Alexandre Alexeïeff and the Art of Illustration

Figure 1 - Alexandre Alexeïeff, aquatint frontispiece for E.A. Poe, *Colloque entre Monos et Una,* 1929.

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Preface

Warm thanks to the ArtExEast foundation in Geneva and the *Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée* in Fontenay-le-Fleury for granting me such liberal access to their collections and kindly providing help, tea and a desk. I would also like to thank Svetlana Alexeieff-Rockwell and Nicole Rigal for their patience in answering questions and their kind advice. A word of thanks also goes to Frau Heidrun Feistner of the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* for introducing me to Alexeieff, and to the *Abteilung Historische Drucke* for providing organisatorial support for the first stages of the research presented in this thesis. Finally, I thank Prof. Dr. S. De Bodt for her tutoring.

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Introduction

Illustration has been a constant Western cultural practice since at least the 4th Century AD. Although it is ancient and pervasive, book illustration is held in low esteem and has never been a popular subject of research. Most notably, there exists no collection of theoretical writings on this word-bound form of visual art.[1] Yet the concept and approach of illustration have changed greatly over time and have fostered an interesting discussion on the borders of art theory, which provides a little-studied corpus of texts containing eloquent statements on the otherwise much discussed relationship between text and image.

The Russian artist and *émigré* Alexeïeff (1901-1982) is one of the illustrators who were particularly concerned with the defence and theoretical explanation of their art. Fifty years after he made his first illustrations, and looking back upon an illustrious career, he remarked:

> The illustration of books is considered a minor art, because of the frivolity with which it is treated by easel painters. These all too often seem to think that their genius suffices to do justice to a literary work of great value with a few thoughtless scrawls. Thus, one is abashed by the sketches of Edouard Manet for "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe: one asks oneself if the great painter even read the poem... or if he didn't understand it just as poorly as the art of illustration?[2]

These are the tart words of a self-conscious illustrator. Alexeïeff, we are to infer, *did* understand the art of illustration. Not only did he illustrate some fifty titles, he also remarked upon the absence of any kind of 'theory' of illustration, and sought to remedy it by writing about the theory and practice of his art. In his '*Conférence sur l'art d'illustrer les livres*' and other, largely unpublished writings, he has provided a rare answer to the question what 'illustration' entails; what its methods, concerns and functions are.[3] Alexeïeff's approach of illustration may help us to understand a form of art that has long been - and still is - denigrated by many scholars and critics.

As we shall see, Alexeïeff himself enjoyed considerable acclaim. Authors like Philippe Soupault, Julien Green, and Albert Camus asked him to illustrate their work.[4] Boris Pasternak

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[1] See for instance the extensive bibliography by Déom, Tilleuil, Vanbraband 2007. There are such collections for graphic design, typography, and other related subjects, however, for instance Bierut 1994.

[2] Alexeïeff, *Quelques mots*, exhib. cat. Annecy, 1975, AEE AL-Ms-212. All translations are my own, unless stated otherwise.

[3] Alexeïeff, *Conférence*, undated, AEE AL-Ms-105.

[4] André Malraux probably also chose Alexeïeff, with whom he was befriended, as an illustrator. See Alexeïeff's correspondence with Gallimard, AEE AL-Ms-208. On Soupault: correspondence with Alexandre Alexeïeff, AEE

praised his illustrations for *Dr. Zhivago*, writing that Alexeïeff even made 'engravings of the breath, of the construction of sentences'.[5] Gogol's *Journal d'un Fou* (Schiffrin, 1927), with engravings by Alexeïeff, was considered one of the three best *livres d'art* published in France since the war, and in *L'art du livre en France* of 1931, the artist is described as 'brilliant visionary'.[6] But if Alexeïeff was much praised, why were his illustrations so successful *as illustrations* - and not merely as graphical art of a high technical skill and stylistic originality? The concept of illustration - of its methods and functions - underlying such appraisals may change greatly depending on time, place, illustrator and critic. Yet the historical art theoretical discussion about illustration, in which professional illustrators like Alexeïeff actively participated, has hardly been studied. The present thesis proposes to initiate the study of the 'theories' of illustration developed by its practitioners, by exploring Alexandre Alexeïeff's theories and practice of illustration. This artist's significance for early 20th-century illustration, his connections with the *École de Paris,* his love of theorizing both illustration and the other arts he was involved with (most significantly theatre and animated cinema), and the wealth of unstudied primary materials documenting this, make him an excellent starting-point for the study of the changing art theories of illustration.

Problem and state of research

In this thesis, we shall consider 'illustration' all graphic art meant to physically accompany a literary text, without including related forms like history painting, which in a broader sense also 'illustrate' a story.

As aforementioned, illustration in general has not enjoyed the scholarly attention which its long and venerable career as a cultural practice, and its links to topical issues such as intermediality and Word & Image studies, would seem to warrant. Earlier, largely fragmentary attempts to theorize about illustration and to find a fitting method of research seem unsatisfactory. First of all, many scholars and critics writing about illustration do not take into account the specificity of this form, treating it simply as graphic art. For instance, Philippe Soupault, praising Alexeïeff for his ceaseless experiments with engraving and for making engraving into an art form in its own right, only considers the technique and style of the images, forgetting their function: to illustrate a text.[7] The art form in question is *illustration*, rather than

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AL-Ms-016. On Green: letter to Alexandre Alexeïeff (05-10-1928), AEE AL-MS-001-015. On Camus: Alexeïeff, letter to Roger Allard (25-02-1958), AEE AL-Ms-208.

[5] Boris Pasternak, excerpt from a letter to his literary correspondent in Paris (05-11-1959), translated by Alexeïeff, AEE AL-Ms-201.

[6] Bruller 1931, pp. 41-66. Calot, Michon, Angoulvent 1931, p. 225.

[7] Philippe Soupault, *Text recorded by the French radio* (25-02-1947), AEE AL-Ms-108. Even in texts where Soupault does consider the images in their function of illustration, he keeps writing of '*l'art de la gravure'*. See chapter 2.2.3 on *paragone*.

engraving, and is characterized sooner by function than by technique – one may illustrate in watercolour, pen and ink, paint, etcetera, even if Alexeïeff preferred aquatint.[8]

Secondly, when an illustration is regarded in relation to a text, often it is only the formal relation which is considered – thickness of line and type, size and placement of the illustrations – and when the specific illustrative function of the image is taken into consideration, it is frequently treated in a normative way. This may mean complete rejection of illustration, which is regarded as superfluous and even harmful.[9] In other cases, illustration is 'accepted' if it fulfils specific criteria, and the task of the illustrations is carefully outlined – for instance, the image should translate the text visually, as exactly as possible.[10] We shall try to establish the criteria Alexeïeff's critics seem to use in their assessment of his work, and the tasks he himself assigned to illustration.

Finally, a beloved strategy in the literature about illustration consists of not writing about 'illustration' at all, creating instead artificial resorts of superiority such as the *livre d'artiste* or the *livre de dialogue* which are to be separated strictly from 'professional illustration'.[11] The latter is denied the status of art, and is branded commercial and utilitarian.[12] To hold up the division, external criteria are used, for instance the status and habitual medium of the artist, the cost of an edition and the number of copies printed. A famous sculptor providing images for a small luxury edition of Ovid does not 'illustrate', he enters into a visual dialogue with a text.[13] In fact, these are still illustrations in any workable definition of the term. The only reasons to refuse to call, for instance, Picasso's drawings for Balzac 'illustrations' are those of a rich man hesitant to enter a poorer relative's house. Such snobbery is a token of the basic issue underlying these problems of approach: the low esteem in which illustration has traditionally been held. Illustration is denied the status of art, and when – in the hands of Picasso – that status becomes unquestionable, the work immediately ceases to be considered illustration.

Even when illustration is not approached normatively and its specific character is kept in mind – for instance, by taking the relation between image and text as a starting point - we still

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[8] An 'art form' or discipline of art can be defined not only by a certain medium (material or technique) which characterizes it, but also by location or function. Illustration is singled out by its specific function – to accompany a text - and its placement in a physical connection to that text, rather than by a set technique.

[9] See for instance Congdon 1884, pp. 480-491.

[10] For some attempts at classification of the varying tasks and functions assigned to illustration, see Nikolajeva, Scott 2001, pp. 2-17. Nikolajeva offers a 'typology of the picturebook' and a number of categories in which words and pictures interact, such as congruency, extension, counterpoint and deviation, with reference to other 'typologies'.

[11] The term *livre de dialogue* was coined by Peyré 2001.

[12] Peyré, Drucker, Castleman, Mitchell, Stein, and Thurmann-Jajes are some of the scholars who seem to subscribe to this view, separating illustration from the *livre d'artiste* or artist's book on grounds of illustration's inferior quality. See Drucker 1995, pp. 60-69. Castleman 1994, p. 13. Mitchell 1976, p. 5. Stein 2001, p. 17. Thurmann-Jajes 2001, pp. 10-21.

[13] See for instance Castleman 1994, p. 49. It is also telling that Schmidt-Glintzer, writing of Picasso, feels the necessity to enrobe the verb 'illustrate' in his title in quotation marks. Schmidt-Glintzer 2002.

encounter problems with the methods used. Semiotics, often used by critics studying the relation of text and images, often appears as a modern version of Lessing's categorical separation of the means and (normative) goals of texts and images.[14] Time and again we find the list of fundamental differences between the two semiotic systems, and almost inevitably, having sketched the abyss, the critic fails to bridge it – which is the essence of the work of an illustrator.[15] The semiotic approach often limits itself to a listing and analysis of the separate ingredients of an illustrated book. This is like giving the chemical formulae of butter, eggs and flour, without attempting to describe how the baker makes them into cake, let alone endless varieties of cake, bread, and cookies.

Likewise, approaches from Word & Image studies have proven problematic. They have concentrated on finding visual elements in text or textual elements in images (mental images, ekphrasis, visual qualities of print, etc.), but seem to have difficulty with the concrete combination of a text and illustration, and have in majority ignored the subject.

As to the theoretical aspects of illustration: theorizing the genre has largely been undertaken from the perspective of other disciplines, such as psychology, semiotics or literature.[16] Surprisingly, the illustrator himself has been largely left out of these discussions. And while there is a fair number of 'histories of the illustrated book', some of which devote a few remarks to theory, there is no such thing as a critical anthology of the subject. The lack of a theoretical basis has been noticed before, although only a handful of articles have appeared to remedy it.[17] A notable publication in this regard is Reinhard Heinritz' *Buchillustration als Kunstform* of 1999, which laments the lacuna but devotes less than 20 pages to the changing functions of illustration from the middle ages up to Romanticism.[18] It is expressly meant as an introduction and appeal to further research, which has so far not appeared, despite the fact that there has indeed been an interesting discussion and effort at theorizing on the part of the illustrator.[19]

Previous approaches of the history of illustration have looked at the changing professional and social circumstances of the illustrator or the changing critical perception of illustration.[20] Here too, the illustrator largely remains condemned to 'speak' only through his

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[14] Melot 1984.

[15] For a good account of this discussion about the characteristics of text and images, see Mitchell 1986. See also my previous paper on this subject, 'Word and Image'.

[16] For examples of a psychologizing approach, see Nodelman 1988. Nikolajeva, Scott 2001 make unsystematic use of semiotics. Hodnett 1982 approaches illustration from the viewpoint of literature.

[17] For instance Ege 1949, who considers illustration as a fine art with its own theories.

[18] Heinritz 1999.

[19] Of course, efforts have been made to map recent developments in illustration. *Illustration Now!* (Wiedemann 2007) for example presents a large number of illustrators, each giving a short statement about their work. But such collections are far from amounting to or even providing a basis for a (historical) discussion of the development of art theories of illustration.

[20] Respectively, Kaenel 1996 and Schumacher 2000.

imagery. Yet if one sought to understand the theories of painting, one would hardly leave out the writings of Alberti, Leonardo and their colleagues. This thesis, which developed out of an interest in the 'theories' of illustration, therefore gives the floor to an illustrator.

Research question

We shall examine one illustrator's 'art theory' of illustration, adopting the research question: how did Alexandre Alexeïeff's pursual of a second art form, animated film, influence his practice and 'theories' of illustration? Answering this question will first of all necessitate an analysis of the ways in which Alexeïeff theorized his work as an illustrator, before drawing conclusions about the relationship between those theories and his activity as an animated film maker.

Relevance

The general interest of the current study may be found in the relative neglect with which illustration has met; more in particular, it is exploratory in its focus on the illustrator's perspective. Alexandre Alexeïeff as the object of study provides us not only with a substantial and original oeuvre, but also with the rarity of a considerable theoretical reflection on the art of illustration. It is rare to have the methods and concept of illustration carefully chronicled, rarer still to find them expressed by an illustrator, and I know of no scholarly study examining a parallel case.

Alexeïeff recommends himself by the wealth of unstudied material (letters, notebooks, essays) testifying to the artist's awareness and analysis of the peculiars of his profession. The artist moreover showcases with particular pathos the double bind of the illustrator caught between artistic and commercial imperatives. The Romantic dogma of originality and autonomy placed the illustrator, bound to both the text and the editor's demands, in a difficult position. Alexeïeff felt this paradox keenly, and sought to elevate illustration's status to that of a fine art. He can therefore also tell the more general story of an artist trying to defend and emancipate a (novel) art form, all the more because the ways in which he engaged himself strongly resemble those used to ennoble other arts, and can even be seen to follow the model of the renaissance *paragone* (competitive comparison between the arts). Thus, Alexeïeff insisted on the specificity of his art - illustration, but also animated cinema -, theorized about the best strategies and the proper use of available techniques, and sought to sketch a theoretical foundation.

Alexeïeff's oeuvre, despite his impressive productivity, his individual style, his technical innovations and experiments with the techniques of engraving, the prestige of the editions to which he contributed, and the acclaim these brought him in his time, has not yet received proper scholarly attention. What literature exists often has a mythical flavour and has never been critically reviewed. By contrast, Alexeïeff's work in animated cinema has engendered quite some

commentary, and he is present in overviews of early animation pioneers.[21] Not only have his illustrations been neglected by comparison, the 'film literature' about Alexeïeff tends to disparage it as merely a pecuniary side-production and puts it in stark contrast to his 'real' calling, film, a view which calls for correction. The question of the relation between the different arts Alexeïeff practiced moreover provides an interesting background to, and insight into, his approach of illustration.

Finally, by approaching illustration mainly through the discourse of a particular illustrator, this thesis pilots a new approach to the study of illustration, while also pointing out its complications. Alexeïeff's writings, while developing some themes with consistency, show many incongruities and variances, and can certainly not be regarded as a rounded theory. What we conveniently call his 'theory' of illustration is in fact a construct of disparate writings and remarks. What is more, the artist's careful self-representation amounts to the construction and manipulation of a persona so changeful it is nigh impossible to pin down.

Materials
The relevant secondary literature about Alexeïeff is quite sparse and will be critically reviewed in chapter one; the most important critical evaluations of his work will be mentioned briefly.

The most important materials, which are at the basis of chapters two and three, are the primary sources, especially the notes and essays by the artist and his correspondence with friends or editors, the lion's share of which has remained unpublished and was taken form the archives of the foundation *ArtExEast* (AEE) in Geneva, whose collection focuses on Alexeïeff's graphic work, and from the *Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée* (CNC) in Paris, regarding the animation work but also the illustrations. Other primary sources include an interview with the daughter of the artist. Again, no attempt will be made to give a complete overview of these materials; they will merely be discussed where relevant to research question.

While the main focus is on Alexeïeff's 'theory', as can be drawn from written sources, part of the actual illustrations which form its basis will be considered in order to illuminate the theoretical conception of the artist. The illustrated oeuvre is too vast to attempt any overview of it here. Illustrated books and some preparatory sketches have been found in the archives ArtExEast, the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* and the *Konkinklijke Bibliotheek*. In view of the bulk of material, a small selection has been made as specified and justified in chapter two.

Structure
The first part of this thesis will give a short description of Alexeïeff's life and oeuvre in order to introduce the artist. We shall not try to provide full biographical details, and questions of style,

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[21] For instance Russett, Starr 1976.

influence and artistic school which are outside the line of our argument shall merely be touched upon. The chapter will proceed to review the most important secondary literature about Alexeïeff's illustrations – both contemporary criticism and more recent scholarship - and will attempt to investigate what appraisals, analyses or explanations have so far been given of its peculiar character and success. Particular attention will be paid to the 'myth' created jointly by Alexeïeff and his critics, and which has strongly determined the way the work has been viewed.

The second and central chapter will concern Alexeïeff's 'theory' of illustration. By an analysis of several of his illustrated books, examined in tandem with his writings on this subject, it will attempt to describe what the artist *does* in his illustrations that is particular for (his conception of) this form of art, and how far his own writings, especially the two early essays about illustration, but also his private notes and correspondence, signal and confirm this. Secondly, special attention will be paid to the relationship between text and illustration within Alexeïeff's practice and theory. And thirdly, we will consider in what ways the illustrator strove to ennoble his profession, and in how far the concept of *paragone* is applicable.

The third chapter will, in a first part, examine the position(s) illustration held vis-à-vis animated film within Alexeïeff's oeuvre. It will show how he proceeded with a similar emancipatory goal regarding his other activity, that of making animated and publicity films. After a short description of the main facts concerning this work, we will first analyze the separate and isolating discourse in which his animation was discussed, by both Alexeïeff and critics and scholars. The 'pin board', Alexeïeff's main instrument for making films, was given its own *paragone* and theoretical garb, which will be regarded with special attention to the position of illustration within this discourse. The second part of the chapter will deal not with the separation but with the synthesis between film and illustration in Alexeïeff's oeuvre. It will highlight thematical, technical and theoretical parallels, and particularly argue that the film work parttakes of certain experiments made in the illustrated books, the results of which then fed back into Alexeïeff's conception and practice of illustration. Concepts central to both the film work and the animation will thus be examined.

In conclusion, we will summarize these findings, sketching their broader context and touching upon current developments in illustration, which will suggest ideas for further research.

1. Alexeïeff in life and literature – introducing the artist

'[O]ne cannot be an artist without exaggerating, without lying, without a certain measure of imposture.'

Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet steno,* 1975, p. 17. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

Figure 2 - Alexeïeff, self-portrait, pencil, 1931. AEE

The facts we have about the life of Alexeïeff can be quickly told, and have been told before.[22] Yet they are uncertain: dates and details vary, even in the artist's own statements, and original documents to confirm them are usually not available. The fact that several people, including Alexeïeff and his daughter, have written and re-written his life's story does nothing to clarify matters – on the contrary. The few facts about his life we may tentatively establish provide the bare outlines of a story which has been filled in with ever varying and extensive dramatisations and interpretations. One of the titles which Alexeïeff considered for his unpublished youth memoirs, finally called '*Oubli ou regrets',* was '*Mes Mythes'.*[23] Because of this (conscious) mythologization, Alexeïeff's portrait will inevitably be a kind of self-portrait. I will first summarize the basic names, dates and 'facts' in Alexeïeff's biography, and will separately discuss the myth that sprang up around them with his help in the second part of this chapter.

Alexandre (or Alexander, or Aleksandr Alekseevič) Alexeïeff (or Alekseev, Alexeïeff, Alexieff) was, of his own saying, born in 1901 in Kazan, Russia.[24] Some sources mention Oufa and the date of April 18th, others that of August 5th.[25] His father, Pavel Alexeïeff, allegedly was a Russian aristocrat and military diplomat in Constantinople, where Alexandre spent his early

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[22] For a longer account of his life, see for instance Alexeïeff-Rockwell 2001, pp. 228-245, and the 'Chronology' in Bendazzi 2001, pp. 306-316.

[23] Alexeïeff, 'Mémoires (Oubli ou Regrets. Souvenirs d'un Cadet de St. Petersbourg)', AAE AL-Ms-101.

[24] Alexandre Alexeïeff, *Biographical date* [ca. 1982], AEE AL-Ms-212. 'Alexandre' was the name under which he published; after he obtained American citizenship, his name was officially set as 'Alexander'.

[25] Bendazzi 2001, p. 306. Spiller 2011. All other sources mention Kazan. In 1985, Bendazzi too mentioned Kazan. Bendazzi 1985, p. 165. We find the date of 5 August 1901 in Noguez 1982, p. 51, and Roudévitch 1989, p. 97.

youth. After his father was killed in Germany in 1906, his mother, Maria Polidoroff, with her three sons, moved via Odessa and Riga to Gatchina, close to Saint-Petersburg.[26] There, Alexandre joined the Cadet School. After the outbreak of the Revolution and the civil war, he crossed Siberia to reach Vladivostok, where he embarked to travel the Far East as a seaman.[27] After a few months in England, he jumped ship near Marseille and travelled to Paris. The sources give varying dates for his departure from Russia, but 1919 seems likely.[28] Alexeïeff writes that he was twenty when he arrived in Paris, and it seems he must have arrived by 1921.[29] Between 1922 and 1925, Alexeïeff designed and painted sets for the companies of Pitoeff [appendix fig. 5], Jouvet, Komisarjevsky, the *Ballets Suédois,* and the *Ballets Russes,* and was a 'private pupil' of Serge Sudeikin, the famous set designer.[30] In 1922 or 1923 Alexeïeff married the actress Alexandra Grinevsky (1899-1976) [fig. 6], who gave birth to their daughter Svetlana in 1923.[31]

Around 1924, Alexeïeff lost his job in the theatre. Because he urgently needed money he started to make wood engravings, which were reputedly easy, aided by Roret's manuel *le Graveur.*[32] Alexeïeff's first illustrations, for surrealist writers to whom Soupault introduced him, were published in 1926.[33] His luck turned when Jacques Schiffrin asked him to illustrate *Le Journal d'un Fou,* published in 1927, which featured his first aquatints and brought him acclaim.[34] Two years later, his lithographs for *Les Frères Karamazov* established his reputation as a master.[35]

Alexeïeff illustrated works of Poe, Baudelaire, Andersen, Hoffman, Tolstoy, Pasternak and Malraux, among others, and his production of illustrations continued until the early 1970's, although it slackened somewhat after 1934.[36] He also produced posters and magazine covers, and occasionally painted.[37] Around 1932, he invented the *écran d'épingles* (pin board), an

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[26] Bendazzi 2001, pp. 306-307, and Alexeïeff, *Memoirs*, AAE AL-Ms-101.

[27] Bendazzi 2001, p. 307.

[28] Bendazzi writes of 1920. We also find 1919 or even 1917; Martin, 1963, p. 57. In a letter of 1928, Alexeïeff writes that he spent two years at sea, but also writes he has forgotten the dates and thinks he never knew them. Letter to Pierre Mornand (14-06-1928), AEE AL-Ms-211. 1919 is the date Alexeïeff mentions in his letter to Albert Camus (27-10-1958), AEE AL-Ms-201.

[29] Alexeïeff, *Biographical date,* AEE AL-Ms-212, and Bendazzi 2001, p. 307, among others. The earliest date mentioned for his arrival is 1917. Fechter 1995, p. 217.

[30] Alexeïeff, *Biographical date*, AEE AL-Ms-212. For an example of this work, see Häger 1989, pp. 221-226.

[31] Alexeïeff writes 1922 in his *Biographical date* (ibid.), Bendazzi 2001 writes 1923, and so does Svetlana Alexeïeff, *L'influence de Alexandra Grinevsky*, [after 1983], AEE AL-Ms-210.

[32] 'I didn't have money to live, I was married, I had a child, it had to eat, and so did I, so there had to be profit straight away.' Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet steno,* 1975, p. 1. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[33] Alexeïeff, *letter to Mornand* (14-06-1928), AEE AL-Ms-001-019. The authors in question were Giraudoux and Gengenbach.

[34] Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet steno,* 1975, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[35] Alexeïeff, biographical date, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell #17.

[36] For a list of illustrated works, see appendix.

[37] See for instance Müller-Brockmann 1971, p. 41, p. 85. The ArtExEast archives hold cover designs for Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. The CNC has some (very poor) paintings.

instrument with which he made animated films, assisted from 1932 onward by the American student Claire Parker (1906-1981), whom he would marry in 1941.[38] Their most important films were *Une Nuit sur le Mont Chauve* of 1934 and *Le Nez* of 1963.[39] Around the same time, assisted by a small team including Parker, his first wife Grinevsky and her lover Etienne Raik, he started to produce advertising films. Gasparcolor commissioned him to organize their colour studio in Berlin, where he lived for some time in the 1930's.[40] We shall return to the film production in chapter 3.

From 1941 till 1947, Alexeïeff, Grinevsky, their daughter Svetlana and Claire Parker all lived in the USA. Back in France, Alexeïeff continued engraving and producing films. After Parker died in 1981, he took his own life in August 1982 in Paris.[41]

1.1 Scholarship: state of research

The secondary literature about Alexeïeff need not occupy us for long. The main traits of the artist's reputation and the few biographical facts we have reviewed above, described with small variations, constitute the lion's share of what has been written about him to date. The film historian Nikolaï Izvolov rightly remarks that 'we keep coming across the same things in the articles, the interviews, his memoirs and letters, which, far from complementing each other, make a truly excessive use of cut-and-paste.'[42] We shall therefore only summarily discuss that secondary literature, before moving on to the artist's work and his own, largely unpublished writings.

First of all, the studies devoted to Alexeïeff's film work far outnumber those examining his illustrations. Where these did become the object of study, they were mostly examined in connection to famous authors and to the Surrealist movement. Renée Riese Hubert, who described Soupault's relation to Alexeïeff, also mentions him in the context of 'the surrealist book'. While the identity of 'surrealist illustration' remains vague, for Alexeïeff it seems to lie in the metaphoric rather than narrated coherence between his illustrations for *The Fall of the House of Usher.*[43]

Like Hubert, Ina Conzen-Meairs in *Edgar Allan Poe und die Bildende Kunste des Symbolismus* focuses on Alexeïeff's illustrations to E.A. Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* and

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[38] In 1932, Claire, who wanted to learn engraving, became Alexeïeff's pupil. Claire Parker, 'Biographie de Claire Parker rédigée par elle-même' (24-10-1962), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17. The precise date of the invention of the pinscreen is arguable, and Alexeïeff might have antedated it. See chapter 3, p. 66.

[39] Fur a full filmography, see Bendazzi 2001, pp. 286-295. The official filmographies mention 1933, but Alexeïeff seems to have antedated his first film. The invitation to the first showing in the Cinéma du Panthéon is dated 6 December 1934. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #9.

[40] Bendazzi 2001, p. 308, mentions 1933-1934, Alexeïeff himself writes of 1935 in his *Biographical date*, AEE AL-Ms-212. In another source he mentions the year 1936. *Biography for Center Screen*, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.

[41] Alexeïeff, *Biographical date*, AEE AL-Ms-212.

[42] Izvolov 2001, p. 55.

[43] Hubert 1988, pp. 265-274.

Colloque de Monos et Una. She gives a short stylistic analysis of Alexeïeff's work, and then concentrates on the symbolic and fantastical elements in his illustrations for these two books, remarking upon Alexeïeff's freedom of interpretation.[44]

Elke Riemer has described Alexeïeff's illustrations to E.T.A. Hoffmann in her study devoted to this author. She counts Alexeïeff among his best illustrators because of the estranging atmosphere he evokes and his apparent congeniality with Hoffmann.[45]

Ronald Spoor and Herman Verhaar have traced the influence of Alexeïeff's etchings for *Adrienne Mesurat* on the poem *De Grijze Dashond* by Edgar Du Perron, which reinterprets this story via Alexeïeff's visualisations.[46] None of the scholars mentioned here devote more than a few pages to Alexeïeff's illustrations, and for none of them he is the primary object of research.

The most important publication about Alexeïeff was edited by his close friend, the film scholar Giannalberto Bendazzi, and consists of essays by Alexeïeff's daughter and grandson and several figures from the (animation-) film world. Only Marco Fragonara's essay focuses on Alexeïeff's illustration, especially on his technical innovations. Fragonara appears to have had access to Alexeïeff's '*Conférence sur l'art d'illustrer les livres*', although he nowhere refers to it.[47] References to sources throughout the monograph are absent or so summary and cryptic they are incomprehensible. Being the only one of its kind, the publication is very valuable, but its value is limited by factual errors and inconsistencies.[48] The majority of the essays in this book have not noticeably benefited from solid research of primary sources, and are rather lyrical and mythologizing in tone.

While much of the secondary literature echoes Alexeïeff's own words in some way – we shall shortly see how actively he contributed to his own public image – none discuss the illustrator's writings about his art, or reflect on his self-representation. The only thing that comes close to a critical reflection on the dominant image of Alexeïeff was written by the artist himself in his old age. In the mildly ironic text 'Alfeoni par Alexeïeff', Alexeïeff tells his (Alfeoni's) life's story in the third person, mocking his self-representation in earlier and official texts: 'he says he left the theatre at 23; in reality he had been thrown out.'[49] He also gives a less high-brow motivation for some of his artistic choices: 'he found surrealism convenient, because a bad engraving could pass for 'original': "if you don't understand – too bad for you".'[50] None of the secondary literature about Alexeïeff refers to the bulk of unpublished archival documents to be found in Geneva and Fontenay-le-Fleury. At best, authors refer to those writings which Alexeïeff

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[44] Meairs 1989, pp. 173-179.
[45] Riemer 1976, pp. 115-117.
[46] Spoor, Verhaar 1995, pp. 4-19.
[47] Fragonara 2001, pp. 98-117.
[48] On page 14, for instance, Alexeïeff is said to reach French soil in 1920, whereas on page 307, he does so in 1921. Bendazzi 2001. Any uncertainty about dates and facts is, however, not mentioned.
[49] Alexeïeff, 'Alfeoni par Alexeïeff', 1972, p. 5. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.
[50] Ibid.

did publish in his lifetime, especially to his short text in the 1967 catalogue of the National Library of Scotland. Other texts published during his lifetime, amplified by previously unpublished ones, were collected in the slim cahier *Pages d'Alexeïeff,* published in 1983 under Bendazzi's supervision on the occasion of the animation film festival of Annecy, and which correspondingly focuses almost exclusively on animated film.[51]

After a short discussion of Alexeïeff's work and style, we shall examine contemporary critical evaluations.

1.2 Work, style, influence

To give a *catalogue raisonné* of Alexeïeff's work will be the task of a future monograph; this chapter merely aims to provide an introduction and overview of the main facts, to place his work in context stylistically and give a short indication of possible influences, by considering the artist's predilections and his connections in the art world.

Alexeïeff's artistic education was fragmented. He received his first drawing lessons at the Cadet school, and later often referred to his wonderful teacher there, who had his class draw objects or scenes from memory or asked them to illustrate the texts he read aloud. Moreover, Alexeïeff writes that from the age of 14, he spent his Thursday afternoons in the museum of St. Petersburg, drawing plaster copies of famous sculptures, and remarks that he had great trouble to detach himself from the academic style later on.[52] A look at his early sketchbooks makes this clear [fig. 7-8]. He also practiced by copying the style of Sudeikin's gouaches [fig. 9-10] and mentions drawing classes at the *Grande Chaumière* in Montparnasse, although he sometimes affirmed that he was too poor for lessons.[53]

As an engraver, he was self-schooled, and by proclaiming how originally he 'reinvented' the different engraving techniques for himself, he soon turned the absence of a formal education to his advantage.[54] In view of this claim and the constancy with which critics have remarked on the individuality of Alexeïeff's style, I shall attempt to describe some of its particularities, indicating possible influences where relevant. As we shall see, the illustrator adapted his style to the character of the text he illustrated, yet his personal style is very recognizable.

Alexeïeff worked mostly in black and white, and the *chiaroscuro*, in combination with the fantastical subject matter, is reminiscent of Goya's etchings. But instead of emphasizing line, he often prefers to assign a great role to the vague outlines he admired in Seurat's charcoal

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[51] Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983.

[52] Alexeïeff, *Memoirs*, AEE AL-Ms-101, pp. 95-96.

[53] Apparently, Sudeikin paid for (part of) these lessons. Alexeïeff, *Images incertaines,* CNC-collections AFF/ Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. Bendazzi mentions the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. Bendazzi 1985, p. 165.

[54] See for instance his letter to Mornand (14-06-1928), AEE AL-Ms-211, and his *Biographical date*, AEE AL-Ms-212. On the particularity of his techniques, to which we shall return in chapter two, see Fragonara 2001, pp. 98-117.

drawings, and which his lithographies sometimes approach. His skilled use of aquatint and mix of fine and course grains permits the transparencies, shadows, and mists so characteristic of many of his illustrations [fig. 12-14]. Sometimes he combines several diaphanous scenes into one image [fig. 11]. Alexeïeff frequently superposes transparent 'layers' suggesting different spaces, matter or shadows, accentuating the fuzzy and indefinite character of many prints. His figures tend to be sinuous and rounded and to appear weightless. Women are not seldom nude or wearing transparent clothes, men are often shrouded in shadow [fig. 13-15]. When Alexeïeff, often in a different technique (especially line drawings, gouaches, or wood-cuts), uses more distinct shapes and lines, his compositions and the stylized clarity of his lines can evoke Japanese prints [fig. 16]. Likewise, his (early) work may suggest the influence of Paul Klee [fig. 17].[55] Alexeïeff's working relationship with his first wife Grinevsky deserves a separate study [fig. 18].[56]

The work of Chagall presents another, acknowledged influence: Alexeïeff's floating marionette-like figures, the airy, unreal quality and melancholy atmosphere of many images remind us of this other Russian-born artist [fig. 14]. In a letter of 1960, Alexeïeff expresses his 'great respect' for Chagall, who 'influenced me deeply during my early years as an illustrator.' In the same letter, he lauds the American illustrator Charles Addams (1912-1988) 'for his genius for suggestion and his poetic sense', and mentions Vladimir Favorksy (1886-1964), as 'a very great engraver. It is the elegance of his works, on the professional and ornamental, rather than the dramatic plane, which I greatly appreciate.'[57] We shall see that he considers 'dramatic' illustration his own speciality, and the Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) is his leading example in all things theatrical.[58] Louis Cheronnet is alone in judging that Alexeïeff's illustrations contain no trace of his previous activity as stage designer.[59] Theatrical elements may be found in the 'flat', slightly surreal, stage-like spaces in which the personages often appear frontally, in full length, like actors presenting themselves self-consciously to a public [fig. 19]. The suggested space is often of limited depth and framed by curtains or a window frame, and if the scene is set outside, the background, instead of showing a vista, may be 'marbled' or supplied by a flat façade [fig. 20]. Windows, either blind or revealing a protagonist, are a recurring motif, and are one variant of the regular patterns which give Alexeïeff's illustrations the decorative quality sometimes also attributed to his experience in theatre.[60] This scenic character is not consistent, however, and from time to time we find unexpected (birds-

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[55]Rowan 1968, p. 56.
[56] See my introductory article on this subject, Hofstede 2012.
[57] Alexeïeff, letter to Gross (24-09-1960), AEE AL-Ms-209.
[58]Alexeïeff mentions Meyerhold in several documents, for instance his *Entretiens* with Clara Malraux, 1980, AEE AL-Ms-107.
[59] Cheronnet 1932, p. 148.
[60] Mornand 1947, pp. 3-4.

eye) viewpoints, blurs or close-ups; we shall come back to cinematic techniques in Alexeïeff's illustration in chapter three.

Another recurring device is the silhouette, which appears either as a dark shadow, a barely visible outline, or in white, reserved against a dark background. This last form might be connected to Alexeïeff's repeated mention of the cave art of Lascaux and Altamira.[61] [Fig. 21-22] To some critics these silhouettes call to mind the influence of (photo)-collage.[62]

Besides the few names mentioned above, collage, cubism, De Chirico's *pittura metafisica* and above all surrealism are the avant-garde influences with which Alexeïeff has been associated [fig. 23].[63] Renée Riese Hubert considers his work as an example of the 'surrealist book', and his name is mentioned in the *Révolution Surréaliste*.[64] Moreover, he had a lifelong friendship with Philippe Soupault (1897-1990), one of the founders of the movement and his faithful champion [fig. 24].[65]

To judge by incidental remarks, Alexeïeff considered himself part of the avant-garde or *école de Paris*. For instance, dissatisfied with a printer who did not follow his directions, he complains that the result is 'foreign to the spirit of the *École de Paris*, such as I understand it'.[66] Yet he is unwilling to be associated with any movement, and emphasizes his originality: 'in no case do I imitate my colleagues (although the opposite happens). I never follow the fashion but always lead it.'[67] Asked whether he sees himself as member of the avant-garde, particularly of Surrealism, he answers: 'As soon as I hear the word 'school', I have a reflex of revolt (...) I have always thought that liberty was my destiny and that I would fight my battle as 'outsider' and not as a follower or told what to do by whomever.'[68]

Although he poses as an absolute outsider, we know Alexeïeff to have been acquainted and influenced by several figures. An important personality we have not yet mentioned is André Malraux (1901-1976), the later Minister for Cultural Affairs, who worked in editing when he befriended Alexeïeff. A joint theatre project for the *Comédie Française* in the 1960's was never realized, but Alexeïeff later illustrated four of Malraux' works.[69]

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[61] Alexeïeff, Malraux, *Entretiens*, 1980, AEE AL-Ms-107.
[62] Cheronnet 1932, p. 153.
[63] See for instance Conzen-Meairs 1989, p. 173, Rowan 1968, p. 55, Bendazzi 1985, p. 173, and Gould 1966, p. 152.
[64] Hubert 1988, pp. 265-266. *La Révolution Surréaliste* 12 (1929), p. XII. I cannot find him on the page referred to in the index, however.
[65] Hubert 1992, pp. 149-161.
[66] Alexeïeff, letter to Albert Symboliste (13-05-1948), AEE AL-Ms-211. The print in question is the cover of Mornand's *Vingt-Deux Artistes du Livre.*
[67] Alexeïeff, letter to Hadad (28-06-1949), AEE Al-Ms-211.
[68] Alexeïeff, Malraux, *Entretiens,* 1980, AEE AL-Ms-107.
[69] Illustrations for Gallimard in an edition of 1970. Most of the correspondence has been sold and could not be traced. Alexeïeff-Rockwell, letter to De Choqueuse (16-07-1986), AEE AL-Ms-212. The theatre project concerned the design of stages and costumes for pieces by Audiberti, Anouilh and Giraudoux. Correspondence between Alexeïeff, Malraux and Escande, 1961, AEE AL-Ms-207.

The Dutch author Edgar du Perron (1899-1940), who befriended both Malraux and Alexeïeff, used them as models for two main characters in his 1935 masterpiece *Land van Herkomst* [fig. 25], calling them Héverlé and Goeraëff respectively. Du Perron gives us the most vivid portrait of Alexeïeff's place in the artistic scene of Paris in the 1930's, and a striking image of his character. He describes Goeraëff as uneasy under the strong influence of Héverlé. Many of the things we read about Goeraëff are also recounted by Alexeïeff in his memoirs, down to details such as the name of the gardener or the black dog he had in his youth in Constantinopel.[70] But despite this suggestion of credibility, with this literary work we enter the uncertain domain of the mythical.

1.3 The 'Myth' of Alexeïeff

The reputation of Alexeïeff's work appears closely interwoven with that of the man; therefore we shall consider them both in tandem. This reputation is essentially established by the literary work of two befriended authors, Du Perron and Noël Devaulx (1905-1995), by Alexeïeff's self-representation in memoirs, interviews and shorter writings, and by critics and scholars who have embroidered upon this reputation. It interests us because the reputation Alexeïeff made for himself has many connections to that which he tried to build for his illustrations and other work.

Du Perron, introducing Goeraëff / Alexeïeff, describes an 'improbably elegant personage', dressed like a dandy with his red *foulard*, filt hat, and cane, who shaves off his long blonde hair once a year because he gets tired of being handsome.[71] The same charm is described by the German writer and critic Paul Fechter (1880-1958), who met Alexeïeff in Berlin, and by the artist's daughter.[72]

To this image of the dandy in white suit is added that of the exotic Russian, the eternal immigrant and outsider. Alexeïeff treasured his memories of a 'lost world' and presented himself as a rare survivor from the Russia that was destroyed in the revolution.[73] The personage of Goeraëff constantly talks of the Russian soul, the Russian sense of the mystique, and the great difference between the Russian and the French.[74] Goeraëff also cherishes his nonconformity: like the 'real' Alexeïeff, he shares his atelier with his lover, his wife and her lover. He disparages the *bourgeoisie* and affirms that 'I'd rather finish myself off *straight away* than to think and feel through a herd.'[75] Further details like an attempted suicide complete the picture by stressing its dark side. In a comparable spirit, Noël Devaulx dedicated his fantastical *Bal chez Alféoni* to

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[70] Perron 1954, p. 15. Alexeïeff also designed the cover of the 1935 Querido edition, although no illustrator is mentioned; the AEE archives conserve the preparatory sketches for this design, reproduced in fig. 25.

[71] Perron 1954, p. 8, pp. 15-16, p. 456. The printer J.J.J. Rigal confirms Alexeïeff's practice of shaving his head ('that's so as to have beautiful hair later'). *Souvenirs de Rigal*, undated, AEE AL-Ms-210.

[72] Fechter 1995, p. 217. Alexeïeff-Rockwell 2001, pp. 234-235.

[73] See his memoirs and his letter to Camus (27-10-1958), AEE AL-Ms-201, and his undated *Why and how I illustrated doctor Zhivago*, AEE AL-Ms-201.

[74] Perron 1954, for instance pp. 9-10.

[75] Perron 1954, p. 10.

Alexeïeff. Alféoni was the name Alexeïeff gave himself in the tales he wrote.[76] Devaulx gives the same name to a reclusive but powerful writer, whose secluded villa is like another world peopled with animal-like, hypnotic dancers in sumptuous costumes, who in a hallucinatory ritual kill Alféoni himself.[77]

Both Devaulx and Du Perron stress the unbridled fantasy and almost delusive mindset of their Alexeïeff-personages. Goeraëff remarks that the world always appears surreal to him, and Du Perron repeatedly stresses his vivid (and self-consciously advertised) fantasy: 'I have to tell Goeraëff about this dream; perhaps his fantasy will appreciate its deeper meaning. (He will certainly pretend so.)'[78] Alexeïeff indeed showed pride in his vivid imagination, for instance by repeating the anecdote of his experiment with cocaine; this was a failure because it accelerated the flow of images before his mind's eye, already so rapid that he only ever sought to slow it down. He needed methods to make his mind less, not more, hallucinatory, and to bridle his imagination instead of stimulating it.[79] Goeraëff self-conscious attitude in this respect may have been quite close to his model's.

Another role that fitted Alexeïeff was that of the necessitous, suffering *avant-garde* artist. He often described the poverty and hunger he suffered during his first years in Paris, and the dangerous and strenuous work he had to do.[80] He consequently had some trouble justifying to himself his commercial work, especially the advertisement films: 'I consoled myself [...] that there really is an 'art' of selling and, anyway, much of the great painting in the world has been done for propaganda purposes, for the Church and for royalty.'[81] This uneasiness with 'commercial' work is also important with respect to illustration's reputation as a pecuniary profession (and not an art).[82] Alexeïeff consequently sought to combine advertisement and art by incorporating an aesthetic or technical experiment in every advertisement film he and his team produced:

> I have remained faithful to that desire, that need of the artist to escape the monotony of a creation which would not be creation, if my production became routine. It was routine from which I wanted to escape above all.[83]

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[76] Kovalov 2001, pp. 50-51. I have not been able to find these tales, which according to Alexeïeff's daughter are in Geneva.

[77] Devaulx 1956, pp. 11-34.

[78] Perron 1954, p. 25. See also p. 11, p. 14 and p. 152.

[79] See Alexeïeff's *Memoirs*, AEE AL-Ms-101, and the *Entretien*, AEE AL-Ms-107.

[80] See for instance Alexeïeff, letter to Mornand (14-06-1928), AEE AL-Ms-211, and Perron 1933.

[81] Starr 1965, p. 21. In his dealings with the companies he worked for, Alexeïeff came off as arrogant, refusing to do business with anyone but the chair, ostentatiously scorning the surrounding 'mediocrity'. Saint-Dreux 2001, pp. 202-207.

[82] See for instance Kaenel 1996 and Bodt 2010, esp. pp. 19-35.

[83] 'De l'illustration de livres et du film d'animation'. Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 25.

Alexeïeff set himself the same goal for each text he illustrated and every technique he used, always aiming for a 'spectacular novelty'.[84] In short, in the way he presents himself to the world, Alexeïeff leaves no doubt that he is an artist, not a craftsman, and that he too is governed by the emotion 'so great that she seemed to me the state of grace of which the poets speak: inspiration.'[85] This will be important in his conception of his illustrative work.

1.4 Evaluations in contemporary criticism

If the remark about inspiration makes clear Alexeïeff wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, the following complaint is also in this line. Alexeïeff remarked in 1968 in a letter to a friend:

> I have never seen in any French paper or magazine a serious criticism of an illustrated "*de luxe*" book. Nothing beyond "*contenant digne du contenu*" and other amiabilities exchanged against a copy "*hors commerce*". Perhaps I should mention a couple of friendly and attentive articles by Soupault – but he was a friend.[86]

While the artist is a little harsh, there are indeed not many critics who have analyzed his work in any depth. We shall therefore concentrate on those critics who venture an interpretation of Alexeïeff's methods and strategies of illustration, instead of merely a summary aesthetic judgment. Philippe Soupault, Louis Cheronnet and Pierre Mornand discussed his work more than once; we shall also include the sole analyses of E. Handloser, Alistair Rowan and Edward Gage.

First of all, Alexeïeff's reputation as an outsider of an impassioned, fantastical and at times dark character, and as a proud and committed artist, translates quite directly to the dominant conception of his work in these articles. Soupault, in the first full-length article dedicated to him, writes that Alexeïeff imposes his magisterial personality on every illustration, and that he is the most profound and original illustrator since the war. Soupault also lauds his sense of mystery and the abandon with which he dedicates himself to his work, and stresses the diversity of the work of this artist who 'only lives to change' and always searches technical novelty.[87] The critic Louis Cheronnet soon baptized Alexeïeff the 'illustrator of the fantastical', finding evidence in his illustrations of a concentration of inner life and a penchant for the imaginative and dream-like, a temperament well adapted to the fantastical character of the texts he illustrates.[88] Other critics write of the strange, Russian character of his illustrations.[89] The

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[84] Alexeïeff, *Quelques mots*, exhib. cat. Annecy, 1975, AEE AL-Ms-212.

[85] Alexeïeff, *Memoirs*, AEE AL-Ms-101, p. 161.

[86] Alexeïeff, letter to Cecile (23-10-1968), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.

[87] Soupault 1928, p. 196, pp. 198-199. E. Handloser also stresses the domineering power of Alexeïeff's personality. Handloser 1936, pp. 119-124.

[88] Cheronnet 1932, pp. 148-153.

[89] Handloser 1936, p. 120.

'astonishing novelty' of Alexeïeff's work is steadily remarked upon, for instance by Pierre Mornand: 'the manner is very new, very personal: one recognizes the inspiration of a born artist,' a description not considered self-evident for an illustrator.[90] In the same vein, critics also stress Alexeïeff's passionate, intrinsic motivation to create, and specifically to create illustrations. In some accounts of his life, the artist appears to have been educated as an illustrator from the very start, and much is made of the precocious training of his visual memory and imagination.[91] Mornand writes that Alexeïeff therefore reunites all qualities of the 'true and perfect illustrator'.[92]

The interpretation these same critics give of Alexeïeff's strategies of illustration is also remarkably uniform. We know that Soupault and Alexeïeff were close friends, and they sometimes seem to refer to each other's writings. Both, for instance, qualify coloured engraving as '*veau à cinq pattes'* (five-legged calf).[93] Alexeïeff also corresponded with Mornand, answering the critic's questions about his work.[94] This direct influence of Alexeïeff's and the recycling of previous articles may explain part of the consistency of the evaluations.

Soupault published his most important text about Alexeïeff's illustration in 1928 in *Plaisir de Bibliophile.*[95] Later texts, dated 1929 and 1947, are shorter and focus on the methods and techniques of engraving, bypassing the function of those engravings: to illustrate.[96] The introductory text Soupault wrote around 1960 for the retrospective exhibition of Alexeïeff's illustrations in the Bibliothèque Nationale is a summary paraphrase of the earliest text. Finally, Renée Riese Hubert has examined Alexeïeff's place within Soupault's art criticism, and analyzes some of his illustrations in the light of that criticism.[97]

At the core of Soupault's analysis is the fact that Alexeïeff's illustrations are not mimetic. They don't give a visual translation of a line or anecdote from the text, or of an image already suggested by the author. Instead, they illustrate the general mood: 'when Alexeïeff finds himself before a book he has to illustrate, and wants to choose a subject, it is not the anecdote which decides him. He tries above all to deduce the general atmosphere of the book.'[98] Alexeïeff takes his distance from the text, and instead of focussing on textual detail, tries to bring out the

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[90] Mornand 1947, p. 5 ('un artiste de race').
[91] See for instance the biographical note in the National Library of Scotland catalogue, 1967, p. 5, and Cheronnet 1932, p. 148. Alexeïeff himself also stressed this training (the drawing teacher reading texts aloud for inspiration), for instance in his *Memoirs,* AAE AL-Ms-101, pp. 95-97, or in the *Biographical date*, AEE AL-Ms-212.
[92] Mornand 1947, p. 4.
[93] Soupault 1929, p. 604. Alexeïeff uses this expression in an undated, untitled conference outline. Alexeïeff, *Conférence sur la gravure*, AEE AL-Ms-104.
[94] Alexeïeff, letter to Mornand (14-06-1928), AEE AL-Ms-001-019.
[95] Soupault 1928.
[96] Soupault 1929, pp. 601-607, and his *Text recorded by the French radio* (25-02-1947), AEE AL-Ms-108.
[97] Hubert 1992, pp. 149-161. I have found no trace of the illustrations for Soupault's *Le Nègre* Hubert mentions. Soupault himself referred to this publication in 1928 as 'to appear' – perhaps it never did.
[98] Soupault 1929, p. 200.

underlying atmosphere and its sources.[99] He thereby gives us a visual commentary, throwing new light on the text, and extending its meaning – the only possible strategy for a true illustrator:

> [the illustrator] can offer the reader a new light, guide him or distance him from his own conception. An attitude which can be dangerous or simply annoying, but which is the only one permitting him to consider himself an illustrator.[100]

The illustrations expressly should not be merely ornamental or underline a few haphazardly chosen sentences. The illustrator shows us what the author *cannot* describe: the purely visible side of his story, as well as the dreams and intentions of his characters, which he suggests but leaves implicit.[101] In 1929, Soupault even writes that the graphic arts 'should do without words [...] they should place themselves above and against them. They have to express what words cannot render.'[102] The task of the illustrator, according to Soupault, is to throw new light on the meaning of text to deepen the reader's understanding. It seems the general aim of illustration may be described as 'intensification'. The reader's understanding, the atmosphere of the book, and the elements the author merely suggests without making them explicit, are all to be intensified.[103] Playing on the meaning of 'illustrating' as 'enlighting', Soupault repeatedly speaks of a 'more intense light'.[104]

Exactly how Alexeïeff visualizes and intensifies the atmosphere of a book remains vague, and Soupault omits specific examples. He does elaborate on the effects of this approach. First of all, Alexeïeff's 'commentary' on the text strongly reflects his own personality, which Soupault considers so strong that it can dominate that of the author. Therefore, only a high-quality literary text will support these illustrations. Alexeïeff's independent attitude towards the text he illustrates also ensures that his engravings have a life of their own and are works of art in themselves, independently from the text; they 'can be separated from the book. When they live their independent life, they acquire a strength which makes them comparable to paintings, or, more exactly, lets us consider them as self-contained works of art.'[105] While he seems to praise the illustrator's strong, almost autonomous contribution, Soupault also shows some hesitations.

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[99] Ibid., p. 202. 'The illustrator, instead of losing himself in details, tries to find the causes of these atmospheres, their sources if one may say so, isolating and underlining them.'
[100] Ibid., p. 602.
[101] Soupault 1928, pp. 207-208.
[102] Soupault 1929, p. 607.
[103] In 1931, the critic and illustrator Jean Bruller, perhaps following Soupault, also writes of the 'considerable increase' in the ambiance of the text accomplished by Alexeïeff's illustrations. Bruller 1931, p. 50.
[104] Soupault 1928, p. 194, p. 169, p. 208.
[105] Soupault 1928, p. 202.

He remarks that the 'deformation' of the text has been avoided, and qualifies Alexeïeff's attitude towards the text as '*hautain*' (assuming, haughty).[106]

The critic Louis Cheronnet published an extensive article about Alexeïeff's illustrations in 1932 and wrote twice about his first film in 1934.[107] He holds that Alexeïeff illustrates 'ideas rather than facts': the anecdote plays a very modest role, while the illustrator tries to materialize abstract intellectual thought: dreams, fantasies, philosophies. To do so, he proceeds by 'evocation, by creation of atmosphere rather than by the accentuated concretisation of external effects.' Therefore, his images are not '"illustrations" in the literal sense but an accompaniment which reinforces the melody of the text'.[108] Alexeïeff captures the 'sound' of each book, reinforcing and prolonging it in a visual echo. This includes adapting his technique to each text. Cheronnet adds that Alexeïeff needs to have a strong personal connection with the text; if its philosophy is strange to him, he can only illustrate gestures and facts and the result is lifeless.

The German critic E. Handloser stays within the lines laid out by Soupault, Cheronnet and – perhaps – Alexeïeff, with whom he too corresponded. He writes that Alexeïeff's illustrations are not 'anecdotal accompaniments of a poetic text, but re-creations, with a stress on the word creation.' Instead of providing cheap anecdotes, Alexeïeff shows a deep spiritual connection to the author. Meanwhile, the illustrator's vision is so powerful that it dominates that of the author, rather as, in our cover illustration, the translator (Baudelaire) pushes the author to the background.[109]

Pierre Mornand, chief editor of *Le Bibliophile,* published two (very similar) texts about Alexeïeff in 1947 and 1948, including him in his *Vingt-Deux Artistes du Livre.* He sometimes quotes from the letter Alexeïeff sent him in 1928, and which mainly elaborates on techniques, without mentioning a concept of illustration.[110] Mornand is somewhat cautious in this regard. He recognises that Alexeïeff excels at the expression of dreams, thoughts and emotions, and that some of his illustrations are philosophical in character. Instead of speaking of 'general atmosphere', Mornand remarks that Alexeïeff's images call forth the same impressions as the text, and fit its spirit and emotion exactly. Sometimes 'the anecdotal character of illustration is surpassed by the symbolical character' of Alexeïeff's work.[111] We thus find the same elements more prudently phrased.

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[106] Soupault 1928, p. 194, p. 208, p. 200.

[107] Cheronnet 1932, pp. 147-154, Cheronnet *Crapouillot* 1934, pp. 34-36, and Cheronnet *Art et Décoration* 1934, pp. 377-381.

[108] Cheronnet 1932, pp. 149-150.

[109] Handloser 1936, p. 124, p. 120. Handloser is the only of these critics who mentions Alexandra Grinevsky, Alexeïeff's first wife, and her work as an illustrator.

[110] Alexeïeff, letter to Mornand (14-06-1928), AEE AL-Ms-211. We find direct quotes in Mornand 1948, p. 15 and p. 21, as well as numerous paraphrases. Alexeïeff provided the aquatint for the cover of this publication.

[111] Mornand 1948, p. 22.

On the occasion of the 1967 exhibition of Alexeïeff's illustrations in the National Library of Scotland, Alistair Rowan published an article in *The Burlington Magazine.* Quite in line with Alexeïeff's short 'Reflections on the Illustration of Books' in the 1967 catalogue, Rowan writes that 'Alexeïeff only rarely illustrates a major event, and it is always with reticence; but a central concern of his theory of illustration is to set the scene, to stage as it were the novel, and to stage even its mood.'[112] Rowan furthermore writes that Alexeïeff never imposes too precise an image on the reader's imagination, thus avoiding a major danger of book illustration.[113]

The critic Edward Gage reviewed the same exhibition in a laudatory article. He writes that illustration can be great art when it manages 'to evoke the spirit and interpret the significance of the written word through parallel images. [...] Here each whisper of atmosphere is caught and amplified with marvellous invention'.[114] The word 'invention', so popular in Renaissance art theory because it was deemed the mother of all fine arts, is the ultimate compliment to the illustrator.[115]

What is striking in these evaluations of Alexeïeff's illustration is their consistency. All these critics seem to agree that the illustrations focus on ideas or atmosphere (abstract elements) rather than on concrete anecdotes, aiming at an intensification or extension of the meaning of the text. They also stress the creative, semi-autonomous and perhaps even dominant character of the work, which however is carefully adapted to the mood and spirit of the text it accompanies.

Let us now turn to a study of some of Alexeïeff's illustrated books, to seek concrete examples of the work which gave rise to these interpretations, and to proffer our own.

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[112] Rowan 1968, p. 56. Alexeïeff, *Reflections,* exhib. cat. Edinburgh 1967, pp. 9-10.

[113] Rowan 1968, p. 55.

[114] Gage 1967.

[115] Giorgio Vasari used the word *invenzione* to indicate the creative and original idea or invention of the artist, vital to the work of art, in his *Le Vite* of 1550.

2. Alexeïeff's practice and theory of illustration

'The book illustrator, contary to the painters of these times, is neither supported nor hampered by numerous or contradictory theories. Yet the art of illustration is very ancient and one cannot be mistaken when considering the works of the great [artists] of the Renaissance, the Middle Ages and Antiquity as its domain.'

Alexandre Alexeïeff, *Jeu de l'Illustration,* CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

Figure 3 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for Hans Christian Andersen, Images de la Lune, 1942.

This chapter consists of two main parts: 'practice' and 'theory'. This may seem contradictory, in view of the previous assertion that we are interested mainly in Alexeïeff's theoretical approach of illustration. However, Alexeïeff's 'theory' (or the construct presented here) consists mainly of loose thoughts and remarks brought forth by a reflection trailing his own practice. Most of Alexeïeff's writings, when dated, date from after 1945, by which time the greatest burgeoning of his illustrations was over. It is the methods and practice which led to the theoretical conclusions, not vice versa.[116] This is why we shall present them in that order, discussing first the way in which Alexeïeff handled a text he had been asked to illustrate, and only then presenting his subsequent thoughts about this process.

Although I am convinced that this approach deserves preference over another, it has a risk of its own: to analyze the illustrations in question in such a way that my analysis might fit Alexeïeff's own reflections better. Although I could not annul my prior knowledge of the artist's

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[116] In his short *Reflections*, exhib. cat. Edinburgh 1967, p. 9, he writes that, after 42 years of practice, 'looking back, I now see that...'

own writings, I have been conscious of the pitfall and have striven to avoid reading more into these illustrations than is reasonable, or drawing upon sources unavailable to the general reader in first discussing them.

2.1 Practice

From what position did Alexeïeff start out when he illustrated a book? In order to understand his practice, we need to know whether, for instance, he got to choose the text himself, how independent he generally was in his choices, what aspects of the book and illustrations were under his control, and how his financial situation was. I shall therefore start by summarily presenting the facts I have found in this regard.

It seems Alexeïeff (eventually) made a good living out of illustration. At the very start of his career, he made about 200 francs (€100) for a portrait of Soupault.[117] However, within five years, in the late twenties, he already earned enough to hire a maid and to furnish a modern apartment near Port Royal.[118] By 1949 he asked at least 50.000 francs (around€ 1200) per coloured engraving, and 30.000 (roughly €700) for black-and-white.[119] For Anna Karenina, illustrated in the early 1950's but published posthumously, Alexeïeff was paid a total of 30 million francs over two years, equalling €480.000.[120] Finally, in 1959 he sold the reproduction rights for his pinboard engravings of Dr Jivago for 2.500.000 francs (around €28.400).[121]

Moreover, it seems Alexeïeff, once successful, had considerable freedom in his artistic choices. He would sometimes be allowed to choose a text, and he chose the themes or scenes of his illustrations himself. 'The editors came to tell me: "Mister Alexeïeff, I would like to have a book by you." Which text? "That doesn't matter – choose your own, it will be mine.'"[122] Alexeïeff proudly defended this independence, and was capable of cancelling a project when the editors asked for one more illustration than the number he had decided upon.[123] At other times he grudgingly followed the 'basely materialist' decisions of his editors concerning the number of illustrations.[124] Alexeïeff would also closely supervise the colouring and printing of his illustrations when possible, and complained when he could not: 'it is inadmissible that the

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[117] Soupault, letter to Alexeïeff, [1926-1928], AEE AL-Ms-016. The approximations in euros have been calculated using the Bretton Woods system, which gives the historical equivalent of the franc in dollars, subsequently multiplied by the percentage increase of the CPI from then to now, and converted to euros according to current exchange rates. Please note that these are only *rough* approximations.

[118] Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet steno,* 1975, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[119] Alexeïeff, letter to Hadad (28-06-1949), AEE AL-Ms-211.

[120] Contract between Alexeïeff and Flammarion (1951), AAE AL-Ms-202.

[121] Declaration of fees paid to Alexeïeff by Librairie Gallimard (11-01-1960), AEE AL-Ms-201. The pinboard engravings were reproduced as photographs; they were not 'original' prints.

[122] Alexeïeff, *Alfeoni* (1972), p. 5. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17. The ArtExEast archives conserve lists of notes recording Alexeïeff's deliberations on the choice of themes to illustrate in Anna Karenina, Dr Zhivago, and other books.

[123] Querenet, letter to Alexeïeff (10-07-1976), AEE AL-Ms-211.

[124] Alexeïeff, *Contes de Fées* [after 1945], p. 5. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

clicheur or printer impose their will upon me in this regard.'[125] He seems often to have had influence on the book design, sometimes cooperating with the editor for the choice of typography.[126] In the case of *Dr Zhivago*, he asked and was granted permission to determine the exact placement of the illustrations in the body of text.[127]

Besides practical matters of payment and of the influence of the editor, every illustrator starting on a project faces certain recurring choices of approach to the given text. It may therefore be useful, before we turn to an example of Alexeïeff's work, to ask ourselves what general choices the illustrator has to make. The literature scholar Edward Hodnett wrote that in order to criticize justly the illustrations of a work of literature, one has to begin by facing the initial problem confronting the artist:

> [t]he most important decision that an artist has to make about an illustration is the *moment of choice* [...] the passage, in a limited sense, and the precise moment at which, as in a still from a cinema film, the moment is stopped. [...] in fact, the conscientious artist reads his text and, computer-like, scans the thousands of images presented to his mind and chooses the moments that he will illustrate. Much the same reel unrolls cinematically for us readers.[128]

For Hodnett, the visualization of a text is automatic and the same for every reader. The illustrator merely selects stills from this ready-made film 'reel'. But this is simplistic. Firstly, the idea that a given texts sets a film in motion, which is moreover the same in very different reader's minds, is curious at best; it supposes the existence of mental images so firmly tagged to a string of words that they can be transferred, almost unchanged, from one person to the next. Secondly, even if we suppose the illustrator merely has to select a passage or moment from the narrative, there are many more, significant decisions he has to make when confronted with a text. And thirdly, Hodnett presupposes a rather traditional manner of 'mimetic' illustration which is not at all imperative or even the norm. Therefore, we shall try to suggest some of the complexity of the questions facing the illustrator, without the hope of being exhaustive.

When choosing the subjects or themes of his illustrations, the illustrator is not merely 'selecting', but *inventing* images that could accompany the text. Even when he chooses to

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[125] Alexeïeff, letter to Kurt Wolff (25-05-1945), Pantheon Books, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #9. The publication in question is that of the *Russian Fairytales*.
[126] In 1946, still in the USA, Alexeïeff postpones a project in order to be able to 'establish the typographical form of the book together and in live conversation [*de vive voix*].' Letter to Malraux (09-11-1946), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, # 9. Alexeïeff also had close relations with his printer, J.J.J. Rigal, to whose daughter Nicole he became godfather.
[127] Alexeïeff, letter to Jean-Pierre Rosier (12-01-1959), AEE AL-Ms-201.
[128] Hodnett 1982, pp 7-8.

visualize as faithfully as possible a scene described in detail by the author, his imagination, fed by individual memories and associations, will visualize that scene in a personal way. Moreover, even the most detailed prose can never tell all that an artist will have to visualize. It is in the nature of his medium to be explicit: images cannot distinguish between the particular (this man) and the universal (man), whereas words indicate general categories of things.[129] If the illustrator draws a line to suggest a nose, he has to draw a *particular* line depicting a very *particular* nose, whereas the word 'nose' can suggest all kinds of shapes, and even an 'aquiline nose' can have many forms.

What is more, the illustrator is not at all obliged to select for illustration a particular line or scene. He or she can choose a level of detail: the portrait of a protagonist, or a view of the location of the action, need not be tied to a certain moment at all. Many kinds of subjects are possible: 'props' from the narrative, allegorical images, a landscape, as well as an action-packed scene.

Moreover, not every illustrator will draw his inspiration from the given text alone. He may choose to use additional sources: the author's biography or critic's interpretations might inform his reading of the text, and earlier illustrations or his own experiences may be an inspiration. He may also choose to refer to the title or the motto preceding the actual text; he may delve into the historical or iconographical background of a literary theme, etcetera. Not every element in the resulting illustrations will therefore necessarily be traceable to a passage from the text.

Once a subject has been settled upon, choices remain to be made for the approach in general and for each image in particular. It is often considered the mark of a good illustrator, for instance, to be able to vary and adapt his style with each new text or genre.[130] The illustrator may choose to work in a realistic, stylized, highly abstract or historicizing form. He or she may try to adapt this style to the type and layout of a text, not to mention its more subtle literary style.

Furthermore, each illustration supposes the choice of a particular perspective, which can refer both to the question of 'from which point' the scene is viewed, and to the question of 'from whose point of view' it is seen. The illustrator will have to choose the composition of each image, which involves placing more stress on some elements from the chosen scene or theme than others, etc.

The relation of the illustrations among themselves may be a further issue for the artist, who may strive for as great as possible a variation in themes, perspective, composition, and level

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[129] 'The Visual Image: Its Place in Communication', Gombrich 1982, pp. 137-161. For an account of the various figures of difference between words and images, see Mitchell 1986, chapter two.
[130] W.J. Strachan, for instance, writes that the work of 'the professional illustrator' is not expected to 'bear the stamp of his individual style'. Strachan 1969, p. 20.

of detail in the images, or may on the contrary aim for a certain visual or thematic uniformity. He may even ponder the internal rhythm of the illustrations throughout the book.

These are choices which may seem self-evident and therefore 'invisible' to the reader confronted with the finished result, as they were invisible to Hodnett. If we are to judge the work of an illustrator, it seems important to consider the very complex set of questions and issues the illustrator has to settle when he starts illustrating a text, and of which the above can only be suggestive. With those questions in mind, this chapter will present three books which Alexeïeff was asked to illustrate: *Voyage au pays des Articoles, The Fall of the House of Usher* and *Le Chant du Prince Igor.* Because of obvious limitations of space, I shall limit myself to these three examples, which are each quite different in character as regards their style, the text (one medieval Russian, one contemporary French, one early 19th-century American) and the point in his career Alexeïeff undertook them. The first, *Voyage,* dates from just before his breakthrough; *Usher* from just after; and the *Chant* from a time Alexeïeff had established himself as a filmmaker.

2.1.1 Voyage au Pays des Articoles

André Maurois' *Voyage au Pays des Articoles* tells us the adventures of Pierre Chambrelan and his travelling companion, Anne de Sauves, escapists and expert sailors undertaking to traverse the Pacific in a sailboat. When their boat is heavily damaged in a storm, they are forced to seek help on the island of the Articoles. This isolated society was founded by an English writer offering free land to every artist who promised to stay. These settlers were called Articoles; their servants formed the second class of the population, the Béos.

The type of work an inhabitant does, determines the class he belongs to: an Articole can only do artistic work, and cannot own money or undertake any kind of commerce. It is the task and the pride of the Béos to support their honoured Articoles.

> The greatest pleasure of a rich Béos, and especially of his wife and daughters, is to nourish the Articoles. Every evening at the Béos farmer['s house], between five and seven, you can see tables heavy with cakes, sweets, drinks and meat, at which the Articoles sit down for a few minutes... The young Béos girls are there to serve them, and in exchange they receive the few phrases which the Articoles address them...when these gentlemen are in a state to talk.[131]

In this society, art is the only religion, and artists are its adored preachers, so clearly superior that an Articole has a right to any Béos woman he may 'need' for his oeuvre. The only reality recognised on the island is that of the work of art, which is more important and true than life. There is, however, one severe problem: all toils belonging to an 'active life' being forbidden to

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[131]Maurois 1927, 63-64.

the Articoles, life offers them no resistance, no fight, no vivid emotions. Thus, they soon exhausted all possible subjects of their art, and have become incapable of real sentiment. As a remedy, they have created the 'Psycharium', an institution collecting specimens of emotion and interesting artistic subjects. When Pierre and Anne strand on the island, they are taken to this Psycharium as objects of study. The hostess is kind, there is a pool and the island has natural beauty. Three of the Articole writers visit the travellers, trying to manipulate, scare or enrage them so as to witness genuine feeling, and taking notes of the result.

Some weeks pass, and Pierre falls under the influence of Routchko, a melancholy and sickly writer who encourages him to keep a journal, and who admonishes Pierre for being too active when he should commit himself to contemplating life. Pierre, muddled by the strange atmosphere of the island, complies and even starts to write poetry.

Anne is courted by another poet, Snake, who 'seemed an aerial being, ready to fly away; his curly and vaporous hair was pale as linen, his eyes grey-blue.'[132] But poor Snake, when confronted with the incorrigibly matter-of-fact Anne, falls prey to what the Articoles consider madness: the idea that the surrounding world is not a dream, but a reality, and that life is real and important. The islanders complain that '[s]ince last night, he hallucinates, saying that a poem is just an arrangement of words, that every artist is a deceiver [*mystificateur*], that one hour of true love outweighs all the books in the world ... in short, madness.'[133] Realizing the danger of this condition, the Articoles quickly send Anne and Pierre - who have finally realized that they are in love - on their way again.

These are the outlines of the book Alexeïeff had to illustrate.[134] How did he acquit himself?
The edition contains 15 coloured aquatints as well as seven coloured woodcut vignettes; the cover is also done in woodcut and shows the title as on a naval map.

When we examine these illustrations, it is hard to determine which exact moment or line of the text Alexeïeff illustrates, perhaps because he doesn't seem to go to that level of detail. When we read how Pierre visits Anne in her tidy apartment to discuss arrangements for the journey, for instance, Alexeïeff only shows us the façade seen from across the Seine [fig. 26]. When he chooses the subject of the fateful storm, he does not depict Anne's heroic action, nor the tearing of the sails, nor the broken instruments or the frantic bailing, but instead the boat seen from a distance, pressed between dark clouds and waves, a generalized storm [fig. 27]. When Anne and Pierre first walk around the island, Alexeïeff gives us a bird's eye view [fig. 28]. The perspective he chooses, instead of being that of an eye-witness of the story, is thus often

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[132] Ibid., p. 42.
[133] Ibid., p. 111.
[134] I have no reason to assume Alexeïeff chose this text, and it comes very early in his career. For the same reason, it seems likely that the editor also decided upon the number and technique of the illustrations.

'disembodied', belonging to nobody in the narrative and supposing an 'impossible' height or position.

Alexeïeff not only gives us distant views; he also depicts the figures and faces of the main protagonists. However, they are not depicted in a particular moment of action important to the narrative; rather, they are doing something they do habitually or over a period of time. Anne, for instance, often swims, and the narrator tells us nothing remarkable about that. The hostess is depicted sitting and smoking, perhaps during a conversation, of which there are many over the weeks that Anne and Pierre are her involuntary guests [fig. 29-30]. These and similar scenes, just like the landscape views mentioned above, are not clearly marked as to time; there is no 'moment of choice'. The only exception seems to be the illustration showing the couple sailing away and waving goodbye [fig. 31]. Another remarkable trait of the illustrations to the *Voyage* is the absence of scenes of (inter)action between the main protagonists; in the two scenes where they would be confronted, we viewers take the part of one of the two parties, so that they are not shown together. The only exception is the image of Routchko and Pierre sitting at a table, talking.

Apart from the fact that the illustrations do not seem to focus on a particular moment in the narrative, we also remark that sometimes, a scene is illustrated which is described at no point in the text. Anne is never said to take a stroll in the forest with her admirer Snake, yet we see them among the trees and (also unmentioned) monkeys [fig. 32]. Similarly, while the text tells us of the general custom of the Béos nourishing the Articoles, it is Alexeïeff who has devised the scene where Snake sits at a Béos' table [fig. 33]. Such illustrations must have a different function than to select and illustrate a particular narrated moment, and the choice of scenes and subjects is clearly less straight-forward than Hodnett imagined it.

So far, we have discussed Alexeïeff's choice of subject, but it seems harder to talk about the illustrator's use of style and technique. His figurative treatment of the story is not quite realistic, partly because of the stage-like quality of the landscapes and the somewhat simplified figures. Now and then they consist only of summary lines, instead of the aquatint grain forming the basis and 'body' of each image, and they are only ever seen frontally. The use of colour is tempered; often only a few colours are used per image, and some parts of an image may be left completely white. It is only upon closer inspection that these elements and variations (aquatint grain or line drawing, colour or white) appear to carry meaning. This is especially significant in the depiction of the Articoles as opposed to Béos.

Take, for instance, the image of Snake at the Béos' table [fig. 33]. He is surrounded by a throng of Béos watching him. Snake himself sits (not) eating; he languidly points a thin fork at a lobster, and, in contrast to the Béos, does not seem to be watching anything. While the poet's slim figure consists of single, straight black lines on a white ground, the surrounding figures have considerably more bulk. The curves of the women's décolletage, especially, are suggested

by the aquatint grain and contrast with Snake's thin pointy shoulders. All Béos wear a deep blue costume, the only other colour coming from the food and wine. The worldly and the ethereal are clearly contrasted. There is an unpublished aquatint depicting the same custom, in which one of two Articoles tries to fork a passing butterfly [fig. 34]. This attempt to nourish oneself with a traditional symbol of the soul, foregoing a table filled with food, was probably not subtle enough for the artist's and publisher's taste and they rejected it of joint accord.[135]

In a comparable scene, we see three Articoles sitting at a table laden with cakes, in a room filled with books and a painting [fig. 35]. While the cakes and furniture are suggested by a fine aquatint grain, the poets' figures again consist only of lines on white. Their notebooks are similarly empty; even the shadows they cast are white, a negative of reality. In both these examples, colour and texture seem to suggest reality, life, food, bodily and earthly things, whereas the artists are quite literally 'affranchised from matter'.[136] This artist's ideal, phrased thus by Maurois, has been translated by Alexeïeff into a visible stylistical marker.

Alexeïeff meaningfully employs the same contrasting treatment of the figures in figure 36, showing Routchko working his influence upon Pierre. While Pierre's costume is still in 'solid' aquatint grain, the contrast between him and the poet is starting to fade; his face is already colourless like the open books, and the ghostly contours of his face and arm appear again as thin lines on the table. The trees in the background, dark to Pierre's side, white to Routchko's, change colour where they meet in the middle of the composition. These variations seem to underline the main theme of the story: the conflict between the reality of life and the fiction of art, which has become reversed for the Articoles (hence the 'negative' shadows).

The small woodcut vignettes [fig. 37] sometimes refer to the narrative, evoking the examination of the two 'guests' (glasses framing their silhouettes) or their confinement (a cage); mostly, however, they are merely attributes connoting 'sea' or 'sailing' (a lobster, a compass, a squid).

The frontispiece deserves a further remark, since it is of a slightly different character than the other aquatints [fig. 38]. The garlands framing the image, and the clearly fictive vessel – a giant shell – upon which the two figures are floating, seem to signal that here, a realistic depiction of the narrated events is even further from Alexeïeff's mind. The clothes worn by Anne and Pierre may refer to those they are described wearing after the shipwreck, but they have a costume-like quality, while the pose and gaze of the two decisively indicate that this is not a frozen moment of action but rather an allegorical image. The composition refers to Botticelli's treatment of Venus rising from the sea [fig. 39], a reference which suggests that Pierre and Anne are portrayed here as they appeared to the Articoles: as creatures from 'novalesque' or mythical

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[135] For the butterfly, see Hall 1996, p. 54. The artist wrote down the information about the rejection on the cover of the file containing the plates in the ArtExEast archives.
[136] Maurois 1927, p. 120.

realms, the stuff of legends and stories. Again, Alexeïeff refers directly to the underlying theme of the novel: reality and life as the objects of art, rather than vice versa.

2.1.2 The Fall of the House of Usher

Alexeïeff's illustrations for E.A. Poe's fantastical novella *The Fall of the House of Usher*, first published in 1929, have, exceptionally, already invited comment from two scholars, Renée Riese Hubert and Ina Conzen-Meairs, in the context of the work's links to Surrealism and to Poe respectively. Hubert calls them 'an effort to render the ineffable', and Conzen-Meairs comments upon Alexeïeff's great interpretative freedom; both call the illustrations metaphorical.[137] Let us examine which decisions and tactics incite these evaluations. What subjects did Alexeïeff choose, how did he render them, and how do his illustrations relate to Poe's text? Neither previous treatment goes into exhaustive detail about what Alexeïeff did or did not do in his treatment of the text that makes his illustrations 'metaphorical' or evocative of a certain fantastical atmosphere. Besides, regarding the illustrations in the context of a larger set of examples will enable us to see patterns and recognize recurring strategies. Further on, we shall moreover be able to view this significant work in the context of Alexeïeff's 'theory'.

Though treated in a very different manner, the theme of this work is similar to that of the *Voyage*; it deals with the conflict between fiction (fantasy, artistic sensibility) and reality. The tale opens when the anonymous narrator arrives at the ancient House of Usher, having been summoned by his old friend Roderick Usher, who is unwell. Upon arrival, the guest feels an unexplainable, insufferable sense of gloom. The bleak walls and decayed trees, mirrored in a black tarn, evoke 'shadowy fancies' in the practically-minded man, which he decides must be caused by 'the particulars of the scene, the details of the picture'.[138] He continues to seek rational explanations throughout the tale, even in the face of increasingly supernatural events.

The atmosphere of the house seems to have acted upon its inhabitants, our narrator concludes. Usher, too, is conscious of

> an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion had [...] obtained over his spirit – an effect which the *physique* of the grey walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they looked down, had at length brought about upon the *morale* of his existence.[139]

Indeed, Usher is terribly altered; Poe gives us a detailed description of his cadaverous complexion, vaporous hair, luminous eyes, and large forehead. The last two are typical of the cliché artist, and indeed Usher, the last in a family of brilliant artists and musicians, suffers from

[137] Hubert 1988, p. 265, and Conzen-Meairs 1989.
[138] Poe 1930, pp. 13-14. First edition published in 1839.
[139] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

a 'morbid acuteness of the senses': his sensibility is such that he cannot endure most tastes, textures, odours, and no light, tolerating only the sound of certain stringed instruments. In consequence, he never leaves the house, his nervous agitation slowly lapsing into madness.

His sister and only companion, Lady Madeline, similarly suffers from a mysterious condition, and the guest sees her passing once through a distant part of the large, dark room, before she takes to bed.

The guest tries to alleviate Usher's melancholy without result; there remains a 'sulphureous lustre over all'. Usher shows him his paintings, which he struggles to describe with words: 'If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher'. His paintings are much more intense than the 'yet too concrete reveries of Fuseli'.[140]

The master of the house also composes verses, of which the narrator recalls one, entitled 'The Haunted Palace'. It tells of a house, 'once by good angels tenanted', where Thought used to reign; now, through the windows, one sees only 'vast forms that move fantastically to a discordant melody'.[141] With this song, Roderick shows that he is aware he is losing his mind, and makes the house into a metaphor.

After some days, Lady Madeline dies, and the two friends carry her coffin into a dark vault with a door of massive iron, leaving the dead – who has 'the mockery of a faint blush' - there until the burial. There now comes a change over Usher. He is ghastly pale, roaming the house restlessly with an expression of extreme terror, always listening intently for a sound. During a furious nightly storm, Usher enters the narrator's bedroom and opens the windows to the whirlwinds of 'agitated vapour' surrounding the mansion.[142] In an effort to calm him, the guest reads Usher a heroic tale. Its hero pulls down a wooden door – and at the same time, a ripping sound is heard in the house of Usher. When the tale's dragon screeches, they hear a real scream. And finally, at the mention of a ringing sound in the tale, a metallical clang rises from the basement. In a bizarre reversal, life seems to follow fiction. Usher is highly agitated, rocking and muttering, and finally reveals that they have put his sister living in her tomb, and that she is now escaping: 'Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!' And indeed,

> there *did* stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of Lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes [...] For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold – then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse...[143]

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[140] Ibid., p. 34, p. 36. Fuseli (1741-1825) was a British painter of the supernatural in Poe's time.
[141] Ibid., p. 38-40.
[142] Ibid., p. 49, p. 54.
[143] Ibid., p. 66.

The guest flees, and looking back, sees the walls caving in and the waters of the deep dark tarn closing silently over the fragments of the House of Usher.

What does Alexeïeff make of this frightening tale? In his ten black-and-white aquatints, what lines, scenes or themes does he select for illustration?

What strikes us first of all is what scenes he does *not* select. We see no portrait of Usher, despite the detailed description of his face; no burial, no escape and beblooded resurrection of Lady Madeline, no bone-chilling appearance. We do not see the mighty house crack and collapse. None of the other activities recounted in the tale – the reading, singing, painting, travelling – nor any of the paintings or rooms described are actually depicted.

Instead, the frontispiece shows us the figure of a man, his limbs half-formed, sitting in an undefined space [fig. 40]. On his chest, above his heart, is a large ear. A lute rests on his lap; its strings are touched by the white silhouette of a ghostly hand. Here, Alexeïeff exceptionally gives us a 'word for word' illustration of a phrase, even including the words of the De Béranger motto opening the tale: '*son cœur est un luth suspendu; sitôt qu'on le touche, il résonne*'.[144] Although there is an ear, not a lute, at the place of the heart, the illustration stays quite close to the letter of the text. The line being so poetic and figurative, the effect is surreal and far from 'literal' in the sense of factual or prosaic. The figure may be meant to evoke Usher's sensibility and his unfitness for life (he has no hands, man's instrument for everything), but does not fit Usher's description at all.

The following nine illustrations all show dark, apparently nightly scenes, the aquatint grain suggesting the shadows and vapour often referred to by Poe. The first shows only a white tree, standing under a dark sky, mirrored in a marshy ground [fig. 41]. The same tree, with its two short, decaying branches (the last two branches in the Usher family tree), appears again in the second image, mirrored in a pool in which a three-towered manor is also reflected [fig. 42]. This castle only appears as a reflection, calling into question its own reality. In the third illustration, we see the dark silhouette of the house, shimmering through a veil of lit or darkened windows, and superimposed upon this, again the tree [fig. 43], although no tree is given such prominence in the text. It seems Alexeïeff has taken the dream-like atmosphere remarked upon by the narrator, rather than the narrated events, as his focus in these opening images. Where the narrator keeps searching for worldly explanations to the gloom, Alexeïeff outbids him, making clear the entire castle is only a phantom mirror image, see-through, fictive. At the same time, however, he offers no other 'reality' than this throughout his illustrations, only adding to the surreality evoked in the text.

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[144] 'His heart is a suspended lute; as soon as one touches it, it resounds.' Poe 1930, motto.

This tendency becomes apparent in his visualizations of Lady Madeline. She appears twice, first as a lady in white looming from a dark background [fig. 44]. Her features are blurred, only her eye-sockets are indicated, and she is veiled. Like everything in Alexeïeff's illustrations, the vague, blurry, and misty far outstrip the specific. After we read of her death, Madeline appears again, this time as a very dark figure [fig. 45]. Only the shape of her shins, neck, arms and breast are lighted up; the rest is darkness. We do discern the figure's opened black wings. At her feet, a spray of sparkles seems to be erupting. Neither the wings, nor the sparks, nor indeed the black figure are mentioned by Poe. Alexeïeff seems to have taken the 'angels' mentioned in Usher's poem, transforming Lady Madeline into an 'angel of death'.[145] Another possible reference is his vivid memory of his mother appearing in black after his father's death, which Alexeïeff refers to in his memoirs.[146]

We have less difficulty finding in the text the source of the next illustration. It shows the dark, blurry silhouettes of ghost- or witch-like figures and hands, appearing behind a transparent window façade and white patches of stars [fig. 46]. This seems to be a close illustration of a phrase from Usher's verse: 'and travelers now within that valley, through the red-litten windows, see vast forms that move fantastically'.[147]

When the narrator describes his terror listening to the storm outside, his sleeplessness, the torn tapestries rustling on his chamber walls, and the sounds within the house, Alexeïeff shows us the mansion from a distance [fig. 47]. It seems to have grown larger and more complex, with several layers of turrets, and white trees almost seem to be dancing around it in the foreground. Waves of vapour partly obscure the building. Alexeïeff has not shown us any details so far, and now, as Usher's madness reaches a climax, he does not refer to any of the dramatic detail of this part of the text. Instead, at this point Alexeïeff depicts a monkey, huddled so as to fit the image, playing a violin [fig. 48]. Its mouth is open, its eyes white and staring, and it is surrounded only by shadowy forms into which its body partly dissolves. Conzen-Meairs interprets the figure as a metaphor for the hero's madness.[148] The stringed instrument – the only thing Usher could still tolerate, the last buttress of his sanity – is now being played by a wild animal.

In the last illustration, after reading about the end of the House of Usher, we see a figure – the narrator – lying head-down over a puddle [fig. 49]. A tree-stump lies next to him, and a fissure cracks the ground. It is continued in the mirror image in the puddle, showing the dark form of the collapsing house. One of the figure's hands seems to reach down into that mirror

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[145] Hubert 1988, p. 265.
[146] Alexeïeff, *Memoirs*, p. 34, AAE AL-Ms-101. He also refers to a female figure in black, inspired by his mother, in *Une Nuit sur le Mont Chauve,* in the radio emission '*Le Sablier Renversé*'. Copy in AEE.
[147] Poe 1930, p. 40.
[148] Conzen-Meairs 1989, p. 175.

image. The House of Usher is again a mere reflection, although the tree-stump and fissure, left on the 'real' side of the mirroring surface, suggest otherwise.

Perhaps the most striking observation is the illustrator's apparent refusal to be specific. He avoids the dramatic or visual detail which the text amply supplies, and leaves the main protagonists invisible. The figures that do appear are fictive or ghostly and blurred, and when we finally do see the narrator, his face is hidden. The spaces in which the few figures appear, are filled only with shadows or hatching, and the images do not seem to illustrate a particular moment of the action. Neither space nor time are defined. When Alexeïeff does clearly refer to a certain line or passage from the text, the result is by no means a 'literal' illustration, for he chooses passages of figurative language for this; he is only true to the letter of the text where the author used a metaphorical image. Thus, Alexeïeff consistently seems to seek indefinition and a distance from the narrated events. He seems to avoid being 'too concrete', as Poe has it.[149] Even the vagueness of the 'stringed instrument' mentioned in the text is exploited; first it is a lute, then a violin.

The character of the illustrations, in view of their play with degrees of unreality, is consistent with the broader theme of Poe's tale. One of the recurring motifs of the tale - the influence of the 'details of a picture' or setting upon the morale - moreover presents interesting links with Alexeïeff's concept of illustration, as we shall see later in this chapter.

2.1.3 Le Chant du Prince Igor

In the last example, *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, published by Eynard in 1950, the focus will be less on the choice of subjects, and more on Alexeïeff's attention to the form of the text and his corresponding use of style, technique and visual forms. This is because the text has quite distinct formal characteristics, the technique used in the illustrations is of Alexeïeff's own invention, and the style is quite peculiar and archaic. Because of this focus on form, and because we are dealing with a poem, I will exceptionally work with the French text, providing an approximate translation in the footnotes.

At the time of this project, Paul Eynard was still a very young publisher, and his first letter to Alexeïeff is full of reverent respect. Alexeïeff, who by now was an experienced illustrator conscious that his 'artistic renown forbade [him] to work on mediocre publications', was granted a lot of control over the form of the book; together with Eynard, he prepared the book's dummys and lay-out.[150] Eynard had gone to some trouble to acquire a type suiting the medieval, possibly 12th-century text, probably the oldest epic of Russian literature; he had bought old Cyrillian

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[149] Poe 1930, p. 36. The narrator said this about the work of Henry Fuseli.

[150] The *Dossier Prince Igor*, AEE AL-Ms-206, contains the correspondence; the colophon of the book completes this information. Around the same time, in 1949, Alexeïeff writes to Georges Hadad that he wishes to decide himself upon the subjects and type (*hors texte, in-texte*) of his illustrations: 'these concerns are imposed upon me by the care I must bestow upon my artistic renown.' AEE AL-Ms-211.

characters from a Russian monastery. We shall see that Alexeïeff chose the form of his illustrations with equal care.

The *Chant du Prince Igor* tells of Igor, Prince of Novgorod-Severks, and his ill-starred military campaign against the Polovtsians (or Kumans) of the Don river region in 1185. He wants to drink the Don's water from his helmet, he says – a formula that is often repeated throughout the text. He therefore calls upon his brother, Vsevolod, who is indicated with the recurring epithet '*le taureau fougueux*' (the wild bull). Formulaic repetitions like these are characteristic of oral epic songs, which are learnt by heart and transmitted orally for some time before being written down. To facilitate memorization, recital and composition, 'smaller motifs combine to form patterned, recurring motif sequences'.[151] The same motifs and motif sequences are then repeated in the text. In the case of *Igor,* over a fifth of the text consists of such formulas.[152] The strong rhythmic element of the text is another characteristic of oral literature that Soupault has preserved in his translation.

The Polovtsians, attacked, initially flee in the direction of the Don, pursued by the Russian troupes, who have left their own land behind: "*O terre russe / tu es déjà au-delà de la colline*" – another recurring phrase.[153] But Igor's luck quickly turns:

> *Et le lendemain / de grand matin / les lueurs sanglantes de l'aurore / annoncent le jour / venues de la mer / les nuées sombres / vont obscurcir / les Quatre Soleils / elles palpitent d'éclairs bleus / et voici l'énorme tonnère / une pluie de fleches / près du grand Don.[154]*

A great, epic battle begins, in which even the clouds and the winds blow down arrows upon Igor's soldiers. Despite their heroic defencse, the Polovtsians surround the Russian princes. Thus, for some time, the great battle continues. Place and time are described in as little detail as the heroes of the tale: *"De l'aube au crepuscule / et du crepuscule à l'aurore / les fleches volaient / les sabres frappaient les casques / les lances d'acier se brisaient / dans la plaine sans nom / au milieu du pays des Polovtsians".*[155] On the third day, Igor's banner falls and the prince is captured; the trees and even the grass bend in mourning. The Russian lands are invaded by the Polovtsians.

At this point, Sviatoslav, the old father of the princes, has a fearful dream, in which two falcons that flew from his throne are cut down by the enemy's sabres. Two suns (his sons) are

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[151] See Mann 1990 for a more detailed account of Igor's campaign, capture and liberation.
[152] Ibid., p. 3, pp. 103-109.
[153] 'O Russian land, you are already beyond the hill'. Anonymous, *Chant* 1950, p. 13.
[154] 'And the following day / early in the morning / the bloody glow of the daybreak / announces the day / coming from the see / the dark clouds / will obscure / the Four Suns / they vibrate with blue lightning / and see, the great thunder / a rain of arrows / near the great Don.' Ibid.*,* pp. 12-13.
[155] 'From daybreak to nightfall / and from nightfall to daybreak / the arrows flew / the sabres hit the helmets / the iron lances shattered / on the unnamed field / in the middle of the land of the Polovtsians.' Ibid.*,* p. 23.

eclipsed, and the Polovtsians spread over the Russian territory like lynx. The old king sternly adresses his two sons, who have attempted the campaign alone, and calls upon other valiant princes to unite and help.

Meanwhile, the Polovtsians amass Russian corpses and heads as if they were building hay-stacks. The metaphor is extended over several lines:

> *Sur les bords de la Nemiga / on dresse des gerbes de têtes / on les bat avec des fléaux d'acier /*
> *sur l'aire on lance des vies / on vanne les âmes des corps / les rives sanglantes de la Nemiga /*
> *ne furent pas ensemencées avec du grain / mais avec les ossements / des fils de la Russie*.[156]

Igor's beloved one wails and calls from the walls of the city, lamenting her wounded prince, and blaming the sun and the elements for his bad luck. In the mean time, "*Igor dort / Igor s'éveille / Igor mesure en son esprit / la plaine";* further away, the tents of the Polovtsians stir.[157] Then, like a falcon, like a grey lion, like an ermine, and like a white teal simultaneously, Igor descends towards the plain, escaping from his captivity, and all ends well for the Russians. This last phrase is a very clear example of the constant comparisons of all heroes of the tale to various kinds of animals, most often falcons or wolves, sometimes in the form of a simile (using words like 'as' or 'like'), sometimes metaphorically (Vsevolod, the wild bull).

Alexeïeff seems to have paid great attention to these and other formal characteristics of the text. For his 17 illustrations, he used a different technique than we have seen so far, of his own recent invention. In 1945, he first experimented with engraving through electrolysis, involving adding material to a copper plate, a technique he combined with 'deep etching', so that a great variation of surface relief could be achieved for every plate.[158] The resulting plate would be inked in different ways: both 'intaglio' (inking the bitten grooves) and 'in relief' for the original surface of the plate, as well as the added, lifted surface.[159]

The effect of this technique is a much greater sense of relief than is usual for an etching. In addition, Alexeïeff fills the surface of each composition, with little distinction between the treatment of figure and background, giving it the appearance of a cameo or small bas-relief [fig.

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[156] 'On the borders of the Nemiga / they erect sheafs of heads / they thrash them with iron flails / they throw lifes on the thrashing flour / they winnow the souls from the bodies / the bloody banks of the Nemiga / are not sowed with grain / but with the bones / of Rusland's sons.' Ibid., pp. 50-51.
[157] 'Igor sleeps / Igor wakes / Igor measures in his spirit / the plain'. Ibid., p. 61.
[158] In the words of Alexeïeff's printer, J.J.J. Rigal: 'One varnishes a plaque, one uncovers [it] with a point just like for etching. One submerges the plaque in a tub of water in which a bit of copper is in contact with the anode while the copper [plaque] is in contact with the cathode. Just like in the other procedures one extends more or less the electric contact to acquire the desired relief.' Rigal. letter to Couren (09-02-1983), AEE AL-Ms-210. The Rigal firm was the only one to know how to make such 'double-inked' prints. For deep engraving and electrolysis engraving, see also Rigal 2003, esp. p. 92.
[159] Alexeïeff, handwritten note on the back of two prints depicting a goat, collection of original prints, AEE.

50]. The forms used are more robust than the careful aquatint grain and line drawings we have seen so far, or the lithographs imitating the 'precise vagueness' of Seurat's charcoal drawings. There is no mist, no vagueness of forms here, as befits the rather muscular, belligerent language. Abstract terms have little place in the *Chant;* there is no talk of a sense of dread; rather, this sense is concretized as an eclipse of the sun. We do not read of thoughts or impressions, but of blows, steel, and armor. As sources for his archaic style, Alexeïeff mentioned ancient Greek vases, statuettes from Cnossos and Tanagra, and especially the still older Scythian art.[160]

If the greater physicality of the style calls to mind one type of substance, it is metal. The text makes frequent mention of all kinds of metal: the swords, lances or helmets are iron, but this is also said of bodies: *'Vos coeurs vaillants / sont forgés / d'un dur acier [...] Qu'avez-vous fait à mes cheveux d'argent'*, the old king demands.[161] The figures indeed consist of rather thick bands or lines, which cover their bodies like a carapace or cuirass, or call to mind an x-ray view of their skeleton [fig. 51, 54].

The medieval text deploys a very different notion of 'character' than we are used to in modern literature, lacking individual traits or psychological depth. Correspondingly, the illustration's figures are not very 'personalized', and are shaped from a limited vocabulary of forms. All men and horses are formulaic, simply drawn [fig. 55-58]. Where the princes appear together, there is no difference between them. Moreover, Igor is rarely even given a human face, and his weeping princess remains completely out of view. She does appear as a cuckoo, following a simile in the text [fig. 53]. Indeed, Alexeïeff gives his figures animal heads or a fully animal form, visualizing the many, almost ritualistic animal similes or metaphors in the text, and which form the character's only attributes. Doing so, he creates mythical half-creatures, reminiscent of ancient Greek minotaurs or Egyptian gods. Vsevolod with his bull's epithet is given a bull's head [fig. 51]. In Alexeïeff's hands, this principle leads its own life: the old king, for instance, becomes a sphinx-like figure, despite not being compared to a lion in the text [fig. 54]. To stress the epic, semi-mythical flavor of the poem still further, Alexeïeff has added some archaizations. The sword Vsevolod fights with in the text has been changed to a herculean club in the corresponding image [fig. 51]. Skulls litter many illustrations, as though the battle recounted is already ages hence; and the bones showing through the figure's bodies may remind us of archeological finds, of long-gone flesh, placing the tale in a past much farther removed.

The repetition of formulas en epithets so characteristic of the text has also been taken up by Alexeïeff in his illustrations. Figure 55 shows a succession of warriors riding horses or shooting bows. There are sets of figures recurring almost identically: the bowman shooting backward, the bowman facing forward, the spear-bearing rider. The line runs horizontally and is

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[160] Alexeïeff, letter to Hadad (28-06-1949), AEE AL-Ms-211.
[161] 'Your valorous hearts / are forged / of strong iron [...] What did you inflict upon my silver hair', *Chant* 1950, pp. 36-37.

repeated across the page. It is a repetition, with variations, of the same elements, parallel to the text's repetition of 'and they fought, and they fought, and they fought', in slightly varying phrasing. Formulaic and rhythmical literary style is thus transferred to a formulaic visual vocabulary. In another context, Alexeïeff expressly compared the repetition of an image to that of a refrain or the repetition of words in prose or poetry.[162]

Alexeïeff also stays 'close to the text' in the more straightforward sense of close to the words of the text. But he does so in a way which we are beginning to see as characteristic of him: he chooses to literally visualize only metaphorical images. For example: the elements (clouds, wind) fight against Igor; this emphasizes the mythical, epic dimensions of the battle described [fig. 57]. Alexeïeff, taking up this image, shows us an army of bow-fighters in the clouds. When the text metaphorically compares the collected bodies to heaps of hay or other agricultural produce, the heads Alexeïeff shows do indeed form a haystack, the yellow beards and hair quite clearly depicted as hay [fig. 52]. Vsevolod truly is a wild bull, as we have seen, and when the old king calls to aid also the '*trois fils de Mstislav / vous êtes les faucons à six ailes / d'une nichée célèbre'*,[163] perhaps as an empowering reference to the six-winged biblical Seraphim, the illustration shows falcons which do indeed have six wings (although there are two birds, not three) [fig. 58]. Finally, the animal epithets, which vary through the text, are also varied by Alexeïeff: the princes now have bull's heads, then jackall's or wolve's, then falcon's [fig. 51, 59].

As usual, Alexeïeff also introduces elements which cannot directly be found in the text. He adds images of mythological monsters of his own invention, and the bull-man trampling the crown is apparently Alexeïeff's own personification and visualization of the enemy [fig. 60]. What we assume to be the two princes are shown having their stomach eaten out by wild animals after their defeat, which is more a generalization of the scenes of defeat than an actual occurrence in the text, especially since the two survive [fig. 61]. These examples testify to the illustrator's interpretative freedom, while he obviously also studied the text very closely, not only its contents – the story – but also its form and style, and indeed its history, if we look at the frontispiece [fig. 62].

Alexeïeff often includes as frontispiece the portrait of the author (he does so for Soupault, Apollinaire, Andersen, Poe, and Baudelaire, for instance), and here he might be referring to that tradition. The frontispiece shows a gnarled old tree, at whose branches there are many mouths. It may be that Alexeïeff here visualizes a line of poets, who generation after generation (the family tree) pass down the oral poem, which is delivered not by one but by many mouths, not to paper (as when Andersen is depicted plume in hand) but to the winds, and which changes and grows organically over time.

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[162] 'It seems to me that the repetition of an image can be treated as analogous to the repetition of refrains, or even words, on a page of verse or prose.' Alexeïeff quoted in Arnault 1973, p. 77.
[163] 'The three sons of Mstislav / you are the six-winged falcons / from a famous nest', *Chant* 1950, p. 46.

It seems we can preliminarily establish that Alexeïeff often avoided a straightforward visualization of the text. He frequently seems to distill elements from the narrative into an illustration suggestive of its more general theme or topic, lifted out of the immediate temporal progression or spatial setting of the story, and often seen from a greater distance and with fewer detail than in the text. When he does choose to stay closer to the letter of the text, he tends to select a figurative or metaphorical phrase or passage. Furthermore, it seems Alexeïeff not only looked for thematic parallels with the text, in subject or atmosphere evoked by his illustrations, but also for formal parallels of style and composition.

2.2 Theory

The second part of this chapter aims to give a comprehensible overview of Alexeïeff's own reflection on his activity as an illustrator, introduced above. What is presented here is in fact a synthesis of the many loose remarks and thoughts strewn here and there in Alexeïeff's correspondence, notes and conference texts. How to structure this web of thoughts, so that we may get a reasonably clear idea of it? To present them one by one would not allow for a comprehensibly structured discussion. Some remarks appear to have been loose thoughts with little follow-up, whereas other elements recur with some consistency and method, seeming part of a more or less coherent line of thought. The present chapter shall concentrate on the most significant of these recurring themes and will evidently be far from exhaustive.

There is only a handful of texts about illustration that Alexeïeff finished and (intended to have) published, and only in some of these texts, Alexeïeff put down his personal definition(s) of illustration, the kinds of illustration he distinguished, and the goals and means he attributed to them. It would seem we could record these ideas without much ado; but even here, we have to be watchful of inconsistencies between the different texts, which are moreover largely undated, making it hard to analyze such problems in terms of the development of Alexeïeff's reflection. Occasionally, in anticipation of chapter three, I shall also refer to Alexeïeff's thoughts regarding animated film, where this illuminates our argument.

The majority of our sources were not meant for publication, being of a private nature or still in a sketchy state. We shall therefore have to structure, synthesize, and interpret disparate materials, without pretending to be simply 'reporting'. In this way, we shall first examine Alexeïeff's general definition and concept of illustration. Our focus will then shift to his thoughts on the relationship between image and text, drawing attention to Alexeïeff's preoccupation with the 'purity' of media and art forms. Thirdly, we shall examine the related *paragone*-like elements in the illustrator's discourse about his art.

2.2.1 Illustration: Definitions, types and aims

Our most important sources for Alexeïeff's definition of illustration, the types of illustration he distinguishes, their tasks and the means of what he considers 'true' illustration, are two lectures by Alexeïeff: first of all his *'Conférence de l'art d'illustrer les livres'*, his longest text about illustration, despite the fact that it appears unfinished and that pages seem to be missing. The text is undated, but I would place it quite early in Alexeïeff's career, in the late 20's, and certainly not after 1931.[164] Secondly, there is the lecture Alexeïeff held at the *École des Arts Décoratifs pour Jeunes Filles* and published in *Arts et Métiers Graphiques* in 1931.[165] These sources are complemented by later, much shorter texts, including that of the 1967 and 1975 catalogues, a letter from 1946, and the undated drafts '*Le jeu de l'illustration'* and '*Le code de l'illustration'* in the CNC collections. Alexeïeff begins his first '*Conférence'* with the following definition:

> If we demand what an illustrated book is, it is clear first of all that it is a work composed of two quite distinct parts: 1) the text and 2) a series of images. Furthermore, we may observe that there is a certain relation between these two parts [...] 1) a formal relation and 2) a relation of content. By formal relation I understand the relation of the aesthetic of the pages of text with the pages containing images. By relation of content I understand the relation of the thoughts, ideas or sentiments expressed by the text, with the thoughts, ideas or sentiments the images express.[166]

The double relationship, both formal and as regards content, between the text and the images is central to Alexeïeff's definition of illustration. It is given equal emphasis in his 1931 conference, in the form of an overall design or structure [*plan*] governing the illustrations and which is based upon and follows that of the text.[167]

Alexeïeff then presents a list of the elements an illustrated book may contain: a frontispiece, *tête de chapitre* (chapter heading), *hors texte* (plate), tailpiece, vignettes, dropped capitals, and marginal ornaments. Most of these elements, excepting the frontispiece and the

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[164] This conclusion is based in part on Alexeïeff's extensive discussion of elements like dropped capital and *cul-de-lampe*, which seem to appear in none of his works after the 1920's, because they went out of fashion; on the absence of any English phrases in the text, which became frequent after his marriage to Claire Parker and his extended stay in America during the war; and on the fact that the text is typed on plain paper, not yet bearing Alexeïeff's personalized letterhead. More importantly, the text makes no mention of cinema, and its line of thought is less pointed than that of the 1931 lecture.

[165] Alexeïeff 1931. He later distanced himself somewhat from this text, acknowledging that it contains 'some erroneous ideas due to the narrowness of the artist's spirit which can be resumed in the phrase, 'illustration is what I myself do, the rest is *imagerie*'. Letter to M. Mespoulet (05-07-1946), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. He is indeed quite haughty, denying even Grandville and Doré the status of true illustrators.

[166] Alexeïeff, *Conférence,* undated, AEE AL-Ms-105.

[167] Alexeïeff 1931, p. 253. The essay states that 'modern illustration distinguishes itself from the ancient form in that she follows a general scheme which the other didn't have'. This overall design or structure is based on that of the book, and even takes into account the mentality of the place and time the text was written.

hors texte - illustration 'proper'- seem to go out of fashion during Alexeïeff's career. Alexeïeff's digression about the formal relation between text and image likewise sounds dated, and basically preaches balance and equilibrium in all things: colour, texture, form, and size of the illustrations should follow those of the text, a condition familiar from early 20th-century criticism.[168] The verb 'impose' is used three times, indicating that here, illustration has a subservient role.

The *conference* becomes interesting when Alexeïeff turns to the relation of text and image as regards content. He limits himself to the illustration of imaginative literature, excluding informative or scientific texts from the domain of the artist, and focuses on the frontispiece and plates, the most important, for not solely decorative, kinds of illustration. These can relate to the text in different ways, characterizing two different types of illustration.

The first and simplest form, the primitive employment of images to communicate with the illiterate, he calls '*imagerie*', evoking popular, somewhat clichéd prints. In its simplest form, 'next to a word appears the image of the named object'; in other words, *imagerie* means 'to reproduce in images as faithfully as possible that which the text describes'.[169] Such illustrations are often accompanied by a caption quoting the illustrated scene: 'the knight of Grieux abandoned himself to his despair…, page 136'.[170] One can look at such books without being able to read or without feeling the need to, for one can follow the development of the story simply by looking at their illustrations. Alexeïeff associates them with the coarse technique of woodcuts, which he considers unsuited to the treatment of complex subjects.

He goes on to question the rationale of this kind of illustration in a literate age. Moreover, these images may befit informative or scientific works, but can a work of literature be rendered 'faithfully' in images? One cannot illustrate a lyrical poem with *imagerie*, for how to represent a sentiment? Thirdly, Alexeïeff remarks: 'I have heard amateurs of books profess a disinterest for *imagerie*-illustrations because they see no use in finding reproduced in image what the author has described in detail, and what the reader may wish to imagine differently from the illustrator.'[171] Alexeïeff here takes up some classical reproaches often made against illustration: that it is superfluous nowadays and can even be harmful, limiting the reader's imagination.[172]

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[168] Bernard Newdigate, for instance, also wrote that the technique, size and texture of the illustrations must be as close as possible to those of the type. Newdigate 1938, 61-64. By contrast, text and illustration are no longer the same size in Alexeïeff's *Dr Jivago* of 1959, for example, where the illustrations fill the whole page without leaving margins, and can have solid patches of black or white.

[169] Alexeïeff, *Conférence,* AEE AL-Ms-105.

[170] Alexeïeff 1931, p. 253.

[171] Alexeïeff, *Conférence,* AEE AL-Ms-105.

[172] See for instance an article by Charles T. Congdon, characteristic of these complaints. Congdon holds that 'picture illustration belongs to the infancy of modern literature', is savage and aboriginal and 'of no use to men of letters', catering to 'the limited intellectual capacity of readers. […] Half of illustration is impertinent. […] It is like the irritating comments that stupid folk scribble upon the margins of novels.' What is more, illustration makes originality of impression impossible: it 'can only enfeeble the mind and pervert the judgment and

The illustrator elsewhere admits that 'it would have seemed reasonable to expect the pure and simple disappearance of book illustration, since the texts have become accessible to the public, which has become literate in its entire mass. [...] And yet the opposite happens: [...] the flood of printed texts, which are increasingly illustrated, has never been greater than in our day.'[173]

In a singularly romantic mode, Alexeïeff once denied the need for illustration to have a demonstrable function: '[l]ike that of love, the utility of illustration is rationally indefensible. It is its existence which demonstrates its necessity (fatality).'[174] More characteristically, however, he tried to solve the problem of the function of illustration by introducing a new, modern illustration, which caters to modern needs. Alexeïeff held that the reproaches referred to above apply only to an outdated kind of illustration, existing as a survival of the times when a majority was still illiterate.[175] Therefore, instead of practicing *imagerie,* 'we must have recourse to the interpretation of the text.'[176]

This brings us to the second, and highest, kind of illustration, which according to Alexeïeff was brought about by the combination of Romantic fantasy, the technical possibilities of copper engraving and the popularity of the allegory in the 17th and 18th centuries. Around that time, illustration not longer limited itself to *imagerie*, but 'sought to elevate itself to the interpretation of the text, no longer content with its representation.' The threat photography posed to illustration meant that her artistic and aesthetic possibilities ('everything which photography could not do') were further stressed, until in the 20th century, Alexeïeff distinguishes a tendency to interpret texts with as much liberty as the directors of modern theatre. Thus, 'the role of illustration is ennobled and rises to the height of the role of a modern director [*metteur en scène*]. The illustrator, like the director, becomes the creator of a spectacle. He has this responsibility and this honour.'[177]

In a letter of 1946, Alexeïeff phrases the difference between these two types of illustration slightly differently, distinguishing a third type, ornamentation:

> One can distinguish, it seems to me, different genres of illustration, which I'd group, without too much thought, in: ornamentation (or *enluminure*), *imagerie* (Epinal); illustration [...] Ornamentation creates an atmosphere like music. *Imagerie* is a variety of

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diminish the ability to read to any purpose'. Congdon 1884, pp. 480-491. Similarly, John Harthan writes that 'it can be argued that illustration disturbs the dialogue between author and reader by imposing a third person's visualization of a text which should be regarded as autonomous'. Harthan 1981, p. 8.

[173] Alexeïeff, *Jeu de l'illustration*, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[174] Alexeïeff, *Code*, 1959, p.1. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[175] Alexeïeff, *Reflections,* exhib. cat. Edinburgh 1967, p. 9.

[176] Alexeïeff, *Conférence,* AEE AL-Ms-105.

[177] Ibid.

ideography or 'pictographs'. Complete illustration adds to that, to all that the stage setting [*mise en scène*], and can have as many varieties as the latter can have in theatre.[178]

Alexeïeff associates the extra type of 'ornamental' illustration he distinguishes here with the approach common to many luxury illustrated editions. He contrasts it with his own conception of an illustrated book as a spectacle or a theatrical dramatic event, which 'owes nothing to the tendency of the current French *livre de luxe,* to see in illustration an aesthetic diversion, entrusted to easel painters.'[179] What Alexeïeff terms 'complete' illustration seems to incorporate the limited functions of ornamental illustration, especially its aim to evoke a certain atmosphere. The goals of 'complete' illustration and *imagerie*, however, seem mutually exclusive.

For what are these goals? The first aim of modern, 'interpretative' illustration is to create an atmosphere. Illustration becomes 'a means of creating a receptive mood in the reader, suitable to a particular text. Like the music preceding, accompanying and ending a song', it 'aims at summarizing the mood of the events on a certain legendary, poetical level'.[180]

Creating an atmosphere to prepare the reader is not the only aim Alexeïeff has in mind for illustration proper. His idea of the genesis of illustration in the transition from oral to written literature suggests a second function: '[i]n oral literature, the storyteller has recourse to intonation and expressive gestures, to rhythm, tempo etc., to poses, to halting breath, etc etc... and even to music and dance [...] and to costumes and masks. Illustration seems to me to make good the absence of these resources in written literature.'[181] The image thus compensates for the expressive poverty of the written notation of language.[182] Alexeïeff compares a book without illustrations to a theatre play which isn't staged or performed: both are incomplete and miss out on an important part of their expressive potential. 'To those who object to illustration I could reply with the question: at the point where theatre passed from Italian improvisation to the written play, is there a sense to staging those plays? Why not read them, and in fact, what does a play by Giraudoux lose by being performed?'[183]

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[178] Alexeïeff, letter to Mespoulet (05-07-1946), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. Epinal is a French town with a tradition of producing idealized, popular prints, well-known in the 19th century, and which has become metonymic of such images.

[179] Alexeïeff, *Biographical date*, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.

[180] Alexeïeff, *Reflections,* exhib. cat. Edinburgh 1967, p. 9. Compare this to the 1931 seminar: '*Le rôle de l'illustration est celui d'agir sur l'imagination du lecteur de façon de le render plus sensible à l'effet cherché par l'écrivain',* Alexeïeff 1931, p. 253.

[181] Alexandre Alexeïeff, letter to Mespoulet (05-07-1946), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. In his earliest *Conférence,* Alexeïeff also mentions pictographic writing as the origins of (*imagerie)*-illustration.

[182] This idea will be familiar to linguists; Roman Jakobson, for instance, regarded written language as merely a parasitical superstructure upon speech. Jakobson 1964, pp. 1-7.

[183] Alexeïeff, letter to Mespoulet (05-07-1946), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

True illustration, as Alexeïeff saw it, also has an element of self-expression. It is not only the author's contribution which is 'staged', it is also the illustrator's, who adds something of his own experience of life to his interpretation of the text.

> Looking back now I see that I have always striven to incarnate the imaginary world of a text according to my own tangible experience of life. In so doing I could not avoid expressing my own reactions to the text – for instance, irony or pity.[184]

The illustrator draws on his own memories when reading the text; every personage from *Karamazov,* for instance, resembles a figure in Alexeïeff's youth. This is because words are incapable of *creating* images, and are limited to evoking and combining them.[185] Alexeïeff moreover considered an element of self-expression to be a *sine qua non* of all art; only artisanal or decorative works do not possess autobiographical traits which make every artwork a sort of self-portrait.[186]

This self-expressive element, combined with the former set-designer's ideal of illustration as a theatrical spectacle, accounts for the large measure of freedom Alexeïeff allows himself in his treatment of the text. He was quite assertive in this regard, for instance when he says in an interview with Clara Malraux:

> I have a remarkable aptitude not to read in a book that which is written, but that which I would have liked to find there. [...] My illustrations are a commentary, a response to a provocation. Something which approaches Meyerhold's attitude towards the Revisor. [...] He said to himself, I think, I want to create a spectacle, that is to say, something else than a written piece. I therefore have the right, for instance, to change the place of the acts, to put the fifth in the place of the fourth, and even to make the personages say things the writer didn't want.[187]

In other words, Alexeïeff doesn't aim to illustrate the situations described by the text, but sooner to visualize that which those descriptions evoke in him. The 'angel of death' in his illustrations for *Usher* might be an example of this. One of his justifications is that what he creates is of a different nature than a written piece.

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[184] Alexeïeff, *Reflections,* exhib. cat. Edinburgh 1967, p. 9.

[185] 'The imagination is based upon seen images; words only evoke images or combine them; they are incapable of creating any.' Alexeïeff 1931, p. 282.

[186] Alexeïeff, *Images Incertaines*, p. 2, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, # 14.

[187] Alexeïeff, Malraux, *Entretiens,* 1980, p. 1. AEE AL-Ms-107. Meyerhold was a very innovative theatre director whom Alexeïeff considered his great example; the Revisor ('The Government Inspector') was a particular piece he had directed and which led to huge debates. Pitches 2003, p. 109.

This slightly rebellious-sounding attitude of the illustrator who doesn't echo, but 'responds' to a text, not only expresses itself in the use of autobiographical elements, but also in the invention of scenes not included in the text: 'scenes of which the subject can be fictive, invented by the illustrator himself; allegories or even a parable'.[188] Modern artists like Picasso, Alexeïeff writes, have not feared to create fictive subjects, for instance impersonal and inactive personages without the least realistic traits. The illustrator can freely add such elements, so long as they serve the drama and are not superfluous; 'that doesn't exclude things not said by the author, on the contrary, it almost necessitates them; but nothing should appear which isn't useful to the drama.'[189] In the first part of this chapter, we have seen several examples of such invented scenes [fig. 32, 34] or parables [fig. 45, 48]. Illustration is 'so free' that it can even invent a subject *opposed* to that of the book, Alexeïeff holds. In *Adrienne Mesurat,* for instance, he includes a marriage scene whereas the text tells us of the separation of the prospective couple.[190] In the *Chant,* he confirms the reader's worst fears as to the fate of the princes, who however do return from captivity.

Alexeïeff's distinction between *imagerie* and interpretative illustration reappears in other writings in a slightly changed form: that of the distinction between so-called narrative and dramatic illustration. Alexeïeff even develops this difference, which must have seemed fundamental to him, into a theory of the evolution of cultures.[191]

In a handwritten essay from 1963, Alexeïeff explains the difference he discerns between narration and dramatic action.[192] He distinguishes two kinds of 'spectacle' (a term which for him includes dynamic as well as static arts), one belonging to the narrative genre, the other to the dramatic genre. Narration is tied to the classic period of each culture; its characteristics are conventionality, clarity, an artificial rigidity of form, and a detached spirit. As examples of this genre, Alexeïeff cites military parades, the masks of Greek theatre, classical ballet, Doric architecture, and Racine's alexandrines. Narrative art appeals to the public's consciousness, and avoids exciting emotion. It therefore reaches everybody in the same manner. The narrated facts seem distant and do not concern the public. This idea of 'narrative' art is quite close to Alexeïeff's definition of *imagerie,* the primitive form of illustration, which also 'aimed at conveying the general lines of the *story* to the illiterate', and was simple and comprehensible.[193]

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[188] Parable: 'a short fiction which exists solely to convey a moral or spiritual truth; it may or may not be narrative in form'. Lemon 1991, p. 4. Alexeïeff, *Conférence,* AEE AL-Ms-105.
[189] Alexeïeff, letter to Mespoulet (05-07-1946), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.
[190] Alexeïeff 1931, p. 254.
[191] We shall come back to this distinction in yet another form in chapter 3, in relation to animated film.
[192] Alexeïeff, '*Le mystère d'Annecy',* 1963, AEE AL-Ms-106bis.
[193] Alexeïeff, *Reflections,* exhib. cat. Edinburgh 1967, p. 9.

After this 'classical' narrative phase, the repression of individuality in each culture slackens; variety and emotions become sought after, and art, reaching maturity, becomes dramatical. *Rêverie,* illusion and emotion now have their place; forms become varied and discontinuous.[194] Through projection, spectacles of the dramatic genre engage the public, making it part of the dramatic action. And because emotion cannot be commanded, dramatic art has a different effect upon each individual, which lends it an aura of rarity.[195] The stress on illusion, emotion, and suggestion are close to what Alexeïeff declared true illustration. And just like the dramatic genre represents the maturity of a culture or art, dramatic, interpretative, or 'complete' illustration is the highest form of illustration, demanding a greater creative effort and a more profound understanding of the text.

It must be said, however, that Alexeïeff's rejection of cerebral, non-dramatic art was not always quite categorical. In a letter written in 1946, Alexeïeff condemns colour for being a purely emotional factor which can only create a sensory atmosphere, without appealing to the intellect.[196] Here, intellect and consciousness are valued above emotion and suggestion. This may have to do with Alexeïeff's uncertainty in the use of colour – something he tried to avoid, and if he could not, left to his first wife.[197]

Alexeïeff's emancipated conception of illustration, and the freedom the illustrator accords himself, may have seemed provocative to some. Even Alexeïeff himself occasionally, and apparently without noticing the contradiction, testified to a very different, much more modest ideal of relating to a venerated text. Commenting on a performance of Poe's poetry, he wrote:

> Claire and I didn't like the reading of Poe by two Americans […] they read 'with expression', dramatizing the text. Our (my at least) feeling was that no-one should try to improve, to add something to Poe's poetry, which should be judged for itself. I imagined even a sleek mask for the reader – to make the words impersonal; with a sort of mechanical voice.[198]

Alexeïeff generously sowed contradictory testimonies and claims, but none quite as flagrant as this. The point of view he propounds here is in stark contrast to his personal approach of this very author, involving auto-biographical elements and the invention of figures and scenes, and even seems to imply a disapproval of the very profession of illustration; after all, 'adding something' to a text and 'dramatizing' it were Alexeïeff's self-professed aims.

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[194] This idea is not unlike Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* of 1915, with its fundamental distinction between the classical and baroque stages of each epoch or style.

[195] Alexeïeff, *Mystère,* 1963, AEE AL-Ms-106bis.

[196] Alexeïeff, letter to Mespoulet (05-07-1946), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. Similarly, in the collection of Alexeïeff's aphorisms, stress is placed on the intellectual effort required by art. Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 5.

[197] Alexeïeff-Rockwell, *E-mail correspondence with the author*, (29-11-2011). See Hofstede 2012.

[198] Alexeïeff, letter to Cecile (23-11-1968), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.

2.2.2 Thoughts about the relationship between image and text

We know Alexeïeff was greatly interested in the question of the relation between the texts he read and the illustrations he provided for them. He remarked: 'I have always loved reading, and loved the connection between the WORD and the IMAGE: a connection I have a passion for.'[199] He shows his preoccupation with the question at several instances, for example when he makes it central in his idea for a filmic adaptation of the myth of Narcissus and Echo, which was never executed. 'In Ovid, the intrigue is based on the <u>verbal</u> relationship between Narcissus and Echo. The importance of the <u>visual</u> in the cinematographic spectacle invites us to transpose, replacing the acoustic with the optic, and substitute the echo of Narcissus' <u>voice</u> with the <u>shadow</u> thrown by his body.'[200] Echo will not repeat Narcissus' words but his gestures, appearing as his shadow. Alexeïeff shows a keen consciousness of the contrast between the verbal and the visual, which he makes into the crux of this film project.

To understand Alexeïeff's approach of illustration, we must examine his ideas about the relation between the verbal and the visual, a relation which he seems to have regarded as one of rather strict separation. In two interviews near the end of his life, he remarked that he had been taught to think in terms of separate domains between the arts and media. His generation accepted as a truth the opinion of their elders that 'in the arts it is especially about avoiding the domains of arts which are strange to your own: for instance, it was forbidden to a writer to describe a sunset – domain reserved to painters, etc.'[201] This rule of thumb, close to Greenberg's purist modernism, determined in part what subjects an artist could treat: 'we thought, for instance, that you must use film to say things you can't say in theatre, and must paint that which can be painted but can't be described as such in a novel.'[202] Alexeïeff indeed often shows this penchant to disapprove of 'hybridism' in art, for instance when he expresses his regret that his process of engraving is hybrid because it is preceded by a sketch in a different technique.[203]

In accordance with these ideas of purity and a clear separation between different artistic genres, we find repeated references to the separate domains of literature and visual art throughout Alexeïeff's writings. To the domain of the word or text, Alexeïeff seems to have counted, first of all, narration. He declared the visual language of (animated) film to be unsuited to narration: 'narrative films need the aid of the word.'[204] To the question what would be the

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[199] Alexeïeff, Just, Salomon, *Dans l'atelier,* 1980, p. 31 bis. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. Alexeïeff's emphasis.

[200] Alexeïeff and Parker, *Synopsis: L'amour d'un ombre*, 1958, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #6. Alexeïeff's emphasis.

[201] Alexeïeff, Just, Salomon, *Dans l'atelier,* 1980, p. 31 bis. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[202] Alexeïeff, Malraux, *Entretiens,* 1980, p. 2. AEE AL-Ms-107.

[203] Alexeïeff, Malraux, *Dialogue* [ca. 1980], AEE-AL-Ms-107. Alexeïeff goes so far as to declare the lines of a pencil and the strokes of an engraving to be of a fundamentally different nature.

[204] Alexeïeff, Just, Salomon, *Dans l'atelier,* 1980, pp. 30 bis – 31 bis, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

proper artistic ground of literature, he frankly responds: 'to narrate'.[205] We have seen Alexeïeff's unflattering portrayal of what he termed 'narrative' art, and its associated form of illustration, *imagerie*. The greatest flaw of *imagerie* was its direct visualisation of the subject of the text and of the narrated facts. Alexeïeff considered the judgment or description of images on the basis of their subject erroneous; this, too, was the domain of the word, rather than the image.[206]

Alexeïeff considered the 'pure novel' to consist of 'thoughts and sentiments, without overflowing into ornaments like description, the picturesque or dramatic effects.'[207] So, besides narration, ideas, the abstract and the philosophical belong to the domain of the word, unlike description, which implies particularities and sensory detail. It is easy, Alexeïeff writes, to express an abstract idea or theorem in words. He himself expresses a liking for verbal approximations.[208] It seems abstraction belongs to the word, concreteness to the image. This fits in quite neatly with the traditional and semiotic characterizations of the properties of words and images.[209]

In contrast to the abstraction of the word, Alexeïeff repeatedly characterizes the particular as the domain of illustration. The image provides the example elucidating an abstract phrase. Because of the word's penchant toward abstraction, images can be used to elucidate the text: 'the more precise the verbal expression is, the harder it is to understand, although a drawing accompanying it would elucidate the idea without effort.'[210] 'Illustration' even becomes synonymous with 'example', in the sense of 'illustrating an idea'. And examples are common to all forms of art.

> Illustration is not simply something for painters: every author, like every creator, uses the means of illustration when, in order to give life to abstract ideas (or to a disposition of temperament, of spirit), the artist moves from the general to the particular, not providing proofs of these themes, but examples.[211]

Illustration appears here as a fundamental expressive strategy not bound to a particular form. Alexeïeff also explicitly extends this idea to the novel, remarking in a letter to André Malraux: 'the novel is often – if not always – already a (literary) illustration of an essay by the same author'.[212] The (virtual) essay represents the author's idea; in the novel, a particular exemplary

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[205] Alexeïeff, Just, Salomon, *Dans l'atelier,* 1980, p. 31 bis, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[206] Alexeïeff, *Conférence sur la gravure,* undated, AEE AL-Ms-104.

[207] Alexeïeff, *Code*, 1959, p. 1. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. Alexeïeff considered Tolstoy as an author who kept within these limits, although that might be debatable.

[208] Alexeïeff, *Images incertaines,* p. 11, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[209] See Mitchell 1986 and my essay 'Word and Image'.

[210] Alexeïeff, *Quelques mots*, exhib. cat. Annecy, 1975, AEE AL-Ms-212.

[211] Alexeïeff, *Code,* 1959, p. 4. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell #14.

[212] Alexeïeff, letter to Malraux (27-10-1970), AEE AL-Ms-208.

personage enacts this idea. And just like the literary text essentially serves to illustrate a fundamental abstract idea, which the particular personages merely serve to enact, so the modern illustration Alexeïeff envisages only uses these personages as a pretext to compose an image expressing the idea at the basis of the text.

> In practice, before undertaking the composition [of a *hors-texte*], let us read the chapter in question attentively and resume it in a very simple fashion: for example – "hypocrisy" or "betrayal" or "murder", as if, in the place of the author, we were called upon to give a title to the chapter we are studying. As soon as we have found our motto [*devise*], let us search an image which expresses it in the most striking fashion. The idea of hypocrisy or of betrayal, etc., will be the true subject or our composition; the personages of the author will merely be its pretexts.[213]

In other words, the illustrator goes back to the fundamental idea that was the author's starting point, and illustrates it by means of concrete examples of his own invention. He undertakes an action that is exactly parallel to that of the author, be it by visual means. Alexeïeff here moves beyond the opposition between 'concrete' and 'abstract' for the image and the word respectively, by ascribing the passage from abstract idea to concrete example to both the image and the text.

In book illustration, as elsewhere, these examples can be more or less happily chosen, and can be presented more or less skilfully, the two criteria which determine whether or not illustration is a great art. And just as one well-chosen example elucidating an idea does not exclude another, just as well-chosen, so one illustration does not exclude another illustration of the same text. It follows from its nature of example that an illustration only ever presents one of the *possible* incarnations of a personage or scene.[214]

This digression about the notion of 'example' again shows Alexeïeff to be in two minds. On the one hand, he declares description (and the particulars it implies) and the concrete example to be the image's speciality; on the other, he extends the concept to the novel and 'every creator'.

To return to the domain of the image: the illustrator also considers 'his' ground those purely visual appearances an author cannot express, precisely because he is using words.[215] This includes descriptions – again, visual particulars - and the picturesque.[216] Regarding this division of tasks between text and image, Alexeïeff perceives (or projects) a certain jealousy on the part

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[213] Alexeïeff 1931, p. 254.
[214] Alexeïeff, *Quelques mots*, exhib. cat. Annecy, 1975, AEE AL-Ms-212.
[215] As Soupault wrote about Alexeïeff's illustrations for Dostoevsky: 'that which the author could not have put there [in the book] because he was a writer, that is to say, all appearances, the whole purely visual side.' Soupault 1928, pp. 207-208.
[216] Alexeïeff, *Code,* 1959, p.1. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

of many authors, who would have liked to be painters. He refers to Hans Christian Andersen, who wrote *Images de la Lune,* in which the moon tells a young man what she sees every night. The preface states that it was meant as a 'book of images' suggesting subjects for paintings, and it was published with Alexeïeff's illustrations in 1942. He later commented:

> Illustrating this book, I found myself confronted with a writer who tried to suggest, with words, images to the painter I was. He asked me to substitute myself for him. He himself would have liked to be a painter, like many writers. But he wasn't, and he regretted it and wished that at least somebody else could make those images which he had imagined.[217]

The illustrator appears here as the author's substitute or extension, taking up where the former had to let off, and adding what the author had intended, but was unable, to include.

Although Alexeïeff may have interpreted them boldly, so far he does not stray far from traditional ideas about the role of the images vis-à-vis that of the text. But, as is his wont, he seems to have been in two minds in this matter, riddling his writings with contradictions.

Alexeïeff professed a love for literature, asserting he would have been a writer had he stayed in Russia.[218] It seems to have been a jealous love, a longing for the impossible transgression of the boundaries separating the domain of literature from that of illustration or visual art: '[j]ust as in love the subject strives for the impossible possession of his object [of love], illustration strives for that of the literary work.'[219] Impossible, because we have just seen how keenly Alexeïeff was aware of the interdictions and limitations imposed upon both art forms. He himself affirmed that the best novels where those which kept within the limits of 'pure literature', and therefore lost the most by being translated into visual form.[220] Yet as an illustrator, he made this impossibility his profession. In Alexeïeff's hands, illustration seems to transgress the boundaries outlined above in several ways.

First of all, it might be significant that stylistically, far from exploiting their semiotic aptitude to particularity and semantic 'density', his images strive towards the vague and the indefinite.[221] We have seen how much Alexeïeff admired the *flou précis* of Seurat's charcoal drawings, which lack outline. By contrast, he scorned the work of Masereel, Picasso or Matisse, who worked with what he calls *à-plats*, flat forms whose shape is not defined by any surface relief but only by outline. This style he considered comparable to drums and percussion, whereas he himself strove to play 'gypsy violin' with its *glissandi,* gliding from one pitch to another: his ideal was a gradation of colours and shaded tones. He would, for instance, praise the

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[217]Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet sténo,* 1975, p. 7. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[218] Alexeïeff, Just, Salomon, *Dans l'atelier,* 1980, p. 31 bis. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[219] Alexeïeff, *Code,* 1959, p.1. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[220] Alexeïeff, *Code,* 1959, p.1. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[221] Density is one of the semiotic characteristics Nelson Goodman ascribed to the image. Mitchell 1986, 53-74.

Parisian morning mist producing indefinite forms.[222] Alexeïeff even made this stylistic ideal into a point of morals or character: 'Seurat never affirms anything. Thanks to his pointillist technique; (contrary to Picasso, to Matisse who affirm that it is like that – exactly and not otherwise -), well, *I* think that's imposture.'[223] He himself was by character drawn sooner to the 'precise vagueness' of Seurat's charcoal than to the inflexible assertion of outline. This was part of a broader preference for the indefinite:

> I like the uncertain, ungraspable character of mental images, mobile or fixed, which belongs to the life of the mind. All through mine I have felt an attraction, which seemed inexplicable to me, towards hesitant images, to be honest, like Giacometti's drawings, towards verbal approximations.[224]

In this light, Alexeïeff's stylistic choice becomes an attempt to transfer the unresolvedness of the abstract, verbal approximation or the mental image to the static forms of a print - an attempt which goes directly against the semiotic characteristics and aptitudes of the image. This strategy has the advantage of leaving the *reader's* mental images a measure of freedom and mobility, thereby avoiding one of the loudest reproaches made against illustration: stifling the imagination by being too concrete – a reproach E.A. Poe voices in *The House of Usher* concerning Fuseli's paintings. That Alexeïeff indeed strove to avoid this becomes clear when he proclaims that 'one should avoid giving portraits as much as possible, to avoid the danger of an open conflict with the reader and even with the author, if the latter has given too precise a description of his character'.[225] The '*too*' is telling, and the quotation makes clear why Alexeïeff did not give us a likeness of Roderick Usher, whose symbolically significant looks were described in such detail by Poe.

We perceive a second deviation from traditional word-image division of roles when we examine the tasks which Alexeïeff sets his illustrations. They are far from modest: he planned his illustrations to *The Gambler* and *Notes from the Underground,* for instance, as 'a running visual comment on Dostoevsky's ideas and the dramatic development of the work'.[226] Seeing illustrations as a *comment* on *ideas* implies that these illustrations have the power to express ideas and thought; it shows an ideal of far-going equality between the roles of text and illustration. Although Alexeïeff nowhere claims that image and word have equal powers of

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[222] Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet sténo,* 1975, p. 2. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. It is interesting to note the many synaesthetic metaphors Alexeïeff uses, despite his insistence upon purity of genre.
[223] Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet sténo,* 1975, pp. 3-4. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.
[224] Alexeïeff, *Images incertaines*, p. 11. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.
[225] Alexeïeff 1931, p. 254.
[226] Alexeïeff, *Heads I win,* [1967], p. 4. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.

expression, he seems to come close to such a claim when he states 'that the study of drawing can result in a method of understanding the world and oneself, a method of reasoning and of self-expression'.[227] According to him, then, (producing) images can amount to a method of reasoning, a capacity usually only accorded to the word. Language is widely believed to be our primary or only method of reasoning, and the only medium capable of expressing thought, although some significant claims on behalf of 'visual thinking' have been made.[228]

Sometimes Alexeïeff pushes his emancipation of the image so far we have the impression of witnessing a competitive struggle, for instance when he affirms illustration's anteriority over the text. Referring to the pictographic or hieroglyphic origins of language and the much later invention of phonetic signs, he concludes with a dainty jump of logic: 'and thus the illustrations existed before the text, and the text came and joined the illustrations.'[229]

As a lover of the text, then, the image is jealously possessive. It seeks to encroach upon the text's domain. We can interpret Alexeïeff's practice of illustration in this light: his illustrations seem to rub up against the text, trying to approach it as closely as possible thematically, stylistically, structurally, formally; even in the working method he chooses, Alexeïeff strives to copy that of the text, looking for unity in all these aspects. To start with the most obvious, unity with respect to content: by definition, all illustration in some way takes its subjects or themes from a text. We have seen that Alexeïeff did not content himself with a novel's superficial subject – the narrated facts - but sought to have his illustrations correspond with the text's underlying theme. Looking back upon his habitual methods of illustration, he remarked: '[b]efore embarking upon the illustration, I would analyze the composition of the text, inform myself about the biography of the author and about his times – about the circumstances of the work's conception – like a literary critic would.'[230] His analysis of *Anna Karenina* shows that the aim of this preparation is to find the common idea, the meaning or unity underlying the text, and which may be expressed in symbolical motifs recurring obsessively.[231] In the case of *Voyage au Pays des Articoles,* we have seen how he stressed the novel's central contrast between contemplative art and active life; for *Usher,* Alexeïeff seems to have settled on the themes of madness and of the influence of one's surroundings or atmosphere, stressed throughout by Poe.

But Alexeïeff strove to adapt the character of his illustrations to the character of the text in other ways, too; by adapting the style of his illustrations, and even the methods by which this form was achieved. For example, when he receives a commission to illustrate popular Russian

[227] Alexeïeff, *Study of drawing*, undated, AEE AL-Ms-106.
[228] See Rudolf Arnheim, 'A Plea for Visual Thinking', in Mitchell 1974, pp. 171-180.
[229] Alexeïeff, *Conférence,* AEE AL-Ms-105.
[230] Alexeïeff, *Biographical date*, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.
[231] Alexeïeff, *Analyse de Anna Karénine* (07-03-1958), AEE AL-Ms-202. Alexeïeff speaks at lenght of 'common idea', 'the meaning of the work', 'the unity of the work', and 'obsessive and symbolical themes'. Part of the prominence accorded to the railway in his illustrations for this book may be due, for instance, to the importance Alexeïeff gave to the fact that its author died in a railway station.

fairytales, he takes great care to preserve their folkloric character.[232] To this end, he conducts research into the history of the tales and the literature and art of their time or region, studying ancient Uralic [*touranien*], Scythian, and Chersonese art. In a business letter, he affirms that this is always his practice: 'whenever the problem of illustration presents itself, I study the text and invent a style appropriate to the problem in hand, depending on the period or the genre of the work.'[233] Indeed, we have seen how he sought an archaic style for his work on *Le Chant du Prince Igor*. The choice of style can share in and contribute to the underlying theme of the work, Alexeïeff wrote, but it can never be its substitute.[234]

Once a style for the *Russian Fairytales* had been found, in order to achieve the desired form, Alexeïeff stayed close to the methods he believed were current at the time the Russian tales were composed. Because they were originally transmitted orally, Alexeïeff takes no notes during his preparation: '[f]aithful to the rules of the illiterate storytellers, I forbade myself to copy anything: remember [it]...'[235] Likewise, to achieve the 'charming nonchalance' of the popular images known as Loubki or Epinal Alexeïeff associated with the popular tales, he coloured his own illustrations for these tales by hand, repeating the same colouring twelve times following his assumption that it was the repetitive nature of their creation which gave the 'original' illustrations for this kind of tale their particular character.[236]

Alexeïeff wanted text and images to form a unity 'like music and words in a song'. This unity did not stop at the literary or visual surface, but included the structure or composition of a text or genre. In other words, as the example of *Chant du Prince Igor* shows, Alexeïeff's illustrations took into account the literary composition of the text they accompanied. This could simply mean that flashbacks, for instance, found a visual parallel in the repetition of backgrounds seen earlier in the same book.[237] In a more complex form, however, it could mean a direct reference to the very anatomy of a literary genre.

To stay with our example of Alexeïeff's illustrations for the *Russian Fairytales*, Alexeïeff wrestled with the lack of narrative unity which characterized the form of the book. He grumbled that such a collection of unrelated texts meant he would have to limit himself to *imagerie,* like his colleagues, or like he himself when illustrating Fargue's poems or Andersen's *Images de la Lune*. To solve his problem, he tried first of all to establish a style corresponding to the shared Russian origin of the tales, as we have seen above. But style did not suffice.

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[232] The importance he attached to it becomes clear when he chides Perrault for translating Perrault's tales from an oral to a written form or language. Alexeïeff, *Contes de Fées* [after 1945], p. 6. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[233] Alexeïeff, letter to Hadad (28-06-1949), AEE AL-Ms-211.

[234] Alexeïeff, *Sur l'usage des scénarios* (7-11-1961), CNC -collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #16.

[235] Alexeïeff, *Contes de Fées* [after 1945], p. 4. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[236] Ibid., p. 6. Loubki, singular Loubok, are popular Russian wood engravings in a very simple, narrative manner, comparable to the images produced in Épinal.

[237] Alexeïeff, *Heads I win* [1967], CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.

I read and reread my tales, taking notes which named the principle personages. I noticed that numerous protagonists: the pike, the cow, the wolf, the cat, Baba-Yaga [the witch], the Three Sisters, the Magic Horse, often reappeared in different tales – like the actors of one and the same troupe appearing in different plays: Sganarelle, Harlequin, the Doctor, the Captain, etc. Finally, I adopted the strategy of presenting a kind of morphological glossary of the myths of my native land. [...] I considered that personages or objects could reappear – exactly the same – in different combinations, or even by themselves [...] The whole thing became a kind of meccano.[238]

The unity which Alexeïeff considered so crucial is achieved by means of the limited set of recurring personages, which do not change in character or attributes in the different tales, nor in form or attitude in the accompanying illustrations. Thus, the figure of the Fox is repeated on pages 72, 170 and 438 without any changes; so is the Wolf, on pages 251 and 275. The ram which appears fourfold on page 406, is repeated once on page 198, this time in combination with a cat [fig. 63-64]. As to the cat, it appears larger but otherwise very similar on page 96 [fig. 65]. Similar repetitions can also be found in the full-page plates, for instance those of pages 433 and 586 which show similar six-winged figures, albeit in different attitudes.[239]

Although Alexeïeff left us no written comment on his work on *le Chant du Prince Igor,* it was probably based on comparable deliberations; in the *Chant,* the repetitive composition of the oral epic poem is likewise given a visual expression.

It seems Alexeïeff accorded a great importance to the unity of text and illustrations on several levels. This ideal of unity might have been inspired in part by the theoretical essays by E. A. Poe, which he must have read.[240] Poe is emphatic about the supreme importance of 'that vital requisite in all works of art, Unity', which he defines as 'totality of effect or impression'.[241] Poe also speaks of the pleasure afforded by repetition and the use of an unvaried refrain, and praises suggestiveness and indefinite meaning, other opinions Alexeïeff might have taken to heart.[242]

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[238] Alexeïeff, *Contes de Fées* [after 1945], pp. 4-5. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. Meccano is a game in which ever different constructions (miniature bridges, cars, buildings) can be put together, using ready-made parts.

[239] Afanas'ev 1973. First edition of these illustrations published in 1945.

[240] In Arnault 1973, p. 74, Alexeïeff refers to Poe's '*Genèse d'un poème*', proposing to call the article '*Genèse d'un film poétique*'.

[241] See 'The poetic principle', in Poe, Sisson, p. 88.

[242] See Poe's 'Philosophy of Composition', ibid., esp. p. 143 and p. 149. Alexeïeff also claims to have carried a copy of Hippolyte Taine's '*Théorie de l'Esthétique*' [*Philosophie de l'art*] with him on his flight through Siberia; if that is true, the book does not seem to have left an obvious impression on his own art theoretical ideas. Alexeïeff, *Pourquoi j'ai illustré Jivago*, [1959], AEE AL-Ms-201.

2.2.3. Elements of *Paragone* in Alexeïeff's discourse

Apart from the relationship between text and illustration, Alexeïeff also touched upon that between illustration and other arts in his various writings. As we shall see, from the way the illustrator writes of arts like painting or photography and refers to the fact that those had already evoked much theoretical discussion from practitioners and critics, it becomes clear that his own attempt to establish the nature and aims of illustration is part of a broader bid to ennoble his profession. Moreover, it is perhaps no coincidence that many parallels can be drawn between Alexeïeff's defense of illustration and the discourse of Renaissance artists lobbying for the status of 'liberal art' and for the ensuing liberty of artistic invention.

Alexeïeff's theory-forming seems to have had the conscious aim of ennobling illustration. He notices how technical progress and novel inventions are overturning habitual classifications of the fine arts. This process of (artistic) upheaval, he says, forces all artists to revise 'the goals, rules and sphere of duties [*attributions*]' of their art – one might almost say, to claim a territory.[243] Alexeïeff adds that numerous theories have already been mounted about painting, but not illustration.[244] Yet it is vital the public knows the 'rules of the game' underlying an art form if it is to form a just opinion of it. A base-ball match, an opera, or an abstract painting 'cannot fail to seem absurd to a spectator unaware of the goals and rules observed by these spectacles.' Therefore, 'since he [the illustrator] must be judged, he must be judged according to the code which is appropriate to his work.'[245]

Defining illustration's sphere of duties also means pitting it against those of other visual arts. Alexeïeff especially has a bone to pick with easel painters turning to illustration. He blames their careless attitude towards illustration for the art's bad reputation, and bristles about the arrogance of painters who 'seem to think all too often that their genius suffices to do justice to a literary work of high value with a few thoughtless scrawls'.[246] Alexeïeff gives the impression of jealously resenting painting's higher status, for instance when he wishfully declares easel painting to be 'dead'.[247]

Photography also had to suffer Alexeïeff's contempt. He considered its invention as a problem of 'life and death' for illustration, which had, however, mounted a vigorous defense, 'accentuating the richness of its scenes, the number of personages, the outlandish [*outré*] form of those personages, in short placing as much emphasis as possible on all that photography is not

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[243] Alexeïeff, *Jeu,* CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Alexeïeff, *Code*, 1959, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.
[246] Alexeïeff, *Quelques mots*, exhib. cat. Annecy, 1975, AEE AL-Ms-212.
[247] Alexeïeff, *Text about engraving*, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell #14.

capable of.'[248] Photography, bound to mechanical reproductions of reality, would never equal the artistic composition or aesthetic quality of illustration, and was clearly 'not an art'.[249]

Upstaging another art by accentuating all that it is not capable of (representing) is one of the stock strategies of the classic *paragone* or competitive comparison between the arts. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), for instance, pointed out that sculpture cannot show transparency, gleam, darkness, clouds, and 'endless other things' painting excels at; and Giancristoforo Romano (1456-1512) similarly stressed that colour, shade and atmosphere were not available to the sculptor.[250] Nor is this the only *topos* Alexeïeff has in common with his Renaissance colleagues: some of the claims we have previously examined also contain interesting parallels with *paragone.* Alexeïeff's claims about the illustration's power to express thoughts, ideas, and emotions, for instance, could echo Leonardo's similar claims for the representational superiority of painting.[251] When Alexeïeff stresses the great skill required for his etching technique, he uses an argument already made by Alberti.[252] When he reminds us of the imaginative, mental exertion necessary to make an etching without being able to foresee the result on the plaque, he is again not far from Leonardo's treatise on painting lauding it as a 'cognate' art.[253] And when Alexeïeff holds that his art does not admit of mistakes in view of the cost of the material, he echoes Giancristoforo Romano's defence of sculpture. Similarly, Alexeïeff's stress on the illustrator's right to use his imagination and even to deviate from the text he illustrates recalls the Renaissance debate on *invenzione* and *fantasia*, for instance Leornardo advocating the artist's right to exercise his imagination instead of merely aping nature.[254] In Alexeïeff's case, it is not nature but the text which supplies the model from which the artist works – and deviates.

However, it is not the *paragone* between sculpture and painting but that between painting and poetry that yields the most interesting cross-links. The 15th and 16th centuries saw a lively debate around the question whether a painting could communicate expressive meaning as effectively as a poem.[255] In this context, Leonardo's familiar-sounding claim that painting is immediately accessible to the spectator, and has greater affective power, reminds us of Alexeïeff's stance on the greater comprehensibility of the image enlightening a vague phrase, and the prime task he accorded illustration: to evoke an emotion or atmosphere.

The Renaissance scholar Francis Ames-Lewis remarks that several painters 'seem to have sought to demonstrate the superiority of their art by creating 'visual poems' – pictorial

[248] Alexeïeff, *Conférence*, AEE AL-Ms-105.
[249] 'Éloge du film d'animation', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 41.
[250] Ames-Lewis 2000, pp. 142-150.
[251] Alexeïeff, *Heads I win*, [1967], CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.
[252] Alexeïeff, *Conférence sur la gravure*, AEE AL-Ms-104.
[253] Alexeïeff, Malraux, *Entretiens*, 1980, AEE AL-Ms-107.
[254] Ames-Lewis 2000, p. 179, and esp. pp. 143-151 for a more detailed discussion of these artist's arguments.
[255] Ibid., pp. 163-167.

equivalents of verbal imagery and the rhythms of poetry.'[256] And doesn't Alexeïeff do just that in his treatment of the *Chant du Prince Igor?* He takes into account even the rhythms of the text, stressing the verbal repetition, visualising the verbal imagery, and thus creating a pictorial accompaniment that is as close as possible to the text. I have also suggested that his illustrations, consciously or not, seem to move towards the semiotic characteristics of text, seeking generality, vagueness, indefiniteness, in a paradoxical effort to escape the fated particularity of the image. Botticelli, whom Alexeïeff quoted visually [fig. 38-39] and referred to in one of his essays, is described by Ames-Lewis as consciously striving to produce a poetic painting, a painted equivalent to poetry, deliberately avoiding narrative and aiming above all at generating a poetic atmosphere. Giorgione is also mentioned as an exponent of an 'apparently theme-less, intensely poetic picture intended primarily to evoke mood and atmosphere' – just what Alexeïeff's illustrations were meant to evoke.[257] They too were evocations of a certain theme, rather than depictions of a specific narrative subject or narrated scene. And they too may be seen as the product of a jealous admiration of text.

In the 15th century, the choice of subject matter and meaning of a commissioned painting was rarely left to the artist; in the course of the century, however, artists gained increasing freedom in the choice of a subject and interpretative mode, and increasingly 'refused to be limited to working within the tightly drawn limits of an intellectually complex – and visually less than satisfying – literary programme. [...] Conversely, the exercise of *fantasia* had by the turn of the century become a priority for the most successful and highly praised artists.'[258] Roughly the same development can be seen in illustration, some five centuries later, as Alexeïeff demonstrates when he claims his independence from the literary programme imposed upon him by the editor, and his right to interpret a text freely.

This is not to say that Alexeïeff drew these parallels himself, or 'must have read' these texts by Leonardo and others. Rather, it seems that the logic of their situation was sufficiently similar to the illustrator's to explain the resemblance in argument. Both fought for the artistic recognition of what was traditionally considered a craft; both dealt with a position of dependence considering subject-matter, decided upon by a patron (editor) by means of a literary programme (text). Both also came up against literature's perceived superiority to their own work, which seems to have invited a bid to outdo the novel or poem, to beat them at their own game.

But comparisons between Alexeïeff's defense of illustration and the Renaissance champions of painting only hold up to a certain point. Beyond that point, the illustrator's argument runs into difficulties which seem to be inherent to the subservient or dependent

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[256] Ames-Lewis 2000, p. 168.
[257] Ibid., pp. 172-173, and pp. 175-176. 'De la peinture au cinéma', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, pp. 7-9.
[258] Ames-Lewis 2000, pp. 181-186.

nature of his art form. The images he produces inevitably *follow* a text, in time, theme and thus in hierarchy. If they do not, they cease to be illustrations. This greatly complicates any case for the superiority of the image over the text, and cripples the seemingly essential argument of artistic freedom and independence. Alexeïeff seems to have tried two different ways out of this fix.

Firstly, both Alexeïeff and critics like Soupault decide to shift the focus away from the function of the image towards Alexeïeff's favorite technique, (aquatint) etching. Etching (or 'engraving' as Alexeïeff invariably calls it, following the French *gravure à l'eau-forte*) is pitted against painting and photography. It is now the art of engraving, not that of illustration, that is being defended. This allows for a focus on the challenges of technique, the virtues and variations of the material, and the imagination required in the process, without necessitating awkward mention of the tyranny of text. Thus, in the 1980 interview by Clara Malraux, Alexeïeff comments on the great imaginative effort required by both engraving and the creation of movement in animated film. Both are '[m]ethods of indirect creation, which are an effort of improvisation and composition simultaneously. [...] I imagine the movement which I will not see on the screen until it will be too late to change anything about it; and the same is true of etching.'[259]

Alexeïeff's prime champion, Soupault, chose the same tactic in his 1928 article lauding and launching the artist. Instead of calling it illustration, Soupault writes that 'Alexeïeff elevates the craft of *engraving* to the height of an art.'[260] He proclaimed the independence of the art of engraving, advancing arguments like the scarcity of highly skilled engravers and the room for experimentation with and discovery of new procedures that printmaking offers. Moreover, he called engraving the 'most difficult visual art'.[261]

Louis Cheronnet, another critic attempting to laud Alexeïeff, also succumbs to the temptation of writing that 'his engravings are not 'illustrations' in the literal sense, but an accompaniment which reinforces the melodic line of the text'.[262] Defending illustration by claiming it is something else, and something better, is one of the problematic strategies mentioned at the very beginning of this thesis.

Alexeïeff himself also tended to discuss individual books according to the technique he used for each of them. In his letter to the critic Mornand, for example, he presents each set of illustrations as a technical and stylistic experiment, without mentioning any aspects of function – how the illustrations accompanied what kind of text. Thus, he says of *Voyage au Pays des Articoles,* 'here is shown the colour inking of a single plaque and the *repérage* [successive

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[259] Alexeïeff, Malraux, *Entretiens,* 1980, AEE AL-Ms-107.
[260] Soupault 1928, p. 202. My emphasis.
[261] Soupault, *Text recorded by the French radio* (25-02-1947), AEE AL-Ms-108.
[262] Cheronnet 1932, p. 150.

application of colours]'.[263] Making the two different techniques of colour printing the focus of these illustrations is all the more odd because this would sooner appear to be the printer's contribution.[264] Alexeïeff's essay '*De l'importance du procédé*' likewise stresses the technical novelty of his images, for unlike the proclamation of the independence of illustration, this was a perfectly legitimate compliment to an illustrator's work.[265]

Alexeïeff especially liked to compare engraving to that one-eyed monster, the camera. The Geneva archives conserve the sketch for a conference on this topic in Swarthmore, probably written in the 1940's when Alexeïeff and Parker lived in the USA. It quite straightforwardly compares engraving and photography, as well as engraving and drawing, by drawing up two columns for their respective qualities. Of course, engraving comes off much better: it is more complex and difficult, and can express thought, whereas photography expresses 'little' and it easy. Engraving demands much thought and a talent for composition, instead of simply reproducing 'nature' as photography does. The cost of the materials used in engraving or etching means corrections are out of the question, another classic *paragone* argment. And although Alexeïeff has added in broad handwriting on top of the typed page: 'be moderate in your terms', he is quite adamant about the artistic qualities of engraving and the inferiority of photography.[266]

In a second attempt to find a way out of the fix – defending illustration's claims to a high artistic status, which requires the art's independence and freedom - Alexeïeff takes a few steps on the path towards 'independent illustration'. That is to say, he imagines a future for illustration as images without text. In his lecture of 1931, rather than focusing on engraving, he chooses to accentuate the functional particularities of illustration. After explaining the evocative function of illustration and the overarching plan or connection he deems obligatory among a series of illustrations, he concludes that these elements 'create between illustration on the one hand, and drawing, printmaking or photography on the other, such a clear difference, that she must be considered as a separate art.'[267] Note that he here sets illustration *against* engraving ('printmaking'), instead of identifying the two as we have previously seen! He continues:

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[263] Alexeïeff, letter to Mornand (14-06-1928), AEE AL-Ms-211. *Repérage* is the successive application of colours, during which the paper is held in the right place by use of pins or needles.

[264] This commentary is all the more odd since Alexeïeff was very uncertain about using colour, preferred working in black and white and habitually asked his first wife, Grinevsky, to select the colours if he could not avoid using them. See Hofstede 2012. Alexeïeff-Rockwell, *E-mail correspondence with the author* (29-11-2011), and *L'influence de Alexandra Grinevsky* [after 1983], AEE AL-Ms-210.

[265] Alexeïeff 1929, p. 608.

[266] Alexeïeff, *Conférence sur la gravure,* 1959, AEE AL-Ms-104. The last page summarizes it as 'comparison between engraving and the other arts'.

[267] Alexeïeff 1931, p. 282.

> [i]llustration being an art, a sequence of good illustrations should be able to retain its significance all on its own, without text. It should be self-sufficient. It would evidently be useless to seek the story [*légende*] *of* the text; but the prints must be welded by the unity of emotion and by the design [*plan*] which has presided over their conception. Shall we ever witness the development of true illustration, whose merit will no longer consist of being a beautiful image, like that of any other good drawing? Shall we see her emancipated from her servitude to the text? Shall we see her the equal of painting or printmaking?[268]

The question whether illustration can become independent from the text can only be answered in the affirmative if we make the coherent design or internal interlinking of a suite of images the defining characteristic of illustration. 'Illustrations' in this definition are a series of formally and thematically unified images which combine to communicate a certain idea or emotion. The text which inspired this idea or emotion is then no longer a necessary accompaniment. And this is just the kind of definition Alexeïeff proposes in this conference. Indeed, when he proceeds to ask where we may find examples of true illustration, he excludes the work of such famous illustrators as Doré, Grandville or Busch, and he excludes history painting. These images may be full of aesthetic and artistic merit, but lack illustration's essential characteristics, Alexeïeff judges.

> We may, however, find a considerable library [of examples of illustration] in the cinema movies. [...] There is no better school for the illustrator than to go to the cinema. One finds in these films numerous investigations and discoveries which are precious from the perspective of illustration and which belong to the domain of the book.[269]

It is cinema which gives us the best examples of and discoveries in illustration. Although Alexeïeff does not detail these 'discoveries' here, in 1931, we may learn them by turning to his own film production, which started about a year later. Alexeïeff only seems to have mentioned this ambition to make illustration free and independent this once. Yet if we look at his selection of illustration's defining characteristic (the criterion of continuity between images), and take into account this early mention of cinema as an important form of illustration and his own turn to cinema soon afterward, it may be argued that Alexeïeff's animated film work can be seen as a form of emancipated illustration. The animated film consists of another type of images which only function by the grace of their interrelation; the projection of unconnected images would not produce a film. This might be why Alexeïeff mentions the cinema as the best school for illustrators. It is conceivable that his idea of the core characteristic of illustration leads him to

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[268] Ibid., p. 284.
[269] Ibid., p. 282.

animated film. And it is animation which will succeed, and do away with, easel painting, Alexeïeff proclaims.[270] We shall now turn to Alexeïeff's new, pointy weapon in his battle to outbid the painter: the pin screen.

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[270] Alexeïeff, *Text about engraving*, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

3. Alexeïeff, illustrator and film-maker: separation and synthesis of the arts

'It seems to me that that world of immobile and successive images (my illustrations for *Zhivago* for instance), that world I was abandoning by passing from the book to film, retains a special and mysterious value.'

'De l'illustration de livres et du film d'animation', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 26. My translation.

Figure 4 - Alexeïeff, film still from *Une Nuit sur le Mont Chauve*, 1934.

In 1932, Alexeïeff decided to try his hand at animated film. He explained to Du Perron in 1933 that he by no means wanted to abandon his 'first love', book illustration, but searched for a larger audience, since there was only a limited number of *bibliophiles* rich enough to buy the fine illustrated editions he worked on.[271] Befriended authors he looked up to talked of the films of Chaplin, Eisenstein, Léger and Man Ray.[272] Most often, Alexeïeff mentions Berthold Bartosch's film *Die Idee,* animating Franz Masereel's woodcuts, as the immediate incentive.[273] 'When I saw the words: 'animated engraving' in *La Semaine de Paris,* I told myself: 'How come you, who have been obliged by poverty to invent so many techniques of engraving, haven't been able to discover how to animate it?'[274] This sentiment of rivalry spurred Alexeïeff to invent his own technique of 'animated engraving'.[275] After all, he considered himself a master engraver,

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[271]Perron 1933. Alexeïeff mentions a public of 15.000 at most. Alexeïeff, 'Reflections on motion picture animation', Russett, Starr 1976, p. 92.

[272] Bendazzi 1985, p. 168.

[273] Starr 1965, p. 21.

[274] Arnault 1969, p. 75.

[275]'And the spirit of competition, if you like, which is a rather petty spirit – neither very estimable nor very enviable, nor very defensible, but anyway which is mine, stimulated a lot to seek 'animated engraving' after all.' Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet steno,* p. 8. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, # 14.

and would not be beaten at his own game. Sometimes he seems to antedate his experiments with 'animated engraving' on the pin screen, stating that he was already working on these when *L'idée* came out in 1932.[276] Claire Parker is co-credited with the invention of the screen, although Alexeïeff has also told the gripping story of his solitary invention, featuring a German spy.[277] Considering the date of *l'Idée,* and the fact that the first pin screen film came out in autumn 1934, and took 18 months of work, 1932 seems a likelier date for its invention than 1931.[278]

The pin screen consists of a wooden frame supporting a piece of canvas, painted white, coated in wax and perforated with several thousands of needles [fig. 66]. These can be pushed through the canvas from either side. When the screen is lighted obliquely, the protruding pins cast a shadow. When they are pushed in completely, the white of the screen appears, and between these two extremes many shades of grey can be achieved. Alexeïeff compared the screen to a piece of steel velvet: 'a canvas of black-haired velvet on a white ground, and whose bristle can be 'shaved' bit by bit using hand-held metallic rollers.'[279] An image can be created using different tools to push the pins in. After an image has been completed, it is photographed, then modified to form the next image or stage of a movement. Projection of the successive photographs creates the illusion of movement. The only 'original' left of each image is the film negative, and in the absence of any other material trace, the artist must keep the previous stages of the movement he is creating in his mind's eye until the film is developed.

In 1934, after eighteen months of work in cooperation with Claire Parker, the first eight-minute film made on the pin screen was shown to the public.[280] *Une Nuit sur le Mont Chauve*, illustrating the score by Mussorgsky, was a critical success [fig. 4]. It was lauded for its poetic atmosphere and novel technique, and was considered epoch-making cinema.[281] The documentary maker John Grierson wrote that 'all film societies should see this film. It is as astonishing and as brilliant a short as they are likely to find.'[282] Nevertheless, it was not widely

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[276] Alexeïeff and Parker, 'About Berthold Bartosch', Russett, Starr 1976, p. 85. 1931 is also given as a date for the release of *L'Idée*, but seems less likely. Arnault 1969, p. 69.

[277] The German spy next door overheard Alexeïeff's explanation of his invention to the befriended artist Étienne Raik, and all seemed lost; fortunately, the spy turned mad that night and was collected by an ambulance. Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet steno,* 1975, p. 13. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

[278] 1931 is the date mentioned by Alexeïeff, for instance in Alexeïeff, Priem, *Premier jet steno,* 1975, p. 8. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14. However, he occasionally also speaks of 1932. The 18 months are mentioned in Alexeïeff 1967, p. 13, among others.

[279] 'L'écran d'épingles', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 20.

[280] Alexeïeff and the official filmographies mention the eighteen months and the year 1933; for instance Bendazzi 2001, p. 286. However, no article discussing the film appeared before the four simultaneous articles of autumn 1934 (see note below), and in November 1933, Du Perron writes that the film is not ready yet but will probably be finished that winter. Moreover, the invitation to the first showing dates from December 1934. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #9.

[281] See for contemporary reactions Perron 1933, Grierson 1934, p. 53, Cheronnet, *Crapouillot,* 1934, p. 36, and Cheronnet, *Art et Décoration,* 1934, pp. 377-381.

[282] Grierson 1934, p. 53.

distributed, and Alexeïeff and Parker turned to different techniques to produce advertising films, of which they made almost forty over the following decades, assisted by a small team. They constructed several more pin screens, with which they made *En Passant* in the USA in 1944, *Le Nez* (based on Gogol's short story) in 1963, and two more illustrations to Mussorgsky's music, *Tableaux d'une Exposition* in 1972 and *Trois Thèmes* in 1980.[283] Alexeïeff called a second technical innovation '*totalisation*', a method by which an illusory solid form is traced on every film frame by prolonged exposure of the film to a moving object [fig. 67].[284]

Animated cinema and stop-motion films were very young media at the start of the twentieth century, and their practitioners were at pains to have them recognised as fine arts. Alexeïeff, as an illustrator turning to animation, chose a second activity which was not considered one of the 'higher' arts, and again took trouble to ennoble his new profession. In the first part of this chapter, we shall consider how he did so, and analyze the discourse in which he and his critics discussed animated film. Animation, and especially the pin board, were given its own *paragone* and medium specificity argument.[285] This discourse will be described with special attention to the position of illustration within it. In the second part of this chapter, we will shift focus from the separation between animation and illustration as it was construed by artist and critics alike, to the parallels which can be drawn between Alexeïeff's two activities. These correspondences can be found on a stylistic, thematic, and iconographic level, but also on a more fundamental, theoretical level of shared artistic concerns and solutions. Nevertheless, the relation between the illustrations and animated films has so far been considered quite one-sidedly as one of antithesis, and has never received serious attention.

A study of this second part of Alexeïeff's artistic effort will enable us to answer our research question, which concerns the interrelation between his illustration and his film work. Moreover, the way Alexeïeff theorized his work in animated film interests us because it shows many parallels with his efforts over illustration. Alexeïeff doubles and adapts certain strategies he used in his discourse about illustration, and has to re-position himself in regard to his first profession. The question therefore sheds a new, sideways light on some of the issues we have examined in the previous chapter and which form the core of this thesis. We shall have occasion to examine two more illustrated books in this light.

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[283] For more information on the (advertising) films, see esp. Bendazzi 2001. For Alexeïeff's own account, see esp. 'Reflections on Motion Picture Animation', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, pp. 9-11.

[284] The whole path of the object's movement is recorded on the frame, and slightly modified for the next frame. Alexeïeff wrote down some of his metaphysical reflections this invention gave rise to. Some of these could provide interesting starting points for further research. See esp. Alexeïeff 1955, pp. 153-157.

[285] The term 'medium specificity' is understood here in Noël Carroll's definition: the idea that media (the materials or techniques with which an art work is made) have distinctive representational, expressive and formal capacities which individuate an art form, and that these characteristic effects should be exploited. Carroll 2008, pp.35-52.

3.1 Film vs. Illustration: Separation

In the second half of his life, Alexeïeff was interviewed and described almost exclusively in his capacity as filmmaker. The golden age of French book illustration had faded, and animated cinema was up-and-coming. The only monograph about the artist comes from film scholars and filmmakers, and in the most recent scholarship, Alexeïeff's illustration work is rarely more than a prologue to his films. Film scholars write that Alexeïeff 'always considered himself primarily a filmmaker' (Bendazzi) and that 'film remains the most authentic muse to Alexeïeff's art, a muse whose presence can be felt even in his 'static' works'(Fihman).[286] By contrast, texts focussing on his illustration are often older and harder to find. This situation has strongly determined the predominant reputation of the artist. Thus, when one starts reading about Alexeïeff, a very different image appears from the one we have sketched in the previous chapter. Yet this image of Alexeïeff the filmmaker is as much of his own design as was the assiduously built reputation of Alexeïeff the illustrator-engraver.

We have seen that, writing about illustration, Alexeïeff liked to remember how his first drawing teacher trained him in this. Conversely, from his position as a filmmaker, he stresses how his youth and artistic education prepared him for just that. He describes how, as a child, he imagined a stream of images moving to the music his mother played at night – a premonition of his films illustrating Mussorgsky.[287] And his accounts of his first drawings and memories are filled with references to movement and animation. He writes that he 'began to draw in 1905 at the age of four', drawing passing boats and running soldiers;

> what interested me was to render the movement of these summary figures drawn with a few lines. Later, towards the age of seven, I succeeded in drawing galloping horses in profile. [...] Still later, when about 10 years old, I saw my oldest brother making a praxinoscope, the function of which was to give the illusion of movement; I imitated this by drawing in a little note-book a moving object phase by phase. [...] They were my first films.[288]

It is tempting to think that this interest and awareness were projected into the four-year old to make him a prototype of the later animator; Alexeïeff's admiration for Muybridge, for instance, may not make the 'galloping horses in profile' a random choice.[289] In the same vein, many critics recount how Alexeïeff had always dreamt of illustrating music, when sound in cinema suddenly made this possible in the late 1920's. Film is presented as his true calling, as opposed to the

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[286] Bendazzi 2001, p. 15, and Fihman 2001, p. 151, respectively.

[287] Alexeïeff, *Image et Son*, 1967, p. 13.

[288] 'Reflections on motion picture animation', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, pp. 9-10. A praxinoscope is a 19th-century animation device using a strip of pictures placed around the inner surface of a spinning cylinder.

[289] See his 'De la peinture au cinéma', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 8. Muybridge is especially famous for his series of photographs recording the movement of a galloping horse in profile.

more pecuniary illustration. If he illustrated books to earn a living, 'none of the animated films using the pinscreen technique were made for money. These [...] were the fruit of a purely creative process'.[290] We even read the slightly bizarre claim that 'Alexeïeff of course had no public or audience to consider' when he made his films, although he himself had said that it was the larger audience that drew him to filmmaking.[291]

Alexeïeff's motifs for turning to cinema have also been subject to different interpretations, in which the supposedly lowly and commercial character of illustration plays a great role. One critic writes: 'the artist goes through a moral crisis. He is weary of a certain, no doubt constant succes. But he has the feeling of repeating himself, of becoming a kind of artisan.'[292] Alexeïeff himself is quoted by his friend Bendazzi as saying: 'I was illustrating books and that brought me money, so all was going well. But I couldn't stop saying that it was no longer art, that it was a craft like any other.'[293] This declaration that illustration is not an art is in stark contrast to Alexeïeff's habitual attitude towards his occupation as we have encountered it in chapter two. It seems that for illustration and animation, Alexeïeff used two separate and at times contradictory discourses, each meant to defend its particular art. We shall analyze some elements of this separate and separating discourse, many of which again remind us strongly of traditional elements of the *paragone*.

First of all, Alexeïeff bulwarks animated cinema against the older arts by placing it on the same pedestal and making comparisons in its favour. He wrote in 1963 that the animated motion picture 'can attain an artistic quality comparable to the masterpieces known in the older arts, painting, the dance, music, sculpture, and above all, poetry.'[294] He compares the shortness of animated films, for instance, to the small size of the Mona Lisa. Bendazzi likewise sounds defensive when he expressly describes Alexeïeff as 'artist of the "higher" arts.'[295] Alexeïeff furthermore compares the struggles of animation artists to those of famous avant-garde painters: 'we, animators, have to acknowledge with some pride that our road is tough, as it has been for the painters of the *École de Paris* in the heroic age.'[296] How strongly Alexeïeff considered his animation films avant-garde becomes clear when he expresses his hope 'that the film [*Tableaux d'une Exposition*] will become up to date 50 years from now.'[297]

Once cinema has been weighed against the other arts, true or pure cinema is separated from more lowly forms, in order to elevate the genre – just as Alexeïeff distinguished different forms of illustration. He draws a sharp line between the common, live action motion picture

[290] Izvolov 2001, p. 59.
[291] Allan 2001, p. 87.
[292] Dunoyer 1983.
[293] Bendazzi 1985, p. 166.
[294] 'Reflections on motion picture animation', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 11.
[295] '[A]rtiste des arts "majeurs"'. Bendazzi 1985, p. 169.
[296] Arnault 1969, p. 75.
[297] Alexeïeff 1976, p. 98.

(which he sometimes simply calls 'cinema'), and the animated motion picture (animation). Just as he set engraving above photography, so he condemns film made with photographic images as inartistic. In art, he holds, the form and meaning of all details depend on conscient choice, whereas photography indifferently records all random details. Moreover, animated cinema is a pure work of the mind, consisting only of inexhaustible human ideas, whereas live action cinema is limited to recording reality and will soon have exhausted its repertoire. Alexeïeff goes so far as to say that animation is not a form of cinema, but should be considered as painting, drawing, engraving or even sculpture in movement. Cinema, instead, is a form of animation, because Emile Reynaud invented the animated film before the brothers Lumière invented 'cinema'. This anteriority means that

> it is legitimate to consider cinema like a particular kind of animation – a kind of industrial, cheap substitute, destined to replace the synthesis of a work of the mind of an artist like Emile Reynard with the photography of human models in movement.[298]

To make this point clear, Alexeïeff invents a new genre of motion pictures which he calls 'the synthetic film [*le film synthétique*][...] a film in which not only the movement is created, but the very look of the animated beings is meant to be that way – precisely – at every instant of the metamorphosis.'[299] Naturally, his pin-screen films belong to this superior category of films, just as his illustrations were the very model of true or 'modern' illustration.

The German author and critic Paul Fechter has written about his meetings with Alexeïeff in Berlin, and is especially eloquent about the question of the artistic film and the contrast with live-motion film. He reports Alexeïeff's explanation of the failed attempts at artistic films so far: in live-motion cinema, the artistic qualities were not created 'purely out of and in the Filmic [...] but they were already given in reality.'[300] The films mistakenly tried to capture the artistic qualities of an object before the camera, qualities which belong to other arts or media, instead of using the specific artistic qualities of the film medium itself. In other words, the means used were not 'pure', and the specific means of film, movement and rhythm, were not taken as a starting-point. Alexeïeff insists that a film artists should *create* an image instead of merely recording it, and he should use purely cinematic instruments to do so. The example of a purely artistic film, of course, is Alexeïeff's pin-board film *Une nuit sur Mont Chauve,*

> a moving art-world, which was only created by and in this film, and is therefore true film art, with means belonging only to film, without borrowing from the actor, the architect or

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[298] 'Eloge du film d'animation', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 39.
[299] 'La Continuité', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 13.
[300] Fechter 1955, p. 219.

the poet. Here, a painter has painted using the film and its media, including the camera itself; painting has here also conquered time, and with her, movement as legitimate instruments.[301]

Alexeïeff's animated cinema thus becomes a more advanced, for no longer static, form of painting. Fechter's adding that the films do not borrow from the poet might point back to Alexeïeff's concerns with the dependency of illustration on text.

Besides being limited to animated or 'synthetic' cinema, true cinema according to Alexeïeff is mute. The artist did not welcome speech in cinema, and considered scenarios to belong sooner to literature than to film.[302] And when the standard speed went from 12 to 24 images per second, he liked to hold fast to the 12 which produces a flicker, simply because this was characteristic of cinema.[303]The strong stress on purity of medium and the use of medium specific effects reminds us of Greenberg's modernist discourse.[304]

The third boundary that Alexeïeff draws to demarcate his artistic territory from other arts or genres lies not around but within animated film. It is a sharp line between the animated cartoon and the 'animated engraving'. The cartoon corresponds to a line drawing, which is summary because of the large number of pictures that need to be made, and lacks depth, grey tones or shading. Alexeïeff and Parker believed that the absence of shading and modelling means that cartoons are limited to comic or satirical effects.[305] The pin board, however, produces a single picture capable of infinite modification, and contains 'all the finesses of tone and shading' – incidentally, the stylistic ideal of the illustrations. It is a material 'which allows of all possible effects and surpasses in brilliancy and delicacy in tint everything that is known in engraving.'[306] It is thus not merely analogous but even superior to engraving, and far superior to the cartoon. To boot, Alexeïeff writes that the *flou* (shades) the pin-board creates are more precise than any obtainable in painting, engraving or drawing.[307]

However, the most important difference between the pin screen and other forms of visual art, Alexeïeff writes, is that no material mark remains of a pin screen image that would permit comparison of successive stages. Each stage is erased by the next. The film scholar Guy

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[301] Fechter 1955, p. 222.

[302] Arnault 1973, pp. 74-82.

[303] 'Images paires et impaires', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 34.

[304] Clement Greenberg famously stressed the idea that the uniqueness of an art form ultimately depends upon the specificity of the medium, i.e. the characteristics that it shares with no other form of art, and that these characteristics should be stressed and developed. Greenberg 2006, pp. 773-779.

[305] Parker, 'The Screen of Pins', Russett, Starr 1976, p. 95. Originally published in *Bryn Mawr Alumnae Bulletin* (winter 1961).

[306] Parker, Alexeïeff 1934, p. 34.

[307] 'L'écran d'épingles', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 21. Originally published in *Le Technicien du Film* 27, 28 (1957).

Fihman therefore calls Alexeïeff's cinema a *cosa mentale*, a matter of the mind.[308] Stressing the mental activity required by an art is an old strategy of *paragone*, as the expression borrowed from Leonardo da Vinci indicates.[309]

Alexeïeff takes great care to describe the specificities of his own discipline of animation, sometimes called *cinépinglé* (films made on the *écran d'épingles*). Another characteristic distinguishing his form of 'engraving' from all other techniques known in painting, drawing, etc., is that it uses no pigment whatsoever; it is the needles' shadows that form the image. Moreover, it is very much faster than traditional engraving. And finally, because of the easy and endless malleability of the material, the corresponding artistic emotion is one of evocation, and the notion of corrections or touch-ups is absent.[310]

Contemporary critics especially praised the poetic atmosphere that could be created by this technique. Cheronnet writes that technique and artistic expression are in perfect accord, and that with this new art, a new emotional range is attained.[311] Alexeïeff himself writes that he designed the pin-board in order to obtain 'the poetic atmosphere which was the life-substance of my engravings. I would have to invent a motion picture technique such that I might, entirely alone, make pictures with half-tones, grays, and indistinct forms' – precisely the stylistic qualities his illustrations are famous for.[312] But if he looked for those effects that were the heart of his engravings, he was also careful to stress the great divide between illustration and animated film.

The most obvious difference between Alexeïeff's illustrations and his 'animated engravings' is movement. In his eyes this leads to several great antitheses. For instance, Alexeïeff quickly noticed that composition is a very different thing in moving images. When he attempted to compose each film still like a painting, the result looked 'like boiling porridge'.[313] He concluded that composition belongs to static art and is alien to animation, where the composition is in the rhythm of the movement (i.e., in a temporary dimension).[314] This was one of the reasons why the artist perceived an absolute rupture between mobile and immobile art. He held that they went with two wholly different ways of visual experience: *voir* (see) and *regarder* (watch), the first passive, the second active. If the object moves, the spectator sees is passively; if it stands still, the spectator moves over it with his eyes and mind. Alexeïeff was struck by

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[308] Fihman 2001, p. 156.

[309] See Ames-Lewis 2000, 177, 180-186. We may also think of the critic Edward Gage using the word 'invention' to compliment the artist. See chapter one, p. 24.

[310] 'L'écran d'épingles', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 21.

[311] Cheronnet 1934, esp. p. 381. The critic said something very similar about Alexeïeff's illustrations. Cheronnet 1932, p. 153.

[312] 'Reflections on motion picture animation', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 10.

[313] Alexeïeff, *Alféoni*, 1972, p. 8. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #17.

[314] 'L'écran d'épingles', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 22.

the difference between the perception of mobile forms (during which the spectator does not move) and the perception of immobile objects (during which the spectator moves – if not with his whole body, at least with the mobility of his gaze and his thoughts). [...] I found myself in the presence of two mutually impenetrable worlds: the world of static images and that of moving images. Between the two, I discovered a discontinuity, almost a hostility, something irreducible. [...] I don't imagine any possible link between the study of a sequence of immobile images (of a comic for instance) and the viewing of phases on a screen.[315]

Alexeïeff saw no possible relation between the way a specator sees moving and static images, and for him this divide between the worlds of static and moving images was absolute. He called it an abyss and compared the moving image to a bird in flight, the static image equalling the cadaver of that bird.[316] Put this way, Alexeïeff's activities as illustrator and as filmmaker appear worlds apart. Yet were they? Two artistic activities pursued in tandem by one person over the decades would appear bound to mutually influence each other. Indeed, the same documents, the same artist, and the same work we have just discussed may also a very different story, when seen in a different light. As we have come to expect of him, Alexeïeff buttered his bread on both sides.

3.2 Film as/and Illustration: Synthesis

The discourse of strict separation which we have just examined hides many very important aspects of the film production – those, in fact, which make most sense of it. The second part of this chapter will therefore deal with the parallels between film and illustration in Alexeïeff's oeuvre. We will start by pointing out parallels in style, themes and imagery. Besides these formal, more or less superficial parallels, equivalences may also be found on a deeper theoretical or conceptual level, and these command our special interest. It can be argued that Alexeïeff conceived of his illustration and films in much the same ways, and that the same artistic concerns governed both these activities. This only becomes clear, however, when we let go of the *paragone* and medium specificity discourse, as in fact Alexeïeff himself did on occasion. He was not consistent in it, and at times emphasized the connections and unity between these activities just like he had the boundaries and separations.

Stylistically, Alexeïeff's pin-screen films are closely related to his engravings, as we have noted. Not only are they in black and white, but the pin-screen was especially designed to

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[315] 'De l'illustration de livres et du film d'animation', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 26. Alexeïeff also remarks that the world of immobile and sequential images (like his illustrations) guards a certain mysterious value, and he asks himself whether the new audio-visual culture will not efface this valuable culture of the static image. Clearly, he did not always think so very badly of static images.
[316] Alexeïeff, *La spécificité du cinéma d'animation*, 1973, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, # 16.

provide the charcoal-like *flou précis* for which Alexeïeff's aquatints and lithographs are admired. Du Perron, who saw *Une Nuit sur Mont Chauve* even before it was finished, mentions the poetical atmosphere, the 'light- and bat-like shadow effects in a Dantesque world'. He remarks on the great correspondences between Alexeïeff's etchings and the film, which is a moving illustration '*du plus pur* Alexeïeff', as the artist has it.[317] Until the end of his life, Alexeïeff meditated on other effects that might be attained using the pin-screen, like that of the superimposition of images he mentions in a letter to Bendazzi in 1980. He proposes exploiting the flicker produced by the relatively low number of 12 images per second, by projecting two alternating series of images.[318] This would, on the retina, produce the effect of two transparent, superimposed images, such as we know from his aquatints [fig. 11], an effect which would make the pin-screen film image even more like these illustrations.

Alexeïeff attributed great importance to technique in determining the emotional state of the artist, influencing the process of creating and thus the final result.[319] And while he ascribes a separate creative emotion to his pin-screen, he also shows it to share its most significant characteristic with engraving: the artist cannot see previous phases while he is working, and cannot see the result until he is done.[320] Just as in engraving the plaque is covered between stages, the stages of the pin-screen are invisible until the negatives have been developed. The pin-screen technique was thus not so alien to Alexeïeff's experience with engraving. Moreover, he used the pin-screen in book-illustration several times, to provide images for Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* in 1959 and for Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler* and *Notes from the Underground* in 1967. The pin-screen was also used for posters and magazine illustrations.[321]

If the style and technique are not so far apart, neither are the themes and iconography Alexeïeff used in his films and illustrations. He treated many subjects in both arts. In his pin-screen films, we generally find many elements from the iconography familiar from Alexeïeff's illustrations: the moon, clouds, nightly landscapes, and horses are all familiar and recurring figures befitting the fantastical and crepuscular atmosphere characterizing almost all his work. But there are also more particular themes recurring in both arts. The famous pin-screen film *Le Nez* of 1963 was preceded by unpublished woodcuts Alexeïeff made for the novella in the early 1920's [fig. 68-69]. 'I was surprised to see, when I found them again, that the barber wore the same chequered trousers as the one from the film ... *Voilà*, already I was no longer free.'[322] Also in

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[317] Perron 1933.
[318] 'Images paires et impaires', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 34.
[319] Alexeïeff 1929, p. 208.
[320] Fihman 2001, p. 156.
[321] For instance, the 1960 poster for the J.I.C.A. The ArtExEast archives also possess (sketches for) magazine illustrations.
[322] Philippe 1963, p. 63. The woodcuts were probably made in 1925.

1963, Alexeïeff proposed a new illustrated edition of *le Nez* to Gallimard, who refused because of the shortness of the novella.[323]

The many short advertisement films made by Alexeïeff and his team mostly feature artfully animated objects – dancing cigarettes or instruments - and are therefore technically and stylistically less obviously by the same hand as the illustrations than the pin-screen films are. Moreover, the subject was always a brand or commodity, determined by the company. Still, we also find some themes returning here. In one of his first productions, Alexeïeff decided to praise the *Vins Nicolas* via the story of sleeping beauty, which he had also previously illustrated with several unpublished woodcuts.[324]

Another example will show that it was not only themes, but also visual solutions which travelled between the publicity films and the illustrations. In *Pure Beauté*, an advertisement film in colour made for Monsavon (L'Oreal) in 1954, the word *mon* caresses the surface of a classical statue of a venus pudica (the Capitoline Venus, among other statues), lit in bluish light and slowly turning before the camera.[325] [Fig. 70] In 1957, in a coloured aquatint frontispiece for Flaubert's *Premières Lettres à L.C.,* he uses the same image of a female bust in blue, this time with the luminescent words *je t'aime* undulating all over the marble skin [fig. 71]. The double or triple contour lines might even be meant to suggest the turning of the bust; Alexeïeff elsewhere mentions it as an old technique for suggesting movement.[326]

The Geneva archives hold a series of sketches all depicting a row of mowing farmers swinging their scythes. Each of them is depicted in a different stage of the action, as they finally appear in an aquatint illustration to *Anna Karenina* [fig. 72], made (but not published) in the 1950's.[327] The same figures earlier made a short appearance in the pin-screen production *En Passant* of 1944, where they fluently complete all the stages of the action [fig. 72-73]. This is one of many possible examples of a motif appearing in both film and illustrations, but this particular example also seems to suggest a parallel concern: the study and representation of movement, an artistic and theoretical problem that occupied Alexeïeff in both his static engravings and his films.

3.2.1 Theoretical constants

Before we examine that of movement, let us draw attention to the most obvious artistic concern shared by both the pin-screen films and the illustrations: the principle of illustration. Alexeïeff consistently describes his activity as a film-maker as 'illustrating music', and considers both the films and the engravings as springing from his disposition to illustrate, to 'borrow subjects from

[323] Maison Gallimard, letter to Alexeïeff (08-10-1963), AEE AL-Ms-208.
[324] *La Belle au Bois Dormant,* see Bendazzi 2001, p. 289. The woodcuts can be found in the AEE archives.
[325] See Bendazzi 2001, p. 291, for the filmographic reference.
[326] 'De la peinture au cinéma', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, pp. 7-9.
[327] The illustrations were published posthumously, without text, by Rigal in 1995.

parallel arts'.[328] In view of how he elsewhere stresses the boundaries between different arts and genres, this 'basic strategy' of Alexeïeff's almost sounds as one of transgression and anti-purism.

This practice of illustrating music, moreover, is much more like illustrating a novel than it would seem at first sight. For *Une Nuit sur le Mont Chauve,* Alexeïeff listened carefully to the music but also borrowed subjects from several tales by Gogol and Pushkin, and from a short text by the composer himself.[329] In other respects, too, the strategies Alexeïeff uses in illustrating the musical by Mussorgsky are similar to those we have detailed in chapter two for the illustrated books. Critics have remarked that for *Le Nez,* Alexeïeff does not repeat Gogol's text or give us a linear narrative, but instead offers snatches of the outline of the story.[330] Indeed, the artist declared himself against scenario, but in favour of theme. He holds that scenarios or subjects are limited in number and are often repeated; therefore they cannot define a work. What is particular to a work is its 'theme', the 'essential component of the work which cannot be expressed otherwise than through the work itself'. A subject is what the spectator tells his wife when he comes home from the movies, whereas the theme of a film cannot be translated into words. Moreover, a scenario gives to animation, 'that visual art if ever there was any', a literary character, which should be avoided.[331] 'Every scenario', Alexeïeff wrote, 'develops a subject. [...] the exposition of the subject of a work, even a literary work, betrays it.'[332] Alexeïeff here takes up the distinction which he also made in illustration; now it is not called *imagerie* versus illustration but subject or scenario versus theme. Subject and scenario were tandem terms for Alexeïeff, and both were associated with *imagerie*-like work.

In accordance with this idea, Alexeïeff avoids direct narrativisation, envisaging his images as 'metaphors' for the music.[333] Significantly, his book illustrations have also been called metaphorical.[334] Du Perron described the film in relation to the music as 'a parallel imagination', just as the illustrations have been compared to music running parallel with the words.[335] And finally, the effect is described as a reinforcement of the musical emotion, just like the illustrations have been described, by Soupault among others, as reinforcing the literary emotion or effect of the book.[336]

For *Tableaux d'une Exposition,* Alexeïeff and Parker built a second, small pin-screen, so that they could work with two series of images. Alexeïeff thought of their alternation as a

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[328] 'L'écran d'épingles', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 22.
[329] For details see Bendazzi 2001, p. 23.
[330] Allan 2001, p. 81. Bendazzi 1985, p. 173.
[331] Philippe 1963, p. 62. Again, we notice a modernist ideal of the purity of arts and genres.
[332] Alexeïeff writes that scenario cannot express the theme of a film, but a particular scene can. The same idea might be applied to his illustrations of literary works. Alexeïeff, *Sur l'usage des scenarios*, 1961, CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #16.
[333] 'Découpage technique', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 29.
[334] See for instance Hubert 1988, p. 266.
[335] 'Een parallel loopende fantasie', Perron 1933. Cheronnet 1932, p. 150.
[336] Bendazzi 2001, p. 30, quoting the critic Stefan Priacel. Soupault 1928, p. 208.

dialogue between two images. This dialogic form, with its particular refrain and rhythm, would have the potential to become a new 'grammar of animation'.[337] The principle of dialogue could just as easily be applied to the alternation of text and illustrations in a book, and is but one of the theoretical concerns that may be discerned in both Alexeïeff's areas of activity. Many more parallels could be sought, such as the references Alexeïeff makes to E.A. Poe and his artistic theory in the context of film as well as that of illustration.[338] Considering the shortage of space, we shall not pursue these, only concentrating here on the most significant interplay of elements in the art-theoretical reflections underlying Alexeïeff's illustrations on one hand and his film work on the other: rhythm, symphonic composition (*plan*), movement and metamorphosis.

3.2.2 Rhythm and composition

One of the theoretical problems Alexeïeff explicitly declared topical for both the illustrations and the film work is the question of rhythm. We may define rhythm as the patterned (ir)regular repetition of an element, or the effect produced by the arrangement of elements in a work of art. Alexeïeff declared that what he cared for above all in animation was 'the power to master the tempo of thought and emotions in the audience.'[339] He tried to achieve this by making use of refrain and of a rhythm he compared to that of verse. He and Parker remarked several times that 'the editing [*montage*] of our frames, both interior and exterior, singularly resembled the composition of poems.'[340] He seems to mean that the composition of both individual film scenes and the way they are combined resembles poetic rhythm. Alexeïeff declared rhythm central to his conception of art: 'for me every form of art is above all a rhythm.'[341]

This is perhaps not surprising when we consider that rhythm is shared by the dimensions of space and time – the very axes along which texts and images have been strictly separated since Lessing's *Laokoon*.[342] For an illustrator trying to couple a 'spatial' art with a story unfolding in time, the concept of rhythm seems a welcome connection. The cardinal difference between the films and illustrations remains that the latter are static, while the film image does move and change through time. Both, however, can have a (visual or visual-temporal) rhythm. For the illustrations, this rhythm may be sought in the regular patterns that often recur [fig. 74]. In this case the rhythm is purely visual (spatial) and lacks a temporal dimension. The metamorphosis and succession of the images of an animated film clearly means

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[337] Arnault 1973, p. 77.
[338] See for instance Alexeïeff's reference to Poe's 'Genèse d'un poésie' in Arnault 1973, p. 74, and his quoting from Poe's *Colloque entre Monos et Una* to introduce his theorizing about illusory solids dans 'Des Solides en Mouvement', Alexeïeff 1955, p. 153.
[339] Alexeïeff, 'Reflections on motion picture animation', Russett and Starr 1976, p. 94.
[340] 'Lettre à Martha', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 33. See also Arnault 1973.
[341] Alexeïeff, Malraux, *Dialogue,* [ca. 1980], AEE AL-Ms-107.
[342] Mitchell 1986, pp. 95-115.

that here, the rhythm is temporal as well as spatial. This is all the more outspoken because it follows the rhythm of the accompanying music.

The rhythm of static illustrations may, however, acquire a temporal dimension through the change and succession of images. In this way it comes extremely close to that of film, which is nothing but a quick succession of still images. We shall examine this 'rhythm of the book' in the serial illustrations for *Dr Zhivago,* the *Colloque entre Monos et Una* and in Alexeïeff's notes on *Anna Karenina.* 'Serial' (continual, sequential) here indicates that Alexeïeff conceived of them as a series with an overarching composition, instead of as individual images linked only by the text. *Anna Karenina* has unfortunately only been published as loose boxed pages without text, so that the original sequence could not be established with certainty, which makes any conclusions about the rhythm of this sequence vain.

Colloque entre Monos et Una is Poe's account of a dialogue of two lovers reunited after death. She, Una, asks him about the process of death, and he recounts the destruction of the world by industrialisation, his demise, and the slow decomposition of his body and sense of time. In 1929, Alexeïeff provided a series of six very similar aquatints for this story, all showing the couple frontally, holding hands, against varying backgrounds [fig. 76]. Both their bodies and the background, which undergoes a slow metamorphosis, seem to become translucent as the reader turns the pages. The strong repetition of forms could indeed be compared to a refrain, and certainly provides a simple, regular rhythm. It is also possible to interpret this treatment of the story as a metaphor for the changelessness of time after death, and the almost imperceptibly slow dissolution of the body and the senses. However, Alexeïeff later also used the repetition of almost unchanged images to illustrate stories which gave no such occasion to it, as we shall see below.

The rhythm of the sequence of illustrations becomes much more complex and conscious in later works. One of which Alexeïeff thought particularly fondly was *Anna Karenina,* although the 120 aquatints he made for Tolstoy's novel in the 1950's were not published until after his death.[343] When the French national library proposed to exhibit some of them in 1960, he replied that he would love to see *all* of them together, not part of them, because they had been conceived of as a symphonic whole:

> the sequences of illustrations are composed in a symphonic order, analogous to that of
> Tolstoy's novel. For this reason, I don't wish to exhibit parts of the illustration: that would
> have no more interest than the publication of parts of the novel.[344]

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[343] The aquatints were finally published by Rigal in 1995 in an issue of 20.
[344] Alexeïeff, letter to the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (07-07-1960), AEE AL-Ms-201.

To achieve this parallel symphonic composition, Alexeïeff had analyzed the composition of the novel, finding that the changes of place and time occurred in a rhythm of seven, 14 or 21 chapters. This rhythm, he remarked, should concern the illustrator or *metteur en scène* of the novel. If the original sequence could be established with certainty, it would be interesting to see whether a similar rhythm can be found in his illustrations. Failing this, the example still shows the illustrator's occupation with rhythmical narrative composition and his own aims in this regard. In his analysis of *Anna Karenina*, Alexeïeff tried to establish the meaning of this composition, using (conspicuous irregularities in) its rhythm to distil the main themes underlying the action. For instance, the rhythm of seven (and its multiples) and the seven main characters lead him to propose the idea, later rejected, that they personify the seven deadly sins; and the conspicuous brevity of the last part of the book is significant in his eyes, and must present the key to its deeper meaning. Alexeïeff imagined the main themes to include the belief in technical progress (instead of in God), exemplified by the railway, and consequently gave railway tracks and (toy) trains an important role in his illustrations. The races, the dream, rain and candles were other themes he singled out.[345]

Doctor *Zhivago* was another project Alexeïeff was particularly proud of. He initiated it himself when he, like most Western intellectuals, was dismayed with the treatment the author, Boris Pasternak, received at the hands of the Soviet government. Alexeïeff wrote to Albert Camus, then working at Gallimard, to propose a popular edition in which his pin-board illustrations would testify to the truth of Pasternak's description of the violence following the Russian Revolution, very similar to his own experiences. The offer was taken up, and in the professional correspondence that followed, we find the next passage:

> Concerning the distribution of the illustrations, I envisage it to have a certain important dramatic function, in its kind (relative to what I call "obturation"), as well as in its neighbouring the content of the text. Several combinations would be possible, every one establishing a particular character; it is impossible for me to foresee them now; which is why I wish, if possible, to have the faculty to choose this or that distribution of images, depending on the particular case of the particular subject.[346]

Alexeïeff accords an important dramatic function to the distribution of the illustrations throughout the text, related to 'obturation'. This word suggests stopping up a flow, probably the narrative flow of the text. The composition of the sequence of illustrations in itself, but also the

[345] Alexeïeff, *Analyse de Anna Karenine* (07-03-1958), AEE AL-Ms-202.
[346] Alexeïeff, letter to Rosier (12-01-1959), AEE AL-Ms-201.

adjoining of text and image are important in determining the particular effect of the illustrations.[347] Alexeïeff goes on to give the following examples of (fictional) sequences of pages:

Text	image	image	image	image	text				
Text	text	image	image	image	image	text			
Text	image	text	text	text	image	text	text	text	image
Text	image	text	image	text	image	text	text	text[348]	

And indeed, in the resulting book the distribution of the illustrations seems to have well-thought out effects. The very first images are exemplary. The book opens with seven full-page illustrations, of which the first six show the steady progress of a long funeral procession below high city walls, following the coffin's horse-drawn carriage [fig. 77]. The effect is slow and stately, the procession continuing monotonously as we turn the pages, corresponding to the endlessness evoked in the opening line: '[o]n and on they went, singing 'Eternal Memory', and whenever they stopped, the sound of their feet, the horses and the gusts of wind seemed to carry on their singing.' But while the illustrations take six pages, the procession and funeral itself are described in few lines, and the novel quickly moves on to the newly orphaned boy Iouri, who spends the night with his uncle in a monastery before they travel towards a new home. Correspondingly, after the six pages showing the procession, a seventh shows us the monastery in the snowy night, and the text begins on the facing page. This change of scene also seems a change in tempo: we understand that now, the action takes off, and the narrative starts 'moving'. Although text and images have a different 'discourse time' here, treating the procession at lesser or greater length, the illustrations correspond very well to the 'narrative time'. Moreover, the overturn of the continuity of the old life and the old Russia is the main theme of the novel, which chronicles the Russian revolution and civil war. The slow rhythm of the beginning symbolically sets off this change of tempo. The next, single illustration comes five pages later, and shows us Iouri and his uncle travelling by coach.

The rhythmical composition of scenes makes the illustrations for *Zhivago* similar in conception to theatre and to animated film, something Alexeïeff himself, followed by his critics, remarked upon. Bendazzi called the irregular succession of illustrated and printed pages a rhythm engendered by dramaturgy, inspired by Alexeïeff's earlier work in the theatre.[349] In the catalogue to the 1967 exhibition of Alexeïeff's illustrations, we read that 'his apprenticeship as a stage designer influenced his attitude to the new medium, for he saw the book as a spectacle,

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[347] Perry Nodelman discusses effects of the succession of image and text in picturebooks. See Nodelman 1988, chapter 9, 'The Rhythms of Picture-Book Narrative'. Chapon also refers to the necessary connection between the verbal and the visual rhythm. Chapon 1987, 131.

[348] Alexeïeff, letter to Rosier (12-01-1959), AEE AL-Ms-201.

[349] Bendazzi 1985, p. 173.

and a series of illustrations as a dramatic sequence'. In the same catalogue, Alexeïeff himself compared his method to the staging of an action in theatre:

> With the years, the tendency to stage a text seems to have become stronger, and for *Doctor Zhivago* I conceived a method of extending a single image over a whole sequence of pages, staging the action in a way similar to phases of an animated film.[350]

'Staging' seems to be the right verb for *Zhivago* in more than one way. In part six of the novel, 'Moscow Bivouac', six double-page and two single-page illustrations are distributed throughout the chapter in groups of two to five pages. They all show us the same stage of the action, Smolensky Square, where this chapter is set [fig. 78]. Sometimes it remains empty, sometimes a character appears: the wounded man Zhivago finds in the street, the newspaper boy and Zhivago himself, reading the news of the Soviet takeover. Together, the illustrations show us the gradual descent of the square into winter and war described in the chapter, which spans a narrative time of several months. The square is stripped of wood and trees, the houses become empty and scarred, barricades are thrown up. The choice of a fixed perspective suggests continuity but actually accentuates this change. By focussing on the setting, instead of on the action of personages, Alexeïeff stresses that these are the circumstances in which all personages have to play their part whatever they do.

Alexeïeff considered the core themes of the novel to be constraint and fatality.[351] Indeed, one chapter is called 'the advent of the inevitable', and throughout the novel, the personalities are forced to partake of the brutalities of war – Pamphil, who appears as a compassionate man who has been driven to kill, and who kills his wife and children to spare them greater atrocities; Jivago himself, who is forced to take up arms even if his profession as doctor forbids this. Nobody can escape the fate of the times. Alexeïeff's illustrations can be seen to underline this core theme, as his treatment of Smolensk Square shows. His unmoving 'camera' only occasionally records action, and it is always an action described some pages earlier in the novel. We only see Zhivago finding the wounded man after we have read about it, and after we have seen the same street corner thrice. The appearance of the man in this series of indifferent street corners becomes an aside, remarked in passing. A single plate showing only Zhivago finding the man would have given this action a much greater weight. Had Alexeïeff shown us different personages in action in different settings, this would have suggested their action changed something and that the unfolding of the story depended on it. Now, the focus is on the inevitable developments surrounding the personages and sweeping them along. Nobody can escape the hunger, the war, or the winter. Alexeïeff draws our attention to the fatality of time and place.

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[350] Alexeïeff, *Reflections,* exhib. cat. Edinburgh 1967, p. 9.
[351] Alexeïeff, *Pourquoi j'ai illustré Jivago,* AEE AL-MS-201.

Another series of illustrations shows us the execution of the conspirators in part 12. We are first shown the empty scene of the execution, which is then described in five pages, followed by two double-page illustrations showing the moment just prior to the shooting, then the climax [fig. 79]. But the scene is announced and concluded by a pair of double-spreads thirty pages earlier and six pages later. Both show a travelling partisan troupe, but the second troupe is fewer in number, suggesting that the missing men were the partisans executed in the meantime. The execution is thus spread over several pages and prolonged by the enveloping illustrations of the travelling troupe. This draws the moment out visually far beyond its description in the text. It reverberates while we read on, just like the violence witnessed resonates in the main characters. Besides, by 'wrapping' the dramatic moment in two images showing the continued march of the partisan army, the execution starts to seem unavoidable. The repetition and spreading of the images underlines the continuity of the events, which thereby appear inevitable and fated.

In the unpublished typo 'Why and How I illustrated Doctor Zhivago', Alexeïeff writes: 'I decided to give my illustrations a cinematographic form, presenting the events or scenes broken down into phases, in series of pictures comparable to sequences of a film that might have been shot where and when Zhivago lived.'[352] We have just seen examples of action decomposed into phases; but we also find other filmic elements in *Zhivago*, such as 'zoom' or changes in viewpoint reminiscent of camera movement [fig. 80-83]. The more realistic character of the illustrations, which go into detail about setting and even show close-up portraits, is likewise filmic and seems to move away from the style characteristic of the aquatint illustrations. But perhaps the most striking film-like element is in the temporal continuity and overarching composition of these illustrations. Alexeïeff's work sometimes almost approaches the coherence of a narrative text, the images acquiring a compositional, rhythmical, and narrative continuity of their own, which is essential in the wordless animated films.

That wordlessness may have been an important factor. Alexeïeff wrote in 1965 that

film is of another nature than a novel: the film is not made with words, but with images. Can one translate a sonnet in film? Translate – no; illustrate – yes. [...] One could perhaps even do better: make a film-sonnet which owes nothing to words.[353]

A film can be a visual accompaniment to a text, just like illustrations are, but it can also do *without* text – the old ideal of independent illustration. Alexeïeff went even further in 1976, when he wrote that a visual or dynamic subject cannot be reduced to words: 'for this reason it cannot be interpreted verbally, but only plastically [visually] or dynamically.'[354] Only the

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[352] Alexeïeff, *Why and How I illustrated Doctor Zhivago*, AEE AL-Ms-201.

[353] Alexeïeff, *À propos des court-métrages* (1965), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #16.

[354] Alexeïeff, letter to Barbin (07-10-1976), CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.

meaning of a literary work can be interpreted verbally.[355] Alexeïeff here voices the ideal of a purely visual art. The lack of text in his animated films, even when they illustrate a story (*Le Nez*), meant that the images had to take on another role and narrate the story themselves; hence the more descriptive and narrative character of the pin-screen illustrations, in which this new mode of telling is still visible. Their special character may also be due in part to Alexeïeff's particular aim for *Zhivago*: to testify to the truth of the story, to report lived reality he too saw from up close. Alexeïeff may have leant more towards a realistic and documentary style because the story was so close to his own Russian youth and memories.[356]

If we can to some extent know the objectives of the artist - to give his illustrations a rhythm or composition befitting that of the book - it is hard to judge objectively of the success of his enterprise. In the case of *Doctor Zhivago,* however, we have a testimony to it written by Boris Pasternak himself in 1959:

> [i]t is the spirit of the book that Alexeïeff has rendered. Everything in it that was composed or mysterious […] is grasped and conceived marvellously. He even makes engravings of the breath, of the construction of sentences, as for example the three double illustrations at the beginning of the overture: 'On and on they went singing "Eternal Memory"'. He recalled to me everything that was Russian and tragic in the story, and which I had forgotten and underestimated.[357]

The assertion is all the more remarkable since Pasternak could not have been aware of Alexeïeff's declaration of just these objectives (to create a symphonic rhythm, parallel to that of the book). Yet he writes that Alexeïeff makes engravings of the construction and breath of the sentences. Perhaps he was thinking of the fact that the endless procession is spread over three double pages, so that it appears to proceed slowly. Perhaps Pasternak was thinking of the rhythm of that particular phrase in the novel, or of that of the funerary chant itself. Or perhaps he was struck by the fact that the illustrations, grouped in sequences this way, appeared to be part of an overarching composition parallel to that of the novel. In any case he strongly felt a correspondence of 'construction' and 'breath' – may we say rhythm? May we say composition? – on some level. Alexeïeff was very proud of this appraisal and often quoted it.

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[355] To take this line of argument further would be to deny the possibility of illustration: interpreting a literary subject visually. Alexeïeff leaves this claim implicit, but why does he make these surprising assertions? By 1976, he had stopped illustrating and made wordless animation films. Moreover, the recipient of the quoted letter is significant: Pierre Barbin was a cinema lover, founder of the French animation film festival.

[356] The other books Alexeïeff illustrated by pin screen include Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and *The Gambler*. Although Dostoevsky was not his contemporary, Alexeïeff knew the setting of these stories (St. Petersburg) from his own experience.

[357] Boris Pasternak, excerpt from a letter to his literary correspondent in Paris (05-11-1959), translated by Alexeïeff, AEE AL-Ms-201.

3.2.3 Movement and metamorphosis

Besides rhythm, Alexeïeff was much concerned with the question of movement, and pondered it in several essays. He discussed the suggestion of movement in static images and the acceleration and condensation that lived time underwent in the painstaking production of stop-motion animation. His visual work shows the whole range, from static engravings, via the strong acceleration of the pin-screen films and the 'totalisations' which reduce a moving object to a static form instead of vice versa, and finally to the static pin-screen images which were filmed to serve as a prequel to Orson Welles' *The Trial.* We shall not discuss all Alexeïeff's musings on this theme, and only consider in what ways he applied what he learnt about movement in his film work to his illustrations, and – conversely - in how far the issue of movement was perhaps already present in these works before Alexeïeff first turned to animated cinema. In short, we shall examine the interplay between stasis and movement, which Alexeïeff himself had declared to be irreconcilably divided.

Much may be said about the suggestion of movement in a single static image; little will be said about it here. Alexeïeff only mentioned the subject in an essay in 1954, entitled '*De la peinture au cinéma',* in which he discusses art works as traces of the artist's movement.[358] He mentions Giacomo Balla's 'multiple basset' (*Dynamism of a dog on a leash)* and the folded draperies in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* as examples of static images in which multiple phases represented simultaneously suggest movement. Every fold of drapery in art is meant to suggest a previous or future phase of movement of the draped body, Alexeïeff holds. He himself wasn't fond of draperies but did, in his earlier work, represent multiple phases simultaneously. In *Bouddha Vivant,* for instance, a racing car is shown from above, the wheels doubled or tripled to suggest its speed [fig. 75].

But Alexeïeff was much more concerned with the suggestion of movement not within, but *between* successive static images. In the essay mentioned above, Alexeïeff concludes with Luciano Emmer's documentaries about art, in which Emmer films parts of art works successively, for instance the different angels in Giotto's Scrovegni chapel:

> Emmer makes them move simply by leafing through the album which is a repetition of the same scene with small deviations. The changes are much greater than those between the phases of an animated film, but Emmer 'targets' our 'ability to explain' [the gaps between the phases], and we dream up the movement.[359]

It is significant that Alexeïeff characterizes the succession of images Emmers selects from a particular painting with the metaphor of leafing through an 'album'. For although he does not yet

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[358] 'De la peinture au cinéma', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, pp. 7-9. Originally published in *Disque Vert,* 1954.
[359] Ibid*.,* p. 9.

mention his own illustrations in this essay, the step is but a small one, and Alexeïeff used the process described here – a sequence of similar images on successive pages, with small deviations which our mind 'explains' as movement – in his illustrations. The clearest examples may be found in his pin-screen illustrations of the late 50's and 60's, and for economy's sake we shall again draw upon *Zhivago*. Here, Alexeïeff uses images repeated with small changes and separated by the turning of a page to suggest a blink, a change in expression, a train passing [fig. 84-85]. The function of these illustrations seems to be to suggest movement, thereby bringing the illustrated book closer to the animated film. Indeed, the illustrations are done in the technique Alexeïeff invented for his films. As we have seen, one of the important characteristics of the pin-screen is the unlimited malleability of the artistic material: the position of the pins can be changed indefinitely. The pin-screen illustrations are merely photographs of successive stages of one and the same surface, which is undergoing an unceasing metamorphosis. And metamorphosis is a slow form of movement.

Alexeïeff repeatedly wrote about the importance of the process by which an image comes into being. He felt that the most important part of a work of art was in that process of realization, in the movements of the artist, not in their trace on the canvas or stone.[360] He found it a great pity that the public did not get to see this process, and that the intermediate phases were wasted. He therefore tried to record on film the *continuity* of his own slowly metamorphosing work on the pin-screen, instead of only the resulting successive stages.[361] This would show the development and rhythm of the artist's thinking. To his regret, the process was jerky.[362] He concluded that here as in painting, drawing, or engraving, 'the artist proceeds, in the best case, in stages. In etching, for instance, they are called states. And if the production of a state is condemned to be discontinuous, there can be continuity between the states.'[363] And this continuity between the states is what Alexeïeff aimed for increasingly during his career.

Alexeïeff's preference for the technique of aquatint etchings is important here, since it induces the artist to work in successive phases or states; the plaque is etched progressively and taken out to 'stop out' areas which have achieved the desired tonality. His assertions about the value of the preliminary phases of a pin-screen image might therefore also be made about the value of the preliminary stages of an etching. The copper or zinc plate of the aquatint is manipulated in several steps, just like the 'steel velvet' surface of the pin-screen. And just like Alexeïeff and Parker photographed the many phases of the metamorphosis of the pin-screen, which constituted the 'final' product, so Alexeïeff the engraver-illustrator made prints of the

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[360] See for instance his essays 'De la peinture au Cinéma', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 7, or 'La Continuité', pp. 13-14.
[361] Ibid*.,* pp. 13-14.
[362] Alexeïeff, *Image et Son,* 1967, pp. 14-15.
[363] 'La Continuité', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p. 13.

successive phases of a single etching plate. It is these intermediate states which form the substance of one of his masterpieces, the *Colloque entre Monos et Una*, of which his printer and friend Rigal writes:

> he already imagines the pin-screen. One can prove it in the six *hors-textes* he engraved for
> *Monos et Una* in 1929: the constant progression of the movement in engraving, since it is
> only a single copper plate which he transformed after every print-run.[364]

An examination of the prints shows that the exact same forms indeed reappear transformed in every next engraving [fig. 76]. Of course, this raises the question of anteriority. Was Alexeïeff already imagining something like the pin-screen or his animated films, or are those rather the offshoot of his experiments in illustration? In any case, the concept of fixing the intermediate stages of a malleable material to create continuity between the resulting images was exploited, and its effects greatly enhanced, in Alexeïeff's work with the pin-screen.

With this use of intermediate phases or 'recordings' of a surface in metamorphosis, Alexeïeff can be seen to undermine his own categorical separation of stasis and movement. He wrote in his *'Conférence'* that 'finally, the important difference between a book and a silent film is only the fact of the continued movement in the film opposed to the immobility of the successive images of an illustrated book.'[365] In his *Colloque* series, Alexeïeff meddled with the immobility of book illustrations by recording the metamorphosis - the movement - of a single image or copper plate. The resulting images, of course, are still immobile, but they function as indexes of the plate, and through them we see it changing before our eyes. That Alexeïeff was sensible to the symbolism of such a procedure becomes clear when we read his essay '*Des solides en mouvement*' of 1955. Alexeïeff here discusses what he calls the 'illusory solid': a form caused by a movement too quick for our eyes. For instance, a whizzing three-winged propeller appears as a disk to us. If an object (the moon) moves slowly, we cannot see the 'illusory solid' it makes without the aid of a long exposition on camera. If the observation is thus slowed down, the moon's movement appears as a line (an illusory solid). Alexeïeff suggests that if we could sufficiently slow down our observation, every apparently static form would reveal its motion.

> Are there any static forms which have not been created by some movements in the past or
> present? The movement of rocks escapes the fleeting of our gaze, the duration of our lives.
> There follows a dynamic conception of all forms, and especially of those of works of art,

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[364] Rigal, letter to Coeren, AEE AL-Ms-210.
[365] Alexeïeff, *Conférence*, AEE AL-Ms-105.

solids generated by the movement of their creators, which are present in their illusory immobility.[366]

Presenting all immobility as illusory, and expressly including that of static works of art, Alexeïeff deftly jumps the abyss between moving and static images he elsewhere declared unbridgeable.

Did Alexeïeff and his critics grant the parallels between and indeed inseparability of the two branches of his production recognition? The answer can only be partly affirmative.

The first to recognize the stylistical parallels between Alexeïeff's illustrations and his pin-screen films was Eddy du Perron, who saw the first film before it was finished, in 1933:

> there are still great resemblances between his engravings and the film he now makes, for this film is a moving engraving, as it were, a harmoniously developing series of engravings, engravings as only he has made them, *du plus pur* Alexeïeff.[367]

This remains the only such remark by a critic which has come to my notice. In a more general tone, Giannalberto Bendazzi remarks that Alexeïeff's illustrations are 'a fascinating oeuvre, evidently linked to his cinema', delegating the study of this link to future scholars.[368] Georges Nivat likewise describes Alexeïeff's work as 'a sensuous bridge between the arts', notably static and moving arts, without explaining this poetic phrase in much detail.[369] And finally, of course, the artist himself remarked upon the relation, writing that the pin-screen 'established a serious liaison between the animated film and the book, more exactly – between cinema and engraving', enabling the 'cinematographic illustration' of books.[370]

The critics are unanimous in their judgment about the direction of the influence. Several have remarked – following the artist's own statements on this point, for instance in the 1967 catalogue - that Alexeïeff's film work influenced his conception of the book. In the 2001 monograph about his work, we read that he was 'the first to have introduced in the book elements borrowed from cinema', and that he 'approached book illustration as a filmmaker'.[371] Alexeïeff 'sought out parallels with film in each book and worked on his illustrations as if they were films.'[372] Although it does not become clear how he did so, this influence of the film is even found by one critic in Alexeïeff's illustrations for Fargue's *Poèmes en Prose* – a remarkable choice, which calls for explanation, especially since the artist himself wrote disparagingly about this

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[366] Alexeïeff 1955, p. 157.
[367] Perron 1933.
[368] Bendazzi 1985, p. 173.
[369] Nivat 2007, p. 355.
[370] Alexeïeff, letter to Lossky (21-11-1959), AEE AL-Ms-201.
[371] Norstein 2001, p. 39.
[372] Norstein 2001, p. 41.

project, having been forced to limit himself to lowly '*imagerie*' for want of a connection between the individual poems.[373]

This chapter has tried to suggest, however, that the influence was not exclusively one of film on illustration, but might just as well be construed in the opposite direction. Perhaps Alexeïeff did not only think of the book as a filmmaker, but also of the film as an illustrator. This, after all, was his first profession, which he kept up for half a century. Discussing his film-work on the pin-screen, for instance, he writes: 'I decided to think of the pin-screen as no bigger than the chapter heading of an *in-4°* [quarto – a book format]'.[374] It takes no great flight of fancy to see his pin-screen films as extension of his work in illustration; they take as their starting-point its style, the name and some of the characteristics of its technique ('animated engraving'), and its strategy of illustrating a text with considerable interpretative freedom; they seek to evoke the same darkly poetical atmosphere, and carry further some concerns and experiments - most fundamentally a concern with unity - that were already important in the illustrations, as the example of *Colloque entre Monos et Una* poignantly shows.

Alexeïeff's own remarks on this point go either way. He both describes the illustrator as a 'modern director [*metteur en scène*], creator of a spectacle', and characterizes cinema and theatre as 'other methods of illustration'.[375] Either can be the overarching principle of the other. Cinema and theatre can be seen as expanded versions of illustration, or illustration may count as a kind of theatrical or cinematic spectacle. The boundaries we have traced in the first half of this chapter are shown to be so fluent and permeable in the second, that both interpretations are equally defensible. Perhaps there is little sense in inquiring which art influenced which in what respects. It certainly is impossible to answer such a question with any authority, even if for some elements anteriority in one of the art forms may be established. The important recognition here is that Alexeïeff's oeuvre forms an organic whole, rather than two strictly separate parts, and that the discourse of separation served a strategic, 'publicitary' goal rather than describing reality.

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[373] Fragonara 2001, 112. Alexeïeff, *Contes de Fées* [after 1945], p. 4. CNC-collections AFF / Fonds Alexeïeff-Rockwell, #14.
[374] 'L'écran d'épingles', Alexeïeff, Bendazzi 1983, p.23. Originally published in *Le Technicien du Film* in 1957.
[375] Alexeïeff, *Conférence,* AEE AL-Ms-105.

Conclusion

We are all familiar with the image of the proud and talented artist. And should such an artist boast of suffering for the sake of Art or Painting, to which he pledges his life, we would not be surprised. But the proud and talented illustrator, doing the same? Alexandre Alexeïeff showcases the double bind of the illustrator who, although he is bound to a text and an editor's wishes, also stakes claims to originality, artistic freedom, and the independence of his work. Navigating between these contradictory imperatives, he has left us a body of high-quality works and of contradictory writings explaining or defending them. Examining these, precisely because of the restrictions and problems the illustrator runs up against, sheds an interesting and new light on several aspects of art theory, especially on its fuzzy borders. These include questions concerning the relation between visual art and literature, or the image and the word, but also the emergence, defence and definition of 'new' arts. Illustration is ancient, but its artistic aspirations were still relatively young at the start of the 20th century; animated film was brand new, but the ways in which it sought recognition as a 'true' art were surprisingly traditional.

Alexeïeff seems to have been quite aware of the difficulty of reconciling his profession and his ambition, and ceaselessly strove to establish for himself and his work a reputation that would befit a proud artist. The commercial side to his work, especially the publicity films but also illustration, discomfited him. We have sketched his biography in the first chapter, piecing it together from disparate sources which all stem from the artist's own, frequently contradictory statements; and we have seen how Alexeïeff actively contributed to his reputation as an exotic outsider of fantastical and tempestuous character. Thus he effectively drew up a curtain of smoke, through which he appears as a half-mythical personage. The critics reviewing his work subsequently equated the character of the man and that of his work to a great extent. They stressed his illustration's fantastical character, its independence from textual detail, its semi-autonomous and self-assertive character, but also its agile intensification of and attention to the atmosphere of each text. Alexeïeff befriended or corresponded with several of these critics, thereby tightening his own control over his reputation. Towards the end of his life, he increasingly found the desired status of avant-garde artist in his second profession of animated film-maker. His pin-screen films engendered considerable comment, whereas his first activity, illustration, has so far been coated in relative neglect.

Undeservedly so, as the second chapter of this thesis attempted to show. Alexeïeff's approach to illustration cuts into several interesting art-theoretical problems, of which we have highlighted some. Firstly, his definition of 'true', modern illustration, which circumvents some of the heaviest reproaches habitually made against the visual accompaniment of a text. Alexeïeff defined and defended a nobler, 'interpretative' illustration, which creates a suitable atmosphere

stimulating the proper reception of the text by the reader. It does so on a metaphorical or poetical rather than literal level, and examples of Alexeïeff's work indeed show that he keeps his distance from the text, rarely fixing upon a specific place, action or moment in time from the narrative. But the illustrator does more than (re)create a mood, Alexeïeff held; he stages a text in the manner of a theatre director, thereby making up for the expressive poverty of written language. In doing so, the illustrator moreover includes his own reactions and experiences, taking considerable freedom, as Alexeïeff shows when he adds scenes or images of his own invention to, for instance, Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher*. This emancipated type of illustration is contrasted with what Alexeïeff terms '*imagerie',* which proffers simple pictographs visualizing narrated facts as though catering for the illiterate.

Alexeïeff also reflected with great interest and intensity on the relationship between word and image, sometimes making it the focus of his work. His deliberations on this subject are characteristically paradoxical. On the one hand, as a child of his time, he stresses the separation between different arts and expressive modes, assigning narration, the abstract and the philosophical to the domain of the word, and the particular, the descriptive and the visible detail to that of the image. In doing so, he neatly toes traditional ideas about language and images. Yet on the other hand, Alexeïeff shows a certain jealous admiration of literature, and an ambition to transgress onto its ground. Both stylistically and in the choice of scene or content, his illustrations strive towards the indefinite and the vague, scorning descriptive detail. They try to resemble the ungraspable mental image and the verbal approximation. Moreover, Alexeïeff wanted his images to have the power to express thought and to represent a manner of reasoning, another domain usually strictly reserved to the word. His method of illustration seems to testify to a desire to achieve a unity between image and text in several ways. Not only theme and style were adapted to the novel; Alexeïeff also strove to adopt a method congenial to that of the author, and to compose his illustrations similarly to the text.

This desire for a unity in form, content and effect did not necessarily lead Alexeïeff to *follow* the text. His ideal was one of equality and parallelism, not one of perfect and obliging adaptation. The equal power and freedom he claimed for illustration occasionally also led him to diverge from the text, as we have seen, depicting an inexistent or even contradictory scene. This has to do with another recurrent theme in his notes and essays: that of the emancipation of illustration and its favourable comparison with painting, photography or engraving. Alexeïeff revisits many familiar *topoi* from the renaissance *paragone*-debates in his argument in favour of illustration, which especially shows resemblance to the competitive comparison between painting and poetry in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Alexeïeff also fought for the artistic recognition of his 'craft', and for a greater independence considering subject-matter – but the very definition of illustration crippled this last aspiration. He seems to have attempted two

conflicting ways out of this bind: firstly, making a case for the art of *engraving*, not for illustration, with great emphasis on the challenges and virtues of technique. Secondly, inventing a new definition of illustration which provides the option of 'independent' illustration, unbound to any text. He did so by proposing that the defining characteristic of illustration is the overarching plan or connection between a series of images, which together contain a unified emotion or idea, and have a single evocative aim. Tellingly, Alexeïeff presented cinema as the best example of illustration: a series of formally and thematically unified images, which can go without text. It is in this direction that he developed his artistic activity after 1932.

For in the early thirties, spurred by a sentiment of rivalry, Alexeïeff decided to try his hand at the emerging animated film. In order to retain the cherished charcoal-like effects and fantastical atmosphere of his aquatint illustrations, he developed his own, new instrument, the pin screen, using it to 'illustrate music'. The instrument and the resulting artistic films, which Alexeïeff and his second wife Parker produced alongside a larger oeuvre of commercial advertisement films, were accompanied by a considerable number of publications, essays, and private notes explaining the new art form and staking claims for its excellence and even superiority over painting and other arts. The necessity to stress the novelty of these films led both Alexeïeff and his (film) critics to present them as diametrically opposed to the earlier illustration work. The films were purely artistic, the illustration commercial and artisanal, and Alexeïeff claimed to see an unbridgeable divide between these static and moving art forms. Yet the ways in which he sought to defend animation, and the technique, style and approach he used for his films strongly resemble those of his illustration. Both areas of his activity moreover share fundamental theoretical concerns. Rhythm, for one, was crucial to the films, which moved and accompanied music, but just as central to illustrated books like *Dr Zhivago*, in which the rhythm of images and text, and of the images between themselves, serves a dramatic and expressive function. Alexeïeff aimed to provide his illustrations with a rhythm parallel to that of the novel. Movement was another theoretical constant between the film and the book, for Alexeïeff started to use small differences between successive illustrations in order to suggest movement, translating a principle of cinematic projection to a form perceived as completely static. As early as 1929, he had already used the successive stages of a single etching plate, constantly transformed, as his finished illustrations for Poe's *Colloque entre Monos et Una.* Metamorphosis and the continuity between successive stages of a single 'moving' image were therefore experimented with in book-form even before Alexeïeff invented his pin screen.

Rhythm, the symphonic composition of a series of images, movement and continuous, successive stages – it is clear that all these ways in which *film* might be seen to have influenced the practice of illustration can be placed under the larger heading of 'unity'. And it was unity which Alexeïeff considered the central and defining characteristic of good *illustration* from his

earliest texts about the art. It is fitting that the concept of unity, propounded as an artistic dogma by Poe, the illustrator's literary hero, should provide the unity at the core of Alexeïeff's seemingly so disparate oeuvre. But although we can elegantly resume the whole saga by placing 'unity' at both its beginning and its end, a certain development can nevertheless be sketched.

This development might be found in the increasing stress placed, firstly, on the unity between the illustrations and the text. The earliest text, Alexeïeff's lecture from the late 1920's, prudently mentions a 'certain relation' of form and content, whereas later on, this unity is even sought in style, working method, rhythm and overall composition of the sequence of images vis-à-vis the text. Secondly, we can also clearly discern an increasing stress on the unity between the illustrations themselves. Again, the earliest text cautiously phrases the ideal of coherence between illustrations as 'a certain unity of form.'[376] Increasingly, however, the images also share a theme or content. The 1929 *Colloque entre Monos et Una* seems the clearest starting-point. By 1931, Alexeïeff already wrote about an overarching composition or plan governing all illustrations. The individual illustration becomes more like a fragment of a prose novel than like a solitary poem commenting on a theme, as becomes clear when we compare the illustrations for *Voyage au Pays des Articoles,* for instance, to those for *Zhivago.* The generally increasing number of illustrations in later works – made possible partly by Alexeïeff's growing reputation, partly by the cheaper process of pin-screen photographs – certainly helped this evolution.[377] Alexeïeff's early illustrations aspired, as Soupault expressed it, to the status of a work complete in itself, which can be isolated from the book and live an independent life, like an easel painting.[378] In the later works, like *Anna Karenina* or *Dr Zhivago,* no illustration pretends or aspires to stand alone; instead, each image is expressly presented by the artist as part of a continuous, symphonic whole or process. The images may still strive to be able to stand alone *without a text*, but certainly no longer alone as sole images. The increasingly continuous character of the illustrations also meant a change in the manner of composing each image. Alexeïeff concluded that an image that is part of a metamorphosis – like figure 79 – cannot be composed like a still-life painting. It is 'bound' to future and past phases, which gives the composition a less deliberate, and more adventitious or contingent character. This change in conception thus involves a wholly different way of treating each illustration: it is no longer enclosed within itself, bound only to the text, but is now also contingent upon previous and consecutive illustrations. In short, it seems that in Alexeïeff's later work, individual images increasingly depend on a larger whole of images, whether in a book or projected on a screen. But

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[376] Alexeïeff, *Conférence,* AEE AL-Ms-105.
[377] Alexeïeff's *Brothers Karamazov* of 1928 counted 100 lithographs, *Anna Karenina* from the 1950's 120 aquatints, and for *Dr Zhivago* (1959) Alexeïeff provided 250 pin-screen images. Compare this to the 15 aquatints for *Voyage au Pays des Articoles* (1927) or the 10 for *Fall of the House of Usher* (1930).
[378] Soupault 1928, p. 198, p. 202.

if this is a development in Alexeïeff's illustrations which appears to have been brought about by his animation work, it started as early as 1929 with *Colloque* – three years before Alexeïeff first turned to animation. The direction of the influence is therefore debatable.

While the fact that Alexeïeff's production of illustrations lessened considerably after the first decade makes it harder to sketch developments, some other elements have been pointed out. For instance, as we have seen regarding *Zhivago,* the illustrations made by pin-screen differ in style and character from those made in aquatint or litho, becoming more filmic. They contain more detail, have a more narrative character, are more explicit in showing portraits, settings and scenes of action, and are more realistic in style. Alexeïeff had started to focus more on the 'exclusively visual' form of film, and had become used to telling a story without words. This may have lead to an increasingly 'narrative', and therefore more descriptive, visual language.

It is remarkable how consistent Alexeïeff's personal style was throughout his career, once he had passed his apprentice years. In fact, his style of illustrating changed so little that the editor Philippe Gonin addressed a stern letter to the illustrator in 1958, warning him that there is a fashion in illustrated books, and that one must take care not to appear outmoded.[379] We may very generally notice an increasing clarity of form and a greater ease and variety in composition and pose. The figures become somewhat more mobile, the spaces less stage-like and flat. But the core elements of Alexeïeff's style, the shady, transparent forms, the *chiaroscuro* and the nocturnal ambiance, stay quite constant throughout his oeuvre. These are even present in the later pin-screen images, whether for animated film or illustration, although these present the greatest difference with the earlier aquatints or lithographs.

The development upon which our research question focussed – the influence of animated film on Alexeïeff's theories of illustration – appears too complex to draw to a bold conclusion here. This is in part due to the fact that too many of Alexeïeff's theoretical musings are undated, which makes it hard to sketch a development in his thoughts. Moreover, it seems very problematic to attribute a direction to the influence: from film to book, or vice versa. Alexeïeff deftly presents the question both ways round, depending on the need of the moment or the interlocutor. Perhaps shared artistic and theoretic concerns and a *mutual* influence between illustration and animated film are all we can reasonably claim to have established.

To determine the relevance of our conclusions and to place them in a broader context, we must ask in how far Alexeïeff was typical for the illustrators of his time. We shall therefore cast a quick glance on the general relation between illustration and 'high' art in the 20th century.

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[379] 'Your book [Don Quixote] has a rather musty [*vieillotte*] conception [...] there is a fashion in the book.'
Gonin, letter to Alexeïeff (06-02-1958), AEE AL-Ms-211. Gonin's emphasis.

In the mid-19th century, there was a clear divide between illustration and autonomous art, but this soon started to change. Major illustrators like Doré gained considerable fame and recognition, in which their profession shared. Moreover, reform movements like Arts&Crafts gave illustration an important role in shaping the minds and tastes of especially children, and respected artists could thus practice illustration without loss of face.[380] According to David Lomas, the first half of the 20th century was characterized by a common culture of artists and writers and a synergy between verbal and visual modes of expression. This was partly brought about by the proximity of painters and poets in avant-garde milieux, facilitating exchanges. In Alexeïeff's case, this could certainly be true; three of his good friends (Soupault, Devaulx, Du Perron) were authors.[381] Saskia de Bodt draws attention to the same development, yet remarks that the artists who focussed on this synthesis of literature and visual art in the decades around 1900 expressly avoided the term 'illustration'.[382] Similarly, after the Second World War, De Bodt signals a sharp, nearly unbridgeable divide between 'high' art and illustration. Independent artist who ventured into the book made it very clear they had nothing to do with 'mere' illustration.[383] And the same may be said of developments in the early 20th century. For although J. Harthan writes that the book became a 'major vehicle for artistic expression', he also considers the contributions of major painters to this field not as 'illustrated, but created and decorated'.[384] In short, the book may have increasingly become a vehicle for 'high' art in the 20th century, but the status of *book illustration* benefited very slightly from this development. The distinction between autonomous art and illustration with which Alexeïeff was confronted therefore seems to have been relatively constant, apart from an apparent rise in illustration's reputation in the late 19th century.

In the latest years, illustration is becoming more and more autonomous. Successful illustrators gain increasing control over the content of their work, often not even reading a text but taking its core idea or theme as their starting point.[385] This is very close to Alexeïeff's attitude as described in chapter two, when he proposes his own visual 'example' of the core idea which the author 'illustrated' verbally in a different way. Indeed, current-day practice seems to attempt to shake off illustration's limitations. This April, *De Volkskrant* opened a review of contemporary illustration with the heading '*Illustrator van nu gunt zichzelf grote vrijheid*' (Today's illustrator allows himself great freedom). Illustrators, the article states, are no longer craftsmen, but now 'surpass' their own discipline, using a great number of techniques and

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[380] Bodt 2010, pp. 22-32.
[381] Lomas 2010, pp. 111-177.
[382] Bodt 2010, p. 24.
[383] Bodt 2010, pp. 32-35.
[384] Harthan 1981, p. 8.
[385] Bodt 2010, pp. 12-13, pp. 22-24.

moving close to autonomous art.[386] After what we have seen, this claim might have been made over eight decades ago. Similarly, Steven Heller writes that since the late Sixties, illustration increasingly gained 'all the weight of the purer arts', becoming more than mere replication of a text: 'Sure, they were beholden to those manuscripts as a touchstone, but their ideas and concepts complimented rather than supplemented; they could expand upon rather than slavishly follow the word.' Editors no longer choose the passages to be illustrated, now that the illustrator has become a kind of second 'author' [fig. 1]. Today, there is more illustration that

> comes close to pure "art" (as in the muse made me do it) than in the past thirty years. [...] sequential progression is formative, and many illustrators have created a repertory of characters and forms that flow seamlessly from one illustration into the next [...] That much illustration today is often separate from, indeed triggered by forces beyond the traditional manuscript, is testament to the need for illustrators to create. The role of muse-fed artists – to reflect and comment on human essences – are currently assumed by some commercially motivated illustrators.[387]

How much of Alexeïeff we recognize in this description of 'illustration now'! Alexeïeff was perhaps not so much a visionary ahead of his time as a relatively early and strong voice in a chorus still calling today, and whose claims are now becoming more and more accepted in practice. The *ways* in which illustrators strove and strive for independence, then and now, remain little known.

What is clear, however, is that one common idea about the development of 'book art' in the 20th century should be corrected. This is the omnipresent assumption that all innovation in the visual content of books in this time came from painters and other 'independent' artists, and not from professional illustrators. We find this idea phrased by Lothar Lang, Khalfa, Castleman, Mitchell, Bock, Thrumann-Jajes, and Stein, among others.[388] At best, professional illustrators are allowed to profit from this new 'freedom from the constraints of illustration', brought about by famous painters.[389] Yet if illustration today knows such freedom, do the illustrators themselves deserve no credit for their role in this development? In view of the great popularity of the major illustrators of the late 19th century, this idea seems too one-sided. To find out to what extent illustrators partook of this development, thereby making their craft attractive for major artists, might be a good suggestion for further research. I would expect the illustrator to have played a greater role in gaining the licence of which other artists then made use than he is now given

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[386] Pollmann 2012, p. 13.
[387] Heller 2008, pp. 4-5.
[388] Lang 2005, pp. 4-16. Khalfa 2001, p. 84. Castleman 1994, esp. pp. 18-20. Mitchell 1976, pp. 5-6. Bock, Classen 1999, pp. 10-15. Thurmann-Jajes 2001, pp. 10-21.
[389] Castleman 1994, p. 20.

credit for. Alexeïeff, who for a decade depended almost exclusively on illustration to make a living, and continued to exercise this occupation for half a century, was nothing if not a professional illustrator. Yet he did much to innovate and emancipate the image within the book.

Moreover, Alexeïeff's work shows several qualities later ascribed to several other, new genres of 'book art' (we might almost call it non-illustration), invariably pitted against professional illustration. Johanna Drucker, for instance, in her influential *The Century of Artist's Books,* discusses the 'photographic book' as a crossover form in which the sequence is an aspect of the meaning – something which is undoubtedly also true of Alexeïeff's (later) illustrations, starting from *Colloque de Monos et Una* in 1929 with its slow transition from positive to negative.[390] Alexeïeff's initiative to make a popular, widely accessible edition of *Dr Zhivago* with a semi-political intention (to support Pasternak) in 1959 also came at a time when several artists started to use books as 'democratic multiple', sometimes also for the communication of political ideas.[391] It is also interesting that what Alexeïeff singled out as the essential characteristics of illustration – unity of idea, and the stress he placed on sequence and the meaning of sequence – are what are considered now as the 'essential components of the book' even after it has dispersed of text altogether: 'integrity of idea and sequential presentation'.[392] Similarly, Donna Stein holds that the artist's book is 'more than a book' and becomes a work of art by 'summoning images that transcend the literary content of a written or printed text to create a totality that surpasses individual parts'.[393] This definition too, seems to me eminently applicable to Alexeïeff's best work.

I therefore hope that this description of a professional illustrator's practice and theory will work against the habitual and, I think, artificial separation between the illustrated book and the *livre d'artiste* or *artist's book* based on (unspoken) criteria of artistic quality. François Chapon has proposed the term *grand illustré* for exclusive, high-quality illustrated books.[394] This enables us to distinguish such books from cheaper, mass-produced works, without degrading the term 'illustration' as such and without excluding illustration *by definition* from artistic experiment and quality.

If we have discussed a range of elements from Alexeïeff's life and work, it will also be clear that, given the time and place, many more could have found their way onto paper. For instance, Alexeïeff placed strong stress on the importance of technique, stating that each technique or medium only permits the translation of certain parts of an experience, and making the exploration of the particulars of a printing technique central to his work. In view of the many

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[390] Drucker 1995, pp. 60-69.
[391] Ibid., pp. 69-71. Indeed, for 'artist's books', this development started in the sixties.
[392] Castleman 1994, p. 13.
[393] Stein 2001, p. 17.
[394] Chapon 1987, pp. 47-48.

(reproductive) techniques the illustrator can choose from, the question of the influence of this choice upon an illustrator's treatment of a given text poses itself. Do certain techniques fit better with certain types of text, or favour a certain choice of scenes? What is the effect of the 'translation' of watercolour illustrations into wood engraving, very common in especially 19th-century illustrated books? To return to Alexeïeff, we might also detail the influence of theatre on his work, for instance by examining it in tandem with Vsevolod Meyerhold's ideas about dramatic *mise-en-scène*, which Alexeïeff mentioned as an important inspiration. The influence of Poe's aesthetics on his work, and on that of others illustrating the great American author, might similarly be explored in more detail, not to mention the influence of Aleksandra Grinevsky, Alexeïeff's first wife.

These suggestions go hand in hand, of course, with the by now familiar suggestion for further research into the topic of illustration in general, and into the changing art theories of illustrators more in particular. Especially the relation between illustration and 'high' art, and the influence of its art theories on the approach of illustration, would seem to offer very interesting research subjects. In this regard, the marginal position of illustration actually provides an advantage, not only because of the largely unexplored terrain, but also because of the frequent interaction with other genres and forms of art. Many illustrators simultaneously practiced other arts; in France in the mid-20th century, for instance, there were several other animators-illustrators, or illustrators practicing other (new) media. Their relation to, for instance, the so-called *ciné-roman* would provide an interesting point of departure.

In Alexeïeff's case, we have seen the far-going parallels between Alexeïeff's two major occupations. In both forms of art, he envisaged an ambitious role for the images produced. The illustration declares its independence from the letter of the text by being metaphorical, and by depending not on the narrative continuity of a text but on a larger whole of images, whether printed in a book or projected on a screen. Never is the illustration merely dangling on a phrase or anecdote from the text. Instead, it seeks other points of support, moving towards the paradoxical ideal of 'independent' illustration. Thus, Alexeïeff seems to have managed the great paradox of the proud, 'free' artist-illustrator quite inventively.

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Appendix

1. List of works illustrated by Alexeïeff

This list may not be complete. Titles with an asterisk have only been illustrated with a frontispiece.

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2. Illustrations chapter one

Figure 5 - Alexeïeff in front of a Pitoeff poster, 1922, AEE.

Figure 6 - Aleksandra Grinevsky in her role as Dorian Gray, Pitoeff theatre, 1924, AEE.

Figure 7 - Alexeïeff, pencil sketch, undated [probably 1919-1921], AEE.

Figure 8 – Alexeïeff, Pencil sketch, 1920, AEE.

Figure 9 – Alexeïeff, Sketch for a theatre set, gouache, early 1920's, AEE.

Figure 10 – Alexeïeff, Gouache in the style of Soudeikin, early 1920's.

Figure 11 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for Hans Christian Andersen, *Images de la Lune,* 1942.

Figure 12 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for Julien Green, *Adrienne Mesurat,* 1929.
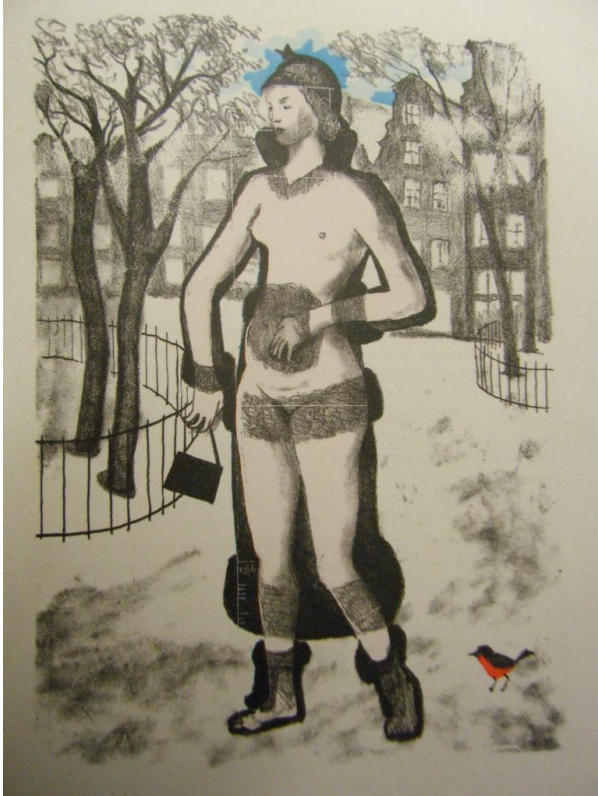
Figure 13- Alexeïeff, lithograph for Jean Giraudoux, *Siegfried et le Limousin,* **1927.**

Figure 14 - Alexeïeff, 'deep etching' essay, published in *Arts et Métiers Graphiques* **10 (March 1929), p. 605.**

Figure 15 - Alexeïeff, colour aquatint for Paul Morand, *Bouddha vivant,* 1928.
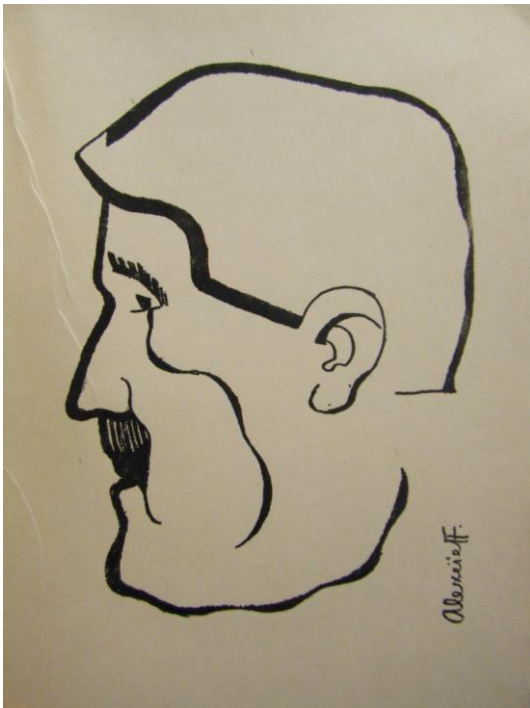
Figure 16 - Alexeïeff, pen drawing for Apollinaire, *Épingles,* 1928.

Figure 17 - Alexeïeff, watercolour, 1926, AEE.

Figure 58 - Aleksandra Grinevsky, oil painting, undated. Reproduction AEE.
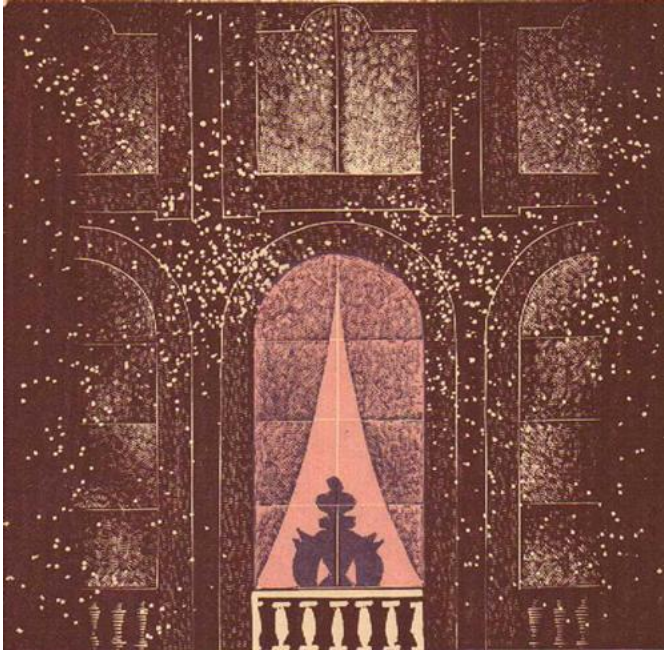
Figure 19 - Alexeïeff, woodcut for Pushkin, *The Queen of Spades,* 1928.
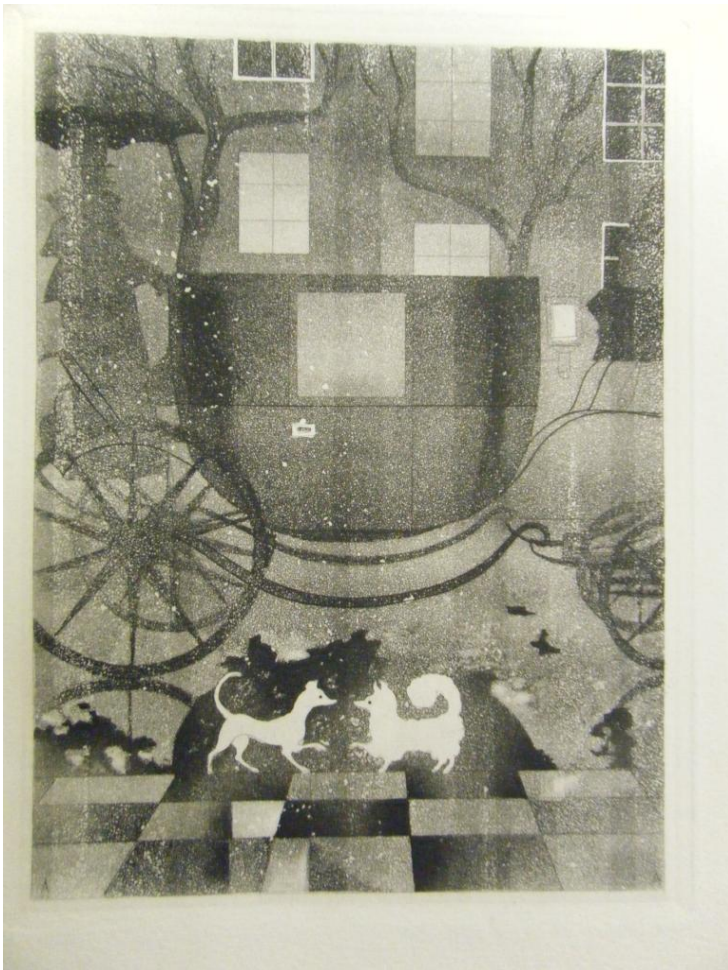
Figure 20 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for Gogol, *Journal d'un Fou,* 1928.

Figure 61 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for Julian Green, *Adrienne Mesurat,* 1929.

Figure 22 - Paleolithic hand negatives in Lascaux, France, circa 23.000 BCE.

Figure 23 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Contes,* 1960.

Figure 24 - Philippe Soupault and Alexeïeff in 1925, AEE.

Figure 25 - Alexeïeff, pencil sketch for Du Perron, *Het Land van Herkomst,* and the resulting cover, 1935.

3. Illustrations chapter two
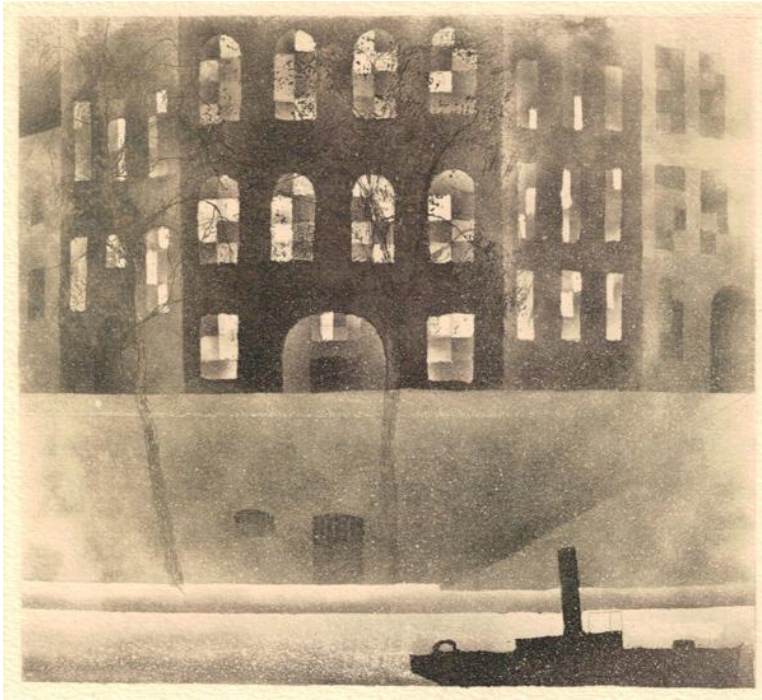
Figure 26 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles,* 1927.

Figure 27 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles,* 1927.

Figure 28 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles,* **1927.**

SI nous n'avions éprouvé, Anne et moi, un léger sentiment de regret en pensant à notre beau record interrompu, nous aurions, au moins au début de notre séjour, été heureux à Maïana. La nature était belle, le climat parfait, on nous traitait avec courtoisie.

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Figure 29 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, **1927.**
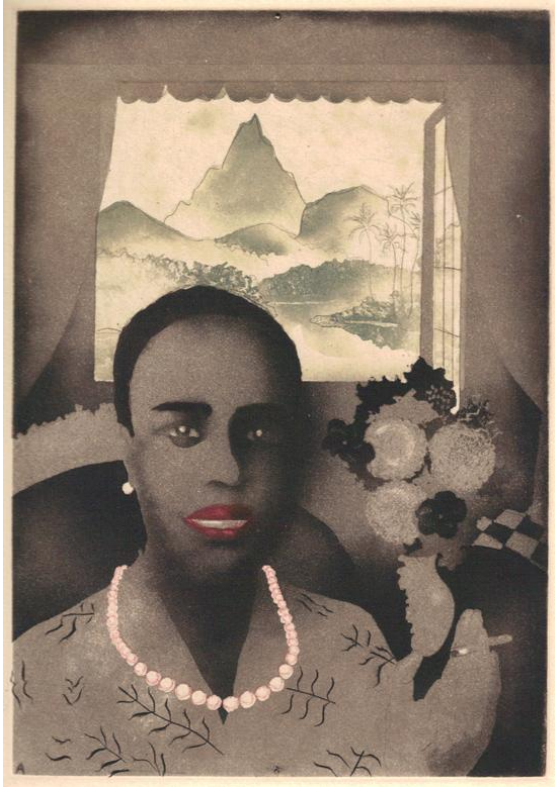
Figure 30 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, 1927.

NOTRE bateau, entièrement repeint,
avait été muni de grandes voiles ocre
qui formaient avec le bleu éclatant
de la mer un plaisant contraste. A la porte du
Psycharium, Mrs Alexander avait embrassé
Anne : « Je vous demande pardon, nous avait-
elle dit, de vous avoir, bien malgré moi, retenus

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Figure 31 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, 1927.

Figure 32- Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, 1927.
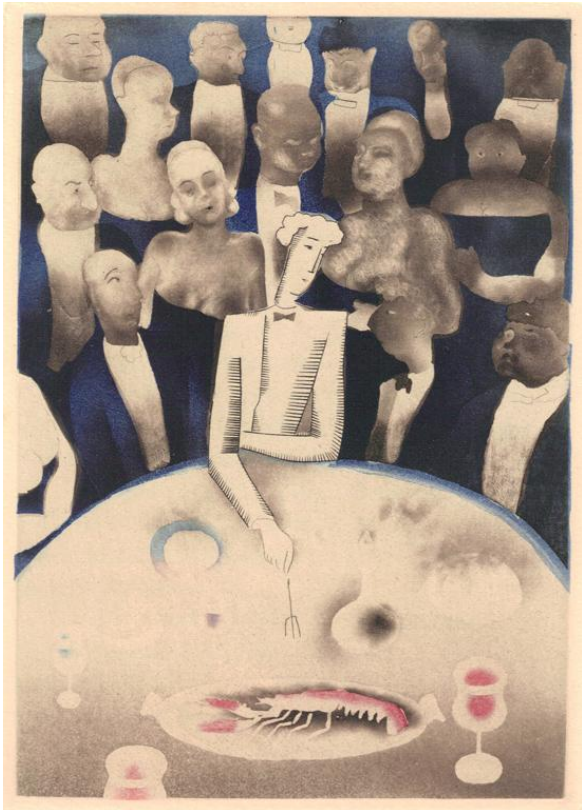
Figure 33 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, 1927.

Figure 34 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, **1927. Unpublished, AEE.**
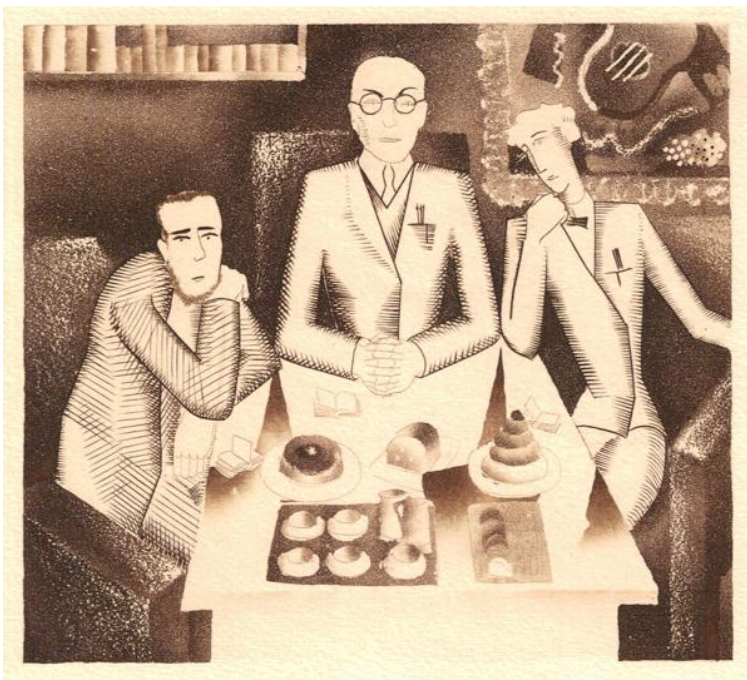
Figure 35 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, **1927.**

ROUTCHKO s'était attaché à moi. Il m'avait demandé le nom de mon père, ne m'appelait plus que Piotr Ivanovitch et venait tous les matins passer avec moi quelques heures. De mon côté j'avais pour lui de l'affection. On ne pouvait imaginer deux caractères plus différents; autant j'étais froid, rebelle à

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Figure 36 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for André Maurois, page from *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, 1927.

Figure 37 – Alexeïeff, woodcut vignettes for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles,* 1927.

Figure 38- Alexeïeff, aquatint frontispiece for André Maurois, *Voyage au Pays des Articoles*, 1927.

Figure 39 - Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus,* ca. 1486.
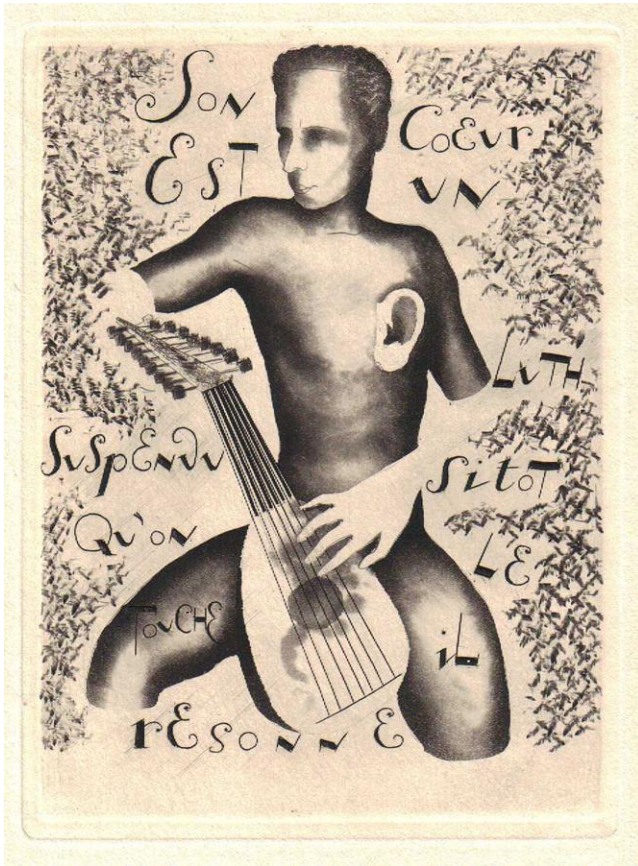
Figure 40 - Alexeïeff, aquatint frontispiece for E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher,* **1929.**
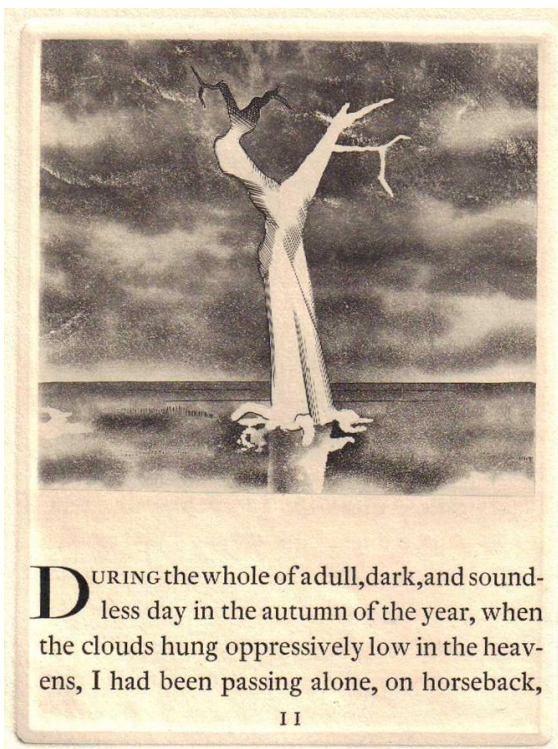
Figure 41 -Alexeïeff, aquatint, page from E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, **1929.**
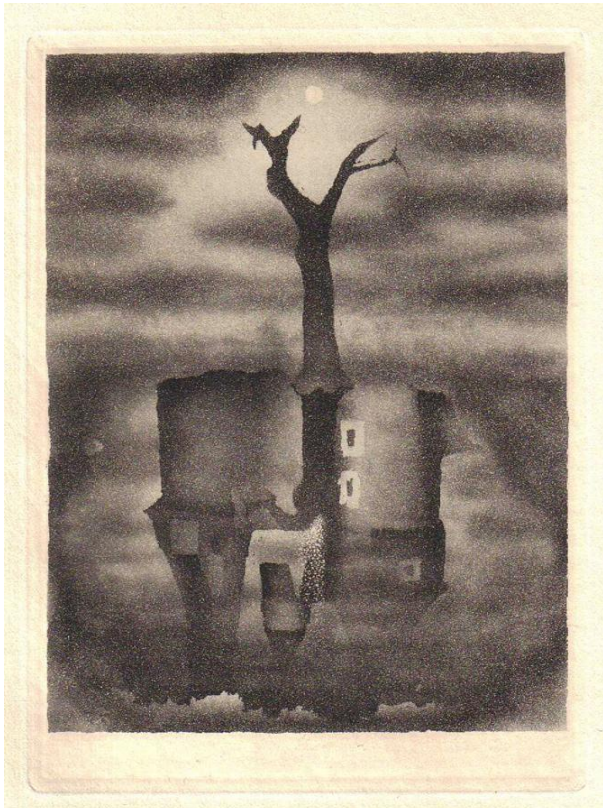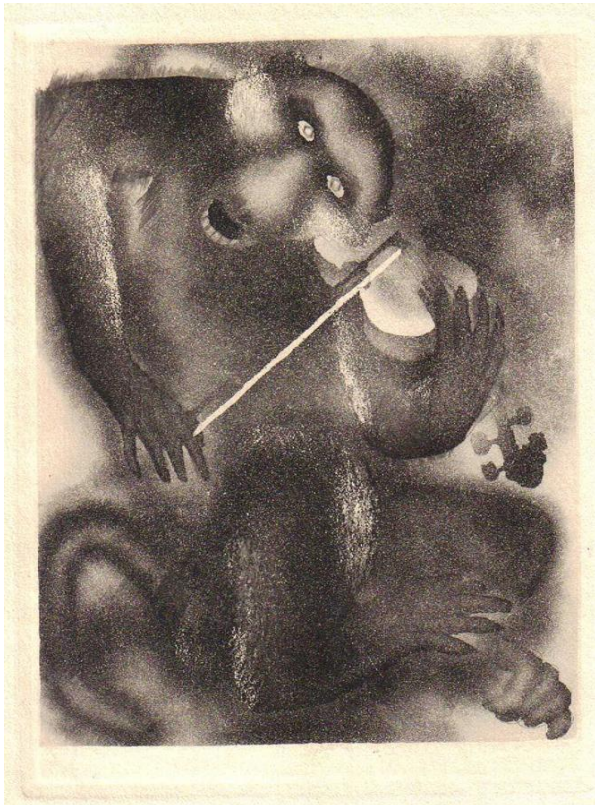
Figure 42 – Alexeïeff, aquatint for E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, **1929.**
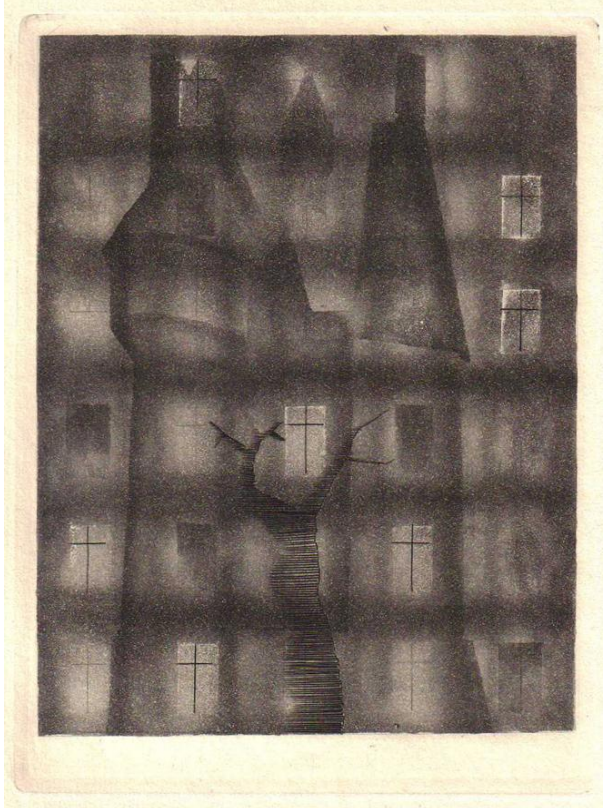
Figure 43 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, **1929.**
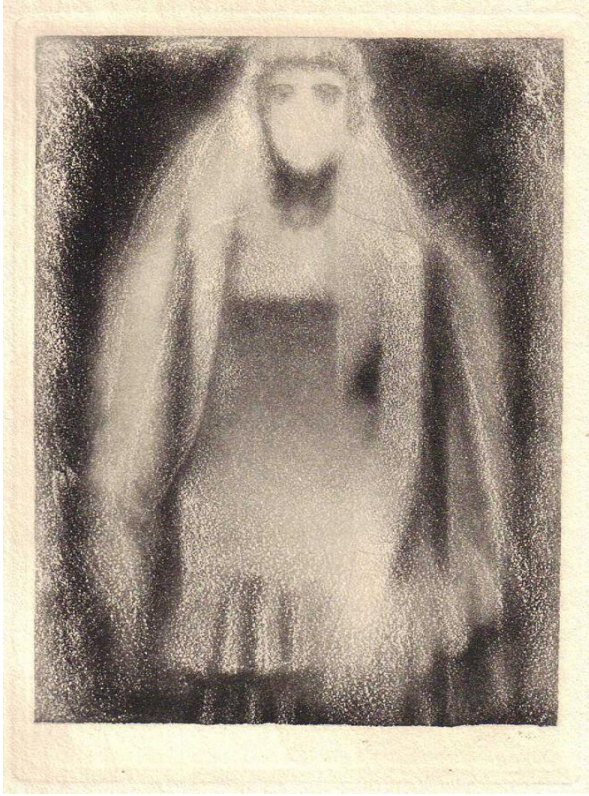
Figure 44 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1929.
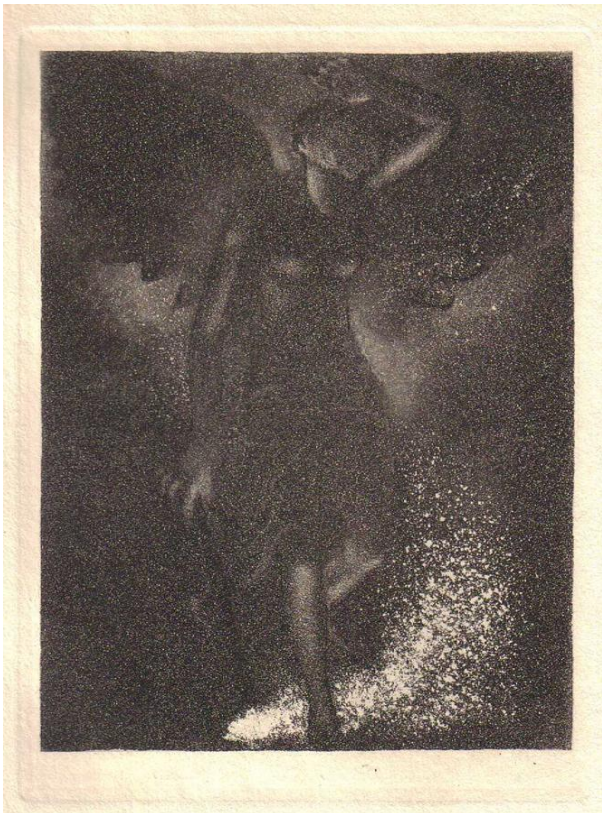
Figure 45 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1929.

Figure 46 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, **1929.**
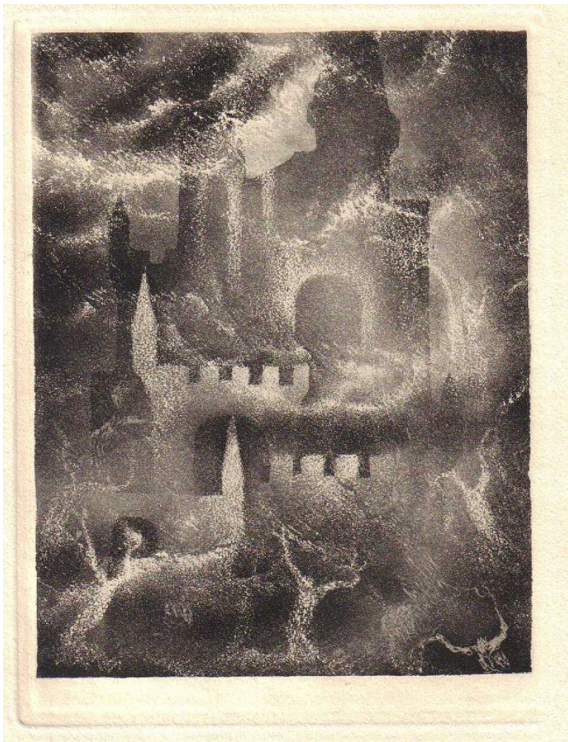
Figure 47 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, **1929.**

Figure 48 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for E.A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1929.

walls rushing asunder; there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters, and the deep and dark tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the „*House of Usher*."

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Figure 49 - Alexeïeff, aquatint, page from E.A. Poe, The Fall of the House of Usher, 1929.

Figure 50 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', page from *Le Chant du Prince Igor,* 1950.

Figure 51 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', cover of *Le Chant du Prince Igor,* 1950.
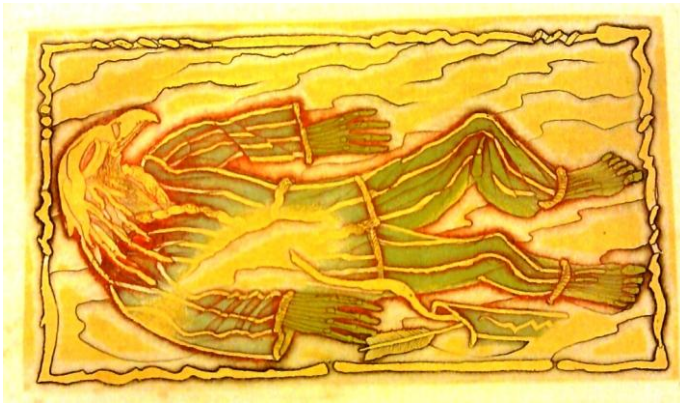
Figure 52 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, **1950.**
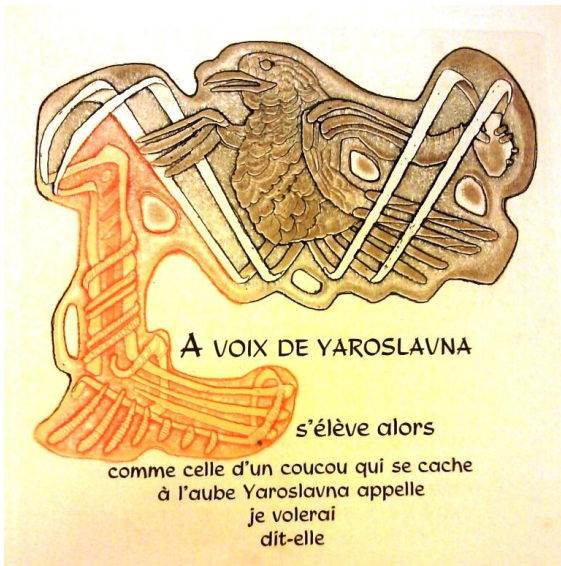
Figure 53 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', page from *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, **1950.**

Figure 54 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', chapter heading, *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, 1950.

Figure 55 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, 1950.

Figure 56 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, **1950.**

Figure 57 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, **1950.**

vous êtes les faucons à six ailes
d'une nichée célèbre
ce n'est pas par chance
que vous avez conquis le pouvoir
où sont vos casques d'or

Figure 58 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', page from *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, 1950.

Figure 59 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', Le Chant du Prince Igor, 1950.

Figure 60 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', *Le Chant du Prince Igor,* 1950.

Figure 61 - Alexeïeff, electrolysis and 'deep etching', *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, **1950.**

Figure 62 - Alexeïeff, frontispiece, electrolysis and 'deep etching', *Le Chant du Prince Igor*, **1950.**

Figure 63 - Alexeïeff, woodcut (reproduction), *Russian Fairy Tales,* **1974 [1945].**

not jumped off the tree, the cat would have eaten me long ago!"

Figure 64 - Alexeïeff, woodcut (reproduction), Russian Fairy Tales, 1974 [1945].

Figure 65 - Alexeïeff, woodcut (reproduction), Russian Fairy Tales, 1974 [1945].

4. Illustrations chapter three

Figure 66 - The *écran d'épingles* (pin screen) with an 'engraving'by Alexeieff. *La boite à Images* <http://laboiteaimages.blog.lemonde.fr/2010/01/19/apprenons-a-dessiner-avec-un-tapis-de-fakir-nain/> (accessed 18-04-2012).

Figure 67 - Still from a publicity film (*Cent pour Cent)* by Alexeïeff's team showing effects obtained by '*totalisation'*, 1957.

Figure 68 - Film still from *Le Nez* by Alexeïeff and Parker, 1963.

Figure 69 - Alexeïeff, unpublished woodcut for Gogol's *Le Nez*, around 1926.

Figure 70 – Two film stills from *Pure Beauté,* 1954.

Figure 71 - Alexeïeff, aquatint frontispiece for Flaubert, *Premières Lettres à L.C.,* 1957.
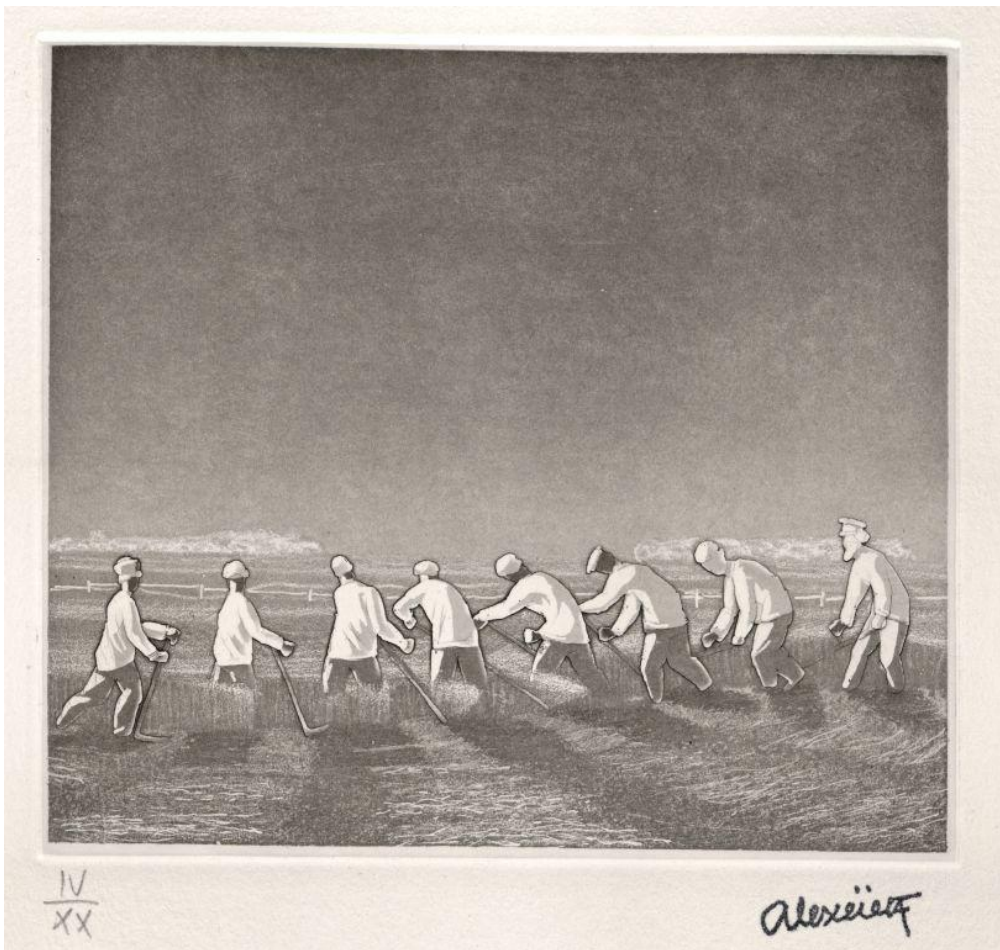
Figure 72 - Alexeïeff, aquatint for *Anna Karenina*, 1995 [ca. 1951-1955].

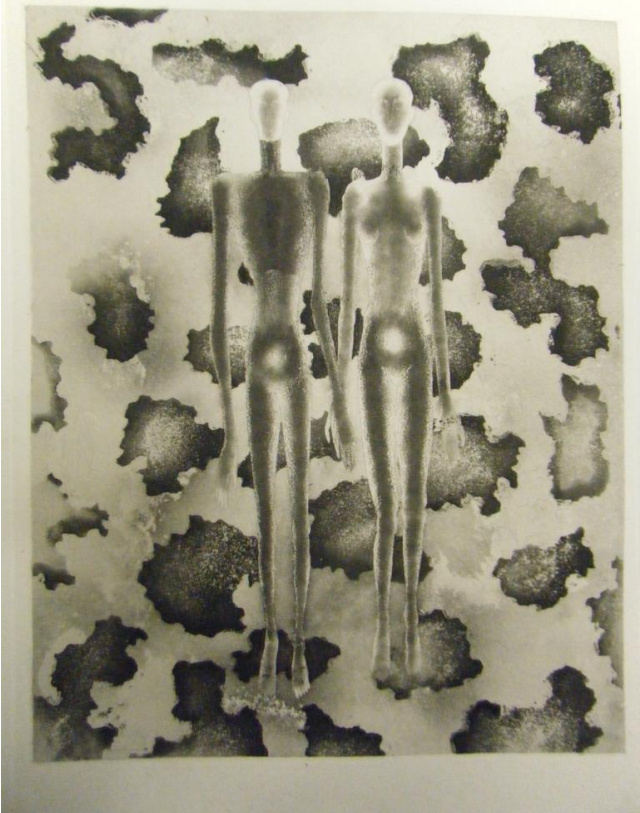**Figure 73 – Alexeïeff and Parker, film still from *En Passant*, 1944.**
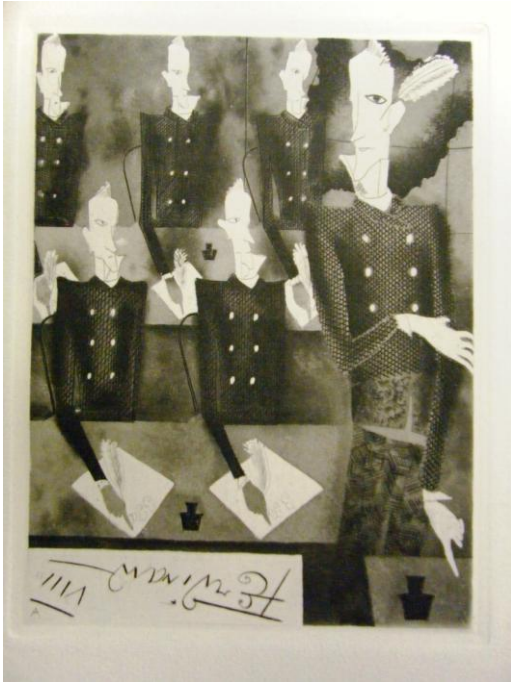
Figure 74 – Alexeïeff, aquatint for Gogol, *Journal d'un Fou,* **1928.**

Figure 75 – Alexeïeff, colour etching for Paul Morand, *Buddha Vivant,* **1928.**

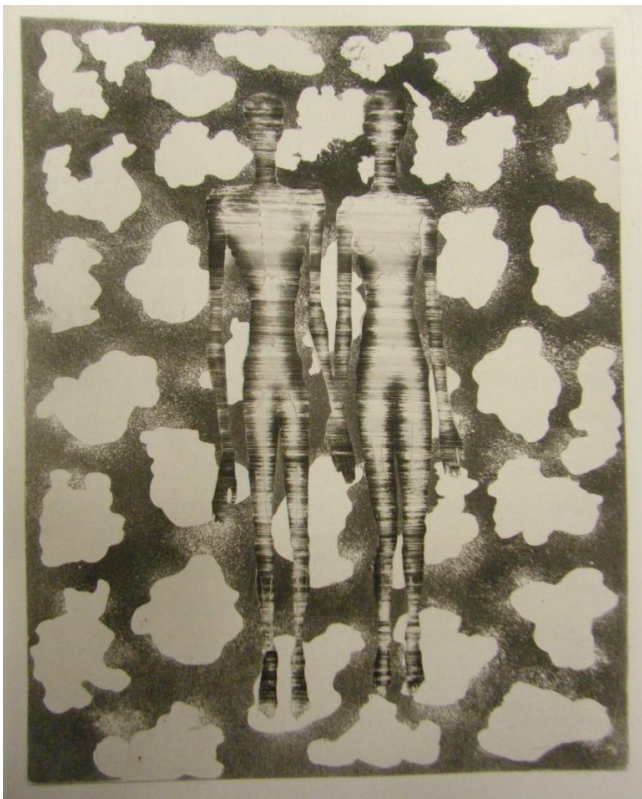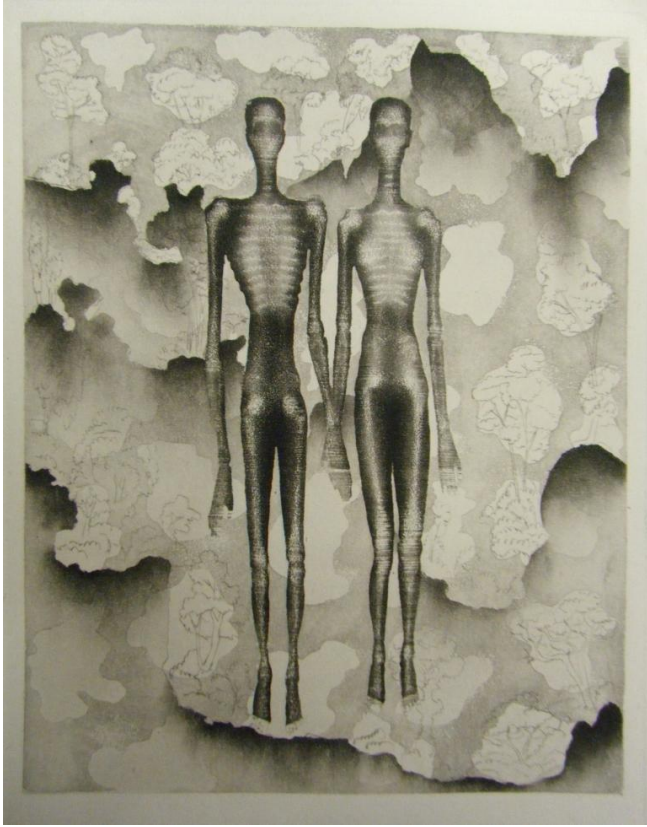**Figure 76 – Alexeïeff, series of six aquatints for E.A. Poe, *Colloque entre Monos et Una,* 1929.**
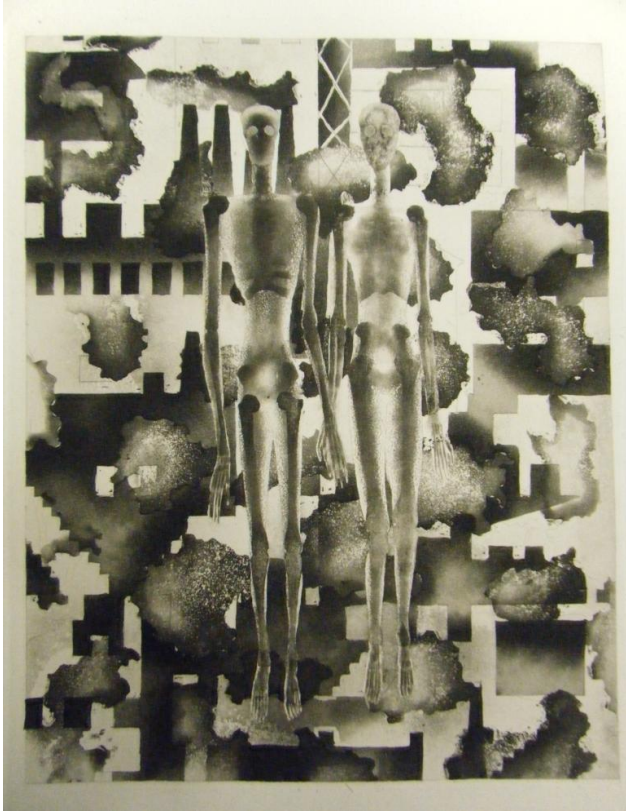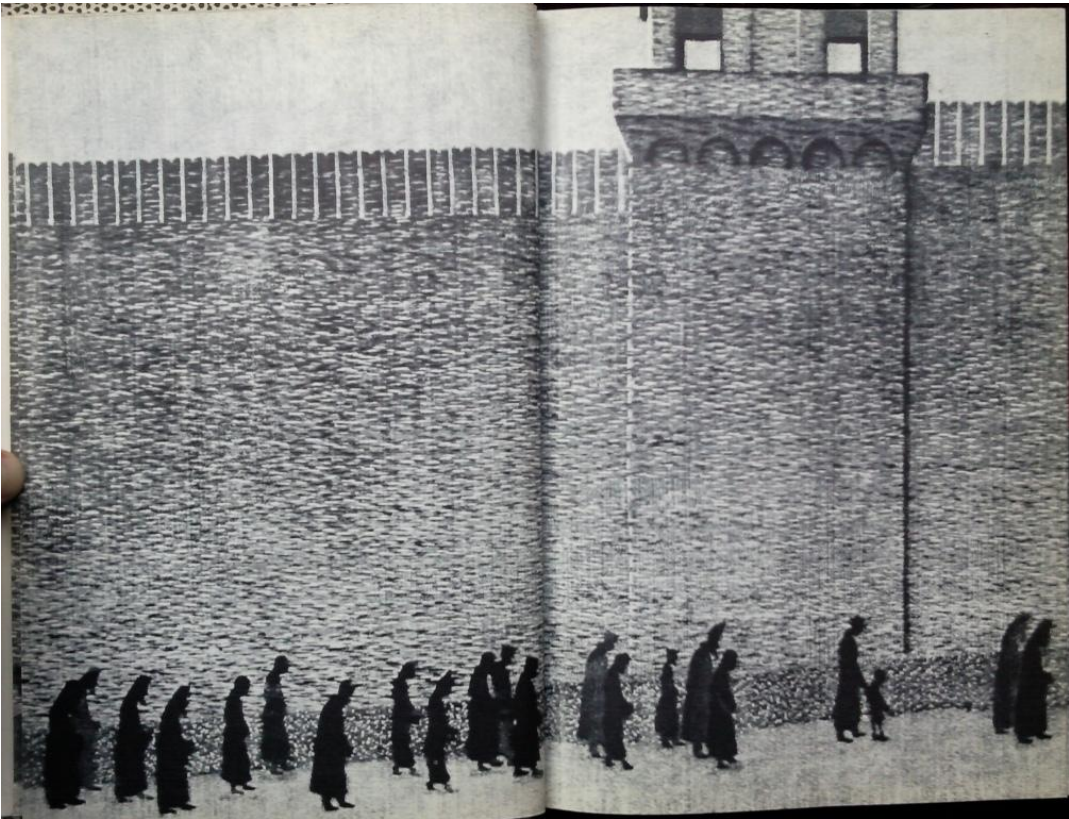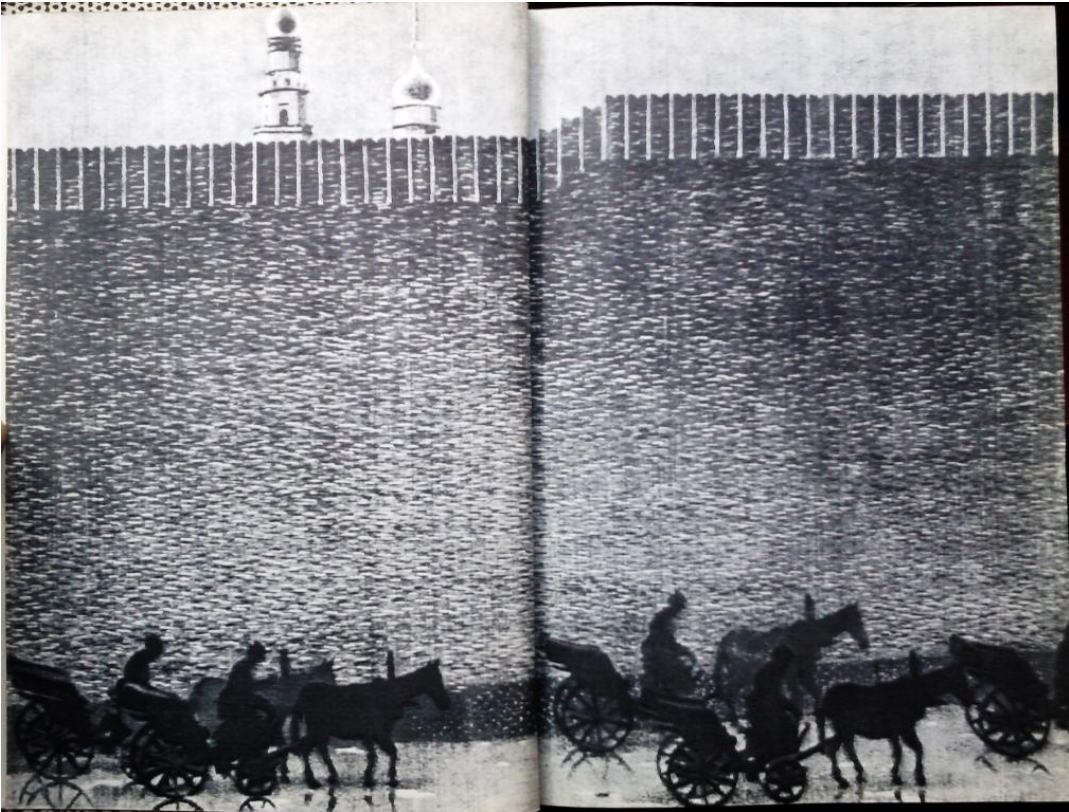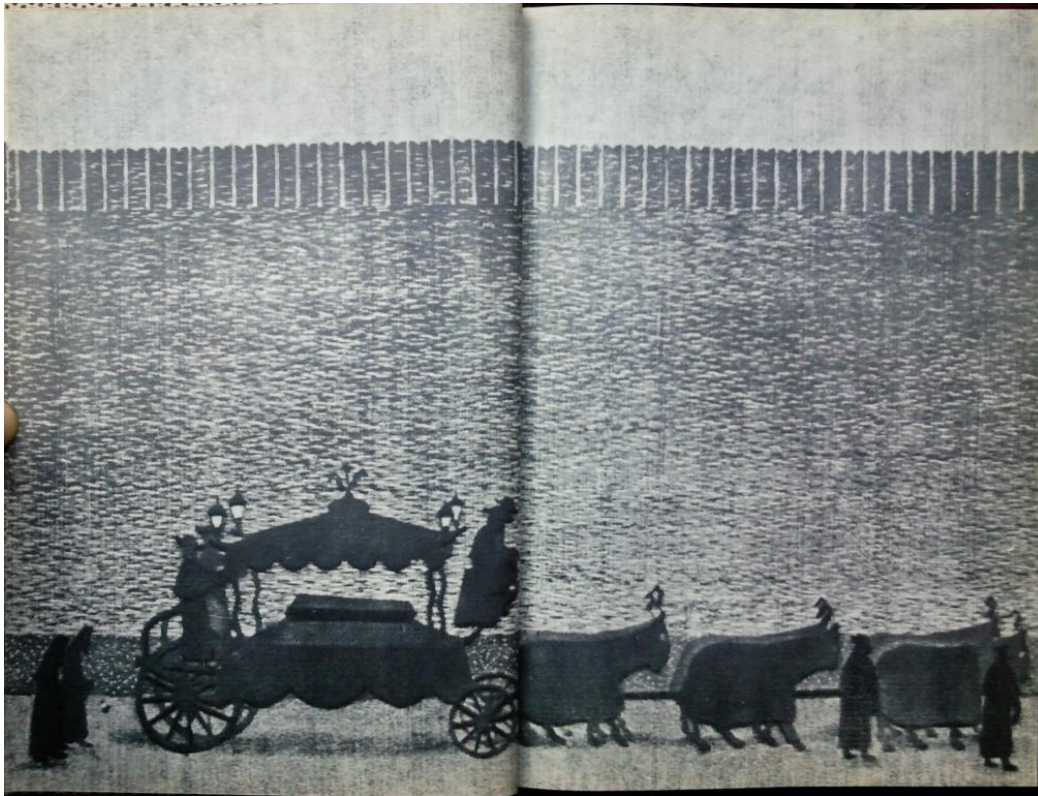
Figure 77 – Alexeïeff, series of pin-screen illustrations for *Dr Jivago,* 1959.

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Ils allaient, ils allaient toujours, et lorsque cessait le chant funèbre, on croyait entendre, continuant sur leur lancée, chanter les jambes, les chevaux et le souffle du vent.

Les passants s'écartaient pour laisser passer le cortège, comptaient les couronnes, se signaient. Les curieux se joignaient à la procession, demandaient : « Qui enterre-t-on ? » — On leur répondait : « Jivago. » — Ah bon. Il fallait le dire. — Mais non, pas lui. Elle. — Ça revient au même. Dieu ait son âme. C'est un bel enterrement.
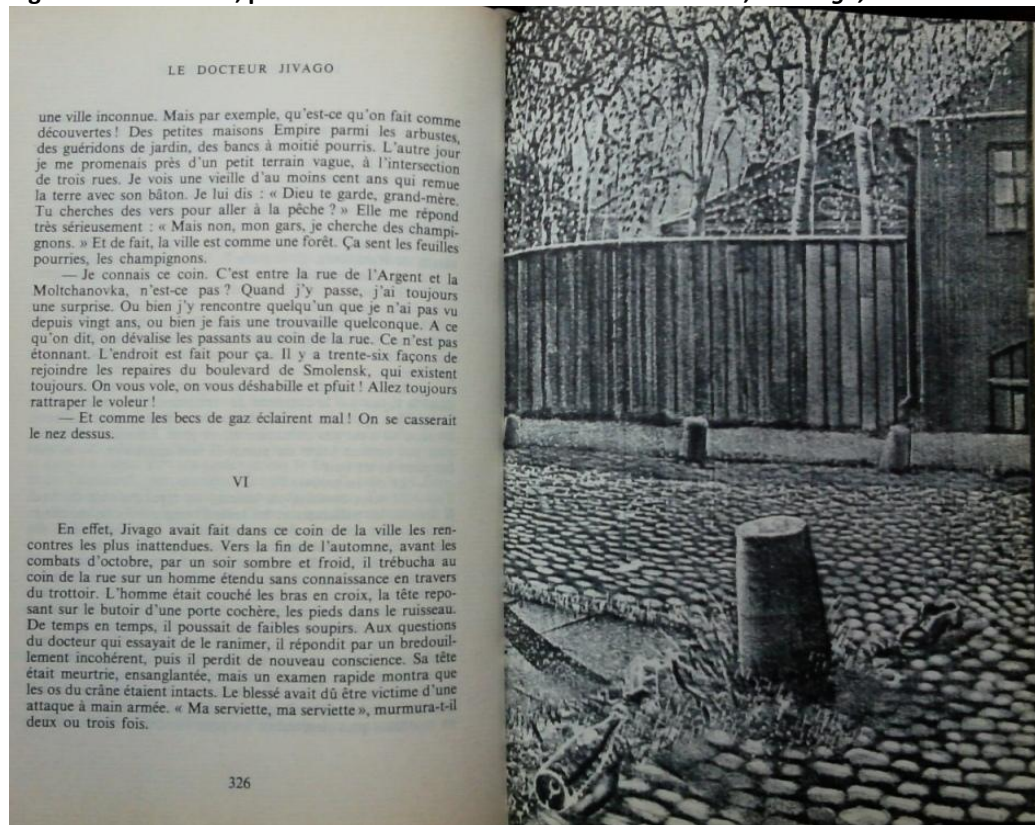
Les derniers instants s'égrenèrent rapidement — instants comptés, instants sans retour. « La terre du Seigneur et tout ce qu'elle recèle, l'univers et tous ses vivants. » Le prêtre, traçant de la main un signe de croix, jeta une poignée de terre sur Maria Nikolaïevna. On entonna *Avec les esprits des justes*. Puis ce fut la course. On ferma le cercueil, on le cloua, on le fit descendre. Comme un roulement de tambour, une pluie de mottes s'abattit sur le cercueil qu'on recouvrit en toute hâte, à quatre pelles à la fois. Un monticule s'éleva. Un petit garçon de dix ans grimpa sur le monticule.

L'hébétude et l'engourdissement qui envahissent généralement le public à la fin d'un grand enterrement pouvaient seuls justifier l'impression que le petit garçon voulait prendre la parole sur le tombeau de sa mère.
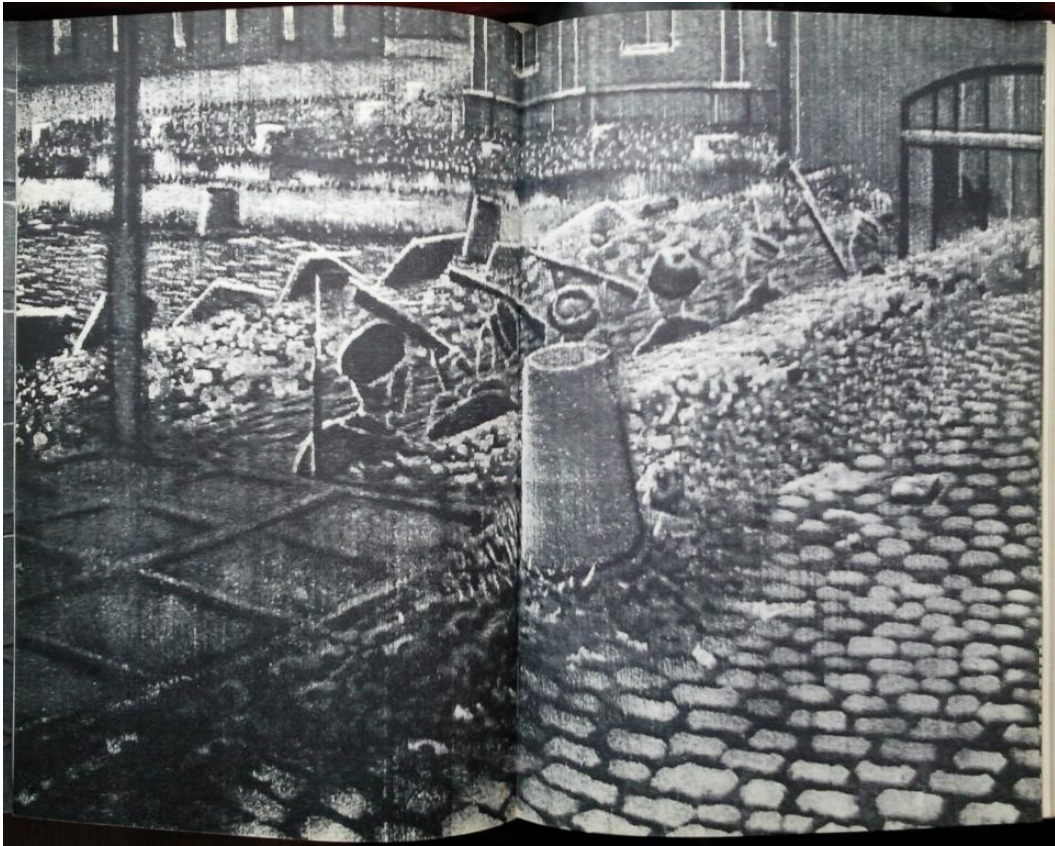
Il leva la tête et, du haut du monticule, il embrassa d'un regard absent les étendues désertes de l'automne et les coupoles
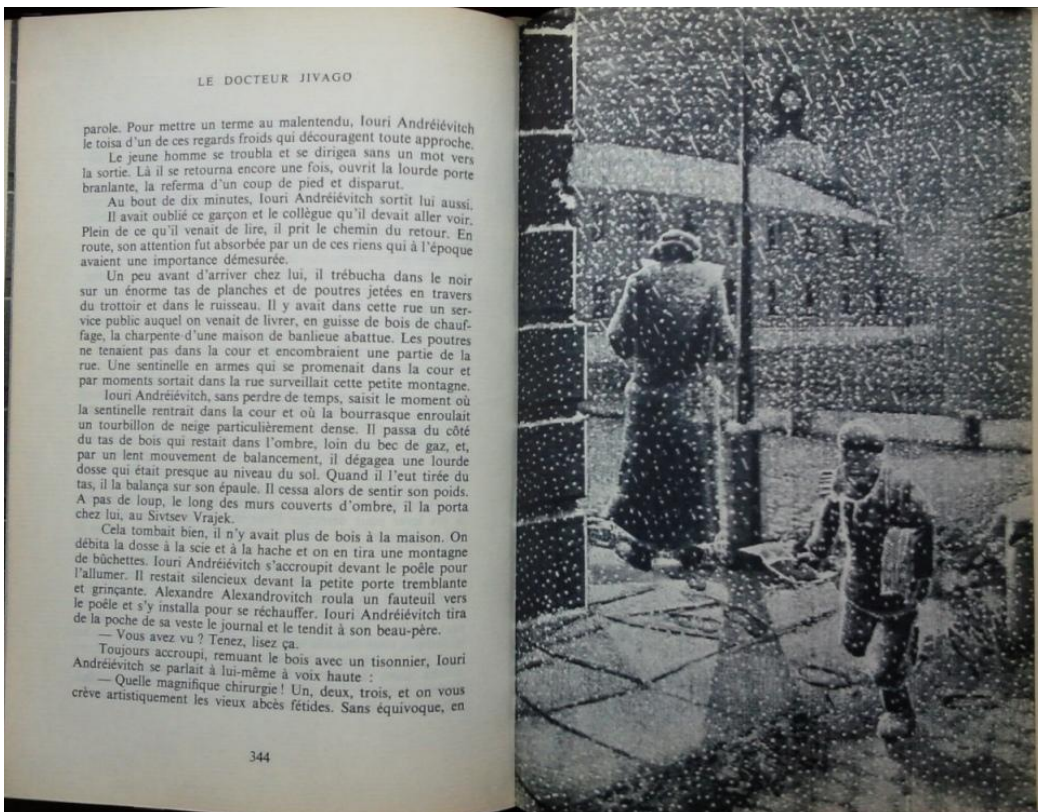
17

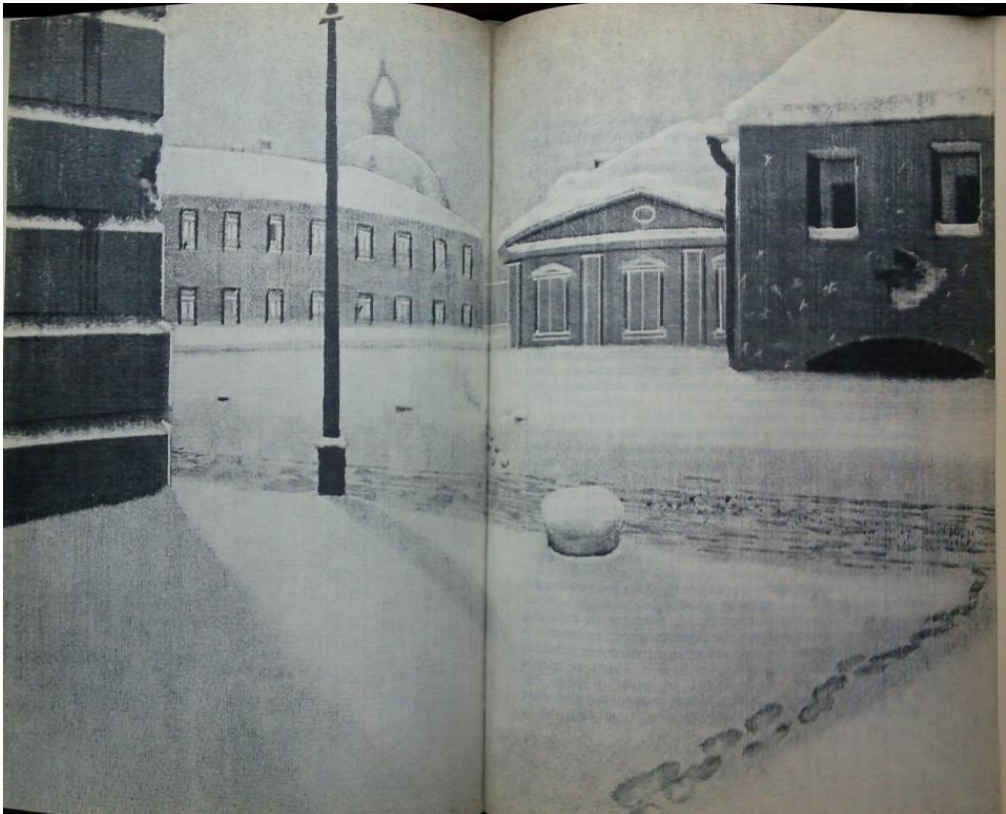**Figure 78 – Alexeïeff, pin screen illustrations for 'Moscow Bivouac',** *Dr Jivago,* **1959.**

parole. Pour mettre un terme au malentendu, Iouri Andréiévitch le toisa d'un de ces regards froids qui découragent toute approche.

Le jeune homme se troubla et se dirigea sans un mot vers la sortie. Là il se retourna encore une fois, ouvrit la lourde porte branlante, la referma d'un coup de pied et disparut.

Au bout de dix minutes, Iouri Andréiévitch sortit lui aussi.

Il avait oublié ce garçon et le collègue qu'il devait aller voir. Plein de ce qu'il venait de lire, il prit le chemin du retour. En route, son attention fut absorbée par un de ces riens qui à l'époque avaient une importance démesurée.

Un peu avant d'arriver chez lui, il trébucha dans le noir sur un énorme tas de planches et de poutres jetées en travers du trottoir et dans le ruisseau. Il y avait dans cette rue un service public auquel on venait de livrer, en guise de bois de chauffage, la charpente d'une maison de banlieue abattue. Les poutres ne tenaient pas dans la cour et encombraient une partie de la rue. Une sentinelle en armes qui se promenait dans la cour et par moments sortait dans la rue surveillait cette petite montagne.

Iouri Andréiévitch, sans perdre de temps, saisit le moment où la sentinelle rentrait dans la cour et où la bourrasque enroulait un tourbillon de neige particulièrement dense. Il passa du côté du tas de bois qui restait dans l'ombre, loin du bec de gaz, et, par un lent mouvement de balancement, il dégagea une lourde dosse qui était presque au niveau du sol. Quand il l'eut tirée du tas, il la balança sur son épaule. Il cessa alors de sentir son poids. A pas de loup, le long des murs couverts d'ombre, il la porta chez lui, au Sivtsev Vrajek.

Cela tombait bien, il n'y avait plus de bois à la maison. On débita la dosse à la scie et à la hache et on en tira une montagne de bûchettes. Iouri Andréiévitch s'accroupit devant le poêle pour l'allumer. Il restait silencieux devant la petite porte tremblante et grinçante. Alexandre Alexandrovitch roula un fauteuil vers le poêle et s'y installa pour se réchauffer. Iouri Andréiévitch tira de la poche de sa veste le journal et le tendit à son beau-père.

— Vous avez vu ? Tenez, lisez ça.

Toujours accroupi, remuant le bois avec un tisonnier, Iouri Andréiévitch se parlait à lui-même à voix haute :

— Quelle magnifique chirurgie ! Un, deux, trois, et on vous crève artistiquement les vieux abcès fétides. Sans équivoque, en
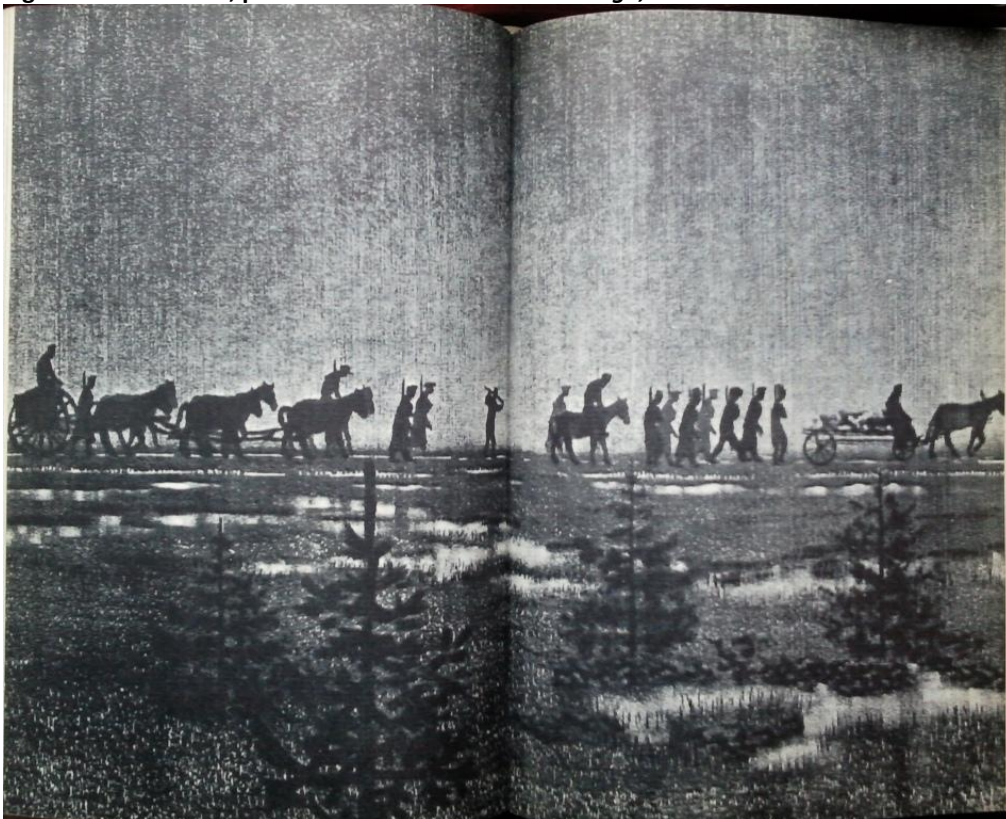
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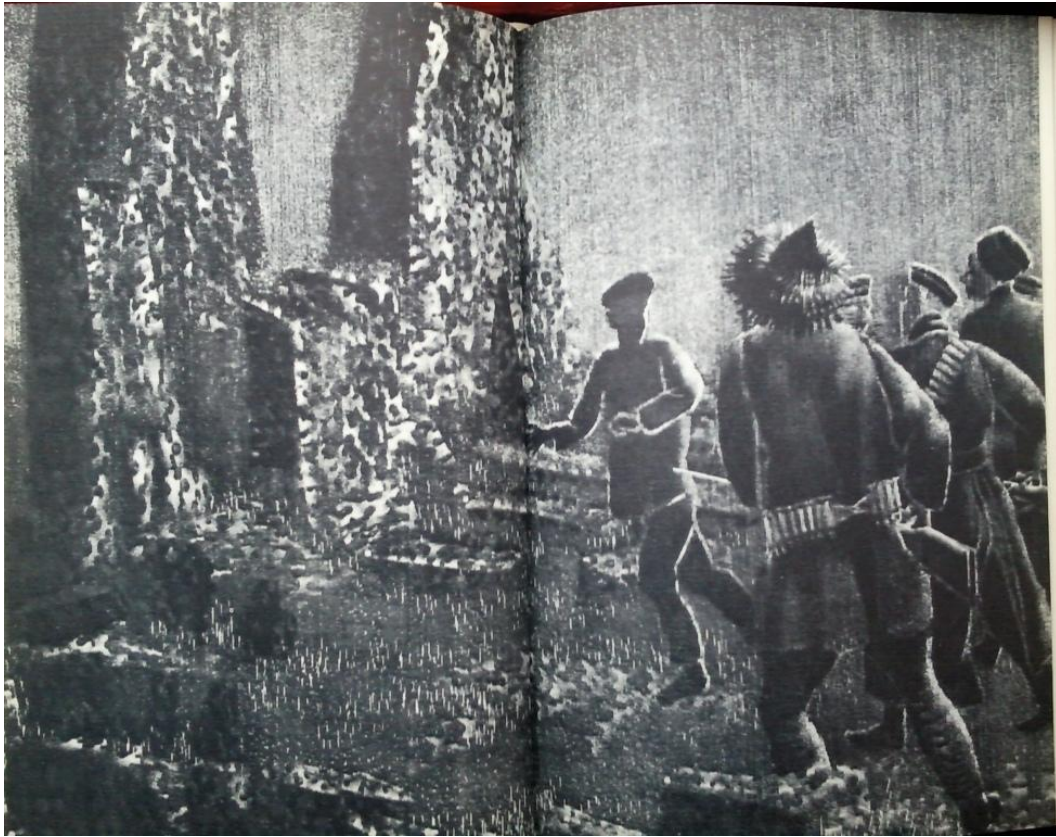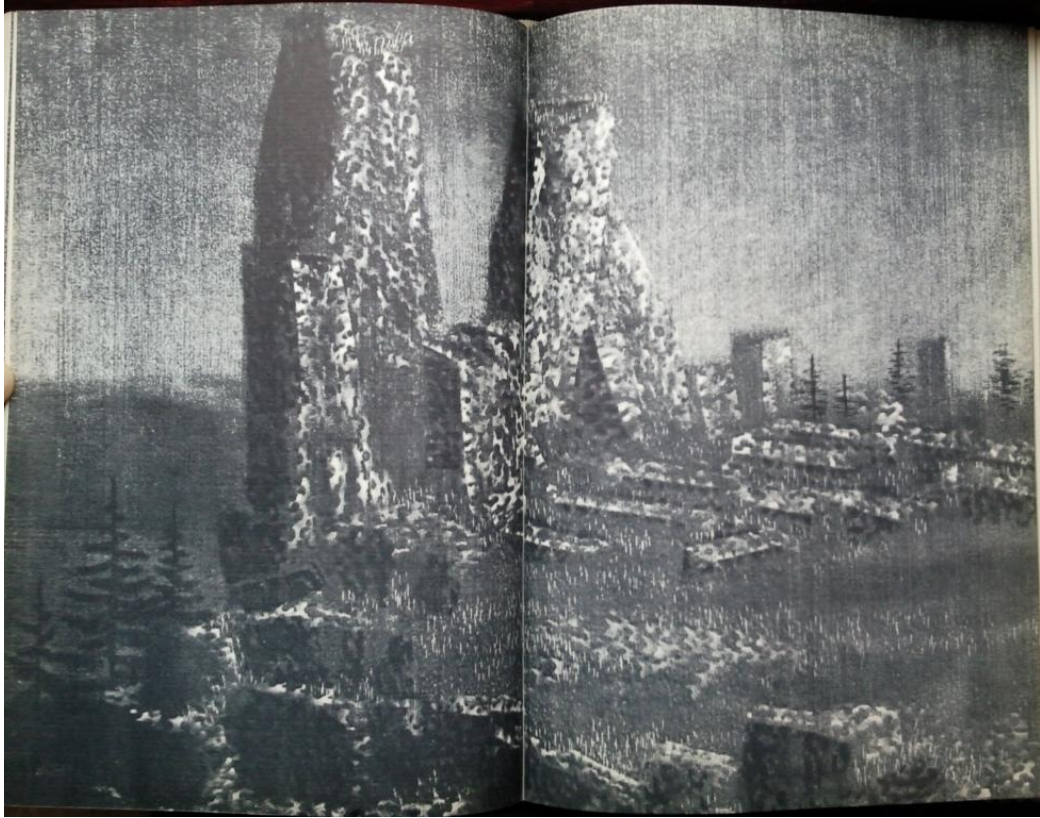**Figure 79 – Alexeïeff, pin screen illustrations for *Dr Jivago,* 1959.**

Figure 80 – Alexeïeff, pin screen illustration (double page) for *Dr Jivago,* artist's proof copy, AEE.
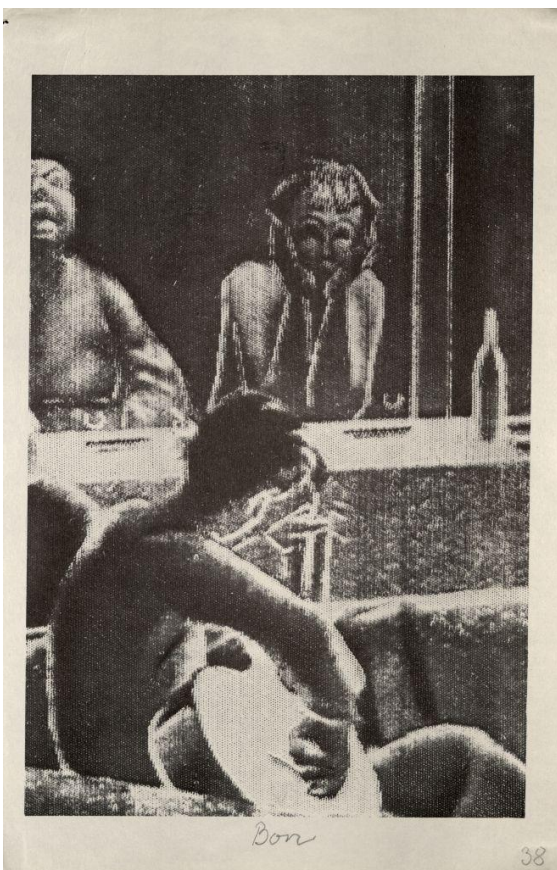

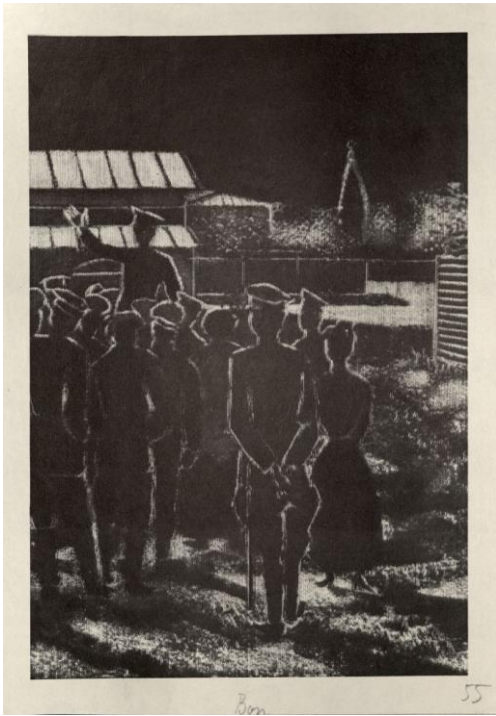**Figure 81 – Alexeïeff, pin screen illustration for *Dr Jivago,* 1959, artist's proof copy, AEE.**

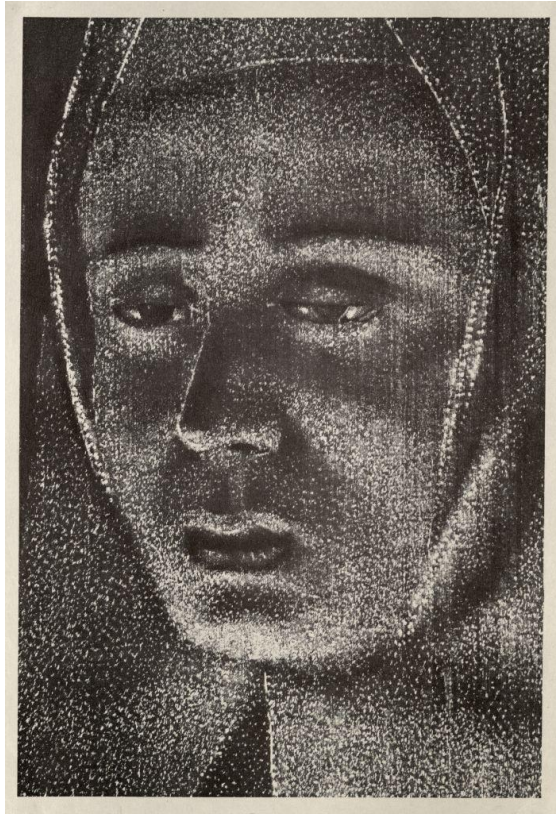**Figure 82 - Alexeïeff, pin screen illustration for *Dr Jivago,* 1959, artist's proof copy, AEE.**

Figure 83 - Alexeïeff, pin screen illustration for *Dr Jivago*, 1959, artist's proof copy, AEE.
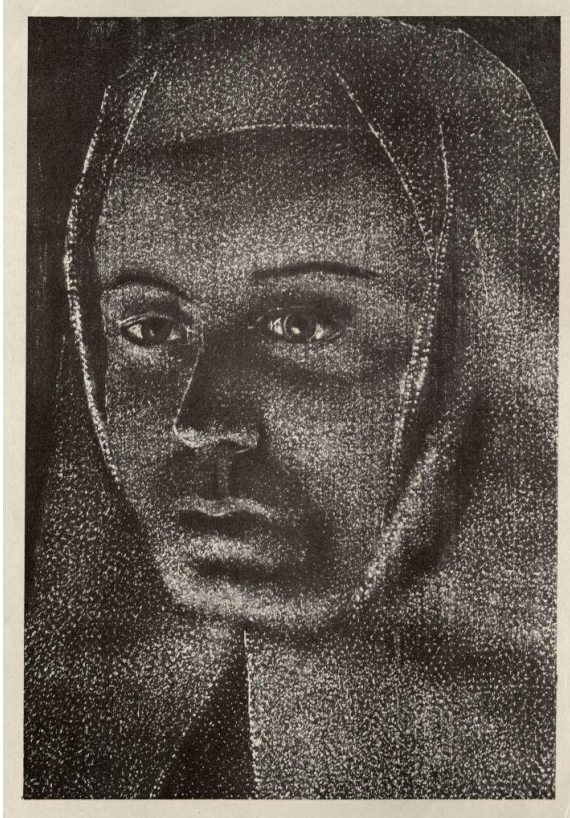
Figure 84 - Alexeïeff, two successive pin screen illustrations for *Dr Jivago*, 1959, artist's proof copy, AEE.
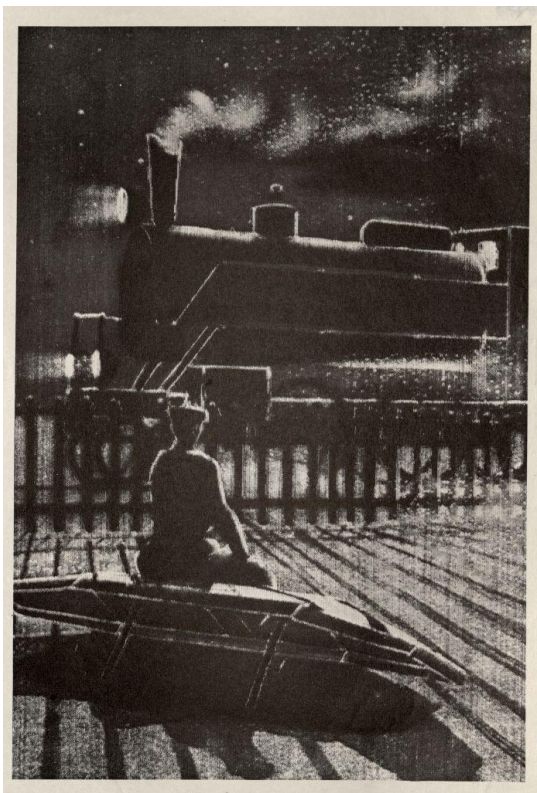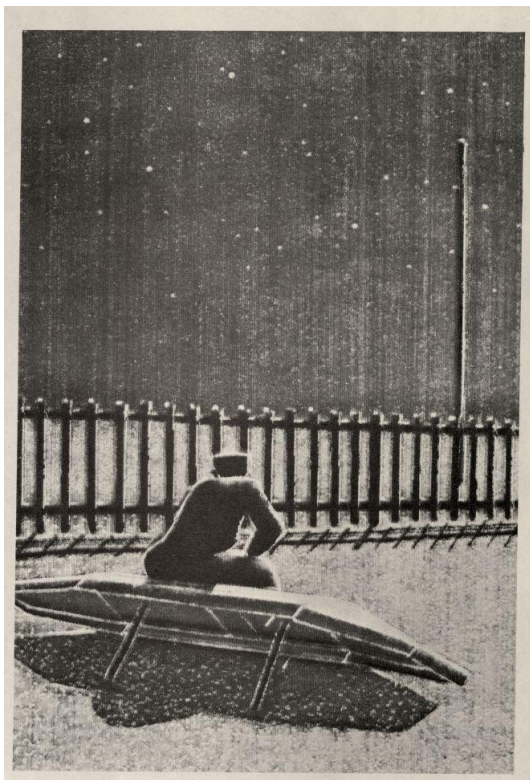

Figure 85- Alexeïeff, two successive pin screen illustrations for *Dr Jivago*, 1959, artist's proof copy, AEE.