The Drift along a Traumatic Past in the Cinematic Worlds of Šarūnas Bartas*

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This paper examines the reflections of a recent past and formations of post-1990s subjectivities in the films of the Lithuanian film-maker Šarūnas Bartas, namely *Three Days* (1991), *The Corridor* (1995), *Few of Us* (1996), *Seven Invisible Men* (2005) and *Eastern Drift* (2010), and presents an analysis of the interrelation of aural and visual layers in Bartas's films, which fall under the discourse of *trauma culture* (Hal Foster) and *de-territorialisation* (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari). All the films tackle the relationship between the past and the present, local and transcultural, stillness and mobility, individual and communal in a sustained and complex way. Therefore, Bartas's films reflect geopolitical and aesthetic perspectives. Bartas's protagonists are nomads glimpsed through the Deleuzian *crystalline image*. They trek from one place or community to another in quest of lost belonging, freedom or adventure. Their national or cultural identity is not clearly articulated. However, they can be recognised as Eastern Europeans whose land has always been a corridor for different nations and a temporary home or place of freedom. They are like Vilém Flusser's *digital apparitions* operating in Deleuzian *any-space-whatevers*. The nation's land, represented by the archetypical images of a bridge, a corridor, a harbour and a home, signifies a period of historical transformations and mental transitions in society.

Introductory notes about the cultural and theoretical framework

Šarūnas Bartas is one of those few Lithuanian film-makers who consistently deal with the traumatic experiences of communism and the constitution of the post-Soviet identities of those living in former Soviet territory. His interest in these problematics can be explained by the fact that Bartas started and nurtured his cinematographic career on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union and produced his first professional films in the period of political and cultural shifts just after Lithuania announced its independence. In 1989, in the era of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika, Bartas established Kinema Studio, which was the first independent film studio to be established

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in independent Lithuania and was meant to confront the current stasis in the local film industry. Kinema Studio emerged as a new site of production for a new generation of film-makers (Audrius Stonys, Artūras Jevdokimovas, Rimvydas Leipus, Valdas Navasaitis and others), who, much like their peers in other Eastern or Central European countries, were rebelling against the old, centrally controlled film production system. Thanks to his talents and luck as an entrepreneur, Bartas managed to fund the films that his studio produced with finances derived exclusively from private and foreign sponsors. Equally significant was Bartas's approach as a producer: young film-makers were allowed to shoot what and how they wanted, and this trust from the studio was seen as very encouraging. Kinema's productions achieved international recognition at prestigious film festivals relatively quickly, including at Oberhausen, the Berlinale, IDFA (the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam), Karlovy Vary and Rotterdam. Prizes and nominations allowed the studio to accumulate much needed symbolic capital: *Three Days* (dir. Šarūnas Bartas, 1991), for example, premiered at the Berlinale and was nominated for the European Felix'92 in the category 'Young European film'; *Earth of the Blind* (dir. Audrius Stonys, 1991) won the Felix'92 for 'Best European documentary'.

Bartas's obvious talent, coupled with his entrepreneurial outlook and methods, made him an inspirational figure for the 1990s generation of film-makers, many of whom were influenced by his film-making style, with its emphasis on non-narrative, non-verbal storytelling, on long takes, on the involvement of amateur actors, etc. The cinema to which Bartas contributed, whether directly as a director, or indirectly as a source of influence, is 'imperfect' from a technological and narrative point of view. It ignored the 'bare life' and, like most 'new waves', it has clear elements of what Deleuze calls the 'time-image'[1]. Examples of this cinema include: *In the Memory of a Day Gone by* (*Praėjusios dienos atminimui*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas, 1990), *Ten Minutes Before the Flight of Icarus* (*Dešimt minučių prieš Ikaro skrydį*, dir. Arūnas Matelis, 1991), *Earth of the Blind* (*Neregių žemė*, dir. Audrius Stonys, 1991), *Three Days* (*Trys dienos*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas, 1991), *Autumn Snow* (*Rudens sniegas*, dir. Valdas Navasaitis, 1992), *The Corridor* (*Koridorius*, dir. Šarūnas Bartas, 1995) and many others. The film-makers can be seen as aiming to provide their take on the historical and societal shifts occurring not only in Lithuania, but in the wider region. Also, the aim, clearly, was to experiment with film genres and conventions. In this connection, a certain insistence on time, and on a kind of liquidity of being became emblematic of the real in these films, which took a symbolic approach to the depiction of significant social, cultural and political changes taking place in the country at the time.

Bartas's cinematography fits very well into memory and post-colonial discourses (Stuart Hall, Gayatri C. Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Robert Stam and Louise Spence) and may be reflected within them, even though, as Ewa Mazierska argues, 'the end

1 For Gilles Deleuze, an image is not a representation or copy of something. It is, rather, a reference to perceived and apprehended things. The 'time-image' is a presentation of direct images of time, which are open to change and becoming. The problems confronted and reflected in the films of 'time-image' are never solved because films pose questions rather than trying to give answers. This openness strengthens the sense of the time flow and indicates the future as open to any kind of change. This kind of film-making was meant to be a film of thought rather than action and mainly predominated in auteurs' films in the 1940s – 1970s.

of communism drew attention to the exclusion of former Soviet satellites from post-colonial studies, resulting from, among other reasons, an unwillingness of left-leaning Western academics to confront the realities of living under the Soviet regime'.[2] Referring to Jacques Derrida, she indicates the necessity of discussing the multiple meanings of the end of communism, as it meant different things to different nations and people, as well as a need to talk about multiple ends of communism as experienced by 'those who experienced it first-hand'.[3] Moreover, for some communities communism is not finished yet, and it is still slowly fading. In this context, Bartas's films deserve deep reflection, as almost all of them metaphorically reflect these processes and collective memories of the Soviet past. In these films, one can feel the presence of 'communism's apparitions' in both the settings and mentality of those who recently have experienced this regime due to fresh memories of communism. These traumatic communities evidently are not able to cope with their traumatic past and miserable present and thus, in Mazierska's words, to 'close various gaps between the old socialist East and capitalist West'.[4] From his first film, *In the Memory of a Day Gone by* (1990), to his latest, *Eastern Drift* (2010), Bartas shows this long path of breaking with the traumatic past, the reconstruction of the state and the nation, and the return to the strategic geopolitical position of a bridge between the East and the West.

Roumiana Deltcheva, in her essay 'Reliving the Past in Recent East European Cinemas', also indicates the ongoing processes of cultural and geopolitical repositioning of both Eastern Europe and Eastern European cinemas after the relocation of former centres and peripheries of power. Moreover, she writes about the need for dialogue between the past and the present, the East and the West, in the formation of the not yet crystallised identity of an 'emerging region'.[5] The role of regional filmmakers in developing such a dialogue and circumscribing a new identity is crucial, as historical memories and their unbiased (just) interpretation play an important role in the constitution of a nation's identity. Moreover, the consistent (re)formation of the memory of human experience in the past vitally changes the notion and the nature of the past, and in such a way modifies collective identity, as it is dependent on (re)readings of the past (and intimate dialogues between the present and the past). Deltcheva argues that (post-1989) 'cinematic narratives depict how historical memory invariably mixes nostalgia and political insight to explore what constitutes the past, to illustrate how the region uses, selects, and interprets history and reinvents the past in the process of its self-definition.'[6] Consequently, post-communist identity can be produced and recreated via diverse cultural acts of rediscovery, including cinematic representation, and can be positioned between the two poles of 'similarity' and 'difference', as offered by Stuart Hall in assessing the identities of 'otherness'.[7] Cultural identity, he

2 E. Mazierska, European Cinema and Intertextuality: History, Memory and Politics. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 175.
3 E. Mazierska, European Cinema and Intertextuality, p. 175.
4 E. Mazierska, European Cinema and Intertextuality, p. 174.
5 R. Deltcheva, Reliving the Past in Recent East European Cinemas. – East European Cinemas. Ed. A. Imre. New York, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 197.
6 R. Deltcheva, Reliving the Past in Recent East European Cinemas, p. 209.
7 S. Hall, Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation. – Film and Theory: An Anthology. Eds. R. Stam, T. Miller. Malden: Blackwell, 2009, pp. 705–706.

claims, '…is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture.' Cultural identities are built in histories: they are not fixed, but rather dynamic entities, which undergo constant changes and transformations under the influence of multiple power structures.

Notably, Eastern European studies (of the majority of post-1989 cinemas of the region) share the centrality of the past and ambiguity of temporality and subjectivity, with postcolonial studies, which focus on investigating the multiple interactions between colonisers and the colonised, and the continuing political, economic and cultural effects of this interaction. These multiple intersections of the individual and the collective in relation to memory and communal history play a vital role in defining postcolonial national identity or, to be more precise, the multiple identities which already existed under colonialism (or communism), and continue evolving in the contemporary global world (especially due to economically and politically conditioned migration). The position of being in various 'post' statuses and acquiring multiple 'post' entities creates an ambiguous spatio-temporality, which Homi K. Bhabha in the introduction to his *The Location of Culture* describes by applying the concept 'beyond'. According to him, '[i]t is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond*. [---] Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism*….' He indicates the controversy of the aforementioned 'beyond' as it 'is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past' as at the end of the century, '…we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.'[8] In other words, we experience a kind of diffraction of previously existing different time zones and a splitting of previously existing unbroken spaces, and the constitution of new spatiotemporal constructs. To invoke the insights of Michel Foucault: 'We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.'[9]

In the following, I will examine Šarūnas Bartas's cinematic reflections on post-communism and the constitution of post-1990s subjectivities in *Three Days* (1991), *The Corridor* (1995), *Few of Us* (*Mūsų nedaug*, 1996), *Seven Invisible Men* (*Septyni nematomi žmonės*, 2005) and *Eastern Drift* (*Eurazijos aborigenas*, 2010), in the framework of 'trauma culture'[10] (Hal Foster), and 'de-territorialisation'[11] (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari).

8 H. K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture. New York, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 1.

9 M. Foucault, Of Other Spaces (1986). – The Visual Culture Reader. Ed. N. Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, 1998, p. 229.

10 Hal Foster notes postmodern culture's fascination with trauma and abjection, which is motivated by a dissatisfaction with 'the textual model of reality' and disillusionment with the celebration of desire as a precondition of a mobile subject. Among other despairs which precondition the 'trauma culture' (raise the contemporary concern with trauma and abjection) are the global AIDS crisis, invasive disease and death, systemic poverty and crime, a destroyed welfare state and societal alienation. In any case, these forces have driven the contemporary concern with trauma and abjection (H. Foster, The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996, pp. 166–168).

11 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari claim that de-territorialisation can be physical, mental or spiritual. It is intended to free up and disintegrate the fixed relations that contain a certain body and make new organisations available out of this (G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, What is Philosophy? New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 68).

I will focus on those of Bartas's works which reflect and thematically mediate testimonies of the traumatic past, and disclose socio-cultural and ideological conditions that vitally influenced the national and the local through the course of history (namely Soviet colonisation). Each of the films tackles the relationship between the past and the present, local and transcultural, stillness and mobility, individual and communal, similarity and difference in a sustained and complex way. Bartas's protagonists are nomads who take a glimpse into Gilles Deleuze's 'crystalline' time[12] and 'any-space-whatever',[13] which form an open framework for the formation of new subjectivities.

Memories of a day gone by and the nostalgia for the landscapes of the past

In Bartas's films, we observe the representations of the recent past as if filtered by his protagonists' memories and their current emotional status. These memories of the Soviet past can be seen as traumatic and nostalgic at the same time, still existing in a society which participated in both building and destroying communism and its community. However, the characters look at the past not in an attempt to escape the present and to create imaginary worlds for themselves, but to bridge multiple temporalities (of the recent past, the present and the near future) together and thus (re)build their 'shrinking' existence in the present. In these works, echoing Svetlana Boym, 'contemporary nostalgia is not so much about the past as about vanishing the present'.[14] In Bartas's films, especially *In the Memory of a Day Gone by*, *Three Days*, *The Corridor*, *Few of Us* and *Seven Invisible Men*, close-up and long shots accurately document the vanishing remains of yesterday's 'powerful' empire, and question the loss and disappearance of the former common territory (gr. *nostos*) and common belonging (gr. *algia*). These films give the impression of a certain 'mnemonic' device – artificial memory – of a day gone by, which is associated with sadness, uncertainty and alienation. They subtly remind us (through oral and visual objects and places attached to collective memory) of the collapse of a utopian Soviet state and testify to the dystopian consequences for the post-1989 Eastern European societies, including the coloniser and the colonised. Svetlana Boym, in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, explores the phenomenon of nostalgia in former Soviet cities and societies, and considers it to be a nomadic phenomenon existing independently of a state. She notes that institutionalised nostalgia focuses on

12 For Gilles Deleuze, 'the crystal-image' is the construction of incoherent interlinks between the past, the present and projections into the future. He claims: 'What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or … it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. [---] Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we *see in the crystal*.' (G. Deleuze, Cinema 2: The Time-Image. London: Continuum, 2010, pp. 78–79.)

13 For Gilles Deleuze, space is what is at once created and unmade – changed by the event. Space is rich in potentiality for the realisation of event and, thus, for new becoming. Space is a discursive territory, while place is a given, named and mapped territory. Place becomes a space due to existential encounters among subjects who mark the place. So 'any-space-whatever' for Deleuze is in the process of change and turning into something else. According to the philosopher, the task of a film-maker is to make these 'any-spaces-whatevers' visible before using them for creative manipulations.

14 S. Boym, The Future of Nostalgia. New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. 351.

nostos and aims to 'restore' (or reconstruct) it, while 'reflective' nostalgia inhabits *algia*, and does not encompass any concrete place of residence, nor does it have a concrete destination of movement.[15] Therefore, 'restorative nostalgia ends up constructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time', while 'reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space'.[16] Bartas's works visibly deal with reflective nostalgia (aimed at shattering mnemonic space) which is closely linked with trauma. This nomadic type of nostalgia is embodied in the very structure of the films, composed of loosely connected episodes of protagonists' mental and physical journeys from sites of the present to former belonging.

For example, in *Three Days* we observe two Lithuanian boys' journey to Kaliningrad (in an ancient Baltic and German land), and their wandering through the multiple spatio-temporal layers of this dystopian city. The vanishing remains of the German medieval cathedral and the diffusion in courtyards of famous Soviet Russian and Western music from the 1980s can be perceived as referential objects of the collective memory of different pasts and presents coexisting in this city. This nostalgic journey reveals the traumatic histories of this land, drastically cleansed of the memories of the Baltic and German cultural background, and finally turned into a prototypical internationalised Soviet space without a past, and inhabited by rootless people, whose existence is marked by a sense of gradual degradation and an existence on the edge of civilisation. Moreover, the trip uncovers the complete loss of emotional and physical ties with this artificial, destructive and depressing space and its inhabitants. The film starts and ends with idyllic sequences of an old flour mill located in an area almost untouched by urbanised landscape. The mill is the residence of an old man, a girl and a dog, who feel absolutely comfortable in this quiet and isolated place, which becomes a place of departure and return for the two flâneurs, and can be seen as a metaphorical *nostos* of Lithuanians.

The Corridor reveals the slowness and complexity of the nation's crystallisation process in post-1989 Lithuania. In the film, we observe characters trapped in an uncanny house with an unusually long, dark corridor, which connects all the rooms of the house and the outside entries. Characters silently observe the outside world and each other through the windows and doors of the house, but are not able to establish sensible relationships. They are closed inside their own world, a world assembled of their recollections, dreams and the sense of an unstable present. The film editing intentionally lacks logical connections, which gives the impression of the spontaneity and uncertainty of the newly crystalising (from former colonisers and the colonised) nation and state (undergoing the process of re-territorialisation). For example, in the film we follow a nostalgic collage of black and white footage documenting the significant historical events of January 1991, when people from all over the country gathered in Vilnius to protect their freedom from a Soviet military attack, the idyllic winter landscape of the Vilnius Old Town, the desperate parting of a Russian-speaking multinational community, the murmuring river in the remains of an old town, etc.

15 S. Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, p. 22.
16 S. Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, p. 49.

In *The Corridor* the chronology of time, and thus the logic of narrative, is confused, as the past, present and future 'crowd' in on each other without warning. The relation to the past in *Three Days* and *The Corridor* is complicated, and it signals the necessity of putting the present and the future before the past in order to have a future.

The spatio-temporal arrangements of Bartas's films, especially in *Three Days* and *The Corridor*, can be explained by applying Henri Bergson's concept of memory, which sees the present and every present perception as being located in the past. Bergson argues that this past continues to exist as a virtual image and it gradually changes and grows. Thus, we live in a past that virtually co-exists with the present and is retained in recollection (not necessarily in chronological order). Each moment in the present 'invites' us to travel to other layers of the past.[17] These layers of memory are in the constant motion, interaction and crystallisation of a virtual world and a real world. Therefore, our identities are dependent on the crystallisation of the present, the recollection of all relevant pasts, and the imagination of the future. Gilles Deleuze further developed this model of multi-planar dimensions of time in the context of cinema and cinematographic consciousness in his famous volumes on cinema, especially *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), where he claims that a '[cinematographic] image itself is the system of the relationships between its elements, that is, a set of relationships of time from which the variable present only flows.' The direct 'time-image' (or pure representation of time) 'clearly goes beyond the purely empirical succession of time – past-present-future', as it is 'a coexistence of distinct durations, or of levels of duration; ... a non-chronological order.'[18] Thus, a 'time-image' can turn into a site of amnesia – a 'time-crystal' – consisting of intermingling sensations of time. His conception of the past is embodied in images that can be addressed in non-chronological order at a meta-level, and can be used as a very suitable conceptual framework for dealing with Bartian cinematic representations of the transformations of Lithuanian identity and the re-territorialisation of the nation-state, even though these works are not considered to be historical films, but rather philosophical films, when dealing with the painful situation of being and belonging in the spaces of the 'beyond'.

Subalterns, hybrid identities and trauma culture

Bartas employs huge numbers of close-up shots and medium shots of people in juxtaposition with devastated urbanscapes and landscapes presented in long shots. He believes that the face of a man and precise composition of a frame are extremely important communicative and signifying elements in a film. The aural expression is respected in the same way. He designs sound very thoroughly and treats it as an important signifying element, even when it is absent. When it exists, it is diffused around the cinematic event or is shaped in a manner of 'lapping sounds', which Christian Metz describes as 'an autonomous aural object'. The sound is designed very artfully in *The Corridor* and *Three Days*, where 'lapping sounds' strengthen the image of a split

17 H. Bergson, Matter and Memory. New York: Zone Books, 1991, pp. 133–177.
18 G. Deleuze, Perface to the English edition. – G. Deleuze, Cinema 2: The Time-Image, p. xii.

(or abjected) subjectivity, which in certain episodes is shaped as 'aural apparition' (the whispering or crooning of invisible inhabitants of a desolate house, or the rustling of trees and wind). Metz notes that 'spatial anchoring of aural events is much more vague and uncertain than that of visual events'.[19] In Bartas's case, both visual and aural events can be perceived as ambiguous, and this aesthetic choice has the psychological function of revealing the inner status of the cinematic characters. In most of the scenes, sound and silence are used as strong emotional and spatio-temporal devices (for example, improvisations of live music performed by locals and compilations of local and foreign pop-music pieces), and help to reveal the co-existence of different cultural and ideological influences in post-1989 societies and, therefore, a need for dialogue in constituting a new multicultural and multi-ethnic state and society.

Bartas indicates and explores the multicultural primarily as an outcome of the Soviet political and economic project implemented through diverse internationalisation strategies. He reveals the destructive power of this artificial internationalisation for small cultural communities, such as Tofalars, Tartars and Lithuanians, who were 'subalterns' of a 'big brother'. The internationalisation of the Soviet Union was mainly implemented through mental, spiritual and physical de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation strategies, which had more negative than positive transformative effects on a given territory and local community. In the approach of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari[20], de-territorialisation is a movement by which something escapes or departs from fixed relations and exposes new organisations. These two processes are interrelated and absolutely natural to any social field. De-territorialisation is always connected to correlative developments of re-territorialisation, which does not literally mean returning to the original territory but rather the ways in which de-territorialised elements recombine and enter into new formations. The aforementioned processes have destructive consequences for the subject, as de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation shatter the subject. The aforementioned processes in *The Corridor* precondition the emergence of several 'hybrid' and split communities: an energetic crowd moving forward and backward along a bridge, a frozen river and a huge city square, a degraded Russian-speaking multi-ethnic community having a party in a common kitchen of an obsolete and shady house with a long corridor, and strange silent observers (played by Lithuanian, Russian and Armenian actors), who accurately follow both communities from the outside, as if trying to match these completely different spaces and subjects to a single mental image of a nation. The heroine of *Few of Us* travels to a remote and vanishing post-Soviet space, a small village in Siberian Sayany, another place which experienced drastic de-territorialisation, causing the marginalisation and degradation (especially due to imposed drinking rituals and the kolkhoz culture) of indigenous tribes and lifestyles. A comparable situation is revealed in a Crimean Tartar community which had been displaced, sent back and finally 'internationalised' by settling Russian-speaking communities in their land. We closely observe these

19 C. Metz, Aural Objects. – Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings. Eds. L. Braudy, M. Cohen. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 367.
20 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 60, 421.

marginalised communities, but never hear their language, as 'subalterns' are not supposed to speak for themselves.

The depicted acoustic and spatio-temporal organisation of Bartas's films can be discussed within the conceptual framework of the 'trauma culture' proposed by Hal Foster in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, in which he questions the fascination with trauma in the postmodern condition. He claims: 'Today there is a general tendency to redefine experience, individual and historical, in terms of trauma: a *lingua trauma* is spoken in popular culture, academic discourse, and the art and literary worlds.'[21] Many contemporary narratives experience 'paradoxical modality' and 'follow the logic of trauma' which can be expressed best by using reverse or erratic narrative, dislocated or missing climax and similar cinematic imperfections, including sonic ones, such as an intense lapping sound, and the lack of audible verbalisation. In Bartas's films, we definitely encounter a traumatised reality related to societal transformations, and witness his strong engagement in trauma discourse. He shares Foster's idea that 'a special truth seems to reside in traumatic or abject states, in diseased or damaged bodies. To be sure, the violated body is often the evidentiary basis of important witnessing to truth, of necessary testimonials against power'.[22] Notably, Bartas uses old, damaged, injured, tired bodies and faces as testimonies of certain political, social and cultural conditions. In all of his films, there are unexpected scenes of motiveless violence and aggression, ending with images of dirty or injured bodies (especially in *Few of Us*, *Seven Invisible Men* and *Eastern Drift*). However, the film-maker's stance is quite neutral, as he takes the role of an 'informant/ethnographer', which, to quote Hal Foster, '...displaces the problematic of class and capitalist exploitation with that of race and colonialist oppression, or, more simply, because it displaces the social with the cultural or the anthropological.'[23]

Bartian characters live on the outskirts of society (in provincial rural areas or desolate urban territories) and are not able to cope with their traumatic past (notably related to Soviet regimes) and miserable present (related to sharp political and economic changes), to which they are slowly adapting. They are in deep existential and spiritual crises and are therefore depicted as ultimately vulnerable and self-destructive beings who have lost control of their lives and any hope of a better life. These ideas are well supported by the acting manner and film aesthetic. The actors (both professionals and ordinary locals) reluctantly move and interact with each other. In most of the observed situations they use minimal body and spoken language, and their faces remain almost emotionless and their psychological states unrevealed until the end of the film. In some films, especially *The Corridor*, they do not utter a single word or, when addressed, they are not able to interact properly, as in *Seven Invisible Men* or *Three Days*. They silently observe themselves and their neighbours, and are observed by others. Only alcohol encourages their social interaction, and makes them audible and enthusiastic (*Seven Invisible Men*, *The Corridor* and *Few of Us*).

21 H. Foster, Obscene, Abject, Traumatic. – October 1996, vol. 78 (Autumn), p. 123.
22 H. Foster, Obscene, Abject, Traumatic, p. 123.
23 H. Foster, The Return of the Real, p. 174.

Bartas observes and examines uncanny areas and their dwellers (ethnically diverse but dramatically affected by the Russification policy) in the remote provinces of yesterday's empire, namely in *Three Days* – Kaliningrad (the former city of Königsberg), in *The Corridor* – Vilnius, in *Few of Us* – the Siberian Sayany and in *Seven Invisible Men* – the Crimean peninsula in southern Ukraine. His perceptions are not characterised by exotic, picturesque motifs on the surface which catch a stranger's eye. He undertakes a journey in time and space marked with signs of devastated areas (or civilisations), lost cultures, memories and identities. In all the films, Bartas uses the same strategy for reworking a traumatic past and revealing evidence of its incarnations. He includes one or a few strangers (sometimes played by himself, namely in *The Corridor* and in *Seven Invisible Men*) in the dystopian territory of a certain community and designs a subjective collage of their observations and recollections of the past. Certain aural and visual motifs repeat several times in the same film (for example, the smoke of a fire or a cigarette, the sound of a train or a plane, a rifle-shot, a croon or murmur, a devastated courtyard, the face of an old man, a fire, the echo of singing people, or a burbling river), and operate as a restorative practice of status of mind and memory, as the more you look at the same exact thing or listen to the same sound, the better you receive it, and the emptier and cleaner you feel. Thus, a repetition of a traumatic event (related to a devastated, desolate site and destructive actions) is a restorative event, which helps to master trauma. Repetition serves to screen the reality and reveal it as traumatic. Therefore, it is possible to claim that Bartas uses the trauma event to 'guarantee the subject'; as Hal Foster puts it, 'one cannot challenge the trauma of another: one can only believe it, even identify with it, or not.'[24]

Instead of a conclusion: in search of a new identity

In the opening sequence of *Eastern Drift*, a nostalgic image of an unnamed harbour is observed and pleasant ambient music heard. The idyll is suddenly distorted by the emergence of Gena, the main character, and his 'confession': 'The time gone by and the Soviet Union collapsed. It was total chaos, so it was easy to take advantage. [---] I have been travelling a lot, and spent much time in France. I do not really have any home. Paris, Moscow, Vilnius, Minsk, Warsaw. I have plenty of enemies. [---] Life is short. The major part of it is over. I did not even notice. I would like to live a normal life. Wherever you are, you are just a guy with no roots other than a criminal past. A Eurasian native.'

For those who know Bartas's films, this monologue is surprising, especially when Gena speaks for himself in the first person, and in doing so 'invoices' the 'subaltern'. He has acquired the new identity of an educated dealer and smuggler from 'the other Europe', which is a typical 'mimicry' successfully functioning in the Western public discourse, including cinema. Contrary to the protagonists of earlier Bartas films (with the exception of *Freedom* (2000) and *Seven Invisible Men*), Gena performs his journeys

24 H. Foster, The Return of the Real, p. 168.

and implements his violent deeds intentionally and meaningfully, and without any possibility of resigning. Therefore, the 'subaltern' can be heard, yet cannot decide for himself. Thus, the newly (re)constituted transnational character (bridging the West and the East) is not much different from those who emerged after 1989, and can be depicted in Deleuze's concept of 'a new race of characters', who are a 'kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers'. These are the inhibitors of newly emerged specific constructs – "any-space-whatever', deserted, but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, and cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction.'[25] This depiction of post-war Europeans represented in a neo-realist cinema suits the Bartian post-1989 and post-2004 Eastern European description, especially when Westerners perceive them as 'the new race of Europeans' residing in desolate places and cities under reconstruction, and frequent visitors of transnational transit spaces (bearing in mind migration issues), which Deleuze called 'any-space-whatevers'. In a sense, Deleuzian 'any-space-whatever' is a space of new becomings and singularities, and perfectly suits the emergence of new subjectivities. He argues: 'Any-space-whatever is not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places. It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity. [---] It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible.'[26]

Bartian film characters notably explore new possibilities of this 'singular and homogeneous locus'. They wander from one space of temporary-residence to another, such as a train station, a motel in a harbour city, a corridor of a multi-flat house, a yard, a farm in a steppe, or a small village on the taiga. However, these places function not as connecting places or sites for establishing new human relations, but as places of new transcultural encounters (sadly not always pleasant or positive). Therefore, the journey or wandering, as has been mentioned above, becomes an important narrative element, with themes centred on inner mental and moral status, dramatic cultural shifts, and finally emotional breakdowns (expressed in rare but very strong scenes of partying, having sex or destructive actions). Therefore, the concept of 'any-space-whatever' is very suitable for revealing and questioning the mental, moral and cultural status of the post-Soviet man. In all the films mentioned, subjects are purely operative, watching and waiting for something to happen. If they travel or even move, any exchange of words is done without any clear purpose or meaning. These nationals are perceived as Eurasian aborigines, whose land has always been a corridor for different nations and a temporary home or place of freedom. Therefore, the nation's land is represented by archetypical images of a bridge, a corridor or a harbour, and home signifies a period of historical transformations and mental transitions in society. Bartas investigates the abandoned peripheries of the former empire, Kaliningrad, Vilnius, the Crimean peninsula, etc., which have complex histories, and are obsolete and unstable. From the Soviet colonisation until the collapse of the system, new settlers, temporary workers, smugglers and all sorts of dealers moved to and from these places, bringing dramatic changes to the places and the local dwellers as well.

25 G. Deleuze, Preface to the English edition. – G. Deleuze, Cinema 2: The Time-Image. London: Continuum, 2010, p. xi.
26 G. Deleuze, Cinema 1: The Movement-Image. London: Continuum, 2009, p. 113.

Šarūnas Bartas's films can be perceived as a communication bridge linking post-communist Eurasia with Western Europe, even though these works do not really belong to the post-1989 European films explicitly manifesting a new Europe and clearly articulating, in the words of Luisa Rivi, 'post-1989 European cinema and European identity firmly grounded in the specific post-Cold War historical juncture and sensibility'[27]. Instead, Bartas depicts different post-communist nations' (Russians, Tofalars, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Tartars and Kaliningrad district dwellers) healing historical traumas, grappling with the issue of the post-1989 identity, and the damage of an artificially created multicultural and multinational belonging. Bartas's films implicitly indicate the increasing threats of moral and mental deprivation in traumatised dystopian societies. However, he leaves some hope for the viewer, and indirectly talks about the necessity of a new human sensitivity and the need for the healing of historical traumas in society.

27 L. Rivi, European Cinema after 1989: Cultural Identity and Transnational Production. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 64.