Female Aliens in *Solaris* (1972) and *Are We Going Crazy?* (1994): Mediating Identity Crisis

Abstract:

This article discusses how cinematic female aliens can be interpreted as signifiers of deeply existentialist discussions of humanity and identity at defining moments of crisis in Soviet and post-Soviet society, namely the US moon landing in 1969 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The analysis focuses on the female aliens in the films *Solaris* (1972) and *Are We Going Crazy?* (1994), using theories of gender performativity, spatial metaphors and the concept of The Divine Sophia. In contrast to the female cyborg typically encountered in Western/Hollywood sci-fi cinema, the (post-)Soviet female alien downplay the binarism of biology vs. technology, and is not concerned with or defined by motherhood. Instead the female aliens' function is to spur existentialist discussions of (gender)identity, ideal societies and morality.

Keywords:

Soviet Film; Russian Film; Gender; Sci-fi; Female Aliens

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In this article I aim to discuss how cinematic female aliens can be interpreted as signifiers of deeply existentialist discussions of humanity and identity at defining moments of crisis in Soviet and post-Soviet society, namely the US moon landing in 1969 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the same time, these female aliens exemplify (post-)Soviet attitudes towards technology and gender. Thus, the (post-)Soviet female aliens make for an interesting comparison to the representation of female cyborgs in Western/Hollywood sci-fi cinema – possibly challenging fundamental binaries inherit in the cyborg characters.

The two films selected for analysis in this article are the seminal *Solaris*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky and released in 1972, and *Are We Going Crazy?* (S uma soiti!), a low-budget, largely forgotten sci-fi directed by Sergei Kuchkov and released in 1994. The emphasis in the analysis is on how the female aliens spur discussions concerning identity, humanity and morality, symptomatic of the contemporary zeitgeist. However, the conditions for making and producing film were very different in the early 1970s and the mid 1990s in terms of financing, working

conditions, distribution and governmental influence. While these conditions necessarily affect the artistic qualities of the films, they will only to a lesser degree be part of the analysis presented in this article. Being mindful of the differences in production conditions, the primary focus will lay on how societal change is discussed cinematically. Arguably the two films are of different artistic quality – *Solaris* considered a masterpiece, and *Are We Going Crazy?* a somewhat camp, low-budget production. Still, they both feature female humanoid alien characters and deal with contemporary issues of identity. I argue that a comparison of a similar phenomenon – the female alien – in two, on many levels, rather different films, help map out how this phenomenon is presented in similar ways, at different times and by different film makers. In turn, this suggests that the phenomenon is a wider cultural phenomenon, not specific to one limited time period or artist. These two films are a part of a larger tradition of (post-)Soviet sci-fi films with female aliens in important roles.[1] The motivation for discussing precisely these two films in this article, out of the catalogue of female alien films, is due to their release in relative proximity after defining moments in (post-)Soviet history.

In addition to the analyses of *Solaris* and *Are We Going Crazy?* I outline key features of the Western/Hollywood female cyborg as she is described in academic literature, and then compare the two types of characters.

The technological optimism of the 1960s was not unique to the USSR. A similar tendency took place in the US, as is evident in the article where the term 'cyborg' was used for the first time (Clynes and Kline, 1960). In "Cyborgs and Space" the authors Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline discuss, in a highly optimistic fashion, how technology will be used to adapt human bodies to conditions in outer space. Rather than developing advanced suits and machines to shield the body, the body itself would be altered. The term was quickly adapted by film makers and the first film with a reference to the term cyborg was released in 1966, *Cyborg 2087* (1966, dir. Franklin Adreon).[2] In Hollywood and Western culture, the cyborg is used to discuss the relationship between humans and their technology. Thus, the cyborg is engaged in transhumanist thinking and ideas of the posthuman.

[1] A more thorough presentation, analysis and discussion of female aliens in (post-)Soviet cinema, is presented in my dissertation (Høgetveit, 2018) and the article "Female Aliens in (Post-)Soviet Sci-Fi Cinema: Technology, Sacrifice and Morality Feminism" (Høgetveit, 2019).

[2] The term cyborg has been used to describe fictional characters who in some way fit the description of a combination of biology and technology, such as Frankenstein's monster.

In Western sci-fi discourse, the concept of the posthuman has proven fruitful for discussions about humans and technology.[3] As Dónal O'Mathúna notes: "Movies with posthuman(ist) and transhuman(ist) themes raise many issues but are unified in asking questions about human nature and technology. […] They question the distinctiveness of humans and human value" (2014: 295). One of the posthuman cinematic incarnations is the female cyborg, a combination of biology and technology in a female form. Scholars discussing the female cyborg's function tend to agree that she is a creature that represents two large threats to masculinity: advanced technology (which may replace most of men's functions) and female sexuality (which simultaneously intimidates and provokes many men, and/or causes in them the urge to drive women into submission). Thus, the femininity of the cyborg presents a dual threat (see Anthony, 2004; Doane, 2000; Faithful, 2016). Another fixation of Hollywood sci-fi, according to Mary Ann Doane, is the fetishisation of reproduction and motherhood associated with female aliens, cyborgs and androids, presenting these women with a very specific function and often bringing a natalist aspect into the binary theme of biology vs. technology (Doane, 2000). According to Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, the posthumanist ideas' function is to challenge the binary mentality in the West:

> While there is certainly not one humanism, which could be identified as a common target of posthumanist criticisms, there are persistent concepts and dualities in Western culture, such as nature/culture, man/woman, subject/object, human/animal, or body/mind, which are deeply rooted in the Western tradition and which get challenged by posthumanist thinkers. (Ranisch and Sorgner, 2014: 8)

Whereas cybernetics was a topic of scientific interest and discussion in the USSR too, the cyborg evidently did not spur the same discussions of humans and our technology in popular culture. One possible explanation for this can be found in the different experience with, and understanding of technology in the USSR compared with the US. During the industrialisation of the 1930s in particular, the ideal of the man-machine was communicated through art and political propaganda. This was not merely conveyed through an image of the industrial worker, but to a high degree through that of the industrialised farmer, typically pictured as a woman on a tractor. Thus, the machine and industrialisation were not all-male spheres. The Soviet view

[3] The majority of non-Soviet/Russian films mentioned in this article are produced in Hollywood, yet, because the German *Metropolis* (1927, dir. Fritz Lang) is seen as such a key film, mentioned explicitly in sources used (Anthony, 2004; Balsamo, 2000) to exemplify the non-Soviet/Russian presentation, the broad term 'Western' is used more often than the specific 'Hollywood'.

of nature was also highly instrumental: nature had a low value in and of itself, and was considered something available for exploitation and human industrialisation.[4]

The Soviet view of technology, machine and nature can be traced to Marxism. For Marx, technology (as a product of human intellectual labour) in itself was neutral, in the sense that it could serve capitalism and socialism equally. Furthermore, machines, as means of production, suppress and alienate the working class under capitalism, but will eventually contribute to liberating workers in a revolution and serve humanity in the classless society. According to this vision, humanity – and masculinity in particular – is not threatened but enhanced by technology and machines. Within this context, the cyborg emerges as a product of a *natural* development of both technology and the human race.[5] So, near the end of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), workers symbolically destroy the machines as part of their anti-capitalist revolt, while in various Soviet films from around this period (e.g. *Man with a Movie Camera*, Chelovek s kinoapparatom, 1929, dir. Dziga Vertov) the cult of the man-machine is in fact celebrated. Consequently, the function of the cyborg – as a character to test out and confront the perceived threat of advanced technology – has not been dominant in Soviet discourse. One should add that, throughout most of the USSR's history, Soviet society was technologically inferior to the US. This can also provide an explanation as to why, in the Soviet context, a future utopia was primarily represented by technology, the potentially threatening and problematic sides of which were not emphasised. The level of technology in the USSR was neither advanced enough, nor embedded into different spheres of society intimately enough, for it to pose an obvious threat.

The analysis of the female alien characters in *Solaris* and *Are We Going Crazy?* is based on Russian nineteenth century thinker Vladimir Solov'iev's The Divine Sophia as an established archetype for female characters in Russian culture, and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. The Divine Sophia, or Divine Wisdom as it may well be translated into, as Sophie means Wisdom, is a complex and elusive concept. Scholar Judith Deutsch Kornblatt elaborates that Solov'iev associates her:

[4] The most extreme examples of this policy are the virgin lands projects, and the alterations of rivers, in particular those connected to the Aral lake, these days considered to be the world's largest man-made ecological catastrophe.

[5] A striking example of this is how one of the important heroes of the Soviet Union, Aleksei Mares'iev (1916-2001), became a kind of cyborg. Mares'iev was a fighter pilot shot down by the Nazis during a raid in 1942. He narrowly escaped captivity, made it back to the home side alive but lost both of his legs. He then got prosthetic legs and was so determined to return to the air that he trained for a year and then resumed active service as a fighter pilot. He was awarded several medals, and became the inspiration for a novel, a film, and an opera (composed by Prokofiev), all named *The Story of a Real Man* (Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke). His prosthetic legs made him no less a real human being. On the contrary, without those legs there would have probably been no 'real man' story.

> [...] with both the divine or ideal and the created worlds: 'the principle (or beginning) of humanity,' 'the ideal or normal' human being, 'perfect humanity,' the realization of the divine principle, the image and likeness of the divine principle, archetypal humankind, one and all, the real form of Divinity, all-one humankind, and the mediator between the multiplicity of living entities and the absolute unity of Divinity. In fact, Sophia's definition is both too much and too little determined in this work, as it remains throughout his oeuvre. (Kornblatt, 2009: 9)

The complexity of the concept might in part explain why it has had such a large impact on Russian, including Soviet, culture. Central to the discussion in this article is how The Divine Sophia is described as feminine, often as an embodiment of the divine in a woman's body, and closely connected to existentialist questions and divine truth.

The concept of The Divine Sophia is a suitable tool for analysing female aliens in (post-)Soviet sci-fi, because of the gender aspect, the existentialist discussions featured in the films – largely by the female aliens –, and the spatial aspect. The Divine Sophia activates the established metaphor of hierarchy expressed through verticality (c.f Høgetveit, 2019; Lotman, 1977; MacAloon, 1984; Tuan, 2013):

> Vertical valorization is so essential, so sure–its superiority is so indisputable–that the mind cannot turn away from it once it had recognized its immediate and direct meaning. It is impossible to express moral values without reference to the vertical axis. (Bachelard, 1988: 10)

In the female alien films the same metaphor, or Moral Vertical, is typically deployed to establish the female aliens as morally superior to other (male) characters. The aim of this article is not to discuss the female aliens' moral function. Still, the perspective with The Divine Sophia place the characters in a Russian tradition, as opposed to a Hollywood/Western tradition.

Another central theory for this article is Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. As mentioned above, in the discussion surrounding aliens, cyborgs and gender, the binarisms biology vs. technology is usually encountered. In the case of the female aliens discussed in this article, their gender identity as characters is based on their gender performance. Their biology is not human, as such, they can be interpreted as a confirmation of Butler's theory of how: "gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler, 2006: xv). This representation of gender and biology is a contrast to the fetishisation of motherhood in Hollywood – in fact none of the female aliens in (post-)Soviet sci-fi are presented as mothers. This suggests that being female is not defined by the ability to reproduce, but, as I will return to in the analysis of *Solaris*, partly a question of self-definition.

The female aliens feature abilities that human beings do not possess. Still, it remains unclear whether these superhuman abilities are the consequence of a different biology, evolved under different ecological conditions, or are technological advancements not available to humans. Therefore, the term cyborg does not seem fitting. Instead I will refer to the abilities as superhuman abilities, and the characters as superhuman.

In Soviet sci-fi cinema, there seems to be less trace of the conflict between humans and technology, the conflict between masculinity and female sexuality, and the fetishisation of reproduction and motherhood. Even a cursory examination of Soviet sci-fi cinema suggests that the philosophical discussion of the cyborg is different from the West. In fact, there seems to be only one explicit mention of cyborgs, no explicit reference to reproduction, no actual mothers, and hardly any characters who match the description of an organic/synthetic creature.[6] Not only do these observations shed light on how gender and technology was and is perceived in the USSR and Russia: these observations shed light on Hollywood and Western representations by contrast.

Solaris and the backlash of cosmic enthusiasm

The Apollo 11 moon-landing, 16 July 1969 effectively ended what has been termed "the Cosmic Era" of the USSR (Maurer et al., 2011: 4). The Soviet popular culture in the 1960s was saturated with cosmonauts, space ships and explorations of outer space. Fuelled by Khrushchev's speech at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party in 1961, promising that the Soviet Union would reach full communism within the next two decades, the general mood of the 1960s was that of optimism. The USSR lay ahead of the US in the space race until chief engineer of the space programme, Sergei Korolev, died in 1966. Then the hero and national symbol, cosmonaut Iurii Gagarin tragically died in an accident in 1968. And then finally the US reached the moon and won the space race. This inevitably had a massive effect on how outer space and space travel was perceived and mediated in culture. In films about space exploration the shift went from optimistic exploration of new planets and technologies in the 1960s, to existentialism and subversiveness in the 1970s.

[6] Cyborgs are explicitly mentioned in *Orion's Loop* (Petlia Oriona, 1980, dir. Vasilii Levin). The entire crew of a space ship is copied into a duplicate crew of cyborgs who accompany the human crew on their expedition. The cyborgs function as the human crew members' autopilots of sorts when the humans need to rest. The cyborgs of *Orion's Loop* do not seem to have much will of their own, suggesting that they are closer to humanoid robots than cyborgs. It is also unclear whether they actually are organic/synthetic creatures. The cyborgs as such do not play a large enough role to be thoroughly analysed in this article.

Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) received substantial attention both in the Soviet Union and internationally.[7] The superhuman Hari (Natal'ia Bondarchuk) plays a vital role in this deeply existentialist drama, set in an unspecified future, where human scientists have been preoccupied with exploring a mysterious planet called Solaris. The psychotherapist Kris Kelvin (Donatas Banionis) is sent to the space station orbiting Solaris. There he learns of the mysterious happenings that the other scientists do not like to talk about with outsiders: the humans receive 'guests' on the station. Solaris, an oceanic planet with no known landmass, somehow produces humanoid beings – 'guests'. The most prominent of these guests is Hari, in image and behaviour like Kris's ex-wife, who killed herself years earlier. Hari and the other humanoid aliens on the spaceship are the planet's materialised version of traumatic memories of the humans on that spaceship. This raises practical questions, of how the scientists are to interact with their guests, philosophical questions regarding humanity and how to deal with traumas. Different possible answers to these questions are represented in the various ways the researchers treat their guests. On the one hand, there is the researcher Sartorius who has no sympathy for the guests and who conducts grotesque vivisecting experiments on them. On the other, there is Kris who cannot get past the obvious display of emotions by the aliens, and therefore thinks they should be treated like humans. There is a clearly gendered presentation of these topics, with all the scientists being men, and the most important guest, a woman.

Hari's development throughout the film, where she connects with Kris on an emotional level and makes difficult decisions related to morality (based on how she feels for Kris and how he feels for her), underscores her humanness despite her unhuman origin. Hari's gestures and facial expressions, her display of emotions, play an important role in convincing us, or at least strongly suggesting, that she deserves to be treated as a human. Based on Hilary Putnam's functionalist ideas and the 'duck test' of inductive reasoning,[8] scholar Vladimir Tumanov argues that Hari's material composition of unstable neutrons (that is definitely non-human) is not as important as her humanoid exterior and emotional capacity (Tumanov, 2016: 370). As a viewer, it is nearly impossible not to see her humanity, Tumanov argues, because of *our* human reaction to other humans. We know the actor Natal'ia Bondarchuk is human, and this also transfers to the character she plays (Tumanov, 2016: 372). Interestingly, this could be seen as a confirmation of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity: it is not sex as biology that

[7] *Solaris* was covered in several articles in the Soviet film magazines *Sovetskii ekran* and *Soviet Film*. It also won the Grand Prix Spécial du Jury at the 1972 Cannes film festival (see 'Prognozy khudozhnika – Soliaris' 1971; 'Zagadka "Soliarisa"' 1973; Revich 1971; Sheetova 1973; Smelkov 1973; Yurenev 1973; Zorkaia 1973).
[8] "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck." Some attribute this aphorism to the poet James Withcomb Riley, but the origin is disputed.

is the foundation of Hari's womanliness, but her "sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler, 2006: xv).

The superhumans' bodies in *Solaris* heal quickly, they respawn if destroyed, yet they seem to have the same experience of pain and similar impulses as ordinary humans. Although this healing and respawning could be seen as a powerful ability, Hari seems troubled by it, and has no apparent control over it. It is unclear how much the memory of the prototype person (such as the actual Hari, Kris' wife), shapes their version as an alien. It is likely that Hari is particularly complex because Kris knew her so well and therefore has a very complex memory of her, and because of his own confusion about why she chose to commit suicide. Even though Hari is a reconstruction of a real human, the Hari we meet in *Solaris* is an alien, based on Kris's memory of her. Hari is Kris's idealised Other through The Divine Sophia. Yet Hari cannot accept this kind of existence. As a result, Hari rebels against the man who's fantasy she is built on.

Tumanov argues that Sartorius represents a reductionist understanding of humanity and the mind (based on biology), while Kris displays a functionalist approach (based on human function and experience) (2016: 368, 372). Kris's position is partly explained by the fact that his alien guest is his deceased wife. For Hari, her own existence is a source of confusion and trauma, as she has a clear idea of herself as Kris's wife, while at the same time being aware that she is not human. This identity crisis is convincingly portrayed. There are things she cannot remember, because they did not happen to her, at least not in a corporeal sense. This raises questions of where a person begins and ends, both spatially and temporally. In the case of Hari, one also gets the feeling that this is what she was like when she was human, i.e. confused by her own existence, with symptoms of depression, ultimately leading her to the decision to end her life. The same decision is taken by Hari the superhuman. She convinces Sartorius to destroy her, without Kris's knowledge, which suggests that this might be a self-sacrifice for moral reasons. Her sense of empathy makes her feel guilty for Kris's suffering. Tumanov reaches a similar conclusion: "That Christ-like act [of self-sacrifice] paradoxically seals Hari's status as unambiguously human and resolves the question of her personhood. Tarkovsky's final answer to the film's central question [of what humanity is] is tragically uplifting" (2016: 374).

The destruction of Hari can be interpreted as a Soviet version of the destruction of the cyborg presented by Anthony:

> The three films discussed above [*Eve of Destruction* 1991, dir. Duncan Gibbins, *Metropolis* and *Star Trek First Contact*, 1996, dir. Jonathan Frakes] demonstrate that sci-fi cinema tends to resolve historical crises

> involving the relationship between humanity and technology through the creation and destruction of the female cyborg. (Anthony 2004: 8)

However, Hari does not fit the description of a female sexual predator or a cyborg. When she is destroyed in the end, this is presented not as a victory but rather as a tragedy. Instead of being a critique of technology, *Solaris* seems to be more concerned with existential questions of self, such as what it is to be human and the limitations of scientific research (not to mention that humans can become extremely violent and aggressive when answers to these questions cannot be found). The gender aspect is not discussed by Tumanov. He considers Hari a manifestation of Kris's moral superiority over Sartorius but does not offer a definite conclusion to this discussion (2016: 366). Thus, the discussion centres around the two men, leaving Hari with little, if any, agency.

As a superhuman, Hari is not without powers, yet she is tied to Kris and his emotions, and through him to his dead wife. She is constantly confronted with her own strange existence – strange to the people around her, and especially strange to herself. Her character comes close to the so-called 'blank slate' trope of television: "A Blank Slate is an empty character with absolutely no beliefs, no opinions and no experience, ready to be shaped by the outside world" (*Blank Slate*). The TV trope is related to the concept of *tabula rasa*, which refers to the idea that humans are born as blank slates, and all knowledge therefore is based on experience. Hari does seem to know certain key facts, e.g. she knows that she was Kris's wife. Still, her overall memory is very limited, and, most importantly, so is her agency. Hari's self-annihilation can therefore be interpreted as an agency-regaining attempt to break free from this unfulfilling existence, and gain integrity: she cannot become a complete human because she is based on Kris's memory and depends on him, and she rejects the incomplete existence of serving Kris's emotional needs.

Are We Going Crazy? and the post-Soviet identity crisis

With the abrupt dissolution of the USSR, the sci-fi genre again changed. In the Soviet period the genre functioned as a way of imagining an idealised communist future, where advances in technology and moral development went hand-in-hand. (Albeit, as seen in *Solaris*, not without subversiveness). In the 1990s, communism no longer served as an ideal, and the relatively low-tech post-Soviet society was evident to everyone. Film production plummeted both in quantity and quality, as the low budget sci-fi *Are We Going Crazy?* illustrates, and a satirical and parodic treatment of everything Soviet flourished. The satirical aspect of post-Soviet sci-fi does present interesting cases for challenging some parts of the stereotype while confirming others. There

are far fewer cinematic representations of the female superhuman, however, just as there are fewer sci-fi films involving interplanetary travel and contact. The space-related films of the post-Soviet era are primarily about the Soviet space programs, depicting either purely fictional stories (e.g. *First on the Moon*, Pervye na lune, 2005, dir. Aleksei Fedorchenko)[9] or those based on historical events (e.g *Gagarin. The First in Space*, Gagarin. Pervyi v kosmose, 2013, dir. Pavel Parkhomenko). From this perspective, *Are We Going Crazy?* better fits a description of a late Soviet sci-fi rather than an early post-Soviet sci-fi. However, the film makes gentle fun of the idea of space travel, thus placing itself within an emerging post-Soviet cultural context, wherein it becomes possible to laugh at heroes and heroic endeavours.

Are We Going Crazy? features the unnamed female alien (Marina Kuchkova), who needs help to get back to, and save, her home planet. The alien arrives in a Russian secondary school, where she convinces three members of the school staff – the history teacher (Ella Safari), the chemistry teacher (Georgii Nikolaenko) and the director (Boris Shcherbakov) – to help her procure a crystal. Parts of the crystal, which would solve the energy deficiency of both the alien herself and her planet, are scattered throughout Earth's time and space. The rescue crew uses a device that looks like an old cassette recorder, but is actually a time machine and universal language adapter. They travel through time and space to a pre-historic environment (possibly the Stone Age), to a Middle Eastern harem and lastly to Western Europe during the Holy Inquisition, where they get into all sorts of ridiculous situations (thankfully, everyone abroad, whatever the time period, speaks Russian because of the language adapter). The crew recovers the crystal pieces, of course, and returns to contemporary Moscow. While waiting for the crew to fulfil its mission, the alien enjoys leisure time activities in a snowy Moscow park, playing with dogs, smiling and laughing. She is grateful to the school's staff members and leaves happily for her home planet, while the staff members are left to deal with vengeful visitors from the different epochs they visited during their time travels.

The film seems primarily to be intended as light-hearted entertainment. The way the alien learns about human interactions and emotions indicates a development of her emotional intelligence – starting out as a blank slate – and communicates a message of standing up for what is right, and taking care of one another. This development manifests itself in her facial expressions,

[9] In the mockumentary *First on the Moon*, the pre-war Soviet space programme is investigated and a conspiracy involving the alleged Soviet priority of the moon landing is exposed. In the team training for space travel there is a woman, Nadezhda Svetlaia (meaning Bright Hope; played by Viktoriia Ilinskaia). Her function seems to be that of presenting an authentic image of the Soviet scheme where women were included in progressive plans as part of the official ideology of equal rights and emancipation. This indicates nostalgia for the 1930s, rather than post-Soviet progressive gender policies.

whereby she goes from a solemn look in the beginning of the film to laughing and smiling near the end. However, the alien does not get involved with a human man, and does not seem to be directly under a man's control. This is possibly because she is not a very central character in the film – she is not even named! The film is hardly philosophical or deep, which might provide an explanation as to why there is no prominent superhuman.

As with the previous aliens discussed, the origin of the alien in *Are We Going Crazy?* is unclear. She uses multilingual communication, advanced technology to travel in time and space, and is capable of psychokinesis (she uses her gaze to stop some bullies at the school, making one of them wet himself). This places the female alien from *Are We Going Crazy?* in the Soviet superhuman tradition, even though by 1994 Russian filmmakers had easy access to Western and Hollywood representations of cyborgs. This suggests that the superhuman remained more readily at hand for an early post-Soviet director than the cyborg. The nameless superhuman's ability to transcend temporality, her spatial origin above the earth (in a geocentric perspective where the ground is below us, with the sky and universe above us), and her moral superiority continue to tie the superhuman to The Divine Sophia. Interestingly, there is no mention of the female superhuman's romantic relations with men, a father figure, or other connections to the male fantasy motif. However, this might be explained by her limited screen time and underdeveloped character. Considering that *Are We Going Crazy?* seems constricted in terms of resources and plot development, it is possible that the filmmakers drew upon the established trope of the female superhuman as an easily recognisable cliché, without exploring it in depth. Yet this could also be explained by the lack of clear moral ideals in Russia in the 1990s: it was uncertain what sort of ideal society the female alien was supposed to represent, now that communism had been abandoned. Thus, the ideal society motif was left out of the film, and she remained largely an opaque character.

Conclusion

The Soviet female aliens with various superhuman abilities and unclear boundaries between biology and technology challenge the typical representation of the Western/Hollywood female cyborgs. Leaving out discussions of the liminal spaces between (human) biology and (human) technology, the Soviet female aliens provoke discussions of humanness as constructed culture, as inclusive, rather than exclusive categories. The Soviet female aliens do not function as a sexualised threat to masculinity, inspiring technophobia. Instead, they spur self-reflection concerning self-understanding, and how we mirror ourselves in the Other. Technology is viewed as an extension of our human nature, not an opposition. Technology in itself is neutral

– value is added in the way humans use technology. It is not Sartorius's technological devices that are a threat to Hari and the other guests in *Solaris*, it is his worldview. Rather, Hari uses Sartorius's device to liberate herself.

Despite being produced and released under different circumstances, and belonging to different sub-genres, both *Solaris* and *Are We Going Crazy?* thematise existentialist questions connected to their contemporary contexts. In the early 1970s the shock of the US moon landing still lingered, and fed into the scepticism of Khrushchev's promise of the country fully realising communism by 1980. In Tarkovsky's future vision in *Solaris* the USSR may be communist, but decades of research of an unknown planet has mainly resulted in existentialist crisis and trauma. Thus, *Solaris* can be read as a critique of the previous decade's naïve optimism and self-identity, which placed outer space as the ultimate goal and answer to everything.

It might seem unfair to compare *Are We Going Crazy?* to *Solaris*, as the latter is arguably more complex in terms of themes, and layers of interpretation. Still, I argue that the opaqueness of the female alien in *Are We Going Crazy?* can be read as evidence of an identity crisis. Where previous female alien films focused on future(istic) opportunities, *Are We Going Crazy?* is more concerned with the past. The future, as represented by the unnamed alien, is a mystery. Of the few things we learn of the civilisation she comes from is that it is in a life-threatening crisis, and she has to travel back in time to try to save it. This can easily be read as an allegory for the identity crisis in post-Soviet Russia, where it was no longer clear what the future ideal society should look like, and it was a tendency to search in the past for possible answers.

The feature films *Solaris* and *Are We Going Crazy?* exemplify how Russian and Soviet filmmakers of various capacities utilise and develop the established character of the female alien to thematise questions of (gender)identity, ideal societies and morality. These cinematic discussions offer us insight in (post-)Soviet culture and can be used as contrast in discussions, for example, of Hollywood representations of female cyborgs.

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