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Envisioning the City: Moscow in the Mind and on Film

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Abstract

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By Haley Jo Laurila

The city in Ilya Khrzhanovsky's film *4* (2005) is bleak, desolate, and often horrifyingly bizarre. The streets are empty; the city is devoid of life and characterized by nightmarish imagery. It is virtually unrecognizable as the iconic capital of Russia, Moscow, and yet the disturbing imagery in Khrzhanovsky's film is part of a trend in the portrayal of the city in post-Soviet cinema. The city becomes a space where the trauma of post-Soviet life manifests most readily. In order to come to an understanding of this bleak and traumatized vision of the city, it is necessary to look to past visions of Moscow. Yet there is no one correct approach to examining the city: the city is constantly changing and therefore difficult to define in any stable or lasting terms. Additionally, the 'real' city is not a collection of buildings, streets, and architecture, and it cannot be located on a map. The 'real' city can be found in the mind, in our imagination, memory, and other mental processes. Such an eclectic approach is justified because of the eclectic nature of the city. In order to come to an even tentative understanding of Moscow, it is necessary to locate the intersections of the mind and the city, and one of the most fruitful mediums through which to accomplish this task is film. This thesis examines the representations of the city in five films: Aleksandr Medvedkin's *New Moscow* (1938), Marlen Khutsiev's *I Am Twenty* (1965), Yuri Norstein's *Tale of Tales* (1979), Timur Bekmambetov's *Night Watch* (2004), and Ilya Khrzhanovsky's *4* (2005). Taken together, these films constitute a history of the city, which is simultaneously a history of trauma.

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Introduction: The Real Moscow

The name 'Moscow' first entered written records in 1147, when Prince Yuri Dolgoruky of the duchy of Vladimir-Suzdal invited an ally to come to a banquet in the small village of Moscow. The village eventually became important enough to be fortified with a kremlin (fortress) on Borivitskaya Hill on the Moskva River. Moscow started off as a remote trading outpost but developed into the principality of Muscovy under the direction of several ambitious princes who were able to retain some measure of autonomy by paying tribute to their Mongol overlords. Muscovy soon became wealthy and began to expand and grow in power. During the fourteenth century, the Muscovites became free of Mongol rule and the wooden kremlin was replaced by a more permanent stone structure. Ivan III (the Great) successfully consolidated internal and external power after unifying ethnic Russian lands and commissioning the building of Moscow's most iconic cathedrals. With the goal of ruthlessly destroying the decentralizing influence of the boyars, Ivan the Terrible (Groznyi) declared himself Tsar of Muscovy in 1547 and set himself to the task of expanding the borders of the young country and consolidating the power of the state. Under Ivan the Terrible, St. Basil's Cathedral, perhaps the most iconic structure in the city, was erected to mark the capture of Kazan from the Mongols; it is a monument to the new Russian empire, and Moscow became an embodiment of Russia's three unifying tenets: the Tsar, Orthodoxy, and the Russian people.

By the early seventeenth century, Russia was the largest state on earth, and Moscow as the maternal city that had given birth to an empire, remained central to national mythology, identity, and self-conception. Even when Peter the Great moved the capital of Russia to the Gulf of Finland in the eighteenth century in reaction to the very

Russianness of the city, Moscow endured in the nation's psyche as a contrast to the unnatural St. Petersburg. As the barometer of Russia's soul, the city was the microcosm of the entire country. A decisive moment for Moscow in Russian history was the War of 1812 and the defeat of Napoleon. After a string of victories across Europe and a very bloody defeat of the Russian army at the Battle of Borodino, Napoleon's Grand Arme'e marched toward the heart of Russia intent on capturing Moscow, which would supposedly force Tsar Aleksandr I to surrender. However, when Napoleon reached the city, he found it deserted and burning. Without hope of defeating Napoleon's superior army, Russian forces led by General Mikhail Kutuzov followed the scorched earth policy as they retreated further into the depths of Russia. Despite the destruction and the impossibility of requisitioning any supplies from the city, Napoleon's army decamped for a month to await the surrender that never materialized. Napoleon's starving army was inadequately prepared for the harsh Russian winter, and eventually, Napoleon was forced to undertake a massive retreat, with a newly aggressive Russian army on its heels.

The defeat of the greatest army in the world was a watershed moment in the history of Moscow. Even though the city was burned, it was essentially saved from being conquered by invading forces, and the Moscow that arose from the ashes was suddenly infused with a new patriotic fervor as James H. Billington explains in his work *Russia in Search of Itself*:

The accompanying upsurge of patriotic feeling among all social classes in Russia sought to find public expression first in the dominant art form of the eighteenth century: monumental architecture. The rebuilding of burnt-out Moscow was itself a monumental undertaking. The flammable wooden buildings of the old city were replaced by neoclassical stone structures, and popular interest grew in the public discussion of an official national monument to commemorate the victory over Napoleon. (7)

National identity coalesced around the image of Moscow as the city came to symbolize the endurance that has characterized Russia's history. The image of Moscow during the War of 1812 was immortalized in Leo Tolstoy's masterpiece *War and Peace*, which tells the story of five aristocratic families on the advent of the nineteenth century. Tolstoy's portrait of Moscow references the city's feminine, maternal qualities. In the novel, Pierre Bezukhov, upon returning to Moscow "felt himself at home in a quiet haven. In Moscow he felt at peace, at home, warm and dirty as in an old dressing gown" (632). After the capital was moved to St. Petersburg, Moscow became a place where aristocrats could relax with friends and family after a strenuous court season. Tolstoy describes the first time Napoleon sets his eyes upon Moscow:

The early light was magical. Moscow, seen from the Poklonny hill, stretched far and wide with her river, her gardens and her churches, and seemed to be living a life of her own, her cupolas twinkling like stars in the sunlight.

The sight of the strange city with its peculiar architecture such as he had never seen before filled Napoleon with the rather envious and uneasy curiosity men feel when they see an alien form of life which ignores their presence. This city appeared to be instinct with life. By those indefinable tokens by which one can infallibly distinguish, even at a distance, a living body from a dead one, Napoleon from the Poklonny hill could detect the throb of life in the town and felt, as it were, the breathing of that great and beautiful being. (1033-34)

While Tolstoy's novel immortalizes the city at a pivotal historical moment, which added a significant layer to the palimpsest that is Moscow, but *War and Peace* also represents an awakening of the "widespread consciousness that Russia had a distinct national identity defined by secular criteria such as ethnicity and language" (Billington 4). Before the nineteenth century, the aristocracy spoke French, the peasants spoke a vernacular Russian that did not have its own written equivalent, and literature was often written in the high Russian laced with elements of Old Church Slavonic. Any sense of identity

extended from “service to the tsar, adherence to the Orthodox Church, and residence on the land” (Billington 4). Written in Russian, the literature of the nineteenth century played an important role in the formation of a Russian national identity, often while invoking the image of Moscow.

The feminine character of Moscow also surfaces in the comparison of the mother city to other Russian cities, mainly to St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg is a stark contrast to Moscow, and in many ways, it is the antithesis of Moscow, but the distinction between the two cities is key to the significance of Moscow in Russian culture. Whereas Moscow seems to have grown from the soil on the banks of the Moskva River, recalling the ‘Damp Mother Earth’ the pagan goddess of early Rus, Petersburg is a most unnatural city, one forcibly erected on the inhospitable swamps of the Gulf of Finland seemingly against all nature. Tens of thousands of people died during the construction of ‘Peter’s City’ and moving the capital north involved also forcing the aristocracy to relocate begrudgingly. Even the names of the two cities reflect the fundamental differences: ‘Moscow’ in Russian is Moskva, a distinctly feminine name connecting it to the river, while the name ‘St. Petersburg’ is masculine and Dutch, reflecting Peter the Great’s fascination with Western Europe, as Solomon Volkov explains in his work *St.*

Petersburg: A Cultural History:

A clearer image of his ideal city, one that had nothing in common with the muddy, dangerous Moscow, where Peter’s enemies could hide in crooked streets, formed during the young tsar’s trips to Europe, particularly to Holland. First Peter started to fantasize about a place like Amsterdam: clean, neat, easily observable and therefore controllable, on the water, with rows of trees reflected in the city’s canals. Then Peter’s vision grew much grander: *His* city would soar like an eagle: it would be a fortress, a port, an enormous wharf, a model for all Russia, and at the same time a shopwindow on the West. (10)

With its baroque and classical architecture, stone buildings, and paved streets, Petersburg quickly overshadowed Moscow and came to represent a break from the backwardness of the ancient city, but the harsh circumstances of its construction cannot be ignored. Petersburg is immortalized in the literary works of Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Andrei Bely as a strange phantasmagoric city of ghosts, psychological distress, and uncanny happenings, while Moscow is the Mother City of Russia, the heart of the country, an image of the city that would remain largely intact until the twentieth century. The opposing identities Moscow and St. Petersburg serve to underscore the importance of Moscow in the Russian psyche and perhaps even points to a possible clue to understanding why the image of Moscow in the twentieth century constituted such a departure from previous conceptions of the city.

Undoubtedly the idea of the city in Russia took on new significance in the twentieth century under the influence of Marxism, the body of doctrine developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. While it is not necessary to outline the tenets of Marxist thought here, it is important to note the role of the city in awakening class-consciousness that would lead to a proletarian revolution. The proletariat, the working class, would become the catalyst for overturning the exploitative socioeconomic hierarchy of capitalism. Since the proletariat is concentrated in industrialized cities, the urban space became the nexus for revolutionary activity. Rapid industrialization in Russia in the late nineteenth century led to overcrowded cities, as peasants migrated to urban centers from the country, and there was not enough adequate housing for the burgeoning population; the newly erected factories contributed to noise and environmental pollution; and the increase in population also led to an increase in crime and the growth of slums. Social

critics and revolutionary intellectuals quickly decried the exploitation of the poorer working classes, and called for a radical resolution. Municipal authorities responded to these problems inadequately, which only increased social and political tension in the cities. Richard Stites, in *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, maintains that the urban conditions at the turn of the century “enlarged the scope of utopian thinking in the last years of the Empire and shaped the utopianism of the Revolution itself” (30). This utopian thinking was intricately linked to Marxism and the city. When the Bolsheviks reinstated Moscow as the capital of the Soviet Union, the city once again figured prominently in the collective imagination as plans for reconstruction envisioned the capital as a new socialist utopia, which would involve the destruction of the symbols of Russia’s pre-revolutionary past. Stites explains that the victory of the Bolsheviks constituted a major experiment in utopian thinking and urban planning:

The Soviet government in the 1920s was the first in modern history to possess such mammoth power to design living quarters for its population; to determine the number, size, and style of buildings; to plot the destiny of the population on the land and within each structure; to decide where to place such structures; to plan future cities and variants of the city; to shape the balance of the population between two and countryside – in other words to proclaim the layout and location of all human services – factories, offices, schools, hospitals, and homes. Town planning in a planning state – which is what Soviet Russia became in 1928 – was not simply a minor occupation; it was in fact “nation planning,” macro-community design – in other words, utopia building on the ground and on the grandest possible scale. (190)

Under the influence of Marxism, which would eventually develop into Leninism and Stalinism, the city adopted a new significance, which is interesting considering that Russia at the advent of revolution was still largely agricultural. So the city, and Moscow in particular, came to embody this vision of a future utopia. The vision of a new utopian

Moscow remained a guiding principle during the Soviet era, directing countless construction projects and debates over the city's future, but it was never fully realized, and in the end, another layer was added over the city. Today, in the post-Soviet era, Moscow is the most important city in Russia. Moscow is Russia's political center, the country's inroads to the global economy and its communications center, its cultural nexus and its most expensive and most populous city. Moscow's centrality is not limited to its tangible and material reality, for its importance can also be traced in the minds of those who live and experience the city and how the city has been envisioned. Today, it is a city in the midst of tremendous change. Often, the changes in a city may not necessarily reflect its physical appearance, but those changes can be traced in the different ways that the city is imagined.

One cannot help but be dazzled by the city of Moscow, the capital city of Russia. Moscow is a cosmopolitan city marked by a variety of architectural styles that marks its unique position between the East and the West, between past and future. Despite having burned to the ground and having undergone momentous political and ideological upheaval several times during its history, the city is possessed of a remarkable resiliency; Moscow is a phoenix, continually rising from its own ashes. In Moscow, old and new come together alluringly. The city is a palimpsest of many layers: "Instability and flux have been two of the most characteristic features of Muscovite development over the centuries: street names have changed, statues have been moved, buildings torn down and rebuilt, sometimes several times over. The net result of all of these changes is that an extraordinary range of different symbols are layered one upon another, turning the very fabric of the city into a palimpsest" (Brookes xix). This means that Moscow is a city of

contradictions and extremes, which makes it difficult to define the city in any stable and lasting terms. When literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin visited the city in 1927 he remarked:

I was all astonishment at the immensity and variety of Moscow, a city so irregular, so uncommon, so extraordinary and so contrasted, never before claimed by attention...Wretched hovels are blended with large palaces; cottages of one story stand next to the most stately mansion...In a word, some parts of this vast city have the appearance of a sequestered desert, other quarters, of a populous town; some of a contemptible village, others of a great capital (qtd in Brookes xix).

In fact, Moscow's defining quality might be that it is so indefinable, and yet that indefinability is precisely what has drawn people to try and come to a conclusion about the elusive and enigmatic city. Moscow captures the imagination, and many of the greatest writers and artists have taken their inspiration from the city, and have immortalized it in their works. In this way, the city is more than just its topography: it is also a product of the minds of the people who live it and experience it. Actually, the 'real' city is not a collection of buildings, streets, and architecture, and it cannot be located on a map. The 'real' city can be found in the mind, in our imagination, memory, and other mental processes, so, in order to come to an even tentative understanding of Moscow, it is necessary to locate the intersections of the mind and the city, and one of the most fruitful mediums through which to accomplish this task is film.

Film is inextricably linked to the city, and in Russia, this is especially evident. Russia was an agricultural society for most of its history, and it was not until the early twentieth century that cities began to expand at a rapid rate and industrialization brought new social and structural changes to the urban space. Urbanization coincided with the

advent of film, which was the ideal medium for documenting the spatial changes of the city:

Formally, the cinema has long had a striking and distinctive ability to capture and express the spatial complexity, diversity, and social dynamism of the city through *mise-en-scene*, location filming, lighting, cinematography, and editing, while thinkers from Walter Benjamin – confronted by the shocking novelties of modernity, mass society, manufacture, and mechanical reproduction – to Jean Baudrillard – mesmerized by the ominous glamour of postmodernity, individualism, consumption, and electronic reproduction – have recognized and observed the curious and telling correlation between the mobility and visual and aural sensations of the cinema. (Shiel 1)

The city was the feature of many early avant-garde documentary films such as Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, which is categorized as a 'city symphony' film, one of several films that capture the uniqueness of a city through images of everyday life organized as a symphony. Vertov's experimental film is a poetic rendering of city life elevates the ordinary movements and rhythm of a city into an art form. In fact, his brother Michael Kaufman, a well-known cinematographer and filmmaker in his own right, made a documentary about the capital city in 1927. While not as sophisticated as his brother's film, his film *Moscow/Moskva* is more concerned with urban space rather than urban life and the daily activities of the people in the city. Kaufman's film focuses on the city's landmarks and architecture and illuminates the elements of the landscape that often go unnoticed in order to emphasize the evolution of the city from pre-revolutionary to Soviet times. These films not only inaugurated new ways of filming the city, but also new ways of envisioning the city, underscoring the relationship between the most important cultural form and the most important form of social organization (Shiel 1).

Many scholars have tackled the subject of Moscow. In *Moscow: A Cultural History*, Caroline Brooke traces the cultural history of Moscow through the writers,

artists and composers for whom the city was a source of inspiration. Kathleen Berton looks at the city's architecture in her book *Moscow: An Architectural History*. Timothy J. Colton's comprehensive study *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* uses a detailed analysis of Soviet political history to try to develop a trajectory for Russia's future. These works are just a few of the studies of the city that attempt to establish a historical arc over time, but others have a more specific approach. Katerina Clark examines the city during the 1930s when Moscow was re-envisioned in opposition to its Orthodox heritage as the Third Rome. And Sir Rodric Braithwaite focuses on a particular year, 1941, using interviews and military history to present a detailed account of the events that took place during that pivotal year of the war in his book *Moscow, 1941: A City and Its People at War*. Because the city inevitably engages a multitude of different theoretical frameworks and disciplines, the sheer number of possible competing interpretations of the city is potentially overwhelming. Yet, it almost seems counterproductive to adopt one strict method of analysis of the city or to even have one definitive goal in mind when undertaking an examination of the city. This study of Moscow takes as its model the work of Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli whose book *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cinema* attempts to identify the common elements guiding the evolution of European cities over the past two decades using postmodernism as a loose framework. They describe their approach to the city:

This book situates itself within this scientific framework, and consequently addresses the 'city' as an ever-shifting text, as the mutating product of a complex series of relations and of representations, one that can be investigated by means of specific discursive regimes. Accordingly, when discussing the cinematic representations of a city we refer not only to the 'real' city, (semi)permanently sited and described by its map, but also, and more interestingly, to the city-text (the product of countless and intermingled instances of representation), and to the lived-city (the

experience of urban life and of its representations that an inhabitant or a visitor may have). Adopting these perspectives, we hope to find ourselves beyond the edges of the map. (2)

Their study utilizes a variety of different approaches to look at a number of varied cities in order to discover how a particular filmic representation of a city diverges or remains true to the reality of that city. In combination with the aspects *mise-en-scene*, they integrate social, political, cultural and architectural history into their examination. Of course, Mazierska and Rascaroli acknowledge that their conclusions about the city are partial since it is virtually impossible to develop a comprehensive portrait of a city with only a few films, but each film in their study provides “insights on life in the city in which they are set, on the way in which the city is perceived and represented by its inhabitants and/or by visitors, immigrants and external observers” (12).

The first chapter is an examination of Aleksandr Medvedkin’s *New Moscow* (1938), a film that takes as its background the reconstruction of Moscow under Stalin. When the Bolsheviks came to power and made Moscow their capital, they realized that the city was woefully inadequate as their socialist utopia. In the film, amateur designer Alyosha constructs a ‘living model’ of Moscow and travels to the capital in order to present it at an architectural exhibition. However, when he does actually present his model, which plays as a film projection, the film runs backwards, causing the audience to laugh. This one moment highlights the comedy of the city, which features buildings that move down the street with the people still in them. In this chapter, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Henri Bergson illuminate the comedic elements that subvert the image of Stalin’s reconstructed Moscow. Overall, Medvedkin’s Moscow figures as a dream because comic logic is that of dream logic. The second chapter looks at Marlen

Khutsiev's *I Am Twenty* (1965), a film that presents the city as a poem. The vast majority of the film's action takes place on the streets of Moscow, as Sergei, a young soldier, and his friends walk through the city and contemplate the direction of their lives. Walking through the city engages the concept of the flaneur, the casual city stroller who absorbs the city and captures it in his art. Khutsiev the filmmaker is the flaneur and he captures the city at a crossroads during the cultural awakening of the Thaw period. Walking through the streets is a way of carving out one's own space in a city that previously was designated as the space of the party and the collective.

The third chapter is about Yuri Norstein's short animated film *Tale of Tales* (1980), in which Moscow does not figure prominently. The film is actually marked by the absence of the city, and in particular the suburb of Maryina Roshcha, Norstein's childhood home, which was torn down. The memories of his childhood indirectly recall a part of the city that has been lost, but recaptured in the film's images, once memory and image are reconciled in Henri Bergson's philosophy of memory. The fourth chapter explores the supernatural world of Timur Bekmambetov's *Night Watch* (2004), the first Hollywood-style Russian blockbuster. The city in this film is fantasy and figures a post-apocalyptic space in which the fears and anxieties of the post-Soviet condition are given life in the war between the Light and Dark Others that threatens to destroy the world. And whereas *Night Watch* constructs a space for talking about the complexities of post-Soviet life in the city and offers the possibility that these fears, anxieties, and the trauma of the Soviet Union's collapse will be overcome, Ilya Khrzhanovsky's film *4* (2005), which makes up the focus of the conclusion, totally closes off that space and paints a bleak, desolate portrait of Moscow. Moscow is a void, and though it is extreme,

Khrzhanovsky's film still draws on a common theme of many post-Soviet films. It is this vision of Moscow that provided the catalyst for the entire study of the city: in attempting to discover why the post-Soviet city is so bleak in film, it is necessary to look back at previous visions of the city, because the term 'post-Soviet' inevitably references the city's past life and how the city has been envisioned throughout a part of its history on film.

Each film correlates to a particular period of the Soviet history, Stalinism, the Thaw, Stagnation, and finally the post-Soviet era. The noticeable absence might be a portrait of the city during the Great Patriotic War. Though several films of the Thaw period take the city at war as its backdrop, notably Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes are Flying* (1957) and Grigori Chukrai's *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959), they are not war films since they are primarily concerned with humanizing and demythologizing the war. Due to the threat of bombs and invasion by Germany, much of Moscow's central activities and institutions, including the film industry, relocated to Central Asia, primarily to Tashkent or Almaty, so that films made during the war about Moscow were not actually filmed in Moscow. The city is conspicuous in its absence, which speaks to the trauma suffered by an entire nation, especially those who were forcibly evacuated while the fate of the city was uncertain. The Battle of Moscow was the greatest battle of the war, engaging over seven million men and leading to nearly a million Soviet casualties. However, Moscow lived on in the minds of its citizens and after the war, its image was strengthened by its new patriotic associations.

In 1935, American journalist and writer Eugene Lyons remarked upon the impossibility of condensing the richness and vitality of Moscow in the pages of a book:

I still confront its heaped-up beauty and tawdriness with a sense of fresh surprise. The fifteenth century and the twentieth are inextricably mixed and there is a foretaste of the twenty-first as well. Moscow is not merely a sight; it is a challenge to the intellect and to the senses. No matter how much you study it you cannot erase the margin of bafflement. Men may try to capture New York in a book, as Dos Passos has done so well in *Manhattan Transfer* or as so many have done with Paris. But who will be foolhardy enough to try to compress this Moscow between the covers of a book? (qtd. in Colton 1)

Indeed, painting complete portrait of Moscow with all of its nuances is a difficult task.

The city is constantly changing and the city means different things at different times. One interpretation of the city at a particular historical moment does not preclude another opposing interpretation. Additionally, the city has a different meaning depending on who is experiencing it. Moscow in film is ideally the subject of an entire book with multiple volumes, so in order to conduct this particular study of the city in film, it was necessary to limit the number of films used. Choosing which films to use was a difficult decision considering the variety of interesting and significant films that use Moscow as their backdrop. Every film about Moscow has something to say about the city at a particular historically, culturally, or personally significant moment. This study takes into account the historical reality of the film's time period and any relevant elements of culture and politics that influenced a filmmaker's conception of the city. Ultimately this is an eclectic examination of the city using a variety of unconventional approaches and perspectives, because ultimately the city is an eclectic entity. Each film is correlated with a different mental process in order to underscore the relationship between the transitory and ethereal aspects of both the mind and the city.

Examining the city on film draws attention to the ways in which our image of the city is constructed. Cities and films are constructed spaces; they find their link in the

mind. The possibilities of the film medium offer virtually limitless potential for representing the city and unleashing particular and nuanced mental visions of the city. The films in this study cover a wide range of those possibilities of the medium, including animation and digital effects. For instance, Moscow becomes a dynamic, living entity in Medvedkin's *New Moscow* when the streets begin to move on their own, an effect that would not have been possible if not for film and its ability to manipulate multiple images simultaneously. The mobile camera and documentary aesthetic of *I Am Twenty* imbue the city with an almost palpable sense of the eternal and of historical continuity. Also, the animation in *Tale of Tales* infuses Yuri Norstein's memories of his childhood in a forgotten suburb of Moscow with a remarkable emotional resonance that might not have been possible if it were filmed as a live-action reenactment of past events. Using cut out animation allowed Norstein to realize an intensely personal vision of Moscow. Additionally, the fantastical world of *Night Watch* would have remained in the imagination if not for the computer-generated imagery that brought the supernatural world of the Others to life. Finally, the sustained bleakness of Moscow in Khrzhanovsky's *4* owes much of its unsettling duration to the use of digital cameras. Each film harnesses the potential of the medium, in all its varied forms, to draw out certain elements of mise-en-scene of the city to further their specific artistic intentions.

Although this study does not go into a large amount of detail about sound, it is nevertheless, an element that cannot be completely ignored. The city is constructed visually in images, but the city is also an aural space. Regardless of whether the sounds of the city are working in tandem with the image or against the image, the ways in which sound is manipulated contribute to potential readings of the city. While the analysis of

Medvedkin's *Moscow* focuses on the manipulation of the very image of the city, the sound in *New Moscow* is also worth nothing. Throughout much of the film, Alyosha and his friends sing songs in praise of Stalin and his utopian vision of the city, a fact that could be read as counteracting the subversive elements in the image, but considering the comedic nature of the film, the enthusiastic glorification might actually amplify the satirical aspects of Medvedkin's vision. In *I am Twenty*, the soundscape only reminds us that despite the film's neorealist aesthetic, it is still highly manipulated space. Khutsiev seems to be documenting life on the streets as it occurs, but he makes definite choices about which sounds accompany the images. The mix of voice-over poetry readings, internal dialogue, and conversations between the characters are often competing for prominence, which suggests a very artistically stylized portrait of Moscow. In *Tale of Tales*, the music makes up the film's soundscape; in particular, the wartime waltz 'Weary Sun' conjures up the feeling of wartime Moscow. The soundscape in *Night Watch* is worth nothing because of its loud, pulsating, high-energy heavy metal soundtrack with its industrial edginess that adds another layer of grunginess to the dark city. In *4*, the sound is hauntingly nightmarish; the desolate landscape is filled with mechanical noise that only seems to emphasize the emptiness of the city.

The films in this study are ordered chronologically in order to bring out a narrative of the city as imagined on film and eventually draw some tentative conclusions about post-Soviet Moscow. As disconnected as these films might initially appear to be, several threads weave them together. One way of tracking the changes of the city in film is to look at the green spaces of the city. Green space refers to the not-built land of the city, including the parks, gardens and open leisure spaces and the undeveloped land both

within and on the outskirts of the city. These spaces, according to Peter Clark and Jussi Jauhianen in the introduction of *The European City and Green Space: London, Stockholm, Helsinki and St. Petersburg, 1850-2000*, are imbued with political and ideological significance. The compilation of articles in the abovementioned work traces the changing meaning of green space in four European cities over a large historical period with the intention of teasing out not only the political and ideological processes that shape the development and use of green space, but also the ways in which ordinary people experience the green spaces of their cities:

The reception and implementation of new ideas and policies on green space is often the outcome of sustained and even fractious dialogue between city politicians, planning professionals and administrators, private developers, environmental organisations and engaged local householders...At the same time, the wider debate about green space, its uses and meaning, is not limited to the political and civil arena. Of vital importance is the wider public sphere, how ordinary local people understand and respond to green space, how they perceive and use it. Here we are not dealing with the relatively closed world of experts and policy-makers, lobby groups and administrators, but with the vast urban majority of citizen consumers. What do they make of it all? (4)

The debate over urban green space has antecedents in the 1600s, but it was in the nineteenth century that the green space really began to figure prominently in discourses of urban planning. In the modern city of the nineteenth century, the population was burgeoning, the landscape was industrializing, increasing pollution was altering living conditions, and the hustle of daily life was often disorienting, natural, open green space was highly valuable and constantly in danger of being sacrificed for new industrial and housing projects. In the twentieth century, city planners and municipal authorities shaped urban green space with the goal of improving the functioning of the city. And by the late twentieth century, issues of urban green space were reoriented through environmental

concerns, issues of sustainability, and the participation of local ordinary citizens in the creation and preservation of green space. The interplay of green space with built urban space inevitably provides commentary on the quality of the urban environment; the amount of green space in a city, its location, who owns it, whether it is natural or planned, and its ultimate purpose are all factors that indicate both the external and internal forces at work in shaping the experience of the city.

Similarly, representations of green space in films about Moscow provide additional commentary on the nature of the city at a particular moment in time. The films of this current study chart an interesting trajectory of the transformation in the green spaces of Moscow through changes that not only correlate to particular political and ideological realities, but also reflect particular concerns about the experience of the city. It may not be immediately obvious to closely scrutinize images of green space for clues about Moscow, especially since in several of the films, green space is not featured prominently. In *New Moscow*, the green spaces are located in Alyosha's living model, in the meticulously manicured gardens and the avenues accented with foliage. When the film projector malfunctions and the "living model" plays backwards, we are offered a glimpse of the grandiose reconstructed city reverting to its green origins as the buildings are gradually replaced by an image of the open countryside. And even though Alyosha intended for his model to show the progress that would accompany the reconstruction, as the film plays backward, we are reminded, if only briefly, of the loss of that green space. Through reconstruction, what was once a natural, bright, and open landscape is now tame, cut off from its past, and brought under the control of the Soviet state. The green spaces of nature succumb to the rational principles of urban planning. The film's primary

green space holds the carnival; even as monuments of Soviet heroes loom over the crowd, they are largely pushed to the margins of the festivities. The carnival also points to Alyosha's Siberian village, a place filled with laughter, singing, and a sense of community. The jovial atmosphere in the green space of the village is contrasts to the chaotic city where the streets shift on their own. Alyosha's decision to return to that space rather than remain in the city is interesting, considering that the hero in Soviet narratives journey from the periphery to the center and do not return to the village.

In *I Am Twenty* the issue is more complex, since the city's green space is not foregrounded. In fact, on first impression, actual green space does not seem to play a major role in Khutsiev's conception of Moscow. However, on closer examination, green space is fused with the built space of the city. The film's cinematography actually transforms the entire city into a kind of open green space, one not necessarily located in any abundance of foliage or wide expanses of undeveloped land, but rather found in the images of melting snow, of children playing, and through the very act of walking through the city streets, which turns the city into a space of leisure. When Sergei walks through the city at night, the mist and twilight of the sleeping city, captured in wide shots of the streets, bring out a side of the city that lies dormant during the day in the hustle of daily life. The green spaces of Khutsiev's Moscow recall earlier utopian visions of a modern city in which the green spaces contribute to the health of the city, but they are also spaces occupied by the city's youth. In *I Am Twenty*, the city is filled with youth dancing in the streets to jazz music, or celebrating graduation. These spaces are contrasted with the spaces of work and school as leisure spaces, individualized spaces outside of official life. These spaces are intricately tied to youth and consequently, the hope for the future, a

theme that has narrative significance as Sergei contemplates the direction of his life. It is important to note that while the film portrays a peaceful Moscow – Sergei has even returned home from the army – *I Am Twenty* was actually filmed and released in the shadow of the Cuban Missile Crisis and a heightening of Cold War tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. In light of its historical context, under the constant threat of impending war with the United States, the uncertainty about the future expressed by Sergei and his friends becomes all the more portentous and ominous. Khutsiev’s portrayal of the city, with its implicit criticism of the political and cultural reality of the time, was met with condemnation by Khrushchev, and the script’s coauthor Gennadi Shpalikov, “one of the most gifted Soviet scriptwriters,” committed suicide a decade later “when he saw no more hope for independent creative work” (Liehm 216). So, on another level, the green spaces of the city function as a kind of space for individual creative expression.

Tale of Tales is replete with images of nature; Norstein’s Moscow consists almost entirely of open, undeveloped, natural green space. This vision of the city is associated with Norstein’s childhood and imagination in a suburb on the outskirts of the city. Whether it is in the changing leaves of the tree in front of Norstein’s childhood home, the bright snow of the park in the contemporary winter scene, the idyllic, sepia-toned landscape of the poet’s world, or the forest of the little grey wolf, Moscow’s green space is found in abundance. However, what makes Norstein’s film so emotionally profound is the fact that these green spaces of Moscow no longer exist; they were demolished in the 1970s and replaced by uniform grey apartment buildings. Even though the images in the film are at times are heartwarming and infused with a palpable sense of hope for the

future, they are quite delicate and fragile. The almost painterly aesthetic of the images remind us that this part of Moscow does not have a material, tangible counterpart in the real world. The lonely little grey wolf, an abandoned picnic, and the mournful strains of the wartime waltz imbue the film with a sense of loss so that *Tale of Tales* becomes an elegy for an all but forgotten part of Moscow. It is in *Night Watch* that the loss of green space in *Tale of Tales* is fully realized. The film's portrait of Moscow is completely devoid of green space. The post-apocalyptic world is imagined in the underground spaces of the metro, in abandoned buildings, and in the decaying Soviet-era apartment buildings. In the film, it is not just the imminent threat of destruction caused by the war between supernatural Others that turns Moscow into a nightmarish space, but the complete lack of green space to provide any refuge from the nightmare that is the post-Soviet city. It is also significant that the hope for the end of the war is a young boy names Yegor, whose choice of Light or Dark will potentially prevent the total destruction of the world. When he chooses to join the Dark Others, he is initiating the final apocalypse.

And in Khrzhanovsky's *4*, the green space is located on the outskirts of the city, but these green spaces either tainted by industrial decay or just as bleak as the city itself. As in *Night Watch*, the city proper is devoid of green space; all we encounter of the city are its dark corners and empty streets devoid of life; the lack of natural sounds in the aural space of the city only confirms this grim reality. We spend a considerable portion of the film in these supposed undeveloped green spaces when we follow Marina on her journey to the village where her sister has recently died. The barren post-industrial landscape she must traverse in order to reach the village has been abandoned: she does not come across another human being. The village is shocking by comparison: it is

surrounded by trees, full of greenery and practically untouched by man. For the first time in the film, we are actually confronted with a semblance of community as the old women of the village gather together to mourn the loss of Marina's sister Zoya. However, this green space is even more nightmarish than the empty center of the city. The grotesque old women of the village survive by selling dolls fashioned out of chewed up bread. They spend their days molding the masticated bread into faces for the dolls and their nights drinking themselves into oblivion. Seeing these women drunk, tearing at the carcass of a dead pig, and crying is almost too difficult to watch, especially considering the duration of these scenes. Adding to the desolation is the fact that in this village, there are no children: Marina and her sisters left the village for the city, Zoya chokes on a piece of bread and dies, and her boyfriend, the final young person in the village, commits suicide. Any hope for the future has been destroyed. In *4*, not even the green space of the village offers us any relief from the bleakness of post-Soviet Moscow; in fact, with the breakdown of the boundaries of center and periphery, the void of Moscow seems to have poisoned the remaining green spaces surrounding the city.

The village that makes up the green space of *4* is a space of trauma, and its portrayal illuminates another unifying thread that links all of the films in this current study. When taken together, all of these films of Moscow tell a history of trauma, one that is intricately bound up in representation of Moscow's green spaces. The trauma is not often foregrounded to the same degree as it is in *4*, but it can be found in the margins of these films as displaced trauma. The word 'trauma' describes an event outside of normal human experience, one that disrupts a person's physical or mental functioning and overwhelms a person's ability to cope. Cathy Caruth's edited volume *Trauma:*

Explorations in Memory offers many interpretations of the meaning of trauma and how it is understood in the contemporary world. When a person experiences trauma, according to a premise of trauma theory, he experiences it belatedly, which creates a gap between experience and the actual event. Trauma exists as a person's "repeated possession" of the event, but one that cannot be situated within a person's prior knowledge and history. The incomprehensibility of trauma is precisely what lends the event its impact. Trauma simultaneously "demands our awareness, and yet denies our usual modes of access to it" (151). Since trauma is not experienced and cannot be fully perceived as it occurs, the experience of trauma is stored in the unconscious only to reveal itself outside the bounds of normal memory, often manifesting in unconventional and unexpected ways. The loss of green space in *New Moscow* and *Tale of Tales*, or the untenable legacy for the future inherited by the youth in *I Am Twenty* and *Night Watch*, we can locate evidence of trauma in the representations of Moscow on film, and in doing so, it becomes clear that the trauma of the post-Soviet vision of Moscow in Khrzhanovsky's *4* does not constitute a complete rupture from earlier visions of Moscow, but is the culmination of an entire history of trauma surrounding the city.

The Comedy of Dreams: Aleksandr Medvedkin's *New Moscow*

Until the early twentieth century, Moscow was a city largely made up of wooden structures with seven elaborate cathedrals dominating the skyline, their onion domes so iconic and recognizably Russian. Moscow's eclectic architecture bespeaks of its history as an imperial capital and the mother city of Russia. In 1712 Peter the Great moved the capital to St. Petersburg but after nearly two hundred years, the Bolsheviks reinstated Moscow as the capital of the Soviet Union in 1921. However, the city hardly looked like the capital of the future socialist utopia envisioned by Soviet party leaders. In comparison to other European cities, it was rather archaic, though not without its own charm. As a constantly rewritten palimpsest, the city has been likened to a phoenix continually rising from its ashes, its many architectural layers invoking its colorful history; but for the Bolsheviks, it invoked a past that they urgently wanted to cut ties with. If the city were to become the socialist mecca, a center for industry and the embodiment of efficient urban planning, then it would have to look like one. Plans for the city's transformation were proposed early on, but when Stalin came to power in 1929, discussion commenced on how to transform tsarist Moscow into Soviet Moscow. A committee headed by Stalin's main henchman Lazar Kaganovich came up with a plan in 1935: the "Master Plan for the Reconstruction of the City of Moscow" would include nearly doubling the size of the city, adding new housing developments for the burgeoning population, constructing highways and parks, widening avenues, erecting monuments to the state, and carving out a metro system beneath the city. The crowning achievement of the reconstructed Moscow would be the Palace of Soviets, which would be built along the Moskva River on the site of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, the tallest Orthodox Church in the world,

but also a “threat to urban hygiene,’ a place where the infectious diseases of the old world threatened the health of the new state” (Boym 103). The demolition of the cathedral in 1931 symbolically harkened the beginning of a new era for Moscow.

The reconstruction of Moscow is the core of Aleksandr Medvedkin’s 1938 comedy *New Moscow (Novaia Moskva)*. The film tells the story of budding designer Alyosha, who lives in a small Siberian village, where Muscovite engineers are transforming a swamp into a hydroelectric power station. Captivated by the workers tales of the great capital, Alyosha yearns to travel to Moscow in order to present his own living model of the city, which will allow the world to see what the capital will look like in the future as imagined in Stalin’s great plans for reconstruction. In Alyosha’s model, Byzantine cathedrals are torn down to make way for neo-Renaissance and classical high-rise buildings flanked by streamlined and uncluttered boulevards, and the centerpiece, of course, the Palace of Soviets complete with a 100-meter high statue of Lenin. Accompanied by his grandmother, Alyosha makes his way to the chaotic city where the buildings are literally being moved around with the city’s inhabitants still in them. The painter Fedya repeatedly attempts to capture Moscow on canvas, but he is unable to finish his painting because the cityscape is continually changing as buildings implode all around him. Eventually, Alyosha has the opportunity to present his model on film at an exhibition. However, the projector malfunctions and plays his film backwards so that the audience sees the grand buildings of the future Moscow being replaced with the former cathedrals. The audience is highly amused and laughs raucously. Although Alyosha is able to fix the projection, Moscow’s grand reconstruction has already been made ridiculous and impossibly ostentatious. This moment is particularly interesting because it

underscores the role that comedy plays in subverting the image of Moscow and rendering it into a space of unreality.

In many ways, *New Moscow* recalls one of the most significant early films about Moscow, Abram Room's *Bed and Sofa* (1927), also known as *Third Meshchanskaia Street/Tretya Meschanskaia* or *Menage 'a Trois*. The film is actually a departure from contemporary Soviet films that glorified the struggle of the masses in that it focuses on only three main protagonists: Liuda (Liudmilla Semyonova), her husband Kolia (Nikolai Batalov) and his friend and their new flatmate Volodia (Vladimir Fogel). The film's narrative revolves around a love-triangle that primarily develops within the small space of a one-room flat, but the city is captured through several stunning aerial views of the city. Julian Graffy points out that *Bed and Sofa* set a precedent for filming the city:

The cameraman, Grigori Giber, recalls that they started shooting exteriors very early on the morning of 23 August 1926, filming from a car, in the street, from the tops of the Lenin Institute and the Bolshoi Theatre. They even filmed on Third Meshchanskaia Street, the street in which the film was set, but the crowds were so great that they were forced to film at 3 a.m. Sergei Iutkevitch, also involved in the filming of the street scenes, described Moscow itself, in a contemporary report, as a 'fantastic stage set' [fantasticheskaia dekoratsiia]. *Bed and Sofa* was the first Soviet film to make such extensive use of Moscow exteriors, and the outdoor scenes that punctuate the film, along with its regular specific references to time, gave the contemporary viewer an unprecedented sense that this story as unfolding in a recognizable world, observed with almost documentary precision. As Room later recalled, 'I wanted the film shot in long sequences: I began to like long extracts of life', adding that he wanted the viewer to watch the film 'not on a bicycle but on foot' (15).

Room's film is considered a landmark partly for its naturalism in capturing the whirlwind atmosphere 1920s Moscow, where living space in the city was at a premium and the country was undergoing rapid transformation under the new Soviet regime. When Volodia comes to stay with Liuda and Kolia, his presence soon disrupts the young

couple's daily life. While her husband is at work, Liuda begins to have an affair with Volodia; Kolia is furious when he finds out, but eventually, the three of them settle into a cozy routine. At one point, the two men become good friends to the point of neglecting Liuda, who is overwhelmed by her domestic duties; however, they are completely unprepared when she announces that she is pregnant. Their only suggestion is that she get an abortion, which leads Liuda to leave the city by herself.

The complicated living situation and Liuda's eventual decision to set out on her own. Emma Widdis suggests that the representation of the city in *Bed and Sofa* provides an alternative vision of the city:

This final "escape" from the confines of petty domesticity into an implicitly Soviet freedom, however, is rendered more complex than similar narrative of the path to consciousness in later films of the 1930s by the cinematic refusal to offer a stable public space within the city. The end of the film shows Liudmila *leaving* Moscow, implicitly for a more authentic life elsewhere. The status of the capital city in this film is complex. As in so many other films of the period, it is represented as a series of partial views, fragmented cityscapes, in which the dynamism of urban life predominates over any monumental, ideological stability. (*Visions of a New Land* 90)

While many films focused on the revolutionary struggle of the urban masses or worked to inculcate ideology onto the city space, *Bed and Sofa* presents a realistic portrayal of life in Moscow, one that undermines 'official' narratives of city life, which often involved people participating enthusiastically in the construction of socialism. When Liuda chooses to leave the city, she is effectively abandoning Soviet life for the country. Underneath the comedy of the film is a criticism of the new Soviet Moscow as a place where one cannot find happiness. The worker-heroes of the film are supposed to be building this new Soviet way of life, but really they are amoral and materialistic. Room's portrayal of Moscow is made up of the city's most private spaces. The small flat is

contrasted with grand views of the city streets, which makes life in the flat incredibly confining, but by focusing on this private space, he foregrounds the corrupting influences of the big city and its bourgeois orientation: unsurprisingly, the film was met with criticism for its ideologically unsound portrayal of life in the city.

Medvedkin's *New Moscow* was banned, and it is unclear exactly why, though supposedly for "weak dramaturgy and an excess of directorial fantasy" (Widdis 180). The most likely reason seems to be that the film was not in line with party ideology since *New Moscow* fails to adequately glorify the reconstruction of the capital as was demanded by the tenets of socialist realism, the theory that all forms of art and architecture should promote socialist ideals and show reality as it will be rather than how it was in actuality. The film does show a reconstructed Moscow in all its imagined glory once the film is correctly projected, but that moment is subverted by the comedic malfunction of the projector. Comedy presented a particular challenge for Soviet filmmakers because of its unserious and potentially subversive nature. Cinema, the most important of all the arts, according to Lenin, came under the control of Soviet state in 1930, and consequently, there was more supervision as to whether a film was ideologically correct. But films must also be able to attract Soviet audiences, who were, up until 1928, drawn to imported Western films, which were purely entertaining but ideologically harmful. Soviet audiences were enamored with foreign comedies, and the Soviet film industry needed their own version of ideologically correct comedy that would compete with the imported films: "Above all, socialist comedy could not be 'purposeless', could not echo the so-called careless decadence of the American genre. With the serious task of building Utopia on their hands, Soviet workers would have little time for 'mere' entertainment" (Widdis

14). Medvedkin set himself to the task of determining the role of comedy in Soviet film, but despite his political commitment to socialism, many of Medvedkin's films from the 1930s including his previous comedy *Happiness* (*Schastye*, 1934) were banned outright. Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Soviet People's Commissar of Enlightenment, defended filmmakers who utilized satire in a 1931 speech directed to the Moscow branch of the AARK, the Association of Workers of Revolutionary Cinematography, explaining: "The artist sees deformities and vices that are in reality concealed and exaggerates them, bringing them to the fore and displaying the essence of things in such a way that he depicts them unrealistically" (quoted in Taylor 456). However, it seems that Medvedkin's particular brand of satire did not satisfy the ideological function required by the shrinking space for artistic expression of the mid-1930s.

New Moscow fell victim to an unfortunate fate, but on initial viewing the film might not seem deserving of the immediate and swift condemnation that it received by Soviet cultural authorities. Certainly, the malfunctioning of Alyosha's film was likely to have been considered problematic, but it constitutes a brief, fleeting moment of the film that is ultimately concluded with the grand vision of Stalin's Moscow in tact. And yet, upon closer examination, throughout the film, the representation of Moscow as the future socialist utopia is subverted in many ways. Emma Widdis in her book *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* explains that throughout *New Moscow* the primary characteristic of the city is chaos, which undermines the significance placed on the grandiose public spaces of the envisaged capital:

Three Moscow spaces figure: the "central" area, the metro, and the space of the first All-Union Agricultural Exhibition. All are transformed into sites of chaos, disorientation, and adventure. The space of the exhibition in particular fulfills a curious function. Much of the film takes place on

“Carnival Night,” a title emblazoned by lights (electrical power) above the city skyline... Within the film’s narrative, the exhibition space functions as a classical liminal site of carnival, in which masks and costumes permit transgression and shifting identity... Chaos reigns. We are reminded of Mikhail Bakhtin’s conception of carnival (in literary genres) as a transgressive and subversive site of pleasure, where “centrifugal” forces are dominant. For Medvedkin, the exhibition space offered an alternative vision of space from that presented by the monumental public sphere of central Moscow. (180)

The Bakhtinian carnival in *New Moscow* immediately introduces a disruptive element into Medvedkin’s representation of the city. Mikhail Bakhtin was an eminent philosopher and literary critic whose work spans a multitude of disciplines and theoretical traditions. Despite the prolific nature of his writings, he remained a very marginal figure and few of his works were published during his lifetime, and it was not until he was rediscovered in the 1960s, that he became well known for his contributions to literary theory. His concept of carnival deserves more explanation, since it will prove quite relevant to an analysis of *New Moscow*’s subversive undertone, which will contribute to the transformation of Medvedkin’s Moscow into a dream space.

Bakhtin’s concept of carnival originates in his study of French Renaissance writer Francois Rabelais, whose work was considered vulgar and grotesque and, consequently, and misunderstood and dismissed by scholars. Bakhtin’s reading of Rabelais’ work, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, however, examined folk culture as an unofficial culture, one that evoked an alternative to the dominant social order. Carnival is a time when the social order is temporally inverted signaling a fundamental change in the relationship between people, as hierarchical boundaries disintegrate:

The laws, prohibitions, and restriction that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it – that is,

everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All *distance* between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people*. (Bakhtin, *Cultural Studies Reader* 251)

Carnival is a time when the concealed aspects of human nature expose themselves, and “eccentric” behavior is permitted. This behavior often manifests in lewd and obscene behavior and language, the profanation of the sacred, and the ritual crowning/decrowning of a festival king. The shifts that characterize the carnival are not permanent or absolute, but are meant to embody the cycle of death and renewal, not in its abstraction, but in “a living sense of the world, expressed in the concretely sensuous forms (either experienced or play-acted) of the ritual act” (*Cultural Studies Reader* 252). Bakhtin emphasizes that the carnival is not a performance, because everyone participates in it, but it is not the real world, either; rather, it is “life turned inside out, the reverse side of life” (*Cultural Studies Reader* 251). The carnivals of today hardly resemble the debauched environment of a Renaissance folk carnival, and we cannot ignore the historical dimension of Bakhtin’s argument, but the carnivalesque persists and is preserved in certain literary language and genres, artistic imagery, and theatrical performances, as well as other aspects of culture. Bakhtin’s concept of carnival can be used to interrogate hegemonic cultural and social mechanisms in order to reveal areas of instability that might allow for alternative readings of culture and society: “The carnival offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things” (Bakhtin, *Problems of...* 34).

Bakhtin’s theories are particularly relevant to Medvedkin’s film, not only because a carnival figures prominently in *New Moscow*, but also because Bakhtin was writing during the early decades of the Soviet era and not only witnessed first hand the radical

changes that overtook Russia after 1917, but also experienced imprisonment and exile for his religious activities. It is not surprising then, that beneath his writing about carnival is a veiled criticism of the cultural situation in the Soviet Union, a fact that only facilitates the larger discussion of the role of carnival in Medvedkin's film. The carnivalesque in New Moscow is not limited to the carnival scene in the film, but is reflected in all elements of the film's representation of Moscow as a frenetic, chaotic, disorienting city. "Carnival Night" is a grand spectacle: with a lit-up Moscow in the background, people dressed in elaborate costumes dance beneath grandiose statues commemorating the Soviet Union, and Alyosha sings a song about wonderful Moscow and performs a traditional folk dance for the crowd. Zoya tries to discern between her two suitors, both dressed as white bears, and tricks Fedya into thinking that she is another girl in an attempt to distract him while she steals away with Alyosha. And Alyosha's grandmother seduces a young man when she puts on the mask of a beautiful woman. Gaiety and joviality pervade the carnival as everyday propriety is suspended and replaced by pleasure. But carnival night constitutes only a momentary respite from the tireless days and nights that Alyosha spends working on his living model of the city, except that the spirit of the carnival is preserved in the comedic elements that structure the entire film.

The above discussion of Bakhtin's carnival is not intended to function as a strict tool for analysis of Medvedkin's *New Moscow*, merely to suggest that the carnival in the film introduces an element that allows for the reading of the film's representation of Moscow as subversive. We cannot forget the film's comedy, which certainly plays a role in carnival rituals, and carnivalesque acts are frequently humorous and marked by laughter. For Bakhtin, laughter is a liberating force, one that familiarizes the world to us,

and individualizes us within that world. The power of laughter extends from its ability to change our relationship to the object to which it is directed; as we laugh and come into close contact with an object, we “dismember it, lay it bare and expose it” and consequently lose our fear of that object: “Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically” (*Dialogic* 23). Laughter demolishes and frees us from the boundaries and hierarchies that order and close off our lives; it signals death and rebirth as we are reborn with a new world outlook: “Carnivalistic laughter likewise is directed toward something higher – toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. Laughter embraces both poles of change, it deals with the very process of change, with crisis itself. Combined in the act of carnival laughter are death and rebirth, negation (a smirk) and affirmation (rejoicing laughter)” (*Problems of...* 127). Once laughter familiarizes an object, and exposes the world to us, it unleashes our creativity, for once we come to know that object, we can observe and manipulate it:

Laughter is a specific aesthetic relationship to reality, but not one that can be translated into logical language; that is, it is a specific means for artistically visualizing and comprehending reality and, consequently, a specific means for structuring an artistic image, plot, or genre. Enormous creative, and therefore genre-shaping, power was possessed by ambivalent carnivalistic laughter. (*Problems of...* 164)

Therefore, laughter functions as a means of dissolving the dynamics of power that structure our life and relationship to reality. Once we can laugh at a thing, then we are free to reimagine our proximity to that thing. In *New Moscow*, the image of the reconstructed city is all-powerful in its ability to captivate and structure the vision of the future, and to laugh at it is to destroy its power as an ideal. Laughter for Bakhtin also originates in folk culture, which Alyosha introduces that element of the folk into Moscow

because of his roots in a Siberian village where laughter and joking characterize the relationships of the people.

Alyosha and the people in the village are boisterous and marked by their propensity for laughing, singing, and dancing.

But laughter, and more generally, the comedic elements of *New Moscow* are also suggestive of dreams and transform the reconstructed Moscow of the film into a dream space. This is not to say that it was Medvedkin's conscious intention to represent Moscow as a space of dreams, but that interpreting the film through the framework of a dream opens up new avenues for understanding the film's subversive nature. French philosopher Henri Bergson suggests that the comedic follows dream logic. Now one might first wonder what a French philosopher writing at the turn of the nineteenth century might possibly have to say about Moscow, but Bergson was a very influential thinker in early twentieth century Russia. Bergson is an interesting figure; his emphasis on subjective experience over rationalism's reliance on reason to understand the world appealed to intellectuals during a time when scholars and scientists were becoming increasingly interested in new theories of consciousness and the acquisition of knowledge. By 1914, his works had been translated into Russian and were well received among intellectuals, and Bakhtin was among the young Russian thinkers who were influenced by Bergson, and many of his concepts can be traced to their Bergsonian roots, though perhaps Bakhtin's work has more serious political implications. Certainly, his notions of laughter share many similarities with Bergson's conception of the comic.

For Bergson, the comic is alive and must be respected as such, which is why it must not be imprisoned within the boundaries of a strict definition. We cannot contain the

comic, for it follows its own logic and “will be seen to achieve the strangest metamorphoses”, which we can only observe and live:

For the comic spirit has a logic of its own, even in its wildest eccentricities. It has a method in its madness. It dreams, I admit, but it conjures up in its dreams visions that are at once accepted and understood by the whole of a social group. Can it then fail to throw light for us on the way that human imagination works, and more particularly social, collective, and popular imagination? Begotten of real life and akin to art, should it not also have something of its own to tell us about art and life? (*On Laughter* 3).

The comic is precipitated on three requirements. What is comic is invariably human; if you laugh at an object or an animal, you are only laughing at it because you detect something human in the object itself or the human impulse behind its creation. In order for the comic to emerge, it also must have emotional distance: when we cannot separate ourselves from behavior and conversation around us, we are more likely to lend our sympathy to even the most insignificant details, acts and objects, which consequently has the potential to evoke our sorrow or pity, but when we are able to observe the world apathetically, “many a drama will turn into a comedy” (5). The comic also has a social function, since we are social creatures: there is hardly comedy in isolation. According to Bergson, the comic emerges whenever the “mechanical encrusted on the living” (33). He maintains that life is always in flux, always changing, possessed of a certain *élan vital* that prevents the mechanization of life by our own stagnant and repetitive behaviors, practices, and habits, which are a fundamental threat to our survival as a social species. The animating energy of the universe continually pushes us forward, so any attempt to slow or stop the passage of time with rigidity and habit is inherently comical:

At the root of the comic there is a sort of rigidity which compels its victims to keep strictly to one path, to follow it straight along, to shut their ears and refuse to listen. In Moliere’s plays how many comic scenes can

be reduced to this simple type: *a character following up his one idea*, and continually recurring to it in spite of incessant interruptions! The transition seems to take place imperceptibly from the man who will listen to nothing to the one who will see nothing, and from this later to the one who sees only what he wants to see. A stubborn spirit ends by adjusting things to its own way of thinking, instead of accommodating its thoughts to the things. (185)

A character possessed of his singular idea is disconnected from consciousness, and becomes a human without his humanity, since consciousness is one of the characteristics that define humanity. The only antidote to rigid, unchanging habits and behaviors is self-awareness, which is brought on by laughter, because it draws attention to and makes us aware of the fixed nature of our behavior.

There are three versions of Moscow in the film: the Moscow of the streets, the carnival Moscow, and the Moscow of the exhibition space. The city's streets are a space of chaos and frenzy, living and breathing, a place where people mingle and interact; the carnival is a space where Moscow is represented as a space of pleasure; and the exhibition is a space of relative order, solemnity, and rationality, a place where people gather for a ceremony glorifying the future as yet unrealized Moscow. Alyosha's vision of the reconstructed Moscow constitutes the centerpiece of the exhibition. We have already examined the carnival space of Moscow, so now it is necessary to look at the other two spaces of the city. The juxtaposition of the image of the public space of Moscow and that of the unreal space of Alyosha's model of Moscow creates friction, and as Emma Widdis points out in her analysis of the film, "it is in the collision of these two visions of the city that the subversive forces of the film can be found" (Widdis *Med bio* 97-98). When Alyosha and his grandmother arrive in Moscow, they are immediately swept up in the chaos of the city. The first images we have of the city are of its

reconstruction. Fedya is standing in front of his canvas, painting a picture of Moscow from his balcony, except that every time he glances up from his work, the cityscape has changed, undoubtedly making his artistic enterprise a frustrating one indeed. Alyosha's grandmother gazes admiringly at a building that is quickly demolished in front of her eyes; then, two more buildings implode, seemingly on their own. Alyosha, with his new friends Zoya and Olga, then boards the Moscow metro, the hallmark of the reconstructed city; they disguise Olga's pig as a baby in order to sneak it onto the train. They are almost discovered when a pediatric doctor sitting next to them insists on examining the "infant"; however, the doctor does not have good eyesight and does not even suspect that the baby is actually a pig. Meanwhile, busy people are hurrying around them, in constant movement.

In contrast to the moving streets are the exhibition space and the space of Alyosha's model. Inside the exhibition hall, the undulating mass of people from the street is transformed into the neat, linear rows of the audience who are respectfully waiting to see the living model of the city. This ceremony also comic in itself, according to Bergson, who explains that the comic can be found when society is in disguise, such as during a ceremony, since the customs and formality of a ceremony are opposed to the dynamism of life:

Any image, then, suggestive of the notion of society disguising itself, or of a social masquerade, so to speak, will be laughable. Now, such a notion is formed when we perceive anything inert or stereotyped, or simply readymade, on the surface of living society. There we have rigidity over again, clashing with the inner suppleness of life. The ceremonial side of social life must, therefore, always include a latent comic element, which is only waiting for an opportunity to burst into full view. It might be said that ceremonies are to the social body what clothing is to the individual body: they owe their seriousness to the fact that they are identified, in our minds, with the serious object with which custom associates them, and when we

isolate them in imagination, they forthwith lose their seriousness (*On Laughter* 45).

When we isolate the ceremony of the exhibition, “a site of symbolic unification, a simulacrum of the whole space of the nation” (Widdis bio 106), it becomes comic that it should stand as a representation of Moscow, a city that, as we have already seen, is alive and full of disorder and adventure, and not a space of rationality and order. Alyosha’s model takes the rationality and ceremony of the exhibition space even further and presents us with what the city will look like once the meticulous process of urban planning has gone into effect. In the model, Moscow is relatively unpopulated; the broad, open, streamlined city streets of the new capital have apparently led to the disappearance of the crowds and the hustle and bustle of city life. The malfunctioning of the projector only emphasizes the mechanism of automation at work in the model, and when the audience laughs at the backward regression of the grand utopian city, they are revealing their awareness of this automation being performed on them and the city. But a landscape itself cannot be comic, according to Bergson, since it is outside of the realm of what is human and living. However, the city, as a social entity, could be said to be a living creature; it is an extension of the people who inhabit it. At the same time the living model anesthetizes any of the *élan vital* of the city. When the audience laughs, they are not laughing at the buildings themselves, which are not comic, but at the automation of the entire city brought about in the film showing the transition of the city in stages from backwards Russian city to a socialist utopian capital. Despite the seriousness of the exhibition, the audience laughs at the absurdity of the images before them; the solemnity of the unveiling ceremony is forgotten and “those taking part in it give us the impression

of puppets in motion. Their mobility seems to adopt as a model the immobility of a formula. It becomes automatism” (Laughter 45-46).

Stalin’s automated vision of the reconstruction of Moscow is then shown to be farcical and ridiculous. Such a vision of the city seems to impart an illusion of control over the movement and development of the city, but the city is a living thing and cannot be controlled. In *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*, Kevin Robins examines the ways in which vision plays a role in how we imagine our involvement in the world. In his chapter “The City in the Field of Vision,” he focuses on how images of the modern city inevitably embody our subjectivity and imitate the spatial texture of our imagination. He describes the modern city as a space in which latent “passions and aggressions” must be contained and controlled, but not completely stifled, since the tension between order and disorder is a hallmark of the modern city: “In the modern city a productive accommodation was achieved: the energy and dynamism of collective emotions were harnessed and given imaginative expression. Modern urban experience involved encounter and contact, the challenge of strangers and of the unknown; the modern city was a place of psychological shock and excitement, a kind of vertigo machine” (131). So, the modern city is possessed of an essential *elan vital*, a life force that then is written into our imagining of the city. But the life force of the city is also threatening, and so urban planning emerged as a counterpoint to the irrational tendencies of the growing, uncontrolled dynamism of the city:

“There has been the aspiration to an encompassing order and rationality. This was represented in the ideal or fantasy of the ‘concept city’, to be found in modern urban utopianism: it articulated the desire to make the city a comprehensible and a governable space. Against the perceived threat of disorder and fragmentation, urban planning has stood for order and integrity. Le Corbusier was perhaps the most epic and authoritarian

exponent of such a project. The architect and planner, he believed, must stand for clarity and cohesion in the face of the dark and formless flows – the magma, the miasma – that threaten their dissolution. Cities are planned when they are coherent, when they are ‘legible’ and ‘imageable’” (Robins 131).

The urban architecture of Le Corbusier was a major influence on the city planning of Soviet Moscow; he even entered his own design in the public contest for the Palace of the Soviets. Moscow is the maternal city of Russia, the life force of the entire country; its narrow, winding streets, haphazard arrangement of living space, and eclectic architecture, exemplified by its onion-domed cathedrals speak to its vitality, its warmth, its Russianness.

Moscow’s sister city, St. Petersburg is planned like a Western European city; its linearity and order has contributed to its eerie, unnatural quality, rather than imbuing it with a sense of “order and integrity.” Writers such as Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Andrei Bely have immortalized St. Petersburg as a city of ghosts and strange happenings. The vision of the city in Alyosha’s model attempts to define Moscow, to render it coherent and readable, and essentially to eradicate any of the mystery and enigma from the cityscape. And it is precisely this process that the laughter is aimed at. As the reconstruction of the city aims to improve the appearance and functioning of the capital, it also has the additional benefit of improving society. Social improvement necessarily hinges on stability. But the tension between order and disorder remains, and the more the balance is tipped in favor of order, and our life force is threatened by rigidity, the more disorder threatens to disrupt. The increased rigidity inevitably forces “to the surface the disturbing elements inseparable from so vast a bulk”, (Bergson 199). Laughter, therefore, is the expression of this disruption, and it exposes any efforts to

increasing stability as futile. In *New Moscow*, the laughter from the audience in the exhibition hall also exposes the façade of the reconstructed Moscow, for all of the grandiose palaces and monuments to Soviet power shown in the “living” model are merely miniatures crafted by Alyosha. Cinema projects them in grand scale, but the Moscow of the model is hardly realistic beyond the celluloid. Oksana Bulgakowa’s article in *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, entitled “Spatial Figures in Soviet Cinema of the 1930s” traces the potential of cinema to show the reconstructed Soviet capital, but rather than becoming an inspiring vision of Soviet ingenuity, the Moscow on film functioned as a puppet city, a “Potemkin Village”, a reality that was exposed in Medvedkin’s film when the overwhelming images of the future Moscow are denounced in comic fashion as mere toys: “Palaces turn out to be hollowed-out constructions. The precious materials of Stalinist architecture are completely profaned in the cinema. Marble, stone, and granite are transformed into painted cardboard, the monumental spectacle of power into a theater set composed only of a canvas façade” (Bulgakowa 68).

The vision of Moscow presented in Alyosha’s model is an imaginary one, whereas Fedya the urban painter is trying to capture the ‘real’ city. Yet, the constantly shifting buildings and changing landscape only underscore the reality that a ‘real’ Moscow does not exist: the city is not something that is easily readable, and therefore cannot be captured in an image. The fact that Zoya chooses Alyosha over Fedya, she is essentially choosing the imagined city over the actual city: “The allocation of priority between the artist and the engineer, the eyewitness and the visionary – affirmed by the beauty’s choice – emphasizes what must be understood as an object of representation, as

nature: the real city is replaced by the fantastic city, existing only in the imagination” (Bulgakowa 66-67). So, what is the status of the city in New Moscow? If Alyosha’s, and therefore Stalin’s, vision of the city does not exist, the city outside of the exhibition space does not exist either. Kevin Robins suggests that images of the city inevitably engage our dreams so that the imagined city becomes a dream space, a “theatre of the mind”:

The image of the dream, the oneiric, is integral to it. The city becomes implicated in the human need for the dreaming experience. The dream space may be seen as ‘the intrapsychic equivalent of transitional space where a person “actualizes certain types of experiences”. The dream space contains, for the purpose of personal elaboration, what might otherwise be acted out – or, rather, evacuated – in “social space”.’ In this case we have a public dream. The psychic space is mapped onto the social space. The city becomes a transitional space in which to actualise experiences. The good city, the good dream. (Robins 132)

Such a connection between the city and dreams is also reflected in the relationship between the comic and dreams. Bergson states that insanity is not comic, since it arouses our pity, but there is a state of mind that resembles insanity, an “inversion of common sense” that is comic but does not arouse an emotional investment, and that is dreaming: “Now, there is a sane state of the mind that resembles madness in every respect, in which we find the same associations of ideas as we do in lunacy, the same peculiar logic as in a fixed idea. This state is that of dreams. So either our analysis is incorrect, or it must be capable of being stated in the following theorem: *Comic absurdity is of the same nature as that of dreams*” (186).

New Moscow engages dreams on many levels. Medvedkin’s representation of Moscow is represented as a place of adventure and play, essentially carnivalesque, a characteristic embodied by the carnival night. It is a city of disorder and chaos, propelled by the elan vital of the people who hurry down its winding streets. It is a place where pigs

ride subways and are chased through the streets, where the buildings move seemingly on their own and disappear right before our eyes. Alyosha's model also forms a dream space, simply by the virtue that it is completely imaginary, the vision of Alyosha, and more specifically, the vision of Stalin. Under the cultural policy of socialist realism, literature and film were supposed to show life in the Soviet Union as it would be, not as it was, which inevitably required the realistic portrayal of a dream. Evgenii Dobrenko, in *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* underlines this trait of socialist realism, explaining that the beautiful ideal of the utopian Soviet future permeated reality to such an extent that it blurred the boundaries between reality and a dream: "By painting "dreaming" into the picture of "realism," the Socialist Realist aesthetic removed the "romantic" gap between them ("the disharmony between the ideal and reality") up to the point that it seemed that reality was more beautiful than a dream." He quotes Anton Makarenko, a writer who asserted, "Our reality is good for precisely the fact that it takes the lead over dreams" (Dobrenko 63). The malfunctioning of that vision, then, can be read as a commentary on the false vision perpetuated by socialist realism, and undermines the power of that image as a product of the dominant political view. Additionally, to show Moscow as a chaotic space, to privilege the old world cathedrals of pre-Soviet Moscow at the expense of the magnificent Soviet capital was a potentially seditious, since Moscow was the example for all cities: "Moscow, however, was not merely a model: it was also the seat of power. Consequently, it came to function as an extraordinarily privileged space. All other cities were limited merely to approaching it" (Dobrenko 6). The film within a film functions as a mise-en-abyme of the city, and effectively destabilizes the image of Moscow, exposing it as a dream, a place that does

not exist. At the end of the film, the conventional journey of the hero from periphery to center is reversed as Alyosha returns to his Siberian village along with Zoya, supposedly because in the village is where the real work of building a socialist empire will take place. Or, they simply awoke from a dream and now must return to waking life, the dream of Moscow having been exposed as unreal.

The reconstructed Moscow was never fully realized, but in its absence the specter of the dream haunted the city. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym suggests that post-Communist Moscow is in a state of arrested development, its identity caught somewhere between past and future. The demolished and recently rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Savior serves as a cornerstone of her argument that Moscow nostalgia is directed at is “Soviet grandeur” (95). The Cathedral of Christ the Savior was torn down to make room for the monumental Palace of Soviets, which was never completed:

Although the Palace of Soviets was never completed, it haunted the Moscow panorama just by virtue of its absence. It was the missing pivot for the whole plan of reconstructing Moscow. New avenues and alleys led to it; seven Stalinist skyscrapers were placed to face the virtual palace. During the Sportsmen’s Parades, the country’s best gymnasts would form a pyramid in the shape of the Palace of Soviets as if conjuring it into existence with their muscular bodies. The palace was one of those invisible monuments to Utopia that cast a long shadow on the Moscow landscape. (104)

The decision to rebuild the cathedral was a contested one and did not garner public support, but in 1994, Mayor Luzhkov approved it anyways. Rebuilding the cathedral might not seem a testament to Moscow’s nostalgia for Soviet grandeur, but once construction began, it became clear that the cathedral, the largest Orthodox church in the world, in fact, replicated some of the features of the Palace of Soviets not only in its mammoth spatial capacity, but also its role in the mythology and dream of the fully

modernized future city. So it seems that the dream of Moscow is still alive even today; it can be traced into the architecture of the city, but it will never be fully realized and will remain in the realm of dreams.

Poetry and the City: The Flaneur in Marlen Khutsiev's *I Am Twenty*

The decade after Stalin's death in 1953 initiated a period of political and cultural uncertainty in the Soviet Union. This period, known as the Thaw, signaled the loosening of ideological control after the repression and mass terror of Stalinism. Often referred to as a relatively liberal time, the Thaw is characterized as a period of reform which included a mass housing campaign, cultivation of lands in Siberia, the Urals, and Central Asia, increased investment in industry and the retail sector, the rehabilitation of exiled and imprisoned persons, and the dissolution of Stalin's cult of personality. Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, even denounced Stalin as a brutal tyrant in front of party members at the Twentieth Party Congress. This political awakening created a seemingly tolerant atmosphere in which people were able to talk more openly about the past and the West, and even criticize party leaders: "In time, they realized that these developments, almost unimaginable on the eve of Stalin's death, were indicative of a new era that went by a simple metaphor. After the seemingly eternal freeze of Stalinism, the Soviet Union had begun to "thaw"" (Bittner 1-2). The term "Thaw" comes from the title of a 1954 novella written by one of the most well known Soviet writers Ilya Ehrenburg. His novella (*Ottepel*) tells a story of three main characters through their inner monologues, each of which touches on several taboo subjects of Soviet history. Ehrenburg's writing evokes images of "impermanence, instability, and uncertainty about how the weather would turn" and suggests "short-term ambiguity amid a long-term process" (Bittner 3). His understanding of the thaw drew Khrushchev's disapproval for its failure to portray Soviet life as reassuringly bright and for its implications that the future of socialism lacked direction. So while the loosening of ideological control of the Thaw might have initially

seemed to promise new possibilities and openness, it quickly became a period of missed opportunities that would be followed by a period of increased repression and stagnation. Nonetheless the relaxing of ideological control gave rise to new forms of expression that a new generation of young filmmakers and other artists was quick to claim as their own. Their new freedom from the strict confines of socialist realism manifested in the portrayal of Soviet life, a change that can be seen in the representation of the city during the Thaw period.

Marlen Khutsiev was a significant figure in Soviet film of the 1960s and his work would influence films of the Soviet New Wave. In his 1965 film *I Am Twenty* (*Mne Dvatsat Let*), also known as *Ilyich's Gate/Lenin's Guard* (*Zastava Il'icha*), the city of Moscow figures prominently as a background for the main protagonist Sergei and his two friends Kolia and Slavka as they attempt to figure out what comes next in their lives: “Abandoning totalitarian Stalinist Moscow, Khutsiev creates a benign urban space as seen through the eyes of his heroes. Rather than the centerpiece of the artificial Stalinist utopia, Moscow becomes a metaphor for the natural flow of life” (Prokhorov 14). In *I Am Twenty*, Moscow is reconfigured from the monumental looming specter of Stalin’s vision of the capital into a space that reflects the changing political and cultural atmosphere of the Thaw period. Sergei is a soldier returning home to Moscow for good, and as he walks through the city in the film’s opening, we get the sense that he is returning to some place familiar and encountering a new place simultaneously. He spends the majority of the film walking through the city, an act that is continually associated with the mind of our protagonist as his thoughts are spoken to us in voice-over along with the images of Moscow. The many scenes of Sergei strolling through the streets often constitute our only

element of continuity between scenes since time is not an organizing principle in the film. Having been influenced by Italian neo-realism, Khutsiev deviates completely from the dominant paradigm of *I Am Twenty* lacks a cause and effect narrative; the film emphasizes the individuality and complexity of its three main characters; and time in the city seems to be suspended. The open structure of the film's loose narrative, the lyrical rendering of Sergei's thoughts and the beautiful cinematography of Margarita Pilikhina work together to turn Moscow into visual poetry.

In "The Painter of Modern Life" nineteenth century French poet Charles Baudelaire famously describes 'modernity' (*modernite*) as "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable" (3). He was writing during a time when France was transitioning from an agricultural society to an industrial one. Modernity gave birth to a new figure, the flaneur, Baudelaire's "Monsieur G," the scribe of the city, who captures the source of beauty within this new landscape of productivity and transience. In addition to an "eternal, invariable element" is the other half of beauty which consists of "the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions"; the variable, ephemeral element of beauty embodied by modernity is necessary for our "digestion or appreciation" of the eternal (3). The flaneur strolls through the streets, cataloguing his experiences from within the crowd; he is at once a participant in the ebb and flow of street life and an observer: "He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive" (10). In "The Painter of Modern Life", Baudelaire explains that the flaneur takes great pleasure in life so that every hour of light not spent on the street is wasted:

So out he goes and watches the river of life flow past him in all its splendor and majesty. He marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained amid the turmoil of human freedom. He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city – landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist or buffeted by the sun. (11)

And in the evening, the hero of the city will linger as long as possible, “wherever there can be a glow of light, an echo of poetry, a quiver of life or a chord of music; wherever a passion can pose before him, wherever natural man and conventional man display themselves in a strange beauty, wherever the sun lights up the swift joys of the deprived animal” (11). When night finally comes, he is possessed with creative energy and spends the night with his paper, pencil and brush capturing the city in art. And through his particular gift of vision, “the world is reborn upon his paper” (12). He is not merely strolling through the city, he has a purpose, for he distills the eternal from the fleeting and “makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history” (12). When reading Baudelaire, it becomes clear that the flaneur and the poet are synonymous.

Walter Benjamin was a German literary and cultural critic, philosopher, and essayist writing in the early part of the twentieth century. Much of Benjamin’s work centers on the meaning of modernity and so it is no wonder that he was attracted to Baudelaire’s poetry and prose. For Benjamin, Baudelaire’s poetry takes the experience of the city as its poetic principle (Gedichtete). Benjamin himself was fascinated by the city and urban experience, and the metropolitan spaces he frequented – from Berlin, to Paris, and even Moscow – figure prominently in his writings. He also draws upon the figure of the flaneur as the explorer and observer of the city, and for Benjamin, the lived experience of the city is highly significant. We come to know the city through our

experience of it, and that experience of the urban space is not limited to any fixed and definitive temporal and spatial boundaries. The city exists in the past, present, and future simultaneously, and the city is more than just the particular organization of space and its iconic architecture. The city, for Benjamin, is something hidden, something to be uncovered in all of the unnoticed details, the strange spaces, and the layers of imagination and memory that give a city its vitality and presence. Reading Benjamin's writing about the city, from his own experiences walking through the streets, provides the template for how to read the city: the importance of the city and urban experience in his writings comes through in the details and can be found between the lines, "digging in odd places, turning over the words to reveal glimmers of memory, the scintilla of meaning" (Tonkiss 121). For Benjamin, the city and the mind are inextricably linked. Whereas Baudelaire's flaneur walks through the city in order to discover the meaning of modernity, the flaneur for Benjamin walks through the city to discover both the city and something about the self as shaped by the city.

Moscow is illuminated in Benjamin's *Moscow Diary*, a collection of disconnected observations on the city's political, economic, and social situation documented in journal entries. Many of Benjamin's entries contain his obsessive reflections on fashion, food, weather, and culture, but also his thoughts on Stalinist politics and his meetings with Soviet poets and writers such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Andrei Bely. His travel to Moscow was motivated by his pursuit of Latvian actress Asja Lacis, his enthusiasm for the Communist Party, and his desire to chart the city over the course of its revolutionary transformation. Ultimately, Benjamin was disappointed by his time in Moscow: the

weather was harsh, the language barrier made it difficult, his love life turned to failure, and the politics of Stalinism were disillusioning.

Its narrative gestures of free indirect discourse register, with much less aphoristic density than is typical for Benjamin's other autobiographical writings, strings of frustrations and moments of consternation, from the long, harsh walks through the icy, overcrowded streets of Moscow to Benjamin's personal isolation during theater performances he cannot understand or even during domino games. Its gloomy descriptions – encrypted in a series of chronologically organized dated entries – of mostly quotidian aspect of life in the wintry Russian capital appear more paratactical and tentative than the *Berlin Chronicle* of 1932 and much less ornate and hermetically sealed than the allegorical prose snapshots of the *Berlin Childhood*, those elegant “fairy-tale photographs,” as Adorno called them, which Benjamin continued to polish until shortly before his suicide (Richter 88)

Instead of the vivid, fantastical descriptions of Paris or the dreamlike memories of Berlin, we are presented with a heavier, more sober account of life in the newly established Soviet capital and all of the new social and cultural mechanisms of Soviet life. His depiction is almost clinical, and yet, there is something about Benjamin's Moscow that remains hauntingly unreadable, as though the city is resistant to being penetrated, to giving up its secrets, as Benjamin explains in his travel essay on Moscow:

The city seems already to deliver itself at the train station. Kiosks, arc lamps, buildings crystallize into figures that will never return. Yet this impression is dispelled as soon as I seek words. I must be on my way.... At first there is nothing to be seen but snow, the dirty snow that has already installed itself, and the clean slowly moving up behind. The instant you arrive, the childhood stage begins. On the thick sheet ice of the streets, walking has to be relearned. [...] Before I discovered Moscow's real landscape, its real river, found its real heights, each thoroughfare became for me a contested river, each house number a trigonometric signal, and each of its gigantic squares a lake. For every step you take here is on named ground. And where one of these names is heard, in a flash imagination builds a whole neighborhood about the sound. This will long defy the later reality and remain brittlely embedded in it like glass masonry. [...] Now the city turns into a labyrinth for the newcomer. Streets that he had located far apart are yoked together by a corner, like a pair of horses reined in a coachman's fist. The whole exciting sequence of

topographical deceptions to which he falls prey could be shown only by a film: the city is on its guard against him, masks itself, flees, intrigues, lures him to wander its circles to the point of exhaustion. [...] But in the end, maps and plans are victorious: in bed at night, imagination juggles with real buildings, parks, and streets. (Selected 23-24)

Benjamin's empirical portrait of Moscow correlates with his sedate mental state, and consequently, one must look for the city in Benjamin's mind. Influenced by his difficult time in the city, for Benjamin, Moscow becomes a labyrinth: "Knowledge of the city is never fixed as its material forms, its inhabited places and shades of meaning encounter the imagination of the subject in space" (Tonkiss 124). With effort, it is possible to discern glimmers of this enchanting city between the lines of Benjamin's writing.

But what is really important about Benjamin and his strolls through the urban streets of Berlin, Paris, and Moscow, is the way that he paints the city, which is not unlike the way a filmmaker films the city. Through the concept of flaneur, who is not just a figure, but a motif and a way of grasping social and cultural context of urban experience, we can understand the Moscow of Khutsiev's *I Am Twenty*, for in the twentieth century, the casual stroller of the city streets is replaced by the filmmaker. Anthony Vidler, in *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* makes this parallel explicit:

Certainly it is not difficult to imagine the figure of Benjamin's flaneur, Vertov-like, carrying his camera as a third eye, framing and shooting the rapidly moving pictures of modern life. [...] An eye for detail, for the neglected and the chance; a penchant for joining reality and reverie; a distanced vision, apart from that distracted and unselfconscious existence of the crowd; a fondness for the marginal and the forgotten: these are the traits of flaneur and filmmaker alike. Both share affinities with the detective and the peddler, the ragpicker and the vagabond; both aestheticize the roles and materials with which they work. Equally, the typical habitats of the flaneur lend themselves to filmic representation: the banlieu, the margins, the zones, and outskirts of the city; the deserted streets and squares at night; the crowded boulevards, the phantasmagoric

passages, arcades, and department stores; the spatial apparatus, that is, of the consumer metropolis. (116)

Walter Benjamin is not an unfamiliar figure in film theory, and many scholars have pointed out the connection between his city sketches and the city in film, remarking upon the similarity between the ways in which Benjamin's descriptive fragments find their equivalents within film language. But what is particularly significant about Benjamin's city sketches in relation to film is how a portrait of the city can offer insight into the interiority of a subject and his particular social and cultural experience, highlighting the intricate connection between seeing the city, reading the city, and filming the city. In Khutsiev's film, the city is aestheticized and presented to us as visual poetry; we read the city as a poem as Khutsiev weaves together the different fragments of Moscow in order to invoke the memory of a pure and unsullied Moscow, a city full of promise and vitality.

I Am Twenty is shot in a documentary style, with a realism that is almost tactile. The soft lighting, sweeping camera movements, and mobile camera of Pilikhina's cinematography lend the film an ethereal aura. The film opens with three soldiers walking down an empty street; each soldier turns to look at us as he passes in front of the camera. A train passes in the background, drowning the image in the roar of its engine and the grading of its wheels against the metal tracks. Three new figures appear, two men and a woman; when they separate, the camera lingers on a young couple in love. We search the streets until we find a lone soldier walking down a nearly empty street; his loud footsteps on the pavement echo loudly. He is Sergei, and he is returning home for good after military service. Sergei is returning home during peacetime, and he is returning to a new city, both familiar and different from the city he knew before he left. He is young, on the threshold of making important life decisions, and yet he does not

quite know what direction he will choose to take in his life. Having lost his father in the Great War, Sergei was raised by his mother, and it is now that his father's absence begins to haunt him. Millions of fathers were lost in World War Two, leaving an entire generation of sons and daughters without guidance for the future. The depth of interiority presented in this film is remarkable. Sergei walks aimlessly through the labyrinthine streets as he contemplates his life, which is marked by the disembodied voice signaling that we have just become privy to his thoughts. His thoughts become associated with the city's streets, and frequently those thoughts are imbued with a lyrical quality and poetic cadence that is complemented by the beautiful urban imagery of Moscow. Though it is not just Sergei who we follow through Moscow, periodically, we are offered a glimpse into the thoughts of Kolia, Slavka, and Sergei's girlfriend Anya as they ride streetcars, fall in love, go to parties, dance in the streets, go to school and to work, and attempt to make sense of the world.

At one point in the film, the three friends are walking through a park, on their way home from work and school. We watch them from a distance at first, from behind the trees and benches filled with people, even as Sergei's voice pulls us into his head. It is an interesting scene for the interplay of voices, which switches between the three friends as well as between their internal thoughts and their conversation with each other. Sergei wonders to himself, "How much time has it been? Three months? Yes, three months since I returned, but I have a feeling that I've never gone away. I'm waiting for something all the time. But for what?" He looks at Slavka and Kolia and thinks, "Yes, I envy the guys. They have everything well ordered. Slavka has his own life, his family. Kolia is always doing fine." Kolia watches the melancholy Slavka and mentally notes,

“My neighbor looks somewhat gloomy. Family problems. They get married at 20, idiots, and then walk with such faces.” And Slavka is thinking about watching the hockey game: “If “Spartak” wins in Moscow, then ties it in Minsk, and the Kiev team loses in Rostov, then “Spartak” gets on the top, and “Torpedo” has no chances, and it was a great team.” They also converse about the weather, Sergei’s new love interest, and their plans for the evening. But there is another layer to the different voices in this scene with the addition of Aleksandr Pushkin’s poem “Осень (Отрывок)/Autumn (A Fragment)”:

Октябрь уж наступил — уж роща отряхает
 Последние листы с нагих своих ветвей;
 Дохнул осенний хлад — дорога промерзает.
 Журча еще бежит за мельницу ручей,
 Но пруд уже застыл; сосед мой поспешает

И с каждой осенью я расцветаю вновь;
 Здоровью моему полезен русской холод;
 К привычкам бытия вновь чувствую любовь:
 Чредой слетает сон, чредой находит голод;
 Легко и радостно играет в сердце кровь,
 Желания кипят — я снова счастлив, молод,
 Я снова жизни полн — таков мой организм

October has arrived – the woods have tossed
 Their final leaves from naked branches;
 A breath of autumn chill – the road begins to freeze.
 The stream still murmurs as it passes by the mill,
 The pond, however, is frozen: and my neighbor...

When autumn comes, I bloom anew;
 The Russian frost does wonders for my health;
 Anew I fall in love with life’s routine:
 Betimes I’m soothed by dreams, betimes by hunger caught...
 The blood flows free and easy in my heart,
 Abrim with passion; once again, I’m happy, young,
 I’m full of life – such is my organism...

Pushkin finds autumn invigorating for not only his health, but also his writing. Pushkin’s poem is not only an ode to the poet’s favorite season or an observation about nature, but a

poem about the power of a landscape to inspire creativity. Andrew Kahn in his work *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence*, maintains, "The poem is built on images that join the mental and corporeal, as it follows the power of the imagination and models how the sensual beauty of the landscape impels the life of the mind through impassioned observation of the natural world" (Kahn 135). Kahn also comments upon the formal fragmentation of the poem, which he attributes to the ability of artistic description and the poetic imagination to overwhelm the poet's verbal control. The insertion of Pushkin's poem into this film only underscores the relationship between the landscape and the mind.

Sergei is not the only flaneur through which we see the city, and he provides only one of the poetic elements to the film, because the true flaneur of this film is the filmmaker. We can treat Sergei as a flaneur, our guide through Moscow, and of course, his voice and interiority are bound up in our interpretation of the city, but he is not chronicling the streets, finding the hidden spaces of the city like the filmmaker is with his camera; Sergei, and periodically other characters, is our stand-in for the filmmaker. Khutsiev explained that the three friends in his film originate from his own experience of being on the threshold of adulthood and feeling like the whole world was open before him: "All three characters, each in his own way, expressed my own experience, emotional state, and attitude toward life. [...] I dreamt of being like Kol'ka, easy-going, brave, capable of joining any conversation, establishing contact. And, just like Sergei, I have been struggling with the question of the meaning of life" (Prokhorov, *Cinepaternity* 36). Sergei becomes the voice of the flaneur that grounds us in the city, because at times, the stunning cinematographic portrait of Moscow threatens to overwhelm us. But it is Khutsiev, and Pilikhina, who linger among the masses people as the camera takes in the

faces, energy, and vitality of the crowd, somehow managing to create intimacy amidst public spectacle.

During the May Day parade when Sergei is at last brought into close proximity to Anya, celebrating Soviet citizens singing patriotic songs with lyrics praising their love for the city: “The ebullient, the powerful, / Unconquerable by anyone/ My Motherland, / My city of Moscow, / I love you with my whole heart!” The camera weaves fluidly through the crowd capturing the diversity of the people in an unpolished documentary style; the rapid editing pattern cuts back and forth between the two potential lovers as their paths cross; and the close-up shots of individuals is interspersed with aerial shots of the large crowd with Red Square, the Kremlin St. Basil’s Cathedral as the backdrop. This scene recalls the crowd scenes of early Soviet films such as Sergei Eisenstein’s *The Strike* (1924) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) or Vsevelod Pudovkin’s *Mother* (1926) or even Dziga Vertov’s *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929). In fact, the crowd was a fixture of films in the 1920s and its representation in film necessarily carried ideological weight. Instead of individual stars, there were the masses, the collective, and because the crowd is a largely urban phenomenon, representing the crowd reflected the city: “The changing status of the crowd in films of the 1920s and 1930s echoed the changing shape of the city. Crowds, of course, were part of urban reality – and in particular part of the overcrowded cities of the early Soviet period” (85). However, the crowd scene in *I Am Twenty* is different than the crowd scenes of most early Soviet films. The differences can be traced to the political reality of the time and the style of filmmaking. Eisenstein or Pudovkin utilized montage to capture the dynamism of the crowd. Not every filmmaker utilized the principles of montage to the same effect, but regardless of the end result, at its core,

montage constitutes a rupture in space and time. This rupture inevitably offered a greater variety of shot types, editing rhythms, and shot angles to represent the crowd. The juxtaposition of shots created meaning.

The most famous crowd scene is the Odessa Step sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*; this scene might also constitute one of the most extreme examples of filmic montage, but it also demonstrates the potential of montage for manipulating the action of a crowd scene. The scene is filled with contrasting shots of the crowd running down the steps and close-up shots of faces; the action is shot from many different viewpoints, both around and within the crowd, which dislocates our sense of space. The action is prolonged: the duration of the event and its duration on screen are in conflict, which heightens the tension and anticipation of the event. Objects that are not part of the crowd, such as the stone lions, are juxtaposed with the action. Overall, montage adds to the disorientation, chaos and frenzy of the terrified crowd that is being gunned down by the army. In assembling the images through montage, a filmmaker becomes a kind of poet, and montage creates a poetry of its own, one that interestingly enough corresponds with the impulses of avant-garde poetry, which created meaning through a montage of words. Avant-garde poetry and film were united in their revolutionary fervor, according to Mira and Antonin Liehm:

The artistic avant-garde was intensely concerned with the Revolution, feeling, consciously and subconsciously, that they were linked to it by their very livelihood. The explosion of the past was their "water of life," forming along with anarchy and chaos, and amalgam in which the outlines of new forms slowly began to appear. The avant-garde advanced with the Revolution, the Revolution became its "most important art." (35)

In fact, Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose poetry is read in *I Am Twenty*, published an article in *Kine-Journal* calling for cinema to play a larger role in the revolution by transforming

relationships between people and the city: “It is not necessarily just what remains to be discovered that is new in this drab world of ours; it is rather the novel relationship between the individual things that surround us, things that have long since been transformed by the impact of the powerful and new life in the metropolis” (qtd on Liehm 9).

The May Day parade sequence is the climax of the film. Film critic Miron Chernenko, who worked in the Soviet film industry writes that the scene of the triumphant May Day parade is the central episode of the film, because it perfectly manifests the “social, psychological, and emotional space which formed the core the era”: “This scene for the first and, perhaps, for the last time captured on the screen a spontaneous and joyful procession of free people” (Chernenko 15). The way in which this crowd scene is filmed differs dramatically from the crowd scenes of montage filmmakers. The most notable difference is the mobility of the camera. Pilikhina takes us into the middle of the crowd as joyous citizens stream past waving flags, singing together, and smiling at one another. The fluidity of the camera movement as we weave through the crowd immerses us in the optimism and carefree atmosphere. The movement of the crowd through the city streets conjures up images of the spring thaw as the layer of ice covering the city begins to melt, unleashing streams of water onto the pavement. Pilikhina’s camera movement also represents a conscious attempt to maintain the spatial and temporal continuity of the parade, in keeping with the neorealist aesthetic. Among the crowd, we locate Sergei and his love interest Anya, but while we note their relative proximity to one another and wait eagerly to see if they will cross paths, they remain among the crowd in a moment of synthesis between individual and collective. Pilikhina,

ever the filmmaker-flaneur, captures the intimacy of people walking in tandem with one another, and at times, remains detached from the crowd. And finally, throughout the sequence we are always aware of the space of the city: it is not just that we see the crowd moving, but that we see the crowd moving through the city.

Clearly though, different goals were involved in the filming of *I Am Twenty* and a film such as *Battleship Potemkin*. The changing representation of the crowd reflects the changing shape of the city. Moscow in the 1920s was still an ideological battlefield as a new way of life was being forged from the ground up; the force of the message matched the rapid pace of change that the creation of the Soviet state entailed. Moscow in the 1960s was a very different city. The city, though more stable and calmer, was just beginning to thaw after the freeze of Stalinism; political and social changes were gradual and the direction of the future was uncertain. However, despite the difference in the style of filmmaking between the *I Am Twenty* and an Eisenstein montage, Khutsiev makes a conscious effort to connect his crowd sequence with the revolutionary crowd sequences of early Soviet film by evoking the memory of a time before Stalin when the revolution remained pure. The inclusion of Mayakovsky's poetry is instrumental in making the connection. In the sequence later in the film, Mayakovsky's poetry is read in a voice over as Sergei walks the street alone at night. Sergei leaves his flat in the early hours of the morning when he is unable to sleep. The bells chime two o'clock, and the streets are empty and damp. A light fog covers the city with a dreamy haze. The windows of the buildings are all dark, and except for the blinking of the traffic lights, the city is asleep. Sergei's voice can be heard:

Уже второй. Должно быть, ты легла.
А может быть у меня такая

Я не спешу, и молниями телеграмм
 мне незачем тебя будить и беспокоить.
 Любит? не любит?
 Я руки ломаю
 и пальцы
 разбрасываю разломавши
 так рвут загадав и пускают
 по маю
 венчики встречных ромашек
 Любовная лодка разбилась о быт.
 С тобой мы в расчете. И не к чему перечень
 взаимных болей, бед и обид.
 Ты посмотри, какая в мире тишь.
 Ночь обложила небо звездной данью.
 В такие вот часы встаешь и говоришь
 векам, истории и мирозданию.
 какая в мире тишь...
 какая в мире тишь...
 Уже второй. Должно быть, ты легла.
 В ночи Млечпуть серебряной Окою.
 Я не спешу, и молниями телеграмм
 мне незачем тебя будить и беспокоить
 молниями телеграмм...
 молниями телеграмм...
 молниями телеграмм...

Past one o'clock. You must have gone to bed.
 Or maybe you're having this as I am, too.
 I'm in no hurry with lightning telegrams.
 I have no cause to wake or trouble you.
 She loves me? not?
 I twist my arms like crazy,
 and having broken my finger fling them away,
 it's thus the petals of first-found daisies, a
 re plucked and guessed on and sent off
 in May
 Behold, my love, what hush has fallen on the ground
 Night wraps the sky in tribute from the star
 At times as these you rise and speak aloud
 to ages, histories and all creation
 What hush in the world...
 What hush in the world...
 Past one o'clock, you must have gone to bed
 The Milky Way streams silver the night through
 I'm in no hurry, with lightning telegrams
 I have no cause to wake or trouble you

With lightning telegrams...
 With lightning telegrams...
 With lightning telegrams...

And suddenly, Anya appears before him. The couple walks to Red Square and, as if by accident, join a group of young students who are celebrating their graduation by dancing and drinking champagne by the Moskva River. Sergei's "thoughts" consist of fragments from of poetry by Vladimir Mayakovsky, a Soviet poet known for his revolutionary temperament and eccentric, bombastic behavior. He was a well-known figure in Moscow, and often composed his poetry while walking through the streets. Mayakovsky was a revolutionary poet, but by the end of his life, he had grown disillusioned with the fate of the revolution; he committed suicide in April of 1930. The fragments included eleven lines on the theme "She loves me, she loves me not" and the short poem "Past One O'clock/Уже второй" and are thought to be part of an additional introduction to his last major poem "At the Top of My Voice/ Во Вес Голос", "a civic poem, boldly declaring Communist beliefs and presenting the poet as an agitator and a rabble rouser" (Brown 43). The fragments were found along with Mayakovsky's suicide note; according to Edward Brown, the poem "At the Top of My Voice" "contains a symbolic commentary on his life" in the cryptic imagery of the poem that fails to answer the question of who Mayakovsky was (44). Mayakovsky's poetry was experimental and transgressive in form, but his often fantastical and satiric poems were meant for the masses and frequently performed in the middle of cafes and on street corners, read in his loud, booming voice. But in this scene, Mayakovsky's words are woven together and spoken quietly to the rhythm of Sergei's footsteps and light piano music into the stillness of the night before Sergei and Anya join the crowd and become immersed in its youthful exuberance. The

poetry, rather than being a public exhibition for an audience in the busy street or café, is associated with Sergei's private experience of the city.

Khutsiev was one of a new generation of auteur filmmakers that would include Andrei Tarkovksy, Andrei Konchalovsky, and Gleb Panfilov, all of whom helped to initiate a steady retreat from the "grand style" of Soviet cinema that promoted a grandiose vision of the future of socialist society once it became clear in the light of the Thaw that such a style of image-making covered up mass murder, cultural repression, and concentration camps of the Stalinist era. This new generation of filmmakers had faith in the ability of artistic individuals "to recapture a holistic vision of the world" (Prokhorov 17). Khutsiev, as a committed Party member, refrains from attacking the Stalinist legacy explicitly, but his vision of 1960s Moscow involved rescuing the ideals of the revolution from the corruption and excess of Stalinism: "Khutsiev himself conceived of his films as reflecting the values of the period: the equal importance of the individual and the communal point of view, self-reflexivity of the new generation, and neoleninism as the sign of return to the ideals of the revolution; hence the title" (Prokhorov 13-14). The original title, *Lenin's Guard* invokes a time of ideological purity, a time when the future seemed open and full of opportunity to build a socialist utopia, before the freeze of Stalinism. That return to an ideological purity is reflected in the opening image of three soldiers marching through the city's streets; they reappear at the very end of the film as the guard is being changed in front of Lenin's Tomb, in a symbolic changing of the guard, as it is now up to the new Soviet youth to continue the project of constructing the Soviet utopia. Sergei, also, becomes the voice of this new guard. During a party at Anya's flat, the flippant and materialistic attitude of some of the other guests who do not

want to contemplate serious matters offends him. “If there’s nothing you can talk seriously about, why live then?” he asks everyone, “I take seriously the Revolution, the “Internationale” anthem, the year of 1937, the war, the soldiers, the fact that almost all of us have no fathers, and the potatoes, too, which had saved us during the hunger...” Another guest cuts him off and makes a joke at his expense; the party turns somber and Sergei leaves.

Yet Khutsiev is not presenting a dogmatic treatise on Soviet culture and society in the Thaw period or proscribe a definitive vision of what the future is supposed to look like. In a dream, Sergei’s father, who passed away in the war, visits him. Sergei wants his guidance, but his father cannot offer him advice on how to make sense of the world for Sergei has already seen more of the world than his father was able to see since he was killed so young. Sergei’s father envies him; he tells his son that more than anything he would like to walk through Moscow’s streets again, because it is the best city in the world. “I’m leaving the Motherland to you, and I do so with an absolutely clear conscience,” he tells Sergei, “You must always keep your conscience unsullied.” In *I Am Twenty*, what Khutsiev is concerned with is capturing a particular moment and feeling in time. The 1960s in the Soviet Union was a transitional period, a time of political and economic modification and changing social values. The Moscow in Khutsiev’s film is not an expression of the dominant ideology and the collective identity promoted by the master narratives of Soviet culture; the myth of the great collective is subverted by the attention to the complexity of the individual. One evening Sergei tells his friends, “You know, I was thinking, and I realized that I am an absolutely right man (*pravilnii chelovek*). I work, I plan to enter college, I participate in social life, I’m an agitator.”

“You’re an ordinary Soviet man.” Kolia agrees with him. Sergei replies, “I do everything right – no reprimands, no criminal record. I don’t know, but sometimes I think that my life is right and decent, but that’s not enough.” It is not enough to be an ordinary Soviet man anymore; he wants something more, and though Sergei might not be able to define what he might want, it is enough to be able to give voice to indeterminable quality of a man’s soul.

Khrushchev denounced Khutsiev’s film, along with several other works, in front of an audience of nearly 600 artists and writers. In March of 1963 Khrushchev accused the filmmaker of promoting “ideas and norms of public and private life that are entirely unacceptable and alien to the Soviet people.” He disliked the characters lamenting that they “are not fighters, not remakers of the world. They are morally sick people.” And he specifically decried the aimlessness of the youth in the film who are without fathers and therefore essentially allowed to create their own future: “The idea is to impress upon the children that their fathers cannot be teachers in life, and that there is no point in turning to them for advice. The filmmakers think that young people ought to decide for themselves how to live, without asking their elders for counsel and help” (cited in Woll 146-7). For while part of the film is concerned with the synthesis between individuals and society and the celebration of the Soviet utopia, Josephine Woll points out that the later half of the film is in tension with the first: “But the remainder of *Mne dvadtsat’ let* details precisely the opposite: the departure from that utopia. The discrepancy between their lives and their dreams troubles all three heroes; so does the distance between the proclaimed ideals of their society and its reality of hypocrisy and lies, dramatized in a number of confrontations” (Woll, “Being 20”). After Khrushchev’s speech, critics responded with

harsh letters and reviews. Khutsiev was reluctant to continue work on the film; he wanted control over the film, but after a nasty drawn-out battle, he finally compromised with a multitude of revisions, which included cutting down the screening time by nearly half. The film was released in truncated form in 1965. By that time, however, society had changed enough for his film to have lost enough of the relevancy and resonance that it would have had if it had been released earlier.

The city in *I Am Twenty* is a space of potential, liberated from the totalizing myth of new Moscow; each person carves out his own story of the city and makes it his own. Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* likens walking through the city with writing a story of that place, a story of memory, of the random and strange happenings, the relationships, and the private pleasures that make up the experience of that place:

They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmanner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poem in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (93)

Experience, both bodily and mentally, of the city thus overlays the tangible, physical reality of a place. The city then becomes not just a planned and concrete topography of buildings and streets, but also a topography of a mental life, and it is in the blurring of the boundaries between subjective and objective experience of the city that the city’s poetic qualities emerge. In *I Am Twenty*, Moscow is rendered in visual poetry: there is poetry in the changing seasons, the whirring machinery, and the activities of everyday life. We

come to know the city through the lyrical quality of the light shining through the window, the rain, the heavy stone buildings, the murkiness of dusk, and the stillness of the night. Time is lost amidst the nearly plotless flow of narration, where day turns to night without warning. The city is caught between its Stalinist past and an indiscernible future. And yet the mobility of the camera, the hallmark of Khutsiev's film introduces a contrasting element that underscores the inner conflict of the youth who are simultaneously possessed by a liberating sense of possibility, uncertainty, and cynicism. The tension between movement and temporal suspension also highlights the fundamental impossibility of defining Moscow, because it is always under transformation. Khutsiev's Moscow is filled with jazz, French and American pop music, dancing and singing, and the exuberance of youth. They attend public poetry readings to hear the controversial poetry of Evgenii Yevtushenko, Bulat Okudzhava, Boris Slutskii, Robert Rozhdestvenskii, and Bell Akhmadulina. They are living in a time of imminent prosperity, new avenues, opportunities, self-expression, newfound consumer abundance, and yet haunted by the loss and devastation of war. Michel de Certeau maintains that a place is more than a sum total of its materiality and locates the real city in the 'spatial stories' of the people who inhabit those spaces, which are dynamic and constantly metamorphosing. Places are elusive entities that are wrapped up in the hustle and bustle of the people who experience them: "Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body" (de Certeau 108). Khutsiev was able to capture the atmosphere of the 1960s Thaw period with all of its dynamism in the visual poetry of his

rendering of Moscow through which we are then able to ‘read’ the “fragmentary and inward-turning histories” of the city.

The Remembered City: Memory in Yuri Norstein's *Tale of Tales*

Yuri Norstein's film *Tale of Tales* (*Skazka Skazok*) has been praised as 'the greatest animated film of all time' and has earned Norstein the title of 'greatest living animator.' For his film, he draws upon his childhood during the war in Moscow, in the suburb of Maryina Roshcha where he lived in a communal apartment building. Maryina Roshcha was the site of his childhood, but also adolescence and young adulthood, and his formative experiences of this place constituted a major influence on all of his artistic projects, and when he learned that his childhood home would be torn down to make way for lifeless, massive concrete housing complexes, he realized that he needed to preserve the memory of that place in film: "Seven years later, the news that the whole of Maryina Roshcha was finally to be demolished to make way for even more concrete blocks suddenly made it imperative for Norstein to take the plunge and, by one means or another, capture on film a way of life that was about to disappear" (Kitson 49). The result would be a film that presents an entirely personal portrait of the city preserved in memory on film. Norstein's Moscow is not composed of the city's iconic monuments or busy streets; in fact, the city is noticeable by its absence. However, in *Tale of Tales*, his experience of Marina Roshcha is invoked not only through the image of the wooden house that anchors the film, but also through the themes of family life and community that are woven throughout the film.

The intersection of memory and the city once again returns us to Walter Benjamin, who confronts similar issues to those of Norstein in his memoir about childhood in Berlin. Benjamin is remembering the city while he is in exile, but his city is

a lost city, just as Norstein's portrait of Moscow is one that has been lost. For Benjamin, memory is

“not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre [*Schauplatz*]. It is the medium in which dead cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. This determines the tone and bearing of genuine reminiscences [*echter Erinnerungen*]. They must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is merely a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth: the images [*Bilder*], severed from all earlier associations, that stand – like precious fragments or torsos in a collector's gallery – in the sober room of our later insights. True, for successful excavations a plan is needed. Yet no less indispensable is the cautious probing of the spade in the dark loam, and it is to cheat oneself of the riches prize to preserve as a record merely the inventory of one's discoveries, and not this dark joy of the place of the finding, as well, Fruitless searching is as much a part of this as succeeding, and consequently remembrance must not proceed in the manner of a narrative or still less that of a report, but must, in the strictest epic and rhapsodic manner, assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve in ever-deeper layers” (qtd. in Andrew Benjamin 193)

Norstein similarly digs deep into his psyche, even to areas beyond immediate awareness to uncover the buried fragments of his past that defy a narrative trajectory. Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* cites this same passage from Benjamin when she is referring to the impossibility to assemble a complete portrait of the city from fragments of memory: “There is no ideal ensemble of the past buried underneath the contemporary city, only infinite fragments. The ideal city exists only in architectural models and in the new total restorations” (Boym Future 78). Norstein's film could be said to possess an element of what Boym refers to as reflective nostalgia, a process of “deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future” (55). Certainly a sense of loss haunts the ethereal images of Norstein's film, but *Tale of Tales* is not characterized by melancholy. In fact, the mere suggestion of the

absence of a place is a primary source of creativity and ultimately constitutes an individual artistic assertion during the period of stagnation in the Soviet Union. Norstein's film captures a past time of hope and promise even while the reality of the period during which Norstein was making the film was characterized by the decline of economic growth, the dematerialization of the Thaw era political reforms, and repressive conservatism. Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the Soviet Union from 1964 until 1982, was a man of mediocre intelligence whose government emphasized a certain aesthetic code that emphasized the ideological function of art. The repression and stagnation, however, were combated by intellectual and artistic endeavors of which Norstein was involved. His film not only presents a highly personal and individual portrait of an absent part of the city, but also his own protest against the absent freedom of expression of the time.

Tale of Tales is a film about Norstein's childhood in Moscow during the war. However, since Norstein was born in 1941, he was too young to remember the war, so the film captures the impressions and feelings of his childhood. *Tale of Tales* is a film about memory, but it is also structured like a memory. There is no narrative and no discernible logic connecting dreamlike images that lend the film its ethereal quality. There is no fixed meaning, just as there is no fixed time and space and no fixed style. The images, meaning, and mood are always moving, constantly metamorphosing. Shaped by Norstein's love of poetry and painting, the film works to evoke certain emotions and to communicate a sense of wonder. Animation is perhaps the most personal film form, and arguably, the one most connected to the mind. Psyche is another term for the mind, the center of thought, feeling and memory; the word comes from the

Greek term meaning ‘breath,’ ‘life,’ or ‘soul.’ Essentially, psyche refers to the animating principle of human life, and therefore, underscores the vital connection between animation and the mind. Much scholarship has been written examining the connection between film and the mind, but less attention has been paid to animated film in the same context. Norstein’s film is about memory, but since it is also a film structured like memory, *Tale of Tales* provides us with an opportunity to engage with Henri Bergson’s philosophy of memory, specifically to explore the role that memory plays in the formation of images and creativity.

Yuri Norstein was born during the evacuation of 1941, and grew up just outside of Moscow in the provincial town of Maryina Roshcha. His early childhood coincided with a war that, for Russia, was especially devastating. Norstein says that he does not remember the war, cannot remember the war, but that he does remember the feeling, “the feeling in the corridor, in a room, the frost, the smell of frost, the smell of snow...and the tango ‘tired sun’ that could be heard everywhere, almost as a national anthem.” The images of his film convey the feelings of childhood, “reconstructed...as they reconstruct a fallen fresco.” as opposed to any particular event or experience. *Tale of Tales* alternates between four fantastical dreamlike worlds: the world of the war and an old house resembling Norstein’s childhood home, the poet’s idyllic world, the contemporary winter world of a young boy, and the forest world, the home of the little grey wolf. Summoned by a lullaby, the Little Wolf, the hero of the film, is the spirit connecting these worlds and he is able to traverse the permeable membrane that exists between them:

The Little Wolf finally emerges as the key to the whole film. Instead of arriving only at the end of the story, evoked by the lullaby as he had been in earlier versions, he now assumes multiple roles. He is the genius of the abandoned house, the spirit of a bygone age. He is the poet’s longed-for

reader, a perceptive reader who picks up an idea and runs with it, nurtures it. He is the structural axis of the whole film, as the only protagonist inhabiting both the world of memories and the world of the idealised future (and even making a guest appearance in the contemporary, winter scene). Finally, and crucially, his melancholic-comic persona, his burning look and his sense of longing dictate the mood of the whole piece. (Kitson 99)

The film opens with a prologue showing a round green apple glowing in the rain, a baby suckling on a large round breast, and the little grey wolf with round glistening eyes. A voice softly sings the lullaby “The Little Grey Wolf Will Come.” After the opening title we come to a shabby wooden house, the doorway of which serves as a portal, radiating a blinding light that beckons us toward it. We follow the light and enter the poet’s sepia-toned world. The poet, dressed in a toga and laurel wreath and holding a lyre, is having trouble composing a poem. Around him, a woman does laundry and keeps a watchful eye over her baby; a young girl jumps rope with a bull; a fisherman returns with a large fish; and a talking cat recites poetry of his own. When we return to the old house, a gathering has just ended, and the wind blows off the tablecloth of an empty table. Night has fallen, and a train whizzes past. The table and chairs are now piled up in the yard, and the windows of the house are being boarded up. The cars parked in front of the house disappear one by one as the furniture spontaneously catches fire. The wolf stays behind, alone, except for an old woman stoking the stove’s fire.

As the popular wartime tango “Weary Sun” begins to play, we are transported to an outdoor dance floor, lit by a solitary streetlamp, where couples are dancing. Each time the record skips a man disappears. The men, wearing their military uniforms, fade away into the rain and shadows. The train whizzes past again, throwing the women notifications containing the fate of their husbands. A lone woman passes sadly beneath

the streetlamp as the train flies past again. At the old house, winter has come, and the old woman stokes the fire. A Mozart harpsichord concerto signals the contemporary scene, where it is also wintertime. A little boy holding an apple stands beneath a tree filled with crows. When he looks up, he is in the tree sharing his apple with them. A couple sits on a nearby bench. The man drinks from a vodka bottle, and the woman chatters away. The man suddenly throws his bottle on the ground and leaves. The boy falls, and the woman, his mother, pulls him away to follow the man, who now wears the hat of Napoleon. The boy gets his own hat as well when he pushes his mother out of his way. We are once more reminded of the lone woman waiting for a sign from her husband away at war.

At the house, the Little Wolf, now alone, warms himself by the stove. He cooks his dinner of potatoes over the fire. Fireworks sound, and the women continue to dance alone. Suddenly, several of the men reappear, and a wounded soldier plays “Weary Sun” on his accordion. The war’s ending has brought some of the men home to their wives, while other women receive notifications foretelling bad news. The Little Wolf cooks his potatoes and tries to eat them before they have cooled down. He hums the tango and dances around the fire, and then he hums the lullaby. The blinding light shines from the doorway, and the wolf walks toward it. We find ourselves once more with the poet and his friends, who are sitting down to dinner. The fisherman invites a passerby to join them; the man accepts before continuing his journey. On the table, the poet sits with his lyre, pen, inkwell and paper. The woman, her daughter, and the fisherman are retiring for the night. The bull and the cat are sleeping. The Little Wolf suddenly grabs the poet’s paper and weaves through traffic along a busy highway to his forest home. But he is stopped by the sound of a wailing baby; he is surprised to discover that the paper has

turned into a baby. The wolf anxiously lays it under a bush and runs away, but turns back. He brings the crying infant to his home deep in the forest and places it in a cradle, where he sings the lullaby. As *Tale of Tales* draws to a close, we see a glowing apple in the woods, the crows in the tree, and apples falling from the sky. The little boy stands next to a giant apple as he eats his own apple. He looks up to see himself feeding the crows in the tree branches. The Little Wolf watches. The soldiers march toward war. The bull and the little girl jump rope; the poet works on his poem; and then the bull jumps rope by himself. The old house endures the winter snow and the spring rain. An accordion plays “Weary Sun” over the final image of a cobblestone bridge over the train tracks. A train passes beneath and a solitary streetlamp glows in the night.

In the Soviet Union the film Goskino, the State Committee for Cinematography, a governmental entity that had to approve a film’s proposal, treatment, and script before the film could be made regulated industry. Soyuzmultfilm, the animation studio in which Norstein worked supported his project unstintingly, but earning Goskino’s approval proved to be a bit more difficult. The primary problems cited by Goskino concerned the film’s incomprehensibility, its deviation from the tenets of socialist realism, its individualistic overtones, and its title, which was initially to be ‘The Little Grey Wolf Will Come.’ Eventually, a script and treatment were approved, but this proved to be a mere formality as during the film’s production process, Norstein dispensed with the script:

[In a script] you lose the most important thing, the immediacy of the poetry, the immediacy of the action. [...] I think the film should be constantly changing, developing. And the only kind of script that can allow for such development is one that is...like a Japanese haiku. The film grows of itself while it’s being shot. And during this time I never look at either the treatment or at the shooting script. Why? Because if I haven’t

managed to fix anything in my memory, then what's the point of looking at them? To see again that brick that's already been baked once? Those editing plans, written down in words? They don't move! But the storyboard, on the other hand, isn't something you just do at the beginning. You do it every day. It's alive. And sometimes, out of some little detail, out of some action not foreseen in even the most detailed, strict storyboard, sometimes when you're shooting, a whole scene grows, a whole sequence. (qtd. in Kitson 71)

Norstein insists on an organic process of production and refuses to use computers, which only illuminates the intensity of his involvement in crafting his films. There is no mediating instrument between him and the actual materials of the animation process; his is a very direct relationship that allows him to be fully present in the film's production. As Norstein would say, "You must submerge deep down there, into the sheet of paper. You must live with your character" (interview, *The Complete Works*).

The process of constructing the film is intimately tied to the film's themes, its structure, and interiority, all of which is inseparable from Norstein himself. The emphasis on layers is key in this respect. *Tale of Tales* is constructed in layers, just as memory contains many layers, and the film's meaning is imbued with many layers. Norstein built a multi-plane camera of his own design in order to make the film. The camera stands 3.8 meters high and has a filming aperture of 2.6 meters by 1.5 meters. The camera can hold up to twelve planes of glass, all of which can be moved horizontally and vertically, with each plane lighted from all sides. Norstein uses cutout animation, one of the oldest forms of animation and one of the most time-consuming animation methods. Each character consists of many small pieces of celluloid that Norstein manipulates with a pair of tweezers under the camera. Norstein does not use hinges on his cutouts so as not to restrict movement; everything is animated in a free-form style without concern for precise, linear movement. Millimeter by millimeter, the film slowly

takes shape under the guidance of Norstein's imagination and memory. Indeed, every element of the film's construction originates from Norstein, who insists upon complete control of the process while also maintaining a "creative chaos" around a film's construction. Alexander Zhukovsky, his cameraman has commented on the scope of Norstein's involvement in *Tale of Tales*: "He did not merely film. He influenced the light, the film stock, the camera, the drawings with his entire being" (qtd. in Kitson 43).

Undoubtedly, *Tale of Tales* is a very personal project for Norstein; the animation process alone speaks to the intensity with which he crafted the film. Many elements of the film are autobiographical and stem from memories that can be traced to particular moments in Norstein's life. Several of the cutouts are modeled after member of Norstein's family. For instance, Norstein explains that the opening prologue is connected to his aunt whose husband was in the war during her pregnancy: "She gave birth and her child died in two weeks. At nights she used to get up and draw out her milk, because it continued to increase. The scene where the baby suckles the breast and falls asleep is from impressions of my childhood, when I was waking up at night and seeing a huge breast shining in the dusk of the room" (interview, *The Complete Works*). However, other scenes are pure imagination, extending from impressions and dreams and encompass a more accessible, universal theme about what constitutes memory and what it means to remember, something to which Norstein refers as pre-memory: "That is, sensations were combined with some sort of pre-memory, that is – something which is beyond...beyond my own self, everybody has it...when you make a gesture and suddenly say to yourself, 'It has already happened, it has already happened one time' ...though maybe it didn't happen to you" (interview, *The Complete Works*). Critic Mikhail

Iampolski explains that because *Tale of Tales* “imitates in its spatial composition the structural texture of our consciousness,” the film is able to embody a multiplicity of meanings, sensations, and layers (qtd. in Kitson 82).

Norstein situates his animation within the realm of the mind, and maintains that the fundamental condition of animation is its ability to transform material reality into fantasy: ‘Animation is made from the secrets of consciousness and feeling that are placed on film. No intervening matter or substance [*materia*] will stop an image reflecting our feelings...Feelings are reflected by natural matter, turning that matter into fantasy’ (interview, *The Complete Works*). Delicately woven together like a poem or a song, the film’s images flow effortlessly across the screen, belying the meticulous work that went into their construction. The multiple layers imbue the images with the illusion of infinite depth. Norstein’s worlds exist simultaneously and continuously as time and space are suspended indefinitely. *Tale of Tales* seems to capture a sense of the eternal. Norstein explains that in the film’s structure “there musn’t be a quotidian logic, but rather something interior, something musical...like the feelings of childhood” (interview, *The Complete Works*). The images, transitory and dreamlike, are not situated in any actual experience from Norstein’s childhood, so one might ask where do these images come from and what do they communicate to us about memory? Fyodor Khitruk, a Soviet animator and contemporary of Norstein’s, describes the *Tale of Tales* as “visual philosophy” (interview, *The Complete Works*). In order to move closer to isolating the metaphysical qualities of Norstein’s film, then, we must delve into the realm of philosophy, and in particular, to Henri Bergson’s philosophy of memory.

Henri Bergson was a French philosopher who became a prominent thinker in the early half of the twentieth century. He challenged one of the prevailing influences on Western philosophy, rationalism, a branch of philosophy that stresses the primacy of reason over sensory perceptions and immediate experience as the basis for knowledge. In contrast to rationalism, Bergson emphasized the importance of intuition and immediate experience as the means of gaining knowledge of the world. For Bergson, the difference between memory and perception is a key concept elucidated in his work *Matter and Memory*. Perceptions are the representations of present objects and the experience of matter, whereas memories are representations of absent objects and the experience of spirit. However, there are two kinds of memory, habit memory and regressive memory, which are connected, but move in different directions from past to future. Habit memory refers to the automatic behaviors that we obtain through repetition, often having become so perfected and habitual that they seem innate; but habit memory is connected to the body and is therefore impersonal since the body exists in the perceptual present moment. Regressive memory, however, points to past subjective experience and therefore, the survival of personal memories. Bergson introduces the image of an inverted cone to illustrate the relationship between memory and matter. The cone's summit is inserted into plane "P" the "plane of my actual representation of the universe" (*Matter and Memory* 196). The cone "SAB" symbolizes regressive memory; the unconscious memories, the oldest memories, are located at the base "AB." The cone's summit "S" is the image of the body, the point of present perception, where action takes place. Memories move down this cone, which also rotates and contracts, in the dynamic process from contemplation to action. Bergson's cone of memory is comparable to a telescope:

Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain “region of the past – a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes into the actual; and as its outlines become more distinct and its surface takes on colour, it tends to imitate perception. But it remains attached to the past by its deepest roots, and if, when once realized, it did not retain something of its original virtuality, if, being a present state, it were not also something which stands out distinct from the present, we should never know it for a memory. (*Matter and Memory* 171)

When a memory of a thought or image is recalled, it first resembles a nebulous mass like the Milky Way galaxy, but as the memory is brought into focus, individual stars begin to appear, and as they move down to the summit of the cone before they can be perceived with the eye and become images. For Bergson, then, memory precedes the image, which is essentially matter understood as an image since it lies outside us.

Memory is ontological: being is memory. While habit memory is stored in the brain, a physical entity, pure memory resides in consciousness. Pure memory is the past; it is autonomous and does not exist within an image. Bergson’s concept of the image is complex and difficult to isolate, but it lies at the core of his understanding of matter, perception, and memory, and will prove useful to a possible reconciliation of memory and the image, and, consequently, to how Bergson’s ontology of memory fits into the larger discussion of Norstein’s *Tale of Tales*. To clarify Bergson’s conception of the image, it might be useful to draw on his use of the cinematographic apparatus as an analogy for intellect. Film, for Bergson, was more of an afterthought and is not a significant subject of his writings. He compares the way in which our intellect processes the world to the cinematographic apparatus, and in doing so, he inevitably places film

within the realm of matter and perception and distances it from that of spirit and memory. Intellect is situated at the point in which the summit of the memory cone meets plane “P”, the representation of the universe, and the result is action; intellect is also the means through which we understand our environment. Yet intellect does not offer advantaged access to reality, because reality is movement. Since intellect works from immobility, intellect must construct movement from “snapshots of reality,” which is essentially the way film works:

It is because the film of the cinematograph unrolls, bringing in turn the different photographs of the scene to continue each other, that each actor of the scene recovers his mobility; he strings all his successive attitudes on the invisible movement of the film. The process then consists in extracting from all the movements peculiar to all the figures an impersonal movement abstract and simple, *movement in general*, so to speak: we put this into the apparatus, and we reconstitute the individuality of each particular movement by combining this nameless movement with the personal attitudes. Such is the contrivance of the cinematograph. And such is also that of our knowledge. Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and, as these are characteristic of the reality, we have only to string them on a becoming, abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge, in order to imitate what there is that is characteristic in this becoming itself. Perception, intellection, language so proceed in general. Whether we would thing becoming, or express it, or even perceive it, we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematography inside us. We may therefore sum up what we have been saying in the conclusion that the *mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of a cinematographical kind*. (*Creative Evolution* 306)

When projected on screen, the snapshots give the illusion of movement. Film is spatialized movement: a film uncoils frame by frame in rapid succession, each image replacing the one before it, and without duration, which is a key concept for Bergson. Duration is conservation with the addition of something new. Memory, because it conserves the past but continuously adds new moments to the past, has duration.

Consequently, Bergson seems a bit dismissive of film and does not connect film with memory. Is it possible, though, that an animated film such as *Tale of Tales*, one that is both about memory and structured like memory, can offer a new avenue through which to reconcile film, as Bergson sees it, with memory?

Bergson in his book, *Creative Evolution*, explains that the whole of our past, from our earliest memories, and from even our history before birth, is preserved automatically and follows us every moment “pressing against the portals of consciousness that would fain leave it outside” (5). The only memories allowed through to the present are those that prove useful in a present situation or action. However, a few unconscious memories sometimes slip through the cracks to “remind us of what we are dragging behind us unawares” (*Creative Evolution* 5). And in some way, our past is always alongside the present: “Doubtless we think with only a small part of the past, but it is with our entire past, including the original bent of our soul, that we desire, will and act. Our past, then, as a whole, is made manifest to us in its impulse; it is felt in the form of tendency, although a small part of it only is known in the form of idea” (*Creative Evolution* 5). Despite memory’s dominant position in Bergson’s hierarchy, it is not completely disconnected from perception and the present. In fact, there is no such thing as pure present, only the unfathomable progression of the past consuming the future. The past *is*, while the present is *becoming*. There is no present moment without memory of the past, since there is no continuation with addition. The reason that memory can exist into the present is duration: Inner duration is the continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present, the present either containing within it in a distinct form the ceaselessly growing image of the past, or, more profoundly, showing by its continual

change of quality the heavier and still heavier load we drag behind us as we grow older” (*An Introduction to Metaphysics* 45). So the past is not some distant place that cannot be known and cannot be traversed; it is something that coexists with what we know of as the present moment. According to Bergson, once a memory becomes an image, it is no longer memory. He also claims that the spatialized movement of images in the cinematographic apparatus is an analogy for intellect. Therefore, is it even possible to make a film with images of memory, to recreate the way in which intuition understands the world, and capture temporal movement? So far, Bergson has outlined a dualism between memory and perception that pits intuition against intellect, dreams against action, memory against matter, and even time against space, one that, at times, seems to present no possibility of reconciliation between memory and image, without which it will not be possible to bring *Tale of Tales* into the discussion. First, we must discover where in his philosophy does Bergson overcome this dualism and offer areas of connection between memory and image.

The mind exists simultaneously on the plane of action and the plane of memory, which means that it oscillates between two ideas of the image, the image as matter, and the image as a way of recovering intuition: “Now the image has at least this advantage, that it keeps us in the concrete. No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized” (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 16). Bergson explains that when memory is dissociated, it turns into memory-images that can travel to the present moment as

representations of the materiality of our experience that assist our perceptual faculties in decoding the world.

Now if we are going to talk about Bergson and film, we are going to have to come to terms with his concept of the image. When he talks about film in his works as the illusion of movement in “snapshots of reality,” he is referring to the photograph in particular. However, when he talks about art, which apparently does not include the cinema, a more positive attitude emerges. He claims that art is distinctly individualized and subjective:

Hence it follows that art always aims at what is individual. What the artist fixes on his canvas is something he has seen at a certain spot, on a certain day, at a certain hour, with a colouring that will never be seen again. What the poet sings of is a certain mood which was his, and his alone, and which will never return. What the dramatist unfolds before us is the life-history of a soul, a living tissue of feelings and events – something, in short, which has once happened and can never be repeated. We may, indeed, give general names to these feelings, but they cannot be the same thing in another soul (*Laughter* 161).

Although Bergson does not outline a fully defined theory of art, he does make several interesting claims about the power of art to show us something beyond our everyday consciousness, an assertion echoed in Victor Shklovsky’s idea of estrangement. He also implies that through art, it is possible for an artist’s subjective experience, or memories to be understood by everyone. It seems as though Bergson suggests that art originates from memory:

What is the aim of art if not to show us, in nature and in the mind, outside of us and within us, things which did not explicitly strike our senses and our consciousness? The poet and the novelist who express a mood certainly do not create it out of nothing; they would not be understood by us if we did not observe within ourselves, up to a certain point, what they say about others. As they speak, shades of emotion and thought appear to us which might long since have been brought out in us but which remained invisible; just like the photographic image which as not yet been

plunged into the bath where it will be revealed. The poet is this revealing agent. But nowhere is the function of the artist shown as clearly as in the art which gives the most important place to imitation, I mean painting. The great painters are men who possess a certain vision of things which has or will become the vision of all men. (*Key Writings* 251).

Tale of Tales may indeed have been shot frame by frame in order to be projected on screen, but each frame is not a “snapshot” of reality, but instead, each frame is a separate painting.

If image is matter, a representation of a present object, and memory is a representation of an absent object, is not animated film a representation of an object in its absence? *Tale of Tales*, as an animated film, consists of images that are radically distanced from the objective reality of perceptive experience, images that could hardly be deemed “snapshots of reality.” The images in Norstein’s film correspond more to Gilles Deleuze’s idea of the time-image, which draws upon Bergson’s philosophy of memory. The time-image is not an easy concept to define, and even Deleuze does not give an explicit, definitive description of what the time-image looks like. In fact, the indefinite quality and indiscernibility is built into his conception of the time-image. For Deleuze, the time-image is akin to Bergson’s pure memory-image; it is one that oscillates between actual and virtual, that records or handles memory, blurs the distinction between mental and physical time, and is often marked by immeasurable spatial and temporal links between shots (Rodowick 79-118). David Rodowick in his book *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine* offers a brief summary of the time-image in relation to Bergson’s philosophy of memory:

Bergson understands the relations between movement and matter as continuous in space. There can be no physical division of body and mind considered from the point of view of movement. Memory, on the other hand, requires the interval as a dislocation in time. In the direct image of

time, the interval no longer functions as a continuity in space, but as a series of dislocations in time. These dislocations involve relations between present and past that are nonlinear and nonchronological. Contrary to perception, then, memory might be defined as a process bringing ever more complex and numerous points in time into relations with an image drawn from perception on the one hand, and from memory itself on the other. Direct images of time provide audiovisual mappings of this process. (Rodowick 88)

There are many similarities between Deleuze and Bergson, but with the time-image, Deleuze was able to extrapolate upon a hazy section of Bergson's philosophy concerning the synthesis of memory and image. In order to clarify the time-image, it might prove beneficial to compare it to the Deleuze's movement-image. The two types of images are not mutually exclusive, but they are quite different. The movement-image presents time indirectly through the representation of action with sequences linked by human purpose and natural consequence, whereas the time-image is not guided by a singular, linear purpose, but exists in multiplicity and indiscernibility. The reconciliation between memory and image is time, and thus, the time-image. The time-image is most clearly embodied in the modernist art films of post-war Europe, while the movement is associated with classical Hollywood narrative films.

Now, using Deleuze's time-image to look at an animated film might seem odd, but an animated film is still a film made up of images after all, and animated film might be an even better-suited medium for presenting the time-image since it is limitless in its potential for representing the world. Clearly in *Tale of Tales*, time is treated differently than narrative films: there is no clear sense of time. In the film, the four worlds seem to exist simultaneously even though there are marked differences in their time periods – the tango music signals the 1940s, while the winter scene is more contemporary, yet the Little Wolf runs between the worlds effortlessly as though there was not separation

between them. The fluidity with which the four worlds merge into one another completely dislocates our sense of space, which consequently affects our sense of movement within the film. The infinite depth created by Norstein's many layers also serves as a temporal expression. Depth "gives rise to all kinds of adventures of the memory, which are not so much psychological accidents as misadventures of time, disturbances of its constitution" (Deleuze 110); in it exists the past, present, and future simultaneously. Therefore, the movement of the figures within the film is not a quality by which time can be understood. The movement is not motivated by human purpose or natural consequence, it is simply movement. Dancing couples float in the air above houses like in a Marc Chagall painting; trains whiz diagonally across the frame, without a destination; men disappear only to reappear later as if they had never left. Mental and physical time meld together indistinguishably. The film has no narrative, no patterns, and no overarching logic to offer explanation. The whole film is imbued with an indefinite quality that is only attributable to the nature of memory. *Tale of Tales* is a film made up of images of memory depicting a purely psychic reality of an entire personal history brought to life on screen through the time-image.

When we watch a film such as *Tale of Tales*, we are offered a glimpse into Norstein's mind, but we are also seeing the memory of a place, specifically of Moscow. "How can you say this?" one might ask, especially considering that while watching the film, it is not obvious that the communal wooden house, the trees, the brief snatch of highway, and the park bench in winter, are part of Moscow. And yet, when seen by a particular generation of people, those who lived in Moscow during the war, the sight of that old-fashioned wooden building in Maryina Roshcha conjures up a distinctly human

element of Moscow that was lost when most of the wooden structures were replaced by impersonal concrete housing developments. Norstein says of his childhood in that *kommunalka*, or communal apartment, that even though everyone was impoverished, and despite the lack of heat and inadequate ventilation, the terrible smells, and the noise, life was rich and he felt secure. He was surrounded by loving neighbors during a time after the war when all of Moscow was in a state of euphoria. Maryina Roshcha was imprinted into Norstein's memory from early on as a happy time in his life filled with wonder and magic. "Norstein's earliest memories, naturally, do not centre on the detail of the house. Yet the geography of the place and the dim internal lighting – lending an other-worldly luminosity to an open external door – were key to the childhood fantasies he would indulge in before drifting off to sleep: "At the end of the corridor was a door leading to a street. And it seemed to me that there, waiting beyond the door, were eternal happiness, light, a talking cat and bread sprinkled with sugar..." (Kitson 11). The Moscow of *Tale of Tales* is almost lost to us now amidst the rapid construction of post-Soviet Moscow, and so we must look simultaneously within and beyond the city for its resurrection. There may be old photographs of Maryina Roshcha, of old Moscow before the war, but photographs are not memory. With *Tale of Tales*, we are brought into close contact with memory, and since memory is inevitably tied to man, and man is ineluctably tied to place, Norstein's Moscow will be forever written with celluloid on the fabric of the city.

Fantasy and the City: Post-Apocalyptic Moscow in Timur Bekmambetov's *Night Watch*

In the decade after the Soviet collapse, Sergei Lukyanenko wrote a trilogy of fantasy books that became extremely popular; the first one is *Night Watch*, which tells the story of a centuries-old war between the forces of Light and Darkness on the streets of Moscow. It is part of the emerging sub-genre of urban fantasy, which features a fantastic city characterized by supernatural happenings and creatures. In 2004, *Night Watch* was adapted into a film with the same name by Kazakh director Timur Bekmambetov. The film constitutes one of the boldest undertakings of the post-Soviet Russian film industry. For an almost measly four million dollar budget, *Night Watch* boasts digital effects on an epic scale that would rival any Hollywood blockbuster. Indeed, *Night Watch* is the first Hollywood-style Russian blockbuster and became the highest grossing film ever released in post-Soviet Russia, and is credited with reviving the almost nonexistent film industry. The film is visually appealing and speaks to the context of everyday life in contemporary Russia. The innovative digital effects in combination with the glossy stylized aesthetic of Bekmambetov, whose background as an artist and experience in making different styles of commercials, render an altogether spectacular portrait of contemporary Moscow, one that blurs the boundaries between the real and the unreal.

What is interesting about the city in *Night Watch* is how sleek and stylish Moscow appears: the saturated color palette, the fast-paced editing, and the industrial rock soundtrack read like a television commercial designed to immerse viewers into the fantastical world of glitzy digital effects. Yet, at the same time the very spaces of Moscow in the film remind us that the city is marked by post-Soviet decay. Moscow is

just as gritty as it is pretty. The stylized fight sequences take place in abandoned factories and tired apartment buildings on the city's periphery. The streets are lit with neon advertising signs, while not attractive close-up, light the city like a Christmas tree in the overhead shots. And of course, vampires, dark magicians, and shapeshifters roam the streets unbeknownst to average Muscovites. In *Night Watch*, Moscow is reimagined as a post-apocalyptic space. In *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, James Berger connects post-apocalyptic representations to historical trauma, and maintains that representing the post-apocalypse is a way of coming to terms with the catastrophic past, and for Moscow that catastrophic past was the demise of the Soviet Union. In *Night Watch*, Moscow figures as a space in which the collective unconscious fears and anxieties brought on by the collapse are brought to life through the fantastical world of the Light and Dark Others who are battling for supremacy over the future of the city.

When the Soviet Union fell in 1991, the entire ideological framework of an empire collapsed too, leading to massive political, economic, and social instability. The upheaval left the former Soviet Union in ruin: suddenly, Russia and the former Soviet republics were overrun with corruption, crime, and unemployment, and the beginning of the post-Soviet era was marked by trauma, which manifested in images of the city in literature and film. In the immediate aftermath of the collapse, chernukha films carried a particularly brutal indictment of post-Soviet society. The term *chernukha* (with its root *chern*, "black") originally emerged in reference to a new vein of perestroika literature, but now is used most often in discussion of cinema. Chernukha pertains to the darkest aspects of life, and its imagery paints a bleak portrait of post-Soviet Russia characterized by the

lack of a moral center, sexual perversion, crime, violence, and lawlessness.¹ The chernukha aesthetic was excessive and extreme and, by the millennium, had gone into decline, but the darkness of the city remains as a trope of post-Soviet film. Many of the films produced in Russia over the past two decades have captured the fears and anxieties that accompanied the emergence of the “new Russia” whose many representations revolve around the threatening urban landscape. Moscow, as the cultural, political, and economic center of the Russian Federation, becomes a space in which new identities and anxieties are negotiated.

The story of *Night Watch* originates in a centuries-old war between humans called Others who have special powers. In the days of Byzantium, there lived a Virgin who became cursed by misfortune so that everything she touched died. The curse laid upon her opened a vortex of damnation around her and led to the creation of the forces of Darkness. Warriors of Light rose up to fight them, and a great battle began. However, both armies were equal in strength, and if the war were to continue, everyone would die, so Geser, Lord of the Light, and Zavulon, General of the Darkness called a truce and set up a system for policing the Others. The Light Others became Night Watch, and they patrolled the night, while the Dark Others became Day Watch, and they stood watch over day. The most powerful of the Others became the Inquisition and would watch over both Watches and keep the balance of Good and Evil. Legend tells of an Other more powerful than all before him. Seers say that he will choose Darkness and, in choosing, will initiate

¹ Feature films associated with the term chernukha include Vasilii Pichul's *Little Vera* (1988), Igor and Dmitrii Talankins' *Autumn, Chertanovo ...* (1988), Iurii Kara's *Kings of Crime* (1988), Aleksandr Aleksandrov and Vladimir Prokhorov's *Assuage My Sorrows* (1989), Olga Narutskaia's *Tamara Aleksandrovna's Husband and Daughter* (1989), Aleksandr Sokurov's *Save and Protect* (1989), Isaak Fridberg's *Little Doll* (1989), Kira Muratova's *The Aesthetic Syndrome* (1990), Pavel Lungin's *Taxi Blues* (1990), Sergei Bodrov's *Card Sharp* (1990)

the final battle between Good and Evil. His presence will be marked by the return of the Virgin.

Anton Gorodetsky (Konstantin Khabensky) discovers that he is an Other after visiting a Dark Witch Darya Leonidova. His wife has just left him for another man, and Anton wants her back. Darya tells him that she is pregnant, so that her spell will kill the baby. Before she can complete the spell, three Others from the Night Watch storm in and prevent it. Anton can see the Others, which means that he too, is one of them, and also a Seer, able to glimpse the future. Twelve years later the Night Watch is tracing a young boy named Yegor, who is being lured by the Dark. Anton is enlisted to follow him. On the subway he encounters a young woman and sees the vortex swirling around her. Yegor is eventually put under the protection of the Night watch who must ensure that the Dark Others do not take him. However, the Night watch is preoccupied with Svetlana, the Virgin, and the threatening vortex amassing above her apartment. During a moment of distraction, Yegor is lured away. Anton and Zavulon fight on the rooftop. As Anton lunges at Zavulon with a knife, Zavulon switches their places so that Anton's knife is now aimed at Yegor. Yegor asks if he wants to kill him; Anton says no, but the Dark Witch Darya reappears and reminds them of Anton's attempt to abort his son twelve years ago. "You're worse than the Dark," Yegor accuses. He chooses to go with the Dark Others. The young boy is the Great Other, and his choice will plunge the world into Darkness.

Bringing this fantastical, supernatural world of *Night Watch* to life would not have been possible without digital technology. Every aspect of the film is stylized, with many of the scenes digitally enhanced so that the ordinary becomes fantastical.

Sequences are shown in slow motion, while others are sped up to dizzying speeds. The music is loud and pulsating. In *Night Watch*, blood pours freely from wounds, from mouths, from dead pigs; the action is high-energy, and colors are heavily saturated and in high contrast against the darkness of the city. A passage from the novel draws out the eerie atmosphere of the glittering city at night which is permeated by dangerous unseen forces:

Even the people who were on the platform seemed confused and depressed. They weren't admiring the view of the city spread out below them, with all its lamps glowing brightly – Moscow in its usual festive mood. Maybe it was a feast in a time of plague, but it was a beautiful feast. Right now, though, no one was enjoying it. Everything was dominated by the atmosphere of Darkness. Even I couldn't see it, but I could feel it choking me like carbon monoxide gas, which has no taste, no color, and no smell. (Lukyanenko 282)

But the digital effects of the film version only underscore a world that exists just beneath awareness, a world of the metaphorical underground. *Night Watch* is not set in Moscow's literal underground, the metro, but in a place that resides under consciousness, since the war between Light and Dark is taking place beneath the immediate awareness of the city's inhabitants. The constant night, the shadows, the dampness, the griminess of the city in *Night Watch* conjures up images of an imagined underground. In *Metropolis on the Styx; The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001*, David Lawrence Pike examines how subterranean spaces, either real or imagined, have influenced the way we think about and envision the modern city. He describes the underground as an eclectic place, often temporally and spatially incoherent, and potentially filled with frightening secrets:

The underground has been a dominant image of modernity since the late eighteenth century: a site of crisis, of fascination, and of hidden truth, a space somehow more real but also more threatening and otherworldly than

the ordinary world above. Whether imagined or real, subterranean spaces present a unique combination of the utterly alien with the completely familiar, of mythic timelessness with the lived experience of the present. As kingdom of death, realm of dust and decomposition, and site of the afterlife, the space beneath the earth has long possessed an unsurpassed power to evoke the negation of whatever has been defined as normal and belonging to the world above. (Pike 1)

The underground bears a direct relationship to the world above ground, and, according to Pike, how we imagine the underground space then influences the our conception of the world above it. Yet, Pike is quick to point out that the underground is not the exact opposite of the aboveground, nor is it an “unmediated and dominated reflection” because the underground possesses its own distinct characteristics and logic (1-2). However, Pike maintains that any interpretation of the underground will include a “displaced vision of something that poses a crisis of representation in the world above” (2). When we imagine Moscow as a supernatural city threatened with destruction from an unseen war between the forces of Light and Dark, we are able to voice some of the fundamental moral and ethical anxieties of the post-Soviet era in which Light and Dark come to illuminate the tensions of a society in flux.

The underground of the Russian capital is the Moscow metro. First opened in May of 1935 after only a few years of construction, the Moscow metro constitutes one of the most spectacular achievements of the Stalinist era. The Moscow metro, though conceived of as a pragmatic feature of the city’s infrastructure, ostensibly became a symbol of Soviet prestige and technological might. Known as the most beautiful metro in the world, the Moscow metro is replete with mosaic tile, chandeliers, art, and marble; no expense was spared. It was referred to as ‘the people’s underground palaces’ and “soon became the most compelling metaphor for the culture’s aspiration to build the communist

society of the future” (Livers 193). The Moscow metro, then, has certain mythological associations attached to it and conjures up images of tireless Soviet workers constructing socialism from the maternal soil of mother Russia. Soviet discourse on the metro emphasized order, efficiency, and stability; it became a national symbol and a source of patriotic pride, even serving as the city’s bomb shelter during the war. However, the splendor of the metro system was a stark contrast to the reality above ground. Travel writer Martha Gellhorn visited Moscow in 1972, and she articulates this disconnect in one of her memoirs:

The Moscow subway stations resemble vast subterranean Turkish baths, with a touch of old-time Roxy movie palaces. Giant murals in mosaic and brilliant paint; statuary in niches, many-coloured marble, pillars and arches. It is the most sumptuous public transport system in the world. Stupefying. Why this opulence below ground when above ground all amenity is lacking? (qtd. in Brooke 86)

The irony of the metro’s position “underground” is obvious. While the metro became a depository for the promises of a socialist utopia that never materialized, it revealed a hidden truth about the reality above ground, mainly that, the foundation of the foundation of Soviet life, the myth of utopia, was merely fantasy. The Soviet iconography inscribed on the metro’s walls in mosaic tile and professed brazenly in the statuary and architecture is now only a haunting memory of what never was.

In recent decades, the metro has taken on new meanings in the post-Soviet era, as Keith Livers points out, “Yet in stark contrast to the anthropological ideal of the ‘30s, the metro of today embodies the pervasive emptiness that has enveloped Moscow after the end of empire” (239-240). In *Night Watch*, the emptiness can be seen in the portrayal of the metro as a cramped, sweaty, dingy, crowded space that hardly evokes the beauty of the Moscow metro or any links to the past glory it once inspired. None of the distinctive

architecture or decoration is on display in a portrayal of the metro that attempts to erase previous associations with the utopian socialist vision. Alaina Lemon in her article “Talking Transit and Spectating Transition: The Moscow Metro” maintains that the metro embodies the transitional state of post-Soviet Russia. She examines the metro as a “place-trope, a figurative setting in contesting ontologies of a society in transition, alternately standing for totalizing glory or uniform repression, social chaos or freedom, conformity or cultured sociability” (18). Public transit narratives inevitably engage “discourses and images of authority, culture, and belonging” because the metro serves as a space of heightened interaction that brings new people into contact with one another (14). Also, the compressed spatial and temporal experience of the metro means that the changes of post-Soviet Russia manifest most visibly in these underground spaces. The metro today is a space of increasing capitalistic enterprise, where advertising and small shops sell their wares. It is a space where the lost citizens of post-Soviet Russia, the homeless and refugees, gather to beg for money or food and to take shelter from the elements. The metro is also a space of increased racial profiling as fears about immigrants from the Caucasus, Africa, and Asia intersect with anxieties about terrorism and imagined criminal proclivities. In a space where so many divergent forces coningle, the Moscow metro becomes a reflection on the unstable state of post-Soviet Russia, and its position literally underground only underscores the city’s metaphorical underground, mainly the collective unconscious that brings the fears and anxieties of the post-Soviet city to life. In *Night Watch*, when Anton journeys into the metro, he comes into contact with Svetlana, the young woman whose unimaginable sadness foretells the coming of a vortex that will destroy the entire city and plunge the world into war. Upon seeing her,

Anton has a painful vision of the apocalypse; the concept of apocalypse provides the foundation for the fantasy of the film's vision of the city and provides a way to look more closely at the post-Soviet condition.

The myth of apocalypse has a long history can be found in nearly every world culture. The idea of apocalypse has haunted the human consciousness for millennia, and people have always searched for ways of coping with and understanding the reality of total destruction. The advent of the twentieth century brought with it a whole new set of fears about the apocalypse, and images of world war, global pandemic, terrorism, and nuclear war have all captured the human imagination and are fixed indelibly in the human consciousness. The word 'apocalypse' comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means revelation or an unveiling; however, the term has become association with a sense of the final ending of the world, or the end of a mode of life or a way of thinking. But even though the apocalypse signals the end, often, as James Berger points out, the apocalypse is not the end; otherwise there would not be a "post" apocalypse:

The apocalypse, then, is The End, or resembles the end, or explains the end. But nearly every apocalyptic text presents the same paradox. The end is never the end. The apocalyptic text announces and describes the end of the world, but then the text does not end, nor does the world represented in the text, and neither does the world itself. In nearly every apocalyptic presentation, something remains *after the end*. (5-6)

After the ultimate catastrophe, somehow, the world continues, "and the apocalyptic writer continues to write," envisioning new endings (6). What remains after the end is more important than the actual "end" itself and these remnants of apocalypse provide us with an opportunity to come to terms with the catastrophic past. In fact, because the world continues on after the apocalypse, the 'post-apocalyptic' can be seen as a pre-apocalyptic world, one that is awaiting the actual End. Representing the post-apocalypse is a

reconciliatory act, one through which we can reclaim what has been lost in order to understand the present situation. The apocalypse reveals and explains: “The apocalyptic event, in order to be properly apocalyptic, must in its destructive moment clarify and illuminate the true nature of what has been brought to an end” (5). The apocalypse clarifies the “moral and epistemological murkiness” of life so that everything is presented in its true form, stripped of all pretense and masks within the post-apocalyptic space. In *Night Watch*, post-apocalyptic Moscow is a space through which we can understand the lingering trauma of the Soviet collapse through fantasy reconstructs the chaos and fragments of the past into this new image of Moscow

Trauma is the psychoanalytic term for apocalypse, “for both refer to shatterings of existing structures of identity and language, and both effect their own erasures from memory and must be reconstructed by means of their traces, remains, survivors, and ghosts: their symptoms. Post-apocalyptic representations are simultaneously symptoms of historical traumas and attempts to work through them” (Berger 19). The immediate rupture produced by the fall of the Soviet Union was a traumatic experience for people in Russia and the former Soviet republics. Practically overnight, they were forced to adjust to a radically new way of life as the very foundation of society eroded. Existential anxiety and uncertainty about the future permeated the nation’s fragile psyche, and people searched desperately for ways to cope with the rapid and unsettling changes. Susan Sontag, in her examination of science fiction films as both a means of representing global anxieties and alleviating them, remarks that during the 20th century anxieties about death were intensified and it became apparent that “every person would spend his individual life not only under the threat of individual death, which is certain, but of something

almost unsupportable psychologically – collective incineration and extinction which could come any time, virtually without warning” (Sontag 48). She points to fantasy as the coping mechanism for the threat of “unremitting banality and inconceivable terror” that loom over our lives. According to Sontag, fantasy distracts us from the continual threat of destruction by providing us with an “escape into exotic dangerous situations which have last-minute happy endings”, but fantasy also anesthetize our fears about impending disaster so that we become desensitized to images of catastrophe (42). For Sontag, the codes and tropes of science fiction films are rendered inadequate, because they fail to provide any criticism of the social mechanisms that “create the impersonality and dehumanization which science fiction fantasies displace onto the influence of an alien It” (47). Without the criticism of society, science fiction disaster films, rather than offering a beneficial and productive means of coming to terms with catastrophe, deprive it of any meaning.

A cursory first viewing of *Night Watch* might illustrate Sontag’s point that science fiction films are, ultimately, an inadequate response to the reality of disaster: the film is undoubtedly fun, action-packed, thrilling entertainment on scale with any Hollywood blockbuster. However, once we probe the levels of representation further, the complexities lurking beneath the glossy aesthetic begin to emerge and ultimately the film utilizes fantasy as a productive mechanism for dealing with trauma and articulating the unconscious existential anxieties of apocalypse. Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who founded analytical psychology, a form of psychology that delves deep into the human mind with an emphasis on the relationship between the conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche, says that our reality is created in the psyche through fantasy:

The psyche creates reality every day. The only expression I can use for this activity is fantasy. Fantasy is just as much feeling as thinking; as much intuition as sensation. There is no psychic function that, through fantasy, is not inextricably bound up with the other psychic functions.... Fantasy, therefore, seems to me the clearest expression of the specific activity of the psyche. It is, pre-eminently, the creative activity from which the answers to all answerable questions come; it is the mother of all possibilities, where, like all psychological opposites, the inner and outer worlds are joined together in union. (Jung 130)

With such a significant role in how we understand the world and our experience of it, fantasy cannot be read merely a distraction or an escape. *Night Watch* can be interpreted as a literal representation of a fusion between “the inner and outer worlds”. The film is not rendering the unthinkable thinkable and therefore diminishing the complexities of the lived experience of catastrophe, but bringing us into implicit confrontation with the rupture and crisis of identity brought about by the demise of the Soviet way of life with all of its ideological and cultural implications. Such a reading of *Night Watch* involves teasing out the film’s more serious undertones and acknowledging the role of our psyche in creating our own reality.

The images of disaster in *Night Watch* mainly center on the huge vortex that causes deadly storms, plans to hurtle towards the earth, the energy grid to malfunction, and threatens to obliterate the entire city, but there is also the imminent war between Light and Dark that would engulf the entire world, which is alluded to with the opening image of an ancient never-ending battle that was only ended by a precarious truce. Such images lay the premise for what could turn into a conventional science fiction narrative, with the hero confronting the alien “other,” and averting disaster in the final moments to bring about a happy ending, but *Night Watch* does not follow this conventional narrative pattern. There is no happy ending, and in fact, the end of the film only leaves us waiting

for the apocalyptic End, setting us up for the next film of the trilogy *Day Watch*. When Anton visits the dark witch in an attempt to effect the abortion of his ex-girlfriend's unborn child, he does not realize that the child is his own. His past comes back to haunt him when it is finally revealed to Yegor of his father's initial betrayal, leading Yegor to choose the Dark, a decision that provides the catalyst for the final war. Anton, our hero, is incapable of preventing what will supposedly be the End. Also, the Others are not as "other" and alien as their name might suggest; apart from their unusual powers, they do not look any different and are shown to be, and have always been, among the crowds of average Muscovites. And the world of the film is not exotic and alien: it is the contemporary city. Such a departure from a conventional narrative pattern necessitates a different way of reading the film and the way that fantasy and apocalypse are working to articulate some of the fears and anxieties created in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's demise.

Obviously the fear is not in the chance that there is actually a race of supernatural, vampiric beings walking among us, and, at least with this particular film, we are not discussing the threat of material and bodily catastrophe. The fears and anxieties brought to life in *Night Watch* come from the mental underground, the unconscious, and involves a fundamental shift in reality in post-Soviet Russia, and an existential anxiety about the basis of life and the future of Russia. When the Soviet Union fell, the regulating institutions and organizing principles of social life were made invalid, the national and cultural myths could no longer be trusted, and the familiarity of everyday life was irrevocably lost. This was the end of Russia as it was known, and there was nothing to take its place. What remained after the end were fragments of the past and uncertainty.

One could only pick up the fragments left over from the catastrophe and attempt to make sense of what happened, which is where fantasy comes into play: “Fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* ‘new’, absolutely ‘other’ and different” (Jackson 8). This quote from Rosemary Jackson in her book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, in which she states that fantasy, as a literary genre, is a “literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss” (3). Her quote resonates with what Berger says about the representation of the post-apocalypse being a “semantic alchemical process” that “burns and distills signs and referents into new precipitates” (8). To study the post-apocalypse is to study “what disappears and what remains, and...how the remainder has been transformed” in order to come to terms with what happened, while simultaneously fashioning an even greater vision of apocalypse (8). Russia is referred to as post-Soviet precisely because we are still dealing with the aftermath of the events of 1991. Alexander Etkind also echoes these sentiments in his article about the role of magic in Russian fiction, “Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied: Magical Historicism in Contemporary Russian Fiction”. He points to the emergence of fantastical imagery in post-Soviet culture as the result of postcatastrophic memory that is often based in allegory, not fact:

“Two processes converge on the stage of postcatastrophic memory, the defamiliarization of the past and the return of the repressed. Excavating the past buried in the present, the scholar of a postcatastrophic culture watches memory turning into imagination. In Russia, many authors and readers seem to share a desire for a poetic reenactment of the catastrophic past. ... The dialectic of reenactment and defamiliarization produces a rich but puzzling imagery. If we want to “understand” postcatastrophic culture, we need to “see” what is absorbing it so entirely” (631).

The fall of the Soviet Union created a cultural vacuum; the values of socialist realism, the stabilizing ideological tropes, the myths of family and the collective, and the master narratives of Soviet culture were no longer viable as a means of cultural production. Instead, there was rampant capitalism, Western culture, lawlessness, unemployment, corruption, and violations of civil rights, which often overshadowed any benefits of some of the freedoms that came about after the fall of the USSR. There was a crisis in representation: how do we represent this new life that is stuck clinging to the remnants of the past, undergoing changes at a dizzying pace, and wary of the direction that the future will take?

Fantasy provides the imagery capable of overcoming the loss and articulating the buried anxieties from the collective unconscious while revealing the fundamental tensions governing post-Soviet Russia. The fantasy in *Night Watch* functions similarly to carnival in *New Moscow*, in that it inverts the image of the city. Fantasy reveals the dangerous threatening undercurrents that shape the post-Soviet city just as the carnivalesque elements in Medvedkin's film reveal the fundamental anxiety of Stalin's vision of a reconstructed socialist utopia. That anxiety is concerned with the potential mechanization of city life, while the tension of the city in *Night Watch*, arises from the clash of old Russia and the new Russia, between the youth who were born after the fall and older generations who lived the Soviet experience, and between the need for laws and pragmatism and the pleasure impulse of new wealth and material culture. We can trace all of these tensions in *Night Watch* where the city is simultaneously represented as a decaying Soviet era relic through a glossy digital music video aesthetic. Vlad Strukov, in *Cinepaternity: Fathers and Sons in Soviet and Post-Soviet Film*, examines *Night*

Watch through the Oedipal myth to examine authority and family in order to account for the social tensions of post-Soviet Russia. He notes that these tensions are embodied by a generational gap between the older Others who have experience and are associated with the Soviet era (Gesser), the younger generation who were raised during the perestroika years (Anton), and the newest post-Soviet generation (Yegor). The older generation is portrayed as resolute and willing to sacrifice for the collective good: “The older generation appears knowing, seasoned, and emotionally stable; indirect references are made to the tragedies and painful experiences the older adults endured in their social and private lives, and overcame...In contemporary Moscow the actions of their generation are concerted and decisive; the characters represent responsibility and capacity for sacrifice” (208). Anton’s generation and the newest generation are more rebellious and more willing to question the Truce between Light and Dark and more willing to test and cross those boundaries. As Strukov explains, the crucial tension of the post-Soviet condition is the power struggle between father and son in which the political and social changes manifest most clearly. He also reads Anton’s impotence and inability to be a parent to Yegor as evidence of a crisis of masculinity, one that must be overcome in order to bring about a possible reconciliation between generations that would lead toward future national unity (211).

Night Watch offers a portrait of post-Soviet Russia, through the microcosm of Moscow, at a crossroads of an uncertain future. The Truce between the Light and Dark is fragile and tense. The Light Others made it their duty to protect the weak and helpless, while those of the Dark chose to forego any responsibility and live without any regard to moral laws or their consequences. For centuries Light and Dark were engaged in a

ferocious battle that threatened to destroy both sides, so a Truce was called, and each side agreed to police the other, but the forces of the Dark are gaining the upper hand. The vampires in the film cannot be read without referencing their obvious connotations of parasitism and bloodsucking. The Night Watch has been charged with keeping the Dark Others from running rampant in the city. In accordance with the terms set forward in medieval times by the Truce, the Dark vampires are not permitted to feed on humans unless they have been granted a special license, and the Light Others are not allowed to interfere in Dark matters. Dark Others are inevitably drawn to negative emotions and pain; they feed on that essential life force, blood; and expensive sports cars and fashionable clothing evidence their association with a hedonistic materialistic lifestyle. At one point a young vampire Kolia “turns” his girlfriend to the Dark side against her will. Anton is charged with finding him, but instead of citing him for a serious violation, he ends up killing Kolia in a fight, leaving his vampire vulnerable. Zavulon then uses her to lure Yegor, the Chosen One, over to the Dark side, which would tip the balance in favor of the Dark. They manipulate her by depriving her of the blood she needs to live, and in combination with her grief from losing Kolia, she becomes desperate. However, vampirism aside, the divide between good and evil is not so clearly defined, because the Light Others are not above using vengeance and retribution in their efforts to police the Dark, so that it is not always so obvious who is good and who is evil. The moral ambiguity is further heightened by the shifting nature of identity in the film: many of the others are shape-shifters who can turn into animals, and the entire concept of being an Other relies on maintaining roles in two different worlds.

Even the digital effects paint Moscow as a city in flux, where social boundaries, laws, authority, and mechanisms that govern everyday life are not yet clearly defined: “Finally, computer-generated imagery suggests plasticity of matter and the possibility of infinite modifications. This narrative mode and cinematic style present the generation conflict and father-son confrontation not as irreparable but instead as reversible, not as fixed but fluid, not as one dominated by predestination but rather by the logic and pragmatics of the day” (Strukov 209-210). A war between Light and Dark is taking place beneath the immediate awareness of the humans in the film: they do not know that strange and terrifying things are happening all around them. In a way, the battle of the Others is reflective of the emergence of CGI technology in our own film-watching experience and the strange things that are happening beneath our awareness in the realm of digital manipulation of images.

By the end of the film, it is not yet certain whether Dark or Light will prevail or what the post-Soviet city will look like. In *Night Watch*, Moscow is an unreal city, a fantastical space of vampires, magicians, and shapeshifters, a portrait of the city that finds its antecedent in Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel *Master and Margarita* in which Satan, masquerading as a magician, and his entourage, which includes a giant talking black cat, come to Moscow in order to wreak havoc upon the atheistic Soviet society. Post-Soviet Moscow is a post-apocalyptic space in which the unconscious fears and anxieties are brought to life through fantasy. In an interview, Bekmambetov acknowledges the role of fantasy in bringing to life the hidden, mysterious, undercurrents of post-Soviet reality:

Night Watch mythologizes everyday life. Everything in the movie is truthful. Every element, every character, every location... An unfulfilled dream, a secret fear, an all-but-forgotten childhood memory, a toy you suspected to contain some living thing in its hollow inside...The film is

full of objects, concepts and images that have a history, things that surround us in reality and that are, for me, THE reality – not the objective reality, but my own, the way I see it. (Interview, horroview.com)

And perhaps bringing the inner recesses of the city, everyday life, and the mind into dramatic, spectacular relief is what the digital effects do best in the film; they illustrate what cannot be filmed in front of a camera, what normally cannot be seen. Just as Anton undergoes a shift in his vision of the world the moment he can see the Others and therefore becomes initiated into their realm, often, it is the province of the artist, the filmmaker, to see the world differently, to capture what is beyond the surface of things.

Conclusion: Moscow, City of the Void

The brightly colored cupolas and fantastical ornamentation of St. Basil's Cathedral constitute the single-most identifiable entity of the Moscow skyline. At night, lit from all sides to impressive grandeur within the red brick walls of the Kremlin, the audacious structure and its surrounding gold-domed cathedrals, proclaims its dominance from the heart of the Russian capital. Invoking such a singular image of Moscow inevitably engages a stabilizing mythological narrative, one grounded in the history of the city and perpetuated by literature, poetry, art, music, and film. The image of St. Basil's Cathedral calls upon the entirety of the city's existence: Moscow, the mother of Russia, the city of vitality and golden opportunity. "To Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!" cries Irina, in a familiar refrain from Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*. Irina, Masha, and Olga repeat the word "Moscow" like a prayer in the hopes that once they can get to Moscow, their lives will be better. Such is the premise of Vladimir Menshov's film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1980), in which three young women move to Moscow in the hope that their dreams will come true.

But Irina's Moscow does not exist, for her Moscow is a city of the past, to which the three sisters cannot return. The Moscow of the post-Soviet era is even further removed from the past, subsumed under the architecture of postmodernity. The capital city is now one marked by fragmentation, deconstruction, and schizophrenia. Ilya Khrzhanovsky's film *4* presents a portrait of Moscow that is altogether terrifying. Indeed, we might not even guess that the film is about Moscow if we were not told so. Moscow has been deprived of its centralizing motif. Dark back alleys, deserted grey avenues, and ruins of a post-industrial landscape have replaced the cupolas of St. Basil's and the red

walls of the Kremlin. Moscow does not look like Moscow anymore. The city in *4* is a void in which there has been a collapse of meaning, and the cityscape becomes virtually incomprehensible.

Ilya Khrzhanovsky's film *4* (2005) (*Chetyre* in Russian) opens with a medium shot of four stray dogs lying in the middle of a deserted city street at night. Only one of the dogs is facing the camera; the other three lay calmly facing away from us. The one dog facing us appears quite anxious as he stands up, sits, then lies back down, and he looks from side to side, while the other three dogs appear calm. The only sounds we hear is a low mechanical sputtering of a small engine in the background and a slow but steady rhythmical clanking that cannot be attributed to a source within the frame. Suddenly, thirty seconds into this opening shot, four huge breakers, like metallic claws, penetrate the frame from just offscreen, the excavators they are attached to remain just outside the frame. As the four disembodied claws of the demolition machines descend upon the asphalt, the dogs scatter, and the loud resonant clanking of metal against the black asphalt of the street is then punctuated by the sharp, piercing cries of the dogs as they run toward the back of the frame. Their echoing cries sound alien and almost human. The dogs disappear down the street only to be met by four massive trucks hitched with snowplows. The sonorous roar of their engines grows, mixing with the heavy metal clanking of the breakers. The metal clanking of these metallic claws is replaced with the percussive hammering of the drill chipping away at the road. Silence and a black screen replace this odd scene to announce the film's title.

The film follows three strangers who happened to meet at a quiet back alley bar in Moscow: Marina, a prostitute, Oleg, a meat salesman, and Volodya, a piano tuner. We do

not identify with any of these characters. While they are at the bar, each one adopts a different persona: Oleg says he sells mineral water to the president, Marina becomes an advertising agent for a Japanese air purifier, and Volodya tells them that he is an organic engineer working on a top-secret cloning project. How easily they slip into their assumed identities and weave such elaborate stories is shocking. They sit around the circular bar smoking cigarettes, and talk about their lives with convincing casualness. The bar is lit from above so that we only see the three protagonists: the bar behind them is shrouded in shadow, and the size of the space is not clear. The lighting resembles a spotlight and the bar a stage, which is fitting considering that they are each performing for the others. Once they part ways, we follow each of these strangers to the strange spaces of Moscow and are offered brief, fleeting glimpses into their lives. Oleg goes to a restaurant for a later dinner. The waiter informs him that they serve round piglets, shipped in from a special farm. Oleg, as a meat salesman, says there is no such thing as a round piglet. The waiter offers to show him. The chef pulls back a towel and reveals several perfectly round piglets, a sight horrifying enough to make anyone swear off meat. Horrifying images such as this one permeate the film and can be found in the most unexpected places. For instance, when Volodya goes backstage at a nightclub, he walks into a dimly lit room. Instruments line the walls, and there is a drum set in the middle of the room, but there are also four tanks filled with various amphibious creatures. The tanks emit an eerie green glow. The first part of the film is difficult enough to piece together, but by the end of the film, we have entered a nightmare; and as the film progresses, any hints at an internal connective logic is forcefully undermined.

The film presents a contemporary vision of Russia, and focuses on the capital city of Moscow in particular. However, we might not even know that it was Moscow if we were not told so through the conversations of the characters, because Moscow does not look like Moscow anymore. Gone are the red brick walls of the Kremlin and the identifiable cupolas of the ornamented cathedrals in Red Square; and without the iconic monument to the Russian nation, St. Basil's Cathedral, the most identifiable and singular structure of the city, the film's representation of Moscow seems to lack its stabilizing narrative. The back alleys, deserted streets and post-industrial decay in the film designate this post-Soviet city as a post-apocalyptic space, a space characterized by disorientation, madness, and chaos. The idea of the number 4 is offered as a unifying element to understanding the film, but any attempt to follow through with that linkage reveals it to be illusory. Additionally, the sound constantly undermines any attempt to cohesively connect the visuals or to establish an internal logic, as the nonsynchronous sound hints at the decentralizing pull, the chaos that threatens from beneath the many audiovisual layers. If Khrzhanovsky's film is replete with disquieting images of a disjointed and baffling Moscow in which areas of the city are disconnected and provide no clear sense of space. The loose narrative is fragmented and the image of the city is characterized by a fundamental instability that renders the reality of a city as irrevocably lost.

Later in the film, we spend a considerable amount of time with Marina as she travels to a small village outside of Moscow after learning that her sister Zoya has died. We follow her extensive trek through a postindustrial landscape in ruins toward the very outskirts of the city. The scene begins with a shot of a high-rise construction crane reflected in a vast muddy puddle, the tiny figure of Marina walks on its edge. The last

half of the film descends into a nightmarish world of this strange rural village. It is almost as though Marina has travelled to the past, since the village looks like it might have looked two hundred years before. This rural village, steeped in old world traditions, is filled with old babushkas who live communally, completely divorced from influences from the outside world. Together, they live off the land and make dolls to sell. It is here that we finally encounter the sounds of human life, however these human sounds hide a much darker reality, one of the forgotten people of Russia, the people that modernity passed by. There is no greenery or bounty here, only a bleak grey tired landscape; there are also no children here. It is clear that the village is on the verge of non-existence. Yet because their pitiful situation is shown in such a detached manner, they do not elicit any sympathy, only our disgust. The women drink copious amounts of homemade alcohol, tear at a greasy pig carcass, and display their shriveled, deflated breasts, images of which provoke a visceral reaction from us. Their grief-stricken lamentations, singing, swearing, and drunken cackling are unintelligible and unfamiliar, but we are not meant to understand what they are saying, and it would not make any difference if we could.

In many ways, *4* is a film for filmmakers with its alluring cinematography: any semblance of a narrative quickly loses out to the striking images, several of which are quotes of other films. The scene in which Oleg is driving through a tunnel instantly recalls a similar scene in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) in which Berton and his son are driving through a series of tunnels and overpasses in a Japanese city. The long drive takes us from the relatively tranquil landscape of a dacha in the opening scene; when we finally leave the tunnel, we are confronted with the garish lights of the city. Timothy Hyman writes that the "landscape of these first sequences spells out a polarity between

garden and city, organic and inorganic, humanistic and anti-humanistic” (Hyman 55).

The drive through the tunnel is a transitional scene. The preceding sequence features the natural landscape through slow, lingering shots of reeds swaying in the lake and wide shots of trees that dwarf human figures in the frame. A dog, a horse, the pond, the flowers, and the abundance of greenery speak to the vitality of nature. Kris (Donatas Banionis) is fully immersed in nature, literally, when he seems to relish a sudden downpour, just as Tarkovsky seems to relish the images of the landscape. In stark contrast, the city is dark and unnatural, and the faster tempo of editing in the images of the modern city emphasizes the disorienting and jarring environment. Both *Solaris* and *4* seem to be presenting visions of a society that has severed itself from nature.

Khrzhanovsky’s film also bears a resemblance to Michelangelo Antonioni’s film *Red Desert* (1964), a film that features a desolate post-industrial landscape. The loose narrative centers on Giuliana (Monica Vitti), a young mother with an anxiety disorder. The background of the story is 1960s Italy, a time of accelerated economic growth that quickly turned Italy into a major industrial power, and Antonioni’s film highlights the negative changes of those developments. Rather than glorifying industrial growth as a sign of national progress, *Red Desert* underscores the alienation and disorientation of the coming of modernity in his bleak portrait of the northeastern Italian port city of Ravenna, the country’s second largest port. His film attempts to articulate the disorienting and alienating experience of modernity embodied in his protagonist’s increasingly more precarious mental state. The landscape on the city’s outskirts is ultimately one filled with trauma and loss. In the opening scene, we locate Giuliana outside the gates of a factory where the workers are striking. Wearing a vivid green coat and heels, she is conspicuous

in the grey wasteland surrounding the looming factory. With her young son trailing behind her, she walks up to the crowd as if lost and buys a half-eaten sandwich from a stranger. With the smoke and fires of the factory in the background, she retreats behind some scraggly bushes and piles of industrial waste to eat it ravenously. All the while, the mechanical humming of the factories and docks fill the soundscape; the absence of natural or human sounds contribute to the palpable sense of emptiness embodied in the landscape.

Giuliana is the wife of the factory director. Her anxiety is blamed on the shock of a recent car accident from which she has not yet recovered, but she is actually recovering from a suicide attempt that she has concealed from her husband. She suffers from frequent nightmares and paranoia from which her strangely cold and minimalist apartment and oblivious husband offer no comfort. When her husband's friend, Corrado, with whom she begins a tentative affair, asks her what she is afraid of; she replies, "The streets, the factories, the colors, the people –everything." And indeed, the surrounding landscape offers no solace. The city is grey, desolate, decayed, and covered in a layer of grime, and industrial structures dwarf the human figures. The environment is inhospitable: smoke billows out constantly from the factory's smokestacks, nearby water sources are surrounded by dead foliage and the once fruitful fishing spots are now green, dried up cesspools, and the barren streets are flanked by buildings resembling prisons complete with iron bars covering the windows. A grating high-pitched hum can be heard periodically in the background, emphasizing the unnatural quality of the landscape. In fact, the only natural landscape we encounter is in the fable that Giuliana tells her son when he is sick. She tells him a story about a young girl and we are suddenly plunged

into the vibrant colors of a beautiful beach landscape where the sun, bright sand and glistening blue water tease us momentarily before we return to the dismal grey color palette of the outskirts of Ravenna.

In *4*, Moscow is not only stripped of its iconic visual identity and the stabilizing framework of the city's historical narrative, but also the film's sound adds another layer of instability. The soundscape of the city harnesses the destructive potential introduced in the opening scene with the smashing of the asphalt. The sound for the film *4* is just not unnatural but without naturalness, for many of the sounds can easily be disregarded as ambient noises, but close listening quickly reveals a subtle but fundamental dissonance between the sound and the image that is unsettling. While many of the images comprising the film are disturbing, the soundtrack adds another layer to the overall chaos of the post-Soviet city and suggests a fundamental fracture in the representation of the city and of reality itself. In "Empty is My Native Land: The Problem of the Absent Center in Zeldovich's *Moscow*" Keith A. Livers' description of Zeldovich's portrait of Moscow in the film *Moscow/Moskva* resonates with Ilya Khrzhanovsky's film *4*. Livers notes that Zeldovich's film represents a stark contrast to other films of the same period that attempted to restore a positive image of Moscow by drawing on Russian nationalism, myth, and spirituality, because *Moscow* shows the city as a void. The film tells the story of a group of New Russians whose lives become intertwined after a businessman is swindled out of a large sum of money. The characters are dysfunctional and unable to cultivate meaningful relationships and one of the characters commits suicide while another is gunned down by a sniper. The director himself describes post-Soviet Moscow as "the capital of post-historic space. ... Moscow is like a polygon – the funnel created by

an explosion. After the explosion a draft blows through the funnel-hole. The result is an emptying out of consciousness” (qtd 424). Moscow is plagued by a fundamental emptiness, according to Livers, which is most embodied in the city’s metro that figures prominently in the film. Livers contrasts two iconic features of Moscow’s cityscape, the rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the Moscow metro, to underscore the notion that any attempt to connect post-Soviet national identity with the past only reveals a negation of that history. He references a post-card depicting the as yet unreconstructed Cathedral of Christ the Savior, a simulation of its future reincarnation, that circulated in the 1990s as an attempt to reclaim a history that has already been irretrievably lost:

Here the “past is recreated anew with feats of labor and computer technology.” The net effect of such cultural and historical “makeovers,” one might argue, is a pervasive and destructive simulation of cultural memory – amnesia shrewdly masked as memory. History, while all around us, remains inaccessible or misunderstood. And Zel’dovich’s *Moscow*, with its multiple nods to architectural, literary, and cinematic styles past, seems to lament this very epidemic of simulation. In this sense, the film portrays not merely the spiritual displacement of the city’s “New Russian” elite, but of the post-Soviet metropolis itself – of its public spaces and sacred myths. (425)

In contrast, the Moscow metro “symbolizes Moscow’s ‘anti-spiritual’ center”, a space “where the spiritual bankruptcy of the city and its inhabitants is most keenly felt”(430-431). Livers also cites the style of the film as emphasizing the characters’ social ineptitude for communicating with the world and those around them. The dialogue is artificial and almost Chekhovian in its construction with the characters cryptic speech masking what they are actually thinking, and ultimately distancing us from the characters. They are victims of a disease that originates from the city’s underground and brought on by the “ontological holocaust” that makes up the foundation of post-Soviet reality (434). The Russian capital is now a city with a glitzy fashionable façade, an extensive

bureaucratic apparatus, and an aristocratic class of Russia's nouveaux-riche. Post-Soviet Moscow has come to resemble imperial Petersburg in the way in which the city figures "as a kind of ghostly metaphysical void sucking up the life of its inhabitants" (426).

Much of these same thematic motifs and descriptions of Moscow in Zeldovich's film could also apply to Ilya Khrzhanovsky's film. The city is bizarre, absurd, and possessed of an eeriness that is profoundly unsettling. The way in which the camera lingers on the dark, deserted streets or the barren post-industrial landscapes lend the film an uncomfortable duration. The usual indices of the city are gone: the iconic monuments, its cathedrals, and its public spaces are replaced by desolate back alleys, empty streets, and bleak dimly lit living spaces that lack any warmth or comfort. The traditional center of the city has been displaced for the edges of the city. In *Postmodern Urbanism*, Nan Ellin notes that now that the conventional way of thinking about the city through the dichotomy between center and periphery has now been replaced by borders and edges:

Other prevalent metaphors for city and culture are the *border* and the *edge*. Current buzz-phrases among anthropologists, cultural theorists, architects, and urban planners include border cultures, borderlands, edge conditions, edge cities, and cities on the edge. In one respect, this fascination with borders and edges (which might be regarded as more jagged than borders or as tears through borders) is a response to the dissolution of traditional limits and lines of demarcation due to rapid urbanization and globalization. Previously clear boundaries between countries, between center and periphery, between city and countryside, and between "us" and "them" have grown increasingly murky. Rather than being the locus of activity and innovation, the traditional center (central city versus outskirts, as well as First World versus rest of the world) has imploded or dissolved to produce multicentrality or a lack of centers. (4)

Now that the cityscape has become less defined, it has become more common to interpret the city through the interstitial spaces that are defined by indefinability and a sense of placelessness. These phantasmic spaces are now haunted by what has been lost in shifts

caused by increased globalization and urbanization: “A by-product of this shift is a profound sense of loss and a corresponding deep nostalgia for the “world we have lost.” To quell this sense of loss a search has been underway, the goal of which is variously articulated as urbanity, a center, a usable past, a sense of community, a neighborhood, a vernacular, diversity, meaning, innocence, origins, roots, certainties, leadership, and heroes” (13).

The edge of the city is precisely the subject of Edith W. Clowes’ book, *Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity*, in which she examines the relationship between identity and place in post-Soviet Russia. Even the terms center and periphery are outdated, Clowes uses them in her analysis to invoke the underlying anxiety about a nation that once had cultural, political, and economic dominance but that has now lost its central stability, and therefore, its identity:

The geographical metaphors dominant in current discourse about identity convey the sense that *who* a Russian is depends on how one defines *where* Russia is. Overarching values attach to that place, however it is defined...The image of the “edge,” where, I hypothesize, post-Soviet Russia fears that it is, bears both geographical and psychological meaning. No longer at the hub of the Soviet empire, many Russians in the 1990s worried about being on the margin. The “edge” also suggests an anxiety that belies the many more recent protestations that Moscow is a powerful center and a great imperial capital. Almost 175 years after Peter Chaadaev’s famous 1836 “Philosophical Letter,” in which he lamented Russia’s lack of national identity, some prominent Russian commentators still write as if fearing that they are in a zone between great eastern and western civilizations. Russia is on the edge, and its most zealous ultraconservative boosters are on edge. (xiii)

The same issues of national identity are reflected in the film in the way that the three central characters are all pretending to be someone they are not. In fact, they all take on a more prestigious identity when they are in the bar together. Oleg says he sells mineral water to the president, Marina becomes an advertising agent for a Japanese air purifier,

and Volodya tells them that he is an organic engineer working on a top-secret cloning project. All of the personas they adopt can be aligned to the new center of Russia, or at least what has the potential to become the center of the identity of the new Russia: links to the president, advertising, and cloning project invoke the new democracy, capitalism, and technology. In actuality, all of the characters occupy marginal positions in society: Oleg sells old canned meat to restaurants, Marina is a prostitute, and Volodya is a piano tuner. The emphasis on the edge is further underscored by Marina's journey to the literal edge of the city. Clowes uses literature as the medium for her examination, but many of the observations that she makes about the post-Soviet city in literature also apply to the city image in film, and especially considering that Vladimir Sorokin is not only a writer on *4* but also an author in his own right, the leap from literary images to film images is not insurmountable. In her analysis of Liudmila Ulitskaia's novels, Clowes asserts that the center and periphery still figure prominently as a way to stress the xenophobic isolation of the city, which carries the threat of violence to outsiders: "The center – Moscow – is a place of ideological and social dysfunction, leading always to cultural homogenization and occasionally to threats of violence and even suicide. The act of going to the center is frequently an act of surrendering one's original identity to buy into the relatively comfortable life and career opportunities in the capital of the Soviet empire" (122). Similarly, though the protagonists of *4* are not traditional "outsiders" in the sense that they are not from a non-Russian region, they are on the edge of the city, and they all encounter violence. Oleg dies in a car accident after swerving to avoid a dog on an icy road; Volodya is arrested and forcefully conscripted into the army as a prisoner;

and Marina encounters the violence of life in a ghost village left behind after the Soviet collapse.

In *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cinema*, Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli examine Moscow in two films of Pavel Lungin, *Taxi Blues* (1990) and *Luna Park* (1992), which present the drab reality of the contemporary city in the final death throes of perestroika which can be found in the traces of consumer capitalism, drinking, Soviet decay, alienation, and dysfunctionality of public space. But Moscow is only one of several cities examined in the book, which charts a noticeable trend in the representations of European cities in film, mainly that the old ways of reading the city are inadequate when applied to contemporary cities, which have a distinctly postmodern sensibility. So the totalizing narrative of the city-film genre is insufficient because it does not acknowledge the emergence of localized and resistant narratives; the utopia/dystopia model is not suitable framework because of its associations with modernism; and we cannot look at the contemporary city as a division between the center and the periphery, because all boundaries have been blurred: “The fragmentation of the postmodern urban environment wipes away the distinction – the city is mostly represented as an undistinguished and practically unreadable collage of sections of areas, streets, and buildings; routes through the town are not clearly marked, so that our sense of space and time are challenged” (238). They are advocating a postmodern framework as a tool for analysis of the city. Changes in the lives of cities make it necessary to find new ways of understanding society so that we can get away from metanarratives and metalanguage that propose a totalizing and comprehensive narrative to explain knowledge and experience with an appeal to universal truths. Such is the argument of

philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard in his short work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). He is just one of the thinkers loosely categorized under the term poststructuralism that are part of the backlash against using a totalizing narrative to inscribe the human experience with meaning because it essentially ignores the complexity of society which is actually made up of many smaller competing narratives. Also important to postmodernism is the “death of myth, the end of ideology and uniformity of thought, the emergence of multiple and diverse patterns of thought, a critical approach to institutions and institutionalized values, a movement from a single Culture to multiple cultures, [and] the desecration of the canon” (Lipovetsky 4). However, in bringing postmodernism into the discussion, it cannot be ignored that Russian postmodernism is its own particular variant, one that is specific to the unique progression of historical, cultural, and ideological changes. It is generally acknowledged that postmodernism defines itself against modernism, but in Russia, modernism was never particularly well developed and its emergence in the 1930s was quickly suppressed by socialist realism. Yet, it is not the prerogative of this analysis to delve into the complexities of Russian postmodernism, which essentially shares the same foundation as Western postmodernism, nor is it necessary to analyze Khrzhanovsky’s film through a strictly postmodern lens. Any emphasis on the postmodern in reference to Moscow is only to suggest a loss in the way we envision the city, as Mazierska and Rascaroli conclude: “A second general impression that emerges from our work is that of a certain void resulting from change, from the fragmentation of the environment and from the loss of prior contents – nothing or at best unappealing substitutes replaced forgotten traditions

as well as demolished old buildings” (238). Moscow, as the newfound center of Russia’s global economy and communications nexus, manifests these changes most noticeably.

In his article “Remaking Moscow: New Places, New Selves” Robert Argenbright maintains that the identity of Soviet Moscow was inscribed in the “symbols of state power: monuments, banners, place-names, posters and many other media that conveyed the regime’s symbols” that covered the city, and though the state was not able to halt the persistence of other meanings, it was largely successful at designating the spaces of the city as the spaces of the party: “The state claimed the right to designate the meaning of a place, but unofficial interpretations lived on in the private conversations of Muscovites. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous, intense, and persistent state effort to control meaning made the urban landscape inhospitable – it belonged to “them,” the rulers, not to “us,” the people” (6). In post-Soviet Russia, the city underwent a flurry of transformation as prerevolutionary street names were restored and new construction projects altered the city’s appearance. The inhabitants of Moscow also participate in this transformation as they set out to reclaim the city by inscribing their own meanings onto it so that as the city is being remade, the people are attempting to remake themselves in a symbiotic process of give and take. Additionally global processes of commercialization and consumerism also shape the city and its symbolic spaces:

Caught up in the same dynamic, Muscovites are energetically re-creating themselves. The new selves – inevitably, it appears – are more segmented, implying a loss of something that feels like authenticity. Yet moving out along the axis of perspective, away from the “somewhere” of personal experience of warm kitchens, to consider the Soviet experiment in the light of modern history, the feeling of authenticity dissipates. People need real places in which to work out what it means to be human. Tiny crannies in dilapidated concrete towers were the last havens for this process in the Soviet Union, but at the same time they were the cells of its incarceration. For better or worse, newly segmented Muscovites are exploring the world

of thinly shared experiences that we modern, or postmodern, westerners inhabit. The one bright prospect here is for a surge in the flow of meaning that connects us all. The successor to “socialism in one country” cannot be civil society in one country. If civil society is to flourish in Moscow, and Russia, in the future, by necessity it will have to form part of a global public space that depends on flows of meaning and selves between places (18-19).

However, while Argenbright expresses optimism that Moscow will eventually stabilize and be able to join the global public space, the vision of Moscow in Khrzhanovsky’s film is bleak and offers no hope for the future or even a direction that we can look to for hope. In 4, Moscow is not a city of happy endings, but a void that is bereft of meaning.

Khrzhanovsky’s vision of Moscow is clearly on the extreme end of possible representations of the city, but it draws on a similar theme that is woven throughout post-Soviet cinema, that of the trauma that accompanies the loss of meaning.

In *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*, Kevin Robbins pinpoints the fundamental change in the nature of the city today, saying that we cannot envision the city in the same ways we used to, that the very image of the city is inherently different, even if the city has not altered physically, because we see it differently:

A particular imaginary configuration – the ‘classic’ modern city, ‘classical’ cinema – is losing its imaginative hold. It is not that something has replaced it: the term ‘postmodern’ can only be understood in a negative sense, as marking an emptiness, a loss, a lack, in urban culture. When we think about cities now, we are likely to take in terms of fragmentation, disintegration, disillusionment: in terms of something that is falling apart or losing its imaginary charge. The image of the city no longer works so readily as a topographical projection. No longer does it function as a transitional space for the collectivity. The city is no longer imageable. It is becoming lost from view. (132)

The city has always been a space beyond its own geography and architecture; it is intimately connected to the mind so that the way in which a city is envisioned is an attempt to understand the experience of that city, and the trauma of contemporary

Moscow stems precisely from a fundamental inability to envision the city or come to an understanding of it. In order to come to some conclusion about post-Soviet Moscow and contemporary Russia, we need to examine its past, because the city today is a product not only of the people that have lived or the events that have occurred there, but also the way in which the city has been imagined and remembered. The void that comprises the landscape in *4* speaks to the fundamental incomprehensibility of post-Soviet Moscow: it is a space that is still marked by a history of trauma and loss, from which not even the green spaces of the city offer any reprieve.

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