

recording the heartbeat” (237). Experiments carried out in Soviet Russia and elsewhere may have been flawed, but, as Olenina emphasizes, they did prove significant and essential to the era’s utopian thrust. Adorno’s remark begs the question of whether such spectator studies were ultimately futile, but that is certainly not the case with *Psychomotor Aesthetics*, for it raises crucial issues about modernist art, its reception, and its interdisciplinary scope.

TIM HARTE  
Bryn Mawr College

**B-2: Brikolazh rezhissera Balabanova 2.** Ed. Frederick H. White. Nizhnii Novgorod: Dekom Press, 2020. 485 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Photographs. ₴749, hard bound.  
doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.83

*B-2* is a collection of interviews, documents, and scholarly essays about the iconic Russian filmmaker Aleksei Balabanov. In his introduction, Frederick White describes the book as a “bricolage” of diverse and loosely connected materials, gathered with the goal of preserving them “for future generations of students, scholars, and cinephiles” (6; 17). The book offers a detailed overview of Balabanov’s career and biography, providing extensive context for his unique body of work and laying out some of its main themes, aesthetic features, and inherent contradictions. Within the collection, the five essays authored by White follow a common thematic thread, focusing primarily on Balabanov’s cinematic reflection about film as a medium, on his portrayal of a fundamental decadence or “pathology” of Russian society, and on the role played by nationalism and identity in his work.

The introductory essay, “Cinema about Cinema,” provides an overview of Balabanov’s works through the prism of a fundamental tension between “sacred” and “prophane.” According to White, in Balabanov’s films the prophane sphere is associated with the artificial or virtual essence of postmodernity, with technological progress—in the form of trains, streetcars, cinema and modern media, voyeurism, and perversion—and with the lawlessness of the 1990s. This prophane artificial world of media clashes with Balabanov’s trademark documentary aesthetics and “fantastic realism,” which culminated in the spiritual symbolism of his last film, *Me Too*. “*Of Freaks and Men: Aleksei Balabanov’s Critique of Degenerate Post-Soviet Society*” interprets the film in the title as a postmodern commentary on contemporary Russia’s decadence and moral decline through the mirror of the Russian *fin de siècle*. By challenging nostalgic views of pre-revolutionary Russia that were becoming increasingly common in the early 2000s—the essay argues—the film shows that said moral decline is not an exception, but only “the most recent emanation of a chronic national pathology” (165). “The Story of Aleksei Balabanov’s Unfinished Film *The American*” traces the history of this failed project, which, the essay argues, marked a shift from “outward” to “inward” nationalism in Balabanov’s work—from the revanchism, anti-Americanism, and xenophobia of *Brother*, *Brother 2*, and *War*, to the increased focus on ethnic tensions within Russia of *Dead Man’s Bluff*, *Morphine*, and *The Stoker*. “Balabanov’s Bandits: The Bandit Film Cycle in Post-Soviet Cinema” studies the way in which Balabanov’s films have influenced the evolution of the gangster or “bandit” genre in Russian cinema and television, from the creation of the iconic (anti-)hero Danila Bagrov in *Brother* to the reflexivity and (self-)parody of *Brother 2* and *Dead Man’s Bluff*. “*Cargo 200: a Bricolage of Cultural Citations*” argues that Balabanov’s cruellest and most scandalous film debunked any nostalgia for the Soviet Union by adapting William Faulkner’s novel

*The Sanctuary* to late Soviet reality and combining it with philosophical reflections from *The Brothers Karamazov* about the nefarious consequences of godlessness and amorality. The book also contains an essay about Balabanov's adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, by Valery Zusman, and one on the history of Balabanov's failed attempt to make a film adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*, by Yuri Leving. In another chapter, Mark Lipovetsky provides an overview of the "cultural renaissance" of Balabanov's hometown, Sverdlovsk/Ekaterinburg, in the 1980s and 1990s, as a context for the beginnings of the Balabanov's career.

Included in the collection are also twenty-six interviews to friends, actors, collaborators, and family members, and to Balabanov himself, conducted by White and other Russian and European scholars and critics; four translations of English-language reviews of Balabanov's films; several documents, primarily from Balabanov's school years; and a screenplay for an unrealized movie, *The Clay Pit* (first published in the Russian original), with commentaries by Anna Nieman. The interviews provide a glimpse into the main phases of Balabanov's life—including his school years and connections with Sverdlovsk's music scene; the life-long collaboration with Sergey Selianov and his production company, CTB; the tragedy of Karmadon, where several of Balabanov's closest friends and collaborators, including his fetish actor, Sergei Bodrov Jr., lost their lives; his self-destruction and alcoholism; and his turn to nationalism and religiosity. They also reveal concrete details of Balabanov's approach to different aspects of filmmaking: from screenwriting to post-production, his work with actors, and directing style.

The essays in the collection use these interviews primarily to substantiate claims about Balabanov's plans, sources, and ideas about his own movies. However, this kind of biographical or ethnographic materials could also be further integrated into a discussion of Balabanov's works, providing added insight on, say, the representation and performance of violence or sexuality in his films (through concrete interactions with actors and other collaborators); the tension between, on the one hand, realistic acting and a documentary impulse and, on the other, surreal and parodic elements of his cinematography; the paradoxical, at the same time desperate and comical, and almost physical attraction to the darkness and decadence of Russian or post-Soviet reality that Balabanov's films display (along with the horror and criticism of said reality). In this sense, *B2* can indeed serve as a useful primary source for future students and scholars of the director's work.

Versions of the essays by White and Lipovetsky included in the collection have also been published elsewhere in English, in article or chapter forms. White's interviews to the actors Ray Toler and Lisa Rayel Jeffrey (*Brother 2*), Ian Kelly (*War*), and a few others, as well as a shortened English translation of Anna Nieman's interview to Balabanov's editor, Tatiana Kuzmicheva, have appeared in *KinoKultura*.

FABRIZIO FENGHI  
Brown University

***Adaptatsiia kak symptom: Russkaia klassika na postsovetskom ekrane.*** By Lioudmila Fedorova. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2022. 368 pp. P420, paper.

doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.84

In this study, *Adaptation as a Symptom: The Russian Classic on the Post-Soviet Screen*, Lioudmila Fedorova offers an original and productive approach to post-Soviet reworkings of classic literature into film. She interprets these adaptations as both symptoms