

THE *CARMEN-SUITE*:

MAYA PLISETSKAYA CHALLENGING SOVIET CULTURE AND POLICY

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

On April 20 1967, the *Carmen-Suite* ballet, starring Maya Plisetskaya in the leading role, premiered in Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet Theatre. The production was immediately banned by the Soviet Ministry of Culture for perceived violations of classical ballet canons. In a unique case of artistic resistance within the Soviet system of production, Plisetskaya negotiated the ballet's return to the stage. Following the initial scandal, performance ban and a media blackout, the *Carmen-Suite* was subsequently re-integrated into Soviet repertoire and projected as a symbol of Soviet creativity and innovation. The history and legacy of the *Carmen-Suite* serves as a unique instance of successful artistic resistance within a framework of a repressive political system.

In my archival study I examine the unique role of Maya Plisetskaya as a Soviet cultural actor. I argue that her role in the production, premiere and legacy of *Carmen-Suite* may serve as a proxy for insight into the undercurrents of Cold War and post-Cold War politics in the USSR and post-Soviet Russia. The evolution of *Carmen-Suite* from a symbol of protest to an integral part of the established cultural system illustrates both political protest on the part of its creators and artistic repossession on the part of the authorities. The incident is revealing of long-term processes of ballet exploitation and adaptation within the field of power. Today, as the United States enters a period of strained relationship with Russia, which many have described as a dawn of the second Cold War, research into the artistic, cultural and political significance of the 1967 *Carmen-Suite* may be of particular significance.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND
LITERATURE REVIEW

The initial impulse for this study was my fascination with the multi-layered nature of the Soviet-era ballet *Carmen-Suite* that provided the possibility for artistic and political opposition within the highly censored Soviet state. In 1967 the *Carmen-Suite*, starring Maya Plisetskaya, shocked the Soviet artistic world with choreography and technique in violation of all major canons of classical Russian ballet. Immediately following the premiere, the ballet was banned by the Soviet Ministry of Culture and labeled overly erotic and culturally subversive. Ironically, today, *Carmen-Suite* is recognized as one of the most important Soviet contributions to the art of ballet. A ballet once considered to be deviant and unworthy of the stage by the Soviet regime is performed as a classical piece within repertoires of multiple Russian and international companies. *Carmen-Suite*'s fate serves as a prime example of the evolution of ballet driven by political, rather than artistic processes.

The central plot of the *Carmen-Suite* is loosely based on that of a novella by Prosper Mérimée, which was published in 1845 and subsequently adapted into a renowned opera by Georges Bizet in 1875. The storyline is focused on a fiery love triangle between a Spanish soldier - Jose, a bullfighter – Torero, and a gypsy *femme fatale* – Carmen. Throughout the storyline Carmen stands as a symbol of passion and freedom who finds herself caught between loving an assertive bullfighter and the reserved Don Jose. The soldier falls in love with the free-spirited Carmen, only to find

her in love with the bullfighter and the plot culminates in the murder of Carmen by Jose, who cannot endure his jealousy.

The musical score accompanying the ballet was inspired by Bizet's opera, but was adapted to the ballet by Rodion Schedrin to include more percussion instruments, giving the *Carmen-Suite* a much more forceful musical texture.¹ The minimalistic stage set, designed by Boris Messerer, consisted of a single stage framed in the form of a bullfighting ring and surrounded by a wooden wall.² The ballet was choreographed by Alberto Alonso to be performed by the Bolshoi ballet artists and Soviet prima Maya Plisetskaya. Often referred to as one of the greatest ballerinas of 20th century, Plisetskaya's energy and vigor set her apart from the iconic image of the fragile prima ballerina and the role of the fierce and fiery Carmen seemed to fit her perfectly. It soon became clear the "subversive" ballet would need every bit of Plisetskaya's energy and determination to save the production from the rage of the Soviet Ministry of Culture, which perceived the *Carmen-Suite* as a challenge to established norms of Soviet ballet.

Typically, a performance ban by the ministry would signal an immediate closing and shelving of any project, but for *Carmen-Suite* it was just the beginning. Defiant artists fought to bring *Carmen-Suite* to the stage, challenging the hierarchy of Soviet cultural establishment, risking their careers and reputations for a project with an uncertain future. Plisetskaya threatened to quit her position in the Bolshoi Ballet, the largest and most prestigious state ballet company of the Soviet Union, earning her the

¹ This music is variation on Bizet's *Carmen* and, with the exception of brief mention in my close reading analysis of the Carmen's and Torero's duet, I will focus exclusively on the ballet technique involved.

² The set design, while supporting my major argument, will not feature in my discussion.

label of a “traitor to classical ballet” (“Interview,” 2008). In a tense meeting with Yekaterina Furtseva, the Minister of Culture, Plisetskaya recalled that the minister screamed, “*Carmen* should die!” to which Plisetskaya replied “*Carmen* will die only when I do” (Plisetskaya 278). Plisetskaya threatened to expose the artistic ban and embarrass the USSR on the world stage. This was a strong statement; even in the relative political thaw of the 1960’s, challenging the powerful Ministry of Culture posed a professional and personal risk. Having witnessed her father executed and her mother imprisoned by the Soviet authorities two decades earlier, *Carmen-Suite* was not an easy political game to Plisetskaya, as she had first-hand experience with the Soviet repression machine.

The case of Plisetskaya’s *Carmen-Suite* is important in the overall framework of the relationship between the dancer, the character and the audience. In the context of a repressive society, the relationship of the artist and the state comes into sharp focus as only an artist fully integrated within the system of production can sway its course. Plisetskaya’s high status of a Soviet prima allowed her to influence the choreography and technique of the *Carmen-Suite*. This level of access, in turn, allowed her to design and choreograph the central Carmen character as herself, triggering an unprecedented level of choreographic empathy and choreographic intimacy with the character. Carmen wasn’t just Plisetskaya’s role, or even an alter ego, but it was in effect a condensed and personalized mix of Plisetskaya’s own emotions, repressed artistic creativity, sexuality, and political frustrations that found a way out within the context of this performance. This emotional condensate, in turn, personified in Carmen, was intimately synchronized

with the audience's perceptions of Soviet reality. Plisetskaya's ability to choreograph herself as Carmen and choreograph the audience as silent witnesses to the repression on and off stage allowed her to accurately mirror the Soviet audience's reality and trigger strong choreographic empathy with the performance. Every single audience member was acutely aware of the repressive nature of the Soviet state and was able to identify his or her own roles in the system through the choreographed reality of the *Carmen-Suite*.

Research Questions

My research questions here are:

1. Why was the *Carmen-Suite* banned by the Soviet cultural authorities?
2. What were the hidden transcripts of the *Carmen-Suite* and how did they work?
3. What is the *Carmen-Suite*'s legacy today?

Theoretical Framework

Carmen-Suite presents a unique example of artistic opposition within the Soviet repressive regime. To examine the protest nature of the ballet, I will rely on James Scott's work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Scott's concepts of public and hidden transcripts will help to explore subtle political messages, embedded in the choreography, and will be particularly valuable in my close reading analysis of the ballet's culmination – Carmen's and Torero's duet. In my examination of the Ministry's charges of "eroticism" and the "borrowed technique," I will show that these accusations exemplified state methods for banning politically subversive works and further promoting the public transcript of artistic freedom. Through the close

reading analysis of the duet, I will unseal Maya Plisetskaya's use of these particular charges to underscore the Ministry's control over the artistic sphere. I will show *Carmen-Suite* as a unique artistic and political event, where hidden transcripts of artistic aggression towards the state became visible through choreography and mimic technique to address politically generated public transcript of artistic freedom.

I will coin *mimic technique* as my own term, which will encompass the elements of the performance that are neither dance, nor acting, nor mime, but at the same time incorporate the elements of all three. *Mimic technique* will embrace all micro accents dancers use to provide emotional expressions that actually transform choreography into a message, and can modify, intensify or diminish the meaning. In my study I will argue that mimic technique was one of the key elements of *Carmen-Suite's* protest significance. I believe the request for filming the performance after the ban removal was intentional; Plisetskaya's motive was to present the performance with all the choreographic and mimic accents to affect the Soviet public outside Moscow.

As a Soviet prima ballerina and a Bolshoi artist, Maya Plisetskaya presents an exceptional symbol of Soviet art, and hence a symbol of perceived superiority. I will base my examination of Plisetskaya as a symbol and cultural actor on Judith Hamera's work *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City*. I will rely on Hamera's discussion of dancing communities to analyze ways Plisetskaya interacted with the broader artistic society in the struggle of staging and preserving *Carmen-Suite*. Hamera's concept of intimacy as a deep sense of communion with and ownership of a performance will be particularly useful in inspecting

Plisetskaya's affiliation with the Carmen character and *Carmen-Suite*. The artist's refusal to accept the domestic and international ban, expressed in the phrase "Carmen will die only when I do" during the meeting with the Ministry of Culture members, is unique in the history of Soviet art. It is critical to understand why a Soviet prima ballerina would risk her prestigious career, her circle of friends and colleagues, and potentially her life for a thirty-minute production. I believe that Plisetskaya's intimacy with the Carmen role may be the answer to this question.

Though Alberto Alonso served as the official choreographer of *Carmen-Suite*, it was Plisetskaya who initiated and organized Alonso's visit to Moscow; according to Plisetskaya's memoirs, she had a leading role in choreographing the Carmen character. Given the fact that Plisetskaya became a Bolshoi choreographer after the *Carmen-Suite* ban removal, I postulate that *Carmen-Suite* was the first Soviet performance where a prima ballerina tried herself as choreographer – the role that distinguished her as a creator, rather than a performer. Thus, Hamera's notion of intimacy as a sense of communion and ownership with the performance will be a particularly valuable framework to analyze Plisetskaya's uncompromising battle with the Ministry of Culture to save Carmen.

To articulate intimacy in the evolution of *Carmen-Suite*, I will use Susan Foster's concept of choreographing empathy as I believe that it was primary cause of Plisetskaya's strong affiliation with the ballet and its main character. Susan Leigh Foster's *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in a Performance* examines choreographic works that acted against the dominant conceptions of self, gender and

cultural difference “constituted in a given, historical and cultural moment” (Foster, 175). Most of the performances Foster examines involve the participation of the audience and the author’s concept of choreographing empathy as a kinesthetic empathy includes neurophysiological and psychological processes that take place during and after the performance. I will extend Foster’s concept to the analysis of dancer’s experience and will argue that performers, as well as spectators, also experience choreographing empathy that might result in other serious processes, such as intimacy with the choreographic piece or the character, and affect or express the performer’s identity.

To examine the legacy of the *Carmen-Suite* today, I will use Victor Turner’s work “Social Dramas and Stories About Them” and Mikhail Bakhtin’s essay “Art and Answerability.” Theorizing *Carmen-Suite* as a social drama will help to understand not only its ban and its lift, but also the ballet’s subsequent reincorporation into the Soviet repertoire. I will portray *Carmen-Suite*’s 1967 premiere as a breach and the ban lift and permit on the edited version as redressive actions taken by the Ministry of Culture, to keep the scandal out of the “Western” press. I will use the social drama concept to understand the socio-political schism between public and hidden transcripts, addressed by the *Carmen-Suite*, and argue that behind the seeming reintegration, this schism deepened.

Additionally Turner’s concept of social drama will help me to understand the consistent failures of contemporary 2005 and 2010 productions of the ballet. I will argue that contemporary *Carmen-Suite* has largely negative reviews and continues to be

misunderstood due to the absence of social drama that was preciously embedded in it. Ironically, as the Bolshoi authorities used eroticism as a method to sexualize and deprive the Carmen character of its protest nature and the *Carmen-Suite* of its hidden transcripts, superficial eroticism is part of these contemporary productions. In this examination of the ballet's legacy, I apply Susan Leigh Foster's concept of choreographic empathy to argue that an absence of social drama in contemporary *Carmen-Suite* also results in lack of choreographic empathy to the character and production, in respect to both – the audience and the artists. I will theorize this processes as choreographic detachment and choreographic indifference and will argue that intimacy is the factor that influences the ballerina's placement of the continuum of choreographic empathy – choreographic detachment/indifference.

Finally, I will apply Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of art answerability to understand why 1967 *Carmen-Suite* had such a powerful influence on the Soviet audience and the authorities and the contemporary 2005 and 20120 productions of the ballet result in consistent failures. I will use Bakhtin's essay to argue that 1967 production was an attempt to reflect the real-life contradictions and tragedies of Soviet citizens and artists; in Bakhtin's terms, the original *Carmen-Suite* answered for life, providing a space for artistic and political protest on the stage, used by the Soviet authorities as a means of propaganda. This concept of art answerability is particularly helpful to understand why the contemporary productions of the ballet fail, one after another. I will show that partly on account of isolation of ballet sphere in post-Soviet Russia and partly over the choreographic detachment experienced by the artists, the

ballet is no longer answerable for life and presents today an empty form of contemporary Russian classical technique, featuring a different, heavily sexualized version of Carmen. Flirting with an audience and artists on stage, new Carmens support the Russian government's traditions of using ballet as a political tool and convey a framework of ballet as incapable to address contemporary problems. Ironically, today, the applause is still directed at Maya Plisetskaya, who comes to see the new productions and welcome the audience, which proves not only that the 1967 *Carmen-Suite* answered for life, but also that the issues of state repression and lack of freedom are still significant for the contemporary Russian audience.

Chapter Outline

To fully consider the artistic and political significance of the *Carmen-Suite* I dedicate three separate chapters to discuss each element of my argument in detail. Chapter Two examines the Soviet Ministry of Culture's ban of *Carmen-Suite*: its imposition, official justification, and underlying political rationale. I investigate the deep anxieties of the Soviet state lurking beneath the official charges of "eroticism" and "borrowed technique" under which the production was forced off the main stages. In Chapter Three I present a close reading of the choreography in the most controversial part of the performance – "The Carmen and Torero duet." I expose the full hidden transcript presented in *Carmen-Suite* and show that it goes much further than "eroticism" or simple appropriation of "non-classical technique." In Chapter Four, I focus on the legacy of *Carmen-Suite* in contemporary Russia and attempt to understand the consistent failures to revive the production. I conduct archival analysis of critical

reviews of the 2005 *Carmen-Suite*, choreographed by Alonso for the Bolshoi, to reveal a lack of choreographic empathy of contemporary performers and audiences with Carmen.

In Chapter Two I introduce the *Carmen-Suite* and examine the immediate reaction of Soviet authorities following the premiere of the ballet in April 1967: the scandal that erupted behind the scenes and the nearly total media blackout that followed. Through archival analysis I establish that classical ballet acted as a powerful allegory, connecting the Soviet state with Imperial Russia and providing historical continuity and legitimacy to usurped political power. I argue that *Carmen-Suite* was banned for violating the myth of Soviet cultural inheritance and for the desecration of the desired connection to the cultural and political capital of Imperial Russia. *Carmen-Suite* serves as a unique example of the collision of artistic creativity, established dance canons and political branding. This performance crystalized all the fears of the Soviet authorities and embodied all the hopes of those who felt repressed within the Soviet system.

In parallel, I consider the role of Maya Plisetskaya in bringing *Carmen-Suite* to the Bolshoi stage. I trace her ability to request and choreograph the ballet to her attained high status of a Soviet prima ballerina and numerous state awards bestowed upon her in recognition of twenty five years of performing leading roles in the Bolshoi's ballets. I conclude that the relative lack of official supervision and censorship throughout the creative process was only possible due to the high level of confidence that the Ministry of Culture had in her political fidelity. I track the influences that developed her as a

protest artist within a highly censored Soviet state. I show that her personal and artistic experiences within the Soviet system of production hardened her determination to stage an artistic protest from inside the state ballet system.

In Chapter Three I expose the full hidden transcript presented in the choreography of the *Carmen-Suite* through a close reading analysis of the Carmen's and Torero's duet. Through this analysis I unseal the metaphors of artistic resistance, paying particular attention to Plisetskaya's mimic technique. I reveal the Plisetskaya's references to the principles of a human machine in respect to the role of the Soviet ballerina within the framework of Soviet production. Furthermore, I find a direct connection between Plisetskaya's ambivalent mimic technique and the juxtaposition of the role of Carmen to that of a puppet. In essence, Plisetskaya references herself as a puppet of the state, forced for years to dance the same roles within the established repertoire of Soviet ballet. Her choreographic empathy with an idea of Carmen, as an expressive freedom, creates a powerful and yet hardly attainable allegory for an artist within a society where culture is subjugated to the will of the state. I expose the role of the Ministry of Culture as a technical manipulator, and examine how Plisetskaya disclosures it in the *Carmen-Suite*, underlying its constant presence behind the curtains, where she directs her artistic aggression. So in this chapter my major research questions is: how do messages, hidden in the choreography and dance technique of *Carmen-Suite*, reach the audience and express the performer's artistic and political views? This question refers to the internal workings of the *Carmen-Suite* and its artistic mechanisms of shaking political and social order.

In Chapter Four I turn my attention to the legacy of *Carmen Suite*. I investigate the effect that the changing political and social climate may have on the audience's perception of politically charged art, such as the *Carmen-Suite*. I conduct archival analysis of critical reviews published following a 2005 resurrection of the *Carmen-Suite* to the Bolshoi stage. Although this production was choreographed by Alberto Alonso, the original choreographer of the 1967 *Carmen-Suite*, the reviews were largely negative in their comparison of the new version to the original. I find, that the new production fails to capture the social drama aspect critical to attaining performers' and audiences' choreographic empathy. I rely on my own professional experience in post-Soviet Russia to postulate that the rift between dance communities, as well as general social fragmentation, introduced a level of choreographic detachment between the 1967 choreography of the *Carmen-Suite* and the realities of contemporary Russia. I conclude that social tension is a critical, but unseen element of the *Carmen-Suite* and without updating the choreography and technique to reflect the current social anxieties, its successful performance will remain largely unattainable.

Data Description

In order to fully understand the origins and history of *Carmen-Suite* at the intersection of foreign and domestic policies of Soviet Union, it is necessary to refer to the Soviet press archives for the time period of the ballet's premiere, ban, and media black out. Issues of central art and theatre journals and popular magazines will be examined for the time period from 1967 to 1970. *Teatr (Theatre)*, *Teatral'naya zhizn' (Theatre Life)*, *Sovetskii Balet (Soviet Ballet)* and *Ogonek (Fire)* will be used as primary

archival materials to answer the questions of Chapter One. Though a period from 1967 to 1970 may be characterized as media black out of the *Carmen-Suite*, I will show that multiple articles on Spanish art and bullfighting were published as intentional advertisements of the upcoming premiere. By examining abundant coverage of other Bolshoi premieres of the period, I will reveal the ways, in which the Ministry of Culture controlled ballet production and prepared the Soviet audience for a particular performance experience. *Teatr (Theatre)* and *Teatral'naya Zhizn' (Theatre Life)* are particularly important for this study because these journals set and reflected the official Soviet artistic agenda at the same time. *Teatr* and *Teatral'naya Zhizn'*, as official journals of the Ministry of Culture, represent the public arena of Soviet cultural policy, where the decision making processes resulted in coverage of particular theatre events that circulated through a mass audience.

To unseal the rationale behind the Ministry's charges of "eroticism" and "borrowed technique," I will examine the 1967 issues of political satire newspaper *Krokodil (Crocodile)*. Through analysis of various caricatures and articles on domestic and foreign policy of the United States, I will reveal the construction of America, the major rival in the Cold War, as an essence of corruption and dissoluteness through mocking of political decisions and fashion. I will show how, through humor and sarcasm, politics and fashion came together in *Krokodil* narrative, defining these spheres as aggressive and driven by the fabricated values of freedom and democracy.

To reconstruct the ballet and reveal how hidden transcripts of artistic protest are embedded in the choreography of the *Carmen-Suite* I will examine the film *Carmen-*

Suite, produced by Felix Slidovker in 1970 and premiered in 1978.³ Though there are several recordings of the *Carmen-Suite*, starring Maya Plisetskaya, available on YouTube, I chose this particular film for a number of reasons. First, it is the closest version to the date of the *Carmen-Suite*'s premiere; it was produced three years after the ban. Second, as I conduct a close reading of the Carmen's and Torero's duet, it is important that Carmen and Torero are performed by the same dancers as during the premiere – Maya Plisetskaya and Sergei Radchenko. Comparing the duet from this 1970 film to its excerpt of the 1967 *Carmen-Suite*, recorded most likely at the premiere and also available on YouTube, I have not noticed changes in choreography. And finally, according to George Feifer, Maya Plisetskaya actively participated in the process of film production, leading the decision-making processes during the shooting (Feifer 76). I will use this particular film not only to reconstruct the ballet and read hidden transcripts embedded in the choreography, but also to examine the close-ups that reveal Plisetskaya's mimic technique.

To examine the legacy of the *Carmen-Suite*, I will analyze reviews of contemporary productions, published in Russia and the United States. Through working with these archives, I will argue that the new version, reincarnated by Alberto Alonso for the Bolshoi Ballet in 2005, presents an interesting constellation of several cultural particularities. First, it represents an attempt to reconstruct and revive the *Carmen-Suite*

³ The film amplifies my main points, though the way it does so exceeds the scope of my thesis; while I understand that dance on screen is different than live dance, that difference will not be the topic of my thesis. For more information, see Branningan, Erin, *Dance on Film: Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), McLean, Adrienne, *Dying Swans and Madmen: Ballet, the Body, and Narrative Cinema* (Rutgers UP, 2008), and Rosenburg, Douglas, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012).

canonical and “innovative,” modern piece of the Soviet repertoire. Finally, it reveals the fears of the Bolshoi administration and or Russian government of the *Carmen-Suite*’s political potential, as eroticism was, ironically, used to deprive Carmen of her protest, freedom-loving nature. And last, this archival analysis, coupled with my own dance experience, reveals dancers’ choreographic detachment with the production as well as the isolation of ballet in post-Soviet Russia and its continual use as a cultural weapon.

Additionally, I will rely on information outlined in the autobiographical book *I, Maya Plisetskaya*. In this work the artist dedicates a full chapter to *Carmen-Suite* and details some of the artistic and political challenges associated with producing and staging it. This book provides a larger context for multiple interviews given by the artist in the post-Soviet period that are available in digital archives and may provide information on the significance of original *Carmen-Suite* production and its complicated legacy. I will use these recorded interviews with Plisetskaya, available online, to examine her choreographic empathy to the Carmen character and intimacy with the production itself. At the same time, these interviews will be helpful in examining the factors that contributed to developing an exceptional individual persona during the training and working in the Soviet/Russian ballet system. I will analyze her narratives presented in these interviews and memoirs to understand what role models predetermined cultivation of Plisetskaya’s canny figure of Soviet/Russian ballerina, fighting for answerability of ballet art.

Literature Review

To accurately assess the origins, evolution and impact of *Carmen-Suite*, it is important to understand its place within the broad historical, cultural and artistic landscapes. While there is a lot of literature on ballet and dance, the works by Susan Leigh Foster, Christina Ezrahi, Ninotchka Bennahum, Naima Prevots, Clare Croft and George Feifer are particularly valuable for positioning my argument. Though the *Carmen-Suite* is completely lost to academic dance histories, these works will help to situate the ballet within a comprehensive historical framework.

Ezrahi's *Swans of the Kremlin* complements this historical overview with a focus on the roles of individual artists within Soviet ballet system, and their adaptation and resistance to the attempts of the Soviet authorities to harness ballets energy as means of state propaganda and a cultural weapon within the Cold War context. *Swans of the Kremlin* describes the overall political-cultural climate of the period of *Carmen-Suite*'s production and will provide primary evidence of state interference in the artistic process and artists' adaptation and resistance to this force. Ezrahi's analysis of artistic creativity in spite of and within Soviet cultural project will be helpful in examining the *Carmen* phenomena and its significance within a framework of artistic resistance.

I will rely on the concept of "artistic repossession," introduced by Ezrahi in *Swans of the Kremlin*, as a basis for the discussion of *Carmen*'s historical and artistic significance. Ezrahi uses artistic repossession to refer to all the ways in which artists recaptured, altered and redefined Soviet cultural production. According to the author, from the very moment of the Revolution, former Imperial ballets needed to prove to the new regime that they had a place in the Soviet cultural project and were not a relic or

even a threat from the Imperial past. Yet, the author points out that even in staging propaganda-like Soviet-themed ballets, choreographers and dancers were able to find creative ways of demonstrating artistic innovation and resistance to the dominant political forces of the USSR. It seems that Plisetskaya's *Carmen*, which was initially banned, but fought for and revived with the effort of Soviet artistic community may be the most potent example of the artistic resistance deserving an additional attention.

To fully understand Plisetsya's relationship with the role of Carmen I consider *Carmen: A Gypsy Geography*, where dance historian and performance theorist Ninotchka Devorah Bennahum presents a history of Carmen's character. European gypsies, as the author points out, remain largely nomadic and, throughout a period of their migration from India and Egypt, have constantly evolved their identity and heritage to protect themselves from persecution. As a result, the author points out, gypsy history is that of the *present*; it must be experienced within the moment and this sense of ephemerality and urgency is central to the character of Carmen. I use this notion to argue that Carmen was intentionally chosen by Plisetskaya as a symbol, rather than an isolated character. Additionally, the notion of Carmen as an adaptable cross-cultural symbol that requires cultural and temporal localization in order to be understood is critical in the discussion of failed attempts to reconstruct the 1967 production in post-Soviet Russia.

Russian ballet traces its history to France; it was introduced to the Russian Imperial Court by French ballet masters and later used as one of the bases for the development of Russian pre-Revolutionary ballet technique. In the discussion of Soviet

ballet influences and legacy *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's staging of Story and Desire* provides an excellent historical overview of the evolution of the 18th century French ballet with a special focus on connecting ballet performances with major political events that impacted ballet evolution. I will rely on the case studies detailed in *Choreography and Narrative* to assess the cultural and political significance of *Carmen-Suite*. In particular, Susan Leigh Foster's analysis of the "human machine" concept, a dominant framework for the dancing body in the 18th century France, reflects the broader understanding of human body within the society. I will utilize this concept in understanding Plisetskaya's references to ballerina's body in the Soviet system of production. Plisetskaya's *Carmen* stepped away from the accepted image of the Soviet ballerina carefully preserved by the Soviets as a symbol of their artistic connection to Imperial Russia. I will use the human machine concept to examine Plisetskaya's mimic technique in the *Carmen-Suite*. In particular, I will focus on the way her construction of *Carmen* as both as a protest figure and a puppet, to reveal the ambivalent position of the artist within the Soviet system of production.

In order to investigate the political framework of the *Carmen-Suite*, it is instructive to refer to two works focused on dance cultural diplomacy within the context of the Cold War. An exceptionally informative work *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* by Naima Prevouts is a major resource for understanding ballet through a prism of its role in the Cold War and the influence of the Soviet foreign and domestic policy on the Soviet ballet system and the art sphere overall. Prevouts' work will be valuable in understanding the Cold War touring experience for the Bolshoi

dancers. Plisetskaya and her colleagues were some of the first Soviet citizens to travel to the United States following the beginning of Cold War tensions and that experience cannot be missed in examining her persona as a cultural actor. Clare Croft's "Ballet Nations: The New York City Ballet's 1962 US State Department-Sponsored Tour of the Soviet Union" presents critical findings on the resistance of ballet art to the political aims of presenting national identity imposed by the governments of superpowers. The author's findings concerning the evolution of dancers' complex identities, burdened with high ambassadorial missions, derived from interviews are very valuable for this study. I will rely Croft's research to better understand Plisetskaya's international touring experience and its influence on her perception of ballet art and herself as ballet artist on the international stage. In particular, I will use Croft's findings on complex dancer' identities to examine why touring outside the USSR was critical to Plisetskaya in her choreographic empathy with the nomadic Carmen character.

Finally, I will rely on the work *Our Motherland and Other Ventures in Russian Reportage* by George Feifer to assess the dual nature of Soviet public and private transcripts within the artistic community. Feifer worked privately with Plisetskaya during the winter of 1969 and dedicated a chapter to the ballerina's biography. His recorded recollections of private conversations with the ballerina on the *Carmen-Suite* will be particularly valuable as they reflect the realities of Soviet artistic life beyond the public image. His interviews with Plisetskaya and other Bolshoi artists provide a unique insiders' perspective on the Soviet system of ballet production and *Carmen-Suite* in particular.

CHAPTER II

CARMEN-SUITE AS A BATTLEFIELD

In January 1967 Maya Plisetskaya, a world-renowned ballerina of the Bolshoi Ballet and a decorated Hero of Socialist Labor, made an unusual request to the Ministry of Culture: to stage and perform *Carmen-Suite*, choreographed by Cuba's Alberto Alonso. According to Plisetskaya, the performance would be just another version of the classical *Don Quixote*, a successful Soviet production that has won official Soviet approval and international accolades in the past. Famous for her roles as Black and White Swan in the Russian ballet classic *Swan Lake*, which she performed for over 25 years, Plisetskaya was known in the ballet world as the exemplary Soviet prima-ballerina. International critics remarked on her incredibly expressive arms, stunning dramatic acting and virtuosic technique. After her tours with Bolshoi Ballet to the United States in 1959 and 1962, the prima became a special treasure for the Ministry of Culture, and was seen as a cultural ambassador of the Soviet state. Almost immediately following Plisetskaya's request, the typically cumbersome Ministry of Culture, the agency created to control and manipulate media and performance culture, granted permission to begin work on the new ballet.

Typically, the Ministry would contact leading artists and task them with promoting political ideals by requesting, supervising and then editing new ballet works (Ezrahi 191, 202). This conveyor belt system of artistic production would periodically be stopped for ideological review by the Ministry, when the entire piece or its parts would be investigated and redacted. As the post-Stalinist political thaw was coming to

end, ideological guidelines became more stringent, crushing the last gleams of hope for the artistic freedom and creativity inside the Soviet Union (Ezrahi 180). Everything that would not fit into the frames of Soviet realism or Imperial classicism would be stopped at the Ministry's checkpoint, banned, and neatly erased from artistic history. The scrutiny level, however, largely depended on the established status of the artist leading the creative process. Plisetskaya, with her decorated status as the Peoples Artist and multiple state awards, including the exclusive Lenin Prize, was spared most of the intrusive sanctions, as she was seen as completely integrated within the Soviet artistic world, and therefore seen as politically trustworthy.

This process of Soviet artistic production fits directly into James C. Scott's notions of hidden and public transcripts. The public transcript in this case, propagated by the Soviet authorities, was that of near absolute artistic freedom, where the Ministry gently guided the artists in their sincere efforts to create works that would glorify the Soviet vision. Hidden behind this mask, however, was an artistic class frustrated with the realities of the Soviet creative process, where an entire ministry was created to oversee and censor artistic production. The hidden transcript of the Soviet artistic system was rarely openly communicated, yet the few glimpses that are evident from the archives paint a very different picture than that propagated by the official Soviet media. In private conversation, recorded by George Feifer, Maya Plisetskaya disclosed an attitude very distant from praise of or loyalty to the Soviet system.

I'll tell you the one thing that explains everything about Soviet rule... It is the *lie*.

Every word here is a lie. Big or little, depending upon *their* needs. Sometimes

you can even tell the truth if it happens to suit *them*. Ungodly lies, vicious and cynical lies... I hate them. There was no dignity for individuals in Russia in the seventeenth century, and there is no dignity in the twentieth. (Feifer 84)

Thus, within the conflict of hidden and public transcripts, the premiere of *Carmen-Suite* represents one of the “rare moments of political electricity when, often for the first time in memory, the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publicly in the teeth of power.” (Scott 13)

Carmen-Suite premiered during the concert dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Soviet rule. It was nothing like the Ministry expected and nothing like Plisetskaya promised it to be. With its non-classical technique and modern choreography, this production was in direct violation of the cultural mission of Soviet ballet. It was immediately banned by the Soviet authorities on April 20, one day following its premiere. “Eroticism” was cited as the primary violation, and borrowed “deviant” technique the second one (Furtseva, Plisetskaya 276). This was more than enough to condemn the production and Plisetskaya herself as a “traitor” to classical ballet, the field to which she dedicated her entire career. Any memory of *Carmen-Suite* was to be eradicated; the path chosen for this was a media blackout and a demotion of the production to second and third-tier performance spaces.

A large media campaign that was initially launched to promote the new production had to be rapidly shut down. In the media reality of the era, this was sometimes impossible and pieces of evidence demonstrating the level of the “emergency” can be found in the Soviet archives. The May issue of the popular central

magazine *Ogonek (Fire)*, ran the photo of Plisetskaya as Carmen, on the cover of the issue. The cover photo depicts Plisetskaya and her partner in one of the most provocative and aggressive poses of the work – Plisetskaya is wearing a black leotard, her legs are firmly planted on the ground, her hands on her hips, eyes looking straight at the camera – there is no remnant of the “elegant” *Swan Lake* star so cherished by the Soviet authorities. With a cover like that one would expect pages of text to accompany it, yet no mention of the performance can be found on the pages of the issue, except for a small text box squeezed between cartoons and fishing news on the back page of the magazine. Typically, the Bolshoi ballet premiere would be covered in multiple worshipping articles complimented by stunning photography. The only modest note on *Carmen-Suite* made the premiere seem as a completely ordinary, and out-of-date production.

This is not the first staging of “Carmen” on the ballet stage. One hundred and twenty years ago famous choreographer Marius Petipa staged the ballet “Carmen and Toreador” in Madrid following the novel by Merimee. Almost thirty years later George Bizet wrote the opera “Carmen”. Soviet composer Rodion Schedrin created ballet-suite on the themes of Bizet's “Carmen.” (Vasiliev 31)

While all three “Carmen” works, created in three different countries, and in different times, seem to be a logical continuation of one another, several inconsistencies might be revealed. First, the text did not make it clear as to how exactly it was possible to reconstruct a century-old ballet, which was staged prior to the invention of film technology. Second, it does not seem rational to provide such a limited coverage on the

ballet “created” by a composer. The authorities could have made a sensation out of an artist who simultaneously wrote the music, libretto and choreography for a thirty minute production all in two months. Third, the text does not explain where the work of *Carmen-Suite* choreographers Maya Plisetskaya and Alberto Alonso fit in, never mentioning the ballet’s initiation and the management processes critical in its creation.

Specialized performing art magazines published in the USSR remained equally silent on the production and succeeded where the popular *Ogonek* had failed – no mention of the major Bolshoi premier can be found on their pages. *Teatr*, a “monthly magazine of dramatic art and theatre,” published by the Ministry of Culture itself, was tasked with covering and critically reviewing most Soviet and international productions. As advertising was an unknown and unneeded art in a country with a centrally planned economy and an emphasis on heavy industry, two hundred pages were dedicated purely to detailed illumination of the “major” events in theatre life and accurate shaping of audience experiences. In essence, this publication was chosen as a major outlet that determined which art was worthy of the Soviet audience and which was illicit. As every issue contained several articles on ballet and reviews of ballet premieres, *Teatr* was chosen as one of the primary archives for this study in order to examine the politics of ballet presentation in Soviet print culture. *Carmen-Suite* was not mentioned among other premieres covered by the April, 1967 issue of *Teatr*, wholly dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the Soviet state and where the Bolshoi premiere was to be the central symbol of Soviet achievement in the artistic sphere.

A thorough review of 24 issues of 1967 and 1968 shows no mention of *Carmen-Suite*, including its premiere on April 20 in 1967, its immediate ban, or its subsequent removal. Interestingly, however, in the months preceding the premiere, several mysterious articles on Spanish bullfighting were published making a case for its performative value. In the February, 1967 issue, a large article titled “Corrida in Pamplona: Sport as Art” by Boyadzhiev and Komissarzhevskii was published. The authors provided a historical overview of bullfighting and described it as “tragic theatre, ancient, as any street action, and passionately intriguing, as any bloody happening” (90) and “artistry as an art that deprives this show of violence and stays in a direct connection with morality” (102). In the following month, an article “On the Picasso Exhibition” was published, again with references to bullfighting. The text begins: “Moscow celebrates 85th birthday of Pablo Picasso...” – a phrase reminiscent of the way articles about Soviet astronauts and other national heroes began. Picasso’s art was presented as an essence of artistic freedom and creativity: “Picasso’s art does not know what an oppressed impulse is, what is an absence of freedom. Thus, it does not know premature degradation. Unrealized opportunities kill an artist, as a commander” (Gaevskii 86; translation mine). In the same March 1967 issue, an article titled “In the Miniature Genre” was dedicated to the new Soviet genre of miniature choreographic performances. The choreographic miniature was presented as a genre that was not burdened with the decorations or Soviet scale of the *corps de ballet*. Instead of depending on multiple lines of choreography, large music sets and costumes, the miniature genre attempted to liberate the dance in its pure form – leaving the dancers and their technique one-on-one with the audience. It

was, in essence, an individual performance that “required a lot from the artist – special plastic expressiveness, completeness and precision of technical mastery, mature artistry” (Demidov 91; translation mine). The miniature genre saw greater deviation from the classical canons of ballet, as the artist was unimpeded by the greater constructions of a grand-scale ballet production. As an excellent example of the new genre Demidov presented *Soldier and Death*, the work by the student of Moscow theatre department, Igor Esaulov, which contained a Toreador (bullfighter) dance miniature similar in character to the planned production of *Carmen-Suite*. According to the authors of this review, the miniature genre opened new horizons in ballet art, as it was about “feelings, characters, and emotional powers of people – the invisible material that weaves the epoch” (Demidov 91; translation mine).

I argue that these articles, preceding the *Carmen-Suite* premiere, may be seen as indirect, yet intentional promotion of the new ballet with a mission of preparing potential audiences by stimulating interest in Spanish themes and characters. Spanish art was cast as synonymous with freedom and originality, and the choreographic miniature was portrayed as an individualistic ballet genre dedicated to “invisible” feelings that “weave the epoch” (Demidov 91). Ballet was presented by this major theatre magazine as an art able to reflect “the invisible,” constructing a new image for ballet artists as highly skilled individuals who dare to unseal “invisible” but significant phenomena.

What is the significance of the press silence that followed the *Carmen-Suite* premiere and its immediate ban? Why does the publication of articles on Spanish art and the emerging genre of choreographic miniatures appear as advertisements for expected

Carmen-Suite? To address this, it may be instructive to consider how another major premiere of Soviet ballet was covered by the same magazine. A year later after *Carmen-Suite* incident, the July, 1968 issue of *Teatr* began with two articles dedicated to the premiere of *Spartacus*, specifically to the new choreographic interpretation of an already existing ballet, made by Yurii Grigorovich.

First, one may notice the importance of a Bolshoi premiere, appearing on the front page. The text, complemented with stunning photography, praised the greatness of Soviet choreographers and the presentation of their talent by world famous Bolshoi soloists. Surprisingly, the main prima-ballerina and Lenin prize winner, Maya Plisetskaya is not in the *Spartacus* cast. Everything that was praised in choreographic miniatures in 1967 – conciseness of the plot and *corps de ballet*, and individual dance – was suddenly out of favor. In contrast, Yurii Grigorovich was conceptualized as a genius who brought the Bolshoi back on the righteous path of a museum of “classical” ballet technique with long historical ballets. The author writes: “He is faithful to the philosophical and psychological drama. He is alien to generalizations and abstractions... Grigorovich does not aim to unseal the underlying causes of the events (obviously, it is unthinkable to do in a ballet), and neither does he reduce it to the details” (Chistyakova 6-7; translation mine). The great scale of *corps de ballet* was not overlooked by the author either: “Episodes danced by *corps de ballet* have special significance. They not only depict the contradicting images of the rebel camp and Crassus’s army, but also reveal the conflicts inside these worlds” (Chistyakova 7; translation mine).

In the following article, another worshipful review about “monumental” *Spartacus* as a “ballet-chronicle,” the author writes: “I am happy to feel that the creative work of this choreographer is alien to pseudo innovation that litters classic choreography with superfluous technique artifices, acrobatics and all that trick lovers use for the effect in their works” (Golejzovskii 14; translation mine). Once again, pre-emptive advertising can be traced in publications preceding this Bolshoi premiere. In the June, 1968 issue of the *Teatr*, a month before the premiere, Nina Timofeeva, one of the *Spartacus* principal dancers, compared experimental Bolshoi chief choreographer Vinogradov unfavorably with Grigorovich. The latter was presented as a more preferable adviser – innovative, but following the canons of classical ballet. Grigorovich’s style was conceptualized as “natural” and thus undeniable in its perfection: “His choreography is peculiar to fascinating naturalness of movement, though in terms of technique it is not easy at all” (Timofeeva 107; translation mine). This article, presented by the highest expert of Soviet ballet art – a Bolshoi soloist, – serves as an advertisement for Grigorovich’s *Spartacus* as the only correct version and Grigorovich as the only correct ballet master – a savior of classical ballet traditions. Thus, *Spartacus* served as a direct repudiation of the experiments integral to *Carmen-Suite*.

It has been shown that, through publications in major art magazines, there was an attempt to shape and define the audience experiences and expectations, building *Carmen-Suite* into the Soviet public transcript. The articles preceding the *Carmen-Suite* premiere, indeed, may also be considered as advertisement to another version of *Don Quixote*, which was the dance expected of Plisetskaya by the Ministry of Culture. A new

Don Quixote was meant to be an instrument of cultural diplomacy in Soviet-Cuban relationships.

Not only Minister Furtseva and her entourage but the Moscow audience, always so kind to me, had expected a second *Don Quixote* [instead of *Carmen-Suite*], sweet variations on a familiar theme. Mindless entertainment. But this was serious, new, strange. They applauded out of politeness and respect, love for the past. Where were the pirouettes? Where were the fouettes? Where were the tours en manège? Where was the cute tutu of the naughty Kitri? I felt the audience sinking, like a drowning signalman, into confusion. (Plisetskaya 275)

Thus, Plisetskaya was aware of the expected and officially valued parts of ballet performances and purposely chose not to include them in the performance. Instead *Carmen-Suite* was meant to expose the hidden transcript, which was focused on representation of artistic struggle, rather than just technical mastery. According to Plisetskaya, the Carmen character, as the axis of storyline, was conceived as protest figure within a totalitarian state system (Plisetskaya 272). In my study I will argue that Carmen was a metaphor for the Soviet citizen's individual life within the communist state. I will examine *Carmen-Suite* as a form of artistic protest and a unifying symbol of artistic opposition in the second chapter of my thesis.

Carmen-Suite was partly banned for the violation of classical ballet canons, partly for eroticism (Plisetskaya 276). Considering this, it becomes clear why the premiere and the ban were not covered in Soviet press – otherwise the censorship and lack of artistic freedom, even for the Lenin prizewinners like Maya Plisetskaya, would

be too obvious to the readers. Most of all the Ministry of Culture did not want the image of a culturally nurturing system to be questioned, nor the image of meritorious artists, such as Plisetskaya to be tarnished by a scandal. “Merit,” after all, was primarily based on loyalty to the Communist party and “artistic service” to the Soviet people. Plisetskaya’s “non-classical” choreography would question the perfection of Soviet education, Soviet art and Soviet values; otherwise, why would a major Soviet prima-ballerina create and perform a subversive work full of erotic and non-classical experiments?

Eroticism - a Convenient Justification for Control

After the publication of Plisetskaya’s autobiography in 1994, a series of works on *Carmen-Suite* followed, such as *Pravda Baleta (The Truth about Ballet)* and *Polety Lubvi Baleriny Russkoi Sceny (Flights of Love by Russian Stage Ballerina)*. Interestingly, in their attempts to elaborate on Maya Plisetskaya’s memoirs, none of the works deviated from the official line of the discussion initiated by the Ministry of Culture. Essentially, throughout these publications, it was once again re-iterated that *Carmen-Suite* was a “great failure,” full of indecent movements, erotic choreography and improper costumes. Eroticism, in essence, was a politically convenient reason for filtering out any art production, particularly ones that contained criticism of the Soviet rule. Once eroticism or indecency was brought up, no further explanations for censorship was required. Soviet rule, by definition, was conceptualized as the only correct system that needed to be installed in all countries to make the world a better place. Soviet citizens were not meant to move out of the Soviet framework of social,

political and artistic order and assess any of these areas critically. Soviet morality was equally presented as unsurpassed by the West, which, in turn was painted as hosting all sorts of immoral behavior – from indecency to sexual deviancy. It was a Soviet analogue of the perfect Catch-22: anything branded as immoral could immediately be branded as Western, and anything Western, in turn, could be branded as immoral. I argue that the true reason of the ballet ban was not its “erotic nature,” nor was it the “borrowed” ballet technique from American companies. Rather, the ban of Plisetskaya’s *Carmen-Suite* is directly connected to the social and political significance of Soviet ballet within the overall framework of the Soviet system.

Classical ballet technique was a complicated symbol used by the Soviet authorities in the Cold War, as well as its perceived attributes: long historical ballets, massive female *corps de ballet*, and “proper” costumes. Violation of all these elements within a choreographic miniature with non-classical technique, male *corps de ballet* and minimal costumes meant much more than just a violation within the art form. In the context of the Cold War, Soviet and American ballet companies were used as political tools for presenting national identities and touring ballet artists as ambassadors, presumably, embodying national identity (Croft, Prevots). While quantitative military, industrial and scientific achievements helped to showcase Soviet technology, ballet, as well as other art spheres, highlighted a perceived qualitative supremacy. Ballet needed to be more than just the “biggest” or “the best”; it was meant to convey the particularity and uniqueness of Soviet culture that was able to incorporate both its imperial traditions and a new social order. Ballet was meant to set the Soviet Union apart from the United

States, as it provided the Soviet state both a historical and modern identity that was projected as lacking in the United States.

While the military race between the United States and the Soviet Union was acted out in the proxy battles of the Cuban Missile crisis, the Vietnam War and the Israel Six-day War, and science race played out in flights to outer space, all the victories here were quantitative. The criteria for both countries were essentially the same: amount of industrial plants built, the number of enemy casualties, and miles overcome while reaching the Moon. And both Soviet and Americans leader knew that in most of these races the United States had the upper hand. Ballet, on the other hand, as well as the other art forms, highlighted a qualitative, cultural difference. If in war and heavy industries the purposes were measured in quantitative way, ballet performed cultural particularity, uniqueness, history and, finally, identity. It did not need to be measured in numbers; it had to convey distinctiveness and exclusivity of Soviet culture and it provided the Soviet system with one of the only avenues of competition, where they could count on a decisive cultural victory.

Carmen-Suite was not the first performance banned for violating the Soviet artistic contract. *The Bedbug*, a work by Kirov chief choreographer Leonid Yakobson, was sanctioned for eroticism and pandering to the West, though the plot was based on a 1920's Russian play by Vladimir Mayakovsky that was lightly critical of the Soviet regime. A quick search allows us to quickly find dozens of Soviet productions where the costumes were just as revealing as those made for *The Bedbug*.⁴ The same holds true for

4 See the costumes for the *Legend of Love* (1965) as presented in October, 1967 issue of *Teatr*

Carmen-Suite. In essence, perceived eroticism in these plays was just a convenient and tested approach to close down these productions. The question that none of the above mentioned publications seem to address is why would Maya Plisetskaya risk her life and career for a 30 minute production if all she wanted to show were her thighs? There could be easier ways to add the erotic to choreography. In terms of costumes, the revered Soviet production of *Spartacus* had much more revealing design, yet it was allowed for production and was subsequently praised by the authorities in Soviet central art magazines, such as *Teatr (Theatre)* and *Teatral'naya Zhizn' (Theatre Life)*. Plisetskaya herself noted that there was nothing erotic in *Carmen-Suite* and sexual excitement was not the purpose of the performance's choreographers (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012).

There are clear similarities between technique and choreography employed in *Carmen-Suite* and that of American ballet companies that Plisetskaya had a chance to observe while on tour, or read about in the Soviet press. Immediately following the New York City Ballet's first performance in Bolshoi, *Pravda* published an article “American Ballet in Moscow,” featuring reviews by the leading Bolshoi artists – the People’s Artist of the USSR, prima Ol’ga Lepeshinskaya, and the Lenin Prize Winner, composer Aram Hachaturyan. The effort of Soviet authorities to participate in cultural diplomacy due to the relative period of Thaw reveals itself, particularly in Hachaturyan’s review.

American ballet has the only disadvantage – the absence of a plot. But it is compensated by the brilliant technique of the artists. Ballet master Balanchine

(*Theatre*), page 102.

creates an absolutely new choreographic language, an utterly unique dance pattern. The world art, the world culture are created in a mutual contact and a close interconnection. I think, our artists, as well as their American colleagues can both learn something from each other. (TAAS 10)

The article features a spectacular photo of Arthur Mitchell with Diana Adams in a female ballet costume new to the Soviet audience – leotard and pointe shoes. A new choreographic language was presented to the Soviet audience in combination with open and revealing ballet fashion, free of multiple tutu layers, artificial gemstones, beads or other decorations. Clearly, *Carmen-Suite* could be described in a similar fashion, damaging carefully-crafted Soviet “authenticity” so prized by the authorities. Instead, *Carmen-Suite* was perceived as part of an intrusive foreign culture, a culture that was constantly mocked and marginalized by the Soviet press.

Soviet Political Satire: Corruption and Miniskirts as the Social Diseases of Capitalism

Ballet was not the only art used by the Soviet authorities in the Cold War and ballet artists were not the only artists rewarded with the highest medals. Caricature artists were in great demand, as no one else could better depict the image of the enemy – the embodiment of capitalist evil. A close look at the specific targets of Soviet satire exposes reasons for the *Carmen-Suite's* ban. In 1967, Soviet caricature artist Boris Efimov received the “People’s Artist of USSR” for his creative caricatures of American society that can be met in every 1967 issue of the *Krokodil*, the major Soviet magazine of satire. Every issue featured several full-page pictures, mocking American government

officials, NATO, war forces, and the participation in the Vietnam War and Israel Six-day war in particular. In the February issue of *Krokodil*, “The Aviary (Hawkus Caucus Americanus)” by Edward Sorel was published, skewering pro-war advocates like Everett Dirksen and Lyndon Johnson, dehumanized and labeled by Latinate titles and puns. The drawing was compared to the work “Predators’ Nesting Place” by Krylov, the Soviet caricature artist, published in *Krokodil* in December 1966. The work depicted hawk-versions of congressmen, nesting on the Capitol, and was presented as an initial source of Edward Sore’s inspiration though it was a cover for the *Ramparts* issue of July 1966.

To illustrate the nature of Soviet satire I include two examples from 1967. In the July, 1967 issue of *Krokodil*, the caricature by famous Boris Efimov decorates the back cover, skewering not only by means of drawing but also through the game of words: “Amerikanskii Tel-Avivonosets” (“The American Tel-Aviv-Carrier”) (Efimov 16). The name of the caricature is supposed to be humorous, as “avianosets” is the Russian for aircraft-carrier, and the prefix “avia” (aircraft) almost resembles the second part of the name of the Israel capital city, Tel Aviv. The caricature features an angry American general looking into binoculars and standing on the aircraft-carrier that consists of two parts: an actual warship and a map of Israel, indicating that Israel plays the role of an aircraft-carrier – the territory that brings United States closer to the all key European countries.

The October issue features another creative critique on its back cover, called “Politics and Fashion,” drawn by another Soviet artist Tenu Pindareva. An American

general is cutting the skirt of woman's dress with a smile and puts the cut piece to his pocket. The woman wears the hat with label "US" and a dress with label "budget"; all the zeros from initial US budget sum transfer straight to the pocket of general with the cut piece of the dress. Under the picture there is a short dialogue between the woman, representing the US budget, and an American general referring to the now very short hemline: "- Its too much, general! – Madam, the fashion requires it" (Pindareva 16; translation mine). This caricature, complimented with the message promoting the idea of close interconnection of politics and fashion, works intricately to convey the image of American government through humor. The main meaning of the caricature is that American politics and fashion walk together hand in hand, are closely inter-related and reflect one another. Both of them are presented as aggressive and driven by "fabricated" values of democracy and freedom, which result in absence of morality of American society. The Soviet audience was presented with an image of the US as that of a nearly-failed state, whose government is corrupt, whose military is bloated and whose women are not cultured enough to put on a skirt of acceptable length.

Corruption in Congress, political "aggression" and mini-skirts were all presented as signs of the same disease – capitalism. The American miniskirt fashion is mocked across all *Krokodil* issues for 1967 year, and to provide one more example I refer to the September issue, which provides the article on Expo-67 in Montreal.

Because of the heat, large part of Expo audience – women and men of all ages – wear shorts. Most of women, particularly the younger ones, wear miniskirts. These fashionable women may be divided onto two categories: the ones have

beautiful legs; the others have just way too short clothes. Though I have seen the announcements placed in one of the tailor companies on Victoria Avenue: “We shorten mini-skirts”. Indeed, if conciseness is the soul of humor, than female clothes in West are becoming funnier and funnier. (Ruzhnikov Evgenii 4; translation mine)

Thus, the mini-skirt was an ambivalent symbol to play with for the Soviet press: sometimes it was presented as dissoluteness of “Western” culture, and American in particular, and at the same time as sign of absence of aesthetic taste or skill to dress up. Miniskirts as dissoluteness were conceptualized as a result of American values of freedom and democracy and made an argument for the existence of Soviet regime and its communistic ideals. The roasting of American fashion was meant to say: look how uncultured and ignorant you would be if not for the righteous Soviet regime that cares about people, that educates them and nurtures. The motto of the Soviet pavilion on Expo-67 said: “Vse vo imya cheloveka, vse vo blago cheloveka” [“Everything in the name of humanity, everything for the welfare of humanity”] (“Namedni 1961-1991: Nasha Era. Year 1967”; translation mine). While Plisetskaya’s Carmen was meant to embody a “fight for freedom” of a person living under totalitarian regime, her costume, like the costumes of other female dancers, recalled American fashion, heavily criticized in the Soviet press. Miniskirt fashion symbolized American immorality and lack of taste, which was continually pointed out in Soviet newspapers and magazines. A direct link was made; eroticism was a symbol of perceived capitalist corruption, miniskirts were a symbol of eroticism, and, therefore, miniskirts were a symbol of capitalism. Putting

Carmen-Suite into this framework was a simple and typically effective strategy to discredit any artistic potential – it was erotic, therefore it was morally corrupt.

The dominance of Soviet classical ballet and criticism of American decadence were two different ways for justifying the Soviet regime. As a result, *Carmen-Suite* was a very inconvenient art work for the authorities: it threatened the intricate framework of references that connected Soviet rule to Imperial Russia, justifying pre-Revolutionary nostalgia, “prolonging” history from 50 years to the 17th century and making an illusion of the state “where everything is in the name of humanity, for the welfare of humanity.” Considering the persistent proliferation of the central newspapers (*Pravda* and *Izvestia*), theatre journals (*Teatr* and *Teatral'naya Zhizn'*) and magazines (*Ogonek* and *Krokodil*) with the theme of the 50th anniversary of Soviet rule, I conclude that the Soviet authorities felt uncertain about retention of power and created a whole arsenal of political-cultural tools to affect and hypnotize the Soviet audience. Plisetskaya, performing the *Carmen-Suite*, proved that technical mastery, expressive choreography and dance and mimic technique are not necessarily limited to classical ballet. Through the *Carmen-Suite* costumes, the prima presented the dancer's dignity and the possibility to reveal distinctive character on stage independently of the costume - dance and mimic techniques were shown sufficiently express this. This work was, in fact, a protest against Soviet ballet stagnation due to its use as a political tool of influence by the authorities. The roots of this protest may be found in Plisetskaya's experiences throughout her career and her interaction with her early career role models, who she saw as responsible for bringing Soviet ballet out of stagnation in its early years.

Female Influences

In the winter of 1970, two years after *Carmen-Suite's* premiere, Plisetskaya was invited by the teacher of one of the Moscow public schools to join first grade students in watching a film-collage of her Bolshoi performances. Following the viewing, Plisetskaya agreed to answer questions from the first grade audience. Responding to a request to reflect on her ballet genealogy, the following dialogue was recorded and later publicized by George Feifer.

Little girl. Who is the greatest ballerina in the world?

Plisetskaya. Living or dead?

Little girl. Living. I mean dancing.

Plisetskaya. I've seen two great ballerinas in my life. Neither is still dancing. No one dancing now seems to me great. (Feifer 57)

While not clearly identifying who were the two mysterious ballerinas in 1970, in her 2012 interview Plisetskaya mentions Agrippina Vaganova and her student Marina Semenova as the two “geniuses” of ballet art. It seems that these ballerinas present two different influencing entities in Plisetskaya’s narrative. Agrippina Vaganova was Anna Pavlova’s peer, and the prima of the Maryinsky Theatre in the first decades of the 20th century. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Vaganova became renowned as a creator of the ballet pedagogical system at the Saint Petersburg ballet school, which in turn was attached to the Kirov Theatre. Interestingly, though Plisetskaya was trained at the Bolshoi Theatre ballet school, she mentioned Agrippina Vaganova as one of her artistic ideals.

When I started to work at the Bolshoi [1944], Vaganova was working there for a month or two. Just with one remark, even with one word sometimes, she [Vaganova] would fix everything. She knew everything about ballet. It was a gift. She studied with everyone else, took classes from Cecchetti and other Italians. But no one perceived [ballet art] as she did. So she had a fantastic nature, fantastic brains for an art, she saw what was incorrect [in someone's technique] immediately. She was given that [gift] by God. You know, it seems to me, she is a Michelangelo of ballet. And she saved ballet art here, when everyone left [Russia] in 1917. There would be no Russian ballet, famous Russian ballet – without her. And no one talks about this, the fact that she saved it. However, it was her. Well, this is an open wound for me, it is better not to talk about this, otherwise I will cry. (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012; translation mine)

Right before this monologue, Plisetskaya discussed her own success and explained it through her artistry and musicality, as given to her “by nature.” As she discusses Vaganova’s pedagogical gift with the help of references to “fantastic brains” and “fantastic nature,” she attributes talent to strictly biological qualities. These “natural” talents, - artistry, musicality or pedagogical talent – could not be taught, according to Plisetskaya; a person needed to be exceptionally lucky to have been born with them. While saying, “It was a gift too,” Plisetskaya links herself to Vaganova, and simultaneously accentuates herself, differentiating from the previous ballet genius: while

Vaganova was an incredibly talented teacher, Plisetskaya was a gifted artist, an expressive ballerina and a dramatic actress.

While listening to the Plisetskaya's monologue about the two great ballerinas, a more interesting correlation may be observed. These ballerinas, gifted "by nature" or "by God," according to Plisetskaya, saved and changed ballet art. Agrippina Vaganova saved it from the destructive chaotic epoch of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, "when everyone left," and the Bolshoi prima Marina Semenova saved it from the stagnation that early Soviet ballet was falling into, in spite of having a strong ballet training system. Semenova was the Bolshoi soloist during the period of 1930-1951, when Plisetskaya was accepted (in 1932) and raised in the Bolshoi ballet school, participating in the Bolshoi performances from her early childhood.

I liked Semenova implicitly; she was a goddess for us. No one danced better than her. Particularly, in the 1930s, when ballet was not interesting at all. When we watch recordings of the old performances, we cannot resist laughing. But Semenova turned everything inside out in 1930 [when she started working at the Bolshoi]. Some ballerinas just had to leave, not to mention Geltser. You know, she just deposed them. No one did that in the history of ballet, as she did. She deposed the old ballet. She rehearsed with me [the principal role of Aurora in] *Sleeping Beauty* [in 1963]. Overall, all the movements I danced were different [in the new version of *Sleeping Beauty* by Urie Grigorovich], but at the same time I was [repeating Semenova as] a monkey. But maybe, all the students are monkeys, they dance in the way that is shown to them. Once, she [Semenova]

even told me, “I did not expect such a submission from you.” She did not expect that particularly from me, you know, as I did not submit to anyone. Hence, she was an authority to me. I did not submit to anyone, as I did not believe anyone. (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012; translation mine)

Plisetskaya’s voluntary “submission” to Semenova, the goddess of ballet art, who in turn was created by Vaganova, another goddess described by Plisetskaya, are critical in understanding Plisetskaya’s actions that led to the *Carmen-Suite* incident. Plisetskaya strongly aligned herself with “the two great ballerinas” and inscribed herself into the female genealogy of genius defiance. Plisetskaya’s role models were ballerinas who were “naturally” gifted and born with a mission to turn ballet art into the direction of creativity, aliveness and originality, and so save it. *Carmen-Suite* was to be Plisetskaya’s artistic and political stand – a statement of her own creativity and willingness to challenge the status quo in a way that her own goddesses did in the past.

It can be seen from Plisetskaya’s comments that she puts herself in the same cohort as as Semenova and Vaganova through recounting her own experiences at Bolshoi and connecting herself to her goddesses through personal effort and greater fate. In her 2012 interview, Plisetskaya highlights that, as a child, she was often selected from a large number of students by the Bolshoi choreographers for secondary roles in the Bolshoi performances, such as the Breadcrumb Fairy in the *Sleeping Beauty* or the cat in *The Little Stork*. It can be assumed that this unprecedented level of access allowed her to develop a deep admiration, based on choreographic empathy, for Semenova in her

principal roles in *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Bayaderka*, *Giselle*, *Cinderella* and other performances.

In the *Sleeping Beauty* I was the Breadcrumb Fairy, it was third or fourth grade, the only one among adult fairies. So, I was chosen [from all the students by the Bolshoi choreographers]. As once Viktor Aleksandrovich Semenov told, after I bowed, everyone made a curtsy and I made it too, “We will take this girl [for the *Sleeping Beauty*’s performance].” Yakobson, Chechenadze, Dolinskaya – these were the people who choreographed [performances] for the students of the school [attached to the Bolshoi Theatre]. Yakobson created marvelous piece *Impromptu* on Tchaikovsky music, where I was the nymph... I have even some pictures left. Hence he was attracted by [my] artistry and musicality, of course. (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012; translation mine)

Plisetskaya explains her selection as a child for the Bolshoi performances through her artistic and musical gifts, and thus draws a line from Vaganova to Semenova, and from Semenova to herself. In Plisetskaya’s narrative, artistry and musicality were her natural gifts that simultaneously inscribed her into the circle of ballet geniuses and made her unique within it. Having this heritage entitled her to both privilege and responsibilities, one of which included a defiant stand in defense of artistic creativity, which was manifested in her involvement with the “subversive” *Carmen-Suite*. This, in fact was clearly perceived as an act of saving ballet, in likeness of what Plisetskaya perceived was accomplished by her two goddesses.

Another important influence on Plisetskaya's career and perception of the role of ballet was clearly Leonid Yakobson, who choreographed *Impromptu* specifically for Plisetskaya as her artistic thesis work at the graduation concert of the Bolshoi ballet school. According to Plisetskaya's memoirs, the graduation concert was a critical event in dancers' lives. Here, young dancers would first be unveiled as the future stars of Soviet ballet and the line between ballet heritage and its future would be clearly visible to the public. The audience's reaction to and acceptance of the new artists was vital; all the elements of the performance, including choreography, technical and artistic mastery, defined future career of upcoming stars.

In Yakobson's *Impromptu* I tasted for the first time the love of an audience and joy of success, the intoxicating roar of clapping hands, the thrill of the first reading... Now, from the distance of the years I have lived, I see that the memorable evening on the stage of the Bolshoi's Second Stage was particularly significant for me. That day I left my meek ballet childhood for an independent, adult, risky – but beautiful – professional life in ballet.

At dawn the next day, war broke out.⁵ (Plisetskaya 51)

For Maya Plisetskaya, Yakobson's *Impromptu* was the gate into the Bolshoi Ballet life and into Plisetskaya's family circle of the prominent artists. Plisetskaya's relatives, uncle Asaf Messerer, and aunt Sulamif Messerer, both leading Bolshoi artists, were in

⁵ Plisetskaya's debut coincided with the beginning of the Soviet Union's participation in the Second World War, which meant an immediate long-term evacuation for Moscow citizens. *Impromptu*, the culmination of Plisetskaya's training in the Bolshoi ballet school, was immediately followed by the two year evacuation to Sverdlovsk and life not just outside Moscow, but outside professional training and performing.

the audience. Plisetskaya's mother, Ra Messerer, actress of the early silent Soviet cinema, was there too.⁶

The Moscow audience was delighted by the number. Perhaps it was – dare I say it? – the concert's high point. We bowed endlessly. Mother was in the audience, and I saw her happy eyes glowing in the first row of the parterre boxes. She was seeing me after our long separation on the stage of the second theatre of the Bolshoi to the strains of the orchestra, conducted inspiredly by Yuri Fayer. He truly was incomparable. The audience applauded wildly, and we kept bowing and bowing, coming out from the curtain onto the ramp. She [my Mother] was happy. Asaf [my uncle], when he congratulated me, made a mocking face: "You bowed like an audience favorite – you should be more modest." (Plisetskaya 51)

The audience's reaction, admiration for Plisetskaya's ballet technique, and her artistic talent, was personified in the reactions of her mother and other family members, who were also ballet experts and renowned Soviets artists. Already at that time, ballet for Maya Plisetskaya meant something more than just a source of self-realization and self-respect. In the chapters about her mother's arrest and exile, "My Mother Disappears" and "Chimkent," Plisetskaya correlates her release from the labor camp and later, from

6 Plisetskaya's mother, Ra Messerer, was released from the exile to Kazakhstan in April 1941, two months before Maya Plisetskaya's debut at the graduation concert in the Bolshoi Theatre in June 1941. Initially, Ra Messerer was sent to the labor camp Gulag "without right for correspondence" from the *Butyrka* prison. According to Plisetskaya, Ra Messerer was released due to the efforts of Plisetskaya's aunt and uncle, Sulamif and Asaf Messerers. "There were six thousand women ("enemies of the people") behind barbed wire – it was a women's camp for wives of arrested husbands. Armed with court documents, she [Sulamif Messerer] moved Mother and the baby [Plisetskaya's youngest brother] to the nearest town, a shabby Kazakh place called Chimkent" (Plisetskaya 42).

the exile, to the efforts of her aunt and uncle and their statuses as the Bolshoi principal dancers and choreographers. Plisetskaya writes,

Russia always respected a person with a medal... And both Asaf and Mita [Sulamif] had just been given awards for creative achievements. For the twentieth anniversary of the immortal October Revolution, Asaf got the Order of Labor of the Red Banner and Mita the Mark of Honor. In those years there were not many medals. Not like today, when everyone is a medal-bearer, with a chest full of ribbons. So they both pinned their medals on their chest and plunged into saving their sister. They pounded on every door, wrote tons of pleas. And they got what they wanted. Mother was transferred from the prison camp to a “free living” settlement in the area. This reduction in the regiment came just in time. In the Gulag, Mother had been forced to carry heavy burdens, push immovable wheelbarrows, and she had a bad hernia.

Mita came to the camp commander to get her sister, wearing her magic-wand order in her buttonhole. She charmed him and made him fall in love with her. At least, that is her version of the salvation trip. (Plisetskaya 42)

By the time of graduation from the ballet school, it became obvious for Plisetskaya that ballet in the Soviet Union was closely intertwined with political power, and the state merits “for creative achievements” could mean much more than just artistic status. In essence, this status had certain political meaning, and could overshadow the “Nationality” designator in her passport, where “Jewish” was definitely not the right entry. In a supposedly integrated Soviet state, which continuously pointed out flaws in

the US treatment of racial minority, being Jewish meant a strict barrier for socio-economic upper mobility. Plisetskaya, acutely aware of her Jewish nationality, could see how Asaf and Sulamif Messerer made the unwanted Jewish label almost invisible due to their status as the Bolshoi artists. Not only had they used their ballet prominence to establish themselves in the society and avoid the Jewish stigma, but saved Plisetskaya from the orphanage, and her mother from the labor camp, and most likely, death. As Plisetskaya correlates most of her “meek ballet childhood” memories with the family history, I argue that ballet with its political significance became a particular source of moral compensation and moral authority. Furthermore, Plisetskaya’s family history and her perception of ballet through this prism may have allowed her to understand the evolving fusion of artistic and political capital within the Soviet system.

Nevertheless, I am grateful to the fates. I studied what I loved. I danced in grown-up ballets. I went out onto the magical stage of the Bolshoi. To the music of marvelous orchestra. Dances were created for me. I had a clean bed. I did not starve. The label “daughter of an enemy of the people” did not ruin my life’s calling. I avoided the hell of a Social orphanage, where they [Soviet authorities] wanted to put me. I was saved by Mita. I did not end up in Vorkuta, Auschwitz, or Magadan.⁷ They tormented me, but they didn’t kill me. Didn’t burn me in Dachau. (Plisetskaya 37)

7 Vorkuta and Magadan were forced-labor camps in the Soviet Gulag (Plisetskaya 37).

According to Plisetskaya, she was not the only child of “an enemy of the people” in the Bolshoi ballet school, and, I assume, in the other Soviet ballet schools. On ambivalent political status of the children of “the enemies of the people” Plisetskaya reflects,

Fortunately for me, the attitude at school did not change toward me. I was not the only one engulfed by the grief. Many in my class had lost their parents in the same sweet Stalinist manner... We were on view all the time but not touched [by the Soviet authorities]. We were already in the palms of their hands. The personnel files were updated annually, even two or three times a year. And you can't hide in a file. Where is your father, where is your mother, when was he born, where does he work, under what statue was he arrested, in what year? Over my lifetime I filled in thousands of these forms. Before every trip. Every single one, readers. (Plisetskaya 36-37)

Constant humiliation by the authorities, questioning of Plisetskaya's family, political and artistic status, was coupled in Plisetskaya's perception with care and respect by the Bolshoi ballet teachers and choreographers. I argue that the use of ballet as a cultural weapon within the Soviet society and in the Cold War was partially based on that ambivalent socio-political position of ballet dancers, with Plisetskaya being a paradigm case. While the performers had outstanding technique, deserving “the intoxicating roar of clapping hands,” the government, armed with their files containing “negative” information, would freely decide their fate.

Plisetskaya narrates initiating, managing and staging of *Carmen-Suite* in 1967 in a way similar to her description of saving her mother from the labor camp and herself

from an orphanage. Plisetskaya explicitly shows in her memoirs that she was able to create *Carmen-Suite* precisely due to her own artistic status inside and outside of the Soviet Union. According to Plisetskaya, the Carmen character, as the axis of storyline, was conceived as protest figure within a totalitarian state system: “a fatal confrontation of a willful person – born free – and a totalitarian system of universal slavery and submission, a system dictating the mores of lying relations, perverted brutish morals, and destructive cowardice...”(Plisetskaya 272). In my study I argue that Carmen character was a metaphor for the Soviet citizen’s individual life within the communist state. To support my argument, I would like to provide a recording of another 2012 interview, taken by Russian journalist Vladimir Pozner, where Plisetskaya reflected on communism and fascism.

Plisetskaya. What is communism, what is socialism, as for me, it is worse than fascism. But they didn't understand it back then.

Pozner. When you say, personally for you communism is worse than fascism, is it because you, personally, have not experienced fascism? Or there is some other cause?

Plisetskaya. No. Through my long life I observed that and that and that. Fascism was visible, and communism was not. To provide an example, what was going on in the camps was known to everyone. What was going on in NKVD camps or prisons – no one knew, it was covered-up, hidden and so on. But I don't think it was better. And I don't think, I don't think, that there were less victims. I think there were more victims and much more. I don't have any rainbow words on this

issue, so for me – communism, fascism... Germans were following orders, but here it was voluntary, it was a pleasure to torture, to kill. (Interview by Vladimir Pozner, 2013; translation mine)

Considering Plisetskaya's family biography, I argue that *Carmen-Suite* incident was an act of artistic, personal and political protest. Plisetskaya's teachers (Agrippina Vaganova and Marina Semenova), aunt (Sulamif Messerer) and mother (Ra Messerer) were ideal role models for the ballerina. Every one of them was a prominent artist, and every one of them resisted Soviet political and artistic control.

While watching the excerpt of the interview with Plisetskaya, cited above, the ballerina's intonation is distinctly different from interviews where the questions focused on her artistic career and ballet history. The pauses in this interview are painfully long, particularly those made after the words "communism" and "socialism." The answers do not just flow lightly and fluently as if they were prepared and rehearsed in advance. Even the vocabulary is not as rich as in the interviews about artistic life. Repetition of phrases such as "I observed that and that and that" and "I don't think so, I don't think so" can be attributed to a much more agitated state of the ballerina during the interview. In a much earlier (1970) interview, George Feifer made a comment on her unwillingness to talk about Soviet politics. According to Feifer, Plisetskaya immediately changed the topic of discussion with "My business is dancing [not talking]" or "I am totally normal. Ordinary in every way. Don't bother looking for something unusual in me" (Feifer 68, 72). At the same time, the ballerina's response was very different when the topic of negative reviews of *Carmen-Suite* was brought up by Feifer, which she perceived to be

driven by political factors. In the interview, taken by *Izvestia*, Plisetskaya reflected on the Soviet critique of the performance.

‘You can accuse me of bias,’ she was quoted, ‘but the fact that I am personally involved with this ballet is irrelevant. Quite aside from this “biographical detail,” I developed an aversion to people who didn’t like Carmen or didn’t understand Alberto Alonso’s achievement. In this rejection of “Carmen,” I see a failure of taste – the expression of a conservative, severely limited conception of art. I am so convinced of the talent and creative originality of this work that no force on earth can change my mind.’ (Plisetskaya, Feifer 61)

In the private conversations with Feifer, which happened after this interview, Plisetskaya presented a viewpoint, contradictory to the stated irrelevance of the performance to her personal life.

With me she discussed the subject in hisses, as if I were ‘Carmen’s’ sworn enemy. ‘It’s the only ballet ever written for me in my whole life. Which means something to a person, doesn’t it? Besides, I’ve dreamt of that Carmen, I adore that Carmen more than any heroine I’ve danced – more than any I’ve seen.

Because she’s my kind of woman – Carmen is me.’ (Plisetskaya, Feifer 61)

The officially stated “irrelevance” of personal involvement meant quite the opposite. According to Plisetskaya, it was “irrelevant” in comparison with the importance of “creative originality” of *Carmen-Suite*, and its talented choreography. But this role and this performance were critical in Plisetskaya’s narrative of her artistic and personal life. It was to become a symbol of her own creative achievement and ability to protect this

achievement against the power structure of the Soviet regime. A victory on this battlefield would allow Plisetskaya to firmly inscribe herself into the genealogy of ballet goddesses, as well as into the narrative of political resistance prized in her own family.

The level of Plisetskaya's defense of *Carmen-Suite* and the significance of her “personal involvement” found its way in an amusing monologue, recorded by Feifer, soon after Plisetskaya's tour with *Carmen-Suite* to England and the negative reviews of the ballet.

Critics are fools. Margot Fonteyn told me that she never reads any critics, English above all. Critics are people who can't do creative work themselves. ‘If you can't make it yourself, teach others’ – that's their motto. Write that down, I want you to quote my exact words on that. Critics are stupid, arrogant, egoistical bastards.

Any fool with enough ambition and spite can become a critic. They always attack anything genuinely creative. A hundred years ago they said Wagner was worthless. They said the same about Rembrandt – when he was on his most brilliant, inspired canvases. Why must this be tolerated? ...

Critics are miserable little bastards. They become critics in their misery over not being able to create – then try to spread their misery to people who can. And English critics are the worst of all, of course. Lumps of you-know-what. Everything that's fresh and strong and creative and alive – everything that deserves the name of genuine art – the English critic hates. (Feifer 45)

One may only imagine what Plisetskaya thought about the Soviet Ministry that blocked news of the performance premiere from reaching the print. Why did British critics matter for Plisetskaya, if the ballet was about “a fatal confrontation of a willful person – born free – and a totalitarian system of universal slavery and submission”? I believe that Plisetskaya's angry tirade to George Feifer, the embodiment of the British press, reveals something more than just “aversion to people who didn't like Carmen.” While Feifer sees the British critique of *Carmen-Suite* as the only reason of “this outburst,” I argue the reason was an inability to openly direct the same anger at the Soviet government.

Ballet Carmen was banned; it was far-far away from what soviet realism was supposed to be. Everyone [in the Ministry of Culture] fainted, they were in despair, claimed it was pornography. There wasn't a single pornographic moment, we did not need that. I am so happy that it is everywhere now, on every channel, in multiple films. I am just gloating now! Here you go! Watch it now! We could not do a movement without permission; special approval was needed. Furtseva was so miserable. Voznesenskii [Russian poet] referred to such people as “victors chained to their prisoners.” She could not allow this work, as she would be deposed from her position if she did. She banned it, while not being against it. You see, she was miserable. (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012; translation mine)

Here, Plisetskaya refers to the overall structure of the Soviet cultural production. It needed to be politically correct and consistent with the framework of Soviet realism in order to truly enlighten a Soviet general audience. Plisetskaya's joyful revenge, “I am

gloating now! Here you go! Watch now!” reveals that her outburst at the English in 1970 was just a way to channel her true frustrations with the Soviet system. In the ballerina's perception, the Soviet Ministry of Culture and Soviet ballet dancers were in the same relationship as “victors chained to their prisoners.” The ministers were the nominal winners due to their adaptive qualities expressed in the stated faith in and admiration of the Soviet Union; ballet dancers and choreographers were prisoners of the state as they could not freely present the products of their creativity to Soviet or foreign audiences. Following Plisetskaya's logic, the consequence of this kind of relationship was in unrecognized talented works of geniuses, who tried to create something “that’s fresh and strong and creative and alive – everything that deserves the name of genuine art.” I argue that the ballerina's reflection on Rembrandt, “They said the same about Rembrandt – when he was on his most brilliant, inspired canvases,” is a reference to herself and the *Carmen-Suite*, as her own most brilliant canvas. In the Soviet dressing rooms, designed for ballet principals or major theatre actors, there was a furniture complex that consisted of comfortable armchair, table, and a large mirror for putting make-up on and preparing for a performance. The mirror consisted of three parts: a central mirror that faced an artist, and two side mirrors that provided reflection from two different angles, abstracted from an actor’s own point of view. While all the female role models of Plisetskaya could be described as a large front mirror and reflect the way she should look like to be able to take her own place in this female genealogy, certain male artists and choreographers could be described as side mirrors. Before every dress

rehearsal and every performance, they would provide Plisetskaya with confirmation about the existence of different perspectives on ballerina and ballet art overall.

Male Influences

In the previous section I touched on the Bolshoi's graduation concert of 1941, where Maya Plisetskaya was presented to the Soviet audience as a future star of the Bolshoi Ballet by *Impromptu*, choreographed by Leonid Yakobson. The reason for providing the excerpts from the ballerina's memoirs was to show the significance of the Bolshoi students' debuts for their artistic career and Plisetskaya's own perception of the audience's reaction, which was exemplified by the responses of her artistic family. This graduation concert was a constellation of several events. Besides the audience's appreciation of *Impromptu*, perceived by Plisetskaya as “the highest point” of the concert, it was the first work and the first role created particularly for her. *Impromptu's* choreographer Leonid Yakobson was one of the choreographers of the Bolshoi Ballet school, responsible for staging choreographic pieces for the students. By the 1960s he became leading Bolshoi and Kirov choreographer and acquired an ambivalent reputation as a non-classical and experimental choreographer. However, within the context of the Bolshoi ballet school in 1941, his interest in “non-classical” technique was not under particular scrutiny of the authorities. Christina Ezrahi described Yakobson's choreographic style in the following way.

Yakobson was unique because he sought to develop a new plastic language within a philosophy of dance as an independent voice of artistic expression... In Russian, Yakobson's choreographic is often described by the term *svobodnaya plastika*, free

movement, which differs both from dance and pantomime and is characterized by movement not subject to the laws of classical dance. The term is also used to describe Isadora Duncan's dances and some of Mikhail Fokine's ballets. (Ezrahi 177)

Plisetskaya, in turn, described Yakobson in one of her 2012 interviews in a similar way as she referred to Rembrandt and Wagner as unrecognized geniuses, while complaining to George Feifer about audience's reaction to *Carmen-Suite* in 1970.

The next [*Spartacus*] was Yakobson's, it was a miracle in terms of stylistics.

Yakobson was a great genius, the only one, [genius] by nature. But not everyone understood him. Then, dancing on demi pointe, in ancient Greek sandals, was considered as not interesting, fouettes needed to be spun. If you do not spin fouette, then you were doubt of having ballet skills. The Yakobson's Greek style was wonderful, I adored Yakobson's Phrygia. But then the new artistic director came, and of course, he deposed everything [Yakobson's *Spartacus*], he needed to make his own *Spartacus*. (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012; translation mine)

Yakobson's *Spartacus* was created within elements classical modern dance technique, which could have been interpreted as having the same subversive genes as *Carmen-Suite*. Grigorovich's *Spartacus*, on the other hand, was everything it needed to be for the Soviet authorities to claim total victory on the ballet front. The technique was perfect – strong classical style with higher jumps, faster turns, and a huge *corps de ballet*, that awed the western critics to the delight of the Soviet press.

Ezrahi provides a valuable excerpt from Yakobson's article on classical ballet, published in the art journal *Zhizn' Iskusstva [Art Life]* in 1928, and it is useful in understanding Plisetskaya's own appreciation of the “non-classical” choreographic style.

... in no art form is there such artistic stagnation as there is in the art of choreography. The classical style, looming like a certain fate and prevailing over all other currents, at the present represents no artistic value whatsoever. A blend of French affectation (which we call for some reason grace) with soulless Italian virtuosity – this is the basis of classical dance. No ray of feeling whatsoever, no progress whatsoever. What beauty can there be in complete and utter unnaturalness? (Yakobson, Ezrahi 176)

Yakobson was known to experiment with ballet choreography and technique while working in the Bolshoi and Kirov. Multiple instances of “borrowed” non-classical dance technique were present in his production of *The Bedbug*, which was also banned by the Ministry. In the Female Influences section, I provided the excerpt from the 2012 interview with Plisetskaya, where she referred to the Soviet ballet of 1920's as “not interesting at all,” contrasting it to the new ballet technique, pioneered by the “goddess” Marina Semenova. I argue that there was a reason why Plisetskaya would frame ballet existing before 1930 as “not interesting,” and part of that reason was Plisetskaya's work with Yakobson during her years of studying in the Bolshoi ballet school, from 1932 to 1941. To provide a support for my argument I would like to refer to Plisetskaya's memoirs on the *Impromptu*, the work choreographed by Yakobson particularly for Plisetskaya and two other graduates.

It's hopeless trying to describe dance. But I'll try. It was all Yakobsonian.

Classical and yet not. Shvachkin and Evdokimov were satyrs, and I was the nymph. The satyrs, as their wont, moved on imaginary hooves. They carried equally imaginary panpipes. They played them, barely touching their lips. That was the dance. The nymph was naughty, tugging at the satyrs' beards slipping out of their grasp, swaying in fragile bends. Believe me, it was a poetic number.

(Plisetskaya 50)

So the “all Yakobsonian” dance, “classical and yet not,” became Plisetskaya's first experience of “the love of an audience and joy of success” (Plisetskaya 51). In her memoirs Plisetskaya recalls the response of Vera Vasilieva, “marvelous dancer,” to the performance: “ 'The best dancing you did in your life was Yakobson's *Impromptu* in school. I never liked you better' ” (Vasilieva, Plisetskaya 50). Plisetskaya recalls “the intoxicating roar of clapping hands” and her mother's “happy eyes glowing in the first row of parterre boxes.” The concert took place on the night of June 21, 1941, as German tanks prepared to cross the border into the Soviet Union. In dark irony, Plisetskaya finished the chapter “Tchaikovsky's *Impromptu*” with the sentence “At dawn the next day war broke out.”

Impromptu was an event that presented Plisetskaya to the Soviet audience and artistic family members, including her mother, just released from the GULAG. It was the “highest point” in her career, not just the graduation concert, but also her artistic success in that particular moment. “The war” shattered the hard-earned mosaic that brought together Plisetskaya's family, social status and artistic success all together. A

year-long intermission in Plisetskaya's artistic career followed her debut in Bolshoi, as her family escaped the sieged city to a provincial town of Sverdlovsk. The evacuation was somewhat premature, as Moscow never fell to the Germans and soon the Bolshoi school was re-opened. Ironically, there was now no way back into the city, as Moscow was now closed-off for those who evacuated, including Plisetskaya. Perhaps for the first time Plisetskaya had to make a choice of direct disobedience of the Soviet authorities in a fight to save herself as a ballerina.

I noticed an item in the paper that said that the remaining members of the troupe in Moscow had given a premiere on the stage of the Bolshoi's Second Stage. The Bolshoi itself was closed. Then we heard that the part of the school had remained behind, too. Studies continued. It was like a bolt of electricity. I had to go to Moscow....

I decided to take a desperate step – to make my way into Moscow illegally.

Mother was in panic and tried to talk me out of it. “They'll pick you up and arrest you.”

“Let them!” I responded. “Time's running out.” (Plisetskaya 55)

I argue that artistic and personal elation at the graduation concert and fear that this dream may slip away was the reason for Plisetskaya's daring escape back to restricted Moscow in 1942. It is not coincidental that *Carmen-Suite*, dedicated to the “fatal confrontation,” had this energy and narrative of a fight against a repressive authority. Plisetskaya's calculating attitude toward state regulations that revealed itself during the *Carmen-Suite* initiating and managing processes and her defiance in defending the

performance against the Soviet cultural authorities is clearly rooted in her perception of her role within the ballet legacy in Russia. She aligned herself with those who acted to change and thus save ballet from stagnation and acted to enact and shield these changes in *Carmen-Suite*.

Today, it is hard to imagine that a short ballet performance could become a flashpoint of tensions between a nuclear superpower and a defiant artist. Yet, in the context of the Cold War, Soviet ballet became much more than a form of entertainment or even a form of artistic expression. *Carmen-Suite* was banned because it exposed the fact that the Soviet state became the oppressor, a direct challenge to the carefully cultivated myth that the Soviet state represented the oppressed. In its effort to wipe out any memory of this performance, the Soviet state attempted to apply its tried arsenal – the performance was charged with lack of innovation, eroticism and “forgotten” in media coverage. Yet, in the case of *Carmen-Suite*, facing the regime was an artist who was both a product of the Soviet artistic system and someone ready to defy it.

Plisetskaya’s training, personal and artistic genealogy prepared her to challenge the state in her fight to bring *Carmen-Suite* to stage and defend its initial premiere and legacy.

Her skillful use of acquired cultural capital, ability to navigate the Soviet system of artistic production and a sense of duty to advance and protect ballet from stagnation allowed Plisetskaya to bring *Carmen-Suite* virtually unabridged to the Soviet audiences.

In the next chapter, I will present a close reading of the choreography in the most “controversial” part of the performance – “The Carmen and Torero duet.” I will expose

the full hidden transcript presented in *Carmen-Suite* and show that it goes much further than “eroticism” or simple appropriation of “non-classical technique”.

CHAPTER III
CHOREOGRAPHIC EMPATHY, INTIMACY AND
PROTEST IN THE *CARMEN-SUITE*

In Chapter Two, I discussed the Ministry's charges of "eroticism" and "borrowed technique" and proposed that the idea of eroticism was a convenient tool that easily justified banning "culturally subversive" works. While examining the charge of eroticism in the Soviet press, I concluded that it was often used to stereotype American culture for the Soviet audience. Eroticism was presented as evidence of immorality and dissolution – the major psychological characteristics of a stereotypical American – a citizen of "the country of decaying capitalism." "Borrowed technique" was a different kind of accusation: it implied "likening of the West" and hence high treason, which often resulted in severe repercussions. Maya Plisetskaya's high social status as a Lenin Prize winner and as a People's Artist of the USSR shielded *Carmen-Suite* from a direct ban though the performance violated not only the standards of Soviet ballet fashion, but also the very canons of "classical" (Soviet) ballet technique.

The "Love Adagio" – Baiting the Ministry or Justification for the Ban?

While working with Plisetskaya's 1995 memoirs and the 1969 video recording of the ballet, I found myself puzzled by an apparent contradiction. The redaction of the "Love Adagio" - Carmen's and Jose's duet, performed by Maya Plisetskaya and Nikolai Fadechev – was the major condition for the removal of the Ministry's domestic ban on the performance (Plisetskaya 276). At the same time, it was not the most controversial part of the performance. In comparison with Carmen's and Torero's duet, the "Love

Adagio's" non-classical violations in the choreography were minimal. The title "Love Adagio" speaks for itself; love is the central idea of the duet. It was, however, a violation of ethical canons established in the Soviet Union, which Plisetskaya summarized in the following excerpt from her memoirs on the negotiations with the Ministry of Culture that resulted in the cut of the "Love Adagio" as the most "subversive," "erotic," and "non-classical" composition.

But we did have to cut the love adagio. What else could we do? At the rise of the strings, at the highest lift, when I freeze in a *la second*, the curtain with the head of [Boris] Messerer's threatening bull suddenly fell in front of Carmen and Jose, keeping the audience from seeing the erotic arabesque, when my leg embraces Jose's hips, the split, the kiss. No need to see that! Only the music carried our adagio to the end. Vartanyan, who had come to his political career from playing third clarinet in a band and was therefore considered a great connoisseur of the musical theater, had followed the minister's instructions thoroughly. There would be no sex on the Soviet stage. (Plisetskaya 277)

Here, it is important to notice Plisetskaya's discussion of the bureaucracy and corruption plaguing the artistic sphere, which partly bound political and artistic fields together in the context of Soviet Russia. I depicted the coalition of these fields in the first chapter to underline the cultural and political authority of Soviet ballerinas. Second, Plisetskaya reflects on the absence of artistic freedom to express a full spectrum of emotions, embraced by the notions of love and passion.

So, coming back to the “Love Adagio’s” redaction as the condition for the domestic ban lift, I was left with two major questions: why did its excision resolve the problem of “cultural subversiveness” of the *Carmen-Suite* if this duet was relatively “classical” in comparison with other parts of the performance? Yes, there was a split, and there was a kiss, but overall I would describe the technique as relatively compliant with the Soviet norms of ballet. Choreographically, the adagio was a moment of complete emotional disclosure and revelation, which was a political statement in itself. But, in terms of hidden transcripts, different elements and parts of the performance seem to me much stronger.

One may imagine just the first few seconds of the ballet, revealing Carmen under the giant black bull’s head, the only decoration of the red backdrop. Plisetskaya’s posture is one of feet separated widely side by side, with one foot aggressively on pointe and with eyes confidently turned to the audience. While the second position separates feet apart more than it was required in the Soviet ballet (the length of the foot), the legs are only half way turned out, toes face diagonally. In the *Carmen-Suite*, this posture is used as the starting point to many combinations that compose Carmen’s dance. Just one element of this jazzy-flamenco posture might threaten the audience: Carmen’s burning and penetrating gaze. Mimic technique plays a special part in Carmen’s role, and the choreographic empathy behind it reveals itself in Plisetskaya’s perception of her role.

She stays in this beautiful posture, not just because she decided to make this pose to show off her leg. No. There is aggression. She aggressively looks at the whole world. And in this pose, in this aggression is all her character. It is a shot, a pistol

or a rifle. She is holding a gun, not a leg... It [Carmen] was always a mockery, always a game, with people and with life, of course. And she knew she was taking a risk. (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012; translation mine)

By highlighting the visible transcript of aggression, Plisetskaya refers to “the whole world” – or to the Soviet state, according to the ballet’s major narrative presented in her memoirs. *Ogonek* magazine’s May 1969 cover featured a photo of Maya Plisetskaya as Carmen, standing in the version of this pose. I believe it is not coincidental that Plisetskaya performed this pose for the *Carmen-Suite*’s premiere picture; the way she seriously, almost tragically, looks into the distance reflects the significance of the pose and contradicts its perceived erotic nature.

The very beginning of the *Carmen-Suite* starts with the complicated metaphor of Carmen as a Soviet ballerina, who might seem a small and insignificant puppet within the Soviet system of production but in reality, might reveal her strong artistic personality. The bull in *Carmen-Suite* is also symbolic of both: the Soviet regime and its product - the Soviet artist, who might turn ballet as a cultural weapon against the regime with an uncontrollable force of aggression, fighting against oppressive social or artistic conventions. These first few seconds of Carmen’s aggressive posture within the *Carmen-Suite*’s symbolically rich and ambiguous stage set is drastically different from the sheer happiness of the “Love Adagio.”

I wonder if Plisetskaya included the “Love Adagio” intentionally, to focus the Ministers on the adagio’s “erotic” nature rather than on the truly subversive parts of the performance? Could Plisetskaya foresee that she might need some red cloth as a

distraction for the Ministry to allow the redacted version of *Carmen-Suite*?⁸ Could the erotic nature of the piece itself be the veil for the major political hidden transcript, located in the different sections of the performance? At the same time, could it be a convenient justification for the Ministry's ban to minimize the conflict with Plisetskaya as the leading ballet artist and spreading of the ban news to the West? Control of eroticism might only underline "genuine" efforts of the Ministry to save and recreate culturally and morally refined Soviet society. The charge of "borrowed technique," on the other hand, was a statement, implying a penalty for experimenting with "Western" or American dance genres and would carry much tougher sanctions.

Carmen and Jose are the major characters in the adagio. Within their storyline, the last few minutes of the *Carmen-Suite* seem to be symbolically stronger rather than the actual "Love Adagio." When Jose kills Carmen, he is wearing a bright red shirt, symbolic of the color synonymous with the Soviet rule. The last few minutes are crystal clear, definite and lucid: Carmen, a metaphor of artistic creativity, dies in the hands of red-shirted Jose - the repressive regime kills artistic creativity. But the *Carmen-Suite*, as the battle of Plisetskaya and the Ministry of Culture, lies precisely in Carmen's and Torero's duet, where in the collision of different dance techniques the battle between artistic creativity and state control reveals itself. I argue that Carmen's and Torero's duet is allegorical of the *Carmen-Suite* itself; it is the heart of the ballet, encompassing major political and artistic transcripts and metaphors. The level of the *Carmen-Suite*'s emotional tension reaches its highest point in this duet, disclosing to an audience the

⁸ In this context, "red cloth" refers to a common Russian metaphor for distraction; originally, it refers to the traditional matador cloth used to distract a bull during bull fighting.

tragedy of Soviet ballet, trapped by the Soviet regime as a prized fighting bull, yet having only one destiny ahead of it. Below, I provide a close reading analysis of the Carmen's and Torero's duet and attempt to decipher the metaphors embedded in its choreography and technique.

Carmen and Torero: Battle-Romance

In *Carmen-Suite*, the duet of Carmen and Torero starts before the actual dance duet. I believe this duet is both a romance and a battle and it begins with Torero's solo, when Carmen appears and positions herself on the side of the stage gazing upon him as he performs. Sitting in a split on a small stool, with one leg stretched back and the other bent and put on the forced arch in front of her, Plisetskaya is tilted forward, making a straight line from her chin to the pointed back foot. Her bent arm with elbow on her bent knee supports the tilt of the upper body and accentuates angular forms of the front leg and arm. The wrist of the front arm, supporting neck and elevating her chin, makes the latter the highest point of the whole bodyline and presents Carmen as majestic and proud woman with independent and strong character. It seems that the posture's geometrical, linear, angular nature serves as a metaphor of Carmen's uncompromising confidence. More than anything, this sharp straight line from Plisetskaya's chin to the pointed back foot resembles a bow with a loaded arrow pointed at the Torero.

Three elements – imperious gaze, elevated chin and frozen pose – make Carmen look almost like a picture of a queen who coldly observes her servants or potential partners. While sitting frozen on her “throne” and not dignifying Torero with a single emotional or kinesthetic reaction, Plisetskaya looks into the distance, across the stage,

which is filled by Torero's exceptional dance. While Torero tries his best to impress Carmen by presenting various body twists and isolations from classical jazz dance, she observes patiently, coldly and seemingly indifferently. After Torero's performance, where jazz technique and percussion accompaniment serve to underscore the "male" character, the music stops and Carmen gets up from her "throne" and condescends to Torero. After making several steps in his direction, Carmen stops in a wide second position, with hips protruded and gaze directed to Torero, and the upper body tilted to the opposite side to underscore her "indifference" and "detachment" to the new object of interest. The violin starts this very intimate conversation of Carmen and Torero, "leg conversation," according to Maya Plisetskaya ("Stihiya po imeni Maya," 2012). With the first sound of the string orchestra, Carmen swings her relaxed arm, closest to Torero, to the back and hides it behind her back, while sinking into one-leg *demi-plié*, which enhances upper body tilt. Her gaze still penetrates Torero, when she suddenly switches the weight to another leg by bending it, now looking at Torero suspiciously and aggressively, as if showing her ability to maneuver in her own river of feelings. At this moment, Torero moves closer to Carmen, but she turns away and puts her working leg on its heel and presses it into the floor, highlighting the flexed foot. The flexed foot position is underscored by a horizontal arm gesture, which is repeated, after switching the weight to the other leg.

This movement seems significant; I interpret it as Carmen's unwillingness to follow rituals of acquaintance, presented and elaborated in classical ballets with references to court traditions of social interaction. Carmen accompanies her flexed feet

with a horizontal arm gesture, palm facing outside, refusing accepted ballet conventions and social interactions they inscribe. Instead of a usual bow, she steps with a pointed foot to Torero, and suspends on pointe making reversed jazz fan kick, nearly missing Torero's head. Torero trembles as Carmen finishes the kick, facing the audience, and turning her back to Torero, as if to announce her as the one leading this "conversation." Suddenly, she comes on pointe and sways her hips lightly, barely visibly, from one side to another with arms on her hips, as if signifying that she is still feminine, though leading this dance. Then, Carmen suddenly comes off pointe and leaves one leg in the forced arch, as if to show that it is her choice how to present herself – through classical ballet technique or her own. At that moment, she turns her gaze to Torero, headily approaches him and completes an extremely non-traditional *arabesque-penchee* on pointe. Rather than keeping the strong arch in the upper back, Plisetskaya drops her back, making one straight line between her working leg and back, almost touching the ground with her head, while her partner rotates her. Suspended in this "upside down" *penchee* on pointe, Carmen swings her leg from arabesque to perform a front kick, facing the left side of the stage. Interestingly, this *penchee* looks similar to fan kick motion in jazz dance; the difference is that the whole body makes the *penchee* fan, not just one leg. The front kick, which so organically flows out of the fan *penchee*, is directed to the same side of the stage as the "pistol" kicks, which embody aggression at "the whole world", as Plisetskaya described in one of her interviews, referring to the Carmen's first solo ("Stihiya po imeni Maya," 2012).

Plisetskaya's fan *penchee* with a kick represents a highly complicated "non-classical" dance element, which seems almost unexpected by her male partner. This unexpected move is symbolic of *Carmen-Suite* itself: a surprise that caught the entire Soviet cultural system off-guard. Plisetskaya promised to create a second *Don Quixote*, pacifying any worries of the Ministry; the pique step and first second of arabesque was a similar promise of traditional technique to follow. Could this complicated movement, possible only with the help of trusted male partner, embody the *Carmen-Suite* as complicated operation – created by Plisetskaya but managed and brought to the Bolshoi stage with the help of her male colleagues?

After completing her opening choreographic sequence, Plisetskaya makes very sophisticated small steps on pointe with one arm resting on hips and another stretched to the front in a way, as if asking Torero to kiss it. Walking away from Torero, Carmen looks at the audience and performs steps perfectly following the string accents, as if the music was playing for her. Suddenly, she comes off pointe, turning her gaze to Torero and leaving one foot still on forced arch, approaches him and performs another trick. Starting again with *penchee* "upside down," almost touching the floor, Carmen lifts her upper body into a classical arabesque after rotation, but with the help of inertia – one of the basic methods of modern and jazz dance techniques – she swings back through the upside-down *penchee* and lifts the upper body to perform a *fouette*.

According to Soviet ballet technique, the upper body should not bend and ideally stay "centered" and "unshakable" to stabilize dancer while it managing *fouettes*. Only light accents with the arms, shoulders, head or neck could make certain adjustments to

the pose, and only after completing *fouette* or any other ballet trick, serving as a bridge from one position to the other. Here Plisetskaya, again, drops her upper body and creates a line from her working foot to the head. After her non-traditional *fouette*, she finds herself, embracing Torero while he holds her straight working leg opened to the front and turned to the same angle – a target of aggression to “the whole world.” And, in this pose, again, Torero provides support to perform the embodiment of “pistol or rifle” (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012; translation mine). Holding Carmen in this pose, with a leg stretched to the front at about 150 degree angle, Torero drags her to the side indicated by her “shooting” leg. This is definitely not the traditional lift of a weightless romantic ballet dancer. He pulls her, frozen in this posture, as some kind of heavy object, or, according to Plisetskaya’s logic, a cannon.

Torero stops and Carmen, with body frozen in this pose and her gaze on him, lifts the supporting leg very sharply to touch the other leg, suspended in the air and held by her partner. I cannot assign any dance term to this sharp movement. This sudden and sharp elevation of the “supporting” or seemingly frozen leg, lifted to meet the working one, suspended in the air, is accentuated with the string orchestra. The left side of the stage has been previously “attacked” by Carmen’s kicks, and targeted by her spectacular bow and arrow. This sharp elevation of the supporting leg to touch the working one and its subsequent rapid lowering is reminiscent of loading, or cocking a weapon. The movement is mechanical in nature and rapid in execution – as if a gun bolt is pulled back and then set in place in rapid succession.

The overall orientation of the sharp kicks to certain sides of the stage seems to be predetermined by the choreographers. Could it be possible that the embodiment of “fatal confrontation of a person – born free – and a totalitarian regime” needed a certain space or place on the stage to be attacked by such a person? The embodiment of a prohibited narrative is complicated within highly censored societies and, in the absence of verbal language, could these movement abstractions be the method to attack the totalitarian regime? Within the space of stage, where else could the repressive regime be located if not behind the curtains, which act to hide the artists and all the inner workings of production, including official oversight, censorship and suppression.

Continuous reference to the entity behind the curtains is evident throughout the performance and within this duet the movements have additional meanings. Still holding Carmen, after her triggering attack, Torero manages and controls her next movements. Holding her waist with one arm and the working leg with another, he makes her do *grand battement jete balancoire*, followed by half-turns in *a la seconde*. These movements differ from the Soviet ballet canons, not only in technique, but also in the character of the dancers’ interactions. In Soviet duet conventions, the male body is allowed to encounter the female body just for the purpose of exceptional ballet tricks: for example to help the ballerina achieve additional height in grand jumps. In *Carmen-Suite* the level of intimacy between the dancers is greatly increased. Here, Torero encounters Carmen with all his body while making her perform her unconventional dance elements. At times Carmen seems like a doll in Torero’s hands; only her gaze, penetrating and scrutinizing Torero, proves that she is alive.

After the repetition of these beautiful elements, carefully and intimately managed by Torero, Carmen makes a second hint to her aliveness. She concludes the combination with wrist accents, accompanied by the accents in music. I believe that this position may serve as a metaphor either of relationships between ballerina and choreographer or ballerina and the Ministry of Culture, or of both. While Torero initiates all the movements in this combination, Carmen still adds hints of her own perceptions and interpretations of the exchange: her accents with her wrists and gaze here are remarkable. I believe Plisetskaya wanted to show here that ballerinas critically assess the material they are given by choreographers, that they are not just physical instruments in repetitive performances, though sometimes it may seem like it. That is, ballerinas do not only “dance” the material, but also interpret it and reveal their interpretation and choreographic empathy through the movements that were not predetermined by choreographers, even if the audience would only see these as embellishments or accents.

As Carmen’s wrist accents are emphasized by the string instrument notes, Torero supports her upper body and straight leg pointed at the left side of the stage. Above, I showed that most of the kicks or *grand battements*, performed by Plisetskaya, have a certain direction and are aimed at this side of the stage. Described by Plisetskaya as shots from “a rifle or a pistol,” these directional aggressive movements, similar to *grand battements* with suspension, suggest that their target could serve as a metaphor of Carmen’s oppressor. The sharp raising and lowering of Carmen’s supporting leg as if cocking a weapon furthers the pistol metaphor.

After Carmen makes her own additions to the dance text with her wrist accents, Torero forces her back to the center of the stage, literally moving her legs to take steps back. He thrusts her leg, pointed to the left curtains, back and down through a *passé developpe* to *croise derriere* at the floor, as if trying to stifle her anger while lowering her leg and pushing it to *croise derriere*. After Carmen takes a step back and tries another kick towards the curtain, he catches her leg again and pushes it back and down through the same sequence of movements. Though Torero makes Carmen back away from the aim of her aggression, she highlights this intense *croise derriere* position with an incinerating gaze and straight arm, directed at her real “aim” – the Soviet system of repression.

Carmen is not a woman who likes to be subjugated. Following the previous sequence Carmen’s gaze falls at Torero and her arm presses against his chest to resist his attempt to prevent her aggression. Carmen is furious; everything in her pose screams, “How dare you stop my fire?” Torero takes her hand as if trying to get control of her movements back, but Carmen forces her hand out and turns away from Torero, as if saying “I don’t need your help anymore.” First, turns her back to the audience, as if there is no audience at that moment of private conflict, as if all of this is happening backstage. Then, she turns to the audience as if coming back to the stage, to her public life and space as a ballerina. And facing the audience, she suddenly comes on pointe and, by dropping to a flat back and tilting the hips horizontally to make the line with the tilted upper body, she sharply elevates the leg to the second parallel position or paralleled *a la seconde*. While this position is often used in modern dance, jazz and

contemporary, its balance and turns are dependent on certain positions of the supporting leg and foot. As the tilted forward upper body moves the center of the whole body forward and no longer stabilizes it, the only way to sustain balance is to stand on the whole foot or just slightly take the heel of the ground if turning in this position. However, coming on pointe and simultaneously elevating one leg off the floor up to 120 degrees and tilting the upper body to flat back, is inevitably followed by an unbalanced fall, especially if performing this element with the same vigorous energy and sharpness as Plisetskaya does. But, in the same sudden way as Carmen comes on pointe to perform this unconventional element, Torero catches her and turns in this paralleled *a la seconde* with a flat back. Suspended on point during this turn Carmen is, again, like a doll in Torero's hands. Her whole body is frozen in this posture, even her fiery gaze. Her arms are fully extended in the second position; the vacant expression of Carmen's eyes adds to the puppet character of the pose itself, at which she is captured and managed by Torero.

Plisetskaya finishes this turn in a modified *la seconde* with a *soutenu en tournant*, as if forcing herself out from Torero's effort to save her from the fall by controlling her. She puts her leg onto his shoulder, still suspended on pointe, as if signifying that she is the leader now. Torero embraces Carmen in this posture by supporting her lower back and starts to rotate her. He stops the rotation when her leg is aimed at the left side of the stage again leaving no doubt that this posture is a metaphor for a weapon aimed "behind the curtains." The way Torero rotates Carmen, frozen in her aggressive posture with a leg on his shoulder, brings up a clear image of a cannon,

rotated on a turret. Carmen looks across her leg, as if she is the one aiming the gun, while Torero acts as a stable surface needed for a more accurate shot.

Alberto Alonso, the choreographer of *Carmen-Suite*, provided a supportive shoulder in creation of this “subversive” ballet, so this rotation makes me think that elements of Carmen’s battle-romance with Torero are metaphors for Plisetskaya’s work relationship with Alonso. The way she scrutinizes Torero in the beginning, measuring his creative abilities and his attempt to take control of her during the piece, may reflect the overall structure of the relationship between leading Soviet ballerinas and their choreographers. Choreographers were intermediaries between ballet dancers and the Ministry of Culture; their job was not only actual choreographing of the ballets but also making sure the new ballets would be allowed for production. The major message, presented by Plisetskaya’s dance in the beginning of this duet, is establishing herself as an equal to Torero (or her potential choreographer) and protesting against the power differential between ballet dancers and choreographers.

They freeze for a moment in this cannon posture, and then Torero elevates Carmen and rotates her to face the audience and elevates her on his hip. Both of her knees are bent now; she looks at the audience while Torero looks at her. Their bodies are intertwined, revealing the complexities of ballet hierarchies. Her gaze at the audience underscores their co-dependent position; while Torero holds her body, she sits on his hip as on a throne, with one leg still on his shoulder. What happens next, accentuates the power battle even more. Carmen comes off her live throne and turns her back to the audience to face Torero, separating feet widely apart and placing her hands on the hips.

In doing so, she violates one of the major rules in ballet – to never turn one’s back to the audience. Torero comes closer, placing his controlling hand onto her shoulder, but Carmen forces herself out again, makes several steps to the left side of the stage and puts one leg onto a forced point in front of her. She looks aggressively at the distance, and transfers her weight to the pointed foot, as if wishing to approach something, but turns to Torero who is walking away. Carmen walks behind him, passes him, and then stops suddenly in Torero’s way with a deterrent gaze and elevated arms blocking his move.

Sometimes I think the Carmen and Torero duet might be more than a metaphor for the relationship between dancers and choreographers, with Alberto Alonso as Torero. It seems that Torero could also be a metaphor for Rodion Schedrin, Soviet composer and Plisetskaya’s husband, who modified Bizet’s music for *Carmen-Suite*. Interestingly, none of the leading composers of the period agreed to write the music, including Shostakovich, the president of the Union of Soviet Composers, and Hachaturyan, a prominent member of the Union. “Shostakovich scratched his head and replied, ‘I am afraid of Bizet, Bizet I am afraid of;’ Hachaturyan just avoided this topic, pouted his lips and walked away” [“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” translation mine]. In her narrative Plisetskaya underscores that her husband, who modified Bizet’s music for the string orchestra and percussion, was the sole reason that she and Alonso were able to choreograph and stage ballet in twenty days. At the same time, Plisetskaya accentuates Schedrin’s initial unwillingness to write the music for the *Carmen-Suite* too.

He thought that we [I and Alberto Alonso] are doing some nonsense, but then he agreed to come to the rehearsal to see what we are doing. And when he saw how

we are making this leg conversation with Sergei Radchenko [Torero], he thought it's interesting and wrote music for us." ("Stihiya po imeni Maya," translation mine)

So, Torero, unwilling to follow Carmen's aims, may be a complex metaphor for reluctant male artists on whom the creation of *Carmen-Suite* depended. Torero is a contradictory character who might be representative of both artistic classes – Soviet choreographers and composers. While being creative, innovative and mostly supportive of Carmen's tricks, he still tries to suppress and control her actions. The moment when Carmen is standing in Torero's path, as he tries to walk away, reminds me of the part of the 2012 interview when Plisetskaya discusses the moment she talked Schedrin into writing the music for the new ballet by performing its early sprouts, and thus blocking one of her artistic partners from walking away from the production.

Carmen's gaze at Torero as he is walking away is remarkable. Torero, as if finally agreeing to participate in her subversive dance, suddenly takes her by the waist and elevates Carmen high above the floor to increase the amplitude of Plisetskaya's *sissonne fermee en tournant*, which she executes four times across the floor. This particular suspended jump finishes all four times with the grand battement leg closing through passé to plied position, with feet crossed and one put on pointe. Plisetskaya freezes for a second in this concluding pose of the jump, and faces Torero, while turned with her back to the audience. Before every *sissonne fermee en tournant* she scrutinizes him again in this back-turned posture with one foot on pointe and one arm extended to the side in a prima-ballerina manner. This series of jumps is not about the audience, but

rather about Torero's and Carmen's relationship, in which she tests him again to make sure he does the combination across the floor toward the left side of the stage the way she planned it. As this combination across the floor consists of four repetitive complex movements, requiring efforts of both Torero and Carmen, I interpret it as the metaphor for the rehearsal process, which preceded the premiere of the *Carmen-Suite*. As it is the only combination where precise repetition of the movements may be found, I perceive it as the moments during which Carmen (or Plisetskaya) still examines and inspects Torero (her choreographer). With these collaborative movements they pursue the same previously identified angle of the stage – the target of Carmen's attack.

For a moment, Carmen turns to the opposite side of the stage and pointes *tendu croisee devant*, with one arm stretched to the left. The meaning of *croisee* position in the legs is critical if this pose is perceived within the context of hidden messages. *Croisee* means "closed" (from the audience's eye) and I argue that, in the context of the preceding combination signifying the *Carmen-Suite* rehearsal process, Carmen's quick turn away from her aim is a metaphor of the final preparation for her statement of political and artistic protest. *Croisee* is closed position of a person having a secret plan. Shielded from the Ministry's eye, rather from the audience's, Carmen makes this movement sharply as if taking a deep breath before attacking.

The arm pointing to the left side of the stage signifies and prefaces the direction of her next movements. She turns back, penetrating aggressively the left side of the stage and makes large steps back in *plié* to the opposite side of the stage. With each step she stretches her back leg to *tendu derriere* and swings her straight arms so that when she

freezes in plied *tendu derriere*, her arms are stretched horizontally to the opposite sides of the stage. As Torero repeats her movements behind her, Carmen unexpectedly turns her gaze to the right side of the stage, comes up on pointe and starts to perform a *fouette* by kicking her leg to the front and turns back to the left side. While turning in suspension, she does not finish her *fouette* but instead comes off pointe into *plié* and pointes *tendu devant* again.

Torero stands in the way of her aggression and makes an arm gesture as if putting the toreador's red fabric in front of her. Carmen is frozen in this *tendu devant* posture with arms bent above her head. Carmen is now a metaphor for a furious bull – an uncontrollable force of aggression, a metaphor that is absolutely clear. While looking at Torero, holding the imaginary red fabric in front of Carmen, it is important to remember that red was the symbol of Soviet regime and Soviet authorities. And Torero is a metaphor for Bolshoi's choreographers here. Who else could represent the Soviet authorities if not the choreographers who were responsible for political sensitivity of ballet productions?

Right after her bull posture, Carmen unexpectedly falls on Torero to be suspended in a diagonal position, as he holds her remaining in a wide second position. Suspended in this diagonal, Carmen makes two turns with the working leg in paralleled *passé*, making kicks to the front after each rotation, as if trying to break away from Torero's control. At the same time Torero is helping her to execute these physically difficult and non-traditional technique elements; their gazes meet each other during these kicks. He lifts her back to the vertical position of the body, and she immediately

kicks to the front again and bends her spine while closing the leg after the kick to fifth on pointe. Immediately after she performs *pas de bourree* on pointe with deep contract in spine, moving under Torero's hand and thus breaking out from his control or support.

After finishing the *pas de bourree en tournant*, Carmen and Torero make a circle with simple steps, meet each other in the back of the stage and in eight counts, slowly and synchronously, turn into a classical jazz fourth position with paralleled feet and twisted-tilted upper body. While their feet and hips are turned to left side of the stage, their upper bodies and gazes are turned to the audience and their arms are stretched into one diagonal line. They freeze in this posture and it is one of the rare moments when spectators can feel that they are dancing for the audience. This is one of the most fascinating moments, as right after entering this jazz position, they sharply close their back legs to classical fifth position. Plisetskaya not only closes her leg to fifth position, but puts her arms on her waist, as if she wants to symbolize a proper ballet student. Torero's arm is stretched to the side, still holding the imaginary red fabric. Both of their gazes are lifelessly frozen and directed at the audience, as if they are puppets.

At this moment, Torero moves his foot to Carmen and transfers his weight onto it. Carmen puts her hand on his shoulder and touches his foot by stretching her leg to crossed *tendu devant*. Feeling this touch, Torero turns the bent leg inward and outward, both of them look at the point where their feet touch each other. Then Torero looks at the audience again; he is scared. After all, he is fighting with a raging bull. Carmen in turn looks cold, reserved and frozen. Their mimic techniques during this "leg conversation" are so contradictory in terms of possible audience's kinesthetic reactions.

They show that Carmen is still a puppet of the Soviet system, though furious at it as an enraged bull.

Carmen performs a *rond de jambe en dehors*, moving her foot away from Torero's touch and hiding it behind her. At the same time, she immediately points another foot to crossed *tendu devant*, in the same way she did before, but to the opposite side. It could be framed as a light flirt with Torero, but her serious face expression does not allow this. At this moment, Torero finally looks at her, though she still looks at the floor, completely transfers his weight onto the leg, previously moved to Carmen and makes a turn on this foot. Facing Carmen, but turned to the audience with his back he touches her stretched leg in *tendu* completely with his leg. Without any change in her gaze, Carmen takes two steps away from Torero and stands at the same crossed *tendu devant*. In turn, Torero makes several steps to her, again sinking into plié with one leg stretched along Carmen's leg. He touches her waist, but Carmen breaks out of his arms again. Music becomes more and more tense as Carmen makes several impetuous steps to the back of the stage and stands in her characteristic posture – with feet separated widely apart, soaked in one-leg plié and hips protruded to Torero. Torero turns to her, freezes for a moment, then approaches her; Carmen raises a hand, but Torero shows her the imaginary red fabric again. Then he approaches, catches her by the waist as she comes on pointe and performs paralleled *grand battements developpe* through paralleled *passé* to different sides, while standing on the same leg on pointe. The tension in the music reveals itself even more, and Carmen, after smashing the space around her with these impetuous kicks, runs across the stage, makes a reversed fan kick and leaves the

working leg on pointe, directed to Torero. As a bull that paws the ground before attacking the Toreador, Carmen shows her foot, placed on the forced arch on pointe with her impetuous gaze and straightened arm directed to Torero. He pulls the imaginary red fabric in front of her again; she approaches, makes a kick, but Torero catches and stops her. The music stops. Carmen is sitting frozen on Torero's knee again, suppressed but dignified. Torero holds her by her waist; her arms commandingly rest on his shoulders. Slowly and carefully the music starts again, just as in the beginning. Torero elevates Carmen to the standing second position on pointe; turned with her back to the audience, she looks at Torero, raises her arms and slowly puts them down along the contours of his face, and then the body.

This impressive duet, full of internal tension, comes to its finale as Carmen turns to the audience and sharply closes her feet in the fifth position, as if being forced to. Torero carefully tries to approach her with his foot. Carmen, again, extends her pointed foot towards his. But after he switches his weight to the "approaching" leg in order to come closer and touch her leg with his, Carmen elevates her leg and slips away from him. He tries again to come closer with the same combination, and this time Carmen does not slip away. They intersect each other's private spaces with the same posture – with one leg put on a forced arch and arms extended to the sides. Now it seems that Carmen controls Torero, as he joins her by dancing her distinctive character movements. While facing each other, they simultaneously perform light low kicks across their spaces, place the working legs on forced arches, and start to sink into one-leg plié while looking at each other. As their hips are protruded and upper bodies tilted in this dynamic

soaking posture, Carmen and Torero extend their arms as eagle wings still penetrating each other till their arms almost touch. At this moment they sharply turn to the audience and start to make rhythmic careful steps in its direction. Suddenly they stop, synchronically look and then turn to each other, and immediately make full turns, finishing in the crossed legs *plié*, arms extended to the sides, as two eagles fighting for territory.

As Torero soaks into one-leg *plié* with upper body tilted to Carmen, she makes a paralleled deep *demi-plié* with one foot on point and elevates herself from this *plié* while she opens the hip of the working leg. She uses that impulse to create a wave in her body that elevates her and every muscle in her from the pointed foot to the chin. With proudly elevated chin she makes several steps to the left side of the stage, still resisting Torero's control, and stands in the final frozen posture. In a crossed leg position, with one foot put on *pointe* and hips protruded towards Torero, Carmen embraces herself by shoulders and looks coldly at him. Torero approaches her again, this time carefully, but stops at a two-step distance. He tilts toward her and puts his hand on her shoulder and commandingly pulls her towards him. Carmen looks at the shoulder and then Torero again, there is anger in her gaze but she submits to his action and comes closer. This posture, full of struggle and internal conflict, marks the end of Carmen's and Torero's battle-romance duet.

Carmen and Torero: Silent Feelings of Soviet Ballet's "Human Machine"

In the close-reading analysis of the Carmen's and Torero's duet, I presented how hidden and visible transcripts work together to accentuate each other, and how

metaphors, embedded in the dance, help the audience fully engage with the performance. This part of my study will discuss a theoretical understanding of the duet as the culminating moment of the *Carmen-Suite*. I will connect the duet to the previous attempts to revive Soviet ballet, advocate for artistic freedom, and underscore a ballerina as an individual.

According to my findings in the close-reading analysis, Carmen's and Torero's battle-romance reflects the process of the *Carmen-Suite* creation. It highlights the power dynamic between Plisetskaya and male artists whose support was needed to stage the work. Furthermore, I interpreted this duet as a reference to the overall framework of dancer-choreographer power relationship within the Soviet system of ballet production. According to my analysis, both Carmen and Torero are complex metaphors – intimately interrelated and codependent choreographic entities. The role of Carmen serves as an allegory for the Soviet ballerina within the Soviet system of production. Additionally Carmen serves as a metaphor for Maya Plisetskaya herself; she dances and mimes her choreographic empathy and intimacy with the Carmen heroine. Torero in his turn is a symbol of the Soviet male artist – a leading composer or choreographer. As such he is a mediator of the “cultural conversations” between the authorities and the artistic community. Though the term “cultural conversation” implies dialogism, it is appropriate to apply it here to underscore the artists' critical awareness of the Soviet ballet's adaptation as a cultural weapon and to accentuate the efforts taken by the artistic community to advocate for freedom of expression.

There is a clear difference between the “Love Adagio” and Carmen’s and Torero’s battle-romance. While Carmen reveals herself as sensitive and sensual woman in the “Love Adagio,” she introduces herself as cold and canny figure in the battle-romance. This image of Carmen as a strong and independent woman first appears in her solo that starts the *Carmen-Suite* and fully discloses itself in her duet with Torero. The close-reading analysis shows that the battle-romance is dedicated mainly to the ballerina’s fight for artistic freedom within the framework of ballerina-choreographer power relationship. The conflict of choreographic interests between Plisetskaya, who violates the protocols of Soviet ballet system to attack the regime behind the curtains, and the choreographer, exposes itself in the clash of different dance techniques. Most importantly, these dance techniques are politically charged: a collision between “classic” ballet as a trademark of the Soviet Union and modern and jazz techniques as allegories of the United States. The accent on technical differences is one of the major themes of Carmen’s and Torero’s battle-romance. These techniques are used as threads of different colors to weave the hidden transcript into the *Carmen-Suite* choreographic canvas.

Interestingly, Carmen’s mimic technique works in two almost opposite emotional dimensions: aggression and detachment. When dance-fighting with Torero, Carmen’s aggression is directed toward him or the curtains: a metaphor for the Ministry of Culture. She scrutinizes him at the beginning of the duet to evaluate the chances of his choreographic support and hates him when he thwarts her protest movements. When Torero begins to lead, Carmen looks upon the audience with an emotionally empty gaze, accentuating the social position of the ballerina as of a puppet in the system of ballet

production. Furthermore, Carmen's empty, frozen gaze is Plisetskaya's reflection on the social status of the Soviet ballet dancer, described as "performer" and not "creator" when referring to categories created for nominations for state awards and honors.⁹

Plisetskaya's embodiment of the ballerina as a puppet, fighting for the independence of its own movements – physical, social or choreographic – resonates with notion of human machine that Susan Foster examines in her analysis of ballet revolution in 18th century France.

In its fulfillment of spatial and temporal specifications, the body increasingly resembled nothing so much as a machine... The joints operated like levers; the muscles resembled springs; and the whole body constituted so many mechanical parts that could be brought into good working order. Dancing masters frequently referred to the body as the human machine and believed that their pedagogical strategies effectively calibrated and aligned its workings. Like Pygmalion's statue, the body could be made to come to life and move beautifully if the proper care were taken. (Foster 69)

Susan Foster relates the perception of a dancer's body to the perception of role of an individual within 18th century French society, where rigid social protocols regulated individual actions within a social mechanism (Foster, 70). It seems that this theoretical framework is directly applicable within the constraints of Soviet ideology. The Soviet state was conceptualized as huge mechanism where each republic, each city, and every

⁹ The categories of "performer" and "creator" were used in the Soviet system of production to classify artists within their artistic professions. The Ministry of Culture used these social categories in determining artistic merit worthy of state recognition. The exclusive Lenin Prize was assigned primarily to "creators," such as writers, composers or choreographers, and was rarely given to ballet dancers.

person played a particular role in the centralized economy. Soviet ballet, in turn, through its many affiliate theatres, was responsible for promoting and preserving prescribed Soviet ideals and morals. To secure the continuity of cultural production throughout the Soviet Union and allied states, young students were chosen every year to study in the Bolshoi and Kirov ballet schools. After eight to ten years of study they would bring Soviet ballet and culture to their native cities and towns as principal dancers of local ballet companies. Soviet journals, such as *Teatr (Theatre)*, *Teatral'naya Zhizn' (Theatre Life)* and *Sovetskii Balet (Soviet Ballet)*, contained epic stories of the Bolshoi ballet school graduates who brought “high culture” to Siberia, Kazakhstan, Tatarstan and other remote, sometimes “uncivilized” places.¹⁰

Soviet ballet evolved from Russian prerevolutionary ballet, which, in turn, was based on two different techniques from Italian and French ballet. These roots in French technique might be another reason for cultural similarities between Soviet and 18th century French techniques, as described by Foster. Soviet perception of the human body as part of a large social mechanism aligned closely together with Foster’s description of French ballet ideals.

But where the body evinced the surety of correct placement and an economy of motion, and where the ballet, as each scene gave way to the next, demonstrated an analogous well-crafted efficiency, then both body and ballet could undertake,

¹⁰ On the presentation of the Bolshoi’s Ballet school and its graduates in print culture, see Serebrennikova 111; on the ballet productions in Siberia, staged by the Bolshoi and Kirov choreographers, see Rubina 1-2; on the selection of students from the “remote” cities to study at Moscow Choreographic School, see Unknown 9-11.

with ease and deftness, their proper mission – to present living images of a perfected physicality. (Foster 73)

The creation of state schools in the Soviet Union resulted in a monopolization of the system of training for young artists aimed at a career in ballet. This helped to centralize and regulate the system of Soviet training and acted a method to raise perfectly trained “personnel” of the ballet system. Artistic minds, conceptualized as parts of the “human mechanism” or “human machine,” had to participate in the promotion of Soviet ideals through choreographing or dancing in the approved productions. To support this argument on conceptualization of Soviet citizens in general and Soviet artists in particular as parts of a vast human machine, I provide an excerpt from the article by Nikolai Kuznetsov, the Minister of Culture, published in the 1967 issue of the art journal *Teatralnaya Zhizn' [Theatre Life]*.

One of the greatest achievements of October [1917 October Revolution] was a cultural revolution, during which the man of the new epoch was raised and formed, a conscious and convinced builder of communistic society... Countless achievements in the development of science, culture and art of the people of our country became possible only due to the constant and everyday attention, which the party and the government have always devoted and still devote to the peoples' enlightenment, literature and art. (Kuznetsov 2; translation mine)

Maya Plisetskaya was presented by the Ministry as one of the greatest achievements of the “cultural revolution.” Her official recognition with multiple state merits identified the ballerina not only as a technical virtuoso, but also as a true Soviet citizen, working to

promote the cultural refinement of the Soviet society. Yet, during the premiere of the *Carmen-Suite*, it took just 30 minutes for her to be labeled as a “traitor of classical ballet” (Plisetskaya 272). This understanding of an artist as a mechanism in the vast system of cultural production assumed that even the central part of the system might break at any moment, and become dysfunctional and even dangerous.

I feel that Plisetskaya’s dance and mimic technique as of a doll or a puppet in certain moments of the Carmen’s and Torero’s battle-romance signify the ballerina’s message: we are just puppets. The most striking moment is Carmen’s and Torero’s sudden turn to the audience after the jazz combination and synchronous “closure” into classical fifth position. Their gazes are absent and empty, yet they look fearful at the same time. They create small and subtle movements with their legs, as if trying to touch each other in an attempt to understand if they are alive. At the same time they take a pause after each non-classical movement, as if trying to make it invisible and avoid the penalty for “borrowed” or just different technique.

To grasp the underlying meaning of the subtle “leg conversation” within the *Carmen-Suite*, it is necessary to explain the particularities of “leg” and “arm” techniques in the Soviet ballet. At the same time, to understand why this “leg conversation” was important to Plisetskaya, I will refer to her own perception of “arms” and “legs,” recorded in one of the interviews with Plisetskaya, made in the 1960s.

You are asking about the arms. Actually, the whole body participates in the dance: legs, upper body, head and neck. Essentially, everything, and of course, the arms. “Fingers are the eyes of the body,” said Stanislavsky, as if he referred

specifically to ballet, as if he was a ballet master. At the time when legs are put into strictly classical positions, the arms can express everything: nationality, character, epoch, mood. Well, let me show you (stands up and shows different arm positions typical for stylized Spanish, Indian, Russian folklore dances). In early times, the arms would be put into such a wick garland, in every ballet, and even in the *Swan Lake*. But why? Arms are wings; in *Swan Lake* the arms are large wings, restless, trembling – any wings, and your own wings, not rented from some ballerina. The arms always represent an image. In *Swan Lake*, while legs are running over classical *pas de bourree*, arms represent the swan itself, they are his fight with death, arms are his swan song. The legs are accompaniment... (“Interview,” 1960; translation mine)

Arms and legs play different roles in ballet, according to Plisetskaya. Legs represent the technique, as “they are put in strictly classical position,” while arms reflect the inner world of the performer, “they can express everything.” Plisetskaya’s references to Stanislavsky underscore particularities of ballerina’s acting that realize themselves through arm movement. Her perception of arms conveying the actual meaning of character’s emotion, nationality or cultural background is vital in the analysis of *Carmen-Suite*.

I doubt that “technique” is an appropriate term to theorize arm movement that supposedly embodies the dancer’s inner world with its capacity to resist the norms, canons and protocols. While “mood” and “character” refer more to the area of individuality rather than society, “technique” implies established protocols, recognized

by members of community. Judith Hamera's definition of technique is particularly useful here.

In critical terms, 'technique,' like 'aesthetics,' is a useful synecdoche for the complex webs of relations that link performers to particular subjectivities, practices, and to each other. The threads of these webs are various and teasing them out offers a useful overview of the complex connections between dance technique and the construction of communities. (Hamera 5)

The distinction between legs, as illustrative of technique, and arms, as emotionally expressive, provided by Plisetskaya in the interview, might be representative of ballet philosophies that existed in the Bolshoi Theatre in 1960s.

To support this argument, I would like to refer to my ballet teacher Galina Balashova, Plisetskaya's peer and a graduate from the Bolshoi's ballet school. For Balashova, legs movement also represented the requirements of the technique, which were "clearly defined," while arms could provide freedom to the dancer "if tension in the legs is not constraining the whole body" (private conversation; translation mine). So, this understanding of body as a mechanism where legs and arms play their own roles in dance – technical and emotional – might be a systematic method for Soviet ballet artists to resist choreography and requirements of the technique.

Thus, Plisetskaya's reference to a "leg conversation" as one of the key components of the Carmen's and Torero's duet signifies the hidden transcripts behind these non-classical subtle leg movements that were accompanied with an empty and scared gaze. Any insignificant violation of classic technique meant by itself resistance

and a courageous step toward artistic freedom for the Soviet artists. Again, I refer to Judith Hamera's discussion of dance technique as a method of artistic resistance.

Dance technique puts aesthetics in motion. It is primary tool by which ideals are incarnated or resisted. The more explicitly physical the aesthetic domain, the more powerful the imprimatur of technique and the more forceful its vocabulary, rhetoric and rituals... Technique is both the animating aesthetic principle and the core ambivalence housed in every dance studio and manipulated by every teacher, every choreographer, every performer. It is both taskmaster and mastered, both warden and liberator. (Hamera 4)

In the Soviet context, there was another technical manipulator – the Ministry of Culture. This regulator tried to control and prevent manipulation or non-normative experiment on macro and micro levels. If the technique is supposed to encompass “complex webs of relations that link performers to particular subjectivities, practices, and to each other,” then what happens in case of state control over this complex web? Is artistic freedom and creativity possible within the technique that is defined by the state institution rather than ballet teachers, choreographers and performers? The answer to this question may be found at the end of Carmen's and Torero's battle-romance, when Plisetskaya (as a leading ballerina) still has to submit to Torero (as to a Bolshoi's choreographer) in spite of all her efforts to create a resistant performance. Technique has to be manipulated and conveyed also on micro levels, “by every teacher, every choreographer and every performer,” in order to link performers to each other and allow creativity and resistance to happen.

Carmen's and Torero's "leg conversation" was a direct metaphor for technical violation in their duet particularly and in the *Carmen-Suite* overall. It was important for Plisetskaya to violate classical technique to underscore that, even though she is a puppet, a "human machine" in the Soviet system of production, she is alive as an individual and artist, as is every other ballerina. For Plisetskaya Carmen embodied not only artistic aliveness and creativity, but also the courage to fight for these responsive states of being. This emotional dichotomy, expressed in the simultaneously helpless puppet, managed by Torero, and the untamed and aggressive Carmen, defying his control, constitutes the choreographic canvas of Carmen's and Torero's duet, which is central to the *Carmen-Suite*.

The Carmen-Puppet dichotomy was a convenient artistic framework and performance strategy to reflect the contradictory situation in which Soviet ballet artists found themselves. On one hand, classical technique was vital and inviolable for participation in ballet productions. On the other hand – arm technique was a legitimate method to express "mood" or "character" and hence perform artistic individuality and personal interpretation of the character. In Plisetskaya's case, the idea of Carmen, charged with the notion of an untamed woman, was a pathway for critique of classical ballet. Through Carmen, Plisetskaya pointed both to the monopolizing and restraining nature of Soviet ballet, and used the character to undermine the very idea of the Ministry of Culture, as technical manipulator.

Carmen's image as a gypsy – a well-known ethnic and gender stereotype – provided space for Plisetskaya to address her minority Jewish nationality and the

stigmatic label of “a daughter of an enemy of the state.” In the Chapter One, I discussed how these two features in Plisetskaya’s biography attracted attention of the Bolshoi administrators and the KGB that often resulted in Plisetskaya’s replacement in the Bolshoi’s tours outside of the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s. In her memoirs Plisetskaya reflected on the overall situation during the repressions of the late 1930s. According to her, ballet students at the Bolshoi ballet school consisted of nearly equal proportions of the “sons” and “daughters of the Peoples enemies” and children of the political elite. Thus, ethnic or political minority status might have been a barrier not just for Plisetskaya. On one hand, Soviet ballerinas were not completely immune to the realities of Soviet restrictions, yet on the other success in ballet career provided an opportunity to cross Soviet geographical, cultural and aesthetic borders. In Judith Hamera’s words, classical ballet technique was “both taskmaster and mastered, both warden and liberator” (Hamera 4). And in the context of Cold War, this dual significance of ballet technique was fundamental for Soviet ballet artists, as the proportion of these opposite meanings of the technique directly affected their artistic lives.

It is not coincidental that the cancellation of the *Carmen-Suite* tour to Canada and performance at Expo-67 was a tragedy for Plisetskaya (“Interview,” 2010); it signified not only the ban of the ballet, but also a ban on foreign travel and a ban on presenting herself as Carmen, an independent strong woman – outside the Soviet Union, outside of censorship and outside of the Ministry’s control. As Plisetskaya’s nationality became a barrier for upper socio-economic mobility later in the 1960s with the start of

anti-Israel policy, her empathy with Carmen could have become even stronger. Though Carmen represents one of the most well-known ethnic and gender stereotypes – the fiery Spanish Gypsy dancer – her character’s significance is rooted in the role of gypsies as an ethnic minority. I think that it might be a clue to understanding why the *Carmen-Suite* was so important to Plisetskaya and why she chose Carmen to represent herself as an individual. It is useful to refer to the history of Carmen’s character, as Plisetskaya was acquainted with the most famous works that presented an idea of Carmen: Prosper Merimee’s novel, George Bizet’s opera, and Picasso’s paintings.¹¹

Why Carmen?

According to Ninotchka Bennahum’s work *Carmen: A Gypsy Geography*, Mérimée’s successful literary embodiment of the Carmen gypsy spirit allowed her to cross genres. A sense of emotional connection to the character, central to Mérimée’s success, allowed Georges Bizet to create an opera that embodied the spirit of Carmen in music and vocal expression with the same intimidating passion as her literary debut. Bizet, according to the author, refined Carmen to bring out the traits central to her character and to the story in general – freedom and pathos. Like Mérimée, Bizet’s personal history of travel and interest in cultural diversity allowed him to translate the novella into an opera that retained the emotional charge carried by Carmen. Bennahum refers to this as “the art of memory” and points out that “Bizet discovered in Mérimée’s novella the sense of exotic, historic locales he yearned to translate musically – an expressive freedom to orchestrate far away geographic places and characters that his

¹¹ In the following section I provide evidence of Plisetskaya’s acquaintance with the Carmen characters, created by Merimee, Bizet and Picasso.

previous work prefigure” (Bennahum, 44). According to Bennahum, Carmen’s successful transition and adaptation to a different medium can be attributed to the fact that the character carries a deeper cultural significance and symbolism than the fictional character of a French novella.

In Bennahum’s view, Carmen is able to retain her character attributes through the works of Mérimée and Bizet. In part, this resilience is due to the fact that the spirit embodied by Carmen extends beyond the works of these European artists. The author traces Carmen as an embodiment of the freedom and passion associated with the Gypsy nomadic lifestyle to the ancient Mediterranean and Arabic Spain; in her interpretation Carmen has mythical status. “Her body, the landscape of orientalist cartography, possesses magical powers that further remove her from any human or chronological dimensions, dislocating her to the world of ancient myth” (Bennahum, 69). The author interprets the attraction of Carmen as a deeply rooted and shared “worship of the female principal,” common across ancient cultures and thus proliferating across time and geographical constraints. Bennahum describes in individual sections of her work the Carmen spirit in flamenco performances of Spain, dance performances in the cafes of the Islamic Mediterranean, and Gypsy dance and vocal performances across Europe prior to this spirit being introduced as Carmen in the work of Mérimée.

Carmen did not stop her evolution following her formalization as a character of Mérimée and Bizet. Bennahum takes her readers forward in time to show that the character remains popular in the works of 20th century artists. The author explores Picasso’s fascination with Carmen to reveal her as an inspirational force behind some of

the most notorious Spanish-themed paintings of the artist. Picasso's inspiration, according to Bennahum, originated from a sense of empathy – in Carmen's Gypsy character he saw a reflection of his own Andalusian ethnic minority status and in her fight for freedom – a reflection of his struggle against fascism in Europe. According to the author, many of the paintings carry "Carmenian themes of sensuality, eroticism and death" (Bennahum 155).

According to George Feifer, Plisetskaya had Picasso's paintings at home; his work does not register which she owned in particular, but acquaintance with the Picasso's work is undeniable. Additionally, in the Chapter One I described Picasso's popularity in Moscow and celebration of the artist's 85th birthday in the spring of 1967. The exhibition of his works was dedicated particularly to the image of Carmen and bullfighting and was held in Moscow during the spring of 1967. Though Plisetskaya and Alonso were working on the *Carmen-Suite* during the months of February and March, there is a large probability that she might know in advance about the exhibition and visit it. The complex effect of Carmen characters, created by Merimee, Bizet and Picasso, on Plisetskaya is obvious. In one of the interviews, Plisetskaya stated: "When I was watching Bizet's opera, I always thought to myself – How so? – Bizet created such a wonderful music, why could not he write it for ballet rather than opera?" ("Stihiya po imeni Maya," 2012; translation mine)

So I argue that Plisetskaya's perception of Carmen was multi-layered and consisted of different ideas of Carmen, presented consequently by Merimee, Bizet and Picasso. Following my own impressions of these Carmen variations, I would argue that

Plisetskaya's *Carmen* is closest to Merimee's version. This earliest version of "expressive freedom" was ruthless, cruel, frightful and even violent, according to my own perception. As a graphic example, the novel details an episode when Carmen cuts the faces of her female coworkers with a knife. This alone is enough to contradict the Merimee's version to the romanticized character of Bizet's opera. In my close reading analysis I provided a reference to the interview where Plisetskaya herself describes Carmen as an essence of aggressiveness. Even if to ascribe eroticism to the influences of Picasso's paintings on Plisetskaya, her aggressiveness in the *Carmen-Suite* obscures any notes of eroticism one may find in choreography or in her costume.

I argue that Plisetskaya's deep choreographic empathy and resulting intimacy was building up over the years of observing different Carmens throughout her artistic career. At the same time, this empathy for Carmen could have reached its highest point when the strings of Plisetskaya's nationality were touched by the anti-Israeli policies in general and by the Ministry of Culture personally. In private conversations with George Feifer, Plisetskaya described the processes of blackmail when the Ministry of Culture threatened cancellation of all planned tours abroad if Plisetskaya did not sign documents supporting the anti-Israel policy.¹² This conversation was recorded in the winter of 1969, but the anti-Israel policy started earlier in 1955, so it remains an open question if and how it influenced Plisetskaya before her request of the *Carmen-Suite* in February 1967. As she acquired the status of the Bolshoi's prima-ballerina in the late 1940s and

¹² While initially supportive of the creation of the State of Israel in 1949, Soviet policy reversed in the 1950's, with Soviet support extended to Arab countries in conflict with Israel. For further details, see Krautz 15-20.

obtained major roles in the Soviet ballet productions, the Ministry could recognize her possible influence on the Soviet audience earlier in the 1950s.

According to Bennahum, Picasso felt empathy for Carmen, seeing a reflection of his own Andalusian ethnic minority status. It is likely that Plisetskaya saw in Carmen a reflection of her minority nationality and a reflection of the negative status of being a daughter of the “enemy of the state.” In her memoirs, Plisetskaya described how this political label effected her and other students in the Bolshoi Ballet school:

But the children of not-so-famous people were left alone. Weren't touched. We were on view all the time but not touched. We were already in the palms of their hands. The personnel files were updated annually, even two or three times a year. And you can't hide in a file. Where is your father, where is your mother, when was he born, where does he work, under what statute was he arrested, in what year? Over my lifetime I filled in thousands of these forms. Before every trip. Every single one, readers. And the questions were always the same: father, mother, date of birth, place of employment, what statute for arrest? (Plisetskaya 37)

So Plisetskaya's political and ethnic designators were performed and repeated for the ballerina by the Ministry of Culture and the KGB, accentuating her political dependency and geographical belonging. Recognizing her extraordinary ballet mastery and allowing Plisetskaya a degree of freedom reserved only for the Soviet elite, while simultaneously accentuating her family, political and ethnic status, the Ministry constructed Plisetskaya as a puppet of the system, dependent on it in every way. Carmen presented two nearly

opposite feelings simultaneously – an expressive freedom and helpless dependency. It was never clear for her, who was she – Carmen or a puppet.

Performing Object in the *Carmen-Suite*

To understand how Plisetskaya inscribes herself in the history of ballet, performing two controversial identities of Carmen, it is helpful to refer to the history of the performing object concept in theatre and ballet. In “Puppets and Performing Objects in the Twentieth Century” John Bell examines the history of puppet tradition and how its implication revolutionized French theatre at the end of the 19th century. Particularly, the author discusses the use of masks as central to symbolic performance, promoted by Alfred Jarry in his revolutionary play *Ubu Roi*:

Before the show, Jarry himself addressed the audience to prepare them for the experience. “A few actors,” he said “have agreed to lose their own personalities during the two consecutive evenings by performing with masks over their faces so that they can mirror the mind and soul of the man-sized marionettes that you are about to see.” (Bell 30)

Within the Carmen-Torero duet and the *Carmen-Suite* as a whole, Plisetskaya’s sometimes “frozen” and “empty” gaze might be interpreted as a mask. In her dance Plisetskaya reveals herself as freedom-loving Carmen and as a puppet at the same time, as she puts on and takes off the puppet mask throughout the performance. Sometimes the emotions of aggression and rage might be seen through this mask, sometimes – the affects of fear and helplessness. This ambivalent mimic technique is especially vivid throughout Carmen’s and Torero’s battle-romance. Plisetskaya’s puppet mask and

puppet dance technique accentuates her position within the system of production, where she had to submit to the Ministry of Culture and to choreographers, as its representatives. So, Plisetskaya's Carmen-puppet revealed her complex choreographic empathy and intimacy with the already multi-layered Carmen's character of Merimee, Bizet and Picasso. Her Carmen, sometimes aggressive and uncompromising, as in Carmen's and Torero's duet, and sometimes romantic and erotic, as in the *Love Adagio*, encompassed and responded to the previous versions. However, the puppet mask was a method to uncover cultural particularities of Soviet Carmen, as of an "individual, born free, in a fatal confrontation with totalitarian regime" (Plisetskaya 272). Plisetskaya's mimic technique of a frozen gaze, revealing aggression and fear, unsealed the very circumstances of life in a highly censored Soviet society. At the same time, this range of emotions, visible through the puppet mask, underscored that Plisetskaya, as Carmen and as a Soviet artist, was alive. So Plisetskaya, as if she was a theatre historian, performed Carmen as a puppet to reveal the mind and soul of the Soviet ballet.

CHAPTER IV

THE LEGACY OF THE *CARMEN-SUITE*

In attempt to accurately assess the legacy of the *Carmen-Suite*, I conduct archival analysis of 2005 production of the *Carmen-Suite* and situate my findings within the contemporary state of ballet in post-Soviet Russia. First, in order to describe the post-Soviet shifts within the sphere of dance, I rely on my own experience of training, working and performing as dancer and choreographer in the period from 1995 to 2010. To reflect on contemporary Russian dancers' perception of ballet overall, and the *Carmen-Suite* in particular, I rely on my recollections of working with dancers and choreographers within the described period. I sketch this post-Soviet dance context in order to underline my own position in regard to ballet art as a member of the contemporary Russian audience. I assume that the audience's perception of the *Carmen-Suite* might stem from acquaintance with modern and jazz dance forms, unattainable before 1991, as well as from a general perception of ballet. After outlining this context, I provide analysis of the reviews of the 2005 *Carmen-Suite*'s restoration, choreographed by Alberto Alonso for the Bolshoi and Maryinsky theatres. This archival analysis is the core of this chapter, reflecting perception of the 2005 *Carmen-Suite*'s version by Russian and American audiences. I use the concepts of Victor Turner, James Scott, Susan Foster, Judith Hamera and Mikhail Bakhtin to reflect on the *Carmen-Suite*'s legacy.

To echo contemporary Russian dancers' perception of ballet, I refer to my histories of interaction with Galina Balashova, my ballet teacher, Oksana Pestova, my

jazz dance teacher, Vladimir Golubev, leading Siberian contemporary dance choreographer, and Nadezhda Sergeeva, my peer and cohort. Galina Balashova, a 1946 graduate of the Bolshoi ballet school and former prima of Novosibirsk Bolshoi ballet, is an expert on Soviet ballet technique and philosophy. Conversations with her during private advanced ballet classes over the years of 2006-2010 influenced my perception of ballet art as of modern and jazz dancer. My conversations with Balashova focused on ballet technique as an embodiment of the ballerina's personality and a means for achieving and revealing individual freedom helped me to understand Plisetskaya's fight for the *Carmen-Suite* and Carmen role as an embodiment of freedom.

Oksana Pestova and Vladimir Golubev represent the Soviet generation of professional Russian folk dancers; both of them worked as principal dancers in prominent Russian folk ensembles that toured worldwide. I believe that their travel abroad in the 1970s and 1980s evoked their interest in modern and jazz dance technique. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Oksana Pestova became a recognized classical and lyrical jazz dance teacher, whereas Vladimir Golubev founded his own company of modern and then contemporary dance. Regular private conversations I had with these dancers deepened my own knowledge of ballet, modern and jazz dance techniques. My own experience working as dancer and performer in Siberia, as well as a manager in a dance company, allow me to conclude that knowledge of modern and jazz dance techniques is vital for working as instructor or choreographer in private dance company. Ballet companies are supported fully by the government; there are no private professional ballet companies in post-Soviet Russia, as there are no government-

sponsored modern or jazz dance companies. Thus, I assume that contemporary audience in ballet theatres consists of dancers, acquainted with these techniques.

While I rely on conversations with Plisetskaya and Balashova as Soviet ballet artists, Pestova and Golubev as jazz and modern dance choreographers, I also refer to private conversations with my peer and colleague, Nadezhda Sergeeva. Her opinion on the original and new production of the *Carmen-Suite* supports my arguments on the contemporary significance of *Carmen-Suite*'s charges of "borrowed technique" and "eroticism" as connections to the controversial "West." I think these recollections might help to depict my own position within the legacy of the *Carmen-Suite* and describe post-Soviet dance realities in which the 2005 *Carmen-Suite*'s version was created.

After recent conversation with Nadezhda, I understood that today the choreography and colliding dance techniques of the *Carmen-Suite*'s might not necessarily lead to thoughts about artistic and political freedom. Though these are crucial questions for many Russians today, the *Carmen-Suite*'s use of multiple dance techniques might make a different impression on both the contemporary audience and contemporary dance communities. Rather than underscoring hidden messages of political protest, *Carmen-Suite* may be out of tone with a new generation of dancers, more acquainted with "Western" dance techniques than the history of political repressions. I note a clear difference in the perception of the ballet between generations of dancers – its role as a controversial social drama at the time of production seems to have significantly diminished with a changed political and social landscape.

The *Carmen-Suite* as a Social Drama

In “Social Dramas and Stories About Them” Victor Turner wrote: “All human acts and institutions are developed, as Clifford Geertz might say, in webs of interpretive words. Also, of course, we mime and dance one another – we have webs of interpretive nonverbal symbols” (Turner, 66). While the web of interpretive words in the Soviet Union was regulated by the Ministry of Culture, ballet – in spite of the state control – became one of the webs of interpretive nonverbal symbols. However, due to the particular power of nonverbal symbols, these webs attracted even more state attention, which sometimes resulted in closing the last public expressive pathway of political opposition. The number of banned ballet works and abundant coverage of ballet life in Soviet journals and magazines testifies to this.¹³

The *Carmen-Suite* survived the Ministry’s ban and media blackout and was gradually re-integrated into the Soviet ballet repertoire, starting in 1968. As such, it represents a peculiar case of social drama. Victor Turner introduces this term when examining power struggles on different levels: within small-scaled societies, such as Ndembu, and on the national scale. This universality of the social drama concept particularly attracts me; *Carmen-Suite* represents the battle between the Soviet state and a major Soviet prima for the right to address and establish cultural norms. Additionally, it represents a symbol of cultural battles between dance communities across the Soviet and post-Soviet landscape.

¹³ On banned Yakobson’s *Bedbug* and *Spartacus* see Ezrahi 169-200.

Victor Turner writes: “Whether it is large affair, like the Dreyfuss Case or Watergate, or a struggle for village headman ship, a social drama manifests itself as the breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom or etiquette in some public arena” (Turner, 70). While Plisetskaya was miming and dancing the image of freedom personified in the Carmen character, she mimed and danced in the *Carmen-Suite* the everyday reality of the Soviet citizen. While dancing on the stage surrounded by a wooden fence and towering spectator chairs, resembling a labor camp rather than arena for bullfighting, she unsealed and accentuated the narrow cultural frames in which the Soviet society was encased. The web of nonverbal symbols had to be very intricate and subtle to be allowed for Soviet stage, yet lucid and apparent for the Soviet audience to recognize hidden metaphors addressing the notions of artistic and political freedom.

As the existence of freedom could not be doubted in the state where “everything is created for the welfare of the people,” the phase of crisis hit both sides of the battlefield (Parfenov).¹⁴ The Minister of Culture stating “Carmen should die!” only to hear “Carmen will die only when I do” from Plisetskaya represent the height of the crisis where the risks of losing highly respectable positions in the Soviet Union for the realities of real labor camp struck both – Plisetskaya and Furtseva, the Minister of Culture (“Interview,” 2008; translation mine). The risks of news of the ban spreading outside the Soviet Union heated this power struggle between nominal and real cultural leaders. Quick redressive mechanisms were enacted: *Carmen-Suite* was allowed to be staged again but only after the Ministry’s revision and approval. However, art and theatre

¹⁴ This citation references the official Soviet slogan, created for the World Expo 67. For more information see Parfenov, “Namedni 1961-1991: Nasha Era. God 1967.”

journals were silent until 1969, as if the system was assessing the damage. Then, in an unexpected turn of events, *Carmen-Suite* was quietly integrated into the Soviet repertoire, as if no scandal has ever occurred.

Victor Turner's model of social dramas with its four phases of breach, crisis, redress and reintegration or schism is incredibly useful for understanding the *Carmen-Suite* conflict and the larger socio-political schism it represented. Although the ban was lifted and the ballet was later reinstated under the veil of reintegration, a deep socio-political schism, underlined by Plisetskaya in *Carmen-Suite*, continued to exist in the highly censored Soviet Union up to the point of its collapse in 1991. Healed on the surface, a deep divide between the public transcript of socialist creativity represented by the Soviet authorities, and hidden transcript of artistic and repression began accumulating energy. A schism of unprecedented proportions finally took place when the rupture occurred. Consideration of two possible outcomes in the last phase – reintegration or schism – makes it possible to examine political situations within highly censored societies when reintegration serves as a veil for a deep schism.

The behavior of individuals directly or marginally associated with the *Carmen-Suite* is particularly instructive. Turner's observations of choosing sides at the point of crisis can be seen in the history of *Carmen-Suite* conflict. Soviet leading composer Dmitri Shostakovich, who was the president of the Composer's Union in 1967, initially refused Plisetskaya's request to write the music for the ballet. Yet, his phone call to the Ministry with a request to lift the ban made a strong contribution to subsequent ballet reinstatement (Plisetskaya, 276). Maya Plisetskaya described the particularities of the

power struggle between the Ministry of Culture and “subversive” artists as “victors chained to their prisoners”: “She [Furtseva] could not allow this work, as she would be deposed from her position if she did. She banned it, while not being against it. You see, she was miserable” (“Stihiya po imeni Maya,” 2012; translation mine). In case of *Carmen-Suite*, taking sides in the moment of crisis was not an optional choice particularly for the Ministry of Culture that served as a medium between higher Soviet authorities and artists who had to fulfill their mission of propaganda of the “impeccable” Soviet regime.

Plisetskaya is difficult to perceive apart from the socio-political schism I observed in post-Soviet Russia and state’s attempts to veil it through the assumed unifying force of ballet. Ironically, she became a symbol of this schism in a critical historical moment of August 19, 1991, when state troops flooded Moscow to stop thousands who took to the streets to defend democracy. A media blackout, consisting of continuous reruns of *Swan Lake*, featuring Plisetskaya in leading roles of Odette and Odile, continued for three days to conceal any news of unrest in the capital. This use of ballet as a cultural weapon against the population crystalized the deep socio-political schism first revealed through the *Carmen-Suite* 25 years before the 1991 collapse. The concept of social drama appeals to me particularly as it considers fluctuations that might happen in the reintegration stage over the time.

The final phase consists either in the reintegration of the disturbed social group – though, as like as not, the scope and range of its relational field will have altered; the number of its parts will be different; and their size and influence will have

changed – or the social recognition of irreparable breach between the contesting parties, sometimes leading to their spatial separation (Turner 71).

The *Carmen-Suite* acts as a breach that underlined the existence of a hidden transcript of artistic unrest within the system of Soviet cultural production. However, the redressive actions by the Ministry and Plisetskaya that allowed to bring production to stage revealed a mutual intention to temporarily conceal the socio-political schism. However, rather than fully defusing the growing tension between the artistic community and the state, the strain continued to increase. The seeming reintegration and unseen schism existed simultaneously in the Soviet post-Thaw society, accumulating social energy for a larger breach of 1991.

I argue that the legacy of *Carmen-Suite* is the reflection of this deep unseen schism. As the *Carmen-Suite* was edited, it started to be accepted by the audience and the authorities (Plisetskaya 280). I believe that partly it might be correlated with the evolution of Soviet foreign policy towards co-existence with the United States in the later half of the 20th century and the propagation of an image of an innovative and progressive society. Thorough selection of Soviet productions for “Expo-67” and cancellation of *Carmen-Suite* that I described in Chapter One reveals a careful participation of the Ministry of Culture in carving the image of the Soviet Union as culturally relevant and culturally compatible with the United States.

The instinct of self-preservation worked in paradoxical ways for Soviet authorities, challenging the Ministers of Culture with political dilemmas, as demonstrated by the *Carmen-Suite* case. On one side, the Ministry of Culture had to

fight for an image of progressive and innovative society, which was in danger after the end of the Thaw. From another side, the Soviet authorities were scared of *Carmen-Suite* as a breach that might lead to unpredictable results. The amount of articles dedicated to the “50th anniversary of the Soviet Rule” in multiple journals and magazines, demonstrated in the first chapter of my work reveals clear awareness of the possibility of another revolution as the Soviet Ministry’s own power was build on the legacy of one. These anxieties, coupled with awareness of a necessity to produce and present culturally compatible artistic works, realized themselves in the redressive actions – the ban lift and subsequent reinstatement of the *Carmen-Suite* as a central piece of the Soviet repertoire. As a result, the legacy of *Carmen-Suite* can be seen as the reflection of the ongoing and deepening socio-political schism.

The Perception of Ballet in the Post-Soviet Context

To fully assess the legacy of *Carmen-Suite* it is critical to understand its role within the cultural landscape in the immediate post-Soviet context. The events of 1991 offer a new reference point for Russian culture and society. With the fall of the Iron Curtain and immediate economic and social liberalization, all artistic spheres including dance became less monolithic. Private studios and small independent experimental theatres immediately popped up offering dance training in modern, jazz and hip-hop dance stiles. After travelling through the country and participating in multiple national dance festivals, I can testify that the attractive force towards “Western” styles was incredible and obvious. The amount of dance ensembles offering their interpretations of modern and jazz technique – sometimes within Russian folklore dance productions –

was captivating. My jazz dance teacher Oksana Pestova and contemporary dance teacher Vladimir Golubev were both former soloists of professional government-sponsored folklore ensembles. Their transitional careers were not unique, as I learned when working in the company offering dance master-classes. And while the impetuous lives of small independent theatres and dance companies inspired post-Soviet audiences hungry for non-classical productions, classical ballet was left in the hands of the state. Hence, Russia's post-Soviet government continued to perceive it as an organic and inseparable part of its own structure. Remarkably, this perception was common with the post-Soviet audiences and post-Soviet artists.

When I spoke with a former colleague, a contemporary Russian dancer, I accentuated that the spontaneous life of newly established dance and theatre companies evoked rivalry and a contest for authenticity in each presented style. Regardless of whether it was a modern, jazz, or modern-jazz dance company – all claimed unprecedented quality of training and authenticity of style. Master-classes became a form of criteria for professionalism. The physical, mental and financial ability to learn from guest choreographers would highlight any dancer as a prospective dance teacher and choreographer. To constantly increase the level of dance education through learning at master-classes became a self-evident goal for choreographers to prove their own professionalism, creativeness and ability to develop as dance artist. The only form of training not included in the continual training and dance education of a modern dancer is ballet. That might seem strange in American dance contexts, where ballet might be received as a regular part of dance training across a range of dance companies. Ballet is

assumed as an integral and continually contributing element to almost every dance style. But in the contemporary Russian context, ballet is not only fully sponsored by government, but also separated from the rest of the society. Ballet students live, study and train in state ballet schools affiliated with state theatres. This is considered is a necessary condition for becoming ballet artists and results in a separation of the entire ballet community from all other dance communities of Russia.

In personal conversations with Russian contemporary dancers over 15 years, I tried understanding the popular Russian construction of ballet as a kind of dance bible or a museum piece that connects post-Soviet Russia to pre-Soviet Empire. While ballet is highly valued by contemporary dance communities as the necessary introductory base for modern and jazz dance, it is conceptualized as a technique of perfection that should stay aside from all the “Western” influences. It almost seems that Karl Marx with his concept of base and superstructure seems to flow in the post-Soviet genes 20 years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ballet, sponsored and guarded by the government, is always conceptualized as the base, but modern, jazz and contemporary are seen as the more complicated cultural superstructures – the place where creativity is born. My fellow dancer Nadezhda’s observation, “I really don’t like when classical dancers attempt to dance modern dance pieces,” truly represents the audience’s perception of ballet as a museum that presents the perfection of dance move but lacks creativity or contemporary significance.

In a private conversation, contemporary Russian choreographer Vladimir Golubev once stated: “Ballet is under a museum glass. You can’t do anything with it.

It's perfect. It's like the music of Bach. You can't say – 'Oh, Bach, you know, your music is crappy,' right? You would be considered ignorant and the conversation would end" (Golubev). Vladimir Golubev's and Nadezhda Sergeeva's conceptualizations of ballet represent two sides of the same coin: while ballet is highly regarded and respected by contemporary dance communities, it is set apart from them. Partly this is done to preserve its "perfectness" and partly to accentuate uniqueness, foreignness and authenticity of modern, jazz or contemporary styles. Framing ballet as the "perfect" technical base and "perfectly routine" exercise not only sets it apart from any other dance community, but also supports and increases the schism, underlined by Maya Plisetskaya in *Carmen-Suite*. Through collision of dance techniques performed within *Carmen-Suite*, Plisetskaya referenced the internal struggle within the artistic community, as well as the building tension within the broader Soviet society. She foretold the consequences of the building strain – an immanent rift between dance communities and the state ballet system, which would come as part of a broader socio-economic rift of post-Soviet Russia.

It is important to state that there is clear mutual interest among the post-Soviet dance communities, but a lack of cross-disciplinary pathways does not allow this interest to materialize in any meaningful collaboration between ballet and contemporary dancers. Illustrating this, during my time dancing there, the Novosibirsk Dance Company rented space for master-classes at the boarding ballet school, affiliated to Novosibirsk Bolshoi Theatre, where I had a chance to observe future ballet stars who studied and lived here. I observed the extent of interest in what was happening in the classes – master-classes in

different types of jazz, modern, contemporary, hip-hop technique. Those taking part in the master classes were instructed to only practice inside the practice halls and not congregate in the hallways. Ballet students, in turn, were not allowed to participate in any of these, although they tried to reflect their interest through other means. As if incidentally, ballet students wore wide “hip-hop” cargo pants and headphones and walked back and forth through the hall trying to peek into hip-hop or break dance classes. The watchful ballet school staff promptly dispersed them, as if even being near other forms of dance could contaminate the purity of state ballet. This non-encounter illustrates the system in its entirety; while outsiders are prohibited entrance into the ballet sphere past the age of ten, those on the inside are not allowed to easily leave it. In the state ballet hierarchy, careers depend on the obedience to instructors and the norms they represent. While not being allowed to take contemporary dance classes or participate in any non-classical productions, students are initially set apart from another dance world and consequently are respected and ignored by it, as well as the audience.

Clearly the state still perceives ballet artists as a cultural weapon and protects it from “borrowed technique.” This framework of artistic separation and ballet preservation continues to permeate throughout Russian state ballet. It is assumed to be perfect and any change or evolution is seen as unnecessary or even treacherous. However, as world ballet evolves, this framework becomes exposed, as domestic and international criticism of artistic stagnation and artistic disconnection mounts. Attempts to revive Russian ballet to make it competitive on the world stage have struggled against the needs of the state to keep it ideologically pure and free from experimentation.

Ironically, *Carmen-Suite* continues to haunt it nearly 50 years after its production. In 2005 the Bolshoi decided to resurrect the now-iconic ballet, followed by the Maryinsky in 2010. A review of critical assessments of this attempt to bring back a once-controversial ballet further demonstrates the rift between state-sponsored ballet, contemporary dance communities and the post-Soviet audiences.

The New 2005 Production of the *Carmen-Suite*: Where Is Carmen?

To accurately assess the artistic, political and social legacy of *Carmen-Suite* I consider existing reviews of contemporary *Carmen-Suite* productions recently staged by major ballet companies. In these reviews I looked for qualitative assessments of the new ballet's choreography, dance and mimic techniques and its social meanings.

Additionally, I attempted to find comparisons to the original 1967 production. I relied on materials published in Russia and the United States focused on *Carmen-Suite* productions. In reviewing contemporary Russian sources, I consider the degree of the publication's political independence and attempt to trace the patterns of reviews to editorial policies of self-censorship.

The most widely publicized re-incarnation of *Carmen-Suite* occurred in 2005 as part of the festive celebration of Maya Plisetskaya's 80th birthday. For this occasion the Bolshoi ballet presented two new versions of Plisetskaya's classics – *The Carmen-Suite* and *The Card Game*, which was also originally staged in 1967. Three Russian publications reviewed the premiere – *Kommersant Daily (Businessman Daily)*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Independent Gazette)* and *Rossiiskaya Gazeta (Russian Gazette)*. *Kommersant Daily* is an independent business-oriented publication modeled after *The*

Wall Street Journal. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Independent Gazette)*, despite its title, is a more conservative publication with a history of self-censorship; it carried both a review of the premiere and an interview with Alberto Alonso, who was invited to choreograph the new version of *Carmen-Suite*. Finally, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta (Russian Gazette)* is a government publication of record, established as such by parliamentary decree in 1990 – its editorial policy is aligned with that of the state. With the consolidation of power by the executive branch, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* is widely perceived to be an official publication of the Russian president.

When contemplating the reasons behind *Carmen-Suite*'s 2005 reinstatement and invitation of official choreographer Alberto Alonso, one interesting utterance comes to mind. In his address to parliament in 2005 the Russian president Vladimir Putin stated: “Initially, it should be conceded, that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. For the Russian people it became a true drama. Tens of millions of our citizens became stranded beyond the Russian borders. The epidemic of disintegration permeated Russia itself” (Putin 2005; translation mine). Could it be that Alberto Alonso was invited to choreograph the *Carmen-Suite* again, in order to reinstate the Soviet innovative production but to make it safe for the contemporary audience by erasing all the metaphors? Could it be that Alberto Alonso's persona was used by the Russian government to prove the authenticity of new *Carmen-Suite* and legitimize the new choreography while excluding hidden transcripts central to the 1967 production?

An interview with Alberto Alonso published by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* titled “Dances of Wild Love” exposes the choreographic intent of the new *Carmen-Suite* production. In a response to the question of *Carmen-Suite* origins, the choreographer indicates that his original intent was to make *Carmen-Suite* much more sensual than the politics of the post-Thaw USSR would allow. According to him, the central theme of *Carmen-Suite* is senseless and wild love and the original production was redacted to remove this sensual charge. When asked directly if the non-classical technique presented in the original 1967 production was a form of protest through a construction of “power is the death of freedom” framework, Alonso refocuses the attention on the direct romantic conflict within the Carmen-Torero-Jose love triangle. Additionally, in this interview Alonso insists that the technique presented in *Carmen-Suite* is a combination of classical ballet technique with “Spanish-Cuban” elements, avoiding the question of modern dance influences in *Carmen-Suite*. When asked to compare Maya Plisetskaya as Carmen to the 2005 soloist Svetlana Zacharova, Alonso predicts that Zacharova will prove to be the real Carmen.

There was considerable disagreement between Alonso’s prediction and critical assessment of the 2005 *Carmen-Suite*. In the *Kommersant Daily’s* review, titled “Cards Are Not In Carmen’s Favor,” Tatiana Kuznetsova points out that the wild applause following the premiere of the new *Carmen-Suite* were not directed at the artists cast in the premiere, but at Plisetskaya, who came on stage to welcome the audiences. The author continues to point out that the ballet remains a relevant production and that the avant-garde costumes and decorations “continue to mesmerize.” Yet, the review

continues with heavy criticism of the artist cast and the main soloists – Svetlana Zacharova as Carmen and Andrei Uvarov as Jose.

This choice raised doubts even before the premiere: ballerina Zacharova is famous for her impeccable body and amazing legs, but not for acting mastery, and her partner - for academic ballet technique and psychological balance. Both artists had to fight not only with their nature but also with balletomanes' bias during the premiere. They were almost pitiful. Svetlana Zacharova had to mobilize all her temper; she smiled with all her teeth, played with her eyes, vigorously swayed her hips, and decidedly swung her arms, trying to draw the portrait of a "free gypsy." She smiled and blinked voluptuously, charming Toreador with her divine leg; during the moment of card reading she expressed anxiety and horror, and ran on the knife as Juliette ran for the poison. The best episode was the duet with Torero, when bustling about the adagio she forgot to bustle about her face." (Kuznetsova; translation mine)

The author's sarcasm serves as a way to reflect on artificiality of Zacharova's acting and, the most importantly, her psychological detachment from the original Carmen character, presented by Plisetskaya in 1967. Thinking about Plisetskaya's choreographic empathy with the Carmen role and the piece itself, this detachment could be called choreographic indifference or choreographic hypocrisy. The author concludes that the contemporary Bolshoi dancers remain grounded in ballet norms and *Carmen-Suite* remains unattainable to them, while remaining critically relevant as a production.

In a review in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* by Maya Krylova titled “Carmen Plays Her Cards,” the author echoes some of the notes from the *Kommersant Daily* review. Initially, however, the author points out that a constant comparison to the 1967 *Carmen-Suite* was one of the reasons that the new dancers could have felt self-conscious and not performed to their full abilities. The review continues to point out the classic technique displayed by Zacharova as Carmen was dominated by demonstrating her “wide leg splits,” rather than a dedication to the dramatics of the storyline. Torero, in turn, remained “self-involved with his own seriousness” to ever appreciate the lively nature of the Spanish-themed music and choreography. The author points out that any sense of sensuality or romantic attraction (“with which Alonso got nowhere in 1967 – the Soviets wouldn’t allow it”) was decreasing with every passing minute of the production (Krylova; translation mine). The author concludes that the 2005 *Carmen* was staged as a mediocre melodrama, rather than the passionate tragedy that it was intended to be.

The review in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is in contrast to those printed in the two largely independent newspapers. The review titled “Playing Cards With Carmen” by Mikhail Malykhin positions the new production as a challenge to the established supremacy of Plisetskaya’s *Carmen-Suite* and a chance for the aspiring Zacharova to reveal herself as a dancer worthy of the Carmen legacy. The review immediately focuses on Zacharova’s technique, which is described as “impeccable, polished in every detail - incapable of leaving one unmoved” (Malykhin; translation mine). The review continues to compare the production to the 1967 production, stating that although the new production lacks some of the fateful tragedy of the original – Zacharova’s interpretation

of Carmen is more playful – “love is but a game to her.” And while the author concedes that the new production is far removed from the original in terms of its emotional charge, the reviewer seems content with Carmen’s new reincarnation.

Largely negative press reviews may have contributed to Bolshoi’s decision not to showcase the 2005 *Carmen-Suite* on the international stage. Instead, the Maryinsky (Kirov) ballet production made its debut in Baden-Baden, Germany in 2010 and New York, USA in 2011. These performances were reviewed by the *New York Times*, the *Dance Magazine* and the *Ballet-Dance Magazine*. Interestingly, these reviews echo some of the themes present in the independent Russian press reviews of the 2005 performance.

The 2010 review in *Dance Magazine* by Laura Cappelle titled “Stars of the Maryinsky Gala” is crucial in understanding the difference between audience perceptions of technique and metaphorical charge carried by the choreography. The publication begins by pointing out that the production is refreshing in its return to some of *Carmen-Suite*’s choreographic basics. According to the author, “the simplicity of most variations and pas de deux is a welcome change from today’s trends,” a clear reference to the 2005 attempt that was heavily criticized for the over-statement of technical virtuosity. The review continues to point out that although the ballet is somewhat lacking in fluid transitions, it is able to get Carmen’s character across through rich use of metaphors and expressive movement. The author concludes that the soloists of Maryinsky, Ulyana Lopatkina as Carmen and Danila Korsuntsev as Torero, were able

to carry across the meaning of the 1967 production better than the Bolshoi previously did it.

In Alastair Macaulay's "This Carmen Seeks Liberty in a Bullring with Strings of Fate," the author's critique was turned towards Diana Vishneva, who danced the main role of Carmen. This *New York Times* review strikes very similar notes to the reviews of the Russian independent press – the soloists look "constantly gorgeous" yet remain "two-dimensional." The review deconstructs the 2011 *Carmen-Suite* as a series of stunts, lacking fluidity or a common rhythm. The review unfavorably compares the new Alonso production to the 1967 Plisetskaya version, stating that the choreography became "clumsily expressionistic," losing its original "dance impulse."

The *Ballet Dance Magazine* review of the 2011 New York debut goes further in its criticism of the renewed Alonso production of *Carmen-Suite*. According to Jerry Hochman, author of the "'Carmen Suite', 'Symphony in C', 'The Little Humpbacked Horse'" review, "*Carmen Suite* died, degenerating into extended, repetitive posing, and vamping. The ballet went nowhere" (Hochman). The article criticizes Diana Vishneva for restricting Carmen's passion to "hyperventilated motions, rather than passionate actions." Once again, the reviewer indicates that the new production over-emphasizes technique over dramatic content in the 2011 production. Furthermore, the author heavily criticizes the production for predictability and repetition of movement and poses. In comparing it to the 1967 original, the author points out that the new production is not able to recapture its spirit of subtle resistance, while at the same time not being able to

raise to the level of contemporary productions in term of emotional content embedded in its choreography.

In conclusion, the reviews have a common thread – the *Carmen-Suite* is not the same without Plisetskaya. Although a concentrated effort was made to change the Carmen character itself, replacing the image of savage freedom with that of sensual desire, it is clear that this is not the critical expectation of this ballet. Carmen is more than just another dancer, its character represents freedom from oppression and Plisetskaya captured this fight for freedom with her choreography, dance and mimic techniques. As a result, Plisetskaya’s Carmen was able to capture the audience with an unprecedented level of choreographic empathy, something that the technically skilled, but choreographically detached contemporary ballerinas cannot achieve. This is the main reason, that the applause still follow Plisetskaya, rather than the “real” Carmen.

Choreographic Empathy and Choreographic Detachment in the *Carmen-Suite*

Carmen-Suite is deeply rooted in the personal history of Maya Plisetskaya, her relationship to the Soviet authorities and the broader historical context of the Cold War during the period of the Thaw. As a result, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a contemporary dancer to step into the choreography of the performance and provide it with the same energy of anger and passion as it was done during its initial premiere. One particular thought seems vital for me in the *Kommersant Daily* review; it sums up the review and reflects on the reasons of *Carmen-Suite*’s “pitiful” reincarnation: “It is not the low (acting) level of contemporary ballet artists that disappoints – apparently, it is

not correct to compare contemporary production and *Carmen-Suite* of 1967 – the scale of personality is not the same” (Kuznetsova; translation mine). Thinking about Plisetskaya’s *choreographic empathy* for the Carmen role and the piece itself, this contemporary detachment could be called *choreographic indifference* or *choreographic hypocrisy*. It is not necessarily the artists who should be blamed for this; I think of Svetlana Zacharova as a brilliant dancer, and she is considered to be the Bolshoi’s leading prima ballerina today. I truly adore her in Bolshoi’s 2011 *Cinderella*, and thank YouTube for the opportunity to watch this ballet again and again, enjoying Zacharova’s technical miracles of Russian old-fashioned ballet style. However, Kuznetsova highlighted an important issue in her review; I think the author implies that artists should be chosen not just for the quality of technical mastery, but also according to their personalities so that a dancer could find something important and appealing in the role. I absolutely agree with Kuznetsova that Zacharova is impeccable and brilliant in other productions but not in *Carmen-Suite*, as well as other contemporary Bolshoi’s dancers; the reason is not in the “scale of personality” which might be easily confused with charisma. I argue that the defining reason of dancer’s placement on the continuum *choreographic empathy – choreographic indifference/hypocrisy* is *intimacy* with the role or the production itself. I think that Judith Hamera’s concept of *intimacy* as a deep sense of communion and /or ownership with a performance strongly contributes to the understanding of Susan Leigh Foster’s notion of *choreographic empathy*, particularly in case of artist’s choreographic empathy. It is important to remember that Maya Plisetskaya not only performed first Carmen, but also initiated and organized the new

production and assisted in its choreography. In Chapter One I trace how personal history and anxieties about the state's control over the private life of Soviet citizens found its way in *Carmen-Suite* and in fight for its staging. The level of intimacy, and hence, the extent of choreographic empathy is different in 1967 *Carmen-Suite*, which might have contributed to the "scale of personality."

In Chapter Three I examined Plisetskaya's ambivalent mimic technique in Carmen's and Torero's duet and concluded that through choreographing herself as both Carmen and a puppet, she exposed the overall position of a Soviet ballerina within the system of production. To support my argument, I refer to one of her earliest interviews, made in 1960s. In it, while describing the role of the Dying Swan, Plisetskaya defined leg technique in ballet as socially predetermined and arm movement as truly revealing of the ballerina's individuality. She stated: "*At the time when legs are put into strictly classical positions, the arms can express everything: nationality, character, epoch, mood*" (Interview, 1960; translation mine). In Chapter Two I discuss the concept of a human machine, examined by Susan Foster, which was commonly used by French choreographers in the 18th century to theorize the particularities of ballet technique, philosophy and artist's body. Following Foster's argument that a human machine represented the overall understanding of individual within the society as a vast machine, I argued that Plisetskaya's understanding of ballerina's body correlates to her overall understanding of the framework of Soviet production. Specifically, I revealed how Plisetskaya's puppet image underscores the dependent position of ballerina as a marionette within the Soviet ballet system. This perception is obvious in Plisetskaya's

interview, with the only difference being that this human machine has a soul, and arms have a capacity to reveal it.

Recalling my conversations with my own ballet teacher, Galina Balashova, who also graduated from the Bolshoi ballet school, arms were *the* key element of ballet performance for her as well. She continuously repeated her argument that the weightlessness of the arms is the true instrument for conveying the character in the performance. Arms' liveness signified that there was no tension in performing physically challenging combinations and hence, that the ballerina's intension was not performing technical tricks. Secondly, live and weightless arms had to convey the illusion of improvisation and unintentional spontaneous movement, and focus the audience on the plot and character's emotions. According to my recollections, Balashova stated: "weightlessness, liveness [arm capacity to reveal the character] is strength; and strength is freedom" (Balashova). I believe that by "strength" she meant the physical and emotional strength to resist the tension in the body and capacity to relax and concentrate on acting. For my teacher, to master weightlessness and liveness of arms was synonymous with gaining freedom, as a dancer and as an individual.

The notion of personal freedom was vital for Maya Plisetskaya and Galina Balashova, and, in Judith Hamera's terms, ballet technique was both a "warden" and "liberator" for them. Both ballerinas perceived (and still perceive) ballet art and technical mastery as a means of personal freedom. While the Carmen-puppet dichotomy captured this understanding of ballerina's body as a human machine with a soul, Plisetskaya's *Carmen-Suite* addressed more general notions of artistic and political

freedom within the Soviet society. I am wondering if that interconnection of personal freedom and general freedom, addressed by *Carmen-Suite*, could depend on historical particularities of the period. Could the wars of the 20th century – the Second World War and the Cold War – raise these questions and make them more significant for the Soviet generation? Could the interior cold war between the state and citizens, that most violently revealed itself in repressions and labor camps, make the Soviet generation particularly sensible to the issues of freedom? Could it be that general freedom was an embodiment of personal freedom for the Soviet artists and Soviet citizens? I believe that intimacy with the piece is a key here to the understanding of why some artists experience choreographic empathy and another artists – choreographic detachment to the same production within the same cultural system.

After the examination of these conversations and reviews dealing with the legacy of the Soviet-era ballet *Carmen-Suite* several conclusions might be provided. First, while *Carmen-Suite* revealed a deep socio-political schism of the Soviet society, it predicted – intentionally or not – the rift between state-sponsored ballet theatres and contemporary dance companies. The perception of ballet as a museum, ballet artists as its curators and contemporary Russian government as the sponsor and guardian permeates post-Soviet audiences, including dance communities of independent small theatres and private studios. This framework closes ballet art in itself, helping the government to control and isolate it even more from the audience by preserving the Soviet system of ballet training and recruiting. The tragedy of ballet stagnation in contemporary Russian society and its isolation from contemporary dance communities is

not in ballet art itself, but in subsequent erasing from the national memory such genuine attempts of answerability as *Carmen-Suite*. In Mikhail Bakhtin's words, "Inspiration that ignores life and is itself ignored by life is not inspiration but a state of possession" (Bakhtin 2). While Russian ballet history veils generations of artists who tried to revolutionize ballet and bring it to life, answer for life, such as Leonid Yakobson and Maya Plisetskaya, contemporary Russian dancers are stimulated to think of ballet as an initially pure form, perfect and necessary but monolithic and dead. While the Russian government perceives and presents ballet art as part of itself and continues to use ballet as cultural weapon, ballet artists seem to be doomed in their alienation from the rest of the Russian and global dance culture.

I argue that the legacy of *Carmen-Suite*, expressed in the perceptions of contemporary Russian dancers, is a reflection of national identity - captured in and challenged by the socio-political dichotomy of Russia and America. Through the examination of the reviews on the recent 2005 *Carmen-Suite* edition, coupled with my own dance experience in post-Soviet Russia, I contend that national self-consciousness is functioning within this dichotomy where the United States still embodies the symbol of freedom for the contemporary Russian audience and that the *Carmen-Suite*, with its complex intertwining of ballet, modern and jazz techniques, represents a symbol of this dichotomy in the perception of contemporary Russian dancers.

Though the re-incarnation of the *Carmen-Suite* could open the conversation about artistic and political freedom within the Soviet society, the 2005 eroticized version of the ballet seems to close it for a post-Soviet audience trapped in the same illusion of

democratic freedom. I think it is not coincidental that in the *New York Times* review the contemporary production was framed as “two-dimensional.” *Carmen-Suite* was meant to be two-dimensional to accentuate the particularities of the Soviet freedom discourse, trapped by the Cold War political-dance dichotomy of Russian ballet and “Western Influences.” The concept of “foreignness” became a general notion, encompassing trends in American dance styles, as well as the broad concept of artistic freedom it represented for the Soviet and post-Soviet audiences. And while other dance communities embraced the possibility to dive into and experiment with “western” techniques, ballet’s role was further solidified and popularly accepted as a museum artifact with a large “do not touch” sign attached.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Plisetskaya's *Carmen-Suite* represents a unique choreographic and political event within the history of Soviet ballet. The history of its creation, subsequent ban and resurrection as a central piece of the Soviet repertoire serve as prisms through which the complicated relationships between Soviet art and politics can be better understood. The *Carmen-Suite*'s choreography is revealing of multiple forces acting on a ballet dancer, caught within a framework of a repressive political regime. Finally, its dual legacy as a piece of protest art and a Soviet icon continues to influence contemporary attempts to revive the work within the post-Soviet political landscape of Russia.

In Chapter Two I set out to explore the high-stakes political and artistic struggle to bring the *Carmen-Suite* to life. I investigated the concept of banned art within the Soviet Union and Plisetskaya's strategy to insure that the production is brought to stage. I attempted to decipher the political motivation behind the ban and re-instatement of the production by the Soviet Ministry of Culture. Finally, I tried to understand the sources of inspiration and determination behind Plisetskaya's insistence on choreographing and performing the leading role in the ballet.

The notion of "banned" art is in itself a controversial phenomenon. Mostly, this term refers to bans on pre-existing productions that for political reasons are no longer viewed favorably and are forcefully removed from public view. However, within the Soviet artistic framework, the entire process of inception, creation and staging was under the tight control of the Ministry of Culture. As a result, a "banned" production was a

unique event – it had to pass all of the initial filters of the state and then be rejected following the premiere. Otherwise, the work would become “shelved” and largely forgotten. In some respect, it was much harder to get a production banned than to have the production either approved or initially rejected. This required a delicate balance of artistic and political expertise and an integral understanding of the Soviet system of production. Plisetskaya’s immense artistic and political capital allowed her to navigate the complex bureaucracy of the Ministry to bring the *Carmen-Suite* to the stage, where its immediate ban ensured its legendary status.

Plisetskaya presented the *Carmen-Suite* as the perfect ballet for the political moment. In the atmosphere of cultural competition with the United States, Soviet leadership desired to project the USSR as an innovative and energetic society with rich history and traditions. Plisetskaya’s ballet would accomplish both - showcase the connection of the Soviet state to Imperial Russian roots through refined traditional technique and demonstrate choreographic innovation. Plisetskaya’s invitation of Cuba’s Alberto Alonso to collaborate on the piece further solidified her image as a loyal and thoughtful member of the inner circle of Soviet artists. This image, as well as considerable political and artistic capital acquired by Plisetskaya in years of dancing leading parts in classical Soviet ballets, allowed her to shake suspicions of political sabotage and proceed with creating the *Carmen-Suite* with unprecedented lack of supervision from the Ministry of Culture.

It is clear from the rapid timeline of ballet’s production that Plisetskaya understood that she had a limited time window to stage the *Carmen-Suite*. Being fully

integrated into the Soviet system of ballet production, she was aware of the Ministry's bureaucratic realities and understood that a shorter time frame of production decreased the chance of unwarranted attention from the authorities. Alberto Alonso played an important part in this plot – a short-term visa for the Cuban choreographer served as the perfect justification for a compressed rehearsal and production schedule. As a result of this effort, the *Carmen-Suite* premiered in an unabridged and unedited form, preserving and making public its hidden transcript of political resistance.

The *Carmen-Suite*'s public premiere forced the authorities into the uncomfortable position of having to make a choice in regard to the “subversive” ballet. Every single factor that influenced the original decision to allow Plisetskaya to bring the production to stage now worked against the authorities. The *Carmen-Suite* was envisioned as an exportable cultural product and it was set to advertise the Soviet Union at the 1967 World Expo. Now, its absence, in case of a ban, would trigger immediate condemnation from the world community as a case of artistic repression. Its presumed role as a bridge between the USSR and Communist Cuba through artistic collaboration became an immediate liability in the face of a total ban of the production. Finally, having had an extensively advertised official premiere, the *Carmen-Suite* became a public event and allied other representatives of the Soviet artistic elite with Plisetskaya. Soviet authorities were largely outmaneuvered by the ballerina and were forced to compromise in a field where compromise was unprecedented. As a result of this compromise, the *Carmen-Suite* was edited for “eroticism” and “borrowed technique”

and allowed onto the domestic stage, where the authorities hoped that it would quickly fade into obscurity.

In an attempt to remove the *Carmen-Suite* from cultural memory, the Soviet authorities followed the same flawed recipe as they did for other works of “subversive” literature and art. A partial ban complemented with a total media blackout seemed to have only raised interest in the ballet. Having achieved the status of a “banned” production, the ballet instigated more interest than other works of Soviet choreography. While it is impossible to accurately assess the level of cultural awareness and popularity of the ballet during the media black out, it is significant that within two years of the premiere, the media blackout was lifted with a simple reference to a “widely known *Carmen-Suite* production.”

While edited to remove references to “eroticism,” Plisetskaya’s *Carmen-Suite* was able to preserve the bulk of the choreography and technique largely inspired by modern and jazz dance. In Chapter Three I presented a close reading analysis of Carmen’s and Torero’s duet, which fully reveals the hidden transcript of artistic struggle embedded within the *Carmen-Suite*. I argued that Plisetskaya intentionally baited the original version of the ballet with the “erotic” “Love Adagio.” This was done to distract the Ministry of Culture with an obvious, but easily editable piece of choreography and draw attention away from the truly subversive Carmen-Torero duet. Sacrificing a part of the “Love Adagio” to lift the ban on the rest of the performance allowed Plisetskaya to preserve the revolutionary choreography and technique found elsewhere in the ballet.

Through my close reading analysis I exposed the hidden transcripts of political and artistic protest within the choreography of the Carmen-Torero duet. I concluded that Carmen, as performed by Plisetskaya, acts as a direct metaphor for a Soviet ballerina within the Soviet system of production. Carmen's dance is meant to symbolize an artist caught in a constant struggle between an inherent need for artistic creativity and freedom, yet trapped within the confines of the Soviet system of ballet. I find that Torero, in turn, is an allegory for a Soviet choreographer, who acts as a direct link between the authorities and the performer. Like Carmen, he is caught between trying to liberate Carmen's spirit and a need to protect her from the authoritarian regime. The watchful eye of the regime is conceptualized as a constant presence behind the curtains, where Carmen directs her artistic aggression throughout the duet.

I continued my close reading analysis to focus on the mimic technique surgically used by Plisetskaya to emphasize trapped emotional tension throughout the forceful performance of the duet. I connect this with the notion of the ballerina as a human machine and the construction of a puppet image to symbolize the direct control of the state over its performers and choreographers. These two notions complement each other throughout the duet, acting as a powerful protest against the existing system of artistic production. Furthermore, the puppet image likely resonated with the audience on an individual level, as similar social constraints were placed on a broad cross-section of Soviet society. As a result, I conclude that the *Carmen-Suite* was characterized by a great degree of choreographic empathy and its message resonated with the audience.

In the final section of Chapter Three I discussed why the Carmen character was an optimal pathway for Plisetskaya to deliver such a powerful embodiment of artistic and political struggle. I referred to historical analyses of the character to reveal its reach beyond the works of Merimee, Bizet and Picasso. Carmen, in essence, serves as a persistent symbol of struggle for freedom and recognition by a deprived and persecuted individual. I conclude that Carmen was personalized by Plisetskaya to incorporate her own experiences of struggle against the Soviet system burdened with her social position as a daughter of “an enemy of the state” and a ethnic minority. These attributes helped to construct Plisetskaya’s Carmen in a way that unsealed the core emotions of artistic and everyday life of the Soviet society and helped the *Carmen-Suite* to become a symbol of resistance for both the artists and the audience.

Plisetskaya saw a direct link between herself and Carmen and was ready to take on significant personal risks and sacrifices to become Carmen on stage. In my Chapter Four I discussed the modern day legacy of the *Carmen-Suite* and the failed attempts to revive the production without Plisetskaya in the leading role. I examined multiple domestic and international reviews to reveal two central difficulties that modern day productions cannot seem to overcome. The first is an inherent incompatibility of classical technique offered by contemporary Russian ballerinas with the sharp and aggressive style of the *Carmen-Suite*. The second is an apparent lack of emotional connection between the artists and the role of Carmen. As a result, Plisetskaya’s *Carmen-Suite* became just that – a performance hinging on a single performer with a unique dance technique and an intimate connection to the leading role. I show that

Plisetskaya's choreographic empathy and intimacy with Carmen went beyond typical affinity for a performed role. Replacing Plisetskaya with other ballet artists continuously results in a failure to capture the spirit of freedom and aggression central to Plisetskaya's Carmen.

In parallel to investigating the difficulties of contemporary productions of the *Carmen-Suite*, I examined the changed audience perception of this ballet. I show that as political and social realities evolved through time, the *Carmen-Suite* lost its initial connection to the audience. As clearly defined political restriction of the Soviet system evolved into a selectively repressive post-Soviet framework, the hidden transcripts embedded within the choreography of the *Carmen-Suite* are no longer able to trigger an emotional connection with the audience. In part, I attribute this development to the much greater social and economic fragmentation of the post-Soviet Russian audience and an overall conservative perception of ballet as a classic and static art form. Additionally, I concluded that the state has successfully isolated ballet from interference and is reformatting it to once again serve the role of a propaganda machine. For this reason, recent attempts to revive the *Carmen-Suite* focus on sexualizing the Carmen character and erasing the protest legacy central to the original production.

The unique history and legacy of Plisetskaya's *Carmen-Suite* firmly position it within the genealogy of politically significant ballets. Its 1967 premiere acted as the breach within the social drama between the Soviet artistic class and the Soviet authorities that depended on artistic production as an element of cultural diplomacy. However, as the political system evolved and as ballet became more isolated from the

audience, the social drama mirrored by the *Carmen-Suite* is no longer comprehended. This is not to say, that Carmen is irrelevant, or that the musical backbone of *Carmen-Suite* is any less dramatic today than it was in 1967. To revive this production, it must be understood that it symbolizes more than just ballet technique and that its legacy stems from being different. In 2014 Russia, concerns of political repression are just as relevant as they were in 1967, making Carmen just as important today as at the moment of its premiere.

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