastoi* that Soviet animation experienced its golden era, beginning in the sixties and pervading all the way until the eighties. It is within this period that the entire series of *Cheburashka* premiered.

Paradoxes to Soviet ideology are abundant throughout all four episodes of *Cheburashka*, the animation series that debuted in 1969. The Young Pioneers are not the benevolent and just children that they are intended to be. Technology and industrialization are visibly harmful, with rivers polluted of oil and trash, and shopworkers who steal and swindle customers. Construction workers idly play games instead of repairing the school for the September 1st holiday. Gena and Cheburashka must step in to build spaces for these lost and friendless children of their city not unlike Moscow, hinting that the Soviet Union is not all-providing. Cheburashka's character himself is antithetical; he is both backwards as a folkloric character, and "cosmopolitan", hailing from a foreign land. There are endless readings of oppositions to ideology in the show. After all, children's animation was a difficult genre to censor, and the idea of innocence was exploited during the vulnerable aftermath of the war. The guise of authoritative power and the dissident spaces that manifested within them were inherently how the system functioned during late socialism, and animation is a paragon of how exactly this was achieved.

Chapter 4: Multiplication (Мультипликация или анимация)

When talking about the techniques of stop motion, it is useful to note the linguistic nuance in the word for animation in Russian, мультипликация or, *mul'tiplikatsiia*. While the term 'animation' implies something new and come-to-life, *mul'tiplikatsiia* can be interpreted in

two different ways: The multiplying of the same thing repeatedly, in line with the hyperreality of Soviet ideology, but also in the sense that this multiplication expands outwards, becoming much bigger than the original idea itself. To understand the implications of stop-motion animation as the world perceives it, it is necessary to know the mechanics behind the medium that in turn captivates its audience.

Hollywood's use of stop-motion today is often associated with eerie children's films such as *Coraline* or Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. This is a complete contrast to the exceedingly wholesome and incorruptible use of the medium in the post-war Soviet Union. Aside from the exploitation of innocence to surpass censorship, Soviet animation exhibits an air of "magical surrealism" in depicting a vaguely real world, where humans are replaced by creatures and puppets (Halberstam 175). Take Walter Benjamin's account of animation—it is a largely distributed and easily digested form of ideology for the masses (in theory), but under the aforementioned cloak of innocence, it is really a parody of true society—animals becoming agentic and children characters written by adults. Further, the possibilities of the medium of animation—with talking animals and objects that come to life—manipulate time. It is no longer a straight-forward and familiar image. The composition of an animation is a dreamworld in and of itself, which is why its initial acceptance as socialist realist art is all the more fascinating.

The process of stop-motion specifically is a poignant exhibition of 'queering time' and manipulating temporality. This maneuvering in time is made clear by the messages of an animation, but as a technique alone there is significance in its fragmented continuance. Stop motion seeks to initiate multiple realities in one instance, and many possibilities in the current moment, outside the observance of linear time (Halberstam 176). Yet all the same, it is

understood that these are not new iterations, only copies. “As Deleuze argues for cinema in general, animated images are disruptions to habitual methods of thought... There is no question that stop-motion lends animation a spooky and uncanny quality; it conveys life where we expect stillness, and stillness where we expect liveliness” (Halberstam 177-178). Stop motion in its name is antithetical, perceiving movement only in the liminal spaces between still frames. The repetitions of stop motion in a 3D form summon an odd passing of time, disorder in what is supposed to be a smooth and forward progression.

The capaciousness of operating the body in a stop-motion puppet film is also notable. While the same laws of animation physics can be applied in 2D animation, the malleability and manipulation of puppets interacting truly within an environment *ex machina* evokes the uncanny as well. The artists want the viewer to believe the figures are operating of their own accord, yet the execution without aid of modern CGI (computer-generated imagery) creates something slightly short of seamless movement (This is not to say it detracts from the beauty or enjoyment of the animation.) In fact, *Cheburashka*'s predating of CGI makes the aspects of multiplicity even more interesting. From frame-to-frame, the movements are repetitive, and characters have fragmented and limited mobility—often standing completely static, with only eyes blinking. *Cheburashka*'s feet often detach from his body entirely, motoring along separately. Characters squish and mold to fit into a myriad of spaces, under trains, in doorways too narrow, and spaces that should be physically impossible to inhabit. These aspects of stop motion, in constructing an impossible utopia through repetition, movement in jilted frames, and mobility of characters, all add to the composition of the series *Cheburashka*. They provide the foundation for the series' unique essence of anti-Marxism that is foremost delivered through its characters, story, and music, which will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: The Good, the Bad, and the Green



On the left: Kuznetsov, Andrei. *Большой город*. 2013.

On the right: Mukhina, Vera. *Рабочий и колхозница* or, *Worker and Kolkhoznitsa Woman*. 1937.

The three main recurring characters throughout the episodes of *Cheburashka* are Cheburashka, Gena, and Shapoklyak. As much as they are eccentric, they are also archetypal of common Russian characters. Cheburashka is the virtuous protagonist, Shapoklyak as the cunning trickster, and Gena as the wise and philosophical character. While the three are very complex, all their words and actions can be boiled down to basic essences. Cheburashka is always wondering where he belongs and who he is, and his main goal is to embody the ideal Soviet child. Gena is lonely and searching for friends. Shapoklyak is only able to play tricks, and she is reminiscent of old ideology, outfitted in outdated clothes. While these character types can be seen as standard of

children’s animation, they seem more so to indicate the Era of Stagnation under Brezhnev. The characters in *Cheburashka* are noticeably idle; they go dolefully about their everyday tasks and lack genuine purpose or drive, and they are all lonely, seeking refuge together from the remaining hastened hegemony.

It is important to study the appearance of the characters, and how this furthers their archetypal personae. *Cheburashka*, the eponymous character of the series, can be summed up by his awkwardness—with eyes and ears too large, indicating his readiness to accept everything told to him. He is a hybrid creature akin to a bear, but ultimately unclassified—the zoo does not even accept him as an attraction. He is entirely missing his legs, with only two large coils of feet, which plop down awkwardly with each small and offbeat step, connected straight to his tummy. He is unclothed, a foreign creature with disheveled fuzzy hair and no belongings. Even his name, *Cheburashka*, coming from the Russian verb *cheburakhnutsya* (чебурахнуться), means to topple (Klyuchkin 2). Yet, his naivety is only fodder for his inherent good, to a pubescent extent. When Gena is struggling to carry their bags during their trek back to the city, *Cheburashka* asks, “Слушай, Гена, давай я вещи понесу, а ты возьми меня?” (“Listen, Gena, let me carry things, and you take me?”). The weight that Gena bears remains the same, but *Cheburashka* believes he is helping. He seems to have trouble grasping basic things, such as asking if the nuts in the trees are in fact, fruit (“Ой, Гена, смотри, это ягоды?”), and when their tickets are stolen, he suggests perhaps Gena swallowed them (“Может, ты проглотил.”) *Cheburashka*’s character is altogether helpless, yet beloved in his doe-eyed attempts to make friends and become part of society.

Gena is the most peculiar character of the show. He is an elder crocodile, only able to read and write at a rudimentary level. He is adorned in a white dress shirt and black bow tie with a spiffy red coat over, topped off in a bowler-like black hat, pantless. When he works at the zoo

(as an attraction in the crocodile exhibit), he sheds these minimal layers and stashes them behind a tree, catching bugs while smoking a pipe. His eyes always seem, slightly knit together, either in surprise, worry, or forlornness. When he is not at work, he spends his time reading and playing chess, and his home is cluttered with encyclopedias, books, and toys. While he is not as clumsy as his new friend, Cheburashka, he navigates through life with a trudge, dragging his onerous tail along, and with an awkward physical presence. Gena is a little too big compared to those around him, even needing to stoop down in his own home. But most recognizable about Gena is his lamenting musical side, accompanied by his accordion. Contrary to his minimal education, we see a very lyrical and philosophical facet to him when he sings his songs.

Lastly, Shapoklyak, the lady trickster, is the series' recurring villain. She gets her name from the Russification of the French word for opera hat, *chapeau claque*. She moves across the screen quickly, weaving in and out of frame guided by Lariska, her pet rat and partner-in-crime that she keeps in her reticule. Her spindly, lanky body is draped in a black overcoat with old, ruffled accents. Her appearance is evocative of past aesthetics, and her slinky demeanor and scheming nature associates those pre-revolutionary times with complete self-interest. But her well-dressed etiquette and dignity shows a lonely resilience as well, as we see her character shift from a woman concerned with selfish amusement, to one who battles her own demons in the eponymous third episode of the series, "Shapoklyak". Her attachment to old clothes and the antiquated weapon of the slingshot seems to ring of a woman scorned, of unfulfilled achievement in her youth. Shapoklyak often sings to herself:

Кто людям помогает
Лишь тратит время зря, ха-ха
Хорошими делами
Прославиться нельзя, ха-ха-ха-ха-ха

Those that help others
are wasting their time, ha-ha
You can't become famous
By doing good deeds, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha

With these lyrics, it becomes clear her meddling is motivated by her own loneliness and rejection. In this way she bears resemblance to Gena, both sharply dressed elders living friendless in the past, feeling that they have been cheated out of a promised youth.

Chapter 6: На Время Компании

Чтобы показать анти-марксистский и эксцентричный характер замедленного времени в эпоху позднего социализма, я решила проанализировать третий эпизод Чебурашки, «Шапокляк». Этот эпизод особенно изобилует загадочным языком, песней одиночества, и желанием отказаться от движения к идеальному будущему. Такие признаки, неуклюжая внешность персонажей, своеобразный сценарий, и стиль анимации, отличают сериал от других шаблонных фильмов и мультфильмов того времени. Это определяло главные мотивы эпизода: бесцельное бродяжничество, одиночество, махинации, которые колеблются в нравственности, конфронтации с властью, столкновения между временем и природой, и также сопротивление прогрессу.

Эпизод начинается с отъезда Чебурашки и Гены из Москвы в Ялту. Город находится в тумане, что является как признаком физического расстояния, так и предвестием грядущей битвы с промышленным загрязнением. Примечателен также голос из громкоговорителя—воплощение манеры идеологического языка времён позднего социализма—повторяющийся и бессмысленный. Цифра 8 комично повторяется: восьмой поезд, восьмой путь, в восемь часов. Голос несколько раз запинаясь, но пассажиров это не отпугивает и не смущает:

«Внимание, внимание! Поезд номер восемь, Москва-Ялта, отправляется с восьмого пути, в восемь часов по московскому времени... Извините...Повторяю. По московскому времени с восьмого пути.»

Проводник внимательно наблюдает за странными существами, Чебурашкой и Геной, когда они садятся на поезд. В это же время Шапокляк уклоняется от необходимости покупать билеты на поезд и вместо этого забирается на крышу, пока дежурный не видит. Уже после одной минуты эпизода место каждого персонажа в обществе становится ясным для зрителя. Два аутсайдера, Чебурашка и Гена, которых следует остерегаться, и старуха, которая живет жизнью на окраине общества, игнорирует условности и нарушает правила.

В вагоне Гена кладёт все вещи на стол возле окна, но поезд резко трогается с места, и всё падает на пол. Пока Гена и Чебурашка возвращают вещи на место, Шапокляк хватает их билеты через окно вагона. Когда дежурный приближается проверить билеты, Гена замирает перед начальством в полном страхе, и Чебурашка следует его примеру. Подобную реакцию мы уже видели раньше, в предыдущих эпизодах. Но в этот момент Гена не знает правды о том, куда пропали билеты, и у них нет выбора, кроме как выйти на следующей остановке. Это пример беззащитного послушания в ответ на безосновательное проявление превосходства от мужчины, который только что впустил их в поезд после проверки билетов.

Попытка Гены и Чебурашки покинуть город сорвана. В то время, как они одиноко стоят у путей и смотрят вслед уходящему поезду, антагонисты эпизода проходят мимо.

Три туриста поют песню хором, которая становится лейтмотивом всего эпизода:

Солнце светит ярким светом
Над Москвою и вокруг.
Почему же, люди летом
Отправляются на юг?

The sun shines brightly
over Moscow and around.
Why even, do people
go south in the summer?

А в Подмосковье ловятся лещи,
Водятся грибы, ягоды, цветы.
Лучше места даже не ищи,
Только время зря потратишь ты.

And in Moscow, breams are caught
mushrooms, berries, flowers are found.
Don't even look for a better place,
you'll only waste time.

Чебурашка и Гена также видят Шапокляк, которая уезжает с их билетами и кричит:

«Стой-постой, карман пустой!» В ее загадочных фразах снова слышны

идиосинкразические пульсы, которые выступают как контраст минамилистичным

диалогам мультфильма. В конечном счете Гена не может забрать билеты обратно, потому

что Шапокляк запрыгивает на крышу поезда и исчезает в туннеле. Двое героев начинают

устало брести, следуя по железнодорожным путям, назад в сторону Москвы. Они

избавляются от своих вещей, так как очевидно, что путешествие не будет коротким или

легким.

Затем мы видим Шапокляк на дрезине. Она поет: «Эх, дрезинушка, ухнем. Эх, зеленая, сама пойдет». Эта мелодия взята из известной революционной песни,

«Дубинушка», популярной в середине девятнадцатого века в качестве рабочего гимна или

«трудовой припевки» в период, предшествующий Октябрьской революции. Название

песни отсылает к дубинушке (маленькому дубовому саженцу), вырванному с корнем из

земли, чтобы готовить почву для выращивания. В версии Шапокляка «дубинушка»

заменена на «дрезинушку», на которой она едет. Вероятно, Шапокляк поет эту песню, так

как она просто напоминает ей о детстве, но, в конечном счете, это песня с

революционными корнями. Но против чего еще можно бунтовать в утопическом

Советском Союзе? Шапокляк поднимает брошенный чемодан Гены и двигается дальше.

Спустя некоторое время, Гена, с напряженным усилием рассказывает Чебурашке о красоте железнодорожных путей осенью:

Гена: А знаешь, Чебурашка, осенью, на шпалах никогда не бывает ни луж, ни грязи.

Чебурашка: Знаю, Гена, это здорово!

Гена: Это очень хорошо!

...

Гена: И самое главное, Чебурашка, что если идёшь по шпалам, то никогда не заблудишься.

Гена учит Чебурашку оставаться на правильном пути. Но как только диалог

заканчивается, наступает любопытный момент: перед героями возникает развилка. После небольшого раздумья Гена переключает рычаг путей, чтобы продолжить движение. Этот перформативный жест следования норме внезапно заводит их в тупик.

В связи с этим эпизодом можно вспомнить известный советский анекдот, в котором Ленин, Сталин, Хрущев и Брежнев находятся в поезде, перед которым закончились рельсы. Чтобы поезд тронулся, Ленин использует крестьянский труд, Сталин убивает проводника, Хрущев использует железнодорожные пути сзади, чтобы проложить пути спереди, а Брежнев задергивает шторы и предлагает просто притвориться, что ничего не случилось. Когда Гена и Чебурашка, два аутсайдера, сталкиваются с такой же дилеммой (хотя и без самого поезда), их решение—просто сойти с путей. Возможно, решение такой проблемы, как в советском анекдоте, проще, когда пункт назначения неясен, так как путь не лежит никуда в частности. Здесь становится яснее, что Чебурашка и Гена не желают, чтобы вмешивалась в их путешествие. Они продолжают бродить по лесу, но вскоре сталкиваются с непредвиденным препятствием и попадают в медвежью ловушку, расставленную туристами. Шапокляк быстро находит обоих в капкане, так как она все это время выслеживала их на расстоянии. Однако она сама тоже оказывается зажатой. Старуха намеревается отомстить туристам и за себя, и за героев, что является редким моментом единения между тремя изгоями. Натравив на туристов свою крысу

Лариску, Шапокляк обнаруживает их лагерь. Она крадет коробку с динамитом и заменяет ее идентичной коробкой с тортом Чебурашки и Гены. Есть юмор в том, что у свежего торта из пекарни и взрывного устройства одинаковая упаковка, как будто внешность является просто означающим, а не индикатором подлинности. Наконец, Шапокляк заманивает рыжих муравьев в палатку туристов, привлекая насекомых сладким тортом. Она также разбрасывает медвежьи ловушки по всему лагерю, и туристы попадают в них, когда пытаются убежать из палатки и спастись от муравьев.

Путешествие Чебурашки и Гены в конце концов корректируется, когда они начинают следовать ровному течению реки. Но эта река сталкивается с агрессивными вторжениями со стороны людей, что разворачивается в настоящую битву природы против человеческих побуждений. Во-первых, мы видим, как туристы пытаются поймать рыбу, используя динамит, хотя они впоследствии и обнаруживают, что его заменили на коробку с тортом. Затем они устанавливают рыболовную сеть с прикрепленным звонком, который оповестит их об улове—Чеховское ружье эпизода. Но более показательным является эпизод с заводом, который раздражает мирную сцену и выступает предвестником ускорения времени. Функция завода подчеркнута бесполезна: большие ветки деревьев конвейер превращает в более мелкие в непрерывном и, казалось бы, бесконечном ритме. В результате этого бесполезного процесса образуется скользкий, черный сток отходов, который течет прямо в реку. Это столкновение двух потоков: грязного потока современности и чистого потока традиций. Прямое столкновение между ними мы увидим позже в эпизоде, когда дрезинушка Шапокляка встретится лицом к лицу с поездом.

Исторически сложилось так, что использование тейлоризм Ленином и Сталинское стахановское движение представляли завод исключительно как проявление времени

несмотря на то, что марксистской целью было превзойти само время. Труд (на заводах и других рабочих местах) использовался как инструмент ускорения времени. Как объясняет Кэтрин Вердери в своем термине “etatization of time” (этатизация времени), идеология, труд, и время сливаются воедино, чтобы ускорить производство и прогресс (Verdery 83). А даже дальше, ведущие деятели Советского Союза стремились к тому, чтобы труд и досуг слились воедино: Ленин ввел субботники, а Сталин свой лозунг «Пятилетка в четыре года!» Субботники были выходными днями, когда граждане убирали свой город в качестве неоплачиваемого, но поощряемого труда. Ленин приравнивал тяжелый труд к коммунизму и свободе и, по существу, создал квази-религиозный праздник (Hanson 100). Он превратил выходные в особое государственное, а не церковное, событие. Печально известное стремление Сталина выполнить свой пятилетний план на год раньше, а также его стремление реализовать мечту о коммунистическом обществе способствовало почитанию его характера со стороны населения того периода. Сталин определял труд как наиболее важный инструмент для достижения обеих этих целей. Вся атмосфера советского Союза, по сути, вращалась вокруг работы и труда, а также личной ответственности человека перед большим коллективом.

Мы видели, какое давление это ответственность оказывает на таких людей, как Никита и Люба в «*Река Потудань*» и Ольга в «*Неделя как неделя.*» И точно так же в третьей эпизоде «*Чебурашка*», мы видим труд, а значит, и время, пытающееся одолеть природу. Труд, по сравнению с цикличным характером природы, накладывает жесткие ограничения на время. Досуг был отброшен в сторону, и в погоне за прогрессом Советский Союз принял все меры, необходимые для создания иллюзии эффективности, равенства и свободы, которые, по мнению советских лидеров, должны были стать

результатом непрерывного коллективного труда. “An economy geared to the overfulfillment of norms and the setting of records by enthusiastic shock workers, coordinated by heroic "engineers without a watch," could not in the long run win the battle against time” (Hanson 161). Завод в мультфильме не только навязчивый монолит, загрязняющий реку, но и представляет собой то, что стало недостатками марксистского прогресса во времена создания Чебурашки.

Таким образом, символика реки на переднем плане и завода на заднем— это столкновение темпоральностей. Путешествуя по реке, Гена и Чебурашка встречают двух детей, испачканных заводскими загрязнениями. Возмущенный Гена идет в офис к директору завода, чтобы добиться справедливости. Как Гена объясняет ситуацию директору, директор видит зубы Гены и явно напуган. Он закрывает разинутый рот крокодила и подозрительно быстро прислушивается к жалобам. Директор тут же берет трубку, чтобы приказать закопать трубу, однако он не закрывает завод. Как только Чебурашка и Гена уходят, он охлаждает себя вентилятором. Роли неожиданно меняются местам, и ранее существовавшая динамика власти подрывается. Трубу закапывают, и Гена первым пытается искупаться в очищенной реке. Однако он выясняет, что река осталась такой же грязной. Из-за закопанной трубы отходы с завода теперь попадают в воду через землю. Желая помочь, Гена ныряет вниз и перекрывает трубу своим телом, заставляя тем самым сток отходов течь обратно в здание завода. Наконец, река снова чистая, а природа нетронутая благодаря одному симпатичному крокодилу. Когда Гена всплывает на поверхность, он запутывается в сети туристов, и звонок начинает звенеть. Все трое бегут посмотреть на рыбу, которую они поймали, но находят Гену и в страхе убегают. Шапокляк натравливает на них Лариску, и они вдвоем гонятся за туристами.

В благодарность за поступок Чебурашки и Гены двое детей с реки дарят им лягушонка. Это эксцентричная сцена, в которой Чебурашка отпускает свой подарок на свободу, даже несмотря на комментарий мальчика, что «он зеленый!» Пока герои ждут поезда, мы видим Шапокляк на дрезине, которую толкают трое туристов. Затем эта дрезина врежется прямо в поезд, что символизирует столкновение старой идеологии и современного прогресса. Шапокляк возвращает вещи Чебурашки и Гены и выстраивает туристов в очередь, чтобы убедиться, что все в порядке, выкрикивая военные команды («А ну, равняйся! Привести себя в порядок!») В грандиозном финале она тянет за детонатор динамита, который турист по имени Петя снова взял у Чебурашки. Происходит взрыв, и туристы убегают в последний раз. Затем Шапокляк возвращает Чебурашке и Гене билеты на поезд и, несмотря на все ее проделки, Гена предлагает ей место в вагоне с Чебурашкой, а сам лезет на крышу. В финальной сцене Чебурашка, а затем и Шапокляк, присоединяются к Гене на крыше. Эпизод заканчивается тем, что Гена поет известную песню, «Голубой вагон.»

Chapter 7: Straying from the Tracks



Tarkovsky, Andrei. Still from "Stalker". 1979.

The music of *Cheburashka* is impressive in its longevity, considering it was only intended for a children's series in the seventies. The two most popular songs are sung by Gena: “Пусть бегут неуклюже” (*Pust' begut neuklyuzhe*, known often as “Krokodil Gena's birthday song”) and “Голубой вагон” (*Goluboi vagon*, meaning blue train car), both of which have endured great popularity. In Russia, Gena's birthday song is as essential as the traditional “Happy Birthday” tune, and “Голубой вагон” is an instantly recognizable tune, invoking nostalgia for many. Listeners old and young hear the songs today and are swaddled by comfort, and sometimes—often—sadness. Because the tunes from *Cheburashka* are not the typical songs geared towards educating young kids, with simple lyrics in a jovial, major key. “Пусть бегут неуклюже” and “Голубой вагон” do nothing to advance the plot in the series, but exist in a unique temporality, stopping time and passing it both at once, with melancholy lyrics and sad melodies. As the latter song appears in the episode, “Shapoklyak”, I will be focusing on “Голубой вагон”.

Throughout the episode, variations on “Голубой вагон” are nearly exclusively scoring the scenes where Cheburashka and Gena are alone, slowed down and in different instrumentations. Old lady Shapoklyak's tricks and the tourists' schemes introduce new playful melodies, yet the two lonely animals' theme stays the same, stuck on a loop. “Голубой вагон” starts the very last scene of the episode: Shapoklyak joins Cheburashka and Gena on top of the train car, pushing Gena's accordion into his hands and commanding him to play. There are interesting connotations in Gena's signature instrument, the accordion—which is not technically an accordion. The instrument is a гармошка (*garmoshka*); A truly Russian folk instrument, it is distinct from the more Western piano accordion by its buttons instead of piano keys, and smaller size. There is unmistakable loneliness in Gena's use of the *garmoshka*, solitarily emitting

melancholy and minor tunes. One human (or crocodile) can replicate the fuller sound of multiple musicians by playing the melody line, bass line, and chords simultaneously—it does not prompt an accompanying musician. The *garmoshka*'s portability also makes it an ideal instrument for a floater, not needing a home. Combining these attributes with the instrument's folk roots, Gena's companionship with the *garmoshka* is a symbol of his eccentric, individualist, and even backwards attitude towards the future of the Soviet Union. As Semyon Babayevsky writes in his short story "Grackles", "Yasha kept his tufted head bent over the bellows and paid no attention to the children or the old woman; he just went on softly playing a sad tune." Here, Babayevsky paints the *garmoshka* as a solitary and unassuming instrument (Reeve 16). Gena similarly retreats to his reclusive *garmoshka*, lamenting on the rapidity of day-to-day life of the Soviet Union.

Голубой вагон, even without the lyrics, is an undeniably melancholic song. But the instrumentation starts out deceptively, nearly lively; a percussive arrangement of horns and strings in a minor key mimic the steady chug of the train. The staccato, see-sawing bassline is playful, and the wind instruments create a whimsy mood—even an upbeat *garmoshka* phrase interjects. But Gena comes in wistfully, and noticeably a bit off the tempo of the instrumentation, which has switched from a frolic, to obedient following Gena's lead. The lyrics ensue:

Медленно минуты уплывают в даль,
Встречи с ними ты уже не жди.
И хотя нам прошлое немного жаль
Лучшее, конечно, впереди.

Slowly the minutes recede into the distance,
Don't expect to see them again.
And even though we mourn the past a little bit
All the best, of course, is still ahead

Gena begins to sing about the slow passing of time, sorrowfully but more so, thankfully, letting the past wash by, expectant of a future that holds better. There is also a slightly comedic note in Gena's "of course" in the last line of the verse. It reads as a knowing wink to the Soviet Union's

assurances of a Marxist happy ending that has been ingrained into everyone's ideology, an ending that has not yet arrived.

Припев:
 Скатертью, скатертью
 Дальний путь стелется,
 И упирается прямо в небосклон.
 Каждому, каждому
 В лучшее верится...
 Катится, катится
 Голубой вагон.

Refrain:
 Smoothly, effortlessly
 The long path spreads out
 And runs straight into the horizon
 Everyone, everyone
 Hopes for the best
 And our blue train car
 Rolls forward

The chorus describes a kind of waiting, in which there is anticipation for this better future, but no one takes action to make it come sooner. Everyone is content sitting, as they observe a seemingly endless road towards the aforementioned happy ending. The train car notably is rolling lackadaisically, rather than rushing with urgency.

Может, мы обидели кого-то зря,
 Календарь закроет старый лист.
 К новым приключениям спешим, друзья.
 Эй, прибавь-ка ходу, машинист!

Perhaps we hurt someone needlessly
 The calendar will turn that page for us.
 Towards new adventure let's run my friends.
 Hey, driver, speed it up!

The second verse is interesting because it suddenly asks for a speeding up of time to leave the past behind—as opposed to inching closer to a perfect future. There is no atonement or accountability behind the hurt that was inflicted, and it is not clear exactly who was hurt, or who the “we” is, that caused it. The future the train is now rushing towards is not necessarily “лучшее” (better), only new.

Припев:
 Голубой вагон бежит, качается,
 Скорый поезд набирает ход...
 Ах, зачем же этот день кончается,
 Пусть бы он тянулся целый год!

Refrain:
 The blue car races and shakes,
 The express train's picking up speed
 But why does this day have to come to an end,
 I wish it would last the whole year!

(Fishzon 553)

The song closes as Gena's wish is granted. After prompting the driver to accelerate, the train becomes unstable, and Gena becomes worried about the disappearance of the perfect day spent in slowness. "Голубой вагон" in its entirety is about existing within a deliberate deceleration, unmotivated by neither the past nor the future. There is no notion that there is resolution, or an arrival at the "better" time. Both "Голубой вагон" and "Пусть бегут неуклюже" serve as doleful breaks for those enveloped by the Marxist temporality, both poignant meditations on unhurriedness.

One would be remiss to dive into the message of "Голубой вагон" without contextualizing it within the wider expanse of traditionally Soviet music. For example, a complete antithesis can be heard in Georgi Sviridov's "Time, Forward!", released as the theme for a Soviet film of the same name in 1965. The song was an unofficial anthem of the Soviet Union, most often associated with workers and industrial progress. Similar to "Голубой вагон", "Time, Forward!" opens with percussion that imitates the workings of an engine or motor, but this time it is frenzied, a stressful metronome that reminds one of the urgency of meeting an impossible deadline. The piano melody is a repetitive, short, and plucky minor tune, punctuated by intense and anthemic ejections of horns, like steam bursting out under pressure. There is a break in melody when the strings enter and it sounds almost as if they are struggling to keep up, distinctly higher pitched and shriller in resonance than the rest of the orchestra. As the melody crescendos both in volume and as it runs up a scale, the song is accentuated by shatterings of cymbal, building towards a grand—nothing. The crescendo is cut off abruptly by a looping of the first section of the song, and the frenzy starts anew. Played back-to-back with "Голубой вагон", the desires of both songs could not be split further apart. "Time, forward!" is an exemplar of

everything the Soviet Union wished to embody, while “Голубой вагон” provides an utterly anti-Marxist passing of time. They represent two hopes from two different times.

At the end of the episode “Shapoklyak”, the train fades off into the distance and there appears a peculiar sight. Beside the never-ending train tracks lies a purposeless railroad switch. Is this perhaps a symbol for the mere façade of change and progress that the Soviet Union presents? It is unclear whether the lever has been pulled or not, but it is meaningless except for its optics, as there is no other track for the train to travel on. Shapoklyak, Cheburashka, and Gena sit backwards on the train, looking forlornly onto the path that they have already traversed. The train does not move towards the cityscape, where the characters have travelled from, but fades into oblivion just as the song ends. While “all the best, of course, is still ahead”, the trio stays focused on the past. One can imagine that Shapoklyak, Cheburashka, and Gena continue existing in their eccentric temporality—one that is not concerned with maintaining progress and ideology but flowing backwards against the Marxist agenda.

Conclusion



@sovietvisuals Instagram account. 2022.

Conclusion

The popularity of the eccentric *Cheburashka* within Soviet culture is both remarkable and ordinary at the same time. Ordinary, because even in the most censored periods of Soviet Union, the saturated ideology of Marxism and its goals to speed up time managed to completely be subverted. This idea can contrast Katherine Verdery's "etatization of time", while which is a veritably true account of the state's intent (with its long lines, communist holidays, etc.), there existed simultaneously a successful resistance to this tool, especially burgeoning in the time of late socialism. In the works of Andrei Platonov and Natalya Baranskaya, one can witness how the individual oppositions to the coopting of time by the Party have been rife in literature and life since the beginning of the Soviet Era. But after Stalin's death, Khrushchev's Thaw laid way for Brezhnev's Era of Stagnation, from which emerged a hyperreality. A time which lacked leaders who commanded fear, and when the strongest implementations of Soviet ideology were only references to previous times. Thus, appearances trumped real meanings to keep the machine and collective mentality of the Soviet Union under total state control. In the realm of children's animation, we begin to see innocence as an artful sheath to bypass censorship, the result of which is the birth of undeniably, non-socialist-realist Soviet animation.

While originally an effort to surpass the West (specifically, Walt Disney's) rapid productions of children's cartoons in the United States, the medium of stop-motion became the most common and successful type of animation in the Soviet Union. Stop-motion itself is an art of queering time and manipulating temporalities in fragmented motions and puppeteering. But the tropes of these cartoons show ideologies at odds as well. In *Cheburashka*, the three main characters of the series are, at surface-level, archetypical of children's animation and Soviet ideology. There is the benevolent child, who is learning how to be good and navigate new

challenges. There is the friendly teacher-figure, who teaches the child how to perceive right from wrong. And there is the villain, who, in their attempts to sabotage the protagonists, represent the values that one should shun in society. But the difference lies in the inherently late-socialist aesthetic of it all—Cheburashka, Gena, and Shapoklyak, are all lonely and ultimately want to find others like them who desire the slowing-down of time and a divergent temporality. In the third episode of the series, “Shapoklyak”, we see many tropes that are subverted through a post-Soviet and late socialist lens. Most of the characters, exclude and deceive Cheburashka and Gena, with a very non-Soviet manner and mentality. More than Shapoklyak does, the factory—a symbol of industrialism, time, and progress—plays the villain. And of course, Shapoklyak, the emblem of old ideology, becomes an antihero and exemplar for doing the right thing in standing up for her friends. The peculiar script and most notably the melancholy song “Голубой вагон”, are lyrical characteristics that set the show apart from others of its time, and poignantly speak to the longing for a slower pace of life and acknowledge how the “better” times never arrived.

Despite the final episode of *Cheburashka* debuting in 1983, the cartoon series has sustained at a monumental level, popularity in Russia, former Soviet Republics, and worldwide. For example, for four continuous Olympics in the 2000s, the fuzzy, large-eared creature served as the official Russian mascot. In Japan, *Cheburashka* was remade as a feature film in 2010, garnering national adoration. Even now, there is a movie in the works set to be released in 2023, where Cheburashka will take on the modern media of CGI and live-action film. For many today, the images of *Cheburashka* overwhelmingly evoke the feeling of nostalgia, even for those who did not grow up knowing and watching the series. It is an artform that, in a way, has been overlooked, in vain of its cuteness, reminiscent value, and most overbearingly, the series’ reputation as a token of Soviet childhood. But it is crucial to acknowledge that very likely, the

reason for the cartoon's popularity during the Era of Stagnation until now, is due to Soviet citizens' resonance with the melancholic and lugubrious sentiments of the show's character, messages, and songs. They related to the characters' hope for a different temporality and reality, one where time is not set to a single track and speed. And the idea that such an emblematically and stereotypically "Soviet" piece of culture can be perceived (whether completely consciously or not) as anti-ideological, and specifically anti-Marxist, presents the possibility for understanding other Soviet art of the epoch as not just toeing the party line, but as diverging from the existing political and social conditions, despite their deceptive fronts.

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