the hero during Soviet times was a collectivist delusion, now he is simply "absent, an emptiness in and of himself" (243).

Chapaev and His Comrades represents an important contribution to an already robust body of scholarly works on the theme of the hero in Russian literature, its specific merit being that it provides us with a comprehensive and nuanced reading of how Soviet and post-Soviet identity shaped itself around a century of almost constant war. An interesting thread in Brintlinger's narrative is how various Soviet authors negotiated the inevitable tension between their role as chroniclers, on the one hand, and as "engineers of human souls," on the other. In this regard, it might have been worthwhile to include such authors as Isaak Babel′ or Andrei Platonov, whose literary and biographical engagement with war represents a significant (if slightly more problematic) chapter in the larger story. Still, Brintlinger's monograph is an engaging one, and it adds significantly to our understanding of how Russian identity was constructed by the major conflicts of the twentieth century. *Chapaev and His Comrades* will be of interest to Slavists but also to those interested in peace and conflict studies.

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The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe. By Olga Gershenson. Jewish Cultures of the World. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013. xii, 275 pp. Notes. Index. Illustrations. $85.00, hard bound. $32.50, paper. $32.50, e-book.

Despite its tragic subject, this is an entertaining book, rich in vivid details and narrative turns. Olga Gershenson demonstrates that Soviet films, some of them obscure and some well known, represented Jewish suffering during World War II. Moreover, she believes that the Soviets were ahead of the western curve in representing the Holocaust. While in the west the production of Holocaust films reached its peak in the 1980s, Soviet Holocaust films were largely produced in the 1960s. While the *Black Book*, a pioneering creation of the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee, was banned in the USSR along with the committee, a number of films that represented the Holocaust, including *Nepokorennye* (The Unvanquished, dir. Mark Donskoi, 1945), were shown in Soviet cinemas and greeted warmly. To be sure, Soviet imagery of the Holocaust was different from the later western idiom. As Gershenson puts it, two features distinguished these Soviet films: externalization and universalization of the Holocaust. On Soviet screens, mass murders of Jews did not happen on the Soviet territory but elsewhere in eastern Europe, and the specificity of Jewish suffering was dissolved among victimization of many other ethnicities. Finally, in the best of these films, true stories of the Nazi terror were also used as parables for the Soviet terror. Using oral history interviews with authors and critics, Gershenson is able to document these double perceptions in unusual detail.

Gershenson is most successful in her diligent, but also entrepreneurial, oral histories of the production processes, censorship battles, and public reception of forgotten Soviet films about the Holocaust, some of them Russian and some Lithuanian or Belarusian. Her story of *Obyknovennyi fashism* (Ordinary Fascism, 1965), a documentary that became one of the highest artistic manifestations of the thaw, is remarkable. The film critic Maia Turovskaia and her friend Iurii Khaniutin wrote the script because they were inspired by Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947). Mikhail Romm, a prominent filmmaker who had earlier made films about Vladimir Lenin, directed this extraordinary film. Later,

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Iurii Andropov pushed the film through multiple levels of censorship. Not the first exploration of fascism on the Soviet screen, this film is definitely the most powerful. But even when showing the documentary footage of Auschwitz or talking about the Nazi anthropology of skulls, the film does not use the word *Jews*. It shows universal victims, explains Gershenson; still, its message is unmistakable.

Discovering the Holocaust in Soviet film, Gershenson transforms two large fields of inquiry, Holocaust studies and Soviet film studies. It will be good to teach this book together with Harriet Murav's *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolution Russia* (2011), which explores the Soviet representation of the Holocaust in different cultural genres (poetry, novels, journalism) and also in Yiddish. Many of the films and books that these two studies have recovered remained unscreened, unpublished, banned, or shelved for a very long period of time. They are phantoms, as Gershenson calls them, and many show the Holocaust without Jews and Jews without the Holocaust. However, both studies demonstrate an early, deep confrontation between Soviet culture and the Holocaust and the sophisticated, worldly cultural activity of Soviet Jews.

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Transition in Post-Soviet Art: The Collective Actions Group before and after 1989. By Octavian Eşanu. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013. xvii, 357 pp. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. $60.00, hard bound.

This rigorously researched and articulately written work provides a close reading of the Russian art group Collective Actions ([Kollektivnye deistvia], hereafter KD) through the lens of *transition*, tracing the group's development from its origins in the 1970s through to the post-Soviet period. A laudatory introduction by Boris Groys supports Octavian Eşanu's methods of analysis, noting that KD's reduction of artistic gesture directed the public's attention to everything surrounding that gesture and therefore warrants an examination through the lens of the social.

Eşanu's text has a solid analytical structure, which he lays out in his preface. In the first part of the book, he provides a literature review and examination of key terms. This is not just a traditional literature review, however, and one this section's strengths is that the discussion of significant texts also provides insight into the distinctive nature of writing and materials on contemporary art from eastern Europe and Russia. As the author notes, the literature regarding KD prior to 1989 is "fortuitous and fragmentary" (21), much of it written by the artists themselves or their inner circle and circulated as samizdat. Other texts about the group appeared in the west in a more haphazard fashion. The key terms the author focuses on are essential to understanding the wider context of KD, namely the *romantic* in Moscow romantic conceptualism, of which KD is a part, as well as *emptiness*. Here, Eşanu also advances the discourse by eschewing the tendency to see Moscow conceptualism only in relation to the historical avant-garde, specifically Kazimir Malevich. He proposes other sources for the term and concept of emptiness—namely, in eastern religious traditions, specifically Ch'an Buddhism, which he suggests came to members of KD through western artists' engagement with these concepts; for example, J. D. Salinger, John Cage, and Allan Kaprow are all discussed in a 1977 book that was known to KD artists, *Kultura Vostoka v sovremennom zapadnom mire* (Eastern Culture in the Western World), by Evgeniia Zavadskaia.

The heart of Eşanu's monograph is part 2, in which he examines KD's pre-1989

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