



**A Contrapuntal Reading of the Works of Andrei  
Tarkovsky**

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**Abstract:**

This thesis explores the films of Andrei Tarkovsky through the methodology of both a combined critical reading and creative response. Tarkovsky worked predominantly under the regime of the Brezhnevian Soviet Union and his films act as modes of articulating expression under totalitarianism. Tarkovsky produced five major films in Soviet Russia: *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1975) and *Stalker* (1979) and two in European exile: *Nostalgia* (1983) and *The Sacrifice* (1986). My research section asserts that Tarkovsky's films are philosophically complex and weighted with hidden influences and meanings which are worthy of deeper exploration. I posit Edward Said's contrapuntal reading enables an unveiling of the opaque and obfuscated meanings found within them. Said's ideas reveal the hauntological influences on Tarkovsky's work such as the hyper-reality of the Soviet Union and historical filmmakers such as Kenji Mizoguchi and Carl-Theodor Dreyer. The creative piece is called *Red Lens* and is a literary response to the findings of the research section. The work channels Tarkovskian stylistic cinema in terms of form, narrative, and characterisation and the narrative is devised through a biographical process which dramatises the lives and creativity of Soviet filmmakers such as Tarkovsky. Based on my contrapuntal reading of his oeuvre, the structure of *Red Lens* is stylistically informed by Tarkovsky, acting mutually with the research section as a further way of exploring and understanding Tarkovsky's cinema.

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## **Introduction: Manifestations of Spectrality – A Contrapuntal Reading of the works of Andrei Tarkovsky**

This thesis explores the films of Andrei Tarkovsky through the methodology of both a combined critical reading and practice-based response. Much has been written about Tarkovsky's films; therefore, the aim of the thesis is to provide a new and original analytical approach to his works, looking back at them retroactively through a modern contrapuntal and hauntological lens, enmeshed with my creative work. The creative work is a literary response which aligns with the research section. The creative objective is to provide a fresh analytical approach that channels the Tarkovsky cinematic experience and acts as a parallel vehicle in which to explore the contrapuntal and hauntological within a Tarkovskian influenced framework. The thesis is probing back at Tarkovsky, delving into his works historically from a different analytical grounding using modern theoretical perspectives. Tarkovsky worked predominantly under the auspices of the Brezhnevian Soviet Union and his films act as modes of articulating expression under a totalitarian regime. Tarkovsky produced five films in Soviet Russia: *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1975) and *Stalker* (1979) and two in European exile: *Nostalgia* (1983) and *The Sacrifice* (1986). In my research section I assert that Tarkovsky's films are laden with hidden influences and meanings which are worthy of deeper exploration as the films are philosophically dense. I first viewed Tarkovsky's films in 2016 projected in the cinema and due to the abstract stylistic choices, such as the long take, fragmentation of narrative and slow philosophical dialogue between characters, I was left contemplating what the films were really expressing. I posit that the works lend themselves to Edward Said's contrapuntal reading which enables an unveiling of the opaque and obfuscated meanings and influences found within them. The retrospective application of Said's critical lens enables new interpretations of Tarkovsky's films in terms of what I perceive to be influences from his past but also Tarkovsky's contemporary Soviet world. The creative piece entitled *Red Lens* is a response to the interpretative approach of the research section and elucidates parallels with Tarkovskian stylistic cinema in terms of form, narrative, and characterisation. The narrative is crafted through a fictional biographical process which mimics the lives and creativity of Soviet filmmakers such as Tarkovsky during the era of Leonid Brezhnev's

communist rule. The structure stylistically takes influence from the syuzhet of Tarkovsky, as a research informed piece of literary fiction based on my contrapuntal reading of his oeuvre. *Red Lens* acts as a mutually enriching vessel with the research section as a way of exploring and understanding Tarkovsky's cinematic realm. Although Tarkovsky was against formal analysis of his films, Ian Christie states: 'Tarkovsky doesn't want us to jump to conclusions: he wants us to attend first to the rhythm and framing of images, to experience the film on an aesthetic level before considering it intellectually.'<sup>1</sup> A spectator of Tarkovsky's oeuvre must contemplate the world presented on screen aesthetically, before forming a judgement of interpretation. His films are characterised by complex meditations searching for a truth in the world yet are simultaneously haunted by spirits from the past. Tarkovsky's films link to the modern theories of Laura Mulvey with cinema acting with: 'quotation as embodiment, summoning up the past [...] inserted into the present.'<sup>2</sup> They are a haunting reminder of the oppressive nature of Soviet governance, which has now been reimagined in the present.

Watching a Tarkovsky film can be a difficult experience due to his aesthetic approach.

Tarkovsky presents:

theoretical propositions: namely, his preference for intuition over intellectual cognition, psychological duration over chronological time, the past over the present, as well as his foregrounding the dual nature of the film image in which subjective consciousness (spirit) and objective reality (matter) are coalesced into a single unit.<sup>3</sup>

The films are discomforting and at times unyielding in their slowness. His films are now placed within the new genre of slow cinema, which was a term first coined in 2002. Though Tarkovsky

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Christie, 'Introduction: Tarkovsky in his Time,' in Maya Turoskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Wood (London: Faber, 1989), p. xviii – xix.

<sup>2</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages – on Cinema, Women and Changing Times* (London: Reaktion Books, 2022), p.84.

<sup>3</sup> Sergey Toymentsev, 'Introduction to Part 1,' from *ReFocus – The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, ed. by Sergey Toymentsev (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 13-14 (p.14).

would not be consciously aware of the slow cinema tropes in his lifetime that he has now become associated with, I assert that Tarkovsky's cinematic style can be found retroactively within the genesis of slow cinema as a genre. Tarkovsky's films are historically laced with what have now become the recognised techniques of slow cinema. Acknowledging Tarkovsky's influence upon the style of slow cinema facilitates the application of Said's theories, to deconstruct meaning within the slowness. Films branded as slow cinema often carry an illogicality and deliberate opacity in terms of meaning, with a recalcitrance towards conventional storytelling. In relation to the viewing experience Julian Stringer says that these films scream 'boredom and exasperation.'<sup>4</sup> Watching these films requires patience due to their complex nature and the spectator is required to contribute to the process of forming meaning; the scenes can be so stiflingly slow and narrative so fragmented that the viewer has no choice but to contemplate what the truth of the scenes really is through an almost hypnotic thought process. Tarkovsky's slow use of time through long pans and on occasions lack of character dialogue provides the bedrock of this intellectual filmmaking. His chosen style is crucial to understanding his links to slow cinema as he sees time as a critical point when crafting film. Tarkovsky wrote that 'The human conscience is dependent upon time for its existence [...] Time cannot vanish without trace for it is a subjective, spiritual category; and the time we have lived settles in our soul as an experience placed within time.'<sup>5</sup> Time acting as the 'spiritual' and the human conscience being 'dependent' on time concretises the important use of time as a visual signifier in his work, which provides space for a audience introspection and contemplation. Stringer points out that films within the genre of slow cinema: 'transport the spectator to another world, a constructed spatial atmosphere [...] which encompasses both intellectual and sensual dimensions.'<sup>6</sup> Meaning is often hidden and 'contemplation and mental work'<sup>7</sup> are required by the viewer to understand the true meaning of the films. In relation to Tarkovsky, Maya Turovskaya says:

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<sup>4</sup> Julian Stringer, 'Foreword' from *Slow Cinema*, ed. by Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. xix.

<sup>5</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p.58.

<sup>6</sup> Julian Stringer, 'Foreword' from *Slow Cinema*, ed. by Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p.xx.

<sup>7</sup> Stringer, p.xx.

The films of Tarkovsky, the expression of his world, always leave audiences free to make up their own interpretations and to relate them to their own lives. [...] I prefer to retain my freedom to interpret what is strange and ambiguous.<sup>8</sup>

Looking back historically at Tarkovsky's works, I believe that a contrapuntal reading offers a fresh way of pushing open the doors of interpretation and understanding beyond what is being initially visualised on screen.

Said's contrapuntal reading enables the reappraisal of a canonical work through an alternative lens, because it pulls back the layers of traditional interpretation to emphasise what is traditionally silent. Said states:

We must [...] read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented in such works.<sup>9</sup>

By combining Said's method with a cinematic close reading of Tarkovsky's films I assert that this enables us to 'draw out' and 'give emphasis' to hidden influences in Tarkovsky's films. It is through Said's ideas that I identify the hauntological influences on Tarkovsky and interpret how and where these hauntings are manifested cinematically. Said argues that rather than viewing a work as it has been traditionally and critically viewed, 'cultural works [...] irradiate and interfere with apparently stable and impermeable categories founded on genre, periodization, nationality or style [...] far from being fixed and pure.'<sup>10</sup> He offers a method of exploration which opens the doors of meaning and

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<sup>8</sup> Maya Turoskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Wood (London: Faber, 1989), p.114.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Said, p.134.

understanding and removes any rigidity of interpretation on which the reading of a work had been previously based. This is an effective and necessary method through which to analyse Tarkovsky's films due to their complex and enigmatic nature. George Wilson states:

Contrapuntal readings are meant to interweave, mutually qualify, and above [all], superimpose the legitimate claims of internal or intrinsic readings of a work, on the one hand, and the claims of various forms of external critique, on the other.<sup>11</sup>

Wilson builds on Said's theory by suggesting that there is an interweaving of internal and external readings of a text which work in opposition to one another but help illuminate the broader contradictions a work can express. The introspection involved when viewing a Tarkovsky work lends itself to Said's contrapuntal reading in that the audience can interpret sound and image in their own unique way as they are encouraged to search for what is 'hidden.' Tarkovsky stated in his own cinematic treatise, *Sculpting in Time* (1986):

I can only say that the image stretches out to infinity, and leads to an absolute. And even what is known as the "idea" of the image, many dimensional and with many meanings, cannot, in the very nature of things, be put into words. But it does find expression in art.<sup>12</sup>

A cinematic image, whilst simple in structure, can have a multi-dimensional resonance and carry with it symbolic meanings stretching to 'infinity.' Tarkovsky believed film to have qualities which enable the audience to experience deep introspection when interacting with this imagery.

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<sup>11</sup> George M. Wilson, 'Edward Said on Contrapuntal Reading', *Philosophy and Literature*, Volume 18, Number 2, October 1994, pp. 265-273 (p.265).

<sup>12</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 104.

Tarkovsky's work is minimalist and distancing, but those sparse scenes are generously layered with deeper philosophical ideas. This theoretical perspective coexists neatly with the theories of Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze writes that framing is, "informatic," and saturated or rarefied [...] it determines an out-of-field, sometimes in the form of a larger set which extends it, sometimes in the form of a whole into which it is integrated.'<sup>13</sup> In Tarkovsky's films more is implied or can be inferred beyond what is simply delineated on screen, and Tarkovsky uses what is 'out-of-field' to complicate a narrative. To aid this exploration, Turovskaya's, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry* (1989) is laced with factual content about Tarkovsky's creative processes but also features discussion around his film's complexities. She claims:

The structure of Tarkovsky's films always contained its own internal excitement, creating a field of tension between the film and the audience. It is this which gave each film in its early career a reputation for incomprehensibility.<sup>14</sup>

A contrapuntal reading helps to dismantle the incomprehensibility by allowing the layers of interpretation to be teased apart. There are meanings to quest for which are not obvious, and it is a contrapuntal reading which opens the opaque doors of meaning. The works are laced with hidden philosophical references about history, trauma, religion, and I have used *Tarkovsky* (2008), which is a large collection of essays from various writers edited by Nathan Dune as a key influence. The text is broken down into varied segments such as: 'Russia and Religion,' 'Art and Nature' and 'Memory and Awakening.' These many essay writers provide critical aesthetic treatments of Tarkovsky's films which are matched under the different sub-headings. They expand on the symbolic nature of Tarkovsky's work, giving much wider critical and socio/historical context to what is interpreted on screen. Examples include linking Tarkovsky's work to direct biblical references, such as James

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<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Wood (London: Faber, 1989), p.95.

Macgillivray's examination of *Nostalgia*: 'Andrei Tarkovsky's *Madonna Del Parto*,' or Gerard Loughlin's debate on how nature interacts with Tarkovsky's films across a broad range in which nature and art intersect such as 'Tarkovsky's Trees.' Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson and Thorkill Á Óttarson's, *Through the Mirror – Reflections on the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky* (2006) contains a myriad of essays under the sub-headings: 'Film Theories' and 'Theological Themes.' Ideas discussed include Tarkovsky's use of the cinematic space and time manipulation which takes place within that space, which according to Astrid Soderbergh creates a 'new kind of filmic space, constantly oscillating between visible and invisible, what is shown to the spectator and what remains hidden.'<sup>15</sup> These ideas combine with my own research as I look at the hidden meanings and influences in Tarkovsky's works.

I assert the contrapuntal reading is necessary to reveal a hidden hauntological consciousness in Tarkovsky's films, provoked by the circumstances of their making. I believe hauntology, as defined initially by Jacques Derrida in 1993, is fundamental to the philosophical discussion of Tarkovsky's oeuvre. A hauntological exploration acts as a complementary method through which to overcome the barriers of interpretation within Tarkovsky's films. I state that Tarkovsky is haunted by events and influences from his past, and his contemporary Soviet world, and those hauntings are manifested visually through his direction and cinematography. Tarkovsky's direction produces manifestations of such spectrality throughout his work. Certain elements of his films contain spectral density, whereby happenings on screen resonate ideas and memories which act with a weighted haunting of events both past and present.

Hauntology has evolved since its inception. Derrida asserts the need to 'introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept,'<sup>16</sup> arguing that humanity is forever influenced by remembered events and people from the past interconnected with the present, haunting them through a spectral

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<sup>15</sup> Astrid Soderbergh, 'Deus Absconditus – Between Visible and Invisible in the Films of Tarkovsky,' from *Through the Mirror – Reflections on the films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, edited. by Gunnlaugur A. Jonsson & Thorkill A. Ottarson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp-152-168 (p.152).

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx – The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), p. 202.

presence. Derrida states: 'The present is what passes, the present comes to pass [*se passe*], it lingers in this transitory passage (*Weile*), in the coming-and-going, *between* what *goes* and what *comes*, in the middle of what leaves and what arrives, at the articulation at what absents itself and what presents itself.'<sup>17</sup> The present 'lingers' and transposes into the past as a spectral form which remains as a hauntological spectre. Contemporary influences and events pass into history, but Derrida asserts these events will always be present as a spectral influence through an element of abjection, both present and absent. The past is a revenant that forms an unavoidable and inevitable influence on the present.

Concretising these ideas, Katy Shaw wrote in 2018:

Hauntology gestures toward the *agency of the virtual*, since the specter is not of the here and now, yet is capable of exercising a spectral causality over the living [...] Haunting its own ontology, hauntology draws attention to the ephemeral nature of the present and offers the specter as neither being or non-being, alive or dead – the ultimate conceptual, and cultural, paradox.<sup>18</sup>

A 'spectral causality over the living' via an 'ephemeral nature of the present' summarises some of Derrida's ideas. Shaw suggests how the present is in a state of flux and quickly becomes the past. The past haunts the present through a 'spectral' manifestation and influences the everyday through a 'causality over the living.' Theorist Mark Fisher then added to this by saying: 'The future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinged on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production.'<sup>19</sup> Fisher's interpretation decrees that a phantasmagorical virtual presence encroaches into the future from the past and 'motivating cultural production,' the past has become ubiquitously inescapable. This is coupled with the notion that the future also maintains a haunting of the present. As an example, the abandoned and decaying industrial landscape of the stagnated Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s pointed to a future which never

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<sup>17</sup> Derrida, p.29.

<sup>18</sup> Katy Shaw, *Hauntology – The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp.2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Fisher, 'What is Hauntology?' *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No.1 (Fall 2012), pp. 16-24. University of California Press <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16> [accessed 23 May 2019].

emerged; it became lost. Those abandoned buildings showcased a lost vision of communist industrialised utopia, the dead future haunting the present.

Haunting takes various forms in Tarkovsky's films. Robert Kirk states: 'there is more to consciousness than the purely physical facts alone can supply. If nothing else, it implies that consciousness depends at least partly on nonphysical properties.'<sup>20</sup> I examine how the haunting of past and future acts as metaphor for the return of the 'nonphysical,' which drives the 'consciousness' in Tarkovsky's oeuvre. A hauntological perspective, acknowledging the penetration of the present by the past, can be seen to complement Said's contrapuntal reading of interpreting the submerged, denied, and obfuscated meanings of texts. It is this method that enables a greater depth of reading as to where Tarkovsky was historically influenced. Though he was not consciously aware of using the techniques of what has become slow cinema, my reading asserts that he is now part of the slow cinema canon. These combined theoretical positions frame my critical methodology for the interpretation of Tarkovsky's films, and likewise inform the portrayal of the Brezhnevian creative context in which he worked in the creative work, *Red Lens*. The experience in Tarkovsky's films is allusive, and these complementary methodologies provide the key to fathoming these films' meanings.

Through my contemporary contrapuntal reading, Tarkovsky's oeuvre reveals an influential hauntological presence of renowned directors Kenji Mizoguchi and Carl-Theodor Dreyer. These influences are discernible in Tarkovsky's narratives and cinematography and show a thematic consistency in terms of explorations of memory, haunting and arguably religious belief. Mizoguchi and Dreyer were also unconsciously early proponents of what has now more recently become labelled stylistically as slow cinema. Slow cinema films are characterised by 'elliptical and dedramatised narrative structures, minimalist *mise en scene*, and/or the sustained application of elongated and self-reflexive temporal devices such as the long take.'<sup>21</sup> I reveal, through tracing Mizoguchi's and Dreyer's influences, how Tarkovsky expresses his own narrative hauntings on a cinematic level; he

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Kirk, 'Zombies', *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2019 Edition, ed. by Edward N. Zalta <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/zombies>> [accessed 6 August 2019].

<sup>21</sup> Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, 'Introduction: From Slow Cinema to Slow Cinemas' from *Slow Cinema*, ed. by Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) ,p.9.

uses their presence to drive his own intellectual agenda through the application of techniques they also used. Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge assert that slow cinema,

not only restores a sense of time and experience in a world short of both, it also encourages a mode of engagement with images and sounds whereby slow time becomes a vehicle for introspection, reflection and thinking, and the world is disclosed in its complexity, richness and mystery.<sup>22</sup>

Due to the slow, dreamlike and poetic nature of the cinematography, the audience builds up a tension in the mind, and as Harold Bloom suggests in terms of poetic engagement: ‘The deepest satisfactions [...] come from a release of tension on the psyche.’<sup>23</sup> The slowness of the scenes lead to tension which is eventually released when meaning is satisfied, both individually and collectively, through contemplating the visuals placed before them. Paul Schrader asserts these films are often: ‘contemplative, austere, abstract, meditative,’<sup>24</sup> and places Mizoguchi and Dreyer within what he has deemed ‘The Tarkovsky Ring,’<sup>25</sup> which is a diagrammatic structure enclosing the advocates of slow cinema techniques. It is these techniques which force the viewer to look at the screen and engage with what can be, on the one hand a mundane space, but on the other, a space of contemplation. Schrader said in 2017:

The filmmaker is using the power of cinema itself, against itself to get you into a sense that you have to participate [...] these type of films lean away from you and they use time and – as

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<sup>22</sup> de Luca & Nuno Barradas Jorge, p.16.

<sup>23</sup> Harold Bloom, ‘The Internalisation of the Romantic Quest,’ from *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (NY: WW Norton, 1970), pp.1-22 (p.1).

<sup>24</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p.10.

<sup>25</sup> Schrader, p.32.

other people would call it - boredom, as a technique [...] activating the viewer, and once the viewer starts to move, it's so much more powerful.<sup>26</sup>

Describing the viewer as 'activating' and having to 'move' indicates that they must contemplate the cinematic space and immerse more fully in it. Schrader adds: 'The filmmaker, instead of creating a film world in which the viewer needs only to surrender, creates a world which the spectator must contemplate.'<sup>27</sup> Schrader also refers to these films as 'transcendental'<sup>28</sup> and states: 'Filmmakers [...] understood they could slow movies down to create a new reality, to explore memory, to beget contemplation, and in some rare cases simulate transcendence.'<sup>29</sup> Troy Burden explains: 'For Schrader, in terms of filmmaking, what matters are spiritual expressions in cinematography, dialogue, and editing.'<sup>30</sup> This is manifested, as Schrader describes, through directorial choices. He claims transcendentalism in film is 'the everyday, disparity, decisive action, stasis,'<sup>31</sup> which visually translates as: 'Given a selection of inflections, the choice is monotone; a choice of sounds, the choice is silence; a selection of actions, the choice is stillness - there is no question of "reality".'<sup>32</sup> It is the staunch stillness of the cinematic style which dictates that the audience contemplate beyond the frame, in other words, to interpret hauntologically and read contrapuntally. In moments of seemingly nothing happening visually, it is this lack of action which forces the audience to think harder about what the film is communicating. Nariman Skakov's, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky – Labyrinths of Space and Time* (2012) discusses the spatio-temporal complexity within Tarkovsky's films and the lack of

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<sup>26</sup> Toronto International Film Festival Originals, *Paul Schrader on Transcendental Style in Film*, online video recording, YouTube, 26 April 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFcCs8c2n6I&t=1s>> [accessed 19 May 2024].

<sup>27</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p.10.

<sup>28</sup> Schrader, p.10.

<sup>29</sup> Schrader, p.21

<sup>30</sup> Troy Burden, 'Revisiting Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film*,' *Off Screen - Cinema as Pleasure Principle*, Volume 23, Issue 8, August 2019 <<https://offscreen.com/view/revisiting-paul-schraders-transcendental-style-in-film>> [accessed 26 April 2024].

<sup>31</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p.21.

<sup>32</sup> Schrader, p.67.

traditional linear narrative structures and the impact these have on the spectator in terms of interpretation and recognition. Skakov states how Tarkovsky's deliberate manipulation of time in particular creates a distinct Tarkovskian cinematic universe where: 'The director employs cinematographic means to deliver a commentary on the human condition, which for him constitutes an experience of reality as a subjective layering of inextricable snippets of various times and spaces.'<sup>33</sup> It is this conspicuous visual style which enables a more open interpretation of the meaning on screen and provokes a debate on this method of manipulating cinematic images, and time, to provoke audience introspection. This is opposed to being given a more linear and direct narrative structure to follow. It is through slow cinema that thematic concerns such as religion, philosophy, existentialism, and sociopolitical ideas are obliquely expressed and I trace those concerns spectrally as an historical cinematic presence in Tarkovsky's films.

The first chapter explores the hidden influence of Mizoguchi on Tarkovsky's 1970s oeuvre of *Solaris* and *Stalker*. Tarkovsky referred to Japanese director Mizoguchi as 'poetic' and lists Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953) within his top 10 most influential films.<sup>34</sup> Tarkovsky lived under the Soviet totalitarian state and Mizoguchi lived under the strongly right-wing regime of imperialist Japan of the 1930s and 1940s. Mark Le Fanu describes Mizoguchi's films as having: 'an extraordinary force and purity. They shake and move the viewer by the power, refinement, and compassion with which they confront human suffering.'<sup>35</sup> Firstly, I argue that both filmmakers are hauntologically affected by their harsh social political surroundings. These hauntings can be found through their visual style, with Tarkovsky's cinematography and narratives being highly reminiscent of Mizoguchi's. Secondly, I observe how Mizoguchi has a spectral presence in Tarkovsky's films and how Tarkovsky is under the influence of Mizoguchi when implicitly expressing his critique of Soviet totalitarianism. The key roles played by women in both Mizoguchi's and Tarkovsky's films reveal further evidence of influence, in the ways both filmmakers represent female characters existing under

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<sup>33</sup> Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky – Labyrinths of Space and Time* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), p.14.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Lasica, 'Tarkovsky's Choice', *Sight and Sound Magazine*, April 1993, p.29.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan*, (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), p.1.

totalitarian frameworks. This is an important parallel between the two directors as women play significant haunting roles in both *Solaris* and *Ugetsu Monogatari*. Tadao Sato's, *Kenji Mizoguchi and the Art of Japanese Cinema* (2008) traces the influences on the director's films in terms of the politics of Japan, his relationship with women and Japanese folkloric melodrama. Sato discusses Mizoguchi's cinematic techniques, in terms of long, meandering shots, requiring patience from an audience and epitomising slow cinema. Mizoguchi stated: '[The long take] allows me to work all the spectator's perceptual capacities to the utmost.'<sup>36</sup> By engaging such a method the viewer is forced to observe the tiniest details and changes within the frame, challenging them to discover what the scene is meant to mean. It is through this critical reading that I propose Tarkovsky has seized upon similar stylistic methods and is haunted cinematically by Mizoguchi. Sato examines Mizoguchi's use of realism combined with the fantastical to make visible the historical traumas which plagued Japanese society during his working life. The resemblance of Mizoguchi's style and approach to Tarkovsky makes Sato's text of particular importance when comparing the two directors.

The second chapter discusses Tarkovsky's final two films which were both made in exile: the Italian production, *Nostalgia* and the Swedish, *The Sacrifice*. Both films explore the experience of exile and 'statelessness' as defined by Lyndsey Stonebridge: 'estrangement, absence, ellipses, groundlessness, otherness, the giddy freedoms and deep despair of rootlessness.'<sup>37</sup> Using a contrapuntal reading I examine how these films contain themes of exile which are nonetheless coupled with images of salvation through religion, mapping the hidden visual artistic influence from Carl-Theodor Dreyer, a director Tarkovsky described as a 'great master.'<sup>38</sup> Alex Barrett states: 'Dreyer strove for what he termed psychological realism, attempting to capture the ephemeral essence that lies beneath surface reality,'<sup>39</sup> and: 'Dreyer emphasises character over narrative, revealing an intense

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<sup>36</sup> Kenji Mizoguchi, cited: Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell, 'Observations on Film Art,' from David Bordwell's Website on Cinema <<https://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/category/directors-mizoguchi-kenji/>> [accessed 27 May 2024].

<sup>37</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People – Writing, Rights and Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries 1970-1986*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p.361.

<sup>39</sup> Alex Barrett, 'Where to begin with Carl Theodor Dreyer,' June 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 <<https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/fast-track-fandom-where-begin-carl-dreyer>> [accessed 5 November 2019].

concern for human suffering, and imbuing his films with a rare, graceful empathy.<sup>40</sup> I trace how the same ideas are strongly located in Tarkovsky's two exile films and that Dreyer has a spectral cinematic presence in the works; Tarkovsky's work is haunted by Dreyer's films such as *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), *Vampyr* (1932) and *Ordet* (1955). Religion in the Soviet Union was not outlawed, but communist ideology emphasised the need for an atheist state. Therefore, I posit through my modern reading that Tarkovsky controversially made films driven with Christian concerns. His own writings indicate a strong sense of spirituality:

I am drawn to the man who is ready to serve a higher cause, unwilling -or even unable- to subscribe to the generally accepted tenets of a worldly "morality"; the man who recognises that the meaning of existence lies above all in the fight against the evil within ourselves, so that in the course of a lifetime he may take at least one step towards spiritual perfection [...] Contemporary man [...] has to understand that his life's path is not measured by a human yardstick but lies in the hands of the Creator, on whose will he must rely [...].<sup>41</sup>

Tarkovsky's beliefs place life as a journey along a path: individuals must travel and be tested psychologically via suffering and teaching, to achieve steps towards spiritual enlightenment. His views are like those of Christian writer Simone Weil:

Suffering, teaching and transformation. What is necessary is not that the initiated should learn something, but that a transformation should come about in them which makes them capable of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time -Reflections on the Cinema*, trans.by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp.209-.228.

receiving teaching. *Pathos* means at the same time suffering (notably suffering unto death) and *modification* notably transformation into an immortal being.).<sup>42</sup>

The individual must move away from the immorality and materialist ways of modern society and struggle to become a person of faith through journeying down a path of spiritual transformation. Dreyer's films are freely structured within spaces where religion outwardly drives the narrative. However, Dreyer 'was absolutely not interested in religion. [...] Yet none of this was ever evident in Dreyer's personality or conversation.'<sup>43</sup> Dreyer is creating work from a different set of beliefs but I argue he still provides a cinematic pseudo-Christian influence for Tarkovsky. I assert through a contrapuntal reading that the religious zones Dreyer created are mirrored hauntologically in Tarkovsky's latter films. These manifest in Tarkovsky's works by using similar slow cinema techniques Dreyer employs, such as slow and sedate takes and minimalist dialogue. As Siobhan McKeown states of Dreyer's work: 'Nothing has happened, but everything has been felt.'<sup>44</sup> This resonates with Tarkovsky's own minimal slow style where the audience is able to feel much more than when watching a conventional narrative on screen. David Bordwell's *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (1981) provides a critical overview of Dreyer's work in terms of these stylistic distinctions. For example, Bordwell's discussion of Dreyer's slow cinema techniques, cinematography and editing provide a firm link to and understanding of the stylistic complexities that Tarkovsky would also use. Bordwell is particularly adept at frame-by-frame close semiotic analysis of Dreyer's films and it is this level of engagement which is needed when exploring Tarkovsky's work due to its similarly challenging nature. Through Bordwell's reading of Dreyer, I read Tarkovsky into Dreyer, even though the focus of the text is on Dreyer, and Tarkovsky is mentioned minimally under the same slow cinematic taxonomy. A contrapuntal reading recognises that Mizoguchi and Dreyer are both present

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<sup>42</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 1999), p.83.

<sup>43</sup> Jean Drum and Dale Drum, *My Only Great Passion - The Life and Films of Carl Th. Dreyer* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2000), p.8.

<sup>44</sup> Siobhan McKeown, 'Techniques Of Terror: Carl Dreyer's Danish Gothic Dissected,' *The Quietus - Culture Countered*, 14 March 2012, <<https://thequietus.com/culture/film/carl-dreyer-danish-gothic-terror-techniques-bfi-season/>> [accessed 27 May 2024].

and absent in Tarkovsky's oeuvre as haunting presences, and I assert that those directors play an influential part in Tarkovsky's work.

The creative piece, *Red Lens*, acts as a complementary response to the research section. It is created as a piece of prose fiction that is another method through which to engage with Tarkovsky's work and is influenced by his visual style. *Red Lens* attempts to mirror his cinematic work through creating dreamlike worlds through slow and contemplative description, fragmentation of narrative and the central characters undergoing a psychological journey to find some form of enlightenment. The creative writing lends itself to a contrapuntal and hauntological interpretation; the reader must be prepared to read more than is articulated on the page. As an example, on a naturalistic level, I have included small references to historical Soviet culture, which haunted Tarkovsky's propagandistic world, and which require the reader to contemplate and understand further to drive the narrative. Characters are symbolically drawn away from realism into zones of unreality which requires the reader to interpret what hidden meanings are found in these zones. This is to exhibit a cognate creative equivalent with my research, which both echoes the creative circumstances of Tarkovsky's work and is influenced by the narratological stylistics of slow cinema. Like a Tarkovsky film, the novella forces the reader to acknowledge that there is more symbolically present than just what is written. The characters act as hauntological vehicles to explore the Soviet past, but the pervasive sense of bleakness is intended to suggest the haunting of lost futures during the stagnated Brezhnev era.

To contextualise his work, methods and environment, Tarkovsky's *Collected Screenplays* (1999) provide a bedrock of reference in the variegated style in which he wrote. Sometimes his proposals and screenplays are written as long prose fiction and at other times in a more traditional screenplay template. This method displays Tarkovsky's fluidity as a writer and he would often create in different ways. It is crucial to read the written words on the page and then see the visual representation in frame to understand how Tarkovsky's creative process evolved from page to screen. As examples, the film *Stalker* evolved from a screenplay by the authors of science fiction novel *Roadside Picnic* (1972), Boris and Arkady Strugatsky, the film was initially titled as *The Wish Machine*. However, as Turovskaya states in relation to Tarkovsky's creative process:

Once Tarkovsky was involved, the science-fiction aspect gradually began to disappear from the screenplay, with the journey now transformed from an adventure into an extended debate [...] The whole complex science-fiction edifice had been pruned back to a few original themes: the Zone, the Stalker, the idea of wishes fulfilled, the sick girl and the journey. The screenplay was now so far removed from the original story that after the film was released, the writers were offered the chance to have it published as a new work.<sup>45</sup>

Tarkovsky had his own evolutionary creative agenda. *Stalker* occupies the science-fiction cinematic genre but the film emerges as a sequence of philosophical debates and is well-removed from the original novel on which it was based. Tarkovsky has engaged with the original text but transformed it as he sees fit to match his own creative purposes. I have used my research into Tarkovsky's works to drive my own narrative in *Red Lens*, borrowing this creative methodology. Tarkovsky is spectrally present in my creative work and my process matches his own, which also signifies a fuller Tarkovsky experience when reading *Red Lens*. Natasha Synessios states in relation to *Mirror*:

The archival history of *Mirror* reveals a long and labyrinthine journey in search of a form to contain meaning and memory. Fragments of stories, dialogue, images, eras, and experience were picked up and developed, then abandoned only to be reinvented in a different form, or with a shift in emphasis or meaning.<sup>46</sup>

Tarkovsky wrote a prose work for the film *Mirror* which is different when transposed visually. The film began as a fictional story called *A White, White Day*, which opens with:

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<sup>45</sup> Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky - Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Wood (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p.107.

<sup>46</sup> Natasha Synesis, 'Introduction to Mirror' from *Andrei Tarkovsky - Collected Screenplays* trans. by William Powell and Nastasha Synesis (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p.254.

And so the winter came. The first snow had fallen. In the centre of town, ploughs began to clear it away before daybreak and street-sweepers began their daily struggle which would go on for several months, almost until the very start of April.<sup>47</sup>

However, the film begins with a strict Soviet speech therapy session between a female nurse and male patient which bears no relation to Tarkovsky's original ideas. This evolutionary creative process would be repeated further throughout Tarkovsky's career with films such as *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice* in particular, which both started as prose writing narratives. Since Tarkovsky created in both media, my own creative work mirrors that style of having a screenplay combined with prose narrative. I have used this Tarkovskian method to reinforce the parallels between Tarkovsky's literary and filmic compositions, and to use both in my own creative practice. The Tarkovsky experience is not only cinematic but also literary, verbal and fictive. My own creative work, channels the same techniques, acting as a literary equivalent and commentary on Tarkovsky's creative methods.

As well as being structured primarily under a cinematic Tarkovskian influence, *Red Lens* also imitates ideas from Tarkovsky's personal diaries which are collected in the volume, *Sculpting in Time* (1985). The diaries demonstrate the difficulties of state-restricted filmmaking during the Brezhnev era. Therefore, my characters are influenced by Tarkovsky's personal circumstances of creativity under the same umbrella of the Brezhnev regime. My aim was to create a piece that also demonstrates an understanding and acknowledgment of historical Russian writing because of Tarkovsky's affinity with Fyodor Dostoevsky. In 1970 Tarkovsky stated: 'Dostoevsky could become the whole point of what I want to do in cinema.'<sup>48</sup> Dostoevsky carries spectral weight for Tarkovsky. His diaries up to his death in 1986 contain constant references to Dostoevsky, including ongoing discussion of a potential adaptation of Dostoevsky's seminal novel, *The Idiot* (1868). Dostoevsky's works such as *Crime and*

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<sup>47</sup> Synesis, p.263.

<sup>48</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries 1970 – 1986*, trans. by Kitty Hunter – Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 3.

*Punishment* (1866) feature central protagonists who undergo raw personal journeys which chime with Tarkovsky's own narratives. I have used these ideas to give my own characters motivation to undergo their own personal journeys to escape their plight. *Red Lens* is also influenced by the stylistic approach of writers such as George Orwell and the seminal *1984* (1948) which dramatises the grim debauchery of the totalitarian state, but also John le Carré's spy novels such as *The Russia House* (1989) are also influential with le Carré's attention to detail regarding the drab existence and paranoia of the Cold War. Conversely, the dissidents in the novel also enjoy ironic parties and have an almost riotous time while still underneath the Soviet shadow. There is a sense of humour in le Carré's text which I have also captured at times in my work.

*Red Lens* begins in the 1970s, mirroring the time when Tarkovsky was facing significant difficulties in his filmmaking. The 1950s and 1960s saw the initial relative economic stability of the Thaw period when, as Denis Kozlov says: 'As never before, the social, cultural, and intellectual processes in the USSR began to parallel those in the West.'<sup>49</sup> From 1964 onwards, a slow transition to greater repression took place under the reign of new Communist Party General Secretary Brezhnev. This was a period when, as Robert Conquest observes:

Stalin himself began to be treated at first with a rather cold respect and later with considerable favour, despite the protest of intellectuals. The system of government he created, as amended, and improved under Khrushchev, was consolidated.<sup>50</sup>

Societal oppression deepened and persecution was rife. Freedom of expression was restricted once again and penalties enforced for creating anything perceived by the political leadership as anti-Soviet in nature. I have used Karl Schlogel's, *The Soviet Century – Archaeology of a Lost World* (2023), which offers an archive of research examining the day-by-day existence and lifestyle of citizens under

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<sup>49</sup> Denis Kozlov, 'Introduction,' in *The Thaw – Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s*, ed by. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p.3.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror – Stalin's Purge of the Thirties, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition* (London: Bodley Head, 2018), p.480.

the Soviet regime, to keep the narrative initially grounded in the world Tarkovsky lived in. The text highlights various Soviet cultures such as magazine publications or various historical but localised news events which would not have been part of Western media coverage. The text also offers a diverse discussion on subject areas from Soviet architectural development to popular holiday destinations. It covers the minutiae of life under the Soviet umbrella which acts as an encompassing reference guide and showcases the reality of how people lived during the communist era. It is an essential text to use when trying to encapsulate moments of realism and hyperrealism in my creative work.

The novella features a screenplay called 'Red Lens' which has been written by one of the female characters, Mirza. Based during the era of Stalin, it is about a psychologically haunted film director called Ivan who was once celebrated as the state's great cinematic propagandist. He now faces his own show trial and potentially the death penalty for an ill-advised political directorial choice. As he waits in his cell, he remembers events from his past which are re-enacted in his mind as a ghostlike presence on screen. However, previous events from his life do not play out as he expects. Ironically the central character is now the victim of his own deception in that he cannot trust what he sees before him. Time becomes obsolete as the performed moments from his past become autonomous and confusing. This is also a concurrent theme in the works of Tarkovsky: time is sculpted as he imagines it. The audience of this film will question the meaning behind the *mise-en-scène* as spectrality continues to influence the protagonist leading to the finale. The aim is to present totalitarianism and exile as haunting presences using some of the hallmarks of slow cinema such as introspection and long, contemplative shots. The remnants of the script are being hunted by KGB operatives as it is considered to be anti-Soviet propaganda. Mirza feels as though she is being watched by the abject presence of authority. Her employment is as a newsreader for Soviet Central Television in the Leningrad Office and as such Mirza is at the centre of the unreality of Soviet broadcasting, or as Sheila Fitzpatrick describes, the 'workaday Brezhnevian facade.'<sup>51</sup> The harsh realities of Socialist

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<sup>51</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Shortest History of the Soviet Union* (Exeter: Old Street Publishing, 2022), p.178.

Realism were apparent to members of the public, as opposed to the projected ideals from television.

Anikó Imre observes:

The gap between the projective ideals and the actual experiential realities of socialism sustained a layer of ironic distance between television and its viewers. This was exacerbated by the increasing leakage of information about capitalist lifestyles and consumer products despite even the most repressive states' efforts to keep it out. By the 1980s of late socialism, television had turned into the primary medium of parodic overidentification with official socialist rhetoric.<sup>52</sup>

Television was a vehicle for the Soviet leadership to indoctrinate its audience into Socialist Realism through the prism of a hyperreality that offered scarce acknowledgment of actual reality. Mirza finds herself cynically carrying on under the guise of a loyal broadcaster, who is simultaneously haunted by the media landscape she helps promulgate.

The Dostoevskian influence continues in my use of a doubling effect as another central character, who is also called Ivan, lives in Mirza's contemporary world as a film director. His story is linked to Tarkovsky's personal diaries, *Sculpting in Time*, which expose the difficulties faced by filmmakers during the era: the lack of resources and frequent interference from the state authorities at both regional and national level. This is a deliberate choice within the novella's structure and characterisation so that both Ivans act as parallelisms between different time zones, linking Stalinist policies from the 1930s and their slow re-emergence under Brezhnev, albeit in a diluted form. Catriona Kelly's *Soviet Art House - Lenfilm Studio Under Brezhnev* (2021) has guided Mirza's narrative as the text provides an account of the Lenfilm Studio in Leningrad, where my story initially

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<sup>52</sup> Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), p.9.

takes place, during the 1970s. Kelly describes the difficult processes involved trying to make films during that era but also the abundance of creativity which took hold during those times.

The concept of the ‘zone’ resonates in Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker* and I have very deliberately taken influence from that work to show alternative places for characters to inhabit. Alternative zones on the page almost act as palimpsests, each one sealing over the other as characters move between them. I use this idea to explore the Soviet psychiatric system which was used as an alternative place of punishment for citizens viewed as dissidents during the era. As Ludmilla Thorne reported in 1977:

The Gulag archipelago exposed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has been partially dismantled; its camps today house an estimated 10,000 political prisoners instead of the teeming millions of Stalin's times. But something else is taking its place—a system of “special” psychiatric hospitals in which perfectly sane persons are confined to be “cured” of their nonconformist views.<sup>53</sup>

I have used the idea of incarceration to express a yearning for the characters’ freedoms. They dream of escape to other places, from their past lives, or fantastical zones of imagination. The fragmentary structure in Tarkovsky’s films is mirrored in my creative work deliberately with these examples, coupled with the dreamlike aesthetic Tarkovsky creates being reflected in my prose.

*Red Lens*’s chapters at times display streams of consciousness which take the reader away to different places. This symbolises the dreamlike fragmentation that Tarkovsky and his influencers create but also the minds of incarcerated patients who are dreaming of escape and normality. A contemporary of Tarkovsky was filmmaker Larisa Shepitko, the director of several works including *The Ascent* (1977). She was censored and would eventually be incarcerated under the mental health

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<sup>53</sup> Ludmilla Thorne, ‘Inside Russia’s,’ *The New York Times*, June 12, 1977, Page 203. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/06/12/archives/inside-russias-russian-prisons.html>> [accessed 15 January 2024].

system having had a psychological breakdown. She also made films deemed not suitable for public consumption. I have created zones of varied interpretation which meshes with the cinematic style of Tarkovsky. Tarkovsky intersperses scenes which can often feel fragmented from the more systematic narrative style. Worlds are shaped within worlds and linear experience of time is lost. I use narrative fragmentary cuts in *Red Lens* as a filmic device, analogised with Tarkovsky's stylistic approach. This is to make the reader understand the demarcation between truth and unreality found in Tarkovsky's films and that of the wider Soviet Union. I have kept the pacing slow and contemplative at times, I want the reader to breathe the text in much like they would if viewing a Tarkovsky film, so the work is analogous to Tarkovsky's oeuvre.

I have also created a character called Larisa who works at Lenfilm which was based in Leningrad, which was the second biggest production house in the Soviet Union, behind Moscow's Mosfilm. She is Mirza's editor during the preproduction process for *Red Lens* and yearns as Tarkovsky did to make cinema which is free from stricter state legislation. Both Mirza and Larisa are part of the emerging Soviet generation in the 1970s and early 1980s wishing for modernisation:

By the early 1980s, solid Soviet citizens with good jobs might scoff at the dissidents when talking to foreigners, even off the record, while at the same time making criticisms of Soviet life that they would never have voiced twenty years earlier. [...] It was so rare in the early 1980s to encounter anyone who professed fervent support for the Soviet Union and took its ideology seriously.<sup>54</sup>

As Tarkovsky became an exile in 1981 by moving to Europe, I have also included a character called Dmitri who is another spectral link embodying the life of Tarkovsky. He is symbolic of the difficulties and delays faced when trying to make a film during the Brezhnev era: from writing a

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<sup>54</sup> Shelia Fitzpatrick, *The Shortest History of the Soviet Union* (Exeter: Old Street Publishing, 2022), p.177.

proposal, having it initially approved by Goskino, generating an initial script for approval which would then be edited by one of the film studio's editorship team to then become the Director's Script, finalising casting, crew, and budget, until finally getting production underway with the Script Board and authorities still looking on. Goskino and Soviet Central Committee members would then monitor the final editing process to ensure no 'anti-Soviet' rhetoric was present. Dmitri's story is the one that showcases the process Tarkovsky would go through during his tenure within the Soviet Union as described in his collected diaries. I have also included an older character called Josef who as a camera operator for Lenfilm has been psychologically ground down by the production process and literally toes the Communist party line as it is the easier action to take. He is haunted by the Stalinist past and the trauma that wrought on him. Those hauntings are explored through flashbacks to his youth and various challenging interactions that occurred. This is heavily influenced by the character of Gorchakov from Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia* in terms of a lost central figure feeling isolated. Gorchakov hauntingly dreams and reminisces back to a different time before his isolation, which has a pre-communist Russia aesthetic. Haunting is the key component to Josef's existence and I have also based his character reminiscent of Tarkovsky's interpretation of Kris Kelvin in *Solaris*. Kelvin occupies different zones of spectrality: the rural landscape, the family home, and the otherworldly haunted nature of the Solaris Space Station. A hauntological guilt burdens Kelvin from his past as a sense of guilt also burdens Josef.

The prose style speaks to my critical research both conceptually and stylistically. The characters in *Red Lens* are interwoven across a tapestry of fragmentation and at times a dreamlike atmosphere which links to the works of Tarkovsky as well as Mizoguchi and Dreyer. Their characters also inhabited hauntological landscapes, as exemplified by Allen Grey (Julian West) in Dreyer's *Vampyr* and Genjuro (Masayuki Mori) in Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari*. These characters are weighed down by spectral density and I have emulated this theme in *Red Lens*. My characters are all haunted by the past in some way and these hauntings influence their present actions. Sometimes the action is grounded to establish a more simplistic storyline, but as an echo of my critical research, the narrative becomes more open to interpretation through symbolism. The reader must embrace the

written journey and contemplate meaning. This is influenced by the contemplative journeys that the cinematic characters created by Tarkovsky, Mizoguchi and Dreyer endure that my research dissects.

My creative piece also needed to speak to the reader about their contemporaneous world and show the continuing relevance and readability of Tarkovsky. *Red Lens* mirrors the modern political sphere towards the end of the narrative by introducing the character of Vladimir. The parallels which are now drawn between the Putin regime and the authoritarian communist regimes of the past forge an historical link and I explore where Tarkovsky fits symbolically today as an inter-generational bridge between the two eras. In our contemporary world the Putin shadow spectrally looms large. There was recognised cyber interference in recent US and UK elections from the Putin regime: ‘The notion of disinformation wars exploded into the mainstream following Trump’s 2016 win, after US investigators found evidence that a Russian troll farm had sought to interfere in the vote.’<sup>55</sup> This shows the growth of a new Cold War and the hyper-real global reach and influence of Putin’s totalitarianism wishing to influence foreign politics to suit Russia’s interests. As Tarkovsky created slow and dreamlike zonal worlds in part as response to the unreality of the Soviet era, his work resonates today as again Russia finds itself navigating a landscape where much like the past, the slightest questioning of government policy can lead to a lengthy jail term. Reality is opaque once again through a state-controlled media panorama. Tarkovsky’s often otherworldly and fragmented zonal topographies co-exist neatly within the totalitarianism of Putin as Russia stares inward into unreality. By introducing the Vladimir character into the creative text, the purpose is to make the reader understand the hauntological resonance of Tarkovsky’s world. It is the historical ruler of the ancient Kievan-Rus Empire, Vladimir the Great, who I named my character after who carries a significant resonance in Putin’s political legacy. On November 4th 2016, which is National Unity Day in Russia, Putin unveiled a statue in Moscow of Vladimir the Great as a tribute to the man who ruled the Kievan-Rus Empire from its ancient capital Kiev. I have labelled my character in this way as an ironic link between the past and the present and how Putin holds such an ancient figure in such

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<sup>55</sup> Hannah Murphy, ‘America’s election year battle over who polices online disinformation,’ *The Financial Times*, June 14 2024 <<https://on.ft.com/4bZzPT5>> [accessed 17 June 2024].

reverence mirroring the unification of Russia and Ukraine. All my narrative strands converge in the conclusion with the Vladimir character. This is to bring the historical world I have rendered on the page into the modern dictatorial era of Putin to show the mutual connection across time of Tarkovsky's era and modern Russia. Philip Short's, *Putin - His Life and Times* (2023) gives a full account of Putin's past upbringing and then his political rise. The text links the Brezhnev era of Tarkovsky, where the reader discovers Putin's life in the KGB, to the contemporary world of geopolitics and contains minutiae of facts around Putin's life, grievances, and motivations for his current political, nationalist stance. Putin is the revenant of past totalitarianism now made relevant again. While my narrative is historical it also reflects the circularity of history with the return of totalitarian rule in Russia, and the impact that has both domestically and globally in our contemporary world. Contemporary postmodern Russian writers such as Vladimir Sorokin have also played an important inspiration in the work, he is a writer who uses prose in a 'paradoxical combination of the epic and the absurd,'<sup>56</sup> Sorokin creates absurdist epic unrealities to critique modern Putinism in novellas such as *The Blizzard* (2010) and *Day of the Oprichnik* (2006). His novel, *The Queue* (1983), which was written during the Brezhnev era but eventually published in France in 1985, is a bleak representation of living during those stagnating times and the sheer boredom and absurdity of having to queue every day for food. Another contemporary Russian writer who has influenced the work is Dmitry Glukhovsky and his novel *Metro 2033* (2002). The novel is set amongst the ruins of a post-apocalyptic Russia where the population is forced to live underground amongst the old metro stations. The characters are haunted by long shadows coming down the tracks and strange creatures above. The novel is full of uncanny elements which are chilling and challenging. I used this influence in *Red Lens* with my more abstract chapters featuring characters under incarceration, and the dark, subjective aspects of that situation. The characters imagine a nightmarish post-apocalyptic zone sometimes in their psychosis. I show how the characters' imagined zonal escape can simply lead to a dead and haunted space. Again, this also links to Tarkovsky's zone in the film *Stalker*, which is an alien space with added elements of threat and the uncanny. I have bridged Glukhovsky to Tarkovsky to create a

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Kahn, Mark Lipovetsky, Irina Reyfman, Stephanie Sandler, *A History of Russian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.685.

fictional world influenced by both. Russian writer Ludmilla Petrushevskaya's novellas and short stories have also been an influence as they feature elements of cruelty and struggle amongst a backdrop of horror and satire set in alternative fantastical Russian worlds. I have used her works to aid the haunting stream of consciousness I create during those chapters as they too are full of uncanny characters but laced with a sense of irony. Tarkovsky is haunted by the experiences of life under the Soviet regime, but his works have never lost their relevance to Russian political realities. In crafting a hauntological literary analogy to Tarkovsky's life, methods, and films, I have created a contemporary, contrapuntally readable work which shows how modern Russia remains haunted by its Soviet past.

To introduce and illustrate the model of analysis for the thesis, here I incorporate a contrapuntal study of Tarkovsky's first ever film, *The Killers* (1956). This was made whilst he was a student at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography. This film provides an early showcase of Tarkovsky's cinematic stylistics which would be honed to a fuller extent later in his career with his broader cinematic releases. Through Said's theory I posit that the student film has 'hidden' influences from Dziga Vertov, which are used to criticise the Soviet totalitarian state still under the haunting influence of Stalin's authoritarian leadership. Although Stalin is no longer leading the Soviet Union at the time of production, I assert that collective memory of his oppressive regime permeates Soviet society. A contrapuntal reading unveils the hauntological presence of Stalinist Socialist Realism. I believe it is through hauntology that the Stalinist hyper-reality is spectrally present, which creates a narrative in the student film that consistently enmeshes reality and illusion. Joan Neuberger states: 'During the 1930s and 1940s, the Soviet government tried to control artistic production in a variety of ways, both for ideological purposes and for profit. Artworks of all kinds were considered important media for cultivating socialist values and behaviour.'<sup>57</sup> This was an important historical rejection of established Russian Formalists. Terry Eagleton describes the Formalists as:

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<sup>57</sup> Joan Neuberger, *This Thing of Darkness – Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019), p.27.

A militant, polemical group of critics, they rejected the quasi-mystical symbolist doctrines which had influenced literary criticism before them, and in a practical, scientific spirit shifted attention to the material reality of the literary text itself. [...] The Formalists started out by seeing the literary work as a more or less arbitrary assemblage of “devices,” and only later came to see these devices as interrelated elements or “functions” within a total textual system.<sup>58</sup>

Formalism extends beyond literary texts as Victor Erlich summarises: ‘Generally speaking, the Formalists were distrustful of all theories predicated upon an “organic” kinship between the sign and the referent.’<sup>59</sup> This kind of arbitrary thinking as to the more abstract meaning of cultural works was utterly rejected by Stalin as Socialist Realism was purely about the promotion of collective socialist values:

Socialist Realism means not only knowing reality as it is, but knowing where it is moving. It is moving towards socialism, it is moving towards the victory of the international proletariat. And a work of art created by a Socialist Realist is one which shows where that conflict of contradictions is leading which the artist has seen in life and reflected in his work.<sup>60</sup>

Socialist Realism was a mechanism for the Soviet propaganda machine to disguise itself from the harsh realities of life under the regime. The irony is that Socialist Realism is a complete fiction, and not realism at all. It produces a highly constructed, controlled, and censored authoritarian view of the world. Birgit Beumers asserts:

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<sup>58</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory - An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p.2-3.

<sup>59</sup> Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism - History - Doctrine*. 3rd. edition (Yale: Yale University Press, 1981), p.224.

<sup>60</sup> Maxim Gorky, Karl Radek, Nikolai Bukharin, Andrey Zhdanov, *Soviet Writers' Congress, 1934: The Debate of Socialist Realism and Modernism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1977), p.157.

The constraints of Socialist Realism required filmmakers to varnish reality and show life in a positive, that would allow people to trace the path to the bright (communist) future, whilst the reality consisted of forced collectivization, famines, and the Purges.<sup>61</sup>

James Goodwin says: ‘the cultural program of socialist realism followed reductive and prescriptive political wish fulfilment in Soviet art for the next three decades. Unconditional idealisation of a “a Soviet man” evaded any contestation of the status quo.’<sup>62</sup> This was a completely propagandistic method of promoting so-called socialist values. Hannah Arendt writes that propaganda ‘is one, and possibly the most important, instrument of totalitarianism,’<sup>63</sup> and terror ‘is the very essence of its form of government.’<sup>64</sup> I unearth and explore these themes in Tarkovsky’s debut film using several key scenes in relation to the reality/unreality created, and how it manifests cinematically. *The Killers* depicts an authoritarian environment, embodying the hauntological memory of Stalinism and the influence of film noir.

In his essay from December of 1953, ‘On Sincerity in Literature,’ Vladimir Pomerantsev accused the Russian establishment of ‘varnishing reality’<sup>65</sup> through methods of construction rather than creation. He considered that artistic forms which are constructed to exist within a certain political mould are insincere:

The history of art and the rudiments of psychology cry out against artificial novels and plays. The degree of sincerity—that is, the directness of a work—should be the first measure of its worth. Sincerity is the basic component of that sum of gifts which we call talent. Sincerity distinguishes the author of a book or play from the constructor of a book or play. To construct

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<sup>61</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p.3.

<sup>62</sup> James Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema and History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.112.

<sup>63</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2017), p 450.

<sup>64</sup> Arendt. p. 450.

<sup>65</sup> Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 237.

a work, all you need is a brain, cunning, and experience. To create a work you need talent, that is to say, first and foremost, sincerity.<sup>66</sup>

These ideas provide a critique of the state of Soviet propagandistic culture of the moment; the remnants of Stalinist Socialist Realism as the idea of ‘sincerity’ in the work are lacking and the arts are being manipulated for propagandistic reasons. Arendt states that Stalin used ‘propaganda apparatus,’ to ‘immortalize his name.’<sup>67</sup> The essay is a rallying cry by Pomerantsev working in opposition to the ‘constructed’ ideas of nationhood under the auspices of Stalinist policy:

Writers [...] must cast off all methods, devices, and means of avoiding contradictory and difficult questions. The duty of a writer, having received a clear program for the advancement of our nation, is to help this program precisely in the difficult questions.<sup>68</sup>

Tarkovsky’s first ever cinematic foray was a co-production of an adaptation of Ernest Hemingway’s gangster noir short story from 1927, *The Killers*, with his fellow student Alexander Gordon. Raymond De Luca states:

From 1934 until 1939, Russian translations of Hemingway’s prose, largely carried out by the erudite Soviet literary scholar Ivan Kashkin, had been appearing with increasing frequency in the Soviet Union. Indeed, Tarkovsky himself owned one of Kahkin’s translated volumes of Hemingway’s earlier works.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Vladimir Pomerantsev, ‘On Sincerity in Literature’ <<http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1954-2/the-thaw/the-thaw-texts/on-sincerity-in-literature/>> [accessed 29 October 2017].

<sup>67</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2017), p.399.

<sup>68</sup> Vladimir Pomerantsev, ‘On Sincerity in Literature’ <<http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1954-2/the-thaw/the-thaw-texts/on-sincerity-in-literature/>> [accessed 29 October 2017].

<sup>69</sup> Raymond De Luca, ‘Tarkovsky screens Hemingway: Andrei Tarkovsky’s first student film, *The Killers* (1956),’ *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol.13, No.2 (2019), 172-181(p.173).

Therefore, Tarkovsky had clearly read 'The Killers' and was prepared to adapt it for a film project. Tarkovsky and Gordon acted both as screenplay writers and directors. Gordon takes a leading acting role and Tarkovsky also features in a brief cameo appearance. Although this was a collaboration, Gordon claims: 'it was Tarkovsky's idea to produce *The Killers* [...] Andrei was definitely in charge. Tarkovsky was serious about his work.'<sup>70</sup> In this earliest work, Tarkovsky interweaves specific and recognisable movie tropes and styles to deliver a socio-political message. The stylistic elements he used to enable the adaptation are influenced by Soviet cinematic and literary cultures of the past. Using Said's contrapuntal theory, I discern that Tarkovsky integrates stylistic elements from both classic Soviet cinema, particularly Dziga Vertov's work - *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), and Hollywood-style film noir, to create a work that is on the one hand a *constructed* student film, but also a *created* work of potentially hidden subversion. The Soviet past manifests a strong hauntological presence in *The Killers* through the stylistic spectrality of Vertov. I argue that *The Killers* can be read as a constructed straight adaptation of the original Hemingway narrative, but if read contrapuntally the film shows a surreal situational trauma on screen: the characters featured are all victims of a haunted totalitarian state and a paranoid culture of oppression. Characters' anxieties throughout the narrative are internalised and manifest visually through fear and intimidation. There is a continuous hauntological abject presence of threat. This is the expression of an oppressive atmosphere which is difficult to pin down or represent. Julia Kristeva defines the abject as 'a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside [...] It lies there, quite close, but cannot be assimilated.'<sup>71</sup> The atmosphere of the film is redolent of Kristevan abjection because of the foreboding and paranoia produced visually by these merging of styles.

Hemingway's textual narrative is the simple tale of two male hoodlums (Al and Max), who descend on a small empty café run by the waiter George, and inform him they are waiting for an Ole Anderson who they are plotting to murder. Anderson does not arrive and Al and Max leave having

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<sup>70</sup> Alexander Gordon, 'Student Years' in *About Andrei Tarkovsky, Memoirs and Biographies* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1990) <[http://www.nostalgia.com/TheTopics/Gordon\\_On.html](http://www.nostalgia.com/TheTopics/Gordon_On.html)> [accessed 1 November 2018].

<sup>71</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans by. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, 1982), p. 1.

intimidated George and others in the café. Anderson is later revealed in a separate room as he is told the events that have unfolded by the character of Nick, who was also in the café at the time. The very simple plot structure is what Hemingway referred to as iceberg theory. The surface narrative describes events but underneath there are omissions and ambiguities, the very gaps which ‘allotted Tarkovsky the leeway to experiment stylistically.’<sup>72</sup> Tarkovsky’s adaptation is laced with masculine aggression coupled with a sense of paranoia and abject threat. The staunch masculinity of Al and Max is used as a weapon against the other characters to intimidate them. They are both armed and ready to commit murder whilst not caring about sharing this criminal information in the café. No-one can threaten them due to their powerful position compared to the other characters. However, the hoodlums themselves do work for a higher authority. They have been given orders by another character to carry out the murder. The spectator never finds out who this is, so it is an abject presence of a higher power which creates the real threat in the film as well as in the original text.

Cinematographically, Vertov can be discerned as hauntologically present in Tarkovsky’s work as a spectral influence. *The Man with the Movie Camera* has historically been read contrapuntally and I explore this model of analysis and then demonstrate how the same methodology is applied to *The Killers*. In his diaries, Tarkovsky writes passionately about Vertov and considers him in the same league as other ‘outstanding’<sup>73</sup> artists:

We saw Dziga Vertov being ignored for decades; we saw the Party painfully rehabilitating the work of Sergey Eisenstein by making changes in the leadership of the arts. A number of great films exist, but very few that will stand the test of time. We carry a responsibility for world cinema.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Raymond De Luca, ‘Tarkovsky screens Hemingway: Andrei Tarkovsky’s first student film, *The Killers* (1956),’ *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol.13, No.2 (2019), 172-181 (p.175).

<sup>73</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries 1970 -1986*, trans. by. Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1994) p. 94.

<sup>74</sup> Tarkovsky, p.94.

Tarkovsky wished to preserve the legacy of Vertov because of the ‘responsibility for world cinema’ and he does this through his own cinematic direction. *The Killers* uses a symbolic cinematography reminiscent of Vertov’s *The Man with the Movie Camera*. Vertov’s work is historically viewed as an unfiltered representation of the successes of the Soviet Union. Vertov said in 1958: ‘In essence it was a daring, bold attempt to master all approaches to filming actuality.’<sup>75</sup> As Khrisanf Khersonsky writes in 1929:

The filming and montage of *Man with a Movie Camera* are very skilled. The content of the observations of the film is completely defined by Vertov’s passionate love for examining contemporary Soviet reality, and in that respect his film is healthy, joyous, and infectious. It is also interesting in the exceptional wealth and good quality of the elements of daily life that it captures.<sup>76</sup>

In doing so, Khersonsky reads *The Man with the Movie Camera* as Vertov’s tribute to and support of *Kino-Pravda* (film-truth). However, Tarkovsky states in his diaries that Vertov employs: ‘a sophisticated method of cinematic abstraction – namely, the dialectical integration of ideas, concepts and messages through visual signs.’<sup>77</sup> If the film is read contrapuntally, *The Man with the Movie Camera* can be viewed paradoxically as a work symbolising the economic, conscious ‘truth’ of the Soviet Union but also potentially containing ‘marginally present’ or ‘silent’ thoughts and ideas which the audience can discern. Theorist Jean Epstein declares: ‘the modifications of spatial and temporal experience provided by slow, accelerated, or reverse motion will provide fresh access to the true, concealed nature of the phenomenal world.’<sup>78</sup> The complex and stylised structure of Vertov’s work in

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<sup>75</sup>Dziga Vertov, ‘About Life for the Living Man,’ *Iskusstvo Kino*, no.6, 1958, cited: Herbert Marshall, *Masters of Soviet Cinema – Crippled Creative Biographies* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.79.

<sup>76</sup> Khrisanof Khersonsky, ‘Chelovek’s kinoapparatum,’ *Sovetskii ekran*, no 18, 1929, p.5. from *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov in the Twenties*, ed. by Yuri Tsivian (Sacile: Le Giornate Del Cinema Muto, 2004), p. 333.

<sup>77</sup> Vlada Petric, ‘Cinematic Abstraction as a Means of Conveying Ideological Messages in The Man with the Movie Camera,’ in *The Red Screen* ed. by Anna Lawton (London: Routledge, 2003) pp.90-112. (p.90).

<sup>78</sup> Annette Michelson, ‘Introduction’: *Kino-Eye – The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. by Kevin O’Brien (London: University of California Press, 1984) xliii.

terms of montage and cinematic pacing allows an opportunity to delve into the potentialities of ‘concealed’ meaning on screen. Because *The Man with the Movie Camera* is such an aberrational piece, this allows access to concealed meanings within Vertov’s narrative. The cinematography is layered as such that there is symbolically more happening within the frames than what is considered conventionally. Tarkovsky’s films work in the same symbolic fashion, with wider interpretations resonating from his visual framing and cinematography. In 1936, Affedorov-Davydov asserted about *The Man with the Movie Camera*:

It was not accidental that this very film received the greatest recognition abroad by aesthetes of the European avant-garde cinema. In it they welcomed Vertov’s complete retreat from a realistic reflection of reality to an empty and fruitless play with form and the philosophy of rejection of an objective perception of the world [...]. It is interesting that Dziga Vertov [...] still did not understand the whole reactionary, anti-realistic essence of *The Man with the Movie Camera*.<sup>79</sup>

Affedorov-Davydov’s views associate strongly with a contrapuntal reading, deconstructing this propagandistic piece, reducing the film to ‘an empty and fruitless play with form’ and ‘anti-realistic.’ *The Man with the Movie Camera* is full of contradictions as to what ‘truth’ Vertov wishes to reveal. Vlada Petric observes in reference: ‘The film does not merely depict a city but rather reflects life’s dynamism – and its multifaceted contradictions – in Soviet society.’<sup>80</sup> The film’s montage structure employs numerous images of Soviet workers working hard in the factories and frames of people enjoying recreational activities. However, ‘multifaceted contradictions’ are also revealed and the film provides a critique of the very utopian ideology Vertov is supposed to promote, as Petric states:

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<sup>79</sup> Affedorov Davydov, ‘Towards a Realistic Art,’ *Kino Gazeta*, 30 March 1936 cited: Herbert Marshall, *Masters of Soviet Cinema – Crippled Creative Biographies* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.79.

<sup>80</sup> Vlada Petric, *Constructivism in Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) p. 80.

The montage integration [...] creates a “grand metaphor” about a society free of any capitalist exploitation of workers. At the same time, however, this cinematic trope discloses all the contradictions of an undeveloped and/or badly managed socialist state.<sup>81</sup>

The viewer witnesses unfettered access to Soviet life but because of this, two contrasting ideological messages emerge: one asserting the successes of Stalin’s propagandistic Socialist Realism with all artistic, media and creative platforms serving purely as instruments of Stalinist dictatorship, and the other implying Vertov’s own criticism of this oppressive and punitive state. He was able to simultaneously provide realist images of real-life Soviet economic industrial success through stylistic montage, whilst also showcasing through subtle fast cuts the difficult living conditions of peasants (Figure.i) and an array of peasantry female nudity (Figure.ii); the ‘silent’ reality of life in the Soviet Union is subtly given ‘emphasis’ to expose a nature of ‘truth’. This is both literal and figurative. The bogus ‘kino-pravda’ that Stalin’s authoritarian regime was ferociously intent on promoting in films like this, in Vertov’s example, can be viewed as political criticism of Stalinism: a different kind of ‘truth,’ an ‘ideological aberration.’<sup>82</sup> There is an emergence of ‘truth’ that is viewed as anti-Stalinist. The peasant in his rags literally littering the street in Figure. i does not indicate economic success whilst the nudity in Figure. ii suggests debauchery and obscenity. Figes states: ‘film directors (Leonid Trauberg, Dziga Vertov, Mikhail Romm) were accused of making “anti-Russian” films and forced out of their studies.’<sup>83</sup> This proves that even at the time of production, Vertov was being read contrapuntally: he had created a work to showcase the positivist spherical view of Socialist Realism, yet hidden meanings were interpreted and deduced leading to accusations of negativity. Vertov’s work would be banned during the latter part of the Stalin era and his reputation ruined because of the complex nature and style of *The Man with the Movie Camera*, a film which was to prove both stimulating and problematic.

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<sup>81</sup> Petric. p. 84.

<sup>82</sup> Matthew Sweet, *Free Thinking: Landmark – Man with a Movie Camera*. BBC Radio 3. 7/11/17.

<sup>83</sup> Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Critical History of Russia* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 508.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.<sup>84</sup>  
Figure.i

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.  
Figure.ii

Figes observes: ‘The avant-garde directors of the 1920s – Vertov, Pudovkin, Kuleshov – were all condemned as “formalists,” intellectuals who were more concerned with cinema as an art than with making films that could be “understood by the millions,”’<sup>85</sup> for the purposes of communicating Stalinist propaganda. This is a criticism which can be aimed at Tarkovsky also as a director who created formally unorthodox films which are artistic, indulgent, and irresponsible, much like the silent Soviet film directors. It is Vertov’s attempt to capture a complete artistic panoramic exhibition of the Soviet Union that ultimately leads to his public denunciation:

In his romantic revolutionary enthusiasm [...] Vertov overestimated his audience: not only common moviegoers but many of the avant-garde filmmakers, theorists, and critics were disappointed with the film [...] Eisenstein accused Vertov of producing “trickery” and “unmotivated mischief.”<sup>86</sup>

Vertov provides a ‘constructed’ film for Soviet propaganda purposes that begins to be viewed at the time of release as a ‘created’ work of formalist subversion. With Vertov’s techniques a ‘varnishing of reality’ takes place but one that still then showcases through a more nuanced way his ‘sincerity’ about life under Stalin.

The Vertovian influence haunts *The Killers* as the film embraces the subversive techniques of Vertov and harnesses the socio-political thoughts of Pomerantsev to create what is from one perspective merely a simplistic student film project, but through a contrapuntal semiotic analysis can be read as a far more controversial work. Providing the spectator with their own distorted ‘varnishing’ of a reality through questions of ‘sincerity.’ Tarkovsky ‘constructed’ a short film as requested by his

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<sup>84</sup> *The Man with the Movie Camera*, dir. by Dziga Vertov (Eureka Entertainment, 2015) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>85</sup> Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Critical History of Russia* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 476.

<sup>86</sup> Vlada Petric, *Constructivism in Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) p. 78.

academic studies, but ‘created’ something more powerful. The concept of ‘sincerity’ becomes problematic because the film was supposed to be a ‘sincere’ short gangster noir student film to be assessed by academics in a strict university environment, but a contrapuntal analysis leads the audience to ask what the real ‘sincerity’ of the piece is, what the message being communicated is and what Tarkovsky’s directorial intention might be.

Hemingway had been a popular writer in Russia, Deming Brown notes:

Ernest Hemingway’s works were first published in 1934. His rise to popularity was so rapid that in 1937, when the editors of a Russian literary magazine asked fifteen leading Soviet writers to name their favourite non-Russian author, nine of them named Hemingway.<sup>87</sup>

Brown also notes this was because Hemingway fitted the Soviet Regime’s Socialist Realism ideals: ‘Soviet critics found that his most notable characteristic was a development away from individualism, pessimism, and the aimless cultivation of artistic craftsmanship - toward collectivism, optimism, and the dedication of his art to socially constructive ends.’<sup>88</sup> Later, in the 1950s, there was also more openness in Soviet Russia as part of the on-going Thaw policies of de-Stalinisation which ironically began to occur in 1956 under Communist Party General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev. However, Khrushchev stated in 1970:

We were scared. We were afraid the thaw might unleash a flood which we wouldn’t be able to control and which could drown us [...] We wanted to guide the progress of the thaw so that it would stimulate only those creative forces which would contribute to the strengthening of socialism.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Deming Brown, ‘Hemingway in Russia’, *American Quarterly* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer, 1953), pp. 143-156 (p.143).

<sup>88</sup> Brown, p. 145.

<sup>89</sup> Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 238.

This meant that this was also the era when the ‘Cheka’ or political police evolved into the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, the KGB, in 1954, which would intimidate and act brutally against anyone trying to undermine the ‘strengthening of socialism.’ Additionally, as Karl Schlogel states:

this was the same Khrushchev who produced his famous outbursts against abstract art [...] the Cuba crisis, the capricious swings of economic policy and administrative reform, the massacre of the protesting workers of Novocherkassk [...] and disastrous atheist campaigns against the Orthodox Church.<sup>90</sup>

Stalinism still haunts the political sphere. Ironically, the uneasy political ‘Thaw’ allows Tarkovsky to take advantage of a new growing but also limited artistic freedom in the Soviet State, exploiting American writing to expose more historical living conditions under this same Soviet regime. Sean Martin claims: ‘*The Killers* is Tarkovsky’s most faithful adaptation of a literary work,’<sup>91</sup> showing deference to Hemingway’s expression of tension. For Tarkovsky, Hemingway’s narrative needs little critical intervention or editing for his artistic or political purposes. The lack of variation from the original text is a subversive method linking to ideas of Vertov and Pomerantsev. Tarkovsky uses the camera to construct an almost verbatim adaptation, but the camera acts as a creative tool for the frames to give a deeper meaning through the subtle stylistic haunting influence of Vertov.

The filmic narrative is imbued with a stifling sense of foreboding. The single camera perspective is often aided by Tarkovsky and Gordon’s reliance on the set and actors, both performing as additional framing agents to counter-poise and stylistically condense the action into what feels like a claustrophobic vision of the world. The opening scene (Figure.iii) has the narrative camera track in on George (Alexander Gordon) as he cleans the workspace, followed by an over the shoulder angle between Al (Valentin Vinogradov) and Max (Vladim Novikov). This perspective illustrates how George is trapped between the two hoodlums with no escape from the intimidation and interrogation.

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<sup>90</sup> Karl Schlogel, *The Soviet Century – Archaeology of a Lost World*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), p.388.

<sup>91</sup> Sean Martin, *Andrei Tarkovsky* (Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2011), p. 49.

There is no non-diegetic sound throughout the whole piece which adds to the stilted atmosphere because there is only a pervading silence, with the hoodlums being a malignant presence. Their only motivations are to follow orders and kill for the people they represent.

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Figure.iii

The costumes of suits and trilby hats worn by the antagonists (Figure.iv) coupled with the dark, moody use of lighting make the overall tone of the film reminiscent of the *film noir* of contemporary Hollywood, which as Nathaniel Rich states are:

punctuated by violence and pervaded with a profound sense of dread and moral uncertainties. The heroes tend to be cynical, tough and overwhelmed by sinister forces beyond their control. Stylistically, film noir is distinguished by its stark chiaroscuro cinematography [...] Films are shot in black and white, lit for night, favour oblique camera angles and obsessive use of shadows and most importantly, take place in a city.<sup>93</sup>

The characters in *The Killers* are ‘overwhelmed by sinister forces’ and carry with them a ‘profound sense of dread.’ The shadowed chiaroscuro effect is used fully to convey the sense of dread and claustrophobia. As James Naremore observes, *films noir* are ‘movies about gangsterism and murder [...] they bestowed an aura of the marvellous upon urban décor [...] confined largely to interiors [...] to reveal the secret life of things.’<sup>94</sup> *The Killers*’ setting is intrinsically linked to this stylistic approach as the film feels ‘confined’ through the simplistic cafeteria setting which also reveals a ‘secret life of things’. This links with Said’s theories of giving ‘emphasis and voice to what is silent’ through a contrapuntal reading, where the gangster noir genre can function to cinematically reveal hidden meanings but through more of a nuanced style, reminiscent of Vertov’s techniques.

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<sup>92</sup>*The Killers*, dir. by Andrei Tarkovsky and Alexander Gordon, online video, YouTube, 27 January 2012, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jofHN3PTpVg>> [accessed 26 September 2017].

<sup>93</sup> Nathaniel Rich, *San Francisco Noir* (New York: Little Book Room, 2005), p.8.

<sup>94</sup> James Naremore, *More Than Night, Film Noir in its Contexts* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), p. 22.

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Figure.iv

Al and Max play a series of mental games with George through a dialogue of threat. They insult George by referring to him as ‘bright boy’ continuously but in a cynical and sarcastic manner. The hoodlums are a representation of masculinity as an aggressive force. The other characters exist as a contrast, where their masculinity is in crisis. They have no way to stand up to the violence without facing a quick demise, as the gangsters carry guns and are there to shoot Anderson. The film therefore conveys Tarkovsky’s critique of the oppressive state. It uses noir as an observation of contemporary Soviet society through an American visual register.

The hoodlums signify decades of totalitarian oppression under the auspices of Stalin’s former dictatorship. The phantom of Stalin haunts the work and they are there to terrorise and intimidate. Arendt states:

Terror becomes total when it becomes independent of all opposition; it rules supreme when nobody any longer stands in its way. If lawfulness is the essence of non-tyrannical government and lawlessness is the essence of tyranny, then terror is the essence of totalitarian domination.<sup>95</sup>

Al and Max being gangsters also links with ideas surrounding Stalin’s past and criminal reputation. Odd Arne Westad states, Stalin: ‘From the age of twenty-one worked for Lenin and his party, specialising in the most dangerous jobs such as bank robberies and occasional assassinations,’<sup>96</sup> he became known as: ‘*vozhd*, the Boss’<sup>97</sup>. Stalin created an ‘entire edifice of terror and suffering by which [he] secured his grip on the Soviet peoples.’<sup>98</sup> Successive Soviet governments required covert operatives to pacify the populace. One of the founders of the Combating Counterrevolution and

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<sup>95</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2017), p. 464.

<sup>96</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War – A World History* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 34.

<sup>97</sup> Westad, p.35.

<sup>98</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror – Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition* (London: Bodley Head: 2018), p.37.

Sabotage movement, a precursor to the KGB, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, stated: 'we are not now in need of justice. It is war now – face to face, a fight to the finish [...] I demand an organ for the revolutionary settlement of accounts with counterrevolutionaries.'<sup>99</sup> Who the 'counterrevolutionaries' were was an abstract concept as Arendt states:

Totalitarianism's central assumption that everything is possible thus leads through consistent elimination of all factual restraints to the absurd and terrible consequence that every crime the rulers can conceive of must be punished, regardless of whether or not it has been committed.<sup>100</sup>

The menacing atmosphere transposed on camera by Al and Max is the embodiment of the Dzerzhinsky rhetoric: waging 'war' against the perceived enemy of 'counterrevolutionaries,' but there is no factual reason why Anderson is being hunted. There is a gap in the Hemingway narrative which Tarkovsky exploits to show the 'absurd and terrible consequence' of a totalitarian regime. The hoodlums are reminiscent of KGB operatives: not only are their gangster noir costumes menacing, but they are uniform, echoing the matching threat of uniformed secret services. The costumes allow no individuality. Rather they exude menacing darkness through sinister conformity. Tarkovsky manipulates Hemingway to augment specific objections to the regimes they have endured. The *Pravda*, or truth, of their world is one of violence and corruption.

In one of the film's critical scenes, the Cook and Nick (Yuli Fait) are tied up together in the back kitchen (Figure.v) and held at gunpoint so they cannot warn the imminently arriving Anderson whilst George must make a sandwich for a visiting customer (Andrei Tarkovsky). As Arendt posits: 'Torture, to be sure, is an essential feature of the whole totalitarian police and judiciary apparatus; it is

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<sup>99</sup> Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *The KGB, The Inside Story* (London: Harper Perennial, 1991), p. 40.

<sup>100</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2017), p. 599.

used every day to make people talk.’<sup>101</sup> Yet the audience never finds out why Anderson is wanted, which ties to Stalinist NKVD policy:

Whether soldier or intellectual, Ukrainian or engineer, the arrested man might thus deduce or learn from his acquaintances what the exact charge would be. And this was important. For when he went to interrogation, it was NKVD practice not to tell him what he was in for, but to let him frame his own confession.<sup>102</sup>

Stalinism spectrally resonates throughout the *mise en scène*. The victims here keep very quiet and will not reveal the location of Anderson despite the threat. George even begins to plot rebellion against the hoodlums.

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Figure.v

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Figure.vi

In one frame George picks up a knife (Figure.vi) as he prepares the sandwich in the kitchen. His hand is subject to a close-up shot as the visiting customer whistles the American jazz song, ‘*Lullaby of Birdland*.’ This is laced with symbolic irony both internally within the film and externally as a wider message about collective freedom in the Soviet Union because Tarkovsky’s character is using a popular western cultural source to symbolise musically the entrapment the characters are facing. A song of freedom is juxtaposed with scenes of imprisonment (Figure.vii) and so a ‘truth’ of Soviet living conditions is being exposed. George is ultimately powerless to do anything, so despite his growing temptation to stand up to his oppressors he must just carry on making the sandwich as the consequences for him otherwise would be fatal, as Robert Conquest shows: ‘A civil stand, a critical rational attitude to political developments meant definite destruction.’<sup>103</sup> Any attempt to fight back

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<sup>101</sup> Arendt, p.594.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror – Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition* (London: Bodley Head: 2018), p.277.

<sup>103</sup> Moscow News, no.42 (1988) cited: Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror – Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition* (London: Bodley Head: 2018), p.488.

against Stalinist oppression in any form would mean certain death. Therefore, he is unable to fight the thuggish Stalinist gangsterism. The camera shows the audience an actual *Kino-Pravda* as opposed to one manufactured by state officials.

The scene is a classic example of the use of multi-layered framing agents (Figure.vii), the over the shoulder shot of the hoodlum seeing through the hatch and then George and the other hoodlum frame the door. The door to freedom is out of reach due to the pointing gun. The characters are all trapped in this asphyxiating and hopeless world, haunted by totalitarianism which is manifested as gangsterism on screen.

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Figure.vii

This theme of unsettling oppression and uncertainty continues with Tarkovsky and Gordon's use of time in the film. There is a large clock which is shot throughout most of the film. When the hoodlums arrive, it reads as 5:20pm yet George claims it is 'twenty minutes fast,' raising questions about why it is running fast without anyone trying to correct it. Without any specific length of the narrative transitioned specifically, the clock then soon reads 5:55pm (Figure.viii) and then 7:00pm (Figure. ix). Time moves forward by several hours until Al and Max depart the café having not really achieved or resolved anything at 9:19pm.

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Figure.viii

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Figure.ix

The physical action all occurs in fifteen minutes of screen-time. This is a specific stylistic device to show a lack of coordination between real life and linearity. Tarkovsky would explore this decoupling of time and events significantly in later works, as Nariman Skakov asserts:

The director's films, from *Ivan's Childhood* to *Sacrifice*, create non-linear relationships between separate times, places, and people. By exploring the ephemeral qualities of cinema – its imaginary, oneiric and hallucinatory potential – Tarkovsky implies that homogenous 'real' reality is also an artificial construct.<sup>104</sup>

The cafe is an imaginary dreamlike space which is a construct. The idea of reality is manipulated and toyed with through the fragmentation of temporality. Tarkovsky philosophised that: 'the artist breaks down reality in the prism of his perception and uses a foreshortening technique of his own to show different sides of reality.'<sup>105</sup> In *The Killers*, time is strangely both significant and insignificant, as the hoodlums are 'waiting' but Anderson never arrives to meet them. They are waiting for something that is not going to happen, but the clock on the wall also disorients the viewer as there is no temporal linear structure to corroborate their narrative. This example of 'temporal dislocation'<sup>106</sup> implies time is irrelevant in this case, and symbolically, in the wider totalitarian state where work is the only significant motivator for existence. The audience is witnessing a liminal space hidden from reality, but ironically one simultaneously symbolic of totalitarian reality, coupled with a sense of the utter futility of action.

This reading supports the idea that reality in Tarkovsky's world was 'constructed' and twisted to suit Soviet propaganda: the world Tarkovsky presents on screen is also a visual representation of the reality/unreality of living behind the Iron Curtain. Haunted by Stalinist control, the visual artistic propaganda, whether filmic or poster-based symbolising the success of the Soviet State is mere fabrication, drawn through an intensive state-controlled editing process. Existence in this world is oppressed to the point where George and others can only interiorise their anxiety at the external world they face. It is the inner repressed trauma of this world and its characters that in-turn embodies an acceptance of the unreality: 'the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience)

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<sup>104</sup> Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky – Labyrinths of Space and Time* (London: I.B Taurus, 2013), p.11.

<sup>105</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 26.

<sup>106</sup> David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Jeff Smith, *Film Art – An Introduction* 11<sup>th</sup> ed (Wisconsin: McGraw Hill Education, 2017), p. 259.

and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards to thought) no longer exist.’<sup>107</sup> This is significant in linking ideas of a repressed collective Soviet consciousness, striving to reveal *Pravda* to the world.

The short film’s elements of abstraction work very differently to the 1946 Hollywood treatment of *The Killers*, which conforms to traditional cinematic conventions. However, if the 1946 treatment is read contrapuntally, the film also carries a spectrality which links the two dichotomous worlds of Hollywood and the Soviet Union together. The film starred Burt Lancaster as Anderson and Ava Gardner as his illicit lover Kitty Collins. With direction by Robert Siodmak, the screenplay by Anthony Veiller extends the short story into a nearly two-hour film. The narrative begins with Hemingway’s story lasting around thirteen minutes with the set and lighting of the café (Figure.xi) based on Edward Hopper’s *The Nighthawks* painting from 1942 (Figure.x). There is a stark sense of foreboding and loneliness in the film’s opening which mirrors the Hopper image; capturing the sense of masculinity in despair with Siodmak’s film noir stylisation.

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Figure.x

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Figure.xi

Kate Bulford records: ‘Lancaster, much later, appreciated what he called Siodmak’s “UFA style,” referring to the German Pre-World War Two studio known for dark expressionist shadows and angled shots that told the story as much as any hard-boiled dialogue.’<sup>110</sup> The film is lit in this dark expressionist fashion with long shadows creating a pervasive sense of the sinister. The film showcases Anderson’s violent bullet-ridden death. Flashback is then used to investigate the reasons why Anderson would be murdered in the first place as life insurance broker Jim Reardon (Edmond O’ Brien) investigates. This sanitisation in the Hollywood mode diverts attention away from the abject

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<sup>107</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2017), p. 474.

<sup>108</sup> Edward Hopper, *The Nighthawks* (1942) <<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/111628/nighthawks>> [accessed 23 September 2024].

<sup>109</sup> *The Killers*, dir. by Robert Siodmak (Arrow Academy, 2014) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>110</sup> Kate Bulford, *Burt Lancaster – An American Life* (London: Aurum Press, 2008), p. 68.

threat of an unknown superior menace and replaces it with a tale involving Anderson acting in various guises including: boxer, lover and armed robber. According to Sergio Angelini it is: ‘the closest Hollywood has ever come to transposing Ernest Hemingway’s work intact to the screen (the opening thirteen minutes), but also embroiders around its edges to a massive extent.’<sup>111</sup> Dilys Powell stated:

The opening sequence is almost a reproduction of the story as I remember it: the quiet snack-bar, the steely insolence of the killers, the abortive hold-up; and from the story some touch of pity and horror has crept into the sharp, finely timed picture of action. But from this point the film rockets away into a superficial narrative of violence.<sup>112</sup>

Interestingly, Siodmak was a Jewish exile from the totalitarian Nazi Germany, so he knew of the horrors of living under dictatorship. The violence that pervades the film shows a society in crisis, which echoes Tarkovsky’s adaptation. However, Siodmak’s vision for the narrative takes place across a scenic geographic American setting and myriad locations, and so the spectator is not confined to just a café. A similarity connecting Tarkovsky’s adaptation and Siodmak’s is the crisis of masculinity that pervades all the male characters. In Siodmak’s vision, the male characters are trapped in an amorphous American world of sophisticated capitalism where no-one is ever content with their existence. Hollywood demands that criminals must be punished. The film was a huge box office success and it appears that Alexander Gordon (Figure.xii) has styled himself as a Burt Lancaster (Figure.xiii) figure in the student remake; Tarkovsky and Gordon must have seen this work and used costumed and lighting influences from it for their own adaptive purposes.

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Figure.xii

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Figure.xiii

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<sup>111</sup> Sergio Angelini, *The Killers* (London: Arrow Academy, 2014) p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Dilys Powell, *The Sunday Times*, 17 November 1946 cited from Sergio Angelini, *The Killers* (London: Arrow Academy, 2014), p. 17.

<sup>113</sup> *The Killers*, dir. by Robert Siodmak (Arrow Academy, 2014) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>114</sup> *The Killers*, dir. by Robert Siodmak (Arrow Academy, 2014) [on Blu-Ray].

Tarkovsky used the Vertovian cinematic form of hiding meanings in plain sight to create a symbolic message to the viewer which gives the work a grounding in sincerity. However, Deborah Forbes sees: ‘sincerity as a destabilising rather than stabilising factor [...], a concept more likely to cast shadows than illuminate.’<sup>115</sup> The student film stands like *The Nighthawks*, as a sincere but bleak snapshot. The two students pay homage to American literature, and both European and American cinema through their directorial choices. It is through this medium that *Kino-Pravda* is subverted to produce a ‘true’ revelation of life under Soviet collective organisation but hidden behind the guise of a seemingly simplistic adaptation of a short story. The destabilising potential of a contrapuntal reading of the film is made overt by Tarkovsky as he cast shadows and subverts genres, providing a real, rather than Hollywood-fictional, sense of threat – the political threat is real in Soviet Russia, while conversely in Hollywood the cinema provides escapist, fictional thrills. Tarkovsky’s film allegorises living within the confines of the totalitarian state. It is driven by the sense of abjection which pervades the narrative through the presence of Stalinist gangsterdom. Tarkovsky uses the Vertovian concepts of a ‘film-truth’ to critique the ideology of the Soviet Union, and through a contrapuntal reading that the audience understands that for Tarkovsky, the underworld has become the overworld.

I have mirrored the claustrophobic and paranoid cinema of *The Killers* in *Red Lens*. Through my contrapuntal reading I identified *The Killers* as carrying a hauntological influence of the totalitarianism of Stalin, still resonating in 1956 when the film was made. In my novella, the KGB features as a haunting presence in different narrative strands, including Mirza’s attempt at scriptwriting, Josef’s role as an informer at Lenfilm studios and Dmitri’s attempt at filmmaking and plotting escape from the Soviet Union. Although KGB agents do not always appear in the physical form, I have written them as a constant threat lurking around the characters and having the power to influence events as a hauntological presence. Mirza feels as though she is being watched and her apartment is searched regularly whereas Josef feels a constant spectral burden of guilt after events from his past have led him to become an informer on young filmmakers attempting any form of anti-

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<sup>115</sup> Deborah Forbes, *Sincerity’s Shadow: Self-Consciousness in British Romantic and Mid-Twentieth Century Poetry* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.5.

Soviet cinema. Dmitri is paranoid about having to check in with his KGB minders whilst being in Paris promoting his work and needs to escape them if he is to leave the Soviet Union. Therefore, this early work from Tarkovsky provides a backbone of *Red Lens* in terms of haunting and spectral influence.

As Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera* was historically read contrapuntally, this has provided a model for my analysis for *The Killers*. Through my analysis Tarkovsky's early film can be read similarly in style, in terms of revealing what is hidden or opaque. This connects with the evaluation of Vertov's film at the time. Vertov constructed a film that was meant to showcase the many triumphs of Soviet ingenuity, but if read contrapuntally, he created a film that unveiled the sobering sides of Soviet life, which led to his public exile. Tarkovsky constructed a film which was a simple adaptation of a Hemingway novel for a student film project. However, when read contrapuntally, he created a film which shows the haunting elements of Socialist Realism, with noirish gangsters symbolising KGB agents and an atmosphere of paranoia and intimidating threat. Stalin is abject throughout the piece. The parallel concepts of the hauntological and contrapuntal reading underpin my critical analysis of Tarkovsky and unite it with my creative work in its crafting of an allegory of Tarkovsky's filmmaking environment and analogy to his methods and style. This approach also provides the backbone of the thesis moving forwards into my research chapters in terms of tracing the spectral influence of Mizoguchi and Dreyer on Tarkovsky's work.

In conclusion to my thesis overall, I consider how Tarkovsky himself has become an influence on subsequent filmmakers such as Béla Tarr and dissect his spectral presence within popular culture, where the concepts and iconography of his films can be seen to permeate the reimagining, reinterpretation and the return to contemporary relevance of the Soviet era. Tarkovsky's *Stalker* in 1979 haunted a future yet to happen with the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 creating a Zone where humanity was not allowed to tread. I examine the cyclical nature of hauntology regarding how his works still carry importance today as they were responding to an historical epoch, which has now returned. I discuss where Tarkovsky's influence resides as a spectre from history, haunting a future, which mirrors the world of the past.

## **Chapter One: ‘United by a single passion’ - Tarkovsky and the Haunting of Kenji Mizoguchi**

This chapter uses Edward Said’s contrapuntal theory to explore the hauntological influence of Kenji Mizoguchi on Tarkovsky’s films *Stalker* and *Solaris*. Tarkovsky lived under the Soviet totalitarian state and Mizoguchi lived under the strongly right-wing imperialist regime which governed Japan in the 1930s and 1940s, and therefore, both faced censorship of their work. I posit that both filmmakers were influenced by their harsh social political surroundings and spectrally represent this through their visual style and narratives. I also discuss how Mizoguchi has a spectral presence in Tarkovsky’s films and how Tarkovsky is under the hauntological cinematic influence of Mizoguchi. Mark Le Fanu describes Mizoguchi’s films as having ‘an extraordinary force and purity. They shake and move the viewer by the power, refinement, and compassion with which they confront human suffering.’<sup>1</sup> Tarkovsky also channels that same set of cinematic values as his characters journey through a kaleidoscope of suffering, whilst striving for forms of redemption. Tarkovsky stated:

All my protagonists are united by a single passion – for overcoming. No knowledge of life can be won without a colossal expenditure of spiritual power. There may be grave losses on this path, but all the more profound and rich will be the achievements. In order to arrive at an understanding of the laws of life, in order to become conscious of what is best in oneself and one’s environment, what comprises the beauty and inner truth of our existence, our being (and not our mere subsistence [...]) all my protagonists must pass through a tense sphere of meditation, searching and achievement.<sup>2</sup>

This spatial concept of a personal journey revolving around a sense of discovering an ‘inner truth of our existence,’ is preeminent across both director’s works and I explore through a contrapuntal reading how these ideas of passing through ‘a tense sphere of meditation, searching and

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan*, (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> cited: Robert Bird, *Andrei Tarkovsky – Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), p.132.

achievement' are revealed and how Tarkovsky's viewers are expected to undertake and undergo a similar trial due to the complex nature of the works. The theme of 'overcoming' and becoming 'conscious of what is best in oneself and one's environment,' chime throughout *Stalker*, *Solaris* and Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari*. The protagonists all 'pass through a tense sphere of meditation, searching and achievement.' Tarkovsky lists Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari* among his top 10 most influential films<sup>3</sup> and also referenced Mizoguchi directly as an influence on his film *Andrei Rublev* (1968):

there was a scene that might have been from Mizoguchi, the great departed Japanese director. I wasn't aware of it until it was projected [...]. The quality of the image in black and white, the landscape, the opacity of the overcast sky had a strange resemblance to an ink-drawn Chinese landscape. [...] It's a scene that has nothing to do with the story. It attempts to express the state of a soul.<sup>4</sup>

The idea that Tarkovsky 'wasn't aware' of the influence but that the scene echoes Mizoguchi's 'attempts to express the state of a soul,' is the driving force behind the arguments this chapter posits as I argue for the haunting influence of Mizoguchi in terms of narrative and characterisation. Although Tarkovsky listed the film as influential, he never specified exactly how *Ugetsu Monogatari* inspired him. By using Said's contrapuntal theory, I re-examine in this chapter where in Tarkovsky's cinema we find 'what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented,'<sup>5</sup> and provide 'intrinsic readings of a work on the one hand, and the claims of various forms of external critique on the other.'<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Mizoguchi's 'hidden' cinematographic haunting and the forms this takes are laid bare using this method of cinematic analysis. Both *Stalker* and *Solaris* bear narratological and stylistic

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Lasica, 'Tarkovsky's Choice,' *Sight and Sound Magazine*, April 1993, p.29.

<sup>4</sup> *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews*, ed. by John Gianvito (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2006), pp. 53-54.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.82.

<sup>6</sup> Said., p.82.

resemblances to the Japanese folkloric sources evinced by Mizoguchi's work. Both directors being early proponents of what eventually became known as slow cinema, a style that,

not only restores a sense of time and experience in a world short of both. Slow cinema also encourages a mode of engagement with images and sounds whereby slow time becomes a vehicle for introspection, reflection and thinking, and the world is disclosed in its complexity, richness and mystery.<sup>7</sup>

Both Mizoguchi and Tarkovsky create scenes that are often long with dialogue between characters slow and methodical. There is minimal camera work apart from very slow panning shots. Paul Schrader claims: 'Post-war film-makers realized that just as a movement-image could be manipulated to create suspense, time-image could be manipulated to create introspection. We not only fill in the blanks, but we create new blanks.'<sup>8</sup> The viewer is expected to actively pursue new levels of thought as to the meanings expressed visually by being tasked with watching scenes which require patience due to their challenging temporality and minimal action sequences. The slowness ensures the spectator cannot view the work passively, they must be fully engaged in interpreting meaning by reading the intellectual gaps the films offer via their slow direction and use of cinematography. A 'time-image' creates an 'introspection' for the spectator which is designed to enhance the viewing experience as the film becomes more about the internalised vision of the audience.

A contrapuntal reading of the works of Tarkovsky and Mizoguchi reveals that *Stalker*, Tarkovsky's adaptation of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's 1972 novel *Roadside Picnic*, is an example of his cinematic oeuvre being spectrally influenced visually by *Ugetsu Monogatari*. The protagonists of both films undertake a journey across different spatial zonal settings. They will find themselves in

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<sup>7</sup> Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, 'Introduction: From Slow Cinema to Slow Cinemas' from *Slow Cinema*, ed. by Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p.16.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p.6.

domesticity initially, only to then be transported into places of supernatural otherness. I also argue contrapuntally that the patterns of Japanese folklore are hauntologically etched into the narrative structure of Tarkovsky's adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* as the protagonists of both *Ugetsu Monogatari* and Tarkovsky's work are haunted by female ghosts from their pasts. The techniques, which became known within slow cinema, act as a bridge between the two directors in terms of long takes which leads to a dreamlike sense of temporality. Laura Mulvey states in relation to temporality: 'The moving image [...] cannot escape from duration, or from beginnings and ends, or from the patterns that lie between them.'<sup>9</sup> This is a more conventional argument suggesting that imagery is unable to escape the concepts of a traditional narrative structure featuring a beginning, middle and end. In contrast, Tarkovsky expressed divergent ideas around temporality in *Stalker*:

I wanted time and its passing to be revealed, to have their existence, within each frame; for the articulations between to be the continuation of the action and nothing more, to involve no dislocation of time, not to function as a mechanism for selecting and dramatically organizing the material – I wanted it to be as if the whole film had been made in a single shot.<sup>10</sup>

There is a sense of both stillness and movement within the framing of *Stalker* and whilst Mulvey formulates that imagery is unable to 'escape from duration,' Tarkovsky uses duration to create a sense of 'no dislocation of time,' he does not use time as a logical organising principle, he sees time as not simply a cognitive sequencing of events. It is this structure which enables the revealing of the spectral and hauntological as time sequential narrative becomes lost in the long slow takes of Tarkovsky's cinema. Mulvey's more conventional views of temporality and cinematic imagery are confounded by Tarkovsky in his attempt to use time not as a 'mechanism for selecting and organising material,' but

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<sup>9</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second – Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp.15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time – Reflections on the Cinema* trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989), pp.193-194.

more as a 'dislocation.' Tarkovsky is endeavouring to express his ideas of presenting temporality as something to be 'revealed.' The Tarkovskian approach theoretically renders the viewing experience as a continuous take and a 'single shot.' This technique can also create a feeling of spatio-temporal disorientation as the audience can be lost in the slowness of contemplation; time becomes an irrelevance to the narrative structure but also simultaneously a key component of the viewing activity and experience.

The plot of *Stalker* is succinctly described by Cal Flyn:

a Soviet man known as the 'stalker' guides two strangers into a mysterious, tightly guarded exclusion zone [...] visitors are drawn into the Zone by the promise of a mysterious room at its heart: all those who enter will find their greatest wish come true. But the Stalker, though he has guided countless others to its threshold, has never himself entered.<sup>11</sup>

The Zone is a sinister and alien creation and is described by Arni Svanur Danielsson as a 'mysterious and dangerous area. In one of his speeches the Stalker (Alexander Kaidanovsky) says: "the Zone is a very complicated system of traps, and they're all deadly." It isn't safe to walk straight ahead or try to take any shortcuts.'<sup>12</sup> Flyn's further description adds more menace to the visuals in frame:

The stalker leads them onwards, slinking through overgrown meadows knee deep with thatch, skirting through ruined buildings overcome with vegetation, wading through rivers and overflows – and as he does this, he constantly tests the ground ahead of him, throwing metal

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<sup>11</sup> Cal Flyn, *Islands of Abandonment – Life in the Post-Human Landscape* (London: William Collins, 2021), p. 194.

<sup>12</sup> Arni Svanur Danielsson, 'Awake: Faith, Hope and Love in Stalker,' from *Through the Mirror – Reflections on the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky* ed. by Gunnlaugher A. Jonsson & Thorkell A. Ottarsson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar's Press, 2006), pp. 200-217 (p.202).

bolts every few paces as he searches for the invisible, unknowable dangers that lurk unseen throughout this sylvan glade.<sup>13</sup>

The characters are heading to the centre of the Zone: ‘where secret wishes unknown to man come true.’<sup>14</sup> Fredric Jameson describes the Zone as ‘an enigmatic and dangerous space of otherness [...] a magical, incomprehensible area of radically other space – a space beyond the law.’<sup>15</sup> However, Tarkovsky’s visual representation of the Zone is minimal as Arni Danielsson suggests: ‘The film’s viewers never get a good grasp of the Zone, as there are no establishing shots that might assist in this and it seems Tarkovsky avoids them deliberately.’<sup>16</sup> The viewer is only shown limited cinematography of this alien world, which adds to the idea of a spatiality which is never truly revealed or explained. This distinct lack of conventional temporal and spatial establishing shots encapsulates Tarkovsky’s attempts to create a ‘single shot’ cinematic experience. There is less systematic focus on the world around the characters. Instead, the film’s diegesis becomes a place of contradictions and uncertainties. Tarkovsky gave his own explanation of the Zone in *Sculpting in Time* (1986):

The Zone doesn’t have to symbolise anything, any more than anything else does in my films: the zone is a zone, it’s life, and as he makes his way across it a man may break down or he may come through. Whether he comes through or not depends on his own self-respect and his capacity to distinguish between what matters and what is merely passing.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cal Flyn, *Islands of Abandonment – Life in the Post-Human Landscape* (London: William Collins, 2021), p.194.

<sup>14</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p.167.

<sup>15</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future – The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), p.73.

<sup>16</sup> Arni Svanur Danielsson, ‘Awake: Faith, Hope and Love in Stalker,’ from *Through the Mirror – Reflections on the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky* ed. by Gunnlaugher A. Jonsson & Thorkell A. Ottarsson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar’s Press, 2006), pp. 200-217 (p.203).

<sup>17</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time – Reflections on the Cinema* trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989), p.200.

Contrapuntally, the Zone as 'life' reflects existence in the Soviet Union which Tarkovsky is haunted by. The hyper-reality of the Brezhnevian era provides a test where a 'man may break down or he may come through.' The USSR is a spectral alien zone which is haunted by propaganda, stagnation, and lost futures through deindustrialisation and war, where the 'greatest wish' has failed to come true. Geoffrey Hosking states at the time of *Stalker*'s production:

The long-simmering internal crisis of Soviet society was undermining the country's economic productivity. [...] The road to utopia had long been lost. [...] The Soviet model of socialism had ceased to be attractive. [...] The Soviet Union's weight in the world depended entirely on military strength, and even that was being undermined by the faltering performance of the economy.'<sup>18</sup>

The Soviet Union was in decline on several levels but propaganda attempted to ensure that reality was displaced from the mind of its citizens. Tarkovsky is haunted by the alienating, nightmarish Soviet Zone of his contemporary society, whilst simultaneously, the Zone in *Stalker* haunts the Soviet Union as a dreamlike reflection of the reality of life under Brezhnev.

Through a contrapuntal reading, this reflection unveils a similar zonal dynamic in Mizoguchi's film. The character of Genjuro (Masayuki Mori) in Mizoguchi's work will come to symbolise, in part, Japan's barbaric history as he travels through different hauntological zones. *Ugetsu Monogatari* is adapted from the Japanese collection of short stories called *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* published in 1776 written by Ueda Akinari. Le Fanu observes: 'Mizoguchi chooses two of them and reconstitutes them into a single narrative [...] The two stories in question by Akinari are known in English as 'The House Amid the Thickets' and 'The Lust of the White Serpent.'<sup>19</sup> Mizoguchi

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<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians – From Earliest Times to the Present*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. (London, Penguin, 2012), p.569.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), p.36.

combines these to create the tale of a peasant farmer and potter Genjuro who leaves his wife Miyagi (Kinuyo Tanaka) and young son during a civil war, and is seduced by a dangerous spirit called Lady Wakasa (Machiko Kyo). The character travels down a path of a domestic peaceful existence at the start of the film but with the outbreak of war he goes on a personal journey into a zone riddled with death and the parapsychological. Genjuro must ‘come through’ a supernatural zone to understand ‘what matters’ in his life. He too is thrust into the Jameson ‘magical’ but ‘dangerous space of otherness,’ as the narrative unfolds. Genjuro is tested and manipulated by what exists in the new zone he enters. This is mainly the apparition of Lady Wakasa.

Before both the *Ugetsu Monogatari* and *Stalker* narratives plunge the characters into their revelatory zones. Contrapuntally, there are further distinct parallelisms in terms of cinematography to explore. A more grounded and human zone is established in both works. During the opening frames of Tarkovsky’s film, the audience is introduced to the Stalker (Alexander Kaindanovsky), his wife (Alisa Freindlich) and their daughter Martyshka (Natasha Abramova). It is significant as the tone and style embodies a stylistic link to the early scenes of *Ugetsu Monogatari*. The wooden shack homes of samurai-era Japanese peasantry which are signified on screen in Mizoguchi’s film haunt the science fiction-based stagnation era Soviet representation in Tarkovsky’s work, the significant difference initially being the relative domestic happiness of Mizoguchi’s characters. However, the shadow of war also looms: as Le Fanu states, *Ugetsu Monogatari* is ‘one of the greatest films ever about the corruption and debauchery of warfare.’<sup>20</sup> The characters’ world will be utterly transformed by the barbaric occurrences which Mizoguchi presents. An initial Edenic setting is disrupted and destroyed by the ravages of war.

Genjuro has returned from a successful sale of pottery items. The framing in Figure.1.1 identifies the general tone of optimism. Genjuro holds his son Genichi (Ichisaburo Sawamura) and smiles are shared between him and his wife Miyagi (Kinuyo Tanaka). The background décor consists of simplistic wooden boarding which signifies the basic setting. These are working people living in a

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), p.55.

rural village space. The characters occupy this pastoral terrestrial zone at the beginning of the narrative. This internal space is always lit from the front which casts dark shadows in the background. Despite the relative harmony within these opening scenes there is an uncanny threat lurking which will ultimately ensnare the protagonist, and the darkness and intensity of the slow pace of the action relay this waiting anxiety.

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Figure. 1.1

The tone changes with Genjuro's mention of war which is about to encroach on their land. The film is set during the Japanese Civil Wars of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century near Lake Biwa in the Province of Omi. This was an era in Japan's history which was dominated by samurai warriors:

The samurai were the warrior caste of medieval Japan, a class of powerful mounted soldiers who rose to power as retainers of feudal lords and the military arm of the imperial court, before establishing a new order. Like the Vikings of Scandinavia, they were initially men with nothing to lose, who won land at the point of a sword.<sup>22</sup>

Genjuro and his family will face the threat of becoming refugees as war is encircling their village. The 'point of a sword' will threaten Genjuro's existence and contentment and destroy the harmony of the initial scenes. I posit contrapuntally that in this opening there is the haunting representation of the more contemporary Imperial era of Japan through which Mizoguchi himself had lived. The 'military' power of the samurai supporting an 'imperial' court would find its ultimate expression in Imperialist Japan which would militarily dominate and colonise parts of South East Asia and the Pacific during the 1930s and 1940s. This mobilisation contributed to the global conflict and destruction of the

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<sup>21</sup> *The Killers*, dir. by Robert Siodmak (Arrow Academy, 2014) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Clements, *The Samurai – A New History of the Warrior Elite* (London: Robinson Running Press Book Publishers, 2010), p.xvii.

Second World War. The trauma of that era is represented through the ancient warrior class that Mizoguchi embodies visually. The word samurai means ‘henchman’<sup>23</sup> and it is the brutality that these soldiers wrought upon Japanese land that enables Mizoguchi to forge historical links with the Japan in which he had grown up. The presence of war shadows the landscape. The Edenic village space that Genjuro occupies will be transformed into a zone of death and destruction by the invading samurai. This chimes with events from Mizoguchi’s life which would happen during the political chaos of the early Showa Era of Japan with militarisation occurring on a large scale during the 1930s and the oppression of any form of civilian rule by the military elites, as Christopher Harding states:

By 1921, the enthusiasm with which Japan was projecting its people and its military power out into Asia and the Pacific was becoming distinctly unwelcome [...] Western imperial powers that had for generations treated global cartography as a colouring-in exercise – British pink, French blue – increasingly feared for their cultural and linguistic homes-away-from-home in South East Asia.<sup>24</sup>

And domestically: ‘most feared of all was the Special Higher Police (Tokko), created back in 1911 [...] Its brief was to tackle unwelcome ideologies and ‘thought crimes’ of all kinds [...] there was starvation, solitary confinement, physical torture and the sheer uncertainty and fatigue of indeterminate detention.’<sup>25</sup> Tarkovsky also lived through similar oppression with the presence of the KGB, which had evolved from the Cheka. And tight censorship restrictions from governmental authorities against anything deemed as anti-Soviet:

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<sup>23</sup> Clements, p. xviii.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Harding, *Japan Story – In Search of a Nation, 1850 to the Present* (London: Penguin, 2019), p. 160.

<sup>25</sup> Harding, p. 174.

The Cheka [...] in the years of its existence while Lenin was still alive it killed some 140,000 people. It became a feared instrument of mass arrests and a pitiful killing machine in its subsequent incarnations [...] In the final form it took in the Soviet era, by then more politically restrained, it was known as the KGB [...] acting in the 1970s in defence of an ageing, conservative political elite.<sup>26</sup>

Tarkovsky and Mizoguchi are intertwined across history as filmmakers who had both lived through eras of oppression. Mizoguchi symbolises and reflects the chaos of the Imperial era through an historical contextual setting, which parallels the war era in which he had lived. The hauntological trauma of the Second World War is abjectly presented by Mizoguchi using this Japanese folkloric tale.

With the threat of impending invasion from a warring group of samurai the atmosphere alters. Figure.1.2 shows the wooden shack now stacked with pottery but through the use of low-key lighting and Miyagi lit from the front, there is darkness, tension and claustrophobic shadow again encroaching. The smiles of previous scenes are now absent from the faces of Genjuro and Miyagi. They know they must evacuate or face potential death at the hands of Lord Shibata's troops. The peaceful family setting has become a place of anxiety and reflects the inevitability of violence and death which approaches. The once happy spatial zone is transforming into an unsettling and haunting environment. These opening scenes link with Tarkovsky's vision for *Stalker*. Figure.1.3 shows the Stalker standing within the domestic space. It is cast in shadow through backlighting and the set has a dark, noirish, claustrophobic and crumbling texture which depicts an atmosphere of unfolding tenseness.

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Figure.1.2.

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<sup>26</sup> Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage, 2009), pp.54-55.

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Figure.1.3

This is a family living as peasants much like the characters in *Ugetsu Monogatari*. What little back light there is acts as a framing agent to the Stalker. This is reminiscent of the shack-like existence of Genjuro and family. The pace of this opening scene is slow and methodical. Tarkovsky allows the audience to slowly observe the *mise en scène* through slow camera panning and minimal sound. There is so much darkness in the framing that details are hidden from the viewer. This visual style reinforces the narrative as the Stalker is trying to hide the fact that he is going back to the Zone from his wife. Stylistically and narratively Tarkovsky's film establishes parallels with Mizoguchi's work with this opening. Both films represent a domestic terrestrial space but also have within them a sense of foreboding of the threats which will emerge. Genjuro and the Stalker will both leave their wives behind as they transgress into zones of an otherworldly, supernatural, and spiritual nature.

Contrapuntally, the similarity of lighting in these opening scenes underlines how both films also have an indelible link to the film noir genre of cinema. James Naremore states:

For most people, the term *film noir* conjures up a series of generic, stylistic, or fashionable traits from certain Hollywood pictures of the 1940s and 1950s. There are, for example, noir characters and stories (drifters attracted to beautiful women, private eyes hired by femme fatales, criminal gangs attempting to pull off heists); noir plot structures (flashbacks, subjective narration); noir sets (urban diners, shabby offices, swank nightclubs) [...] noir costumes (snap-brim hats, trenchcoats, shoulder pads).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Stalker*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky (Criterion Artificial Eye, 2017) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>28</sup> James Naremore, *More Than Night – Film Noir in its Contexts* (California: University of California Press, 1998), p.1.

Tarkovsky had previously experimented with film noir in his student days with an adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *The Killers* (1956). This experimentation continues in the establishing scenes of *Stalker*. The Stalker's apartment is 'shabby' and he has the aura of a 'drifter' due to his lack of commitment to his family. His wife is furious about him abandoning them to visit the Zone again and this is clearly a regular occurrence. When the audience is introduced to the Writer (Anatoliy Solonitsyn) he is wearing a 'trenchcoat' and is accompanied by a glamorously dressed 'beautiful woman' (Faime Jurno) with flowing sensuous hair. Jurno's character could be lifted from any source of film noir from 1950s Hollywood with a fur coat and long dress. There is a convertible car in the scene which is central to the frame which gives the impression of its importance, a potential 'heist' car waiting to be used in a criminal act (Figure.1.4).

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Figure.1.4

This scene directly evinces a noir influence. In the background of the shot the audience can see the faded aerial perspective of the boat yard and grimy cityscape beyond. In a noir film, 'Black and white cityscapes [...] became virtually synonymous with the artistic sensibility, and they began to appear with increasing regularity throughout the visual culture.'<sup>29</sup> Though the setting of *Stalker* is nameless there is the influence of the noirish American urban sprawl surrounding the central characters. Much like Tarkovsky's *The Killers*, there is a sense of tightening claustrophobia, in this case despite the open landscape. The spatiality feels bleak and doom-laden due to the film colouration and the scenery stacked behind the incongruous glamour of the car and style of the woman. Isolationism chars the atmosphere as the bleak cityscape feels entrapping and claustrophobic. There is a lack of freedom permeating the frame signifying the mood of the Brezhnev era: a lost present and a lost future.

Central to the framing of the scene is the Writer and a character merely labelled as 'Woman.' They are in an intellectual discussion regarding the origins of the Zone and belief of the supernatural. Ironically the female character is intelligent and curious about the world they occupy but has no

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<sup>29</sup> Naremore, pp.172-173.

professional status such as 'Writer' or 'Professor.' She is demeaned by her sex but holds a challenging conversation with the Writer:

WOMAN: And what about the Bermuda Triangle? Surely you can't argue...

WRITER: Oh, yes I can. There is no Bermuda Triangle. There is a triangle, abc, which is similar to xyz. Can't you feel the depressing tedium that such a statement contains? The Middle Ages were interesting. Every house had its spirit, God dwelt in every church...People were young! But now, one in four is an old man. It is dull, my angel, oh how dull!

WOMAN: But you can't deny that the Zone...is the result of a super-civilisation, that...

WRITER: I expect I can. Tedium...that is laws, triangles, and no house spirits to speak of, nor of course any God...because if God is that same triangle, then I just don't know...<sup>30</sup>

The female character is an intellectual who has a meaningful discussion with the Writer and is challenging him, and she has a level of intellectual sophistication and power. However, she will be ultimately dismissed and belittled by the Stalker. It is the *noirish* black and white world she has entered which is full of subterfuge and a toxic masculinity. With her intellect she is a danger to this world. She signifies the potential of being a 'femme fatale,' and there is no room for female interference in the masculine world of the Stalker:

WRITER: [...] This lady has kindly agreed to visit the Zone with us. She is a courageous woman. She's called...ah...forgive me!

*The woman is burning with interest*

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<sup>30</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays* trans. by William Powell & Natasha Synessios (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p.382.

WOMAN: So, are you really a Stalker?

*Stalker bends towards her ear and whispers something. The woman bursts out:*

WOMAN: You cretin!

*She slams the car door and drives off.*<sup>31</sup>

It is ironic that the Writer refers to her as 'courageous' but does not know her actual name. She is merely 'Woman.' In the film the Stalker orders the Woman to 'Go'. She can only storm off taking the car with her. Any power she did hold previously in the scene is quickly swatted away and the audience is left with only the male characters predominantly until the film's finale.

The lack of any meaningful respect for the role of women from their male counterparts is hauntingly similar in *Ugetsu Monogatari* and established in a similar noirish fashion. At the beginning of the film Miyagi is abandoned by Genjuro due to the warring tribes and utterly forgotten about when he falls in love with the seductive femme fatale of Lady Wakasa. Genjuro's sister-in-law Ohama (Mitsuko Mito) is also callously abandoned by her husband Tobei (Eitaro Ozawa) who is intent on joining the army and becoming a samurai warrior. The males in *Ugetsu Monogatari* both operate in the same film noir world of the Stalker. The difference is that war is the driving factor behind the abandonment of the female characters from their male partners and the fact that both Genjuro and Tobei are both on personal journeys. Both males are obsessed with the realisation of their own dreams, to the detriment of the women in their lives. Genjuro wants trade for his pottery but Tobei wants a meaning to his life through war and honour. However, both Genjuro and Tobei enter their own Stalker-esque zones. Tobei will find himself lost in the war zone of the samurai, completely out of his depth in the culture of the 'henchman.' Once Genjuro crosses the lake he is lost in the supernatural zone of noirish seduction and the femme fatale that is Lady Wakasa. Nothing is what it seems for Genjuro for the duration of the film after he abandons Miyagi.

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<sup>31</sup> Tarkovsky, p.383.

In *Stalker* the visual echoes of film noir reach a peak before the action is geographically transferred into the Zone itself. The Stalker and the Writer will then meet the Professor in a bar setting which conceptually is another prime noir setting (Figure.1.5).

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Figure.1.5.

The lighting is low key and again the walls are blank, much like the apartment of the Stalker. There is an ‘urban darkness or primitivism’<sup>32</sup> which again draws comparison with the village life of Genjuro in *Ugetsu Monogatari*. It is a place that the characters are attempting to escape from to find a meaning to their lives in the Zone. The streets are dark, dirty and represent a dangerous in-hospitality, Figure.

1.6 showcases this rain-filled, dimly lit world Tarkovsky has created. The characters are keen to escape this noirish nightmare.

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Figure.1.6

The scenes in the Zone will act in juxtaposition as once the three emerge into it they will be surrounded by cinematic colour. The ‘darkness’ of the film’s opening scenes is immediately replaced by the more earthy Edenic pastoralism of greens and browns. The primitivism is transformed into a space of quest but also uncertainty. However, to get there they must dodge bullets from the security guards blocking entry and here *Stalker* transforms into a live action Hollywood-esque drama with machine guns firing and the protagonists having to run for cover. The action mirrors that of *Ugetsu Monogatari* when the villagers are attacked by samurai warriors and must run for their lives to avoid capture or death. In both films the ‘primitivism’ reaches a climax with the protagonists in both films facing a difficult situation with violence and death. Both Genjuro’s and the Stalker’s companions are attempting forms of escape. Genjuro is escaping war whilst the Writer and Professor of *Stalker* are escaping the mundanity of their lives to explore the unknown. Tarkovsky’s exploration of temporality

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<sup>32</sup> James Naremore, *More Than Night – Film Noir in its Contexts* (California: University of California Press, 1998), p.171.

in his cinematography takes on longer form when the Stalker, Writer and Professor start their long journey on board a railway trolley (Figure.1.7).

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Figure.1.7

The pacing of the film slows as the spatial dynamics also change. The three characters merely glance back with close-up shots as in the background the noirish, foggy, industrialised zone is left behind. The close-ups are extended, as each individual shot is drawn out. The clacks of the trolley echo and reverberate aurally and there is no other sound. The audience is completely immersed in the monotonous journey which lasts for several minutes on screen. The quickly paced action of the previous scenes is now disrupted and reorganised into a slow hypnotic speed. The earlier energy of the bullets ricocheting around the characters' heads is now contrasted with the contemplative calm of the railway journey. Birgit Beumers states:

Tarkovsky's approach to time is crucial to an understanding of his films: time as past and present, as personal and historical time, is the material for the filmmaker who trims the flow of time as captured in the frame. Cinematic images are capable of creating an intersection of different flows of time, different tempi, different kinds of time, and it is this quality that distinguishes Tarkovsky's films.<sup>33</sup>

Tarkovsky has created such an 'intersection' at this moment in the film. The narrative transforms to a more contemplative atmosphere. The 'different flows of time' with 'different tempi' alter the viewing experience. The audience is drawn into the scene's use of slow cinema. Tarkovsky's use of slowness is important here as the audience, rather than being repulsed by the slowness of the film sequence, is intentionally drawn into contemplating the cinematic space. The slow and meditative nature of the

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<sup>33</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p.166.

temporality provides a gateway in which the viewer becomes active with their own thoughts and feelings about the filmic spatiality. Echoing Tarkovsky's own enigmatic description of the meaning of the Zone, Danielsson states: 'If one were to describe *Stalker* the best approach might be to say that it seems to be a meditative or poetic description of life itself.'<sup>34</sup> Schrader goes on to state that:

Tarkovsky used film techniques to study time. For Tarkovsky time was not a means to a goal. It was the goal [...] The Tarkovsky long shot is more than long. It's meditative. The psychological effect of slow cinema's "long take" is unlike any other film technique [...] The train journey places emphasis on expectation rather than presence.<sup>35</sup>

Here time is not used as a conventional narrative structure or component, but as a way of accessing the hauntological and spectral. The audience is hypnotised by the diegetic sound of the rail cart as they journey beside the characters. The train journey is particularly poignant in *Stalker* because as much as Tarkovsky emphasises the contemplation of the characters as they journey into the unknowingness of the Zone, the audience also feels the 'psychological effect' of the scene. The slowness creates a haunting as the audience feels simultaneously the uncertainty of the characters.

This effect mirrors that created by Mizoguchi in *Ugetsu Monogatari* when Genjuro and the fellow characters are travelling across Lake Biwa to escape the violence of the samurai. Much like *Stalker*, the frenetic pace of *Ugetsu Monogatari* during the fighting scenes is succeeded by a gentle and contemplative nature when the lake crossing begins. The stylistics of 'long takes, extended camera movement, and an absence of close-ups'<sup>36</sup> is fully replicated at this stage. There is a dreamlike and otherworldly quality to this scene as the boat courses along surrounded by a threatening mist

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<sup>34</sup> Arni Svanur Danielsson, 'Awake: Faith, Hope and Love in *Stalker*,' from *Through the Mirror – Reflections on the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky* ed. by Gunnlaugher A. Jonsson & Thorkell A. Ottarsson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar's Press, 2006), pp. 200-217 (p.201).

<sup>35</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p.8.

<sup>36</sup> Donald Kirihaara, *Patterns of Time – Mizoguchi and the 1930s* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p.18.

(Figure.1.8). A gentleness pervades the scene but also a sense of uncertainty. Le Fanu says that ‘Few things in the finished film are handled more suavely [...] than the way Mizoguchi governs the transition between the real, present-tense world of war of survival and making a living, and the archaic imagined world of art and luxury and erotic reverie into which Genjuro is irresistibly drawn.’<sup>37</sup>

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Figure.1.8

In Mizoguchi’s vision there is a strong spectral density in *Ugetsu Monogatari* as revealed in Figure. 1.8. The diegetic sounds of the water give more of a sense of horror than a contemplative mourning because they are coupled with a growing and strangling fog. There is an audience anticipation as to what will emerge from the surrounding mist, and a sense of death surrounding the characters. An abjection looms within the cinematography, as the sense of tense foreboding and dread manifests in the apparitional appearance of another boat emerging from the fog (Figure.1.9) with a Boatman (Ichiro Amano) warning the protagonists to return to their village or face death. The speaker then dies himself (Figure.1.10), his corpse left of the frame. Julia Kristeva states that:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), p.57.

<sup>38</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror – An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.4.

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Figure.1.9

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Figure.1.10

Death ‘infects’ life in this scene of the film. It is the first moment of the supernatural to occur in the film and it will result in the supernatural ‘engulfing’ the main protagonists as an abject presence as they take no notice of the dying man and carry on the journey. In a tragic fashion, they cannot protect themselves from the boatman’s corpse; it is an abject symbol of the now inevitable haunting to come later in the film as Mizoguchi’s cinematography will take an even more nightmarish tone with ‘death infecting life.’ When later Genjuro first encounters Lady Wakasa, Le Fanu states in reference to the scene: ‘The viewer does not feel (any more than Genjuro does) the sudden break or sharp contrast that might be felt to exist between the marketplace and mansion-house. For it is part of the magic of dreaming that distinctions of time – distinctions of epoch – have no special meaning or significance.’<sup>39</sup> However, prior to that scene there is a distinguishable change in the film’s cinematic tone from the opening of the film in contrast to when Genjuro and the other characters sail across the lake; death hangs abjectly around with the physical fog. The audience had previously been drawn into a naturalised period drama set amongst a Japanese village but it is the transcendental traits in the lake scene that articulate this turning point. The scene has a ‘magic sense of dreaming’ and there is a contrast between the atmospherics created by Mizoguchi at the film’s beginning and when the death-like mystical fog enfolds the characters on the lake. This style is reflected in *Stalker* during the railway journey, as viewers are left with their own sense of contemplation.

In both films these moments symbolise the transition from one zone to another. In Mizoguchi’s film it is the point in which the narrative alters to one of the mysterious and supernatural. In *Stalker* this occurs when the protagonists are entering the Zone of mythical alien manifestation. Robert Tally writes of the importance of myth in relation to spatiality:

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), pp.57-58.

Aristotle's word for "plot" is *mythos*, and perhaps it is no accident that this myth or plot is also a map, a means of plotting a course using a map. Myth is what helps us to see the territory, mapping as we explore it, and vice versa. Mythic or fantastic cartography thus weaves together a world that is both strangely familiar and utterly novel, bringing together old myths with astonishingly fresh ones to create a world that is also our world.<sup>40</sup>

The Japanese 'myth' that Mizoguchi has adapted lends itself to Tally's ideas. The myth maps the spatial territory of the film. The audience is there to explore a world which for the protagonists will be 'strangely familiar' but also 'utterly novel.' Genjuro will think that he has occupied a safe zone away from the catastrophe of war. Yet, he is lost in the 'mythic' and 'fantastical' realm which maps his own mistaken path, but also concludes with an attempt at redemption for the sins he will commit while lost in the other world.

Comparisons can be made with Tarkovsky's *Stalker* where the characters desire to enter the Zone and are then drawn in and manipulated by the spatially mythical qualities the Zone exhibits. The Zone in the physical sense is mainly a realm of pastoral fields of green. However, it is a place much like Mizoguchi's supernatural creation in that it is also a world where 'fantastic cartography thus weaves together' a place which is deeply layered with physical but also psychological and spiritual tests. This makes the Zone into an area of deeper 'mythic' qualities. It is mapped by the Stalker's, Writer's, and Professor's spiritual embarkation. Both Writer and Professor have lost inspiration in their lives and they are searching for new meaning. Danielsson posits: 'They – as individuals and as representatives of society – lack faith. This thus becomes part of the critique of a world view and a society that is characterised by lack of faith and narrow-minded rationalism.'<sup>41</sup> Tarkovsky emphasises

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Tally, *Spatiality* (London, Routledge, 2013), p.150.

<sup>41</sup> Danielsson, Arni Svanur, 'Awake: Faith, Hope and Love in *Stalker*,' from *Through the Mirror – Reflections on the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky* ed. by Gunnlaugher A. Jonsson & Thorkell A. Ottarsson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar's Press, 2006), pp. 200-217 (p.207).

the Zone as a place where humanity is tested and a man ‘may break down or he may come through.’<sup>42</sup> It is a test of individual faith. In a pivotal scene the audience is treated to a pool of water reflecting the moon which is then disturbed by a stone thrown into it. There is a tranquil nature of contemplation as the Stalker recites in a voiceover:

Let everything that’s been planned come true. Let them believe. And let them have a laugh at their passions. Because what they call passion is not some emotional energy but just the friction between their souls and the outside world. And most important, let them believe in themselves, let them be helpless like children, because weakness is a great thing, and strength is nothing.<sup>43</sup>

This resonates as a call on the other protagonists to recognise their self-belief but also that weakness is not a shameful facet as it is a way of acknowledging vulnerabilities and limits. The Zone offers a journey through life itself. It offers a way to regain lost faith by physical and mental examination through the Zone’s spatiality. Tally states:

bewilderment has increased with the modern and especially postmodern condition, where the traditional signposts or divine guidance are no longer available [...] There is something truly terrifying, or at least rather frustrating, in being lost. Not to know where one is, or perhaps, not to know where one is relative to where one would like to be, is a thoroughly unpleasant feeling. In such a situation a sign, any sign, would help.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time – Reflections on the Cinema* trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989), p.200.

<sup>43</sup> *Stalker*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2017) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>44</sup> Robert Tally, *Spatiality* (London, Routledge, 2013), pp.1-2.

The characters find the Zone bewildering but through the postmodern spatiality that it encompasses, it is also a vehicle for a recognition of faith and a regaining of life's meanings. The 'postmodern condition' that Tally discusses is a breaking down of the traditional grand narratives and sign structures that formulate existence. The Zone is a signifier of postmodernism in that it is an unearthly creation filled with mystery and there is no clear understanding as to what it is truly meant to be. The Zone is an aberration, a 'blank' whose truth is hidden. However, by journeying through the postmodern spatiality, the characters are attempting to regain a truth to their lives. Jameson states:

the Zone – a geographical space in which, as a result of some inexplicable alien contact, artifacts can be found whose powers transcend the explanatory capacities of human science – is at one and the same time the object of the most vicious bootlegging and military-industrial Greed, and of the purest religious – I would like to say Utopian – Hope.<sup>45</sup>

The characters are searching for the Utopian 'Hope' as Jameson describes, but they can only do this by challenging the mythical landscape of the Zone. The Zone is a protected military space as the viewer observes earlier in the film when Tarkovsky employs noirish cinematic elements to express the violence of military action. The nameless hierarchy of the society occupied by the characters will stop at nothing to protect what lies inside the Zone, which links with the idea of 'Greed' that Jameson posits. There is also a sense of 'Greed' which resonates with the Stalker, Writer, and Professor in their quest of discovery. But as Jameson states, by unravelling the mysteries of the Zone they are trying to find the Utopian 'Hope' representing a re-emergence of faith. However, as Beumers states, when the characters reach the inner chamber of the Zone 'no-one enters. The desire for self-recognition and for an exploration of the innermost world [...] is disappointed as knowledge is denied, rejected and feared.'<sup>46</sup> Turovskaya observes:

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<sup>45</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future – The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), p.294.

<sup>46</sup> Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p.167.

Stalker emerges as something very different from the swashbuckling adventurer the others take him for. He stands forth as an apostle and martyr of hope, striving to lead his clients to the miraculous room and to bring them the chance of having their wishes fulfilled. [...] There is a painful unfinished quality about him, a feeling of great human potential unable to find realisation and therefore doomed to wretched uselessness. He is an embodiment of the search for meaning, a supplication that remains unanswered at the end of the journey.<sup>47</sup>

These ideas resonate with *Ugetsu Monogatari*, though with a slight variation. Genjuro is also on a journey of exploration but his lack of understanding as to the truth of his situation is the flaw which costs him dearly. Throughout Genjuro's time within the supernatural world he is ignorant of the true knowledge of his situation. In Tarkovsky's film there is the rejection of 'self-recognition' and 'knowledge' towards the film's ending. Genjuro rejects those same traits throughout the narrative of *Ugetsu Monogatari* but will find faith and self-understanding at the end of the film - when it is too late. He is easily led and manipulated by forces which are beyond his physical and psychological control. His path to enlightenment is littered with hauntings and failings along the way. He is faithless in his choices and is eventually punished as he realises the Edenic home of Lady Wakasa is nothing more than a ruin and she has been dead for some considerable time.

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Figure.1.11

In one of the film's most chilling scenes (Figure.1.11), Genjuro walks slowly amongst the ruins of what he imagined to be his adopted home. A non-diegetic gentle haunting female harmony can be heard as Genjuro acknowledges the enormity of the situation. The supernatural zone has been exposed and he is left bereft in a new reality of loneliness, a victim of his own betrayal.

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<sup>47</sup> Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Ward (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p.112.

There are further parallels in the protagonists' journeys to enlightenment as both films conclude. Stalker returns to his domestic setting. He is angry that the Writer and Professor have both failed the test of faith applied in the Zone. In Figure.1.12 the audience can see the noirish spectacle has returned: the colour is drained from the framing and the spatiality is claustrophobic:

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Figure.1.12

Shelves of books in the background indicate the intellectual prowess of the Stalker which has been concretised throughout the film. However, his wife is required as a physical crutch to literally support him up from the floor. The female figures, despite their lack of screen time, are always significant and powerful compared to the visual weakness of the male characters. Despite the philosophical rhetoric enunciated throughout the film by the men, it is the females who are the stronger. This is established furtherly at the end of *Stalker* as the final scene shows the Stalker's daughter using telekinetic powers to break a glass by moving it off a table. This indicates another type of Zone is at work in what was the noirish domesticity. Figure.1.13 shows Tarkovsky's use of colour in this scene, which is striking when compared to the other low-lit scenes of the domestic setting. The child represents brightness and hope but the scene also signifies how the Zone's reach is beyond any boundaries. The alien and otherworldly atmospherics of the Zone encroach into the domestic space. The supernatural is fully present as the daughter carries an unearthly power.

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Figure.1.13

The supernatural conclusion in *Stalker* links with *Ugetsu Monogatari*. Upon Genjuro's final return to the village where the narrative began, he is greeted by his wife and child who then play out a similar domestic scene to the one at the film's beginning. However, the audience already knows that this is a pure haunting, as there is a hint that Miyagi had previously perished at the hands of samurai warriors, though her death does not occur on screen, Mizoguchi's direction leaves her vulnerable and surrounded by the soldiers before then cutting away. With Miyagi already dead, a dramatic sense of

haunting irony pervades these closing sequences. Genjuro is punished for a lack of marital loyalty to his wife as he took up residence with the ghost of Lady Wakasa and now the happy domestic scene which unfolds carries with it a sense of uncertainty and doom. Genjuro expresses guilt for having originally abandoned his wife and son, but also relief that they are safe. His mind was ‘warped’<sup>48</sup> he states. This is laced with irony as the audience recognise that his wife is deceased and Genjuro is again conversing with spirits.

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Figure.1.14

As he initially approaches their old home it is in a dilapidated state yet suddenly transforms to as it was before to reveal the ghost, and the phantasmagoria that Genjuro experiences. Figure.1.14 shows the stylisation of Genjuro and Miyagi’s reunion. Mizoguchi employs single soft lighting of Miyagi which casts a darkness and shadows across the scene. There is a sense of the comfort of happy marital domestication whilst witnessing this happy reunion, but there is also an otherworldliness to the scene as these lighting effects promote a sense of claustrophobia and darkness. Miyagi is lit as a banshee white spectre. Genjuro was trapped in a hellish palace with Lady Wakasa, yet he is now in a similar situation with the ghost of his murdered wife. Again, Genjuro is plagued by the violence of war and its many victims. The once happy domestic setting in reality has been ruined and there is nothing left, only death and guilt laced memories of those who have been killed. Genjuro’s family setting has been destroyed much like the thousands of Japanese families who would experience similar events during the Second World War.

Genjuro was tested by the supernatural environment just as the Zone in *Stalker* acts as a testing ground for humanity to rediscover faith. Le Fanu states: ‘The film is much clearer than the tale both about his furious ambition (in the book he is lazy) and also about the corresponding fact that, despite everything, he loves his wife.’<sup>49</sup> Genjuro’s infidelity with Lady Wakasa shows his weakness as a human being as he is seduced. Much like the Tarkovskian Zone the supernatural spatiality Genjuro

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<sup>48</sup> *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953) dir. Kenji Mizoguchi, The Criterion Collection, 2019 [Blu-Ray].

<sup>49</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), p.56.

encounters beyond the lake represents a test of Genjuro's faith. He shows weakness but through that lapse in judgement he can recognise where his true values lie. However, the supernatural zone that Genjuro had occupied shows no mercy and it is simply too late to reconcile with his wife. Despite escaping from the ghost of Lady Wakasa, he is now destined to pay for his sins in another zone of the fantastical. The reality is that the wife he betrayed, whom he now acknowledges as his true love and destiny, is purely a supernatural spirit also.

The parallel themes of haunting, loss, longing, and guilt are reimagined in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. The film was an adaptation of the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem's novel of 1961. It is the story of astronaut Kris Kelvin's exploration of the planet Solaris and the strange mind-altering effects of its oceanic surface. It is the extra-terrestrial power of Solaris that conjures images of Kris's deceased wife Hari who took her own life but now who interacts with Kris in human form again. Hari is a reminder of Kris's past trauma and guilt that still haunts him over her suicide. The novel is set completely in space and Nariman Skakov states:

The beginning of Lem's *Solaris* immediately informs the reader that he or she is entering the realm of science fiction – a highly mechanised world of inconceivable equipment and language [...] the text will be dominated by wondrous technical gadgets shaping the human horizon, and will be presented along a linear narrative.<sup>50</sup>

Jameson adds that:

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<sup>50</sup> Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Tarkovsky – Labyrinths of Space and Time* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2012), p.75.

Lem has given us a virtual representation of science itself, “hard” science and not just knowledge, with a miniature sociology of scientists, a history of their funding, and an account of the role of experimentation and of scientific publication as well.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast, Tarkovsky’s cinematic adaptation is set in space but also significantly on Earth, with Kris’s domestic parental home as a key setting and the interactions with his parents playing a major part. There is over 40 minutes of introductory footage dedicated to the Earth setting at the beginning of the film which provides a more earthen narrative, making the film feel less like science fiction. Tarkovsky does this from the film’s very beginning to establish that he will manipulate Lem’s textual narrative to give more of a focus on characterisation and human relationships in his adaptation. In contrast to Lem’s space science fiction adventure, Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* will be a more psychological story in which human beings are manipulated by forces beyond their control, thus providing a wider critique of the contemporary Soviet state in which the population faces similar manipulation by the totalitarian authorities. The ocean of Solaris is reminiscent of such manipulation, as Jameson states:

It is, however, henceforth proven to everyone’s satisfaction that the ocean is not only sentient but also the cause and origin of the material hallucinations, which can be seen as a kind of reverse experiment it had undertaken on the human investigators whose presence it has just become aware of.<sup>52</sup>

The notion of ‘hallucinations’ resonates with the propaganda espoused by the Soviet hierarchy of the time. This chimes with the concept of an ‘experiment’ being undertaken by Brezhnev’s government on the proletariat with regards to the exploitation of unreality. The film was made during what has

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<sup>51</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future – The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), p.108.

<sup>52</sup> Jameson, p.111.

become historically known as ‘The Era of Stagnation’ which was the period of Soviet economic decline between 1964 and 1982. Archie Brown states: ‘this was a period of a declining rate of economic growth, no political reform worthy of the name, and a conservative Communist regime led by cautious Brezhnev.’<sup>53</sup> It was an epoch which added ‘little or nothing to the well-being of the populations that comprised the Soviet Union,’<sup>54</sup> as Thomas Crump suggests: ‘The result was that the great Soviet masses were continually being fed on the single achievements of a very small minority – a diet of bread and circuses that would prove very thin in the long run.’<sup>55</sup> The concept of ‘circuses’ emphasises the destructive effects of the propagandistic era in which any perception of global or national Soviet success has little impact on the socioeconomic deprivation of the general population.

Tarkovsky opens *Solaris* with a slow close-up camera pan of reeds swaying under water (Figure 1.15). A low angle pan shot moves higher to eventually reveal Kris (Donatas Banionis) standing in contemplation by a small lake near his parents’ home, surrounded by the colours and diegetic sounds of nature and the landscape (Figure 1.16.). Kris stares at the nature around him but his face has a soulless appearance with little physical emotion. It is the lack of expression that signifies a deep and penetrating loss. The audience is compelled to keep watching despite the lack of action because it is the stillness of the scene that is most fascinating and intriguing; a point is reached where an almost uncanny atmosphere pervades the frames due to the static observation. Tarkovsky uses colour to full advantage to express Kris’s powerlessness as he is surrounded by the greenery and ghostlike swaying of the vegetation around him, producing a transcendental acceptance of mortality. There is a sense of another presence in the frames despite Kris being all alone and seemingly abandoned. The landscape is the more powerful character.

Lem did not like this Earthbound introductory sequence, and indeed questioned the film’s opening:

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<sup>53</sup> Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage, 2009), p.398.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Crump, *Brezhnev and the Decline of the Soviet Union* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014), p. 205.

<sup>55</sup> Crump, p.205.

This script proved a rather unpleasant surprise to me. In the long prologue that takes place on Earth, it introduces Chris's family and undue importance is given to the old mother. The mother's character symbolises his family ties, but also the Motherland, Mother Earth, and this has very strong connotations in Russian folklore; as far as I was concerned, Chris's family connections were of little interest and should not have been bothered with in *Solaris*.<sup>56</sup>

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Figure.1.15

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Figure.1.16

Soviet authorities also decreed that the 'Earth' section was 'too long.'<sup>58</sup> Despite Lem's disappointment and Soviet Central Committee disapproval, Tarkovsky made no changes and the audience is led into a complex and thought-provokingly abstract scene. Tarkovsky's use of the tropes which would become associated with slow cinema in the opening to *Solaris* is 'contemplative, austere, abstract, meditative,'<sup>59</sup> and engages the audience in a contemplation of Kris. As he stands pensively within the natural setting, the audience can ascertain his withdrawal and personal introspection. These slow cinema tropes enable the opening to convey a sense of melancholia, longing and of loss as Kris walks amongst the earthly greenery guided by the gentle sound of nature. He looks 'forever traumatized, slowed by some unspeakable sorrow.'<sup>60</sup> The flow of water is particularly poignant and a trope used throughout Tarkovsky's oeuvre. The audience will later discover that Kris mourns the loss of his wife

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<sup>56</sup> Stanislaw Lem, 'The Profession of Science Fiction: XV: Answers to a Questionnaire', trans. by Maxim Jakubowski and D. Jakubowski, in *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction*, no.15 (1979), pp.45-46.

<sup>57</sup> *Solaris*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky (Curzon Artificial Eye, 2017) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>58</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries 1970 -1986*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p.50.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Philip Lopate, 'Solaris: Inner Space' <<https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/239-solaris-inner-space>> [accessed 3 December 2019].

and Tarkovsky's initial use of the flow of water is particularly symbolic in foreshadowing and anticipating the Solaris Ocean as a medium of memories of the feminine. As Gaston Bachelard states:

A being dedicated to water is a being in flux. He dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away [...] Water always flows, water always falls, always ends in horizontal death [...] death associated with water is more dream-like than death associated with earth: the pain of water is infinite.<sup>61</sup>

The idea that death associated with water is 'dream-like' links with the *Solaris* narrative in that an extra-terrestrial apparition of his wife Hari (Natalya Bondarchuk) will haunt Kris once he is on board the space station investigating the planet. The water has an association with the Kris's subconscious, from where the planet accesses the memory of the lost Hari. The alien creation will psychologically toy with his feelings through her existence which will culminate in his falling in love with the ghost. Kris's 'substance' therefore 'is constantly floating away': as he is unable to recognise reality from unreality, his pain is 'infinite'. Tarkovsky uses water to create a hypnotic and mystical presence in *Solaris* which is reminiscent of Mizuguchi's use of the trope in *Ugetsu Monogatari*, which Tarkovsky recognises as an influence on his work. This is an almost identical trope which emerges and is established in *Solaris* through the relationship between Kris and Hari. Hari has been deceased for several years and initially haunts Kris until he begins to accept her. However, their relationship is increasingly strained due to Hari's psychological torment, aware that she is merely an alien projection created from the memories of Kris. This results in repeated suicide attempts by Hari (Figure.1.17) yet she always returns.

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<sup>61</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. by Edith Farrell (Dallas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983), p.55.

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Figure.1.17

Hari states: 'I don't know myself at all, I don't remember who I am. When I close my eyes, I can't remember my own face.'<sup>62</sup> Hari's torment continues throughout the initial stages of the alien relationship with Kris, haunting him physically as well as psychologically. '[...] You're afraid. Well then, I'll say it. I'm not Hari! That Hari is dead, she poisoned herself. I'm...I'm something completely different.'<sup>63</sup> However, Kris wants to accept the ghost and admits his love to her. His guilt from the death of the human Hari also torments him and having fallen in love with the alien spectre wants to redeem the failures of the original marriage on earth. He states: 'Fine, fine, perhaps your presence is a torment, or it may be a service performed by the Ocean. But what does it matter, if you are dearer to me than all the scientific truths which have ever existed in the world?'<sup>64</sup> Despite her spectral alien presence as 'torment', a manifestation of his past in hauntological form, he wants to accept her as human and make amends. The 'Ocean' physically reproduces Hari whose memory psychologically haunts Kris and presents the conflict that rages within him. It is a haunting yet also acts as 'service' enabling Kris's catharsis, but echoes back from a dream state as a residue of conscious thought.

This concept evinces parallels to *Ugetsu Monogatari*. Genjuro visits a marketplace and meets the enigmatic Lady Wakasa and her Servant (Kikue Mori) who invite the potter to Lady Wakasa's mansion having ordered several pieces of pottery from him (Figure.1.18).

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Figure.1.18

Lady Wakasa appears to seduce and 'dazzle Genjuro out of his wits,'<sup>65</sup> and wishes him to marry her. There is a beguiling and strangely seductive quality to the way Lady Wakasa is presented on screen,

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<sup>62</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, trans. by William Powell & Natasha Synessios (London: Faber, 1999), p.167.

<sup>63</sup> Tarkovsky, p.170.

<sup>64</sup> Tarkovsky, p.178.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan* (London: BFI Publishing. 2005), p. 57.

Mark Le Fanu says that ‘Everything about the lady is old-fashioned.’<sup>66</sup> Roger Ebert remarks on her stylised and otherworldly appearance: ‘made up like a Noh heroine with smudges for eyebrows high on her forehead, her face shadowed by veils and a wide straw hat, she is like no woman he has ever seen.’<sup>67</sup> Ebert’s connection of *Ugetsu* to the ancient Japanese theatrical tradition of Noh Drama, dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century is tonally and narratively significant. Donald Kirihaara states that ‘the structure of *Ugetsu Monogatari* can be read as the [...] progression of a Noh drama.’<sup>68</sup> Royall Tyler explains that ‘In performance, *noh* plays may be, and often are, enjoyed simply as a sequence of sights and sounds – of dance and musical forms – with a general affective import (mood, emotion).’<sup>69</sup> The plays are based more on symbolic gesture rather than plot driven narratives:

the *Noh* drama may, in effect, be described also as a lyrico-dramatic tone-poem in which the text has a function somewhat similar to that of the libretto in a Wagner or Debussy opera. The significance of the action, the beauty of the verse, and the excellence of the music and singing [...] are purposely designed to ‘open the ear’ of the mind, while the miming (*monomane*) and dancing (*mai*) awaken the emotions of the spectator.<sup>70</sup>

This is reminiscent of the immersive slow cinematic style in which the audience is forced to acknowledge the heady symbolic space presented to them and formulate meaning for what they see as active viewers. Tarkovsky’s slow cinema can be compared to Noh as the slow, symbolic theatricality presented, mirrors the technique of slow cinema. The audience must become interpreting active responders to what they are presented with on stage to find meanings in the complex works. Thus, Mizoguchi’s film acts as an hauntological historical bridge between Tarkovsky and Noh. Noh dramas

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<sup>66</sup> Le Fanu, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> Roger Ebert, *Ugetsu Review*, 9th May 2004, <<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-ugetsu-1953>> [accessed 3 December 2021].

<sup>68</sup> Donald Kirihaara, *Patterns of Time: Mizoguchi and the 1930s* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press), p.8.

<sup>69</sup> Royall Tyler, *Japanese No Dramas*, ed and trans. by Royall Tyler (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Sanki Ichikawa, *The Noh Drama: Ten Plays from the Japanese*, ed and trans. by Rutland D. Vermont, Charles Tuttle (Tokyo: Japanese Classics Translations Committee, 1955), p. ix.

communicate ancient Japanese stories through form rather than conventional westernised stagecraft. The dramas often feature tales of gods and their relationship to humanity or family relationships. Themes of love, greed and power are often symbolised through dance, poetry and music. In *Ugetsu Monogatari* it is revealed that Lady Wakasa and her Servant are ghosts who died long ago, and have phantasmagorically tortured Genjuro. Hari from Tarkovsky's *Solaris* is of a similar type of character, as a ghost sent to haunt Kris and his guilty conscience. In Noh plays there are demon women who are often found tormenting male characters. They are vengeful figures, previously scorned by men who wreak havoc and terror on stage. Lady Wakasa is a comparative example as she was slain before she had experienced love and now seeks it from Genjuro. Kiriara observes:

Mizoguchi uses narrative structure, narration, and style in a manner that acknowledges norms of filmmaking and film viewing while it also departs from them. In accounting for the strangeness that results, it is necessary to see Mizoguchi's works not in isolation, but as systems that evolve within significant historical developments.<sup>71</sup>

The audience may 'depart' from the conventional narrative and see *Ugetsu Monogatari* 'not in isolation' and thus acknowledge 'significant historical developments.' Genjuro's haunting by Lady Wakasa links to the traumas of contemporaneous Japanese history. This haunting is reflective of the defeat of the Imperial Japanese just seven years before the production of *Ugetsu Monogatari*. Kiriara's observation echoes Said's contrapuntal approach to 'draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented.'<sup>72</sup> The viewer discovers that Lady Wakasa is said to have been murdered by samurai soldiers and still haunts the land just as Japan's Second World War dead haunt the geographical homeland. The atomic bombs dropped on

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<sup>71</sup> Donald Kiriara, *Patterns of Time: Mizoguchi and the 1930s* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press), p.6.

<sup>72</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 82.

Japan resulted in ‘half a million Japanese civilians’<sup>73</sup> killed, ‘around 140,000 at Hiroshima and 70,000 at Nagasaki.’<sup>74</sup> Abe Mark Nornes would describe Lady Wakasa as ‘the spectre of impossibility,’<sup>75</sup> in that the horrors experienced by the Japanese were so powerful that they cannot be represented on screen or in any form of cultural representation. David Deamer says: ‘How can poetry, art, film, represent such torment and misery, and do it justice?’<sup>76</sup> The trauma cannot be represented except through extreme abstraction in the form of folktales. They offer a way of understanding horror through exaggerated forms of storytelling. As a Noh figure Lady Wakasa is the symbolic vengeful spirit that mourns for the loss of life. She is the ‘White Serpent’ of Akinari which recalls historically the demon women of Noh drama, but she is also significant as a spiritual embodiment of the recent horrors of Japanese conflict. Her presence stalks the land as the ghost of war. Lady Wakasa is reminiscent of a character the Solaris Ocean would create in that she manipulates the human Genjuro with ‘death infecting life,’<sup>77</sup> once again. Lady Wakasa has ‘transmedia’<sup>78</sup> elements due to her Noh 14th Century representation which links with the contemporary haunting of fifties Japan.

Through Mizoguchi’s film a link from Japanese folk tales and Noh drama can be made to the work of Tarkovsky. In *Solaris*, Hari is also a female spirit who haunts the present (Figure.1.19) and is deemed wronged from her past, like Lady Wakasa (Figure.1.20).

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Figure.1.19

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Figure.1.20

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<sup>73</sup> Christopher Harding, *Japan Story: In Search of a Nation - 1850 to the Present* (London: Penguin, 2019), p.226.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.227.

<sup>75</sup> Abe Mark Nornes, ‘The Body at the Centre – *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*’ in *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*, ed. Mick Broderick (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996), pp.120-160 (p.122).

<sup>76</sup> David Deamer, *Deleuze, Japanese Cinema, and the Atomic Bomb* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p.5.

<sup>77</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror – An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.4.

<sup>78</sup> Donald Kirihaara, *Patterns of Time: Mizoguchi and the 1930s* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p.8.

Although they are from different genres, contrapuntally they are visually similar characters as angry and torturous female spirits who seek vengeance after suffering patriarchal wrongs in their worlds. Hari is reminiscent of the demon characters from Noh but she is created by an alien force which aims to manipulate the human inhabitants of the space station, just as the Soviet government manipulated their citizens through continuous propaganda at the time of the Tarkovsky production. A contrapuntal reading reveals how both Tarkovsky and Mizoguchi adapt works of literature to comment on their contemporary worlds. The protagonists of both films cannot escape their past behaviours. Genjuro claims to have been ‘warped’ due to his actions of abandonment but Kris experiences the same confused anxieties when confronted with the alien spirit of Hari. Both men are ‘warped’ by the past.

Said’s contrapuntal theory reveals the clear parallels and influences from Mizoguchi which are found within Tarkovsky’s works. Mizoguchi’s Japanese folkloric journey has a direct resonance with the Soviet science fiction of Tarkovsky. Both *Solaris* and *Stalker* carry significant influence from Mizoguchi’s earlier work through the journeys that characters undertake through zones whilst searching for meanings in their lives. The historical link between Tarkovsky and Mizoguchi’s ancient tale of Japanese female ghosts is discernible in *Solaris* where Hari occupies a similar space to the ancient Noh drama hauntings. Mizoguchi’s spectrality is traceable within Tarkovsky’s works. Both directors were haunted by the eras in which they created their films and their political pasts. Mizoguchi is found to be hauntologically present in Tarkovsky works as a visual and narratological spectre. The Soviet science fiction which Tarkovsky has adapted concretises reveals the influence Mizoguchi exerts on his 1970s films. The characters and themes of Japanese *Noh* drama influence the characters of Mizoguchi but also haunt the characters of Tarkovsky.

My creative piece responds to these hauntings by also placing characters in different zonal structures where they undertake a journey into the unknown in a search for meaning in their lives. The reader is simultaneously required to contemplate the meanings on the page and become active in contemplating the text due the modernist prose style adopted during those chapters. This is to mimic the cinematic style of both directors. I have also written the female characters, such as Mirza, as haunting figures for the Soviet authorities as they act in rebellious and vengeful ways. They are also

haunted internally by the dominant political system under which they exist, and much like the audience feels a level of sympathy for Hari and Mizoguchi's female characters, I have deliberately channelled those traits for the reader to experience the sensation of viewing a Tarkovsky film.

## **Chapter Two: ‘Dreaming with our Eyes Open’: Cinematic Exile Under the Spectral Influence of Carl-Theodor Dreyer in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice***

This chapter discusses Andrei Tarkovsky’s final two films which were both made in exile: the Italian production, *Nostalgia* (1983) and the Swedish production, *The Sacrifice* (1986). Both films examine and articulate ideas of exile and ‘statelessness,’ defined by Lyndsey Stonebridge as ‘estrangement, absence, ellipses, groundlessness, otherness, the giddy freedoms and deep despair of rootlessness.’<sup>1</sup> I compare Tarkovsky’s final films with the works of the Danish filmmaker Carl-Theodor Dreyer: *Vampyr* (1932), *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) and *Ordet* (1955). Although Tarkovsky’s and Dreyer’s films differ in terms of their narratives, using Said’s contrapuntal approach I examine how these films’ themes of exile are coupled with ideas of salvation through a religious iconography, uncovering Dreyer’s spectral hidden influence. Tarkovsky described Dreyer as a ‘great master,’<sup>2</sup> and listed him in his top 10 most influential directors.<sup>3</sup> Alex Barrett states that ‘Dreyer strove for what he termed psychological realism, attempting to capture the ephemeral essence that lies beneath surface reality.’<sup>4</sup> By using Said’s theory of connecting ‘the structures of a narrative to the ideas, concepts, experiences from which it draws support,’<sup>5</sup> I argue that the same essential quests are strongly located in Tarkovsky’s exile films, and that Dreyer has a hauntological presence in these works. As with Mizoguchi, Dreyer is also an early proponent of what would be eventually labelled as slow cinema techniques. These techniques, associated from an early stage with Dreyer’s style, include ‘minimalist mise en scène, and/or the sustained application of elongated and self-reflexive temporal devices such as the long take.’<sup>6</sup> Though not labelled within the relatively new genre of slow cinema in his lifetime,

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<sup>1</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People – Writing, Rights and Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries 1970-1986*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p.361.

<sup>3</sup> cited: ‘Tarkovsky’s Choice,’ Tom Lasica, *Sight and Sound*, March 1993, Volume 3, Issue 3. [www.nostalgia.com](http://www.nostalgia.com) [accessed 21 May 2023].

<sup>4</sup> Alex Barrett, ‘Where to begin with Carl Theodor Dreyer, June 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 <<https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/fast-track-fandom-where-begin-carl-dreyer>> [accessed 5 November 2019].

<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), p.9.

Tarkovsky uses the same methods stylistically and particularly in the later films. *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice* both reflect the theme of exile, but through a religious iconographical lens, which matches the stylistic methods and spiritual themes of Dreyer. These methods demand a focused patience from the spectator in order to gain a greater contemplative and intuitive cinematic experience.

The techniques used by Dreyer and Tarkovsky lead to cinema viewing becoming an almost transcendental experience. Schrader asserts: ‘Carl Dreyer employs the transcendental style extensively,’<sup>7</sup> and that ‘Transcendental style seeks to maximise the mystery of existence; it eschews all conventional interpretations of reality: realism, naturalism, psychologism, romanticism, expressionism, impressionism, and finally rationalism.’<sup>8</sup> I posit through my contrapuntal reading that Dreyer’s spectre is found in Tarkovsky’s works as Tarkovsky also eschews filmic conventions and instead places emphasis on the exploration of mysticism: ‘plot, acting, characterization, camerawork, music, dialogue, editing. In films of transcendental style these elements are, in popular terms, “nonexpressive” [...] robbing the conventional interpretations of reality of their relevance and power.’<sup>9</sup> Schrader states Tarkovsky ‘had religious themes, obsessions, and characters. He was austere. He employed distancing devices.’<sup>10</sup> This style visually manifests in the use of the long take, minimalist dialogue, emphasis on natural sounds and use of religious themes and iconography. These are abundant in Dreyer’s work and also in Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice* creating a transcendental bridge between the two directors. The viewer must actively work through these slow and complex films to locate meaning within them. Raymond Carney writes in relation to Dreyer that:

Dreyer’s style is more than an artistic matter: it is a statement about the purpose and value of possible relationships to experience and expression. It is a declaration of faith in the ability of the active soul (of a filmmaker, a character, or a viewer) to remain imaginatively (if not

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<sup>7</sup> Schrader, p.42.

<sup>8</sup> Schrader, p 42.

<sup>9</sup> Schrader, p.42.

<sup>10</sup> Schrader, p.22.

actually) free from being trapped or imprisoned by certain impinging forces. [...] It is a statement about how we can make meanings in life as well as in film.<sup>11</sup>

Schrader and Carney provide complementary interpretations of Dreyer's stylistic approach. The evasion of 'conventional interpretations' as suggested by Schrader links with Carney's view of Dreyer's work wanting the spectator to be 'free' from 'impinging forces,' though for Carney, this can only be achieved 'imaginatively.' The audience must have their own psychological response to the work and encouraged by techniques such as the long take, it is through their active viewing of the films that they fill in 'blanks' in interpretive meaning. Dreyer's oeuvre is concerned with making 'meanings in life as well as in film,' which makes the cinematic viewing a more openly interpretive undertaking. Tarkovsky and Dreyer use remarkably similar filmic styles and they undermine conventional chronological structures via a fragmentary temporality. The viewing of Tarkovsky's and Dreyer's films requires an intuitive response. The idea that 'subjective consciousness' and 'objective reality' combine through their cinematic cultures is evidence of the transcendental spatiality both directors occupy.

*Nostalgia* was Tarkovsky's first cinematic work made in a different country, with the screenplay co-written with Tonino Guerra. The film was the starting point of Tarkovsky's exile from the Soviet Union. It was a period containing a new level of freedom for him but also a time of statelessness and searching for belonging. *Nostalgia* was a critical success outside the Soviet Union and won Tarkovsky recognition at the 1983 Cannes Film Festival by receiving the *Grand Prix de Creation*. However, Sean Martin reports: 'The screening turned out to be another scandal, with the jury wanting to give Tarkovsky the Palme d'Or, but the official Russian delegation, led by veteran director Sergei Banderchuk, worked overtime to persuade the jury not to.'<sup>12</sup> This was much to the annoyance of Tarkovsky and adds to the fact that exile was the only choice he felt he could make, as he wrote: 'There is a rumour going round Moscow that I had a complete failure at Cannes. My God,

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<sup>11</sup> Raymond Carney, *Speaking the Language of Desire – The Films of Carl Dreyer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.63.

<sup>12</sup> Sean Martin, *Andrei Tarkovsky* (Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2011), pp.156-157.

that really is the last straw!’<sup>13</sup> The film was not released in the Soviet Union until 1987 after Tarkovsky had passed away, and the authorities in his homeland began to finally acknowledge the respect he had gained internationally.

Working as a film director in the West, Tarkovsky was granted more freedom of expression in his work as he was no longer bound by strict state cinematic controls. This allowed for greater control of the production process but simultaneously could be slightly bewildering when the pressures of being constantly under the watchful eye of Goskino and the Soviet Central Committee were finally removed. Having to work with less restrictions offered a sense of freedom, but also presented the challenges of having to adapt to a less rigid editing process. Tarkovsky said:

I would not say it was really so easy to make a film in Italy. This does not mean that I have found it more difficult to work in Italy than in the Soviet Union. [...] If you have some sort of project, it is insanely difficult to see it through to completion.<sup>14</sup>

There were still myriad creative anxieties that plagued Tarkovsky despite being distant from the constrictions of the Soviet Union. He would now have to decide where to draw the line of creativity, as opposed to having somebody else draw it for him so forcefully. Losing the ‘ability to understand where you are and what you are doing,’<sup>15</sup> signifies Tarkovsky’s perplexity of being in a new country and production environment. Tarkovsky is lost in a paradox of ‘otherness’<sup>16</sup> as Turovskaya states about his new cinematic location:

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<sup>13</sup> Andrey Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries, 1970-1986*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p.328.

<sup>14</sup> ‘V. Isimov and R. Shejko/1984,’ in *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews* ed. by John Gianvito (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp.124-154 (p.125).

<sup>15</sup> V. Isimov and R. Shejko, p.125

<sup>16</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People – Writing, Rights and Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.8.

Although his talents were widely recognised and he was regarded as one of the cult figures of Russian art abroad, in the commercial world of Western cinema Tarkovsky felt himself an outsider of a different kind – one who neither could nor would make any effort to change. Before, he had faced constant aesthetic confrontation in the bureaucratic minefield of his relations with Goskino; now he was working in the ‘anything goes’ aesthetic of the West.<sup>17</sup>

He was now an ‘outsider of a different kind,’ though he would not ‘make any effort to change.’ The spectral presence of Dreyer would ensure that the more traditional transcendental Tarkovskian tropes from his work behind the Iron Curtain would remain in place for *Nostalgia* and his later Swedish production, *The Sacrifice*.

The themes of loss and exile are prominent in *Nostalgia*. The film is haunted by a grieving for a lost life, a lost time, and a lost Motherland. As Tarkovsky wrote in his diaries on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1983 in Rome: ‘I am lost! I cannot live in Russia, nor can I live here.’<sup>18</sup> The film is laced with the ‘deep despair of rootlessness’<sup>19</sup> and signifies Tarkovsky’s anxieties in terms of a sense of loss for Russia, but also a yearning, which couples with an aching nostalgia for the lost past, as Tarkovsky wrote in *Sculpting in Time*:

I wanted to make a film about Russian nostalgia- about that state of mind peculiar to our nation which assails Russians who are far from their native land. I wanted the film to be about the fatal attachment of Russians to their national roots, their past, their culture, their native

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<sup>17</sup> Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Ward (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), pp.117-118.

<sup>18</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries, 1970-1986*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p.328.

<sup>19</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People – Writing, Rights and Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.8.

places, their families, and friends; an attachment which they carry with them all of their lives, regardless of where destiny may fling them.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the problems Tarkovsky had in the Soviet Union there is still a desire to see the Motherland again in the purest form of the rural landscape coupled with the traditional family unit; Tarkovsky's yearning for his homeland that no longer exists permeates the work, but it is expressed through the paralleled haunting influence of Dreyer. Turovskaya succinctly relays the narrative structure of *Nostalgia*:

a Russian poet Andrey Gorchakov, who is in Italy researching the life of the eighteenth-century peasant musician Pavel Sosnovsky [...] is accompanied in his search by an interpreter, an emancipated though dissatisfied Italian blonde, and the relationship between them, especially against the background of the memories of home which torment Gorchakov, could easily provide the subject matter for a film itself.<sup>21</sup>

Tarkovsky's direction was to make Gorchakov (Oleg Yankovsky):

the portrayal of someone in a state of profound alienation from the world and himself, unable to find the balance between reality and the harmony for which he longs, in a state of nostalgia provoked not only by his remoteness from his country but also a global yearning for the wholeness of existence.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time – Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p. 202.

<sup>21</sup> Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Ward (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), pp.118-119.

<sup>22</sup> Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time – Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), pp.204-205.

These representations of alienation and an inability to find the balance between reality and harmony also feature heavily in Dreyer's oeuvre. *Nostalgia* contains much religious imagery as Gorchakov explores the symbolisms of the Roman Catholic country on his journey; a sense of humanity searching for meaning and salvation is present. As Dreyer's films were known for their concentrated considerations of loss, grief, guilt, faith and alienation, the indelible influence of Dreyer is spectrally present throughout *Nostalgia*. The emphasis of 'character over narrative'<sup>23</sup> and a biblical signification of 'an intense concern for human suffering'<sup>24</sup> provide spectral links between the two directors. Dreyer haunts *Nostalgia* through the cinematography of contemplative slow cinema, in character portrayals and the faith-driven journeys the characters undertake.

The contrapuntal presence of Dreyer is registered during the opening moments of *Nostalgia* as the audience is introduced to the characters of Gorchakov and his 'dissatisfied Italian blonde'<sup>25</sup> interpreter Eugenia (Domiziani Giordano). Turovskaya's idea that the relationship between the central characters of Gorchakov and his interpreter could 'easily provide subject matter of the film,'<sup>26</sup> is a significant point because the binary relationship between the two characters drives the narrative. Nariman Skakov states: 'Binary oppositions, such as male and female, dream or vision and present reality, Russia and Italy, sanity and madness, life and death, together with the phenomenon of doubling are omnipresent in *Nostalgia*.'<sup>27</sup> Though Skakov's observation is helpful, a contrapuntal reading reveals the film's greater complexities. Initially, Eugenia is vital as a counterweight to the broodingly introspective Gorchakov, but she also provides a link to Dreyer as his work is also marked by male/female oppositions and pious characters placed in opposition against others who question devout Christian beliefs.

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<sup>23</sup> Alex Barrett, 'Where to begin with Carl Theodor Dreyer, June 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/fast-track-fandom-where-begin-carl-dreyer> [accessed 5 November 2019].

<sup>24</sup> Barrett.

<sup>25</sup> Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Ward (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), pp.118-119.

<sup>26</sup> Turovskaya, pp.118-119.

<sup>27</sup> Nariman Skakov, 'The (im)possible translation of *Nostalgia*,' *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Volume 3, Number 3, (2009) pp 309-333 (p.309).

At the film's outset, Gorchakov and Eugenia are going to view a fresco by Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca called *Madonna del Parto* (Figure.2.1) which depicts the Virgin Mary as heavily pregnant. However, Gorchakov refuses to enter the church and James Macgillivray states this is due to the painting being used inside as part of the 'ritual of the Cult of the Virgin, a new meaning for the painting itself.'<sup>28</sup> Gorchakov does not want to see this depiction of the Virgin Mary being centralised as part of this religious ceremony, whilst Eugenia ventures inside.

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Figure. 2.1

Eugenia is a physical embodiment of the renaissance Virgin Mary (Figures.2.2 and 2.3) and the *Madonna del Parto*, with long flowing hair and a pallor of melancholy. She appears as a visualisation of traditional pious purity and Mother figure: 'photographed at times as if she had stepped out of a painting by Titian,'<sup>30</sup> and surrounded by religious iconography and a quiet atmosphere of prayer. However, she challenges her holy setting by debating the role of childless woman in society with a Sacristan (Livio Galassi).

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Figure.2.2<sup>31</sup>

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Figure. 2.3.

She endures a disagreeable exchange with the Sacristan, who insists women must be mothers. There is a tense atmosphere as Eugenia is chastised by the Sacristan for not praying. The haunting imagery from Dreyer's most famous work *The Passion of Joan of Arc* looms over this scene. As Eugenia is

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<sup>28</sup> James Macgillivray, 'Andrei Tarkovsky's *Madonna del Parto*' from *Tarkovsky* ed. By Nathan Dunne (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), pp.160-175 (162).

<sup>29</sup> *Nostalgia*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky (Curzon Artificial Eye, 2017) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>30</sup> Peter Green, *Andrei Tarkovsky – The Winding Quest* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1993), p.110.

<sup>31</sup> Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna of the Book* (1480) <[www.wga.hu.com](http://www.wga.hu.com)> [accessed 29 May 2023].

interrogated, the static camera focuses on her mid-shot (Figure.2.4) as she defends herself against the misogyny of the church as Jeanne (Maria Falconetti) must do in Dreyer's film (Figure.2.5).

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Figure.2.4

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Figure.2.5<sup>32</sup>

The physiognomy is similar when comparing the two characters, as their facial expressions convey elements of sadness but with a sense of defensiveness. Jeanne has a haunted expression as though she already knows her fate before God. David Bordwell observed of Dreyer's film that: 'Since the décor is scraped clean of reference points, objects and figures often float suspended in a luminous vacuum.'<sup>33</sup> This brings an unreal quality to the film as Jeanne never appears grounded in a conventional scene: she is surrounded by blank walls as though floating in an entrapped space. The trappings of Jeanne are contrapuntally alluded to in *Nostalgia* as Eugenia is filmed ensnared by the church architecture, which at times appears in softer focus creating that same 'luminous background.' She is also trapped and under interrogation: the church is not a safe space for either female character due to their personal views and experiences. The pacing of both these scenes is slow, making the audience become active viewers, since they have nowhere else to look other than at the facial expressions of the female victims. Tarkovsky has used the hauntological presence of Dreyer in his work to place Eugenia as a disrupter to the patriarchal conventions of the church both as a character and through slow cinematography.

The otherworldly theme continues in *Nostalgia* with Eugenia bearing witness to the ceremony of the Cult of the Virgin. The pacing of this scene is very slow and after Eugenia's initial dialogue with the Sacristan, the only sound heard is the whispering of holy women deep in prayer. Since the women are barely audible, the sequence is both uncomfortable and mysterious moment but also feels

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<sup>32</sup> *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, dir. Carl-Theodor Dreyer (Eureka Entertainment, 2017) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>33</sup> David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 1981), p.66.

sacred and private. The spectator is made to feel like an outsider looking in, observing something they should not really be privy to. What is meant to be a celebration of the Virgin pregnancy does not feel celebratory, merely otherworldly (Figure.2.6).

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Figure.2.6

This is also a moment of reflection for the character as Eugenia is positioned as an outsider in this sequence, being situated in a religious setting and witnessing a ceremony of celebration. Despite the fresco 'being a devotional image, and in practice, a comforting one for pregnant women,'<sup>34</sup> the scene feels darkly contemplative and haunting. The women wear long robes and carry candles. Tarkovsky originally described the scene in his diaries: 'The first episode, in the mist. *Madonna del Parto*. The pregnant women come crowding here like witches, to ask the Madonna to ensure them safe delivery, and so on.'<sup>35</sup> Describing the holy women as 'witches' signifies the contrapuntal haunting of Dreyer as Jeanne from *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is treated as a witch by her English Christian torturers due to her belief that God has spoken to her. Not only is Eugenia persecuted by the Church like Dreyer's character, she is also filmed using the slow cinema style in close-up and with long takes which makes her character's persecution more intensely expressed. Eugenia is surrounded by women who are witches accusing her of not being a woman, whilst Jeanne is surrounded by men accusing her of being a witch. Contrapuntally, Dreyer's witch theme in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* haunts Tarkovsky strongly and Tarkovsky would go on to explore this further in *The Sacrifice*.

Much like Tarkovsky, Dreyer would face some persecution and censorship for *The Passion of Joan of Arc*: 'Conservative journalists and politicians were offended at the idea that Dreyer, a foreigner and a Protestant, would film a subject that is so distinctively part of French history.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> James Macgillivray, 'Andrei Tarkovsky's Madonna del Parto' in *Tarkovsky*, ed. by Nathan Dunne (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), pp.161-175 (172).

<sup>35</sup> Andrey Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries, 1970-1986*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p.245.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Larson, 'Risen from the Ashes: The Complex Print History of Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928),' *The Moving Image*, Volume 17, Number 1, Spring 2017, pp 52-84 (p.58).  
<<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/677531>> [accessed 1 June 2023].

Despite this, Dreyer, in contrast to Tarkovsky, was happy during the production process. The film was made in Paris and according to Jean and Dale Drum:

Dreyer was both highly respectful of his source material and also cognizant that the filmic form must be his. Consequently, he immersed himself in the period, studying the actual record of the trial in the library of the Chamber of Deputies until he knew the details almost by heart and felt as though he could see into the minds of the people of the fifteenth century.<sup>37</sup>

He was meticulous to detail in his research, but what is most significant is the filmic form being ‘his.’ *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is recognised for Dreyer’s use of close-ups and early slow cinema style. Bordwell states: ‘the film’s intelligibility hinges upon our connecting one close-up with another.’<sup>38</sup> It is the claustrophobic framing of Jeanne and her interrogators which demands the spectator be drawn into the tragic drama of the interrogation scenes. Dreyer’s spectral presence is felt at the beginning of *Nostalgia* with the use of Dreyer’s eminent cinematic device. The Sacristan is facing the camera as he debates with Eugenia (Figure 2.7). The intensity of the scene is reminiscent of Dreyer’s film through camera angle and pacing (Figure 2.8). The Sacristan and Jeanne both do not stare directly at the camera, but instead look slightly out of frame as though in contemplation. Their eyes and faces in close-up become crucial in mapping the emotions of the scenes: the cynical religious patriarchy in *Nostalgia* embodied by the Sacristan, and the visionary but fatalistic Jeanne, the emblematic victim of the same patriarchal attitudes. Contrapuntally, Tarkovsky uses this Dreyer framing technique to draw the viewer into the drama and build an intensity through the camera’s lack of motion. The lack of movement means the spectator cannot avoid the Sacristan’s face and dialogue. The unconventional spatiality of Dreyer’s film is mirrored in Tarkovsky by the Sacristan dominating the camera angle and

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<sup>37</sup> Jean Drum and Dale Drum, *My Only Great Passion – The Life and Films of Th. Dreyer* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000), p.126.

<sup>38</sup> David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 1981), p.66.

the background being slightly out of focus. The face of the patriarch filling the frame heightens the sense of Eugenia's persecution.

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Figure.2.7

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Figure.2.8.

Through Dreyer's distinctive use of the close-up and the blank background, the viewer is presented with nowhere else to look in the frame. Jeanne presents a look of victimhood and persecution as the audience is drawn into the depths of her despair:

Her face has almost no make-up and on the big screen her freckles are visible. In the film her eyelids quiver like butterfly wings, but in other ways her face is immobile, almost expressionless. There is almost no depth to the image, nothing in the background. Although this was a black-and-white film, the walls of the set were painted pink to remove the glare and not to detract from Falconetti's face. [...] In some shots she is framed, at the edge of the image, almost trying to escape it.<sup>39</sup>

The spectator is hypnotised by the performance of Falconetti, as the camera is held on her for them to have a visceral response. The intrinsic 'psychological realism'<sup>40</sup> Dreyer establishes reveals the 'intense concern for human suffering.'<sup>41</sup> Le Fanu states: 'What one can never have too much of is the simplicity and guilelessness of the future saint's answers to her judges. Even when she speaks of miraculous happenings (such as the provenance of the famous voices summoning her) it is, somehow,

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Cousins, *The Story of Film*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Pavilion, 2020), p.114.

<sup>40</sup> Alex Barrett, 'Where to begin with Carl Theodor Dreyer, June 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/fast-track-fandom-where-begin-carl-dreyer> [accessed 5 November 2019].

<sup>41</sup> Barrett.

without superstition or sentimentality.’<sup>42</sup> Ironically, it is the realism of Falconetti’s performance and Dreyer’s direction which evokes a transcendental reading of the film. Barthélémy Amengual states Dreyer shows ‘a realism without frontiers [...] which opens itself to a world as to a haunted domain.’<sup>43</sup> It is through Dreyer’s vision that we become similarly ensnared in Jeanne’s plight and persecution. There is an empathy generated by the viewer because of the sheer rawness of the drama. The viewer actively feels Jeanne’s sadness and plight through the concentrated gaze and hypnotic nature of the static camerawork which is intended to lead to a questioning of the ‘meanings in life.’<sup>44</sup> This transcendental aesthetic leaves the audience no choice but to become active participants, filling the gaps or ‘blanks’ of meaning that Dreyer has left open through his direction. The fact that the film is silent also adds to these effects, enabling or requiring more active participation from the viewer. The direct, slow close-ups of Jeanne provide no distractions from the contemplation of her suffering. It is this direction that drives the transcendental feel to the film as the viewer is completely immersed and engaged in the action. Traditional cinema traits are removed and the silence, facial expression but also lack of depth to these scenes is stifling for the viewer, enabling a deeper level of thought and interpretation as the audience must actively engage with the imagery. This enhances the otherworldly quality to the work; it is unsettling for the viewer to watch. Rather than having Jeanne’s faith celebrated as a holy spiritual connection, she is ultimately intimidated, psychologically tortured, and killed, whilst surrounded by men of the holy order.

In the latter half of the film, she is placed in close-up and foregrounded in front of a crucifix (Figure.2.9).

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<sup>42</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *Believing in Film – Christianity and Classic European Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 163.

<sup>43</sup> Barthélémy Amengual, ‘Les nuits blanches de l’âme,’ *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no.207 (1968), p. 61. cited from: David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (London: University of California Press, 1981), p.2.

<sup>44</sup> Raymond Carney, *Speaking the Language of Desire – The Films of Carl Dreyer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.63.

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Figure.2.9.

Jeanne looks more boy-like in these scenes: in Dreyer's original script she is described as 'this girl in man's clothes [...] gentleman regard her man's shoes and short hair as something loathsome and indecent.'<sup>45</sup> Conversely, Tarkovsky's Eugenia resembles a feminine Renaissance figure but is still chastised by the church. Christ is looming over the shoulder of Jeanne, but she is facing death as a heretic. Dreyer's array of close-ups, slow takes and cuts is what Bordwell refers to as the film's 'eccentric space,'<sup>46</sup> as 'objects and figures often float suspended in a luminous vacuum. [...] although the lighting of facial contours and textures creates shadows, there seldom any cast shadows to confirm depth.'<sup>47</sup> The set of the film is minimal and Schrader asserts that,

the composition and sets of *Passion* serve the same purpose as the faces: they offer an expressive environment in which the viewer can emotionally participate. This environment also permits the viewer to read-in character psychology which may not be explicit in the film.<sup>48</sup>

Jeanne is always starting upwards into the light source throughout the piece as though talking to God. Disrupting perspective and spatiality as much as temporality, Dreyer's unconscious use of slow cinema techniques demand attentiveness and articulate this unconventional historical depiction.

As a binary, both Eugenia and Jeanne are estranged by their otherworldly religious surroundings. Later in *Nostalgia* when Eugenia is also angered with Gorchakov when he will not

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<sup>45</sup> Carl Theodor Dreyer & Joseph Delteil, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, trans. by Oliver Stallybrass <<https://imsdb.com/scripts/Passion-of-Joan-of-Arc,-The.html>> [accessed 11 August 2024].

<sup>46</sup> David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 1981), p.67.

<sup>47</sup> Bordwell., p.67

<sup>48</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), p.145.

sleep with her, she is marked as a figure representing the anxiety of cultural isolation. It is this binary which places her as an outsider: she has been critiqued by the church for not being a mother, but yearns to be an 'independent woman,' finding herself lost between the two positions. By the film's ending she has formed a relationship with the intimidating and Vittorio having abandoned Gorchakov and it seems sold her soul to the devil. She symbolises the outright rejection of the spiritual world in favour of the material, where she is persecuted further by her new lover. Eugenia is ultimately made to suffer throughout the film both spiritually and materially. She occupies the Stonebridgian space of 'extraterritoriality,'<sup>49</sup> as she is placed without any sense of comfortable grounding as a character, and is trapped in a Dreyer-esque spatiality. In this way Skakov's binary reading proves simultaneously helpful and complex; there are notable differences between the two female characters. Eugenia and Jeanne are both seen as fallen women. Jeanne is told she looks male, yet claims to have communicated with God, but faces ecclesiastical demonisation because of it. Eugenia is emblematic of the Madonna but ultimately is chastised by the church, and having offered her body to Gorchakov sexually, but being rejected, ends up unhappy and trapped in a toxic relationship as some form of symbolic punishment. This movement of binaries continues *The Sacrifice*, the film that would be Tarkovsky's last.

*The Sacrifice* was a Swedish production with the screenplay written solely by Tarkovsky. The narrative is about the character Alexander, who is played by *Nostalgia* veteran Erland Josephson, and is set during the outbreak of World War Three. Alexander offers his soul to God as a sacrifice to save the world. He lives on a remote Swedish island with his family. They employ a maid servant called Maria (Guðrún Gísladóttir) who despite her lowly status in the household will eventually play a major part in the film.

*The Sacrifice* continues Tarkovsky's unconscious directorial use of slow cinema techniques. Very slow zooms are employed, and the camera often lingers on characters for prolonged periods and will also track very slowly from left to right, or vice-versa during character dialogue. At times

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<sup>49</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People – Writing, Rights and Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.19.

dialogue between characters is paused and lingering. Dreyer's presence is felt in this contemplative and philosophical aesthetic. For example, at the film's beginning the audience sees the central characters of Alexander and Otto (Allan Edwall) discussing Alexander's general gloominess (Figure.2.10).

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Figure.2.10

The dialogue is teased out slowly between characters with long pauses and little change of vocal tone. The conversation is recorded in the distance, so the audience is having to listen as though far away from the action. The camera pans from left to right very slowly. This establishes from the film's offset the contemplative style which the audience must embrace to become active viewers of the film and develop the film's meanings within their own minds; Dreyer's transcendental elements haunt and mould the film. Turovskaya describes the film as: 'spacious, uncluttered, and somehow washed clean.'<sup>51</sup> Dreyer's *Ordet* is spectrally present both technically and narratively due to its stylistics. The philosophy behind the film is dense as Tarkovsky continued his journey into the West:

It seems to me that the individual today stands at a crossroads, faced with the choice of whether to pursue the existence of a blind consumer, subject to the implacable march of new technology and the endless multiplication of material goods, or to seek out a way that will lead to spiritual responsibility, a way that ultimately might mean not only his personal salvation but also the saving of society at large; in other words, to turn to God.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *The Sacrifice*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky (Curzon Artificial Eye, 2017) [on Blu-Ray].

<sup>51</sup> Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Ward (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p. 137.

<sup>52</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time – Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p.218.

As with Tarkovsky's previous works, *The Sacrifice* shows characters having to undertake a journey as an attempt to find enlightenment. Tarkovsky said in relation to the film that 'I wanted to show that man can renew his ties to life by renewing his covenant with himself and with the source of his soul.'<sup>53</sup> Alexander, the protagonist of *The Sacrifice*, is the centre of this process of spiritual and mystical renewal. As Turovskaya says, it is a film with 'visual power,' and 'compelling ideas,' but is also 'washed clean.' There is a clinical feel to the set design, the house is tidy and clean, until the threat of death invades the space. Tarkovsky worked with famous cinematographer Sven Nykvist who had previously had an extensive working relationship with Ingmar Bergman acting as a more contemporary Scandinavian influence. Bergman is another proponent of the slow and transcendental cinema style and Nykvist and Tarkovsky 'developed a close working relationship.'<sup>54</sup> The audience initially follows the camera very slowly manoeuvring amongst the family setting which highlights the claustrophobic elements of their fears and anxieties but also later on across scenes of a fragmented dreamscape that emerges in the film that Tarkovsky created. The audience must view and engage in the narrative and search for meanings through this slow style. It is the lack of action which requires the spectator to fill the narrative space. It is this style that ultimately harks back to the haunting of Dreyer in the film.

Dreyer's film is an adaptation of the Kaj Munk play, *Ordet*. The play was written in 1928 but adapted for the screen by Dreyer in 1954: 'It tells of Inger, a young farmer's wife who dies after she bears a stillborn child. The climax comes when her mentally-disturbed brother-in-law, Johannes, who believes he is Christ, brings her back to life.'<sup>55</sup> The themes of isolation and exile are dominant in the film. Inger (Birgitte Federspiel) is a devoted wife to Mikkel Borgen (Emil Hass Christensen) and she is the goodness at the centre of the Borgen household despite the animosity surrounding her. This is namely a religious feud between the Borgen family and the local Petersen family and also Johannes

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<sup>53</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky in an interview with Annie Epelboin in Paris, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1986. See English press brochure, *The Sacrifice*, Swedish Film Institute, Stockholm, 1986 cited: Peter Green, *Andrei Tarkovsky – The Winding Quest* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1993), p.120.

<sup>54</sup> Sean Martin, *Andrei Tarkovsky* (Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2011), p.171.

<sup>55</sup> Jean Drum and Dale Drum, *My Only Great Passion – The Life and Films of Th. Dreyer* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000), p.222.

Borgen's (Preben Lerdorff Rye) descent into madness with his constant belief that he is Christ. The Petersen family are members of the Inner Mission – a 'strict religious'<sup>56</sup> movement and objections are raised when Anders Borgen (Cay Kristiansen) wishes to marry Anne Petersen (Gerda Nielsen). The patriarchal heads of both households, Morten Borgen (Henrik Malberg) and Peter Petersen (Ejner Federspiel) cannot allow their children to marry. It will be the actual death of Inger and then her resurrection by Johannes that will ultimately unite the feuding families.

The theatrical style is replicated in Dreyer's cinematography. The action mainly takes place within the claustrophobic Borgen domestic space. This style lends itself to comparison with *The Sacrifice* with a similar situational setting; a large familial living space that carries with it a sense of claustrophobia and foreboding. Most of the action in both works takes place where the families live in comfortable housing, but the tone is not one of happiness and contentment, rather a symbolic mood of melancholy. Figures.2.11 and 2.12 show the Dreyer influence in terms of *mise en scene*. Alexander sits as Morten does looking away from his family, creating a sense of unease. Both Dreyer and Tarkovsky use long tracking shots within the domestic space which give the films a sense of oddity and estrangement. The scenes have low-key lighting which gives a sense of sadness and fatality to the narratives. There is an overarching unhappiness throughout both films which eventually builds to despair. The slow pacing and low heavy shadows bestow this atmosphere on the audience throughout the duration of both films. Dreyer's setting is lifted from the pages of Munk's original 1932 play, but this Danish theatrical work nonetheless resonates in the work of Tarkovsky. Monk's play haunts *The Sacrifice* via Dreyer's spectral influence.

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Figure.2.11

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Figure.2.12

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<sup>56</sup> Jean and Dale Drum, p.225.

<sup>57</sup> *Ordet*, dir. Carl-Theodor Dreyer (BFI, 2015) [on Blu-Ray].

In relation to film adaptations of plays Bordwell claims that ‘a film can mark a certain distance from its text by preserving a relative autonomy for its cinematic systems,’<sup>58</sup> : he refers to this as ‘theatricalization.’<sup>59</sup> Bordwell’s observation pertains to *Ordet* as ‘the film sets up a distance between play text and cinematic style. [...] In *Ordet*, the split is between a closed, highly motivated narrative and its “performance” in the *mise en scène* and filming. In *Ordet* the play text is challenged by the film’s spatio-temporal systems.’<sup>60</sup> Therefore, what has been written by Monk theatrically for staging purposes within the confines of the theatrical space, has been cinematographically expanded. The spatio-temporal system that Dreyer employs is one which again embraces the elements of slow cinema technique, challenging the viewer to contemplate a deeper response to what is a simple domestic staged space created by Monk. *Ordet* is marked with religious and mystical elements and could be read as a simple moralistic staged parable. However, the work is another example of slow, contemplative cinema and filled with transcendental elements. Serge Denay claimed: ‘The filmmaking that interests us is haunted by writing. Writing implies a separation (*éspacement*, or spacing-out) a space between two words, two letters, a gap that allows for a proliferation of meaning.’<sup>61</sup> Dreyer provides the *éspacement* in *Ordet* through his direction and manipulation of temporality through camera position and shot duration. Examples of this are the consistent long discussions Johannes has with other characters. He stares past the facing camera in mid-shot, his eyes looking at something the audience cannot see, and he never blinks. His language is slow and drawn out, and the audience feel his isolation and madness through Dreyer’s slow cinema direction (Figure. 2.13). It is the pauses between words which show a hidden depth. There is a lack of dialogue coupled with his somnambulist presence which requires the audience to contemplate the strangeness of Johannes and to try to find meaning in his behaviour. The *éspacement* drives the narrative through character but Dreyer’s frozen camera too. The slow cinema pacing makes the audience feel that they must fill the gaps of understanding as Dreyer’s direction gives slow contemplative pans across the

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<sup>58</sup> David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (London: University of California Press, 1981), p.149.

<sup>59</sup> Bordwell, p.149.

<sup>60</sup> Bordwell, p.149.

<sup>61</sup> Serge Denay, *The Cinema House & the World – 1. The Cahiers du Cinéma Years 1962-1981*, trans. by Christine Pichini (South Pasadena: Semiotext<e>, 2022), p.16.

space or simply remains still and focused on a particular moment for an extended time, such as during Johannes' monologues.

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Figure.2.13

Johannes is viewed as a haunted character and disturbs his family through his behaviour; he speaks slowly and hypnotically, his eyes are forever transfixed and he very rarely blinks, he chillingly predicts the death of Inger during childbirth through visions involving the grim reaper carrying a scythe entering the birthing room, but also predicts her resurrection. He is a visionary character but is perceived as a mad man by his family and the local community. Even though the play provides a simple narrative, it is Dreyer's vision which moves the work beyond the stage to a higher level of visual interpretation. Despite the action only taking place within a short timeframe, the spectator is drawn into what feels like a claustrophobic world haunted by characters' unceasing piety. There is a strangeness and uncomfortableness throughout due to Dreyer's slow style direction. The welcoming domestic space becomes estranged through Dreyer's hypnotic vision.

Schrader observes that 'In *Ordet*, as in no other Dreyer film, one senses the self-conscious use of the transcendental style.'<sup>62</sup> Rick Warner states that the finale does not entirely explain the 'residual strangeness of this film [...] the miracle does more to deepen and intensify the film's mysteries than it does to elucidate them. We *are* prompted to rethink the overall shape and tectonics of Dreyer's experiment.'<sup>63</sup> This view highlights the depth of multilayering the film encapsulates. Dreyer spoke about the influences he had on his adaptation:

The new scientific thinking which followed Einstein's theory of relativity had shown that outside of the three-dimensional world which we can experience with our senses, both a

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<sup>62</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), p.153.

<sup>63</sup> Rick Warner, 'Filming a Miracle: *Ordet*, *Silent Night*, and the spirit of contemplative cinema,' *Critical Quarterly*, (2014) Vol.57, No 2, Wiley, pp-47-71 (p.51).

fourth dimension, the dimension of time, and a fifth dimension, the dimension of the psychic, can be found. That means that it was now possible to experience events that had not yet taken place. A new perspective was adopted which allowed us to recognise a fundamental connection between exact science and intuitive religion [...] the mentally ill Johannes is perhaps closer to God than the Christians he was surrounded by.<sup>64</sup>

Dreyer's ideas showcase a much larger canvas of thought at work as Warner recognised. The film's narrative and cinematic stylistics invite the audience to contemplate the true depth of meaning on offer. Dreyer poses more questions than answers but in a purposeful way. The film asks questions about a psychic dimension and future events which have not yet taken place. Critic Roger Ebert states:

The camera movements have an almost godlike quality. At several points, such as during the prayer meeting, they pan back and forth slowly, relentlessly hypnotically. There are a few moments of astonishing complexity, beginning in the foreground, somehow arriving in the background, but they flow so naturally you may not even notice them. The lighting, in black and white, is celestial – not in a joyous but in a detached way. [...] When the film was over, I had plans. I could not carry them out. I went to bed. Not to sleep. To feel. To puzzle what had happened to me. [...] It had found its way into my soul.<sup>65</sup>

Ebert's interpretation is a perfect example highlighting the transcendental elements the film delivers for the spectator. The idea that a film leaves the viewer rendered lost in a cloud of thought and interpretation matches Schrader's ideas around Dreyer's stylistic approach. *Ordet* is created to make the audience 'feel' and find its way into the viewer's 'soul.' This is done through the hypnotic camera

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<sup>64</sup> Carl Theodor Dreyer, *Om Filmen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendals Ugleboger, 1964), p.91.

<sup>65</sup> Roger Ebert, *The Great Movies III* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p.280.

work panning back and forth and the celestially ‘detached’ lighting. This style of cinematography used by Dreyer is also found resonating throughout the work of Tarkovsky.

*The Sacrifice* is also laden with a similar ‘proliferation of meaning’<sup>66</sup> under the spectral influence of Dreyer. The film is multi-layered and contemplative through the similar use of slow cinema techniques and characterisation taken from Dreyer. Monk’s original play text is linked to Tarkovsky through the spectral channelling of ‘theatricalization’<sup>67</sup> and ‘*éspacement*’<sup>68</sup> via Dreyer’s *Ordet*. Both films take on transcendental themes. *The Sacrifice* displays similar camera techniques which act in a hypnotic way, enhanced by a dreamlike quality in the use of setting and lighting. The same sense of detachment permeates the film through this Dreyer-like direction.

Contrapuntally, the Stonebridgean theme of ‘estrangement’ connects Tarkovsky with Dreyer in *The Sacrifice* in varied ways. The character of Maria is a critical bridge between the two. When the audience first encounters Maria she is ordered around by Alexander’s wife Adelaide (Susan Fleetwood) in a passive aggressive fashion. Maria’s physical appearance works in contrast to the well-dressed feminine couture of the female family members and housemaid Julia (Valérie Mairesse). Maria is dressed in blacks and greys wearing a headscarf (Figure.2.14). She is othered by her appearance which carries with it an element of peasantry when compared with her white middle-class employers. Her facial expression is one of fixed submission and sadness, Maria does not blink very often which gives an uncomfortable aura to her presence. She merely stares and is subservient in her responses to Adelaide.

It is ironic that as the narrative unravels it is Maria who holds great mystical power. The haunting of Dreyer’s Jeanne (Figure.2.15) is present as the film was originally to be titled ‘The Witch’ by Tarkovsky and this is because he had originally planned to create a film about a terminally ill man

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<sup>66</sup> Serge Denay, *The Cinema House & the World – 1. The Cahiers du Cinéma Years 1962-1981*, trans. by Christine Pichini (South Pasadena: Semiotext<e>, 2022), p.16.

<sup>67</sup> David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (London: University of California Press, 1981), p.149.

<sup>68</sup> Serge Denay, *The Cinema House & the World – 1. The Cahiers du Cinéma Years 1962-1981*, trans. by Christine Pichini (South Pasadena: Semiotext<e>, 2022), p.16.

‘who is instructed by a soothsayer to spend the night with a “witch.”’<sup>69</sup> He would then be cured and seek a new life with the witch devoid of material possessions – ‘a spiritual regeneration expressed in the image of a woman.’<sup>70</sup> The nuclear element of the film was added during production. In *The Sacrifice*, Alexander’s friend Otto explains to him that the only way to save humanity from the nuclear annihilation is to sleep with Maria, a ‘good witch.’<sup>71</sup> In quite an extreme interpretation, Dunne states: ‘despite the fact lying with a witch may prevent the apocalypse, Maria is part of a larger demonic body that emanates from the anti-Christ.’<sup>72</sup> But in contrast to this, Le Fanu describes Maria as a ‘benevolent witch, a holy innocent.’<sup>73</sup> Maria is a very Christian symbolic character despite the otherworldliness that she also embodies. She has a visual binary existence as angel/devil and Jeremy Mark Thompson describes her as a ‘Goddess’ but who also ‘represents dark.’<sup>74</sup> The same could be said of Dreyer’s Jeanne as she has a connection to God, but the Christian community she exists in consider her a witch. Both characters can be compared in physiognomy despite there being nearly sixty years difference in film production: Tarkovsky employs close-ups like Dreyer. The ghost of Dreyer is present both technically as well as physically.

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Figure.2.14

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Figure.2.15

A contrapuntal reading reveals Dreyer’s Jeanne as a spectral presence in *The Sacrifice*, haunting the film. Both characters are consistently front-lit and carry with them a possessed

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<sup>69</sup> Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky – A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 172.

<sup>70</sup> Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time – Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p.220.

<sup>71</sup> *The Sacrifice*, Andrei Tarkovsky (Artificial Eye, 2016) [on Blu ray].

<sup>72</sup> Nathan Dunne, ‘Tarkovsky and Flaubert: *The Sacrifice* and Saint Anthony,’ from *Tarkovsky*, ed. by Nathan Dunne (London: Black Prince Publishing, 2008) pp.283 -302 (299).

<sup>73</sup> Mark Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), p.128.

<sup>74</sup> Jeremy Mark Robinson, *The Sacred Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* (Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2006), p.498.

melancholy in their eyes. Jeanne's hair is cut very short whilst Maria's is tied up and hidden away, long hair is sensual and feminine but is repressed due to their holy characterisation. Susan Sontag argued: 'It was principally the influence of Christianity that deprived beauty of the central place it had in classical ideals of human excellence. By limited excellence (*virtus* in Latin) to *moral* virtue only, Christianity set beauty adrift – as an alienated, arbitrary, superficial enchantment.'<sup>75</sup> Both Jeanne and Maria are labelled as witches. There is a clear dichotomy which separates them from convention, both physically and psychologically. Both these characters hold a spiritual resonance but are othered by their communities. Robinson argues that 'Maria is the strongest woman in the film, though she lives alone; Adelaide, surrounded by people, is the weakest.'<sup>76</sup> Maria holds the key to the survival of humanity as Alexander is told by Otto, and when she and Alexander do sleep together this becomes a metaphysical moment as the characters slowly float upwards together in animation (Figure.2.16). It is the physical act which is supposed to bring about the resurrection of humanity. Alexander sacrifices his marriage vows and family position to bring about the reversal of the apocalypse, whereas Maria's body has been sacrificed by being used as the vessel for resurrection.

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Figure.2.16

Maria and Alexander are surrounded by features of Maria's apartment: dark walls and basic seating, but bright light courses through the windows. This is very different to the materialistic domestic space of Alexander's family and signifies the difference between the binary material/spiritual. This theme also links back to the sparse cinematography that Dreyer employs in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. However, though there are minimal props, the two films link with their transcendental nature. The scene between Maria and Alexander becomes unreal and transcendent and surprises the audience. The scene then leads to the film's fantasy denouement; Alexander returns home and sets fire to the family

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<sup>75</sup> Susan Sontag, *Susan Sontag on Women* (London: Penguin Random House, 2023), p.90.

<sup>76</sup> Jeremy Mark Robinson, *The Sacred Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* (Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2006), p.498.

house and is physically pursued by the family who call an ambulance to have him taken away. There is only Maria who supports him. It is never truly known if the world has been saved or if this dreamlike ending represents the narrative's unreality throughout.

In *Ordet*, Inger, according to Raymond Carney, is 'Dreyer's most extraordinary creation.'<sup>77</sup> She is the focal point of warmth and love in the Borgen household: 'Inger can pray to God just as hard as she works at soothing delicate egos and allaying fits of pique or brooding.'<sup>78</sup> Inger's ghost can be found in *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice*. *Nostalgia*'s Eugenia links with Inger in the framework of the Skakovian binary opposite because in Tarkovsky's film she is presented physically as the renaissance Virgin Mary figure, even though she is unable to pray and embrace the Christian ceremony she is attending. Eugenia is similarly isolated; she is told that a woman's role is to sacrifice by giving birth and raising children. She is ultimately sacrificed to a mysterious and untrustworthy lover. Eugenia cannot exist in a world of faith so instead she is forced into capitalist heteronormative conformity, despite her ultimate unhappiness. Conversely, Inger has both the physical embodiment of a renaissance icon, displays the devout Christian holy faith and is symbolically pregnant, but dies during childbirth, making the ultimate sacrifice.

Though Inger is not labelled a 'witch' as Maria is in *The Sacrifice*, comparisons can also be drawn between the two characters. In *Ordet*'s climatic scene, Inger is resurrected by Johannes. Her corpse is a symbol of religious peace and purity (Figure.2.17) surrounded by the celestial light that Ebert discussed. In what is initially a scene of sorrow there is also a sense of the uncanny lurking. Dreyer's pacing is slow, the audience is entranced by the lighting coupled with the sad repentance of the Borgens and the Petersens.

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<sup>77</sup> Raymond Carney, *Speaking the Language of Desire – The Films of Carl Dreyer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.182.

<sup>78</sup> Carney., p.183.

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Figure.2.17

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Figure.2.18

Light blazes through the background windows in a similar cinematic direction as Tarkovsky uses towards the end of *The Sacrifice* (Figure.2.18). There is a religious light surrounding the central characters symbolically showing the presence of God. However, this is not a reassuring sensation. Inger lays dead in an open casket whilst Alexander is sleeping with the ‘witch’ Maria. Both scenes feel melancholic and strange but are juxtaposed with the heavenly light that pervades. The darkness is to be lit by a heavenly spirituality which the light signifies. Dreyer’s haunting influence on Tarkovsky’s work is clear in these thematic and stylistic details.

Inger is a symbol of faith but also carries with her a sense of otherworldliness post-resurrection. Inger returns from the dead but holds the same characteristics as Maria after her rebirth. Gone is the devoted Christian mother to be replaced by an unreal figure of gentle strangeness. She is embraced by the family upon her return but also faces elements of otherness and exile due to the nature of her dramatic return from the dead. Dreyer’s direction emphasises this point. She takes on the otherworldly elements that Maria displays in *The Sacrifice*. Figures.2.19 and 2.20 show the unique way in which Dreyer stylistically makes Inger seem incongruous.

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Figure.2.19

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Figure.2.20

Whilst her husband Mikkel looks on in happiness, there is an uncanniness to Inger in her resurrected form. She is now a witch figure herself having defied conventionality and been reborn. Her eyes are glazed over as though always looking beyond to somewhere else with a fixed stare: she is now a

visionary much like Maria in *The Sacrifice* (Figures.2.21 and 2.22). She rarely blinks and has become as Johannes was at the start of *Ordet* but with a sense of emotional hope rather than constant sadness.

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Figure.2.21

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Figure.2.22

Figure.2.18 showcases the bright light of faith emerging through to what has been a dramatically dark film narrative. In Figure.2.19 the audience can see how light also pours onto the faces of Alexander and Maria during the religious moment. Both scenes capture climatic and challenging action from the films. Inger has become much like Dreyer's Jeanne with her screen presence acting as religious signification. This is manifested with a warmth within the characterisation but also a strangeness and unconventionality. The audience is left to ponder the meanings behind these transcendently styled moments.

The paradoxes and mysteries that pervade the finale of *Ordet* also frame *The Sacrifice*. It is through 'theatricalization' and *éspacement* that Dreyer can transform words from the scripted play, set within the confines of the stage, into an experience which is collectively provocative and intellectually challenging for the cinematic audience. Dreyer haunts Tarkovsky through influential cinematographic technique which uses slow cinematic elements, otherworldly narratives, and individual female characterisation in *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice*.

Tarkovsky's film is also haunted further through the themes of spiritual resurrection and otherworldliness from Dreyer's first sound film, *Vampyr*. However, this film features a resurrection of a different kind, which is gothic and supernatural and features the dead coming back to life to wreak havoc on the living. Its male protagonist also registers as an influence on Tarkovsky, as *Vampyr* features a dream-like zone which the protagonist must travel through, much like Tarkovsky's male protagonists do so in *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice* and previous works such as *Stalker*. Using Said's

contrapuntal reading there are Stonebridgean elements of exile and otherness found in *Vampyr* which I argue have a profound influence on Tarkovsky's male protagonists and narrative structures.

*Vampyr* was written by Dreyer and screenwriter Christen Jul. It was based on Sheridan Le Fanu's short story collection *In a Glass Darkly* published in 1872. The leading novella incorporated into the collection was *Carmilla* which, as Kim Newman says, 'is notable for tackling a vampire theme decades before Le Fanu's countryman Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula*.'<sup>79</sup> *Vampyr* takes its lead from this story:

Allan Grey [...] arrives at an old inn by the side of a river and explores a nearby castle where an evil doctor appears to be helping a vampire prey on the lord's two daughters – one of whom is bedridden, suffering from a strange sickness, while the other is being held captive. Grey reads a book on vampirism and acts as our surrogate in this curious realm.<sup>80</sup>

It is a chilling tale and Dreyer's direction offers the viewer an opening into the world of strangeness and haunting throughout the film. Anne Bilson states: 'It's hard to spot where nightmares end and reality begins. This really is a film that exemplifies the idea of dreaming with our eyes open.'<sup>81</sup> This concept summarises *Vampyr* succinctly but also ties together the theme of Dreyer's continuous presence in Tarkovsky's work. Tarkovsky's films have a similar atmosphere of 'dreaming with our eyes open' due to Dreyer's presence through cinematographic techniques and style. *Vampyr* uses the Skakov binary theme of real/unreal through the techniques of slow contemplative cinema. Much like Tarkovsky's oeuvre, it is a mystical creation that leads the spectator into a contemplative yet uncertain feeling. Jean and Dale Drum state:

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<sup>79</sup> Kim Newman, 'Sheridan Le Fanu's gothic spirit lives on,' *The Guardian*, Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/aug/28/sheridan-le-fanu-two-centuries-birth-vampire-ghost-stories> [accessed 2 July 2023].

<sup>80</sup> Anne Bilson, 'Vampyr: No 9 best horror film of all time,' *The Guardian*, Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2010 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/oct/22/vampyr-dreyer-horror> [accessed 2 July 2023].

<sup>81</sup> Bilson.

*Vampyr* is a glimpse into a twisted, mystical, confused world of evil and corruption that is bizarre in the fullest sense, both in content and execution. It is a world in which shadows leave their owners and commit murder, a man witnesses his own funeral from within his casket, and the machinations of vampires, so often made ludicrous in other movies, become real, incarnate evil. On the surface, this is a horror film, yet its manner is so strikingly different, its approach so intensely real that it must be taken for much more.<sup>82</sup>

The otherworldliness that the film exhibits scenes of horror but also prompts a deeper than surface reading. Peter Swaab says: 'we are unable securely to interpret what we see either as material or as illusory. [...] The film makes us uncertain about the ability of Grey's perceptions but also about our own, and uncertainty moreover about the boundaries between these two.'<sup>83</sup> The film makes the viewer question the reality of Grey's world but also simultaneously has a deeper contemplative experience which hauntologically links to Tarkovsky with *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice*.

The stylistic aesthetic the Dreyer creates takes the audience to a place of much deeper contemplation. Dreyer said of the film:

With *Vampyr* I wanted to create a daydream on film, and I wanted to show that the sinister lies not in the things around us but in our own subconscious. If we are, through some occurrence or another, brought to a great state of tension, there are no limits to where fantasy can lead us or what strange meanings, we can ascribe to the real things which surround us.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Jean Drum and Dale Drum, *My Only Great Passion – The Life and Films of Th. Dreyer* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000), pp. 149-150.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Swaab, 'Un Film Vampirisé: Dreyer's *Vampyr*,' *Film Quarterly* (2009) Vol.62, No.4, pp 56-62 (p.60).

<sup>84</sup> Ebbe Neergaard, *En Filminstruktors Arbejde* (Copenhagen: Atheneum Dansk forlag, 1940) p.68. cited: Jean Drum and Dale Drum, *My Only Great Passion – The Life and Films of Th. Dreyer* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000), p.155.

A fantastical uncanniness reigns through the film with the use of various created states of mystifying zonal space visually established by Dreyer via bizarre and enigmatic imagery. For example, at the film's outset, when Grey (Julian West) enters his surroundings, he is confronted by a zone of supernatural unease and otherness. Grey is an exile in a strange land, and he observes a figure holding a scythe and ringing a bell by a lake (Figure.2.23). Dreyer employs slow camera motion and minimal cuts which condenses the action and forces the audience to gaze upon the strangeness for longer than comfortable, but this camera effect also gives the scene a dark but dreamlike reflective aesthetic. There is a mist permeating through the shot which adds weight to the spectral density of the scene. A feeling of danger and menace lurks, in a pathetic fallacy used by Dreyer to signify the dangers to come. The ringing of the bell coupled with the film's slow morose classical score adds an element of menace to the scene. The pacing is slow as the shots pause on Grey and then the figure, prompting the audience's extended consideration of the otherworldly imagery on screen. The scythe is intimidating and the holder faceless, like a shadow of death filling the frame across the mist. There is a sense of the unknown to the scene which requires exploration through active audience introspection, a more transcendental level of thought.

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Figure.2.23

*Vampyr* is not just intended to frighten its audience. The *mise en scène* is unsettling to watch on many levels, as there is a constant atmosphere of incongruity. As the audience watches they are invited to feel uncomfortable and slightly unnerved by what they see. The audience is hypnotised into the unreality of Dreyer's creation and makes the spectator feel viscerally engaged in the dark zones that Allen Grey navigates. Bordwell states:

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<sup>85</sup> *Vampyr*, Carl Theodor Dreyer (Eureka Entertainment, 2022) [on Blu-ray].

To admit that *Vampyr* is a “hard” film is not a confession of Philistinism but a basic aesthetic datum which the critic must confront and examine [...] acknowledging a work’s particular opaqueness or impedances is often the most direct route to grasping its salient properties.<sup>86</sup>

By acknowledging the complexity of Dreyer’s film, the audience can begin to appreciate the work’s disruption of the classical cinema aesthetic. The use of ‘opaqueness’ by Dreyer is a technique used by Tarkovsky throughout his oeuvre, with meanings consistently hidden and the hauntological influence stemming from the Dreyer works through cinematography and characterisation.

Even though *Vampyr* is a sound film, it is a very early example and vocalisation is used minimally, which adds to the uncanny and disturbing nature of the piece. David Rudkin posits: ‘Wolfgang Zeller’s score is an intelligent presence in the film, its darkness that of a haunted melancholy rather than of the sinister, and it merits truer hearing [...] voices and source-sounds heard as if from the edge of the inaudible are integral to the experience that Dreyer intended.’<sup>87</sup> Grey is not in a friendly space. This is then matched with a soundscape of a disturbing male voice emanating from somewhere in the inn which Grey pursues. The spectator is immediately beguiled by this stylistic direction. Bilson’s idea of ‘dreaming with our eyes open’ is enhanced again as the pacing is slow and contemplative, which again matches Dreyer’s other uses of transcendental style. The camera work in *Vampyr*’s opening feels unconventional, interchanging between point of view shots, slow pans and mid-shots, the pacing being consistently slow and contemplative. Rudkin explains in relation to our initial viewing of Grey:

In this dysfunctional syntax, we now begin to see a principle at work. From the moment Grey first appeared on screen, we have been trying to construct a spatial coherence binding the features we see. Each shot frustrates us: verticals are elided, distances cancelled, an emphatic

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<sup>86</sup> David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 1981), p.93.

<sup>87</sup> David Rudkin, *Vampyr*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: BFI Film Classics, 2013), p.34.

camera movement toward Grey is left unexplained. Just as the disjunctions of *Joan* had the effect of situating the drama in a metaphysical space, the disjunctions of this sequence bring Grey into a non-rational space. And in this non-rational space, there is the perverse function of light.<sup>88</sup>

Tarkovsky also creates the ‘non-rational space’ through camera and lighting and there is a lack of ‘spatial coherence’ due to the dreamlike direction. Comparisons are drawn initially with a scene from *Nostalgia* in which bathers from St Catherine’s Pool (Figure.2.24) are heard by Gorchakov and Eugenia discussing the local ‘mad man’ Domenico (Erland Josephson), a Christian zealot who kept his wife and children locked away from the outside world for fear of sin.

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Figure.2.24

Domenico is banned from entering the pool because of his behaviour. The audience hears the conversation from different swimmers, but this is mostly overlaid which gives a disembodied atmosphere to the scene. The style in which the bathers just stare at Gorchakov and Eugenia is unsettling and jarring. Like Dreyer’s *Vampyr* there is a mist created by the water which surrounds the characters who appear emotionless in their expression. They are ghosts occupying the zone which Gorchakov has entered, providing a warning to stay away from the mysterious Domenico. These haunting characters generate a sense of unwelcomeness that Gorchakov feels as a Russian in Italy.

The scene is preceded by a sequence where Gorchakov meets Eugenia in his hotel space and Tarkovsky draws on his stylistic influence from Dreyer’s *Vampyr* in terms of pace, lighting and framing. Gorchakov emerges from his bathroom under a very slow take and framed by the door (Figure.2.25): light flickers on in sequence but the scene feels tense, so that what is simply a character emerging from one room to another feels uncanny. In *Vampyr*, throughout Grey’s introductory exploration of the inn, he too is continuously framed by door openings. Figures.2.25 and 2.26 show an

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<sup>88</sup> Rudkin, p.46.

example of both protagonists emerging into rooms and we can see the comparison in terms of framing and décor. The walls are rustic and undecorated, and the lighting is low key which gives a dark air. Both central characters are isolated in their spaces and the influence on Tarkovsky from Dreyer is concrete. The characters are both similarly framed within these haunted spaces. They are both exploring their unhomely surroundings in a dreamlike space. Tarkovsky has used Dreyer's framing technique to give Gorchakov the same sense of isolation as Grey.

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Figure.2.25

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Figure.2.26

The stylistic pattern continues slightly later in both scenes. Figure.2.27 shows a shot of Grey continuing his exploration of his surroundings in *Vampyr* and again the motif of door framing is paramount, he is small and entrapped in his surroundings. In comparison, when Gorchakov meets Eugenia, they are both framed in a Dreyer-esque fashion (Figures.2.28 and 2.29). The haunting influence of Dreyer is present in the more modern Tarkovsky film. The lighting in both scenes is dim which gives a gothic atmosphere to both scenes. All the protagonists are presented within shadow due to the 'perverse function of light' as Rudkin states, which breaks established norms of cinematic representation. Bordwell says of *Vampyr*:

The film refuses to establish space in the fashion of the classical Hollywood cinema [...] what we have instead is a profoundly discontinuous space [...] the revelation of space rather than situating us more comfortably, disorients us.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 1981), p.98.

Due to this directorial style the viewer can feel the sense of otherness; the characters do not belong in the worlds they are occupying. The buildings are plain and envelope the characters, which adds to the chillingness of otherness bestowed upon the protagonists; they are ghosts themselves haunting their own space of their exile. Tarkovsky's directorial choices reveal this Dreyer haunting, through lighting and framing which give Dreyer spectral weight in these scenes.

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Figure.2.29

As Grey stumbles around the inn he follows a shadow (Figure.2.30) which eventually finds its bodied owner. This is a mind-bending, dreamlike, and mystifying moment which builds on the haunting already established by the man by the foggy lake. The audience has to accept that the film locates in a 'non-rational space'. Contrapuntally, this slow chilling effect haunts Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia* when Eugenia arrives to see Gorchakov at the hotel (Figure.2.31). The hotel door pulls back very slowly, and Eugenia is surrounded by shadows. She is like the shadow that Dreyer establishes in *Vampyr*, though Eugenia is a living person. She is a haunting figure, invading the world of Gorchakov as he sees: a brazen sexualised woman unrelated to the spiritual salvation he seeks.

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Figure.2.30

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Figure.2.31

In *Vampyr*, Grey can then hear dogs barking and children playing only to be confronted by a mysterious looking old Dorfarzt (village doctor) played by Jan Hieronimko who informs Grey that there are no dogs or children. It is a haunting moment similar to Eugenia's appearance. Gorchakov will then have a vision of the pregnant wife he has left back in Russia which forms a causal link to the past he has left behind. As such, the Russian Motherland also haunts the hotel space. This moment also establishes further that the narrative is not conventional and embraces a 'dysfunctional syntax' comparable to Dreyer's work. Skakov says of Tarkovsky's scene:

There is almost no movement, let alone action, registered in the space. The fluctuating sound of rain and the movement of light make the viewer aware of the movement of time. The mesmerising sequence is interrupted by a spatial abnormality – Domenico's dog enters the room from the bathroom and lies down by Gorchakov's side.<sup>90</sup>

The presence of Domenico's dog is confusing and does not belong in that zone. There is a passage of time but the temporality is consuming and contemplative due to the symbolic use of sound to show the transition as Skakov notes. The audience is left having to contemplate the concept and signification of Gorchakov's sense of isolation, coupled with a yearning for a lost home, through this 'mesmerising' scene.

Gorchakov interrogates the noir-like space just as Grey does in *Vampyr*. Both are places of exile but also of unsettling mystery and contemplation. The audience can see how Dreyer's spatial destabilisation reverberates in *Nostalgia*. Gorchakov is constantly shown in spaces with a sense of alienation and uncertainty: 'Whenever he finds himself outdoors he is not interested in his environment; he refuses to explore it. Instead, we see him wandering about most of the time as if he doesn't know what to do with himself. These scenes demonstrate Gorchakov's estrangement from the

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<sup>90</sup> Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky – Labyrinths of Space and Time* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), p.177.

Italian environment and his consequent displacement.<sup>91</sup> These themes run parallel in *Vampyr* as Grey frequently explores environments with no sense of temporality. He also gives the impression of not really knowing what to do with himself as he is lost in the madness of the supernatural zone. Both protagonists are motivated by mystery and are psychologically guided through their spaces by a presence of unsettlement and disunity. They are searching for answers which will end their alienation but are both victims of ‘spatial abnormality’ too.

Grey’s spatial influence can be found in *The Sacrifice* as well; Alexander roams through a zone of uncertainty and exile. He is caught in the domesticated space of the middle-class, yet uncanny, household. There is great anxiety permeating the air as the family faces their inevitable death due to the onset of war. These scenes are interspersed with moments of black and white dreamlike sequences in which a cityscape is shown full of people running chaotically in panic, with detritus blowing around the ground. Skakov states:

The overall narrative uncertainty manifests itself in a number of inexplicable occurrences scattered throughout the film. For example, several strange comments are made, and minor characters become aware of the nuclear catastrophe. Fighter jets fly over the island where Alexander and his family live, and they create havoc inside the house: glasses start trembling, a jug of milk falls and breaks, Julia and Marta start running in a rather theatrical manner from one window to another.<sup>92</sup>

The scenes feel related but incongruously at times, with the ‘inexplicable occurrences’ invading the structure adding to the overwhelming sense of unreality pervading the film. After Alexander sleeps with Maria, he returns to the house and the scenes play out as though nothing has happened; the

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<sup>91</sup> Stefan W. Schmidt, ‘Somatography and film: nostalgia as haunting memory shown in Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia*,’ *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* (2016), Vol.3, No.1, pp.27-41 (p.33).

<sup>92</sup> Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky – Labyrinths of Space and Time* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), p.202.

family meet for breakfast, the conversation is mundane and apparently there is no war. However, the question arises whether there ever was a war in the first place. In *Vampyr*, Grey also finds himself within the confines of a familial domestic middle-class space. As Alexander's household in *The Sacrifice* is haunted by death, Grey is also ensnared in a space littered with similar hauntings and further 'inexplicable occurrences.'

In a particularly chilling scene in Dreyer's film, female characters again play a huge role as Sybille Schmitz's, Léone, is being drained of life mysteriously and she provides a disturbing performance in front of Rena Mandel's, Gisèle. The Dreyer stylistics are evidenced again as Léone is framed in close-up much like Jeanne and always staring beyond the camera as though seeing something beyond everybody else (Figure.2.32) much like Johannes and Jeanne. She provides a frightening atmosphere as she yearns for death. She is a visionary who can feel a presence in the room and glances around in dark recognition whilst the other characters can only look on in fright: 'Léone is the dark martyr-sister to Joan herself.'<sup>93</sup> This links the ideas seen with Dreyer's other sacrificial female characters such as Jeanne and Inger and in-turn forges the haunting legacy of character sacrifice in Tarkovsky's films. Léone is entangled with the vampire and much like Dreyer's Jeanne has visions which nobody else is privy to, however, Léone's are visions of the vampire. Léone is utterly othered by her behaviour but there are parallels to be drawn with Maria in *The Sacrifice*. Maria is deemed a witch and through Tarkovsky's vision, 'profoundly other because of her Icelandic origins, unmarried status and humble mode of existence (she lives in a semi-demolished building outside the village centre), makes for a perfect witch.'<sup>94</sup> She is framed in a similar fashion to Léone; lit from the front and facially disturbed as she too can see beyond the reality presented (Figure.2.33). Grey's isolation in *Vampyr* is compounded by Léone's predicament and behaviour, much like Maria, Léone has an otherworldly aesthetic. Ironically, both female characters are isolated and outcast but it is they who hold the keys to the narrative. Léone represents the truth of the heart of darkness invading the

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<sup>93</sup> David Rudkin, *Vampyr*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: BFI Film Classics, 2013), pp.67-69.

<sup>94</sup> Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky – Labyrinths of Space and Time* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), p.206.

domestic space, whilst Maria holds the key to unlocking the family's survival in *The Sacrifice*. They are both visionary witches.

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Figure.2.32

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Figure.2.33

The tight framing devices Dreyer employs in *Vampyr* are again embraced by Tarkovsky in *The Sacrifice*. The audience can see Grey framed again through various claustrophobic spaces as he wanders inside and outside to witness the death of the vampire which is terrorising the house (Figures.2.34-2.36). Alexander's family are also caught in tight spaces. They may have the surroundings of a comfortable existence but the reality is one of anguish and entrapment by their inevitable deaths (Figures.2.37-2.39). The positioning of the shot evokes the claustrophobic camera framing used by Dreyer. This is coupled with the pacing of *The Sacrifice* which also matches that of *Vampyr*. The film has a slow cinematic pacing as *Vampyr* does, which really chimes with the shared contemplative nature of both works. Through this technique, both films require the viewer to acknowledge the complexities and become actively engaged with searching out meanings. Dreyer's film hauntingly interpenetrates Tarkovsky's film through narrative and cinematography.

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Figure.2.39

The Skakov binary of reality/unreality is prevalent throughout both films. Alexander in *The Sacrifice* finds himself travelling into various zones of uncertainty with unexplainable sequences during the film's running: 'presence/absence develops into a narrative anxiety - the inability to separate dream from reality or the actual from a fantasy of the protagonist's mind.'<sup>95</sup> Much like *Vampyr*, the film is fragmented through a transcendental style; the narrative permeated by contemplative aesthetics through the use of otherworldly zonal spaces. There is the more naturalistic domestic setting of the familial chatter with his family, to an unsettling sequence of the announcement of war, to the traversing to a dreamlike sequence featuring his adult naked step-daughter Marta (Filippa Franzén) walking through a bedroom. Alexander's vision of a chaotic cityscape emerges at points and the scene of Alexander sleeping with Maria holds a particularly significant dreamlike religious purity, smashed by war:

In a close-up we see Marta's face as it turns to the camera; she removes her nightie. There is a medium shot of her bedroom: the wooden bed, a framed picture over it, a folding screen, wildflowers on the nightstand, a mirror, a billowing lace curtain. A naked Marta emerges from behind the screen that is next to the window; she is reflected in the mirror, on the opposite wall. She walks as far as the middle of the headboard of the bed, and we see Alexander fleeing down the corridor which is flooded with water. We hear the shattering sounds of raindrops falling, and receding footsteps. We see the silhouette of Alexander sitting in an

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<sup>95</sup> Skakov, p.204.

armchair, his head down. [...] We then have a close-up of the frightened face of the main protagonist, and a slow panning shot along the many centuries old trees' wet trunks.<sup>96</sup>

The film is laced with this kind of visceral and contemplative slow imagery. The fragmentary style acts as a haunting and intellectually intimidating viewing.

Dreyer haunts Tarkovsky in terms of the films' conclusions. In *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, it is the titular character who is burned at the stake in one of silent cinema's most shocking moments (Figure.2.40). Jeanne is burnt alive; she makes the ultimate sacrifice so not to appease the ecclesiastical patriarchy which surrounds and intimidates. Her faith is devout and will not break for the sake of religious and societal conformity. Sacrificial fire is a theme which is found towards the closure of both *The Sacrifice* and *Nostalgia*. Dreyer, the 'great master' is fully acknowledged by Tarkovsky in these endings.

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Figure.2.40

In *The Sacrifice*, Alexander burns down the family house much to his family's anger, Maria being the only person who supports him. It is an unexpected moment as the spectator is forever wondering and distracted by the narrative idea of seeing if Alexander's actions with Maria have ended the war. The viewer is also left questioning the authenticity of the entire preceding narrative.

McSweeney writes:

Alexander wakes to discover that the world has returned to the day before and the apocalypse has been averted just as he had wished for as if nothing had ever happened. He asks himself the same question the audience is compelled to ask: what was real? Was the whole thing a

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<sup>96</sup> Layla Alexander – Garrett, *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Collector of Dreams* (London: Glagoslav Productions, 2014), pp.205-206.

dream or a fantasy? Tarkovsky offers no explanation for the viewer, as the film has presented the event as a bifurcation of reality.<sup>97</sup>

For Alexander to sacrifice his home leaves the film with a sombre thought-provoking tone as the protagonist is driven away by ambulance crew and the house is burned to a cinder. Although he has not burned to death, he has sacrificed his soul and all that he had in the world: he has abandoned his family and destroyed his old existence entirely. Turovskaya states: ‘Alexander consigns to the flames all his worldly possessions. And so flares up the last of Tarkovsky’s conflagrations, like a demonstration of the power of Nature – or perhaps like a pillar of fire, or a fire of sacrifice, a consuming fire.’<sup>98</sup> Figure.2.41 shows the extent of the sacrificial destruction Alexander unleashes.

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Figure.2.41

There is nothing left of the home, Alexander’s life will never be the same again as he leaves behind all of his materialism from before. The green space dominates, the claustrophobia of the domesticated space, which is consistent during the film, is finally destroyed and replaced by the openness of nature, Emma Widdis writes: ‘His landscapes create a dual image of the natural world, at once protective, private and subjective, and vast, intractable and impersonal.’<sup>99</sup> On the one hand he is liberated and surrounded by the now empty land; there is now only the natural earth; gone is the social materialist conformity that the house signified. On the other hand, Alexander is chased off the land by ambulance workers signifying the grounded resonance of behavioural convention. Being driven away by ambulance workers signifies that he is deemed no longer of sound mind. Yet, he has simply attempted to reinvent himself through a sacrificial process and embrace a more spiritual existence. Alexander

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<sup>97</sup> Terence McSweeney, *Beyond the Frame – The Films and Film Theory of Andrei Tarkovsky* (Cyprus: Aporetic Press, 2015), p.151.

<sup>98</sup> Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky – Cinema as Poetry*, trans. by Natasha Ward (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), pp.148-149.

<sup>99</sup> Emma Widdis, ‘One Foot in the Air? Landscape in the Soviet and Russian Road Movie,’ from *Cinema and Landscape*, ed. by Graeme Harper & Jonathan Rayner (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), pp. 75-87 (p.76).

pays the ultimate price as conventionality will never accept his behaviour; therefore, he is observed to have severe mental health problems and is taken away under restraint.

In *Nostalgia* it is Domenico who makes the ultimate sacrifice by setting fire to himself in a piazza in front of a emotionless and statue-esque group of people, whilst Beethoven's Fifth Symphony plays diegetically via a tape recording: 'Domenico immolates himself in order to summon a fractured and alienated humanity to come together as one, to attain mutual understanding; by means of his own sacrifice he seeks to change a callous world.'<sup>100</sup> He too wishes to reject the modern materialistic trappings for a purer existence. (Figures.2.42-2.43). Domenico burns as Dreyer's Jeanne does in a quite shocking scene. The people watching add a real strangeness as they show no reaction. It is an excruciatingly haunting scene and adds to the overall otherworldliness of the film.

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Figure.2.42

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Figure.2.43

Bhaskar Sakar adds:

one vividly hears Domenico writhing on the pavement, ablaze, shrieking in pain and calling out to his dog. Tarkovsky allows for a utopian semblance at the heart of this horrific moment: the tape happens to break on the word "bruder" (German for brother), encapsulating the dying man's fervent hope for a universal brotherhood that will transcend pervasive apathy.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Layla Alexander – Garrett, *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Collector of Dreams* (London: Glagoslav Productions, 2014), p.135.

<sup>101</sup> Bhaskar Sakar, 'Threnody for Modernity,' from *Tarkovsky*, ed. by Nathan Dunne (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), pp.235-259 (p.254).

Domenico sacrifices his soul as an act of martyrdom to symbolise a moment of pure faith, a faith which he wishes mankind to embrace; forming a ‘universal brotherhood.’

Alexander, Domenico and Gorchakov all undertake a Dreyer-esque journey through spaces influenced by the Danish director. It is prescient how Grey in *Vampyr* will journey away from the nightmare he found himself in and leave the darkness behind. He crosses the lake with Gisèle and walks through a wooded area towards a lighted space as the film closes. Crossing the river is symbolic of passing from one zone to the next. This is a trope mirrored by Mizoguchi in *Ugetsu Monogatari* in which water plays a symbolic demarcation between the supernatural and the natural. Grey and Gisèle are free of danger and face lightness moving forward (Figure.2.44).

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Figure.2.44

They are surrounded by the safety of nature and a very natural looking beauty. It is a heavenly scene and is mirrored by Tarkovsky in *Nostalgia* after Gorchakov has crossed Saint Catherine’s Pool at the request of Domenico. Despite the pool being nearly drained, Gorchakov nonetheless attempts the crossing to pass through into a different zone. According to Domenico it is a sacrifice that Gorchakov must make to re-engage with a sense of purity – ‘a path to his salvation,’<sup>102</sup> The spectator is then shown Gorchakov by his dacha back in Russia but also surrounded by the remnants of a cathedral (Figure.2.45). This is yet another fantastical use of imagery.

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Figure.2.45

By crossing the pool, Gorchakov can realise his spiritual connection surrounded by ecclesiastical architecture, but also see his homeland again. The worlds are combined as one and Gorchakov exists in this emotional, yet also liminal space. There is a heavenly presence in the scene with the Dreyer trope of bright white light cascading through above which bathes and frames Gorchakov. This is

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<sup>102</sup> Slavoj Žižek, ‘Andrei Tarkovsky, Or the Thing from Inner Space,’ from *ReFocus – The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, ed. by Sergey Toymontsev (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp.155-177 (p.165).

reminiscent of the same use of white light from Dreyer, which leads Grey to safety, and the light which surrounds Inger at the end of *Ordet* during her resurrection. The protagonists end the films being embraced by a heavenly ambiance. Dreyer's Grey and Inger are reborn in the heavenly light and Gorchakov, who spends the duration of *Nostalgia* searching, arguably is reborn to find the spiritual connection between Russia and Italy and a peace with himself. Dreyer's haunting influence on the finales of *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice* is clearly discernible. The central male protagonists' journey into an unknown state of being, having traversed different zones of existence. They must sacrifice their lives and their possessions to reclaim a life away from the materialistic trappings the modern world offers. As Grey fights through a surreal nightmare zone in *Vampyr*, Gorchakov and Alexander will both have to fight through their own spaces of unreality. Alexander will burn all his material objects and Domenico will ignite his own body as a sacrifice, just as Jeanne martyrs herself in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. These characters make the choice to leave their worlds through symbolic gestures of martyrdom. The male central characters are exiled just as Dreyer's characters are, and they must journey to different real/unreal spaces to find meaning: 'the sacrifice made for the sake of others' salvation.'<sup>103</sup>

Using Said's contrapuntal reading allows the viewer to see where Dreyer is present in the late works of Tarkovsky. Though Tarkovsky did not speak in detail about the influence of Dreyer, referring to him simply as a 'great master,'<sup>104</sup> Said's ideas make visible what is traditionally 'silent or marginally present or ideologically represented,'<sup>105</sup> providing a lens through which to view the hidden significance of Dreyer in *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice*. Tarkovsky was stateless when making his final works and the Stonebridgian themes of exile are prevalent throughout these films. Dreyer worked across Scandinavia and Western Europe and kept his style his own, irrespective of where he made films. However, the themes that Dreyer showcased are found haunting Tarkovsky's films. The protagonists of Gorchakov, Alexander and their surrounding characters are all victims of

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<sup>103</sup> Layla Alexander – Garrett, *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Collector of Dreams* (London: Glagoslav Productions, 2014), p.136.

<sup>104</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time – The Diaries 1970-1986*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p.361.

<sup>105</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 78.

‘estrangement, absence, ellipses, groundlessness, otherness, the giddy freedoms and deep despair of rootlessness.’<sup>106</sup> The contrapuntal reading also shows the historical influence of Dreyer, as his central characters are also suffering from the same themes of exile. Jeanne, Inger, and Grey have been symbolically transposed through time and find themselves in Soviet cinema of the 1980s. Dreyer’s characters all undertake a journey in their narratives and those journeys are distinguished by ideas of salvation through their religious iconography. They are persecuted by their environments and are forced to react and make sacrifices. Jeanne is martyred and burned to death just as Domenico ignites his own flesh in *Nostalgia*. Alexander burns his materialist lifestyle and is persecuted because of it. Maria in *The Sacrifice* is branded a witch but holds the key to humanity’s survival. She too is persecuted because of her almost puritanical way of living when compared to Alexander’s moneyed family and expensive materialist lifestyle. She is an exile due to her otherness as Jeanne is, but is the most important female character in the film due to the religious weight she is burdened with. In *Nostalgia*, Eugenia is also persecuted for being unable to pray. She is often compared physically to renaissance iconography of the Virgin Mary, though ironically does not hold internally the purity of her visual representation. She is sacrificed to the capitalist world instead and faces an unhappy marriage to a mysterious man.

Gorchakov and Alexander both follow the stylistic pattern of the rootless Grey in *Vampyr*. They journey through zones of darkness and discovery. The characters must pass through these spaces to ultimately find a sense of salvation. At the closing of *Vampyr*, Grey is free from the nightmarish zone of unreality to literally wander into the light, having helped defeat evil. By the end of *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice* both Gorchakov and Alexander are free, after journeying through dense spaces of the unreal.

The cinematography employed by Dreyer which features long slow takes, minimal dialogue and expressionistic use of light and sound is replicated in Tarkovsky’s later works. This style enables the viewer to contemplate film meanings more and have a more psychological response to the work

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<sup>106</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People – Writing, Rights and Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.8.

by being an active viewer as opposed to passive. It is a cinema of complexity and contemplation which is designed to take the audience on a transcendental journey, just as the protagonists do in the films on screen. A contrapuntal reading reveals Dreyer is spectrally present in the oeuvre of 80s Tarkovsky through characterisation, narrative, and cinematography. Tarkovsky uses Dreyer's stylistic influence to drive his films whilst made in exile. Dreyer is the cinematic link to the theme of Tarkovsky's personal, yet also visual, exile and statelessness.

*Red Lens* has characters who are similarly lost and likewise traverse haunted spaces. Like Gorchakov and Alexander in Tarkovsky's films, Ivan and Josef in my creative piece offer another perspective from which to view the ideas of exile and statelessness. Both Ivan and Josef are both seeking salvation of some kind. Whether that is coupled with redemption in Josef's case or the determination to make a great cinematic work like Ivan, they both resemble Tarkovskian characters. Both characters travel into an otherworldly zone which is baffling and disorientating. I want the reader to become active as they must do when viewing a Tarkovsky and or Dreyer work to think for themselves in terms of interpreting meaning with the spaces offered by the directors through slow cinema techniques. In *Red Lens* my ensemble of characters are all situated in zones of otherness or strangeness; for example Mirza working for Soviet news and the isolation that brings through her imprisonment having to be a part of the propaganda machine; and film director Dmitri who is fed up with the Soviet Union and wishes to defect to the West, but feels trapped and bound by the KGB monitors who watch him whilst in Paris. Dmitri is free but also caught simultaneously, which mirrors Tarkovsky's exile whilst working across Europe during the 1980s. Tarkovsky had earned creative freedom but could only have that in exile from the Motherland, so arguably was not free at all.

It is through the contrapuntal reading that the themes of exile and isolationism are unveiled in Tarkovsky's work through the veil of the hauntological influence of Dreyer. These influences are found simultaneously in *Red Lens* as another method in which to explore and experience the contemplative and intellectual atmosphere of what it is like to view their films as they were created. It is by using this contrapuntal method that the haunting of Dreyer is shown across Tarkovsky's work as an effective model of exploration. *Red Lens* systematically concretises with the research chapter as it

also features the stylistic narrative structures of *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice*. Characters feature who undergo similar journeys of contemplation matched with an anxiety when faced with the eventual realities of their worlds. The contrapuntal allows for these ideas to be paralleled across both research and creative work.

## Conclusion – The Haunting Tarkovskian Ring of Influence

Andrei Tarkovsky is part of the slow cinema canon. Although he made films before this term was officially coined, he is now seen as being in the vanguard of this new genre. Paul Schrader has subsequently created 'The Tarkovsky Ring'<sup>1</sup> as a way of categorising slow cinema filmmakers by placing directors within the ring space and considering Tarkovsky as a pioneer in this regard. This conclusion explores beyond the Schrader 'Ring' to interrogate the ever-expanding circle of influences and haunting echoes from Tarkovsky's works, firstly in more modern and influential films, but also popular home entertainment such as video games, to reveal how wide the 'Ring' expands into modernity with Tarkovsky's revenant embedded into modern culture.

Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* carries significant influence in popular culture and spectral foresight in relation to the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. Due to the radioactive fallout from that event, an exclusion- zone was created where human beings may not enter, which mirrors the concept of Tarkovsky's film. The Zone in *Stalker* is a mythical space that is overgrown and depopulated, and features a haunted landscape of empty and abandoned buildings. Chernobyl has a parallel level of greenery coupled with abandonment. Svetlana Alexievich writes:

More than twenty years have passed since the accident, yet I have been asking myself ever since: what was I bearing witness to, the past or the future? [...] I see Chernobyl as the beginning of a new history: it offers not only knowledge but also prescience, because it challenges our old ideas about ourselves and the world. [...] What are we capable of comprehending? Is it in our power to extract and decipher meaning of this still unfamiliar horror?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p.32.

<sup>2</sup> Svetlana Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer – A Chronicle of the Future*, trans. by Anna Gunin and Arch Tait (London: Penguin, 2016), p24.

Alexievich discusses Chernobyl as the ‘future,’ and the ‘beginning of a new history’ as it was such a watershed moment. Alexievich's reflection on Chernobyl echoes Tarkovsky's phraseology of temporal and spatial dislocation, desire and loss which describes the desire and disappointment of the Zone. Tarkovsky's film can be viewed retroactively as a way of witnessing the past haunting of the Soviet Union at the time in terms of a dying land of stagnation embroiled in the hyper-real, where people are searching for meaning in their lives beyond what the surface reality offers. *Stalker* also acts simultaneously as a foreteller of what was to come of the Soviet Union's nuclear ambitions; a lost future with a post-human uninhabitable zone. However, Chernobyl has also become a cultural touchstone in Western consciousness. Chernobyl could be pure science-fiction due to the incomprehensibility of such an event occurring on mainland Eastern Europe. Alexievich speculates as to what history bore witness to that day as a globally influential yet indecipherable event. The Chernobyl legacy haunts the West through books, film, and television series, but interestingly now its shadow is cast in simulacra such as video games and table-top role-playing games. However, these are viewed through a Tarkovskian prism as his vision anticipated the nightmare to come. These games echo back to the Soviet Union and so Tarkovsky is now a revenant invading the spaces of popular culture. The exclusion zone around Chernobyl may remind the world hauntingly of the dangers of nuclear catastrophe, but Tarkovsky's Zone visualised and anticipated this future haunting. I argue in conclusion that Tarkovsky haunts the world as a spectre who straddles western art film through his precedent of slow cinema, and popular culture as game designers are forever fuelled by the ghost of Chernobyl which Tarkovsky had already imagined. They are responding creatively to the Soviet legacy in visualising worlds based on the concept of the Zone. The content and contrapuntal reading of his oeuvre is also just as important today during the Soviet era, due to the return of despotism in Russia under the regime of Vladimir Putin. John A. Riley states:

Tarkovsky's films, far from being sidelined by the ending of the Cold War [...] now take on their full significance as a result of its passing. Our ongoing obsession with promised futures

that never seem to arrive and with borders and zones ensures that Tarkovsky's films are relevant and essential.<sup>3</sup>

Stylistically and hauntologically, Tarkovsky's influence in cinema and popular culture is increasingly 'relevant and essential' in the contemporary world in various spectral guises.

My thesis explored selected works of Tarkovsky through the critical lens of Edward Said's contrapuntal reading, and this was paralleled with a creative response to the research, the novella, *Red Lens*. The research section and creative work link, as the creative work incorporated many facets in Tarkovsky's oeuvre that the contrapuntal analysis uncovered. The research section and *Red Lens* are theoretically forged together as a conduit through which to explore the complexity of Tarkovsky's films. Both research and prose narrative co-exist as complementary vehicles in which to explore the creative processes of Tarkovsky's filmmaking. As I explored, the contrapuntal helped examine and interpret the transcendental nature of Tarkovsky's films. This is a style of slow cinema which, as Paul Schrader states, uses 'less abundant and more sparse means, drawing the viewer from the familiar world to the other world [...] it is a progressional relationship.'<sup>4</sup> It is the 'other world' that I analysed using the contrapuntal reading which helped reveal the hauntological influence on Tarkovsky within this 'other' viewing experience. This is where the viewer must be active in seeking meaning through their own interpretations and understandings.

I have used the same ideas to amalgamate my critical and creative work. I ask readers to consider an 'other world' in *Red Lens* through a more analytical reading process. The reader must consider what they think is happening narratologically, which draws on the interpretive viewing experience of a Tarkovsky work. My application of hauntological concepts unveiled Tarkovsky's spectral influences, such as the revenant of Stalin's totalitarianism in his fledgling student film, *The*

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<sup>3</sup> John A. Riley, 'Hauntology, Ruins and the Failure of the Future in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*,' *Journal of Film and Video*, Volume 69, Number 1, Spring 2017. pp. 18-25 (25).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p.177.

*Killers*, and the visual and narratological spectral weight that Kenji Mizoguchi and Carl-Theodor Dreyer both exert over Tarkovsky in the films *Solaris*, *Stalker*, *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice*. I have used the contrapuntal to provide explanation and understanding of the worlds that Tarkovsky generates on screen. These worlds are often complicated and multifaceted but I believe my approach has provided a new understanding of the influences and interpretations of Tarkovsky's cinema.

The research component inspired the creative novella, *Red Lens*, which acts as another way to gain further insight to both the experiences of viewing a Tarkovsky film and his own creative practices. The novella is an effective method via which to explore Tarkovsky's context and creativity as the plot and characters are based on different facets of the life of Tarkovsky and the many complexities of his films. These creative ideas were then channelled together using the analytical findings that my contrapuntal and hauntological readings have uncovered. All the characters in *Red Lens* are spectrally weighed down in a myriad of ways. For example, the character of Larisa is haunted by the editing restrictions placed on her by Goskino officials from above in her role at Lenfilm. She has lived through the cinematic freedoms of the Thaw period before transitioning to Brezhnevian censorship, which has led to her being cynical about the society in which she lives. This represents an analogy to Tarkovsky's experiences, as he too became increasingly frustrated with the denial of creative freedom. However, the story also incorporated hidden elements which the reader must question and contemplate, as certain events contain historical references to texts such as Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. My intention was to prompt the reader to explore the historical significance of Solzhenitsyn's work and the importance of it becoming a piece of samizdat, which as Ann Komaromi says was 'the uncensored, grassroots system of self-publishing found in the USSR,'<sup>5</sup> which places the reader in a particular historical zone. I intended the reader to be challenged to infer or create meaning for themselves, as they would have to do whilst watching a Tarkovsky film. In a deliberate structural and stylistic echoing of the spatial and temporal dislocations encountered in Tarkovsky's work there are moments when the text randomly cuts to different places and characters meet obscure individuals in dreamlike spaces. The reader must interpret what they

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<sup>5</sup> Ann Komaromi, *Soviet Samizdat - Imagining a New Society* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2022), p.2.

think the message truly is through this fragmented approach. The narrative structure is based around the same stylistic approach of Tarkovsky, and therefore I have included scenes which are contemplative and slow. I have foregrounded a fragmented narratological structure, which echoes the dream-like state of Tarkovsky's films. The characters intertwine across the hyper-reality of the Brezhnev era and the beginnings of the Stagnation period in Soviet history. I have captured the minutiae of life during those times through my research into Soviet culture of the 1970s, and linked back historically to the Stalin era to forge a bridge across time between the two periods, to symbolise the 1930s haunting the 1970s.

*Red Lens* also connects to the contemporary world as the piece speaks to today's audience about the rebirth of totalitarianism in modern Russia and the consequences of the geo-political machinations of Russian President, Vladimir Putin. Tarkovsky lived during similar Cold War circumstances of repression and I have created a circular narrative which links all my characters together under the modern yoke of Putin. I included ironic references to Vladimir the Great who was the former ruler of the Kievan-Rus Empire, and whom Putin holds in high regard. Modern totalitarianism haunts the narrative at the conclusion of *Red Lens* because I intend the text to show that historical Soviet repressions have returned to haunt modern Russia through Putin's presence. Russia in 2024 now echoes Tarkovsky's world as a land where the media is state run and any anti-government act is punished by a long prison sentence. Maria Alyokhina from the Russian punk band Pussy Riot observed: 'It's very unsettling, knowing they could grab you at any second. That random passer-by could turn out to be an undercover agent.'<sup>6</sup> Her comment reads like something from a Cold War spy novel, and yet it belongs to contemporary Russia under the Putin government. I included KGB agents in *Red Lens* as a shadowy presence in the 1970s setting. The paranoia from that period is now insidiously returning in modern times. Therefore, with my link to Putin I wanted to show the contemporary reader the relevance of Tarkovsky's Soviet world, which has resurrected under a different leadership. Hauntology is therefore the key theoretical framework which links all aspects of the creative work together in a cohesive fashion, both historically and contemporaneously. The

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<sup>6</sup> Maria Alyokhina, *Riot Days*, (London: Penguin, 2018), p.40.

cinematic scenes in *Red Lens* of Ivan's Stalinist show trial are devoted to the revealing of Putin's character towards the end of the story. I wanted to show Putin and Stalin standing shoulder to shoulder as a dark warning from history, with Brezhnev bridging the two across time. Tarkovsky was haunted by Stalinism and Stagnation and would no doubt have been exiled again under the auspices of Putin. The Tarkovsky Ring incorporates both past and present political manifestations in these historical parallels.

Reflecting Tarkovsky's continuing influence on more modern cinema, Schrader places Hungarian director Béla Tarr in the Tarkovsky Ring. Schrader claims that: 'The placement of various film-makers in the diagram is subjective and to some degree arbitrary [yet] somewhere in the expanses, each artist finds a place.'<sup>7</sup> The fact that Schrader created such a categorisation suggests it is Tarkovsky's films which now haunt modern cinema as an encircling influence. Schrader says:

Tarkovsky's success was the tipping point in the movement toward slow cinema. There is a before -Tarkovsky and an after -Tarkovsky. [...] Tarkovsky was not a "pure" slow cinema stylist – he was more interested in poetry than stasis – but he made slow cinema fashionable. He made Béla Tarr possible.<sup>8</sup>

Although placement in the Ring is 'arbitrary,' I will briefly discuss Tarr to showcase examples where Tarkovsky's hauntological presence is traceable as a spectre in his work. The suggestion of his precedence making Tarr 'possible' highlights how Tarkovsky's legacy lives through into the present. Jacques Rancière states of Tarr:

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (California: University of California Press, 2018), p.33.

<sup>8</sup> Schader, pp.9-10.

he is one of the filmmakers most committed to making time the very stuff of cinematic fiction. He started making films in Communist Hungary. At that moment, he pitted the official rhythm of the construction of socialism against the everyday ways of life, problems and aspirations of ordinary people. Then, his major films witnessed the decline and fall of Communism and, after its fall, the advent of a world apparently devoid of any orientation and any faith in the future.<sup>9</sup>

The exaggeratedly slow and at times disjointed nature of temporality in Tarr's works is one of the key elements which reveals the influence of Tarkovsky, as well as a sense of a haunted visual spatiality. Tarr admits Tarkovsky as an influence: 'I just like *Andrei Rublev*, but Tarkovsky was a religious guy and I am not.'<sup>10</sup> However, a contrapuntal reading reveals the haunting presence of Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Tarkovsky's *Stalker* is felt hauntologically in Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994): though both films have different durations and narratives, a contrapuntal reading highlights Tarkovsky's spectre across Tarr's film. Tarr creates zones just as Tarkovsky did in *Stalker*, with Tarr's reflecting the spaces that the realities of communism instated, 'devoid' of creation and inspiration where time is a fiction. Both Tarkovsky and Tarr craft dreamlike, otherworldly spaces occupied by characters who are trying to find meaning in their lives across a slow-paced, questing, and contemplative structure. Both *Sátántangó* and *Stalker* are pieced together through a slow and disjointed temporality. András Bálint Kovács writes of Tarr's use of slow cinema technique:

Each shot is a long sequence, a block of time, and it has to have an exact atmosphere, an opening and a closing, and a dramaturgical curve of its own. [...] All shots must have their

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Rancière, 'Béla Tarr: The Poetics and the Politics of Fiction,' from *Slow Cinema* ed. by Tiago De Luca & Nuno Barradas Jorge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 245-260 (245-246).

<sup>10</sup> Martin Kudlac, "'Be More Radical Than Me!': A Conversation with Béla Tarr,' 18 Jul 2016 <<https://mubi.com/en/notebook/posts/be-more-radical-than-me-a-conversation-with-bela-tarr>> [accessed 5 August 2024].

own individual aesthetic essence, and in this respect they are in fact reminiscent of the construction of space in time employed by Tarkovsky.<sup>11</sup>

There is an echo here of Tarkovsky's imagining of a film as a single shot or take as this 'block of time' and the Tarkovskian 'construction of space in time' is demonstrated in *Sátátangó* which runs at 7 hours 12 minutes. With such a long duration this is an encapsulation of the slow cinema style that Tarkovsky used. For example, the film is constructed by long takes analogous to Tarkovsky technique, where the viewer must fill the gaps that the visual narrative offers:

In consequence, all kinds of long takes create in the viewer some feeling of participating in the space viewed. The participatory effect is enhanced by the movement of the camera during a long take, as it provides the sensation of moving about in the space, the spectator discovering the space together with the camera. [...] Either way, the long take is always more anthropomorphic than short takes and discontinuous changes of angle.<sup>12</sup>

The 'participatory effect' is the same as Tarkovsky's films and Tarr's work requires an active engagement by the viewer. Audience participation is expected and required to make meanings in the works. Tarr employs the use of this immersive style of camera work to place the viewer in the 'space' which gives scenes the 'anthropomorphic' cognisance, where the viewer is not passive but more actively engaged in seeking meaning through the slowness as previously embraced by Tarkovsky. *Sátátangó* is filmed in black and white and adapted from the novel of the same name by László Krasznahorkai. The narrative:

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<sup>11</sup> András Bálint Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr - The Circle Closes* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2013), pp 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> Kovács, p.50.

tells the story of a ruined collective farm whose inhabitants are having affairs with each other, conspiring against each other, and constantly being observed by a drunken doctor (Peter Berling). The charismatic trickster Irmiás (Mihaly Vig) manages to cheat most of the villagers out of the little savings they have, though he himself is manipulated by the local government.<sup>13</sup>

This nightmarish scenario enables the slow and dreamlike stylistic visual presentation Tarr creates. The scenes are often long and drawn out with characters' transitions across the frame lasting several minutes. Ranciére describes a 'dissociation between the visual and the sound [...] as a form of fragmentation or critical disorientation.'<sup>14</sup> This is very evident in *Sátántangó* even near the film's beginning in which the viewer is treated to a mid-shot of a kitchen which slowly fades up from blackout. The only sound is the chime of a distant bell. After around 4 minutes of the same camera angle and diegetic sound, the character of Futaki (Miklós Székely B.) eventually enters (Figure. 3.1).

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Figure.3.1

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Figure.3.2

This scene is visually testing for the viewer in terms of duration and quite hypnotic due to the rhythmic distant chiming of the bell, and the fact that the audience has very little to look at; the viewer is drawn into the emerging back light from the window. Futaki is a ghostlike shadow draping across this funereal space. The story and characters are completely different, but the viewer can see an

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<sup>13</sup> Thorsten, Botz-Bornstein, *Organic Cinema – Film, Architecture and the Work of Béla Tarr* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017), p.3.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Ranciére, 'Béla Tarr: The Poetics and the Politics of Fiction,' from *Slow Cinema* ed. by Tiago De Luca & Nuno Barradas Jorge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 245-260 (p.253).

<sup>15</sup> *Sátántangó*, dir. Béla Tarr (Curzon Cinema, 2022) [on Blu-Ray].

allusion to the haunting of Tarkovsky's *Stalker* in which the protagonist makes his first appearance and emerges into a similar dull space (Figure.3.2). The pacing is also slow as Stalker gets out of bed and moves into the low-key lit space, and the shot is prolonged as he gets dressed with minimal mid-shot camera work. The diegetic sound is also minimalist with only Stalker's footsteps hitting creaking floorboards. The audience waits and observes this slow opening sequence as they must in Tarr's work. In a parallel to the experience of viewing *Stalker*, the opening of *Sátátangó* creates a depressing yet absorbing sense of reflection and foreboding.

Enhancing the visual style, Tarr uses sound to produce a strong sense of disorientation and 'dissociation' in the spectator. The sequence in *Sátátangó* where Irimiás (Mihály Vig) and Petrina (Putyi Horváth) are merely walking forwards through a town is an example of the power of this dissociation (Figure.3.3).

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Figure.3.3

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Figure.3.4

The camera follows the two from behind as they continue walking. No footsteps can be heard, only the constant sound of the wind. However, the wind sounds powerful due to its exaggerated amplification but visually this is contradicted by the litter just being blown around gently. The diegetic noise of the wind is loud and feels unconventional in terms of sound-scaping. This provides an odd aural sensation for the viewer; the space feels strange and otherworldly due the excessive noise of the wind. It is intimidating and acts as prophetic fallacy as the characters are feared by others and are returning to the local village after some time away. The two villains carry a threat and the sound indicates they are a storm coming. The scene lasts for around 7 minutes and the viewer can only contemplate the abandoned buildings of the town combined with the forward motion camerawork. The spectator is following the journey across a place of decay. There is a feeling of uncanniness and

emptiness as the characters traipse forward through the wind, yet the spectator is also on the same journey as the camera is their eyes and ears.

Tarr has used Tarkovsky's visual storytelling to mirror his own with the haunting influence of *Stalker*. The scene in Tarkovsky's film when the characters enter the Zone via railway cart, is cinematically echoed in *Sátátangó*. The sequence is around 7 minutes which matches Tarr's and shows how there is a slow anticipation to the scene as the protagonists are sitting on a slow-moving railway cart (Figure.3.4) but nothing happens other than eventual close-up shots of the three protagonists combined with the sound of the rail cart on the tracks. The vibrating clacking sound Tarkovsky uses has a hypnotic effect as arguably the overburdening use of wind does from *Sátátangó*. Both sets of characters at that stage of the narratives are journeying into an unknown circumstance, and it is the sound which drives a sense of foreboding and uncertainty. The viewer can hear as well as see the Tarkovskian ghoul striding through Tarr's film.

The space that the characters occupy in *Sátátangó* is sparse farmland. Figures.3.5 and 3.6 showcase the bleak black and white perspective Tarr creates.

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Figure.3.5

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Figure.3.6

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Figure.3.7

The spatiality produces a feeling of the morose and phantasmagorical. The figures are placed far away in black and surrounded by a dank landscape. Yet this is also a mystical space where tricks are played on characters and there is a pervasive sense of the uncanny. The world of *Sátátangó* thus resembles and evokes the world of Tarkovsky's Zone (Figure.3.7). The characters are journeying through it to find a sense of meaning, but little is discovered due to the hopelessness of their situation. Tarr's world

in *Sátátangó* generates the same feeling of melancholic contemplation as the haunted land of the Zone in Tarkovsky's work.

Just as Tarkovsky made use of film noirish elements in *Stalker*, Tarr's film evinces a similar style. In Figure.3.8 a nameless character sits in the local bar filmed in mid-shot. It is a bleak setting of cynicism and contemplation in which characters discuss the lack of hope in their lives. The lack of colour sets the tone and Tarr's use of shadows casts a depressing look. The adoption of noir aesthetics enhances this sense of isolation.

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Figure.3.8

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Figure.3.9

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Figure.3.10

This is also reminiscent of Tarkovsky's student film *The Killers* (Figure.3.9) which also articulated a sense of entrapment. In Tarkovsky's film the characters were threatened by two hoodlums and in Tarr's work the villagers are nervous for the arrival of Irimiás and Petrina. The characters' facial expressions reveal the anxiety of their situations across a noirish space. There are parallels too to be made in the bar scenes in *Stalker* (Figure.3.10) as the central figures are surrounded by low-key lighting and a blank set. Tarr's characters, like Tarkovsky's philosophise about their place in the world. Therefore, Tarkovsky carries spectral weight in one of the most famous films of modern times. *Sátátangó* helped establish Tarr as a more widely respected and ambitious filmmaker, but it is Tarkovsky who resides as a spectral figure across the work in terms of hauntological influence regarding temporality, spatiality, and sound design.

Tarkovsky's circle of influence also stretches into modern popular culture. An example of this can be found in Russian writer Dmitry Glukovsky's *Metro 2033* (2007), which is set in a post-

apocalyptic Moscow Metro system. Human inhabitants are living below ground due to the radioactive dangers persisting from a nuclear war. The narrative focuses on the character of Artyom and his journey through the subway tunnels to warn others of the ‘dark ones’<sup>16</sup> who have evolved through radiation and are a threat to the surviving human population. The initial link between Glukhovsky and Tarkovsky comes in the form of stalkers in the novel. These are characters who roam the radioactive zone above ground, which has become a dangerous and mysterious place but they are held in high regard for their explorative bravery: ‘In the metro, the rare daredevils who had the guts to venture to the surface were called stalkers. [...] Every stalker became a living legend, a demigod, whom everyone, young and old, regarded with rapt amazement. [...] children dreamed of becoming stalkers.’<sup>17</sup> Tarkovsky’s revenant not only shadows in this regard, but *Metro 2033* is also weighted with the sense of distant haunting memory. The ghost of Soviet history symbolically lurks within the narrative. Tarkovsky was haunted by memories of Stalinism and the unreality of Socialist Realism that the contemporary Brezhnev era espoused, with the Zone in *Stalker* manifesting this spectrality as a hyper-real alien Zone, which humanity attempts to journey through to find truth. In Glukhovsky’s novel, the metro is haunted by revolutionary conflict, and this is explored through memories which are shared and implanted from Artyom’s Stepfather: ‘Then the Red leadership decided that it was time to act more resolutely: if the rest of the metro wouldn’t take up the merry revolution flame then they needed to be lit from underneath. [...] The war turned out to be long and bloody, wearing on and on.’<sup>18</sup> This mirrors the Soviet revolution in 1917 and yet is set in the future deep underground. The novel echoes the reality of the Russian Civil War, but for fictional Artyom and the other characters, a parallel conflict happened in the underground whose consequences still resonate. The characters are still haunted by the metro wars, despite the fact they were not alive when they took place. Some stations are under communist rule and some are even under fascist rule, which also recalls the Soviet experience of the Second World War. Glukhovsky has created a world which is threaded with memory and trauma, but memories which have been implanted and not personally experienced. Tarkovsky

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<sup>16</sup> Dmitry Glukhovsky, *Metro 2033* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2007), p.36

<sup>17</sup> *Metro 2033*, p.30.

<sup>18</sup> *Metro 2033*, p.15

created films also experienced through a similar lens. For example, *Nostalgia* shows some dreamlike images emerging from the mind of Andrei the protagonist, of a dacha out in the Russian countryside, whilst his young family looks on (Figure.3.11). They are dressed from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and look ghostlike as they stare at the slowly panning camera. It is a haunting moment with the bleakness pervading the landscape.

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Figure.3.11

Andrei is haunted by the past, but it is an unfamiliar historical past and appears incongruously within the linear narrative. The same feeling of unfamiliarity is heightened in *Metro 2033* as Artyom walks the dark metro tunnels, thinking about a past which he did not experience, but now reigns over his world.

The irradiated and evolved creatures which are hunted in the narrative of *Metro 2033* give the story a level of escapism which lends itself to the video games market. In 2010 a *Metro 2033* first-person shooter game was successfully released by 4A Games on the Xbox games console. Players take on the role of Artyom and journey through the tunnels, whilst having to shoot and kill the ‘dark ones,’ which links to Glukhovsky’s original narrative. Figure.3.12 shows the first-person perspective which the player occupies the game. This is a pertinent concept as video games provide, ‘The pleasure of transformation [...] The chance to become someone or something else, experience new ways of being, and see life from different perspectives.’<sup>19</sup> This happens psychologically in video games player’s brains when ‘our mirror neurons and proprioception create a loop of input and response that make us feel at one with the character we control.’<sup>20</sup> This is reminiscent of the experience of watching slow cinema, in that the experience is fully immersive with the viewer completely engaged in the action due to the nature of the visual images. Video games offer a different visual aesthetic access into the Tarkovsky Zone, but the principles remain the same. Tarkovsky’s ghost hovers over these new

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<sup>19</sup> Edward Ross, *Gamish – A Graphic History of Gaming* (London: Particular Books, 2020), p.45.

<sup>20</sup> Ross., p.49.

forms of modern entertainment as they require the player to become part of the Zone psychologically and the characters they play as are an extension of themselves.

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Figure.3.12.

A game controller such as a joystick feels like a physical extension of ourselves through the cognitive process of proprioception and mirror neurons respond to seeing physical activity: ‘Proprioception extends our body into another, while mirror neurons make our mind feel that body’s movements as our own on a subconscious level.’<sup>22</sup> When people are playing video games they are psychologically immersed into the character they are playing and into another world. Therefore, through this process, Tarkovsky’s spectre is now found planted into the minds of people who have played the *Metro* games series. A more visceral example of this is the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* games series which was first launched in 2007 by GSC Gameworld. These are also first-person shooter games which take place in the actual Chernobyl Exclusion-Zone, whereby the player must kill radioactive mutants and hunt for alien artefacts. The influence of *Stalker* and the Zone linked to the Chernobyl disaster is therefore clearly discernible in the creativity of the gaming sphere. Serhii Plokyh says: ‘*In S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl*, a shooter-survival game, the action takes place in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone after a fictional second nuclear explosion. In *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, the main figure, Captain Jon Price, goes to the abandoned city of Pripyat to hunt down the leader of the Russian ultranationalists.’<sup>23</sup> Both the *Metro* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* games have been very successful, with new titles from both franchises being released continuously since their original conception, and now well into the 2020s. Figure.3.13 shows a still from *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripyat* (2010) where the shooter travels through the overgrown apocalyptic landscape having to hunt for strange beings and clues for to how to survive. Although based on the city of Pripyat, the overgrown greenery and abandoned buildings

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<sup>21</sup> Fooster, *Surviving the Horrifying Metro for the First Time ... Metro 2033 – Part 1*, YouTube, 9 September 2022, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbaKWtZZCPQ>> [accessed 21 July 2024].

<sup>22</sup> Edward Ross, *Gamish – A Graphic History of Gaming* (London: Particular Books, 2020), p.49.

<sup>23</sup> Serhii Plokyh, *Chernobyl – History of a Tragedy* (London: Penguin, 2019), p.xi.

are clearly evocative of Tarkovsky's cinematic creation of the Zone. The Tarkovsky/Chernobyl link is forged strongly through these games.

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Figure.3.13

A brand-new title this year is *Escape from Tarkov* from Battlestate Games: 'Tarkov is sealed off by UN and Russian military, supply chains are cut, communication with operational command is lost, and in these conditions, everyone has to make his own choices of what to do and how to get out of the chaos-ridden metropolis.'<sup>25</sup> This game narrative revolves around moving through a chilling Tarkovskian zone of uncertainty, trying to escape various dangers, 'isolated from the outside world.'<sup>26</sup> The parallels with Tarkovsky's oeuvre are felt strongly in video games developers repeatedly recreating otherworldly and dreamlike post-apocalyptic zones, which characters must journey through to survive. *Escape from Tarkov* is the latest in this series of games which echo back retroactively to a nightmare Soviet world in which characters are trapped in the hyper-real. It is the Chernobyl disaster, which the world is still haunted by, and an event which Tarkovsky's *Stalker* arguably foretold that represents a pervasive influence on these games. There is still a cultural obsession with the irradiated zone where humans cannot enter and this has manifested in these games, but with Tarkovsky's spectre haunting as a visual creator of these zones before Chernobyl occurred. Tarkovsky carries spectral weight in this culture and through proprioception his haunting influence has been implanted into the minds of video gamers. The influence of *Stalker* and the compelling narrative of an isolated zone which is open to exploration and interpretation clearly makes for a blueprint of creativity which game designers have engaged with. Younger game players are haunted by Tarkovsky, and yet most of the younger players will never have heard of him or his works. The Chernobyl event haunts the world through these popular games, but it is Tarkovsky who also haunts the world as a foreteller of the event

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<sup>24</sup> Gamer Max Channel, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Prip'yat – Full Game (4k 60FPS) Walkthrough Gameplay No Commentary*, YouTube, 19 February 2023, < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPQhCFmoQoU> > [accessed 21 July 2024].

<sup>25</sup> <<https://www.escapefromtarkov.com/>> [accessed 21 July 2024].

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

and creator of a future which is now played through in people's homes. Video games offer a new and different visual aesthetic to experience the haunting of Tarkovsky.

However, video games are not the only genre where Tarkovsky's revenant is present in popular culture. His spectre now resides in table-top role-playing games also. These games emerged in the early 1970s and specifically evolved from military table-top games when Gary Gygax and David Arneson created *Dungeons and Dragons* in 1974. In table-top role-playing games:

Each player takes ownership of a single character, devising their personalities, their flaws, their goals; a lead player, the Game-Master (GM), develops the game's setting, and puts obstacles in the characters' way.<sup>27</sup>

The games take place within what is known psychologically as a 'fictional frame',<sup>28</sup> which is a storytelling environment where the game narrative takes place. Table-top role-playing games give players the chance to develop 'parasocial relationships'<sup>29</sup> with the characters they are playing as, in which they will feel as their character does and act completely in accordance as to how their character would in game situations. These experiences are immersive but also more personally and psychologically creative than the video gaming experience. This is another comparison of the Tarkovskian immersive slow cinema experience encroaching into other forms of media. The player must completely immerse themselves into a realm created by somebody else, and to find meaning in the game they must be a character in that world to understand it fully and separate themselves from reality, with a focus on imagination. Science fiction role-playing games developed with *Metamorphosis Alpha* (1976) and *Traveller* (1977), and then the first post-apocalyptic game was

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel Hand, *Role-Playing Games in Psychotherapy – A Practitioner's Guide* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), p xx.

<sup>28</sup> Hand., p.4.

<sup>29</sup> Hand., p.6.

developed in 1978 called *Gamma World*. However, Tarkovsky's revenant can be found in *Zona Alpha* (2020) which,

is a set of simple, fast-play skirmish rules for scavenging, exploring, and surviving in a near-future, post-apocalyptic Eastern European setting. Players take on the role of bandits, mercenaries, and military units fighting over the blasted Exclusion Zone and its abandoned artefacts.<sup>30</sup>

Again, there is an abandoned zone which players must travel around to progress through the game, creating narrative simultaneously to do so. The *Stalker* influence looms over and it is through this Tarkovskian presence that players are embracing yet another way of experiencing the nightmarish remnants of the stagnated Soviet Union. There is a level of nostalgia where players are keen to delve into a world which has been destroyed by a nuclear accident, and symbolises the horror as Alexievich describes, but in a collegiate and playful way. Another example is *The Very Good Dogs of Chernobyl* (2021) in which players take on the roles of telepathic dogs having to roam through the Exclusion Zone using magic to survive. There is a dog which appears within the Zone in *Stalker* at random times during the film and though the table-top game may sound comical, there is a hauntological link to the Soviet past and the many animals that were abandoned at Chernobyl and had to be eventually hunted down and killed. The game is another echo back to the darker elements of the nuclear Soviet era and links to the otherworldliness that Tarkovsky visualised living under that regime. The dog in *Stalker* is hauntologically alive within the minds of table-top gamers. Therefore, Tarkovsky haunts these modern forms of popular entertainment, acting as a hauntological conduit forging a chain back to the nightmarish world of destruction that was wrought by Soviet nuclear ambition and the hyper-real. It is via the ubiquitous haunting of the Chernobyl disaster that *Stalker* offers a zone of exploration and

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<sup>30</sup> <<https://www.ospreypublishing.com/uk/zona-alfa-9781472835697/>> [accessed 22 July 2024].

mystery which resonates with the genre of imagination and creativity required for a role-playing game.

The haunting of Chernobyl began on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1986 in Ukraine when Reactor Number 4 on the site exploded by the atomic city of Pripyat:

That even the untouchable nuclear realm turned out to be rotten suggested that the whole system was, too. For the flaws revealed at Chernobyl and afterward were characteristic of the system as a whole: rampant incompetence, cover ups at all levels, and self-destructive secrecy at the top.<sup>31</sup>

The utopian Soviet ideal of a system of atomic cities was destroyed by the harsh realities of the Stagnation era. When the plant was being constructed in the 1970s, Adam Higginbottom states: ‘Labour and supply problems remained endemic: the concrete was defective; the men lacked power tools. A team of dedicated KGB agents and their network of informants at the plant reported a continuing series of alarming building faults.’<sup>32</sup> The future being promised was already lost to these issues. An accident was inevitable when dealing with the sheer complexity of nuclear fission, since there was no margin for error. Chernobyl was pure ‘horror’ as one of the victims of radiation is described:

He began changing: every day, I found a different person. His burns were coming to the surface. First these little sores showed up inside his mouth and on his tongue and cheeks, then

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<sup>31</sup> William Taubman, *Gorbachev – His Life and Times* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2017), pp.240-241.

<sup>32</sup> Adam Higginbottom, *Midnight in Chernobyl – The Untold Story of the World’s Greatest Nuclear Disaster* (London: Penguin, 2019), p.20.

they started growing. The lining of his mouth was peeling off in these white filmy layers. The colour of his face ... the colour of his body ... It went blue. Red. Greyish-brown.<sup>33</sup>

The nightmarish description shows the fragility of the human body when confronted with scientific forces beyond its control. There was a feeling of incomprehensibility by this horrific apocalypse and human beings transforming into almost fictionalised monsters. This would have huge implications on the wider sphere of the future of the Soviet Union. Chernobyl marked a huge turning point on mainland Europe as it created a vast area of post-humanity. This accident was so horrific it was an alien situation that the Soviet government refused to acknowledge as Serhii Plokyh states:

Immediately after the accident, as panic spread, the authoritarian Soviet regime imposed control on the flow of information, endangering millions of people at home and abroad and leading to innumerable cases of radiation poisoning which could otherwise have been avoided.<sup>34</sup>

The behaviour of the Soviet regime in refusing to acknowledge the situation just solidifies the hyper-reality of the moment. There was a ‘new history’ born in which the unreality surrounding the Soviet Union would soon be torn through with its collapse.

Tarkovsky’s spectral presence is felt as part of this nuclear iconographic legacy of the Soviet Union. Chernobyl has become the Tarkovskian Zone from *Stalker*, where time has frozen and humanity is not allowed to enter. Cinema and reality have chimed together in a nightmarish echo of one another. Tarkovsky was haunted by the hyper-reality of the Brezhnev era, and his visual Zone represents the unreality and decay of those times. However, there is a Tarkovskian legacy to the

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<sup>33</sup> Svetlana Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer – A Chronicle of the Future*, trans. by Anna Gunin and Arch Tait (London: Penguin, 2016), p.12.

<sup>34</sup> Serhii Ploky, *Chernobyl – History of a Tragedy* (London: Penguin, 2019), p.347.

Chernobyl disaster and his spectral presence is felt across the ways popular culture has chosen to respond to the Exclusion Zone.

The irradiated landscape was prescient and visualised by Tarkovsky in *Stalker*. The Zone in the film is symbolic of the lost futures of the Soviet era as Riley says of the filming locations:

A landscape littered with ruins is a landscape stained by time. The industrial ruins seen in *Stalker* are a trace of the economic stagnation that had set into the Soviet Union by the Brezhnev era. Both the monochrome world of decaying bars, railway sidings and barbed wire and the colourful, verdant, waterlogged world inside the zone are full of decaying and ruined buildings [...] a monument to failure [...] *Stalker*'s visual landscape represents a natural world that industrialisation is incapable of industrialising, a landscape the modernisation can no longer modernise. This is how *Stalker* articulates the failure of the future to arrive.<sup>35</sup>

It is this landscape incapable of supporting human life which parallels the reality of Chernobyl. Chernobyl is also a 'a landscape the modernisation can no longer modernise,' the future is lost. The lost futures of the Soviet Union, which are deeply ingrained through the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, concretise with Tarkovsky's directorial vision of the Zone in *Stalker*. The cinematic Zone is imagined as being in 'a permanent state of disrepair: buildings are crumbling, moss fills every corner, machines are rusted and broken, abandoned vehicles litter the landscape like carcasses, the detritus of a society in moral and spiritual decline.'<sup>36</sup> This cinematic vision is now a reality in Northern Ukraine where a post-human 'Zone of alienation'<sup>37</sup> now physically exists. The two Zones are now interminably linked across history. Tarkovsky physically created a haunted alien

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<sup>35</sup> John A. Riley, 'Hauntology, Ruins and the Failure of the Future in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*,' *Journal of Film and Video*, Volume 69, Number 1, Spring 2017. pp. 18-24 (21-22).

<sup>36</sup> Terence McSweeney, *Beyond the Frame – The Films and Film Theory of Andrei Tarkovsky* (Cyprus: aporetic press, 2015), p.119.

<sup>37</sup> McSweeney, p.119

landscape, which was weighed down by a contemplative and philosophical narratology in which humans are at the mercy of alien technology. The exclusion Zone of Chernobyl now exists with the same atmospherics. Chernobyl as an event is so incomprehensible, according to critics such as Alexievich, that it also acts as an alienised Zone of contemplation. As much as the cloud of the Brezhnev era was a looming presence symbolically and ubiquitously in Tarkovsky's Zone, the nuclear cloud is still suspended symbolically over Chernobyl's exclusion-Zone as a legacy to the failings of the world in which Tarkovsky made his films. Tarkovsky acts as a revenant across the exclusion-Zone and that hauntological legacy stretches to our contemporary moment.

Tarkovsky's works were historically a reaction to his Soviet hyper-real world, but now those films also fit in the contemporary postmodern world of unreality. It is an era of post-truth where 'grand narratives [...] have no unique or reliable fit to the world, no certain correspondence with reality. They are just another form of fiction.'<sup>38</sup> The veracity of truth and knowledge is now no longer stable in this information age. As Jean-François Lyotard said: 'Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its "use-value."<sup>39</sup> This outlook highlights how knowledge is interwoven into the fabric of exchange across the ubiquitous and variedly biassed media landscape, and in doing so has now lost its value. This hyper-reality and a rising autocracy and paranoia in Russia mirror that of the times in which Tarkovsky lived and created films. The Soviet Union is haunting the present, which makes Tarkovsky's films of that era resonate with a modern-day audience. Tarkovsky haunts contemporary Russian cinema and his works still carry significance in the now autocratic Russian state under the dictatorship of Vladimir Putin. Soviet style autocracy has once again become ensconced in modern Russia, under the present political regime. The shadow of the Soviet Union and the revenant of the Cold War haunts contemporary

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism - A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.14-15.

<sup>39</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp.-4-5.

Europe. Europe is currently battling an ‘avalanche of disinformation from Russia’<sup>40</sup> in terms of election interference and espionage activities. This shows the global reach and influence of Putin’s totalitarianism. There have been various assassinations carried out on foreign soil by FSB Russian agents against former Russian citizens, now deemed enemies of Putin. As Catherine Belton observes: ‘the first real wake-up calls about the true nature of the Putin regime came first in November 2006, with the excruciating death by polonium poisoning in London of Alexander Litvinenko, a former FSB officer.’<sup>41</sup> These acts show the spread of Putin onto the physical streets of the United Kingdom and influencing my own personal world. They are another example of the rebirth of traits from the Cold War in terms of espionage and paranoia. In parallel, 1978 witnessed one of, ‘the most audacious murders of the cold war: the émigré Bulgarian writer Georgi Markov was waiting for a bus by London’s Waterloo Bridge when a man bumped into him with the tip of his umbrella, pushing a tiny poisoned pellet into his leg. Four days later he was dead.’<sup>42</sup> Tarkovsky created cinema during similar times, with global Soviet influence attempting to spread throughout the era.

Whereas previously our consciousness of the Soviet era was waning, this historical epoch now requires re-examination as it holds a strong contemporary relevance; Cold War politics has been firmly reignited across the world. There are now parallels to be drawn with the political machinations that were prevalent during the era when Tarkovsky was making cinema. Tarkovsky’s work raises many questions about the collective idea of nationhood, and existence as an individual in a collective and oppressive sphere. The growth of authoritarian politics has led to a postmodern culture of ‘fake news,’ ‘post-truth,’ and ‘hyperreality.’ Tim Harford writes: ‘In a press conference late in 2023, Vladimir Putin fielded a video call from a deep faked copy of himself [...] you can’t believe your eyes; you can’t believe your ears; you can’t believe anything.’ Tarkovsky’s world was weighted with similar ideas, which render his films still relevant as a bridging response between past and present.

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<sup>40</sup> Lelia Abboud, Henry Foy and Paula Erizanu, ‘Europe battles avalanche of disinformation from Russia,’ *The Financial Times*, March 21, 2024 <<https://on.ft.com/45tqPmr>> [accessed 16 June 2024].

<sup>41</sup> Catherine Belton, *Putin’s People - How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West* (London: William Collins, 2020), p.445.

<sup>42</sup> Shaun Walker, ‘The poison umbrella: film sheds new light on infamous cold war killing,’ *The Guardian*, 17 March 2023 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/17/poison-umbrella-documentary-sheds-new-light-infamous-spy-killing-cold-war>> [accessed 23 June 2024].

The unreality of the Soviet Union has returned to haunt the present as a psychic aftershock: ‘Russian media channels, websites, and social media accounts [...] post anything. It didn’t matter whether it was true. It didn’t matter whether it was believable [...] analysts called this “the fire hose of falsehood.”’<sup>43</sup> Tarkovsky’s communist world was like the Russian world of today, which gives his films a modern relevance and makes them not only important historical cinematic documents of the Cold War era, but also contemporary postmodern works, providing signification and a channel through which to explore the state of unreality which affects modern Russia. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Russia is now analogised with the Soviet era as the post-truth Russian media now produce an equivalency to those historical times with their own paranoid, doublethink hyper-reality which renders Tarkovsky still relevant, as he was historically, as a critical reaction within the post-truth sphere.

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<sup>43</sup> Tim Harford, ‘Fakes, forgeries and the meaning of meaning in our post-truth era,’ *The Financial Times*, January 25<sup>th</sup> 2024 <<https://www.ft.com/content/0afb2e58-c7e2-4194-a6e0-927afe0c3555>> [accessed 28 January 2024].

## The Creative Piece: *Red Lens*

*A man goes into a shop and asks: 'You don't have any meat?'*

*'No, replies the sales assistant, 'we don't have any fish. It's the shop across the street that has no meat.'*

Larisa closed her eyes and imagined shooting the whole scene ...

'We suffer too much and are too immersed in our own pain to rivet with penetrating and far-seeing gaze those pale night executioners who torture us,'<sup>1</sup> she announced with a playful but provocative air. Hers being the only dissonant voice that dared speak out by reading the samizdat in her hand disguised within the pages of *Pravda*, as the camera pans along the queue on Nevsky Prospekt. A road pathed for the Tsar that had then seen revolution, now reduced to witnessing the queue of cold and hungry people. A faint but cold mist from the freezing Neva wound its way gently around them as the lights went on in the Saigon Café and the smell of cooked meat began to drift out from an open window. There were no seats free inside, the KGB filled them all, perpetually.

'Will you shut up,' came an anonymous and raspy male voice from an over the shoulder angle shot somewhere. It could've been any one of the featureless serfs behind her in mid-shot. The chimes of fellow frustration were loaded in the tone. 'We've been here for ages, and we don't seem to be moving anymore. We don't need you making things worse.' Larisa sighed in close-up again and tucked *Pravda* under her right arm. She would think of a pithy response soon enough but acknowledged she was ultimately bored and cold. On her way to the queue, she had slid over and slightly twisted her ankle. The stinging pain she felt as she moved was adding to her feeling of annoyance today. Her mother's old battered brown fur coat and wool hat offered small comfort. The

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<sup>1</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago – 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (London: Vintage Classics, 2023), p.66.

hat merely worked to conceal the new shorter hair cut she'd recently experimented with, much to the disbelief of her parents.

Her mother had said in flashback: 'You look like a boy, why can't you grow up and be a woman?' But Larisa *was* grown up as far as she was concerned. Thoughts like this always haunted her as she stood queuing on these streets, which still hadn't been cleared since the latest blizzard.

She opened her eyes and unreality became reality and began to bite like the cold. Like everybody else, Larisa could only stand, shiver, and cautiously shuffle forward. There were periods of chatter amongst the fellow food seekers but it was always the quieter periods Larisa preferred. Sounds were sometimes just audible but would often disappear into a harmonised humming.

'Is this what you fought the Nazis for?' she railed against the interrupting old voice, 'so we could just carry on queueing up and starving to death?' No response, from anybody. The man was right though. The only thing the camera was tracking was the slow but regular traffic on the road as nothing else moved. Larisa was pained and petulant as she'd been here so long. This made her an irritant to others. There on the pavement was a mere snake of humanity which had died. There was nothing happening anymore, anywhere. Just a myopic scene of hats, coats, and occasional clouds of cigarette smoke in all directions.

A woman standing in front of Larisa turned around to her and made a grimacing eye contact. She had a weather-beaten face and looked drawn. No doubt much younger than she looked, her escaping blonde hair was streaked with grey and her wrinkled face. 'Could you *actually* make yourself useful and save my spot? I'm going for a piss by the bins.'

'Oh, of course. When you put it like that.' Larisa was used to this standard behaviour.

'I'm putting this plastic bag down as a placeholder, make sure it doesn't move, please?' The woman had lightened her tone as she produced a ragged bag with *Eliseevsky* written on it.

'Oh wow, you've been to Moscow?' said Larisa with just a hint of sarcasm.

‘Yes, no better than here,’ and with that parting shot the woman stamped her bag into the snow only to then carefully slink off.

Larisa closed her eyes again and began to block out the anger. Her thoughts began to stream towards reaching the shop counter and smelling the cold sausage meat and being served by polite and gracious workers who were happy to see her. That was a fantasy as most things were now. The food was fresh, but there just was never enough and the servers would be tired and fed up no doubt; their faces dour. They would be pleased to see you leave. Larisa was a young woman but getting too old for this. All the inevitable queuing coupled with the constant propaganda which, like Larisa, many acknowledged as unreal, but at the same time put up with and never publicly questioned.

Hyperreality bathed many people in cynicism as the news filtered through the media. Many coughed and sputtered on the montage of headlines that the economy was on an upward turn under Brezhnev. Some war in the Middle East had helped the politburo exploit the USSR’s natural resources. This was the Soviet Union saving the world again, or merely taking advantage of the great energy crises disrupting the capitalist powers. Larisa could only wonder when she and everybody else would feel the benefits of such an economic boom. As the queues grew longer and the food became scarcer there had to be a time when people would surely say, ‘Enough is enough,’ even the hardened communists? As Larisa sighed and shivered simultaneously, she reflected again and again and could only reach the circular conclusion that things would never change; this was the perpetuity of her life state. She was lost.

Some people weren’t even bothered about upsetting the KGB anymore, they were under the impression that the security services didn’t seem to care as much anyway. There were already enough committee walls erected to stop the population from doing things and so to cross the KGB meant you had to be doing something unforgivably bad. Or sometimes they’d just single people out for *their* idea of fun, so Larisa thought. The KGB had no trouble getting fed, they seemed to eat when they wanted. Try booking a table at any restaurant in the city centre and you soon learned that. Despite her sarcasm, there was a saddening truth in Larisa’s mind that there was a growing authoritarian threat again, which

had been foetal size for many years, but was now starting to metastasize. She had witnessed this occurring in her work.

The Leningrad Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography had been her home for three years, and now Lenfilm on Creative Unit Two as a junior editor. It was exciting a decade ago when the studio was reorganised and Larisa benefited enormously from the Ministry of Culture's fresh and more open approach. She was young and impressionistic and got to be on set when Kozintsev was making *Hamlet* in sixty-five, and even had a chance to offer edits to the script of Ermiler's *Let History Judge* around that same time. A film that offered actual ethical debate around the abdication of the last Tsar. It was a vibrant and exciting time; optimism cascaded through the studio corridors. The work, according to Kozintsev, was all about the freeing of the philosophical mind from the claustrophobia of totalitarianism. The cage had been upturned and creativity was released.

Larisa loved the work initially, and found herself trying to give the green light to certain film proposals and then editing scripts. However, times had changed and the cage was returning. Larisa had recently been ground down by the Ministry of Culture's new representative there, Ivangov. She often joked that he was a lizard-like man with a face of acned features. He crawled around the studio like a mythical creature from the Mosfilm production of Yershov and Kropachyov's *Viy*, the only horror film Larisa had ever seen. She'd been so jealous when seeing that film and the invention involved, with a good script about intellectuals haunted by satanic creatures, but now that was becoming her life. The strait-laced ridiculousness of Ivangov's 'anti-Soviet propaganda' interpretations of practically everything that came through the doors of the studio were driving everybody mad. He was a joke, but a joke that had to be taken seriously. The productions were slowing down and people from Goskino were asking why. More worryingly, they were asking about the agenda that Lenfilm was perceived as having. Larisa began referring to Ivangov as the 'grey terror.' He was a ghost that haunted the editing suites, sound stages and production meetings. It was like the cult of personality all over again. He was the Stalin from above, always watching and waiting. Ivangov wasn't the only one though, and his influence was nestling and expanding amongst certain other members of the creative teams. He was an infection that was spreading. There were also the

ridiculous decisions of the Leningrad Regional Committee who were a brick wall against any form of creativity these days. It was too easy to say no to ideas when those ideas could lead to great cinematic works. Lenfilm needed some hits but they were drying up as the proposals were deemed too ‘radical’ by Ivangov. *Let History Judge* was simply forgotten about and imprisoned in the archives now, it hadn’t been shown for years.

‘Stop daydreaming will you, and move forward,’ came a grating voice from behind Larisa which broke her train of thought like thunder on a summer day. She gasped gently due to the ache from her ankle. She winced her way forward carefully; making sure she picked up the discarded plastic bag place marker of the older woman’s at her feet, saving her place for her. A new voice cut through the air.

‘Larisa isn’t it?’ a softly spoken female voice from the left of her.

Larisa turned to see a young woman who also looked old before her time. There was an element of beauty though to the anaemic whiteness and shivering brow. She had a strand of brown hair that teased and dangled as though trying to escape from her ashuka hat. It was a feeling Larisa knew well. The woman was wrapped up in a thick, black coat which clung to her. But she still looked freezing and malnourished. The woman spoke again.

‘Sorry, it is Larisa, isn’t it? I’m sure we met at the studios once? Down at Lenfilm I should say?’ she was shaking and Larisa wondered if she was prone to fainting in her current state. There was almost something ghostly about her.

‘Yes, my name is Larisa,’ she was cautious not to say too much despite her cynicism towards the authorities. The commissars were so annoying. She tried to remind herself that she was relaxed generally about those things though, remembering that she was more irritated than anything else.

‘You liked my film proposal; my name is Mirza...’

\*

*Another place, another time...*

*I wasn't born for this. We are becoming like the forest creatures connected with the natural environment, where does the human being end and the machine begin? I stare at my watch but for what purpose? Does time have a bearing on our lives? There is only the party and socialism and work. We must work, work is art and artistry comes in work. We are becoming one great machine of socialist endeavour. Together as one breath, one body, one life. I am no-one now, we are nowhere but-*

Mirza stood on the collection of cigarette butts littering the main entrance to Building 12 on Baskov Pereulok. She raised her eyebrows and gave an ironic smirk, reflecting on the small pleasures people find in the dirge of existence. There was a biting cold that stung her temples and sent a frozen chill down her back and legs. Mirza knew there were other places in the world right now where the sun was shining, but travelling to foreign countries was difficult. She was trapped, perpetually treading the streets of a haunted city. Death had streaked the very pavements she now stood on in the most during the Great Patriotic War. It was before she was born, but she could feel it. The ghosts endured. She saw it especially on the faces of the elderly. The fatigue and sadness that life had throttled them with which could never leave. We were all supposed to be happy now and some people of Mirza's age were, to be honest. But Mirza knew they were deluded and everything just seemed to have stopped now in this bleak decade. There were occasional signs of economic progress but Mirza knew it was all pure fantasy really and life was standing still. Her thick winter coat and ushanka hat gave the comfort she craved on the journey home. She knew she was facing a difficult situation personally. There were small comforts now.

Mirza kept her usual way home; it was almost the same route she had been taking since leaving State School Fifty-Seven. Mirza generally didn't like thinking about her time at school too much though. The reminders from teachers that they should all be grateful to the elders who fought against fascism so the socialist utopia could thrive. The schools were not as strict now she heard, unless you lived in East Germany, but it was a confusing time for her back then because Mirza was sometimes happy too.

There had been holidays to Odessa and trips to Moscow. She even went to the ballet once with her mother. A sense of optimism arose. There seemed a lightness of being. There were films to watch which carried anti-war messages and art galleries to visit. Things altered though as Mirza moved beyond her teen years. There was a dullness to life, optimism died with the arrival of a new and strange anxiety that was coupled with a wretched and sheer weariness at times. Since then, life had never really altered that much in truth, the boredom never lifted. As she had this momentary reflection, she felt the urge to place her right hand across her midriff and hold it there gently as her stomach rumbled. This was both an act of calming and an admission that she was hungry having not eaten enough during the day. Mirza needed to eat more these days, but she hadn't been bothered to queue at the shops today, luckily, she had some bread and cheese in the fridge for when she managed to get home. But there was a stagnation in the air. Mirza as well as everybody else could really smell it, despite being told how wonderful everything was. As she heaved the stiff double doors open using her shoulder as leverage, she could smell in the air a snow shower arriving. This was entirely predictable with the usual bite of the cold; Mirza could always sense it.

Blocking any old images from school she climbed the steps to the fifth floor, the elevator had never worked in this block and remained stranded on the ground. There was blood on the walls and it carried the rancid smell of urine. She sometimes couldn't quite believe that this was how she lived. It was not what she had in mind.

Mirza had quite a good job compared to some but found herself living in a building which was never maintained. One explorative step into the elevator was all Mirza ever dared take in her current condition. It was not ideal having to climb so many stairs but she had no choice. When climbing the stairs she always made sure she never touched anything with her hands now. The walls were grey and stained whilst the banister, though missing in places, was always sticky to touch. The same thoughts ransacked her head when she climbed up and down those steps every day, where had the sticky patches come from and who had caused them? She never saw anybody else here. There were people living in these flats but all Mirza ever heard was occasional muffled voices. They were strangers to her. There was no community, the people looked after themselves. How can she live in a

world where she hears people living all around her but has never seen them, ever? Mirza liked to think that they were all in this mess together, but this was a misguided idea. If only they knew who she really was, the influence she had on their lives. It would be impossible for them to even begin to understand. This is what Mirza thought. She was a ghost to them but her haunting presence would keep them alive. Again, this is what Mirza thought, or liked to think. She felt her job was important.

Her thoughts wandered to her parents wanting her to join the military. They were hugely disappointed that their only daughter had opted to not defend the borders from the enemy abroad. The Motherland needed protection according to them, she always sighed when she considered this. A view which went back hundreds of years, to the kingdom of Kievan- Rus itself and Prince Vladimir. Mirza was better at perpetuating the myth that there was a threat in the first place and so became a journalist. She worked at Programme One's regional Leningrad office, reporting and presenting the news. It was a very creative role.

She often reflected on how she liked being creative, it gave her a sense of escapism in her youth from the relative mundanity of the everyday. At ages 12 and 14 she had presented poems in school assemblies which were her proudest moments, despite the sullen faces of her peers, coupled with the forced applause. There was a sense of empowerment, if only very brief. She enjoyed holding her peers' attention and the fact they had to wait for her every word to emerge. Mirza held court and was the centre of the action, if only for a few minutes. She wanted more and more of that. She could influence the thoughts of those around her for good. It was this motivation that would lead her to state broadcasting, she wanted to take these moments from her youth and feel it perpetually. There was a way to find some form of happiness and a motivation to exist.

She'd even tried proposing a film once a couple of years ago and saw this as the next stage of her life, but it didn't work out. The process was exhausting. It was initially conceived as a comedy, but wasn't perceived that way by Goskino, the Regional Committee or even the Ministry of Culture. Lenfilm had liked the proposal and wanted a script. Mirza got carried away though with her plotline and despite support she'd been assigned from the Creative Unit at the studio, the politics didn't resonate with the Ministry of Culture. She was then dragged through the mud of compliance; her

script just couldn't get approval. It dragged on and on until Mirza finally gave up. She was told 'the State Committee of Cinematography couldn't get on board and never would,' and her narrative was 'aggressively anti-Soviet,' and she would 'risk incarceration,' if she 'ever tried anything like this again.' Mirza found this strangely amusing as it was something she had merely written in her spare time and she could never conceive of it being such a tool of disorder. There were many voices at Lenfilm who had backed her and told her that just a few years ago they 'could've got the film on its feet.' She certainly would never consider herself an anti-establishment revolutionary. She tried to appease the censors with some changes but it was never enough for them. And this led to Mirza questioning why she was bothering in the first place. It was still an ambition of hers but it would have to wait now. The script she had left at Lenfilm on a desk somewhere as she was told the Ministry of Culture may want to destroy it. But according to her script editor Larisa, no one could locate it anywhere.

Mirza gave a great symbolic sigh in her life and compromised. She continued with her journalism as best she could, though she had received some warnings about her previous behaviour and should 'consider' herself 'lucky.' She then towed the appropriate lines but felt she merely existed and was not actually alive, not really. But this was reality, boredom, and stagnation. Any controversy which didn't match the vision of truth could lead to prison, or even worse would be the psychiatric hospital so some people said these days. A profound strangeness enveloped her when she thought of him, of Brezhnev. The Ukrainian born war hero with his damaged chin. The man for peace and cooperation who doesn't like the consequences of nuclear war but couldn't even feed his own people properly. Mirza would smirk because he seemed like such a boring and uninspiring man who just looked like a sad decrepit, stuffed old toy. It was inconceivable to Mirza that he really cared about anything, especially placing his citizens in psychiatric wards for having an opinion on something. It seemed bizarre to imagine that could happen to Mirza and her life could end up in such a place, but she made the choice anyway to carry on and find some happiness wherever it could be found, though it hid itself well these days.

She liked working with others though, like-minded people where they could be found. The younger the better. They had a flair for realism and had a small candle lit hope inside their souls that maybe one day things might change for the better. Mirza clung onto that where she could.

Her job at Programme One was to find stories of local interest which gave credence to the system. Mirza always maintained in her mind that she had got the job on merit, though she'd heard others talking about how good she looked in front of a camera. And the committees liked that. Nonetheless, *Time* was one of the most watched shows across the Union since its launch, and Mirza could only continue.

She had to spread 'good news,' and give the viewers 'euphoria.' This could be difficult. Sometimes she'd have to resort to making stories up. Local actors would become involved:

LOCAL DOCTOR SAVES CHILDREN.

VILLAGERS HAPPY TO WORK IN CITY FOR LOVE OF COUNTRY.

LOST WAR HERO WHO RETURNED HOME AFTER 25 YEARS MISSING IS READY TO FIGHT AGAIN.

None of these events occurred. It was the spectacle though that Mirza had to chase. The euphoria which could be created through a lens. There was a space for truth, but a televisual truth placed inside the viewer's head by the camera. The people sitting in their apartments whom now Mirza staggered by would have watched those stories and gone along, unmoved by any original thought. The power of television had brought incredible potential to bring modernisation into people's lives, but it was also another weapon of deception. It went on and on and on, the world entirely imagined to suit a minority.

Something made her immediately break away from her thoughts. Her apartment door was ajar. They'd been again. This was not entirely uncommon these days since she had written her script. They were still searching for it openly and sent her these symbolic intimidating messages occasionally. Mirza wasn't that scared or threatened but found it more irritating than anything else, as

did others who suffered in the same way. She didn't know where it was, but she accepted that in her position after what she had written, a random inspection is quite ordinary. Mirza just wished they could close the door fully to avoid any draft when she came home.

As she gently pushed her way in, she quickly became aware of a sense of paranoia beginning to cloud her, and she became reluctant to enter. She could sense a presence which was unusual. Something grated at her and a cold chill swept down her spine. Her stomach began to ache slightly and she could feel a bowel motion gaining traction in her abdomen. Mirza had little choice but to bravely move forwards though, despite her reluctance. She reached for the hallway light-switch like she traditionally would but with less urgency than normal. There was a light emerging through the dark from around the corner in her lounge area accompanied by the sound of her own voice. For a moment she felt like her doppelganger was present and talking away to her. Mirza thought about running, but where to?

As she strode quietly inwards there was the dumbfounded realisation that the sound of her own voice was not a weird phantasmagorical creation but merely the fact that the television was on and noisily blaring out the reports she made today. Mirza was used to occasionally seeing herself and began to think the team inspecting her apartment must have tried her electrical devices and left the television on as a marker to show they'd been. She was not comfortable but decided to creep in nonetheless.

The apartment was empty. The minimalist lounge and kitchen areas opposite one another were undisturbed, demarcated by the long central window gaping out into the dank cityscape. Mirza's battered couch showed signs of recent occupation, it was an old model and often sank decrepitly underweight. It was comfortable though and doubled as Mirza's bed as she had only 2 rooms, this, and a small bathroom. She moved towards switching the monitor off which still showed her face from earlier today: *I'm sure comrade Kishan's bravery in rescuing his comrades from the collapsed mine will be hugely rewarded and has put a huge smile on the face of the nation.* The image of her and 'Kishan' the miners' saviour quickly vanished when turning the knob to Off. Making actors look authentic could be difficult at times with limited resources.

Mirza began to remove her coat and hat and relaxed for the first time today. Any threat had subsided. It was uncomfortable knowing she'd had visitors but there was nothing to hide, she still considered herself a good worker, despite her cynicism. Placing her head in her hands and then running them through her greying brown hair offered a moment of calm as she sat on her couch and contemplated removing her boots before making a coffee to galvanise herself for the evening's events: a small meal of vegetable soup followed by warm bread and cheese. This was a real luxury, though she was running low. She may even treat herself to a bath later and let the warm water wash the scum from her, though at school she once heard a friend say that *washing was fascism* as it was an act of purity. Mirza smirked to herself remembering this memory, though it had stayed with her. She often wondered what on earth that child had grown into.

As she dropped her head back on the ridge of the couch and closed her eyes, the brief hiatus of peace was smashed by the sound of her toilet flushing. Mirza leapt up and shouted, 'Hello, who's there?' There was initially no response through the bathroom door in the corner. 'I said, who's there?'

There was yet more silence until a noise eventually came, 'Mirza, I'm so sorry,' came a familiar voice as the door was unlocked. 'I wanted to greet you when you came through the door.' It was Ivan. He carried the same look as everybody else did these days, tired. Yet there was something different about him today, a slight glow of optimism perhaps? There was a glint in his eye, a look of actual joy too. Ivan entered and left the bathroom door open behind him, this was a small act which Mirza found irritating. He and Mirza had a long and complex history. Ivan had been an excellent regional producer for the network and Mirza was completely enthralled by his talents and attempts at charisma to begin with, but ambitions had driven a wedge between them. Ivan was the one who insisted on creating drama for the news cameras. He saw himself as a spreader of the joys of utopia. This had eventually led him to the popular 'made for television' film industry, but he was desperate to aim higher. The reality was he helped grow and perpetuate the myth of truth; the unreality for the masses. Mirza was angered by this but toed the line because the alternative was worse. Despite everything, they had remained very close. Comrades from opposite sides but with an enduring attraction. 'I have great news, Mirza. Great news.'

‘Wait, Ivan,’ said Mirza exasperated. ‘You can’t just arrive like this.’

‘I know, I’m sorry. The door was open so I assumed they visited you today. I just let myself in. I didn’t want to tamper with how they left everything.’ Ivan looked concerned but he clearly had an urgent agenda. He was not an impressive man these days, his attempts at presentation resulted in a plain and holed black jumper with tatty grey trousers hanging over his ill-fitting brown shoes, which looked too large for his feet. Despite his perceived success, there was nothing to show. Frown marks appeared across his temple now as he brushed the thinning hair across his scalp to hide the bald patches.

‘It’s been another long day, Ivan. If you could say whatever it is I’d be grateful,’ said Mirza.

‘Wait, wait,’ Ivan began to pace towards her and she stood her ground. ‘It’s happened, Mirza, it’s finally happened.’ Placing his hands on her shoulders, Mirza could only submit due to her fatigue. ‘I have it,’ hugging Mirza excitedly. ‘They accepted Peterov’s script and they have picked me to direct. The Regional Committee want me, personally. Some guy at the Ministry too, he’s based at Lenfilm. I’ve got the full 400,000 roubles.’

‘They’ve let you?’

‘Things are going to change now.’

‘Are you afraid?’

‘I fear nothing.’

‘But Ivan, there’s an iciness everywhere. You’ll be under even greater scrutiny...’

‘Mirza, what can I say to you? They’ve given me a major work here.’

‘At what cost, Ivan? I have doubts.’

‘You can have exclusive coverage.’

‘It’s not what I want.’

‘It’s who we are. It’s who we are.’

Mirza broke away from Ivan and took a moment to stare out of the window. She could see the latest blizzard moving in on the horizon which would envelope the twinkling spots of light. It felt almost serene to witness more powerful forces at work from above. But she also knew what it was like to be caught in a snowstorm and Ivan’s presence here tonight offered little difference.

‘Ivan, you must be careful now. The slightest editing error and you know the potential consequences.’

‘Mirza, I’ve been making films for a long time. Look, they have total confidence in me. I’m a *good man*, they said. Why can’t you be pleased?’ Ivan joined Mirza at the window and placed his arm around her. The excitement drained from his voice slightly to a tone more of complaint. ‘This could be the start of something for me, the chance to make a real name. I could even find myself in a ministerial position.’

‘Or a jail,’ Mirza shrugged his touch away. ‘I need to eat something, Ivan, and get myself ready for tomorrow ... I’m pleased for you of course ... but I’m also worried now.’ This was hard for her to admit openly. The something which consumed her Ivan needed to know, eventually. To tell him could be an error and lead Mirza down a dark path towards obsolescence. He would be able to dominate and interfere with whatever life she would try to enable for herself. She could keep the secret and he would be released to live as he chose. He would have no burden, no cross to bear.

The tension between them had multiplied after Mirza’s parting shot and they found themselves in a moment of silence. Ivan began to decipher that there was more to Mirza’s comments than he initially thought. His mind ticked furiously as nothing was spoken between them.

‘Tell me the truth, Mirza.’

‘The truth?’

‘Nothing else will do. The people must have it, and I must have it.’

‘You’re going to be a father, Ivan.’

There was a momentary sharp intake of breath. Looking at the floor he placed his hands together as if in prayer and turned away from Mirza. Ivan edged slowly and methodically in a circular motion around the limited space. There was something melancholy about him. Silence. Mirza didn't want to say anything as she was desperate for him to leave having shared the news. She felt a menagerie of emotions and began to regret sharing her secret. It was the first time Mirza had told a difficult truth for quite some time. It was a truth that could deconstruct Ivan's future of propaganda piece by piece. Pregnancy out of wedlock was out of the question. There were methods of termination available to those who wished to pay extortioners behind closed doors, but they were dangerous, and could result in sterilisation or even sudden death. It was out now though. If Ivan was to abandon her then she would find a way, she would have no choice. Mirza found herself beginning to shake for a reason she couldn't fathom. Maybe it was standing by the coolness of the window, or perhaps the tension of the moment she had fallen into. She felt lightheaded and she placed her palms against the window to steady herself. It was then that she felt a steadying influence from behind her. Ivan's hands clasped her shoulders firmly and reassuringly. As much as she had resented him at this moment, Mirza drifted backwards into his touch.

'This is an incredible day,' he said. 'An incredible day.' He closed his eyes and held her tighter. His breathing was calm and long. Mirza felt herself drawn to his relaxing rhythm and in the dark of the storm outside she momentarily felt a sense of protection. There was chaos around her and a future unknown but for a moment she was safe. She held the feeling but her mind was abuzz with too many disruptions and uncertainties. The respite ended and anxiety quickly tore the moment open.

'Are you sure, Ivan? Is this what we want right now?' she said, clearly worried but knowing she needed him.

'Mirza, what's the problem? You're trembling.' Ivan said almost ironically: 'Our jobs are all about supporting the Soviet Union,' he paused, then began again. 'We can get married, a small affair, no big deal. I can take care of you...both.' That word crept into Mirza's mind like a wasp, happy to sting and then fly away to inflict the same pain on others. It solidified the situation for Mirza in a grotesque form. Her life was about to change.

‘I do not feel like I belong here...’

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## **Leningrad Special Psychiatric Hospital**

### **Article 70: Paranoid Development of the Personality**

There is a slap of cold air which flicks and fettles at the back of my neck. I shake a little before the frost passes down my spine. I am used to these episodes by now. Sterility is the order of life within these white walls. My body has become cold and austere and crumbles gently away into a pile of bones. But my soul journeys into the unreal and fantastical. Sometimes I know where I am and can touch the tangible zones of memory I occupy. Other times I am lost in an alien ocean just staring both outwards and inwards. There are spaces of disorder and mechanised decay. Rust and dirt filling and charring at my fingernails. But there is also the freshness of the farms and the spring air which massages the lungs and soothes the aching backs of the masses. There are frames within frames and narratives within narratives like Russian dolls packed, stacked, and waiting to be realised level beneath level. Fragmented but static. It is the balance between madness and sanity that drives me forwards. They say those who talk to God are religious but those whom God talks to are mad. Though God is dead to many. Brezhnev is our only God and everyone is a disciple, though many do not understand that anymore, they know the boring reality. There has been too much alternation and everyone wanted stability. Now we have a stagnant pond. The gulags may be passing but giving an opinion about something which stems the tide of committee belief is still an actual test. I know this is a test, it is a test I must pass, another journey. There have been sacrifices along the way and now I am facing the turning-point. It will be the zenith or the nadir. We all must pass through at some stage and I am ready. They think they have control of me but this is an illusion I play for them. I was always,

and still am the creative one. To the others out there I am dead, but right now I have never been more alive. I feed on the cold again which reminds me of how to feel, a hand which scars down my back. It is winter outside. It is always winter inside. The door to my room was shoddily fixed so that there is a gap at the bottom between door and floor which broadcasts the day from the corridors. I hear the chat outside about my fellows, coupled with the biting draughts. The news is always filled with achievements and glories. My mind is doped with the opium of light entertainment. But it is shoddily produced at times with no real production values. No understanding of what could be achieved. Merely a formula of phoniness. Life is tired. There come announcements and media excitement. The channels filled with dramas to keep the masses in place. We are gripped by *Seventeen Moments of Spring* and the exploits of Stierlitz infiltrating the Nazis on Programme One. It is slow preachy television just like life's like now. I sometimes wonder if we are in a huge television show ourselves, the whole Union. People in their homes somewhere else, another place very different to here, just sit and gape at us as we wake in the morning, lap our porridge down and grab a couple of doktorskaya sausages before moving off into the work spaces. The nuclear zones are the most interesting, that is what I like to think anyway. All I know is how I would love to work in one of those. The big control panels with the flashing lights, like something from a film. Everything under watchful eyes, for if something goes wrong then the consequences could be catastrophic. I was never made for that world though. Not cut out for it. Not now. There is only the queue to look forward to and the rancid repugnant rodents you must stand with. Some figures can be kind and placid whilst other times there is a hint of dark debauchery. It is the mechanical breathing of the faces on the metro that will start it. The soft resignation that burns internally. It aches and stifles the day as everybody flows along the conveyor of the metropolis. The steps are planned and systematic like a military parade ground but for the great unwashed. Time is only there to mark when to move. The clocks are hypnotic if you glance at them for too long. Just watching as the minutes pass by and that single minute you counted as you stood on the spot glancing up will never occur again. It is another part of your life removed and it will never return. To stand still is to be haunted by those who came before. The spirits are dense and are visceral to the soul and as you turn the awkward avenues and alleyways it is sometimes impossible to know who is real and who is just there as a ghost from the past. Watching, always watching. That is

what they do. There is desire and a hunger for something else, a different way of being much like how the people probably watching us from that other place live. A stark feeling of wanting to speak out and ask questions is replaced by a sense of boredom and frustration. We can only get back in the queues and wait. Waiting for what is hard to know now. Nothing ever changes and the committees will just line their own jacket pockets while their people try to line their rumbling stomachs. The tensions are replaced by cynicism and a mere shrug of the shoulders. There is no alternative to this anyway. Screams of repressed anger litter the streets. A profound sense of doubt and broken will. The footfall along the streets sound tame and subdued. The monotony of the days reveals the dark workings of our rotten lives. There is always time to think, at least we have those moments. This is because the world is so tired now. Think too much and there can be consequences. It is only by laughing at ourselves that we survive all of this. Laughing privately behind closed doors of course. The secret joke that everybody finds amusing. The fanciful lifestyle they bathe us with is chopped down through humour followed by the never-ending sigh. People exist and pretend to live. Ask me where you can buy a loaf of bread without having to queue for the afternoon and anybody would struggle to answer that question. The winters are freezing and as long as the queues. Though spring offers no optimism now. Everything is always the same. I feel it was never as bad in the past, but then everyone always thinks like that. I do not recall the last time. I think it was last Thursday, though days are becoming even more irrelevant as we grow older. I gave my place up in the queue and just chuckled to myself as Magda offered to save it for me. How she manages I can never understand. Her heart still beats despite everything. Magda is over 90 years old, and it is as though she has launched her own private protest against them all by continuing to live. She has got through worse she always says. Like the siege of Leningrad and the bodies lined the streets. Or the time the KGB knocked on her door asking for her son. It is always eye popping when you stop and have an actual conversation with someone. When inhibitions are lowered, people like Magda will talk, they have nothing else left. They understand where we are and where we are going and they can only shrug, sigh but then laugh too. It is truly hysterical the world we find ourselves occupying. The chosen culture they spray us with and expect us to lap up and enjoy is beyond human. We can only make quiet jokes and give the occasional knowing look at others. People accept life for what it is and it does not get any better ... We cannot tell

the dream from reality. They baptise us all in the lies so we can only join the festival of fun they call the state. Always speaking to us from a distance. The committees of medalled gentlemen with blood seeping from their tongues. Imagining a world without the queue. But the poetic life we crave is killed by the monsters. Suddenly the Cossacks were charging straight at me as Dostoevsky spat in my face. It was a field, an open space free from the netting of clustered urban life, where I stood. I dived away from the sabres but they were gone before I blinked at the cloud of dust from which they had arrived. Sunlight began to disappear behind a cloud as Dostoevsky began to squeeze my face with both hands at my temples. My skull is being crushed yet I feel no pain. His breath is rancid but he vanished away as quickly as he came like all the other spectres of my mind. Despite the emptiness surrounding me I can think of nothing. Dropping to my knees I am drawn downwards but there is no point in praying anymore. They are coming for me; I can still hear the voices as Moscow burns to the ground. The nuclear fire. Ashes and shadows dance around me, a rhythm of death. But he still stands there in the black smoke with his eyebrows raised judging me. The medals are still glistening in the darkness. It is useless to resist him as he puts his tongue in my eye and licks me like the creature of habit he is. He hugs me tight and it feels good for a time as his saliva drips down my face. He is gone though. I am back staring at the mirror and nothing stares back. Just an emptiness, a blank space, a nothingness which we all embrace together. Moving forwards towards nothing and nobody. Waiting for that flash or that trick of the light which will kill us all. The black smoke is back but I chase my mother up a hill. The heat is unbearable and there is the sound of gunfire rattling overhead. There are survivors somewhere. She is too fast for me and out of touching distance now, I can only try to close the gap as I stumble through charred bone which I can stamp to ashes. It becomes almost a game; I feel like the child I was, chasing rats again through the flats. Fighting with the other girls and pulling their hair out as they pulled mine. Stumbling and crying as I just wanted to get home back then, once the fun was over. Though did it ever really begin? I remember Ludmilla screaming as they stuck the blades in her around the corner from where I stood when I was a teenager. That searing noise of death echoed around the neighbourhood and cast a long shadow over us all. I found her with no face, just hair dangling over what was left. The blood congealed into a mask. She had upset too many people and I of course never liked her, I hated everyone I ever met. But as I stood over her, that moment of

violence brought us together for a moment. Desperate to help but knowing she was dead. She was at peace and they could not bother her anymore. It was over. I lost sight of my mother; she entered the burning Kremlin and I knew she would vanish there forever. I blink and he is there again, standing, waving, smiling and nodding. He knows. He knows it all, the stench of death hanging around us all. The queues, the waiting, and the queues. The meat, we want fresh meat but it is all burned now into blackness. I trip up over a skull which means I have no choice but to collide and fall forwards into the nuclear sands. My hands burn as I try to avoid my face falling into the hot metallic abyss. But again, it is all fine now because I am back where I should be in my bed, but I cannot move because of the straps. The straps and the injections keep me at peace. But I still travel, they have no idea where I go. He is there again and he begins to unbind me and caress my sweating face. He pulls my hair and whispers in my ear as my arms become unburdened and sag by my sides. I can smell disinfectant clinging to him and it permeates the white room. Sometimes I wonder if I am dead or still just being held captive. Captive by them and their committees and leaders and queues. Blink and he is gone again but I am in the street and it is daylight. The cold slaps me hard and I realise I have been here before. I am by the apartment block I grew up in and I want to do something I have previously forgotten. It racks my brain as I observe the brutalist structures around me. Grey slabs with some weathering and dried vomit splashes cascading across them or at their base. It is customary for this mess. Cigarette butts are heaped in abstract piles. No one will tidy this mess up; the wind will blow them all away eventually. There is the smell of urine which is so intense it reaches inside my throat and makes me gip; I am home. I hear them coming through as day turns to night, there are scuttling and tiny scratching sounds. Suddenly I feel surrounded by them. They are fast and my eyes only see a blur of matted fur fusing across the floor. I am trapped and can feel my body sinking to the ground. I can kick at them and listen to the squeals but they clamber upon me and I can feel them sniffing and scratching my skin. Whiskers tickle my face whilst claws cling to my cheeks and forehead. My hair is being pulled but I can start running through the pain and I begin to sprint as the tiny creatures gash at every move I make. Sprinting beyond block after block after block. There is no one else in this world now but me, everything has fallen to silence. The only sound that punctures the air is my breathing. I can breathe and they are all suddenly gone. But there is a wall in front of me. An old brick wall with

bullet marks. Lots of bullet marks. I am surrounded by blackness, but a candle by my feet. But there is a creature there by the candle. It stares up at me as though I owe it something. It stares a long while bites down into my ankle. I scream like I am four years old and need my mother. But she was taken from me a long time ago and is no good to me now. Now it is just me and it. I stumble away in pain from the tiny torment. I can only limp. It sears into me and spreads up my leg like a disease I have no control over. It will paralyse me soon enough and I will be at its mercy. Until then I can only struggle on to somewhere else. Home perhaps. There are no rats now, just the usual dark ash which is like being on a beach of death. I can see a light on in a far block, it is impossible. Nevertheless, I must try to reach it. The nuclear wind blows across my balding scalp, my hair is dropping out as I go to caress it. The hairs fester into my palms which are also blistered and burned. Something distracts me from death though. I see a sign still standing for the metro. It was a place I visited every day before I was taken. But the pain in my leg is driving me back. There is a noise, a voice, someone laughing. I turn around and there before me, standing in a doorway, is a child, no more than seven or eight years old. Her teeth are black as she raises a smile to me, her eyes lack any feeling in her trance. She is dressed in rags, like she belongs to 1905. Her dress looks dirty and her bare feet are covered in pustules. Her smile sends a chill through me, it is not of this world, of any world. The pain in my leg seethes again and I can only hold the lonely stare with the child. I want to call out and ask her who she is and how she is alive. Something pulling on my senses informs me otherwise. There is no point. She is not here and neither am I. I know where I am really, in that white room. They all thought I was mad. They put padding by my bed and the soiled toilet as though I could hurt myself. However, the thing that scares them is that they know as well as I that I am not insane at all. In fact, right now as I stare into the abyss of the child's eyes, I have never felt saner in my life. It is they who are mad, for they merely perpetuate the myth of reality. Before I think anymore, the child has moved towards me. I never observed her doing it but she is now right at my side. I know she wants to follow me back home. She is familiar to me. From a time before. She begins to whistle, and with that sound the whole view before me metamorphoses. We are both standing by a fence in a large field. There are hills surrounding us and I feel I must look into a Prussian blue sky. I must then gently turn my gaze away as blinding me is the sun. I have not seen the golden corona for what feels like an age. Not since

childhood. The city is always bleak and grey. Out here I can feel the emptiness of existence departing and a new wave of being emerging. There is bird song, life. But it is invaded by the Cossacks and Dostoevsky emerges with his usual act of abuse. The child runs into a meadow and I follow as the old horsemen vanish again like always. There are spectres and I often wonder why they deliberately lead me here. The child is in control now as I leave Dostoevsky to his own devices. He will soon be gone anyway. I lose sight of the girl as they are enveloped by the emerging forest I have run into in pursuit. Miles and miles of trees with no end and no pathway. I am trapped as the haunted field is now gone and there is only dense woodland. The temperature drops but I am sweating. I am struck by the lack of sound. Silence. There is a tap on my shoulder. Before I can turn, I am pushed forward into the bark and clatter my head. There is a warmth which begins to stream down my forehead. I feel dizzy. Childlike laughter rings out but I think a child could not have pushed me so hard, not any normal child anyway. When I eventually turn there is nobody here but me. Until I hear something else. A creaking and then a rocking sound combined. I cannot fathom where the noises are coming from as there is no place to move if I am to avoid the army of nettles which sting my ankles and knees. There is no choice though. Following the sounds, I begin to step forward as my head aches and I can taste blood in my mouth. There is something else though. Not just blood. This is different somehow. There is the sound of gunshots, machine guns. It is in the distance and something that I feel I should run away from; I am drawn towards. There is no sensation as my legs carve through the nettles and I struggle through the limited space the trees afford me. A gentle rain patters on my forehead which helps to cleanse my bloodied face. The ache gently abandons me and I feel like I have transitioned elsewhere now. It is an odd sensation. I almost want to be back in my bed with the straps pulled tight and the padding for me to glance at. But I know that whatever they have planned for me is linked to all of this. I am in another zone, a zone of their choosing. It always happens this way. I often wonder who is really in control here. There is always a presence wherever I am. It manifests in different ways. Sometimes the child, sometimes my mother. They are all dead. I just plough on with the worlds within the worlds. The boxed narrative. Like a Russian doll. Layer after layer after layer. I peel them back but before I find out the truth I am gone elsewhere. My mother once came to visit me in the flat. There was something wrong with her in an uncanny sense. It was just after my father had died and she kept

talking about seeing a cat every day when she went out on her walks in the city. I tried to tell her there was nothing unusual about seeing cats in the street. But she swore she had killed the same one some years ago back on the farm. She always maintained that stray animals had to be kept under control. They could also be eaten if needed. It would come and stand by her in the queues and rub against her, much to the appreciation of the others. My mother wanted nothing to do with it and would be accused of a certain coldness by everyone else present. She said it was haunting her. People would laugh and think my mother a comedian, not realising she was being serious. My mother kept on at me for weeks about this animal. Until one day they found her dead in her bed, just like my father. But that was only a dream I had anyway. Both my parents are alive. There is simply no way of distinguishing reality from unreality anymore here. Though that statement is unreal itself. We all know the truth. I am sweating as I see someone between the trees. Tired but assured. Fear does not take me. I have become so used to the different guests in these zones. They always offer something. Even the rabid child. They guide me to these places for a reason no doubt. Always alone but never really. I used to create. Film, plays, poetry. So, I wonder now where the truth begins and unreality stops. The essence of the future is the death of humanity. I wander alone in the woods wherever the sounds take me, the voices, the noises, sometimes music. They always lead me back to despair though. Despair for what I did. What they say I did. The figure waves at me, I cannot see a face yet, just darkness. I pick up my pace and wrestle with the landscape, tripping, falling, and wheezing. The wind is punched out of me and tears begin to stream down my face. I can hear the gun fire again as a breeze slashes across my hair. The figure is gone. The child returns though, snarling and seething as I plummet towards her. I grab hold of the wretch and scream in her face, 'who are you?' but he just bites my arm like a rabid animal and I must let go as I can see the red streaming from around her mouth. I wince with pain as the teeth bite in. I begin to feel faint and can feel a fit coming on. My head is light and my legs are buckling as the lunatic child finally stops biting. I fall to the ground and feel the broken twigs against my back. But I can glance up at the rising sun ...

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**RED LENS - A SCREENPLAY**

**BY**

**MIRZA IZAKOVA**

*SC11 INT. A DARK PRISON ROOM.*

*[FADE IN: IVAN is standing by an old wooden chair whilst CHEKA paces the claustrophobic room.]*

**CHEKA**

*[Shoves IVAN back down from behind onto the chair.]*

The mist has descended on you, Ivan Sartorius, everything is strained, you aren't yourself *[Paces, circling]* ... the dying man is silent? Nothing to say anymore? *[stands]* You've become the very thing you were attempting to expel from this great nation. A filthy traitor.

**IVAN**

But I'm not a-

**CHEKA**

Enemy of the state? You'll be found guilty. One of the greatest assets of Socialist Realism and yet it's your lack of vision, your blindness to the truth, that's brought you here.

**IVAN**

Truth?

**CHEKA**

Yes, the unreality of what you did was treason. The opening of the Dmitrov Channel by Stalin was to be a magnificent celebration of Soviet industry, and was... but for your own twisted agenda. You were given such a special job, Stalin wanted to show we could match the Americans cinematically. An historical film, a tribute to the Dmitrov canal opening... and you messed it up. Spreading disease like a rat.

**IVAN**

I saw nothing illegitimate in the work, I was commissioned by our great leader to make the film based on the dam opening, and that is precisely what I did-

**CHEKA**

That film was an abomination! [*Pauses and calms himself*]) Ivan Sartorius was one of the Soviet Union's greatest film-makers, but now he will no longer exist. You understand this? Others can get on with the work. Your little crisis will be erased.

**IVAN**

What's happened to my family? What's happened to Mirza and Andrei?

**CHEKA**

Your wife and child? They must suffer the disgrace of having been related to an enemy of the people. A filthy dog, wallowing in his own excrement. But they'll forget you. The fog of time will alter them, memories can be changed through re-education. Rats easily scuttle away.

**IVAN**

They will nev-

**CHEKA**

But they will ... their lives almost depend on it [*IVAN stands in anger as though to strike*] but oh don't worry, Ivan. Don't worry about anything from here. Lubyanka is your world now, a little claustrophobic admittedly, until your death. I'd sit if I were you. You thought you could spread lies through the media to the workers.

**IVAN**

[*Sits*] You can take my life, but it doesn't matter, *you* and all the rest of them are already dead.

**CHEKA**

[*Laughs gently*] We're not afraid. Why should we be afraid when the truth is on our side? [*exit through door*]

**IVAN**

[*V.O. INT pan of prison walls.*]

Cinema was my vision into the soul of humanity, my great exploration. For years I made short films [*projection of montage footage on back wall*] representing what I thought was the collective power of the socialist state, they toured from Odessa to Novosibirsk. The audiences loved seeing them and so did Stalin himself apparently [*chuckles*]. A heroic era. Myself, Vertov,

Eisenstein, Dovzhenko and Pudovkin, forged from the steel of revolution [Pause]. You may ask what brings me to this?

*[IVAN glances out of prison window as V.O. of two mysterious voices emerge, one male and the other female. SLOW TRACK to CLOSE-UP on IVAN'S eye as dialogue grows.]*

**VOICE 1**

*[Female]*

An assembly of shots, an intrinsic pattern.

**VOICE 2**

*[Male]*

Spontaneously, they edit themselves.

**VOICE 1**

Laboriously seeking.

**VOICE 2**

A self-organising structure.

**VOICE 1**

The character of the editing is the film's essential nature.

**VOICE 2**

Imprinted in the frame is time and makes the rhythm of the picture.

**VOICE 1**

But must not put conceptual time with actual time.

**VOICE 2**

Consistency is intensity.

**VOICE 1**

Maintain to unify impact.

**VOICE 2**

The frame is not limited by what you see in it.

**VOICE 1**

It's a guide to stretch thought beyond infinity.

**VOICE 2**

The film lives its life away from its creator.

**VOICE 1**

A newborn to face the world.

**VOICE 2**

A story, a plot, characters.

**VOICE 1**

Phenomenon

**VOICE 2**

An intellectual experience.

**VOICE 1**

Imposing on an audience a truth through puzzles, riddles, and symbols.

**VOICE 2**

Meaning beyond meaning.

**IVAN**

You speak as though they are rules which are followed. I always maintained accuracy. My work was pleasing to all, I edited as I should.

**VOICE 1**

Too clever Ivan, trying to outwit the Supreme Leader with your message.

**VOICE 2**

How dare you ridicule what is true?

**VOICE 1**

The state is truth.

**VOICE 2**

Now you expect mercy for the unreal.

**IVAN**

I expect to be treated as a human being. I served the party well. My record speaks for itself and I made great films that were true to the state. I deserve some respect, compassion.

**VOICE 2**

You expect *us* to believe that?

**VOICE 1**

When compassion is shown it leads to destruction.

**VOICE 2**

Showing sympathy for mankind.

**IVAN**

I'm tired of this, you are not of my making.

**VOICE 1**

We are truth.

**VOICE 2**

Sanitised by you.

**VOICE 1**

We come from your vision of life.

**VOICE 2**

Don't you recognise us?

**VOICE 1**

You framed us to suit your narrative.

**VOICE 2**

The truth of cinema is the reality of thought and language composed in the human consciousness.

**IVAN**

Just words, utterly meaningless.

**VOICE 1**

If we have meaning then surely, we are art?

**IVAN**

Ridiculous!

**VOICE 1**

We are your invention Ivan, truth to power.

**VOICE 2**

We are the real as you saw it.

**IVAN**

Natalya, where is Natalya? She was here.

**VOICE 1**

Natalya is dead.

**VOICE 2**

Dead because of you.

**VOICE 1**

You used her to get to them.

**VOICE 2**

And they punished her for it.

**IVAN**

What of everything else?

**VOICE 1**

There is nothing else. Only the remnants of your world.

**IVAN**

But that's ...

**VOICE 2**

What?

**IVAN**

My wife and son, they are real.

**VOICE 1**

Not just projections?

**IVAN**

Of course not, this place has driven me mad already. You're just projections.

**VOICE 2**

Ghosts, Ivan.

**VOICE 1**

Revenants.

**VOICE 2**

From a world that was non-existent.

**VOICE 2**

Your world.

*As the air grows ever more sultry,  
This is the prayer I recite:  
and may the storm cloud over my country  
be shot through with rays of light<sup>2</sup>*

Larisa drew breath and carefully considered her response. She of course recognised Mirza and remembered the film proposal ... which became a script ... which then became a wrestling match between Lenfilm, Ivangov and then Goskino themselves. Larisa had loved it and wanted to see Mirza's work realised on screen.

'I'm sorry things didn't work out for us, I really liked the script and I felt that it was historical but also gave a sense of meaning to this shit we're living in,' said Larisa to Mirza, still standing in the queue and beginning to wonder if she would ever make it to the butchers at this late stage of the day.

'Oh, it was what it was,' replied Mirza as a slight shiver shook her in the cold. 'I never felt I had the chance to thank you properly for what you did.'

'Well, we were close to securing the four hundred thousand roubles needed but for the Ministry. Interfering idiots,' Larisa felt like raising her voice towards the end of her statement but decided against it on this occasion.

'You shouldn't really say things like that,' Mirza began to feel that speaking to Larisa again may have been an error of judgement, but proceeded on anyway with her agenda. 'I'm still stuck back at my old job now,'-

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<sup>2</sup> Anna Akhmatova, 'Prayer,' trans. by Robert Chandler from *The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*, ed. by Robert Chandler, Boris Dralyuk and Irina Mashinka (London: Penguin, 2015), p.253.

‘Yes, I’ve seen your work on Programme One. I can’t help but feel that it’s erm ... interesting, I mean no disrespect, but I’m sure you know what I mean?’ There was a hesitancy from Larisa. She didn’t want to upset Mirza with her cynicism.

‘Oh, don’t worry. I’m very creative, let’s be honest,’ Mirza felt a slight smile raise in her, it was the first time she’d felt a sense of joy since...she honestly couldn’t remember. At that moment she caught a glint in Larisa’s eye which led to a catharsis that neither would be able to control. Mirza opened with laughter and Larisa mirrored her much to the surprise and annoyance of those in the queue around them.

Tears streamed down Larisa’s face. ‘What would Brezhnev say?’ and then this led to an even greater outburst from them both. Mirza’s face began to hurt as she was using muscles that hadn’t been used for such a long time.

‘I’m sure he’d be full of joy as we are,’ Mirza managed to say in between her almost breathless happiness. It couldn’t last for long, but these were the moments people had to take.

‘Has anybody got any vodka?’ shouted Larisa down the line.

This was too much for some people as an elderly shrivelled gentleman next to them shouted, ‘Will you two stop your girly giggling, you’ll get us all arrested.’

Larisa was having none of this, ‘Oh, don’t be ridiculous, arrest us for laughing? It’s not the thirties anymore, you know?’ However, this mention of the historical purges brought Larisa and Mirza some sobriety from their outburst. The mania died within them.

The queue began to move forward. The woman who had earlier abandoned her place to relieve herself by the bins now returned and hoisted her plastic bag from the floor. She looked at Larisa and nodded a symbolic thank you but then ruined the gentle moment by giving Mirza a weasel-like glare.

‘You can’t push in!’

‘I’m not in the queue.’

‘Then what are you doing here?’

‘I’m just chatting to my old friend,’ Mirza still had some tear marks streaking her cheeks.

Larisa intervened, ‘She’s with me and we’re just talking, nobody is queue jumping, okay?’

The woman made a disapproving noise and turned her back to face forwards.

‘So, what are you going to do next?’ Larisa asked Mirza. ‘You’ve got a good talent for writing and being creative, you could use it somehow. Easy for me to say, having seen you’ve been put through the heavy mill by the powers from above I know, but it’s such a waste.’

‘I appreciate that, but I’m not sure,’ Mirza began to whisper. ‘I was given a warning after all that, and I don’t think I dare rock the boat again for now. I don’t want to lose my job, I really need it right now,’ her whisper died away towards the end as the queue tiptoed forward.

‘I get it, have you thought about working for Lenfilm here? I’m sure we could get you on one of the creative units, I could have a word, and see?’ questioned Larisa.

‘What good would it do though?’ there was a pause between them before Mirza continued hesitantly. ‘You know they still come and search for the script, I don’t even have it. That man, whoever he was called, at the Ministry said I could never work in the film industry after this. And any issues at Programme One could see me in jail.’ Mirza reflected sadly. ‘My partner Ivan has been given a chance; he’s making science fiction. But because of me he’s being watched, or even set up I feel.’

‘Ivan Sartorius? Really?’ Larisa paused to not make a great deal out of the revelation. She then changed tact. ‘Listen, Ivangov from the Ministry is a complete fuckwit who most of us despise. He’s a joke,’ Larisa began to grow in frustration. ‘Did you see what he eventually commissioned? Some shit by Dmitri Onanov. Our studio head Blinov loved it, but we all hated it, then the Ministry got involved and then the Central Committee. After massive rewrites it was produced. Onanov is in Paris now, they thought his work should be a window into our world.’

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*Help me, O Lord, through this night.*

*I fear for life, your slave.*

*To live in Peter's city is to sleep in a grave.<sup>3</sup>*

Dmitri squinted as the sunlight emerged from behind the broken clouds. He had been staring upwards and trancelike at the monolith before him. It was one of the great works of western architecture and nothing was going to ruin this day for him. Not even the occasional intense shower of rain, or even the multitudes of young people or families sitting on the grass blocking every step he took. They could not break this moment of awe he felt. They were not a nuisance. If he was back home, he would have been angry, but things were different for him here. He felt more relaxed. And dare he think it, but he was starting to feel an energy again. He wasn't hungry. There were no queues here. Well, there were queues, but not the ones you stayed in all afternoon just to get a bag of apples.

'Dmitri, for God's sake you still have croissant bits on your chin,' said Mosha as she tiptoed towards him skilfully avoiding seated young semi-nudes in their uniforms of kaftans or chequered shirts, some with bare feet. Some had eyes closed and were smiling whilst others were sitting gently debating with finger pointing and the occasional nodding of heads. 'Excusez moi,' she said as she clambered over a young man with hair almost down to his waist and a forest of beard. He seemed to be meditating with his eyes firmly closed and Mosha's interjection made no difference. 'Maybe we should sit down too, Dmitri?'

With a gentle sigh Dmitri wiped his chin with his hand ... Some of the croissant landed on his blue Levi jeans which he'd bought especially on this trip; never in his life had he felt so modern. 'This is amazing, Mosha, this is truly amazing. I mean, just look at it.'

'Yes, I know, Dmitri,' Mosha was standing by him now, because of the meditative surroundings she felt the urge to whisper. 'I've got the sandwiches for us, should we sit? Like I say.'

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<sup>3</sup> Osip Mandelstam, 'Untitled,' trans. by Robert Chandler, *ibid.*, p.293.

Let's find some room.' It was a gentle maternal tone that she used sometimes which always made Dmitri do exactly what she wanted.

'Let's find a space a bit away from everyone here, we could sit right underneath and stare up.'

'Okay, Dmitri,' and this made Mosha giggle slightly. 'You know there are plenty of monuments to stare at back home.' There was now a brief awkwardness between them as Mosha's humour had not quite landed as she intended. She was an understanding person and shared empathy for Dmitri. But Mosha was also a pragmatist and knew they would both have to leave soon and return to where they had travelled from. This bubble they were in would have to burst.

'Yes, but this is liberty, Mosha. Don't you feel it?' They began striding through the sitting crowds being careful not to kick anyone. Mosha said nothing. The sun was bright and hot. Both could feel the intensity of the shine on their faces. They would be likely burned tomorrow with red faces; they hadn't expected the sun today. Dmitri didn't care about any of that though, he was just happy to be liberally striding amongst the Europeans. He felt like Peter the Great on his European Embassy, though it wasn't sixteen -ninety-seven. It was nineteen-seventy-three. The journey to get here had aged Dmitri, or so he felt, by several years both physically and psychologically.

*Goskino had liked the proposal that he and Besekhov wrote. They put a script together. It wasn't liked. Mosfilm wouldn't touch it but Lenfilm ... even the Ukrainians might be interested? Then the Central Committee got on board, but Lenfilm didn't like certain points. Mosfilm were back on board, then the Committee changed their minds ...*

Dmitri sat opposite across the desk belonging to Mikhail Suslov. The Chief Ideologue of the Communist Party remained unblinking as his pen crossed through line after line of the script. The stressed induced shaking of Dmitri's hands was easily visible as well as his uncontrollable twitching left eye lid. A single window behind Suslov offered little comfort from the stiflingly warm office as Dmitri felt a bead of sweat trickle down his forehead and penetrate his right eye, which made him blink; the only sound being the ticking of a distant clock and the mechanical accuracy of Suslov's pen. Time held no weight for Dmitri anyway, as he sat unable to even look at the so-called war hero in

front of him. A man who was once considered the heir to Stalin but seemed almost mellow in his later years compared to others, to the point that Dmitri had forgotten about him and was now confused as to why this man would take such a personal hand in his efforts to get this work into production. Surely, he had more important things to do? It didn't stop the intimidation Dmitri felt from this grey haired, large spectacled, pinstriped old man sitting before him. To say the wrong thing now could be personally catastrophic, better to remain silent.

Suslov tutted, sighed, and said, 'You know I can't believe they have me doing things like this, but my old friend Leonid had nothing else for me to do.' There was nothing Dmitri could say in response. 'What do you think of Leonid?' Dmitri held his breath as he realised what he'd just heard. It wasn't a question he could answer. He could only play for time.

'Erm ... well ...' he sputtered out.

'Yes?'

'I think he's ... outstanding ...'

'At what?'

'At ... leadership of our great nation ...'

'You actually believe that?'

'...'

Suslov shuddered with laughter. 'The look on your face, boy. Oh, the look on your face.' He settled: 'Just relax, breathe ... I don't care what you think, I just fancied playing.'

There was a cunning iciness to Suslov. Dmitri sat in silence again. The old man had frightened him. The sound of the distant clock came back into Dmitri's brain and he decided to just think of the hypnotic tick to try and relax, as his tormentor continued with his red pen.

'Not sure about the Mikal character, he's a bit, how can I put it? disruptive isn't he? I think he's a bit of a problem. What does he really say about socialism? Not a lot. And, the Lena character,

I'm not sure her line about the collective glories really fits, feels a bit forced, a bit put on, wouldn't you say?'

'I can make changes; I'll do whatever it takes.'

'Well, you still wrote this though, didn't you? You and that mysterious Besekhov fellow. That's the problem we have here ... where is he anyway?'

'Comrade Besekhov couldn't be here today due to a personal matter. If some things are not appropriate then alterations can be made.'

'The personal matter being his incarceration of course. You don't need me to tell you, but I should say that obviously it may be worth putting some distance between yourself and him. With that in mind, who does the script belong to then?'

'The Soviet Union, Mother Russia. I want the film to be a beacon for the rest of the world.'

Suslov began to shake slowly which puzzled Dmitri until it quickly became clear that his face was about to explode into a laughing fit. In fairness to Dmitri, he tried to compose himself initially but then failed. He sprayed spittle across the table, hitting Dmitri below his right eye, as a bellicose roar ripped through the room. Suslov was enjoying himself and Dmitri just bowed his head to glance at the floor, it was overwhelming and his eyes closed.

He opened them to find he'd fallen asleep in his clothes again as a cold shiver tiptoed down his spine. In his tiredness, Dmitri had forgotten to draw his curtains last night, which meant for a colder start to the day. The twelve other occupants of his apartment were usually not as forgetful in their rooms, but Dmitri was just too tired sometimes to even move. He wanted to get away, he could go and live with his sister and niece. There was space now his brother-in-law had vanished.

*The script was too risqué and had 'the potential to insite anti-Soviet feeling.' Dmitri crafted his own script and Besekhov was furious as he now had 'party friends' on the Lenfilm editing committee who were going to help get the original approved. Dmitri changed the narrative slightly but only to suit him and not them. No one liked it. Besekhov abandoned him. Dmitri had nothing but his old films to*

*fall back on - those he'd got made through Mosfilm but they were not successful across the Union, or so they told him. How would he even know? He wrote another script, and another. There was a moment where he needed explosions, this 'could prove problematic,' was what they said at Mosfilm, but Lenfilm started to like it. It was ambitious but he had to be careful about certain 'character portrayals.' The central protagonist had to be a heroic figure both 'devoted to his family and the Motherland'. Dmitri didn't disagree with that but he would craft in his own way. There would be war, death and a haunting by the lost wives and daughters like Japanese Yurei.*

Dmitri was convinced he had been haunted for years by Yurei. His father was a gallant soldier and had helped rid Russia of Nazis, but he was then designated to invade Japan from the north, until the Americans dropped the bomb. Nonetheless, his father had spent time in Japan and Dmitri was convinced he'd done bad things there. The vodka he consumed into his old age spoke of layers of trauma. He was not a violent drunk, but there was a perpetual unhappiness which dogged him to his death. He would see things in the corner of his bedroom, pointing and shouting at them ... but there was nothing there. Dmitri's mother and sister would pacify his father, but as an imaginative child, Dmitri became convinced that he could see things too.

Sometimes in the corner of his eye there was a tiny flash of black, a flickering would just arrive and quickly depart. On occasions when he was sat alone, he began to feel paranoid and felt as though he was under surveillance. It was all in his mind he told himself repeatedly, but sometimes he would feel a movement from behind him caress the skin on the back of his neck, just a soft flow of air but a reminder that he wasn't alone. A bedroom window might be gaping open that he knew he had previously closed, and the kitchen door might be closed that he'd left open. He dare not speak about these things for fear of chastisement from his mother and teasing from his sister. Dmitri didn't want to encourage his father's so-called fantasies. But his father was a war hero according to the neighbours, though there seemed nothing heroic about the man he'd become. Sitting in his favoured kitchen chair often staring into space talking to himself after a day of moulding metal tools at Factory 24. He looked haunted. Dmitri could only look on and emulate his father's trauma somehow, as though a gift passed down to him. The young filmmaker had to confront his fears and whilst watching Mizoguchi's

*Ugetsu Monogatari* things started to make sense. The seduction and haunting of a local potter by a dead princess reached out to Dmitri. He'd never seen a horror film before, Soviets just couldn't make them or even attempt to. He felt his father was Masayuki Mori's Genjuro who was to be perpetually tortured by the dead. He recently saw Shindo's *Onibaba* which he found both terrifying and enlightening. The image of Nobuko Otawa in the mask, frightening the samurai warriors to death embedded into Dmitri's soul. These films were old but they spoke much to Dmitri about his father, but also Dmitri. It was the power of the image that seduced and he felt that his future lay in that direction. There was nowhere else he could go. The screen was his only future.

*He would make it work. Dmitri became more frustrated though. There was no response from Lenfilm after six weeks. The more he waited the more he wanted to redraft again. Something more subversive and subtextual. An anger grew which manifested on the page. Besekhov came back on board and laughed at it. He thought it was meant to be a comedy and to destroy it before anyone else read it. Dmitri could be cleverer. Besekhov was arrested but released quickly for something or other. He wouldn't talk about it, but he'd avoided prison this time. Dmitri had to cut all ties or he would 'never get a film made again.' Lenfilm wanted more changes. Dmitri wrote about a hero from the war. Mosfilm were interested again but didn't like the script, it was 'too offensive to the General Secretary and would result in everyone's incarceration.' Hilarious. The General Secretary had a fine war record so everyone had been told. He was an injured hero. The chin injury still bothered him.*

Leonid was under heavy fire from the Nazi machine guns but his platoon had to push on, they had to liberate the Steppe mile by mile. The forest of fir directly in front of them was partly hidden by an irritating mist and the fascists sprayed them through it. They could wait for it to clear and give the fascists even clearer shots or just charge forward into an unknown hell, either way, there was death everywhere. Leonid's jeep had been bogged in some mud and it took three of them to push it out whilst under fire. Bullets whistling past their heads. One of them took a ricochet to the heart and dropped instantly. He made no sound as his corpse simply slipped under the mud. It would be his body that served as support to get the back wheel out. More helpful dead than alive in truth. Down the valley they went unto the forest border, tanks and infantry combined to clear the area. When Leonid

listened hard, he could sometimes make out the beginning of a distant dawn chorus, but he couldn't be sure. The noises were confusing. The distant shouting of German voices blended in and was both exhilarating and terrifying, the enemy was close. It wouldn't be a bullet that gave Leonid his hero status, but a landmine planted just at the forest opening. As the forward line of tanks pushed onwards like crawling insects, they somehow avoided Leonid's tormentor. It was waiting especially for him, just letting the hours tick by to detonation. It had waited months for the pleasure through the seasons, sometimes baked in warm mud and other times freezing and dank. It remained primed though and would finally give itself to the fascist cause. The problem was the rains had been heavy and the mine had sunk further down into the land. As the jeep's front left wheel rolled over, the explosion was not as formidable as it once might have been. Nonetheless, Leonid was thrown upwards and shoved onto the dirt like a paper doll. He rolled over onto his front and in the adrenaline surge that followed felt himself reaching for his legs. They were both there and he grabbed at them, he could move them. He then crawled under the wreckage to take shelter as others pushed on into the unknown. Leonid waited until he gathered himself together, drew his pistol and joined in the charge, running forwards to liberate his motherland. He had suffered some painful facial damage to his chin, but what cared him when freedom was at stake?

That was one story anyway.

Alternatively, he damaged his chin in a small jeep crash and never even faced a nazi bullet.

He couldn't make a film with Brezhnev in, but he could make something similar.

*Mosha asked Dmitri when he was going to make a film again. It felt 'too long since.' This made Dmitri laugh to himself but he also felt annoyed. He could offer a safer treatment for Mosfilm again, just to get the go ahead. He could edit with Mosha later. Lenfilm came back, there were 'issues' but they were willing to 'talk face to face about them.' Victor Blinov was in the meeting sat at the back, smoking. Silent throughout but giving a hard stare which said plenty to Dmitri. They wouldn't upset Romanov at any cost, the Regional Committee secretary was too important. 'War could work though,' they said. Brezhnev loved war memories. But Dmitri wasn't popular with the Filmmaker's Union these*

*days. He was a risk. Things were tighter with Brezhnev. They'd had trouble with Operation "New Year" and couldn't afford to upset Goskino again. There were too many committees, Dmitri thought. It was just jumping hurdles. 'Get back to us with a version which shows the protagonist is stronger, he cannot be perceived as weak at any stage, the man is a war hero.' Dmitri knew that was questionable. He would craft the story of a great hero who returns injured to face, what? He would go abstract. The hero would be haunted by his past, the glory of the Nazi defeat but the ghosts wouldn't leave him. The protagonist could work through it until he's at peace in the new Soviet. Dmitri would have to be subversive but it would be worth it. He wanted it to be slow and contemplative. Make them all think. But too intellectual for Goskino, they must only see the basic story. It was too much and Dmitri knew it. But he needed the Europeans to like it then he might get to go places.*

'Mosha, this could be a ticket out of here.' There was silence at this comment. This all weighed down the atmosphere greater as the rain trickled down in the concrete communal courtyard where they both stood, which stank of urine and vomit. Dmitri thought it would be a good place to talk to Mosha secretly, as they would surely be alone during the daylight here.

'Dmitri, what are you talking about?' Mosha whispered. 'You know if someone heard you saying that they wouldn't like it. They might even lock you up.' There was disappointment in her tone.

'But Mosha, I only meant that we might be able to see a bit of Europe perhaps? We can do it now, they'd let us.' Dmitri couldn't resist the follow-up though. 'Trouble is you have to come back...'

'Stop with that talk, let's go. I don't want to be part of a conversation like this. I thought we were going for lunch.'

'We can try and get lunch but the KGB just eat everything.' Dmitri laughed at his own joke but Mosha maintained a silence. The rain began to get heavier.

*He even contemplated being chastised by the Central Committee just so the film could become underground and forgotten. They'd ironically love it in Paris, London, and Rome, it would be that kind of film. But he had to do it, get on with it. Create an artistic war film ... It might be dangerous but*

*Dmitri searched for some reality in the state he now found himself. Lenfilm waited for another draft, they warned him about Besekhov again, he couldn't be 'touched.' Any association and 'you'll never make a film again.' Mosfilm were completely out of the picture now, vanished. It was fine. Mosha was asking again, and again. Alexei and Mosha became engaged, this was a gift and a curse. They were good filmmakers but Dmitri was jealous. Mosha could make her own films if she wanted, she didn't need Dmitri or Alexei, but she was timid about it. Dmitri understood and felt relieved deep down, he wouldn't be able to take the success she would receive. It would hurt him if he was honest. He often told himself late at night as he was drifting off into sleep and his consciousness jumped between fantasy and reality how pathetic he was for thinking things like that. Fantasy and reality were what caused him his late-night angst too. No one seemed to know what was real anymore, Dmitri thought that nobody cared either. We all just got on with it as best possible. Dmitri's niece would tell him how she'd learned about the evils of 'capitalist decadence' in school and how the Union must always be defended against those 'evil ideas.' The General Secretary defends us against such things and makes the Soviet Union the 'leader of the free world.' Dmitri felt embarrassed for her and embarrassed by the fact that their family had to talk in code in front of her to hide the truth. If someone had 'gone to university' then they were in prison, once they 'graduated' they were released.*

Ludmila ran into the kitchen space to greet her uncle. Dmitri gave her a wink and a brief embrace.

‘So, how was school today? I hope the pitfalls of Westernisation were discussed, naturally?’

Dmitri was trying hard not to sound sarcastic in front of the young child. Ludmila was eight years old and would no doubt keep her old duffel coat on for most of the evening due to the coldness of Dmitri's sister's apartment.

‘Did you know that Brezhnev is currently helping to bring peace to the people near Egypt, or something like that?’ said Ludmila with great optimism. ‘I had a good violin lesson too, Madam Brushenka said I was nearly at Tchaikovsky level.’

Dmitri chuckled, ‘Goodness, that is impressive.’

It was always following this daily debrief that his sister Balima would enter, unwrapping her hair from the scarf she perpetually wore no matter what time of year it was.

‘Don’t be sarcastic with her, Uncle Dmitri, she is working hard at the minute,’ a gentle caress of Ludmila’s crown. ‘We want to get her in the concert hall soon.’

‘And away from here perhaps, sister?’

Balima sighed, ‘Always the same with you, like a stuck record.’

‘Ah, those things we owned in the sixties but had to sell?’

‘Uncle Dmitri, that’s not funny and you should be nice in front of your niece.’

Ludmila stood and watched this exchange like she always did. She loved her mother and uncle, but there was always a gentle tension between them at this time of day. Something about school riled Uncle Dmitri. They would then joke about travelling and leaving home for some reason.

Balima continued: ‘You know we’re not badly off here; it could be much worse. Some people share with twelve others in an apartment. We are doing okay in comparison. We’re lucky.’

‘Lucky?’ Dmitri had heard this talk before from his suffering sister. He kept the tone playful though to not upset Ludmila. He turned to look out of the window next to him by the sink, covered with dripping condensation, nothing but grey outside. ‘Well, I’ll just take in this lovely view then.’

*Quite a few friends and distant relatives had studied as mature students, which always made Dmitri chuckle. Some had longer courses than others. Some were doing research overseas and may not ever return. It was a game and it made Dmitri laugh out loud sometimes. They perpetuated a lie for her as the lie was perpetuated to them. Though no one really bothered to question the lies, not through fear as such, they weren’t living under Stalin, more through a total lack of care. Join the queues and soldier on. Brezhnev was taking care of everyone. So, a new draft was needed for Lenfilm. Dmitri was close to presenting again. He knew that Blinov had been meeting with Goskino in Moscow. Pavlenok was there and he had been critical of Lenfilm and all the ‘mistakes’ as he saw, Operation “New Year”, The Blue Hares and Kapukhin which were not ‘fully realised.’ Irina Golovan was facing being*

removed, Dmitri liked her, she was a good editor, but this is why she probably had to go, she was too good. There was always an ideological pressure. The Regional Committee had gotten involved, they had to be appeased too. Dmitri could rescue the studio with his masterpiece as he saw it. He had to avoid the 'ideological indifference' somehow which the studio had been accused of. It would be a test of Blinov's nerve to get the film out, Dmitri knew. The latest draft came back, they didn't like the violence, it could be too upsetting and invoke 'collective trauma.' This was a lie, but there were other problems too. They didn't like the use of female ghosts, they needed to be real people and not supernatural. Dmitri would make them open to interpretation and that is as far as he would go in terms of compromise. There was something else they were keeping from him. It was Besekhov again and his association. There was too much heat. It had apparently gone as high as the KGB. Dmitri would have to renounce his old friendship completely. But Besekhov still knocked on Dmitri's door late at night wanting to talk. It was difficult for Dmitri, though he knew his old friend would have to go if he stood any chance of getting his ideas back on celluloid. Blinov called a personal meeting and Dmitri was told there had to be a public renunciation in front of Regional Committee members to satisfy them that Besekhov was not an associate anymore. Dmitri agreed. Besekhov had gone to university again. He still hadn't graduated, and it had been two years. Mosha wanted to start work on her own script now. Dmitri didn't like the idea, he needed her more than she thought, besides which, things had gone wrong for her in the past, why would she try again. Mosfilm had expressed an interest in an idea she had about something or other. Dmitri hadn't been listening to her and he was caught off guard. She phoned him to tell him. It was about a war hero returning to Moscow but he was haunted by his past. Dmitri couldn't believe what he'd heard and thought it was a dream. She was going to base it around Brezhnev, he would rise above his demons to become the leader of the free world. Dmitri could only laugh when he heard the news. Mosfilm wouldn't touch him, but they wanted Mosha. He accused her of theft but she had no idea what he was talking about. Dmitri thought he was in some kind of nightmare. Mosha was living the dream suddenly. It couldn't last, it just couldn't. Dmitri would continue with his own script. Mosha refused to work with him. Brezhnev wanted a new narrative in film for war memory. Everyone was scrambling to get a project together suddenly. Dmitri had been there first though; he knew via Blinov. Lenfilm were still backing him now he'd renounced

*Besezhov but the script had to be watertight. The editing board didn't like the ending, it was too ambiguous. They didn't like the protagonist staring at the sky, it was 'too threatening' as though 'waiting for the bomb to drop.' Dmitri was convinced Lenfilm were toying with him, and it was a joke to them. Mosha was already thinking about the team she was working with, Mosfilm loved the script as well as the Regional Committee and even the Central Committee. Dmitri thought it was a conspiracy against him, getting that level of approval so fast never occurs. Mosha came to see him to talk about him being a production manager but Mosfilm wanted him to drop any script he was working on with Lenfilm as a condition. He initially refused. Mosfilm had been hard to work with in the past but maybe it might work. Lenfilm came back, Blinov backed the project and Dmitri could start pre-production soon. The Regional Committee weren't convinced but Blinov had fought them hard so he told Dmitri. The Central Committee could wait. Mosha's script suddenly hit a problem with Mosfilm. The editing board wanted to remove 12 pages suddenly. There was fantasy talk that this had come from the Central Committee themselves. Mosha was lost in the narrative now. Dmitri spoke with Alexei about cinematography. There was talk of getting Banionis for the central part, he was the right age but not too keen on a film which he deemed a populist work. Dmitri would have to speak to him about the film directly.*

Banionis kept ruffling his thick hair as he paced the room slowly. Dmitri was nervous meeting him and couldn't get his words out. Banionis glanced at his watch.

'What time is Blinov coming, exactly?' he said. 'I thought we said quarter past?' he sighed and looked at his watch again irritably as if to make a further point. His black suit was getting ruffled with the agitation.

Dmitri just listened to the distant chatter of walkers outside, there felt like an urgency on the streets for some reason today. The Lenfilm offices offered slight respite from the humdrum. Inside, Lenfilm made fantasy, whilst those outside lived it.

‘I’m sorry about this, sir.’ Dmitri cringed internally at his response but was driven by self-doubt. He was entering a world of names he felt didn’t match his station. Who was he to them? ‘I’m sure he’ll be here any moment soon.’

‘What is this film about, anyway? You might as well give me a run down whilst we wait.’ Banionis paused his pacing and placed his hands on the back of a chair which was by his side. Facing the wall. The office was quite well presented with cream walls and a lamp in the corner. A portrait of Brezhnev suspended above the filing cabinets. The space was small though a large window opening out on one of the Studio 2 made the dynamics feel larger. There was a set under construction, it looked to Dmitri like an alien planet or something. Banionis suddenly broke into a joke: ‘Gagarin would’ve liked that planet, non?’ and bellicosely guffawed before breaking into a wretched cough.

Dmitri gave a performative haughty laugh which helped ease his mind. It was the French accent at the end. Completely bizarre.

‘Yes,’ he said in between chuckles. ‘Mind you, I guess you’re no stranger to that world yourself,’ said Dmitri.

There was a slight thoughtful pause from Banionis as though trying to remember something. Then it arrived: ‘You know they were sleeping together? Her and him?’

Dmitri wasn’t sure where to take this and so pleaded innocence. ‘Oh, really? gosh.’

‘Are you into that level of creativity with your actors?’ asked Banionis.

‘No.’ Dmitri suddenly felt empowered. He had a moral high ground.

Blinov waltzed through the door.

‘Sorry about this,’ he said without raising a smile. ‘Central Committee things. Really don’t know why I get dragged into it all. It’s only local stuff anyway.’

Banionis now sat down. ‘Don’t worry, me and Dmitri here were just chatting away.’ He gave a grunt and a smirk. Blinov remained standing as Dmitri just leant against the cabinets.

‘So, Banionis, are you in or out, you’ve read the script I take?’ asked Blinov nonchalantly.

‘Nope, I wanted our friend here to talk me through it,’ said Banionis as he gestured towards Dmitri, who just now stared out at the alien planet.

‘Get with it, Dmitri. Banionis is here!’

‘It’s fine, he’s a little nervous,’ quipped Banionis.

Dmitri was annoyed by all of this, he said: ‘It’s about a haunted war hero and the vanquishing of fascism.’

Banionis laughed. ‘Of course it is, of course it is. I read the proposal.’ He then stared out at the planet and didn’t say another word for the rest of the meeting, despite Blinov’s attempts at convincing him to take the lead.

Dmitri then woke up, not another dream, surely?

*The title was still under negotiation with Lenfilm and couldn’t be finalised yet. Red Lens came to Dmitri one morning as he drifted in and out of sleep, but no, someone else could have that. Besekhov appeared in a nightmare begging Dmitri to help him, he was on his knees and thinking Dmitri was his mother. It was so strange but Dmitri also found it quite inspiring. Banionis wouldn’t play the lead. He needed to ‘give it some thought.’ Dmitri didn’t have time for him, he either took the part or not. Mosha was speaking to Dmitri again. She was frustrated by the twelve pages she lost; they’d been deemed ‘creatively destructive’ by someone at Mosfilm. Mosha wouldn’t say who. It seemed far-fetched and Dmitri thought there was much more to the story than she was letting on. Dmitri would find out another time. Mosha was asking questions of Dmitri now. Alexei was struggling to want to work with Dmitri too. They’d got quite heated in discussion. Alexei accused Dmitri of stealing Mosha’s ideas. Dmitri already knew he was in a paranoid world where truth was being eroded away. Alexei and Mosha didn’t help him. The narrative was his, he wrote it. Blinov was supporting him now. Alexei said Blinov wasn’t real. Of course, Blinov is real, Dmitri argued. But then the strange paranoia crept in. Why was it all so difficult, why so troubling, why can’t it be easy? Blinov is in charge, he’s the power*

*at Lenfilm. Alexei is always speaking philosophically which annoys Dmitri. Alexei thinks he's so clever compared to Dmitri. Dmitri is a peasant to him. The film will be made with Alexei or not. Mosha's film has gone. Blinov got in touch, there's an issue with the film stock, Lenfilm is running low and can't source any from the smaller houses. Blinov is just not very popular. Too demanding of those above him, fierce at times. Dmitri could only wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and. There's talk that Shepitko has been hospitalised, Klimov is going beside himself with worry. Mosha is worried about committing to films now. There are rumours that censorship has made Shepitko mad. Mosha can't bear it. Alexei is worried about Mosha. Dmitri just will carry on, Blinov is intent. Dmitri could be the saviour of Lenfilm, so Dmitri liked to think. Once there's some actual celluloid available. All anybody can talk about is Shepitko. Dmitri didn't understand it, soon they'd all be talking about him anyway. There was a rumour that Besekhov was dead. Only a rumour but it hung in Dmitri's mind. Besekhov was ridiculous, a ridiculous person anyway. If he was dead then so be it. It would stop everyone talking about Shepitko at least for a day or two. Alexei had a normal conversation with Dmitri, he was beginning to feel the 'visionary purpose' again.*

‘Alexei, I think we have something you know? I could really do with you onboard.’ Alexei always looked perfectly presented even when dressed in a dowdy jumper and cords. There was a jealousy that angered Dmitri, but he needed him and wanted to use him; Alexei meant Mosha. Alexei ran his fingers through his long-coiffured hair.

‘Well, D, my friend,’ he said. The shortening to just ‘D’ was an irritation for Dmitri. ‘I mean, with everything kicking off with Shepitko right now, there is a part of me that wants to strike back. Do something outrageous? I’m not sure your proposal is really that outrageous, you know what I mean?’

Dmitri drew breath after this statement which he considered ridiculous. Whilst his sister and niece were out at the swings, he had invited Alexei around, and as they both sat in the poky apartment it felt like an important moment in Dmitri's life for some reason. The thought of escape became overwhelming. Escape from the Union was always unrealisable until now. Dmitri had a sense of freshness in his soul, if he could just capture a mood of optimism briefly with others.

‘This is our chance though, Alexei. I hate the Shepitko situation, but we can make a difference here. Get our work across Europe even. It could happen if we go about things in the right way. Don’t overthink it. We’ve got them interested and we might even get a full budget.’

Alexei nodded and gave a puzzled face. ‘Do you really think it’s a ticket to elsewhere? They’ll let you leave for a short time, but they’ll call you back, my friend. They always do. What about your sister?’

‘She’s fine, she thinks she’s lucky to be living here,’ said Dmitri dismissively. ‘Well, I want to take a chance to see a bit of the world, don’t you? There’s talk that Brezhnev himself has seen the script and likes it; can you believe this?’

‘No, I can’t, Dmitri, that’s crap and you know it. Why would he be reading your script exactly?’ Alexei gave a gentle but sympathetic laugh.

‘He’s interested in war films, apparently,’ Dmitri wouldn’t be defeated, even if it was crap.

‘When would he have the time?’

‘Are you in or out?’

‘I’ll talk to Mosha, we’ll give this some thought.’

Dmitri resented the fact that Alexei and Mosha had to consider this together and couldn’t be separated, but he had to accept it, for now.

*Mosha wanted a role with Dmitri’s film. Shepitko had made her feel awful. Dmitri could finally feel that ship coming in. Lenfilm liked Mosha and Dmitri was sure he could have her onboard. Things were changing slowly. The film was going to be made and Dmitri would get some form of control. There were still edits to be done for Lenfilm. Blinov was being undermined but he told Dmitri to just ‘go with it’ because he would eventually clean out the editing board when the moment was right. For now, Blinov had to keep them in, he’d already upset too many other people elsewhere and much higher up in the chain. Dmitri wasn’t the ‘voice of the people’ as so many thought who had gone before. He was uncomfortable but then again so was Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, were they ever*

*comfortable in what they did? There could be no comfort in creativity. It was a torturous process and a test of endurance and disharmony. But through that black hole the vision would come. Dmitri thought people who spoke like that were utterly pretentious. He wanted to make films as good as they possibly could be. The melodrama came from the system. It was the system that liked drama, not Dmitri. Those above who sat in large darkened rooms with military fatigues and pieces of wool on their chests for doing what no one really knew or dare question. He wanted sound and light on screen. They wanted their own message, not Dmitri's. Dmitri would not let it bother him though. He could only carry on and on. The script would be ready, the board could have their say and he would make it. Dmitri would transmit his message whether they liked it or not.*

He was going to stay for as long as possible even when they were called back. There had been a phone call received at the hotel for him, but he didn't take it. There was still time yet. Let *them* wait for once. Because while they waited Dmitri could plot. He dares not share his potential idea with Mosha though which was causing him a dilemma, he couldn't abide the thought of putting her in a difficult position. These were thoughts he'd been having since they departed Sheremetyevo Airport, there was a chance, but the window was limited. As he faced the grind of the long press junkets who all asked the same questions with their translators repeating, he was always thinking further ahead. His tongue would say controlled responses to those people but his mind was elsewhere. Internally he was a hive of conspiracy. Whilst he felt physically sick at the thought, an exotic excitement also gripped him. He'd never done anything seriously rebellious in his life, he just wasn't like that. Dmitri needed Mosha though. He had to have her with him. She was the most accomplished editor he'd ever worked with but it wasn't just that of course. There was much more to it. Whilst they were still young, they should do this. The obstacle was Alexei, Mosha's fiancée. A great cinematographer but Alexei was also a brick wall placed directly in front of Dmitri's desires. Alexei was simply too much for Dmitri, he wasn't cynical enough to take the necessary actions needed. He tried to enjoy life too much which was crazy. They'd all made a great film together and were being celebrated across Europe while in the Motherland they were ignored, and Dmitri's masterpiece had been hidden away. Dmitri saw no dissent in the work but the Central Committee had a difference of opinion. It was shambolic.

After all the time in production processing the film. Brezhnev himself was supposed to have loved it initially but then changed his mind. Changed his mind. In that fleeting second of indifference from the great leader, Dmitri's work was catapulted into Siberia. But the Parisians liked it and the British. It was plucked from obscurity.

Dmitri wanted to stay here. He had no ties back home and Europe had opened his eyes. But he had to plan carefully. A mistake could lead to prison potentially or there's even talk of the mental institutes these days. It would be easier for everybody if they just let him stay here. He could go home when things changed. When things got better. Dmitri knew those times were never going to happen and he was living in a hyper bubble of reality. In Paris there was colour, he could almost die with envy. Back home he queued for food every day and had lazy banter with his regular queue mates. They all knew how dire their lives were but it had now become an ironic joke to exist. They could only laugh about it; they had no choice. To really face reality could cave your brain in. That's why people ended up institutionalised. They stared too hard and felt the censorship slap them. The ferocity left a bitter taste. They were drones then, state medicated drones. Dmitri refused to follow that path.

\*

*A newborn to face the world. A story, a plot, characters. Phenomenon. An intellectual experience. Imposing on an audience a truth through puzzles, riddles and symbols. Meaning beyond meaning.*

Ivan sat watching the daily rushes. The celluloid gave the usual hypnotic whirring through the projector as his eyes were transfixed for the task in hand. The reflecting bright lights emblazoned across his face both inspired as well as dominated his thoughts. Nothing but perfection would do and the masterwork was forming. They wanted science fiction. *Progress* is the master word, *not what*

*could be, what will be.* They wanted an epic. Their vision, the might of industrialisation is ‘The Golden Ladder’ into the cosmos and beyond.

He felt very alone in his work, though Ivan felt it had been a good day, the results could be seen. That was what he was trying to keep locked in memory. The location filming was fine, the weather was turning springlike out in the country. It was somehow warmer and soothing. Away from the chill of the cities. Ivan reminded himself again he had to think only positively. It’s all he had to remember. The shoot had gone well and the censors would be pleased with the work. But when Ivan let his thoughts wander, he began to acknowledge there was an element of merely performative satisfaction within. His feelings of contentment were made to feel opaque when reality crept in. Soon the rushes that he looked at began to lose focus and he could only see a danger approaching. Deep down he was clouded.

It was Natalya, she’d been difficult on set. They’d been filming on location in thick forest near the borders. The weather was perfect and the sun had emitted a satisfying glow all day, it was cool at times but great to shoot in. However, the leading lady and fellow crew members deemed themselves more competent than Ivan and seemed perpetually irritated by his choices. Ivan had no choice with who he could work with this time, it was a price that he was having to pay for being given the project. Natalya was one of the most powerful actresses because she was adored by the important committee people, the ones who made the decisions. Ivan knew he had to gain her respect or she could make his life a misery.

‘Why am I standing in this position?’ was her first gambit during a solo scene. ‘Surely I’m better off to the right of the frame where the sun will light me better?’ It was a legitimate question but Ivan wanted to assert himself. Yet he lacked confidence and deep down knew she was correct.

‘Yes, you’re right of course,’ said Ivan and he asked the small crew to reset. They all said nothing in response. ‘Could we all move along quickly please, I hear there’s bears in these woods.’ This was intended as a joke but again there was no response.

‘Trying to be funny?’ Natalya piped in.

‘Yes, I was actually,’ came Ivan’s response, laced with joviality.

‘Wow, you know my cousin was killed by a bear?’ Natalya’s dry statement filled Ivan with utter mortification.

‘Oh God, I’m really sorry, Natalya. I meant no disrespect,’ losing his footing as he approached and falling forward, he was practically begging on his knees.

‘Don’t bother with it, I hated him anyway.’ The surrounding crew began to snigger and then laugh bellicosely. Ivan was humiliated and felt weak like a small animal surrounded by lions. The joke was on him. He knew he would have to earn respect somehow. But as he stood back up with slightly muddied knees and listened to the sniggers surrounding him on this spring day, he took no reassurance whatsoever.

He had to remember he was doing this for the love of the state. He was one with the state. This is what he tried to tell himself to give a stoic reassurance that all was well. The thing that he found most annoying was that Natalya was right about the framing of the shot. She was an expert at filmmaking with a clear vision on the idiosyncrasies of the camera lens. He could learn much from her if his stubborn pride would allow it.

‘So, I’m wondering what you think about the angle as you emerge from behind the tree?’ Ivan asked later that day. ‘I’m thinking a low angle shot which pans upwards to reveal you, slowly.’

‘Not a bad idea. Yes, I can see that,’ Natalya was onboard temporarily, still much to the amusement of the other crew members. If only he’d been allowed his old team, but he was working directly for a higher power now.

‘Can we set that up, please?’ Ivan’s confidence had grown slightly but it was about to be disintegrated by Natalya again. From the props tent emerged the sight of the crown Natalya would have to wear as ‘Queen of Space.’

‘Why do I have to wear this ridiculous head piece? I mean, what the hell is it even supposed to be exactly?’ Natalya referred to a large but flat circular crown placed on her head by one of the crew. It was bland with little embellishments other than a fake diamond at the front.

‘Well, it’s from the props team.’

‘I know where it’s come from but why should I look utterly stupid on screen wearing that bland piece of crap? My parents didn’t spend years starving for this,’ her anger seemed to grow with each word. ‘Do you know how much I’ve had to put up with over the years? Now I find myself working with yet another new director who wants to dress me like a royal whore?’ Natalya stood and stared Ivan straight in the eyes, he felt his soul painfully burning away second by second as her pupils, dilated with rage, met his. She was right again of course; she would look better without it. He let his thoughts escape, he could film the fullness of her long hair brimming down to her shoulders, captured and toyed with by the breeze, which kept arriving and then departing softly. The difficulty was the props department would be livid if she wasn’t wearing it.

‘You’re right, it would look better without,’ Ivan explained as there were tuts and whispers from the dissatisfied crew behind him. ‘Let’s try a take with and a take without, I want to see how the sun lights it.’ This was a lie but Johan from props would hear about what happened and make a complaint if the crown wasn’t used.

Ivan was always keen to experiment with light, it had become a recent obsession in his work. Resources were limited so light sources were inevitably a key component to Ivan’s films. He saw feature films as the ultimate art form and he was finally getting to work on a bigger canvas. He thought each frame should be perceived as an emotive work of art and contain a depth of feeling which the viewer could interpret. He wanted even the tiniest prop to mean something to somebody, to take them on a journey into their lives past and present. There could be nothing passive. The image must be endless in scope.

Yet here he found himself placing a tacky plastic crown on the head of a younger woman who without any doubts knew much more about cinema than him. Natalya was the true artist; her

complaints may sound awkward but she held the key of knowledge which Ivan lacked. She also held the crew in the palm of her hands, they would not dare question her. Again, he reflected how he was tormented by this but only because of his ridiculous male prejudices. He had to learn to adapt and use Natalya to thrive. There were other cast members who he hadn't even met yet and he had no idea how they would respond to him. The doubts were there. He must stop thinking though, he thinks and thinks too much. *Too much thinking is bad*, it's what they were taught at school. His thoughts would run wild into a frenzy sometimes ...

'Ivan, are we doing this or not? Natalya barked at him to break open his churning brain and placate his mind back to the present task. She had loosened her hair and Ivan saw himself staring again almost lost.

'Perfect, Natalya,' he turned to face his principal photographer, Josef. He was an older man by some degree, dressed drably with holes in his jumper for company, this seemed to be the style these days. Josef had a large frame which was a combination of entangled muscle with fat, no doubt once a physically fit man who had now let himself go to wrack and ruin, Ivan recognised the scenario only too well. 'Let's just rotate the camera slightly if we could please? I really want to capture that sunlight,' he suddenly felt galvanised, 'quickly now.' Josef was reluctant and took some time stroking his long white beard but did Ivan's bidding nonetheless and used his large aching rotund frame to move the heavy camera to the decreed position. 'Thank you, Josef.' The silent man gave a smirk. This was the most emotion Ivan had seen from him all morning.

There was no doubt a history there, how did Josef end up so cynical and demotivated? What did he feel he was doing with his life? Why stand there in abject silence the whole time offering nothing? Ivan knew that the likes of Josef were vastly experienced in filmmaking, but they were trained in a style most likely the antithesis to what Ivan visualised. They were led by the power from above, they had a set direction. It was socially didactic, designed to educate the nation in a simple way with distinct messaging and zero experimentation. Ivan had never been taught formally and had climbed his way through the news media instead. He had played his part and had earned the opportunity to be here. 'Josef, I'd love to sit down and talk with you properly at some point, I could

really use your input about a few things.' Josef said nothing again and merely nodded. Ivan had to steel himself from grabbing the older man by the throat to get him to speak.

The shots eventually worked well and Natalya seemed appeased. In the coming weeks Ivan knew he had to get to know his leading lady. She had been a child star when making films had been a simpler process many years ago. Like Josef she gave the impression of being ground down by the system. Ivan was fresh though and saw it as his responsibility to galvanise these people.

The rushes were of quality and as Ivan reflected further on the day's events, he knew things would be fine in the end. There was an almost smug satisfaction evolving as he sat back in the battered chair and placed his hand on his chin. However, somewhat inevitably he had the urge to rub his face with the fatigue he had. It had been a long day but he would get there. He had a lot to offer, and they hadn't seen the greatness yet to come, so Ivan thought to himself. He was ambitious to succeed but at the back of his mind the seed of cynicism had potentially already been planted and must not be left to grow.

★

*INT. PRISON CELL.*

*[NATALYA suddenly appears over the shoulder of IVAN.]*

**NATALYA**

You have no right to lecture on morals. Can't you see why they hated it? Are you that dumb? This treatment has repeated generation after generation.

*[IVAN is panicked and crouches with fear]*

**IVAN**

How are you here? My nerves are weak ... a dream?

**NATALYA**

A dream is as true as reality.

**IVAN**

Help! Guards, help me! Get her out of here!

*[Enter two Red Army GUARDS through the prison door. They do not notice Natalya]*

Get her out here! Please!

*[They circle him but simply stare at him, saying nothing as though toying with him]*

Didn't you hear me? Get her out!

*[The GUARDS begin to laugh gently to each other, which then slowly builds to a louder, almost intimidating level. Eventually, IVAN changes his panicked expression and begins to point at NATALYA and laugh also. He joins in fully until a crescendo is reached between the three of them. NATALYA simply stares out to the camera. The guards exit as they arrived. Natalya climbs onto the bench and places her hands on IVAN'S shoulders holding him and keeping him pinned down as he tries to escape her, her voice builds]*

**NATALYA**

I'm the truth of your reckoning, to not believe in me is to not believe in God.

**IVAN**

Why have you come to me? Why is my mind doing this to me? Have I gone mad? It can't be, I haven't been here that long, and I was sane before I came.

**NATALYA**

You find my existence strange? Unreal? Yet you've filmed unreality for millions to see. Fake news.

**IVAN**

My films were intended as truth. I've always pursued the truth.

**NATALYA**

You've no concept of truth, your truth is diseased, I'll make you see your ignorance.

**IVAN**

I recognise you; I think.

**NATALYA**

I worked on the Dmitrov Channel ... you don't fully recognise me then?  
I thought you might have done.

**IVAN**

Wait, I'm still thinking.

**NATALYA**

[Laughs] An enemy of the state like you.

**IVAN**

I'm not the enemy.

**NATALYA**

My crime was to steal corn for my starving family, yours is far worse. Ask yourself who the real enemy is.

**IVAN**

This is stupid, I don't need this, don't have the time for it.

**NATALYA**

Are you going somewhere, Ivan?

**IVAN**

I don't know why you're trying to fool me.

**NATALYA**

You're only fooling yourself.

**IVAN**

You surround me but have no control over me.

**NATALYA**

You're mistaken, you think I'm dead, but I still exist.

[The GUARDS leave laughing]

**IVAN**

This is sleep, just dreams.

**NATALYA**

And in that sleep what dreams may come.

**IVAN**

Just words.

**NATALYA**

You remember it yet? The time in the forest, the ditch, the bodies, steaming in the summer heat?

**IVAN**

I have no memory of that. Too many memories.

**NATALYA**

Silver birches.

**IVAN**

What?

**NATALYA**

I was pressed against one, but who was doing the pressing, Ivan?

**IVAN**

What are you imagining?

**NATALYA**

You're afraid.

**IVAN**

Too many memories, too little truth.

**NATALYA**

Look into your mirror, Ivan.

**IVAN**

Natalya Brozhkov.

**NATALYA**

Recognition from beyond.

**IVAN**

Natalya Brozhkov. Natalya Brozhkov. Natalya Brozhkov.

**NATALYA**

Oh Ivan, the cranes are flying but the future is bleak.

**IVAN**

Aimlessly wandering between the trees.

**NATALYA**

So lost in mistrust.

**IVAN**

She smiles to herself and trips slightly. Innocence encapsulated.

**NATALYA**

Innocence.

**IVAN**

That was the shot I wanted.

**NATALYA**

And they saw what you did with your camera and punished me for it. You should've pointed it elsewhere.

**IVAN**

You were needed.

**NATALYA**

I'm here now, Ivan.

**IVAN**

An example of the eternal spirit of truth.

**NATALYA**

And manipulator, the great manipulator.

**IVAN**

We. Natalya Brozhkov and I were there? Together? Yes. Together.

**NATALYA**

I was irresistible.

**IVAN**

Easy to forget when one is so tired.

**NATALYA**

That would make me dead, Ivan, if you think I'm her.

**IVAN**

The silver birches. The sunlight... the stench of death.

**NATALYA**

Smiling at the camera from below. You had to get that shot. But what *they* were doing was more important ... and God forbid you be caught with a peasant girl in the woods.

**IVAN**

The background, the saturated image. Like skinned animals all in a ditch, some still twitching.

**NATALYA**

They wanted to hang me from a tree when they saw how clever you'd thought you'd been.

**IVAN**

Just a hint in the background, that's all I gave.

**NATALYA**

I was the focal point, Ivan.

**IVAN**

Ah the memories.

**NATALYA**

I will leave you but you can never leave me. Remember, Ivan, 'too many bodies' in your film. Fictional but also real.

\*

## **Leningrad Special Psychiatric Hospital**

### **Article 70: Induced Psychosis**

He will be here again soon. The turning of the key in the lock which shackled my frame. That simple sound. I'm starving as always. He will come though, there's light through my bars, it's freezing but the sun lives through it all. This is the time he comes. *Too clever, trying to outwit us all with your message.*

'You speak as though there are rules which are followed. I always maintained accuracy. My work was pleasing to all.'

*How dare you ridicule what is truth?*

*The state is truth.*

*Now you expect mercy for the unreal.*

It was always the same voice I heard, the same intoxicating eyes and the same furrowed brow which I saw. The voice was plain and stark, almost hypnotic. It tries to coerce and confound me but I fight hard.

‘I expect to be treated as a human being. I served well. My record speaks for itself and I did great work that was true to the state. I deserve some respect, compassion.’ This is a phrase I use consistently. My protests often evaporate before deaf ears. I often pace around and run my hands against the stone walls. Just to feel the grain under my nails gives me a momentary palpability of life. The scraping of my hands reminds me of being a child exploring new different sensations and running through the city streets, whirling around the vista that I was so awe-inspired by. Everything so large and dominant, but safe. Those adventures were replaced with something more sinister. Though now I realise the sinister was there all along, just biding its time and waiting to reveal itself.

*You expect us to believe that?*

*When compassion is shown it leads to destruction.*

*Showing sympathy for mankind.*

‘I’m tired of this, you are not of my making.’ It will never leave me alone. Sometimes I’m taken to another room. I see others like me on the journey. They are starved, bruised and their eyes glazed. Nobody makes eye contact; I have tried but find my targets will never look back. They appear to be the walking dead. Dumped out of life like discarded rags. Tossed and torn until no doubt the inevitable burial. I often wonder if this is the place of hell, we were banned from thinking about. Have I died and now face punishment? Then I begin to remember the old ways and hold no memory of death. This is the most terrifying feeling; I am still alive. It goes on.

There’s pain across my face. A whiplash sensation. It feels like I’ve head butted a rock. There’s the warm rush of something wet sliding down my face. I’ve no time to engage with what’s

happening when the pain comes again. This time an electrified paralysis through my emaciated carcass. There are red drips which splash on the dank floor at my feet. After a pause my brain is slowly able to gain some understanding as to what I'm experiencing. I'm being tortured. I quickly slip back to a stateless mind as it's my only sense of escape. Let the voice come again.

*We are truth.*

*The truth of cinema is the reality of thought and language composed in the human consciousness.*

'Just words, utterly meaningless,' I blurt out.

*If we have meaning then surely, we are art?*

This language I hear betrays me. It sounds familiar and isn't the usual barbarous nonsense that gets spouted. They are words from a generation long ago and remind me of an era of thought and integrity, a time of debate and scrutiny. The memories stir and wrestle as images from the old world emerge. I allow myself a brief teasing of my mouth into a smile.

*Revenants.*

*From a world that was non-existent.*

*Your world.*

'Platitudinous nonsense,' I exclaim. The pain comes again and this time it feels stronger. I feel a distinct jolt and the floor comes straight towards me. It's cold and my head is laying in grease of some kind. I can move it around but my neck offers a shooting pain which riddles down my spine like a rat scuttling. I accept that I can't move and take a brief comfort in the fact that I'm on the floor. I'm foetal, ready to be reborn and start life in some place other than this. I see blurred leather boots and hear a voice, different this time, more familiar, grounded, and softer.

'Just tell us what you did, will you? We can do this all day. All this denial and pretending to be mad, it doesn't help you.' I can't quite pinpoint the tones, but I know the voice. My memories

begin to calculate again. 'You've been here for days now, do you think we want this, think of the others.' I still see only a frosted pained vision of black boots. 'Just admit to it or be damned. They might even be able to help you.' Help is not a word I've heard in a long time. 'You see the longer this goes on, the worse it will get.' There is a change in tone again and the voice is softer still, it fuels my mind. 'Do as they ask.' A picture develops of green meadows and farm houses, beasts graze and look content as a spring sun encourages them to chew their cud. There's a soothing gust that wades through the idyllic scene and I begin to know the place I see. 'You might as well just do as they ask and be damned,' the voice is now kind and I can feel a hand touch my head. It's the first moment of compassion I've experienced in what feels like an age. But I still see only boots. 'Why not stand up and do us all proud, just give in and it will all be over.'

'Wait,' I feel an unlikely urge to speak, 'I recognise that voice.' A palpable sensation moulds its way through me. There's a sudden rush of excitement but it's punctured with anxiety. The mind runs, trips, falls but stands tall in a circle of confusion. I'm devastated as I lie on the ground but also reaching back mentally for a point of recognition, an acknowledgement that will bring joy and comfort. That voice. 'Who are you?'

'There, there, just let them have what they want, simple really,' maternal and soothing. The images strike again. A wooden fence, trees and a barn. There's a house, it's slightly dilapidated but most importantly, it's home.

'Is it really you?' The room descends into silence and the boots are taken away from my eyeline. There is a noise that I hear faintly, it sounds like a hissing but then a clawing. With all the energy I'm able to produce I slowly arch my head away from the grime of the floor. There's still a wetness crawling down my face, but my focus is purely about moving away from the ground. The sound evolves to a light sniggering as I simultaneously can support myself to my knees. This is all done through the eyes of temporary blindness, I can observe only shapes. When ready and able to do so I place my head back against a wall behind me and begin to blink ferociously, but then open my eyes wide to garner some perspective. The sniggering continues, it's a familiar sound to me these days, yet I can't fully recollect as to why. It grows to the sound of a singular laugh. It's laughter that

feels private and I'm not invited to join as my thoughts relay to me. It's mockery and as I blink and open my eyes again and again in those short seconds the world returns to the hell, I've become familiar with. The laughter then stops, and I'm confronted by a physical form. A human being. Hairless and bolstering strong arms, that's all I can make out.

'I'm not your mother,' it speaks to me, 'we may have to shoot you for being insane.' The voice is matter of fact and cold. I find myself now standing but my hands are bound behind me. There is a splash of spittle that lands between my eyes. It's the human who has done this. 'Why not just admit what you did, it doesn't matter, either way you're finished.' I've no idea what it means. 'You either die or be re-educated. I'm afraid there's no room for your kind anymore, not with your views, your so-called way of life. How dare you even stand there, you're a pig, filth. You belong in an abattoir strung up and if I had my way that's exactly what would happen to you. You disgust me.'

I don't really understand what it's saying to me, but I can feel sunlight shimmering between my eyes.

*We are your invention, truth to power.*

\*

The life inside Mirza was growing. She had hidden it well to begin with and no one would question the long winter jumpers. The marriage to Ivan had made things easier now though. Even if it had raised the eyebrows of her colleagues:

'Thought you despised him?'

'Are you mad, Mirza?'

'After all he did.'

‘He treated us all badly, but it’s your life.’

‘I like it, Mirza. He’s moving up in the world, good thinking.’

‘Do you think he’ll be a minister soon?’

‘I wouldn’t trust him.’

‘He’s got ambition, Mirza. You do right, he can take you with him.’

‘How are you feeling, Mirza? You look a bit tired of late?’

This final question was from the grizzled tobacco affected vocals of Zelba. She was the only person Mirza would consider anywhere near being an actual friend. Zelba was slightly older than Mirza and had an almost maternal relationship with her. They had worked together the longest and Mirza had always admired the older woman’s work. There was an attempted dignity in her dispatches to camera and a distinct lack of fakery. Mirza believed in Zelba. She was the only one. Zelba would make a great actress, Mirza always thought. She had a certain wretched but beautiful look across her face.

As Mirza sat behind her desk scanning the local newspapers for stories to poach it was Zelba who would come and sit by her. Her thick spotted coat and grey flash through the hair was always the distinguishing features that would be captured from the corner of Mirza’s eye. Zelba always seemed to be on a mission, but she always made time for Mirza.

In response to Zelba’s question, Mirza said, ‘I’m fine, just tired, Zelba.’

‘Everyone is always tired, you look different.’ Pulling up a chair at Mirza’s desk, other workers glanced about dispassionately. It was a small room but had numerous journalists who would be perched on desks or rifling through filing cabinets. Sometimes the noise was too much for Mirza but at other times there was silence. Zelba had an office on the floor above. Mirza wasn’t jealous of this because all of the floors were the same: sterile, grey and always atmospherically hostile. ‘You and Ivan then?’

‘Yes, me and Ivan, Zelba,’ Mirza didn’t want to sound uninterested, but those conversations had been very repetitive of late.

‘Oh, I’m not judging. You had to make a choice, it’s clear from the ones who know,’ she tapped her pointed nose. This made Mirza blush and give in to a quick and revealing response.

‘You say that, but how clear is it exactly?’

‘You used to vary your wardrobe; those baggy jumpers are doing you no favours.’ Mirza enjoyed the honesty of Zelba, most of the time. ‘There’s no shame in it. You’re married after all now. No one can say anything. Besides which, Mirza, everyone is too busy trying to survive and look after themselves.’ Zelba patted her friend on the shoulder. ‘It’s nobody’s business anyway.’ All of this was true but Mirza would always feel a sense of paranoia. ‘You have my total support no matter what happens.’

‘What do mean, *no matter what happens?*’ This was the paranoia seeping in again but Mirza just felt uneasy.

‘Oh, Mirza. You need to relax. I mean nothing by it,’ there came a pause here. Zelba moved closer still so she could lower her voice. There was now an intensity to the moment that Mirza hadn’t anticipated. Zelba edged even closer. ‘I’m sorry about what happened with your film. The thing is, because of all that, you should know that they’ve been watching Ivan for a long time now, you just need to understand. The situation could be fantastic for you but you need to know that they consider him a man of importance. The Ministry of Culture is interested. That’s why he’s been given the big project. He needs to be a success which I’m sure he will be, but he needs to prove himself, he doesn’t need a reputation ... well, you just need to know, that’s all.’ She took a long breath, ‘A bright future awaits, Mirza, a bright future awaits, you know I’ve got your best interests at heart...’ and with that Zelba stood up, gave a cursory glance around the room, and began to walk away. ‘I’ll see you around, take care of yourself.’ Zelba began to regally mince away as though a domineering puppet master to Mirza’s lifeless marionette, but then turned back as though having forgotten something, ‘I might have something for you if you are struggling?’ Mirza was utterly flabbergasted by this interaction and

paused for thought. She had had enough of the skulduggery recently but had no other option really but to see what Zelba had to offer.

‘What does it involve?’ Mirza was struggling and would take any help she could get for the moment.

‘Oh, Dean Reed is coming to tour or something. I’ll get the details from above and let you know what they want. I know it’s not normally your area, but we could do with someone experienced on it.’ Zelba walked back to the desk and leaned forward towards Mirza, again to lower her voice. ‘You see communist sympathising American musicians are good entertainment, but there’s potential being missed there, those above us are starting to see the bigger picture, Mirza. They’ll be wanting someone different for Programme Six eventually and that’s the long and the short of it. It could be perfect for you. Someone who can show the cultural benefits to society and wider community outreach, not just the normal results reports ... I’ll keep you in the loop.’ Zelba turned and walked out with a trail of turning heads behind her.

Mirza sat and caught the eyes of several of those heads as they seemed to now lurch in her direction. She stared back momentarily and caught the eyes of several of them, but then had other ideas about wanting to wind anybody up today. She looked back down at her newspapers. There was a trepidation which crawled down her spine and made her heart palpitate slightly as she began to reflect on the all too brief interaction with Zelba. It felt like a warning of sorts. The issue which puzzled Mirza is how her old friend came to know so much. So far as she knew, Zelba was only slightly senior to her. It appeared Zelba had gotten herself in a place of power by some means and was able to extract information. She often wondered how influential Zelba had been in making sure Mirza kept her job at Programme One. Music was not her area of interest; it was too controlled. Anything risqué was not something Mirza would wish to explore.

All of this didn’t really matter. Mirza could only carry on and do the best work possible. She understood they considered Ivan important. The difficulty came in acknowledging the idea that the father of her child was also potentially being set up to fail and it may even be partly her own fault. Yet

if Programme Six came her way, then that is something she would have to consider also, despite all this. She was not without a sense of ambition, even after all she had been through. Mirza would wait for the memo from Zelba, but in the meantime could not escape her troubled thoughts over Ivan and the baby that grew inside of her.

\*

*INT. PRISON ROOM AS BEFORE. IVAN IS SAT WITH A STORYBOARD IN HIS HAND.*

**IVAN**

All the troubles in the world. It's only now I can see the pain I caused.

*[Images from the 1908 film Stenka Razin are projected on the back wall]*

*[V.O. INTERNAL. PAN around prison walls but back to IVAN staring at Stenka Razin]* The world of film was so exciting and fantastical. Anything could be achieved. When I was a boy, I saw the film Stenka Razin, it was projected on the back of a horse cart in our village. I thought it was the most amazing thing I'd ever witnessed. Papa thought it was witchcraft. My mother had tears in her eyes. What madness was it that we were seeing? Human beings were in front of us, but not real human beings. Projections, fantasy. They were outlaws living in the woods. The woods were so powerful at hiding them, but also powerful in the sense that when I saw the wind blow on the trees, I felt a presence. It was something I could relate to. The sway of the forest, it symbolised the powerful language of nature. I felt it first-hand. When I next walked in the forest, I felt it again and again. I thought the forest could protect me. Film had shown me a world within my world.

*[CUT to INT. EDITING SUITE fantasy. Enter LEBYADKIN, an old assistant of IVAN from his film-making days. The lights from the wash become brighter. The mood changes slightly]*

**LEBYADKIN**

Ivan, who are you talking to? I see you've got the boards from earlier. What did you think of the shoot today? I think we got some great footage. Natalya Yegorov is beautiful, isn't she?

**IVAN**

Lebdy! I thought you were due later? Or is it that time already?

**LEBYADKIN**

Time, Ivan, what is that to us these days? We have no need of it surely? The dam was incredible, wasn't it? Such engineering.

**IVAN**

I can only agree, my old friend. Moscow has a bright future ahead with such Soviet ingenuity whilst the West lies in its pool of shit.

**LEBYADKIN**

Indeed, [pause] Forgive me, Ivan, as we're alone, I've been wondering about something for some time [pauses and notices Stenka Razin footage] Ah, how old but still gleaming. Were you just thinking, Ivan... back to the golden age?

**IVAN**

Surely this is the golden age now? We make films about dams, Lebdy, disguised as historical epics! [Chuckles] but anyway, what's on your mind?

**LEBYADKIN**

I was meeting my friend Tugeyev, the one I told you about... he works for the Government ... he knows things ...

**IVAN**

[Jokingly] Oh, what things?

**LEBYADKIN**

He told me production standards are changing all the time. Stalin is starting to watch the final cuts himself, to give a final yes or no to a release.

**IVAN**

How interesting, well, we have nothing to worry about.

[Stenka Razin stops immediately in the background and is turned off]

**LEBYADKIN**

[Hesitantly]) Well, of course not, Ivan. It's just I think everything needs to be water-tight! Ha! Excuse the pun! We can't have our bits of fun anymore here and there.

*[IVAN looks confused by this and stands up; he places the boards on the floor]*

**IVAN**

I don't understand what you're talking about, Lebdy. What 'bits of fun'? My work is completely devoted to the Party. You know that.

**LEBYADKIN**

Yes, yes of course, Ivan, of course.

**IVAN**

You don't sound so convinced.

**LEBYADKIN**

I understand what you're saying.

**IVAN**

What a strange thing to say, Lebyadkin. I don't understand you.

**LEBYADKIN**

It's nothing, Ivan. Really nothing.

**IVAN**

This isn't a conversation I thought I'd ever be having with you. You've been with me from the beginning.

**LEBYADKIN**

I have, Ivan. This may be of service.

**IVAN**

I don't understand. Explain what you mean. I'm starting to worry here.

**LEBYADKIN**

Do I really need to explain, Ivan?

**IVAN**

Am I in trouble? And what would my assistant know about it? My work has always been completely and utterly behind the Party.

**LEBYADKIN**

We've all had our jokes here and there Ivan. In the past it was fine, but it may not go unnoticed now, that's all I'm saying. My friend was very vocal about that.

**IVAN**

This conversation isn't happening. I've no idea what you're talking about. How dare you come at me like this? I thought we were a team? Mosfilm and Lenfilm have always respected my work, I don't see how that will change now. Are you for real, Lebyadkin? After all this time, this feels like a betrayal.

**LEBYADKIN**

Please, please, Ivan. Don't think like that. I'm just saying that's all. I didn't mean to wound your pride.

**IVAN**

Too late for that, I'm afraid.

**LEBYADKIN**

Ivan, please don't fret and be upset with me... think of it as a joke from your silly assistant... that's all. Unreal.

**IVAN**

Unreal? This whole conversation is unreal. It's not how I remember ever speaking to you. This surely never happened between us?

**LEBYADKIN**

Ivan, who are you talking to? You're talking to yourself a lot these days. Is the work too much? Why not let me help me more. I could have a bigger impact for you if...

**IVAN**

If I let you manipulate me?

**LEBYADKIN**

Isn't that what you do, Ivan?

**IVAN**

I don't understand anything now.

**LEBYADKIN**

You're not a stupid man, Ivan.

**IVAN**

I have put too much into my life for these accusations, these lies, and this betrayal.

**LEBYADKIN**

It's all going to be fine, Ivan. We can take care of it for you.

**IVAN**

We?

**LEBYADKIN**

The ones who watch.

**IVAN**

I've spent my life thinking about nothing but film. My work has always been for the party. They are the ones *I know* who watch.

**LEBYADKIN**

Of course, Ivan. Your art is well respected. All I'm saying is that you must be careful here and there with your arguments... It has been, shall we say, commented upon?

**IVAN**

I think it's time you left, Lebyadkin.

**LEBYADKIN**

But Ivan, I'm just giving you a friendly message.

**IVAN**

You won't work for me anymore-

**LEBYADKIN**

And why, Ivan? [*Aggressive*] Have you something to hide?

**IVAN**

This is not a conversation I remember happening. What is this, what is this place I'm in? This must've happened years ago but I've no recollection. Time is becoming a burden. History is dumb.

**LEBYADKIN**

History is what you've made it, Ivan. Just make sure you make it in the correct way.

**IVAN**

I need to talk to somebody else about this.

**LEBYADKIN**

There is nobody else, Ivan. But please, there's nothing to fret about. The gulag is a long way off.

**IVAN**

Gulag? You dare talk of the gulag?

*[SOUND FX. noises of the Gulag can now be heard louder; the clanking and whirring of machinery and screams]*

**LEBYADKIN**

It's a place I'm sure you'll never find yourself in, but just be warned, Ivan. That's all I'm saying.

**IVAN**

But what are those noises I hear? The cries?

**LEBYADKIN**

Oh, they are real, Ivan. In your mind. All this is real for you. You say we never had a conversation like this. But how would you really know? You create fantasy, you live in it. So, what you imagine can be real. Your memory is traumatised, but life's what you make it, Ivan.

**IVAN**

It was raining, and they came? I remember that. I don't remember this. You're not the Labdy I knew, you're not how I remember. I ask again, what is this?

**LEBYADKIN**

Stop, Ivan. Please now, no more of this childishness.

**IVAN**

You've never spoken to me like this before. I do remember us speaking during edits, but not like this.

**LEBYADKIN**

Maybe I should just let them take you after all. I'd be ready to take over, imagine that, Ivan?

**IVAN**

I can't go anywhere, and you are or were, whatever has happened, merely my assistant. You're not ready for the critical stuff, not yet.

**LEBYADKIN**

I remember you telling me that, Ivan. But look how things are. Here I am warning you about your message to the people.

**IVAN**

We'll just go around in circles.

**LEBYADKIN**

[friendly] Anyhow, I must leave you now my old friend, good luck with the edit. I'll be in touch later, yes?

**IVAN**

Why yes, of course, do pop by anytime my old friend, your advice is always respected.

**LEBYADKIN**

Oh, and give my regards to the family, won't you?

**IVAN**

I absolutely will. Goodbye, Lebby.

**LEBYADKIN**

... Goodbye, Ivan. (he walks back to the door he came through)

*[IVAN and LEBYADKIN stare at each other in silence for a moment as the noises of the gulag are heard again getting louder. Then LEBYADKIN exits. The noises stop. Ivan goes back to looking at his storyboards]*

★

Josef trod the lone path through the woodlands. Sometimes he felt a satisfied relief that filming was over for the day. Josef saw the forests as a place of suffocation on bad days, but other times he found them captivating. It always appeared warmer and the atmosphere more welcoming where they would typically film. The local workers and farmers always treated the film crew kindly and with a sense of gratitude wherever he went. Josef knew he should be thankful for having a position which kept him predominantly working rurally, but he still felt on edge.

In truth the countryside was not a place of safety despite the better climate and fresh air to breathe. There was space and time to reflect on life when grounded so close with the natural earth. The soil of life. But those reflections could lead to the inevitable dark self-obsessions in a mind full of cynicism such as Josef's.

He found himself again having to work with some 'chosen' youngster at Lenfilm who in truth looked much older before his time. That was the effect of the city though, the stagnant nature of life,

the pace, the smog, the mental injuries caused by the constant looking over the shoulder. Josef tried not to enter Leningrad anymore unless he absolutely had to, he lived on the outskirts. He preferred location filming, as for him it was the best of a bad choice. He would work in the Lenfilm studios naturally when needed, but they were of poor quality these days and were only getting worse.

When Josef began his working life the strict narrative in films was to show the beauty of the nation in some form: the hard-working peasant, the glory of providing the food for the nation on the collective farm, the mechanisation of the factories. This was done in various symbolic forms. There was the straight documentary, the moral drama or even the use of science fiction to press the message of how marvellous the nation had become. The farmers fed the workers and the workers fed the machines in the cities. That was the imposed vision.

Things then became easier for a short time under Khrushchev and Josef found himself working on films that pointed a critical finger at the regime. It couldn't last for too long. There was a returning ingrained paranoia and uncertainty now, like an old disgraced family relative returning. A film could be misinterpreted and the consequences sometimes dire. That's if the film ever got made in the first place.

Josef had survived through his own complicity. The directors who were able to get projects off the ground required close inspection. There was a way of working and if they failed to adhere to the rules ... and didn't wish to share the vision ... then they would be removed. What happened next Josef tried to give no care to, he could only carry on. He tended to choose which projects he worked on these days. They wouldn't refuse him; he'd been too good for them. There were times when he sat staring into the peaks and valleys, listening to the rhythms of the birdsong, and feeling that sense of freedom momentarily and his world would come crashing down on him. The realisation that he was a liar, a conspirator and ultimately no doubt a killer. It was inescapable. At that point he would break down and wonder just why he had let this happen. Through his tears he saw the beauty around him but he couldn't feel it, the clouds across his mind were too dark.

The most traumatic was how Josef destroyed the life of his friend, Mikel. They'd both been to State School Thirty-Five, had lived in the same apartment block and spent many hours whiling away their youth together on the city streets. They would explore the decrepit, bombed out unoccupied buildings and clamber in and out to see if they could find any homeless squatters, or even more macabre than that, remnants of what they imagined were torture chambers. Hidden from the world and forbidden for prying eyes but unmistakably still present. There was one under Block Forty-Eight, which started construction but was never finished for some reason, if any one dared scramble down to the lower reaches. The ground floor door had been blocked off by a filing cabinet which as teenagers hadn't taken them long to wrestle haphazardly out of the way. They were confronted with a black hole and an unearthly chill which gently festered around them. Mikel went first into the darkness and Josef followed but an atmosphere of excitable exploration had deserted them to be replaced with an almost unreal sense of being somewhere forbidden and dangerous. It was serious, the adult world was about to hit them both hard, and the visceral sense of fear it brought, Josef has felt ever since.

They only had matches between them to shine a light on the unknown. They always carried matches as people would constantly ask them for a 'light' when they travelled around to smoke cigarettes. Josef thought that being able to offer someone a match had saved their lives on odd occasions.

'Let's just go, Mikel,' Josef had protested with a whisper when they were several paces down a creaky set of stairs.

'Come on, this is scary but aren't you interested too? What could be down here, Josef? What was someone trying to hide? Don't you want to find out?' They were ultimately both committed and Josef knew there was no escape from his friend's compulsion. He tentatively put his hand against the wall to steady himself and found it cold and rough against his innocent and soft skin.

'What's that noise, Mikel?' Josef heard a small scuttling sound from somewhere below them.

'It sounds like rats, don't worry. You put your thick socks on, right?'

'Yes.'

‘They won’t hurt you then,’ This was hardly reassuring from Mikel but Josef had faced rats before on their previous explorations around the city and knew that it was no excuse for them to turn back.

‘I just don’t want them crawling on me, that’s all.’

‘Just relax, will you?’ Mikel was slightly agitated by the protests now as his whispered response was weighed down slightly with aggression.

They had reached the bottom and there was nothing to see through their limited vision other than blank grey walls. The sound of distant wind acted as a guide.

‘How many more matches do we have left?’ asked Mikel.

‘I think I’ve got about ten,’ replied Josef.

‘That’s good, I’ve got the same.’

‘There’s a noise, the wind, can you hear that?’

‘It must be coming from somewhere, let’s just follow the sound. It’s like we’re entering a new zone or something.’

‘Look, Mikel, are you not at all worried? I’m finding this scary,’ Josef had to admit his sudden increased terror at the situation. Terrible thoughts ran through his mind as another match died in his hand. He wanted to turn back immediately, go home, and forget about exploring for now. Josef was sure he could hear running water ahead which was coupled with a perpetual dripping. There were hints at something there.

‘Ah come on, will you?’ Mikel’s annoyance had grown again. ‘Look, I get it but we are here together. Let’s just go a little bit further and then we’ll go back, okay?’ his tone softened towards the end.

‘Just a bit further, but that’s it,’ Josef lit yet another match and started walking forward to prove he was keen to see Mikel hold his word. Where they could walk was uncertain, they felt trapped with walls on either side until a slightly stronger gust caught Mikel’s hair.

‘Come on, then, there’s air coming from somewhere,’ and with that he put his hand out further forward with the soft glow from his match unveiling a small tunnel entrance. ‘Here we go, we just must kneel slightly to get through. We’ll see where this goes, if anywhere, and then go back, right?’

Through the darkness there could be heard the distant sound of music now, just gently in the air. A violin or maybe a cello? It was a cello, Josef decided. He thought he recognised the piece from his music teacher, was it by Bach? It whirled through his memory, but he couldn’t name it.

‘Can you hear that? Seriously?’ no response from Mikel. ‘Right, straight back once we’ve seen.’ Josef followed his overly keen friend into a small rounded archway and proceeded. They both maintained a silence but found it was not matched by their surroundings. The scuttling and scratching seemed to become more intense the further they walked and was accompanied by a stronger sound of dripping now. The music was dying. Josef’s hair was wetted by a particularly large splash which forced him to rub the damp spot. It was then that he caught sight of a rodent’s tail at his feet which quickly vanished elsewhere. He shivered slightly but had to keep going for fear of disappointing Mikel.

Josef looked forward but again had to light another match. Mikel had vanished from his immediate vision. He thought he could smell the outdoors, the countryside, like a forest. There was the smell of burned wood. Keeping calm, he lit up and paced forward only to feel his feet beneath him have no floor to find. Josef became disoriented and felt his weight dragging him downwards until his face flew into the unknown darkness and his body followed with it. Thankfully he landed on something soft.

Josef opened his eyes and became utterly disorientated. A bright light hit his eyes and made them want to squint and close. The outdoor smell continued to invade his nostrils. His eyes stung

slightly now but he dared open them nonetheless. What he saw shocked him initially but then oddly reassured him.

He groped a soft grassland floor and wrestled to his feet. His eyes feasted on the countryside. A small campfire was gently dying off by his feet whilst in front of Josef was a small lake with a mist suspended above it. There was a patter of drizzle in the air and the breeze from before caressing his forehead. It was peaceful. The decrepitude of the urban sprawl was gone. Josef wrestled with his mind but something was dragging him to calmness. He had no control. The anxieties were gone.

He stood and breathed in the surroundings. Miles and miles of hills being lit by the sun breaking through the clouds. There was the chirping of a few distant birds and the rustling of bushes.

‘Mikel?’ he called out. No response. ‘Mikel, where are you?’ he called again. It was futile and he knew it. He glanced down at his reflection in the lake and fell backwards losing his footing. There was nobody there. Here Josef didn’t exist, or so he thought. What a wonderful feeling, he began to realise, as the shock left him. To just float in a world of non-existence. Josef clambered to his feet again. He felt like a ghost haunting this land. It made Josef think of the great Russian plains, the romanticised Motherland. The real Russia, not the Soviet Union. But those thoughts would have to dive down back in the real world, whatever that was.

Josef felt compelled to walk around the lake and plough through the forest which lay ahead. He wanted to explore this new place and take to the high hills beyond. The drizzle continued though it was no pain for him. It was a cleansing sensation being hit by the drops.

When he marched forward there was a quick blur at the side of his right eye. Josef turned his head to see a white horse chewing grass. It was a sensation to see such a creature in the flesh. He stared for a few moments but dared not disturb the horse in this moment of innocent peace. Where it had come from was not something which concerned him. Josef merely stood and watched in silence and awe. He had never seen anything like this before, only in *Pravda*.

The horse decided to cantor away into the woods. It was quickly gone. Josef couldn’t follow it directly. He went his own way into this zone of uncertainty but also beauty. His feet crunched on

broken branches below him as he used the tightly arranged trees to pull himself along. Soon the space opened up more, but the canopy above somehow became thicker. There was a greyness now, the colours from before had faded. Josef felt relaxed though as he strode on, despite the sombre change in surroundings.

Ahead of him he began to make out a wooden house with smoke piping out of a chimney. There was a washing line with white sheets hanging and all was guarded by a puny looking wooden fence. A flimsy gate acted as an entry point. There were hints of grassland below him through the churned up mudded forest floor. The sheets rustled on the breeze which had grown in power.

‘Hello, is there anybody home?’ something made him think that was a futile gesture. The truth was he was enjoying this solitude he had, despite the strangeness. There was a voice.

‘There you are, Josef.’ His calm was broken abruptly as an older woman with long white hair appeared behind him. She was dressed as though from a medieval time, a simple dirtied sleeveless dress hung over her. ‘Have you heard about the Tsar; he’s taken Kazan from the Horde at last?’ Her voice sounded young despite the aged face.

‘Who are you? Where is this place? And what even are you?’ asked Josef in a trepid way whilst doing his best to present confidence.

‘Don’t be frightened, Josef. Karelia won’t hurt you.’

‘What do you mean? Is this where we are?’

‘You are home.’

It began to dawn on Josef that the woman in front of him reminded him of the folk tale character Baba Yaga from when he was a younger child, an old witch who would either perform good or evil. She lived in a shack in the woods; hag-like with chicken legs. He began to reflect that despite the vivid world he was surrounded by, this was surely a dream. He must've banged his head in the tunnel. Josef would wake up any moment and escape the witch.

Baba Yaga began to murmur and slowly become quieter as she encircled him. 'Josef, I see you are doubting everything. There is a truth which eludes you but you must play your part in the deception also. Reality is not for the people; it can only cause harm and distress. Nobody wants that, Josef. You don't want to be the little tsarina who ended up being lost to her father like in the old stories. It was due to her own naivety. Josef is not that person; you have a creative duty to perform. One which will save the revolution. The truth can be magical. Think about Peter the Tsar's double headed eagle. It looks both east and west. You must look both ways but pick the right side.' The rain began to grow stronger now through the darkened canopy as Josef reflected on the strangeness.

'That's all just imperial rubbish,' he retorted. 'Nobody cares for Tsars anymore or being ruled over like that. That's all-ancient history to me. You keep banging on about Tsars but those days are gone, you old which.'

'Are they? Are they, really. How stupid are you? Young and stupid. Young and stupid. Young and stupid...' this began a quiet chant from Baba Yaga and she danced around Josef, mocking him. 'This is your journey, Josef. It is a journey you can only move forwards through, nobody can ever go backwards. If you enter my shack, you'll understand.' Baba Yaga beckoned him on.

'I'm not going in there, you dumb old hag,' and with that he ran out into the woods again as the rain pelted down on him. When he looked back the house was gone and there was no sign of any white witch. He paused. Josef had heard of white witches flying around the woodlands of Karelia as an infant from his mother. This was not to scare him though; they were there to help should he need it. What he had just witnessed could well have been a scene from his mother's old stories, but the atmosphere felt wrong somehow. Was it really Baba Yaga acting as a friendly white witch and trying to guide him towards his destiny? This was pure fantasy and any minute now Josef thought he would wake up and be back in his cynical teenage world of technical school and bombed out or unfinished buildings. Vodka, he had an urge for a swig of vodka. You could get it everywhere back home as Stalin had seen to, and yet when he really wanted a burning down his throat, he couldn't find any.

Josef now jogged gently but began to slow to walking pace again. The white horse reappeared but then vanished again in some thicket. There was an opening to the woods ahead and natural light began to penetrate the spaces between branches. Beyond the trees was quite thick long grass overshadowed by a collection of hills. The shower stopped and the sun began to break the wall of grey clouds above, until a warmth brushed across Josef's face. He began to cut through the grassland and headed toward the vantage points ahead of him. Baba Yaga's words began to echo in his mind about finding truth and being on a journey. Looking both ways like the eagle. It was all sentimental rubbish really, but was still imprinted in his mind.

Incongruously, on a hill in front of him, he thought he saw another human presence. Josef rubbed his eyes and then squinted slightly. There was nobody there. When he blinked it was back. There was a man. He was just standing on the hill staring forwards. It would take Josef a while to get to him but he bobbed down to avoid being seen. He had to decide either to approach or go around but, in the end, he felt as though he should go and see who they were. This was all a dream anyway, so what did Josef care?

As he got closer and closer to the hill, he kept low and decided to approach from sideways on. The climb would be steeper but it could be worth it. As the grassland levelled off, he began to ascend, the angle was intimidating but he committed himself as the wind was at his back. There were patches of blue sky beginning to appear above and the sun carried on its journey moving from behind the clouds. Mud began to hinder Josef's progress, but it wasn't too long till he was near the top of the mound where the man was standing. He trod gently from behind. Over the shoulder of the man were miles and miles of greenspace and woodlands. Josef thought he could even make out the lake where he had arrived.

The man just stood without a sign of movement. Josef could make out a long woollen winter coat and flat hat, boots with holes in various parts came over some grotty loose corded trousers. The man seemed oblivious to Josef being there but then without any other acknowledgement began to speak.

‘Did you see her then?’ the voice was matter of fact. ‘I’m Ivan, did you see her?’ he didn’t turn around. Josef stayed distant but tentatively spoke.

‘Baba Yaga?’

Ivan laughed. ‘Who? No, I’m talking about Mirza. You know Mirza.’

‘I don’t. I don’t know any girls.’

‘Yes, you do, Josef.’

‘I know this is a dream and I’m going to wake up,’ said Josef calmly.

‘You should see Klimov’s *Welcome or No Trespassing*,’ suggested Ivan who displayed a level of impatience. ‘It’s full of childhood fantasy, enjoy it when you can, Josef.’

‘I haven’t seen it, in fact I’ve never even heard of it. When was it made, who’s Klimov?’

‘It hasn’t been made yet.’

‘This is stupid.’

Ivan turned around to face Josef. It was an old face, tired. Perhaps someone who was younger than their appearance suggested. Ivan’s face was dogged with wrinkles and his eyes were forever squinting. Josef noticed laboured breathing.

Ivan continued: ‘You must have seen *Chapaev*, you’d have to have been blind not to?’

‘That’s before my time,’ Josef paused. ‘Something about the Revolutionary War?’

‘The Vasilievs knew how to laugh at things, that’s for sure. *Pravda* loved it, though.’ Ivan gave a knowing smirk. ‘What about Stolper?’

‘Who?’

‘*Tale of a Real Man*, a fine work. If you enjoyed fighting for Mother Russia, that is and having your legs shot off in the process.’ Ivan’s sarcasm was evident now.

‘I’ve not seen that either.’ Josef began to feel ignorant in Ivan’s presence. He felt slightly bullied.

‘But you’ll have seen *The Fall of Berlin*, of course? Made for Joe’s seventieth birthday?’

‘Yes,’ began Josef. ‘I saw that, had no choice really.’

‘Forced on you, was it?’ A small chuckle from Ivan.

‘No, we just went to see it, to see the Nazi’s destroyed and our freedom ignited.’

‘There is no freedom, Josef,’ said Ivan. ‘There might be for a time but it will soon perish again.’

The wind was starting to increase and a bluster caught Josef off guard. The brief emergence of sunlight was blocked back again behind the clouds. There was a growing bleakness in the air and Ivan would not stop with his interrogation.

‘Did Mirza not tell you about being an engineer of the soul? Are you not on board with Socialist Realism?’ Ivan took a languid deep breath. ‘You see, Josef, you will have a big part to play in the future. When you find your truth. This is the journey for you now. Who are you going to be? You can only move forwards.’

Josef shuddered at this last statement as Baba Yaga had used the same phrase. At this point an Alsatian dog jogged up the hill. Josef had always been slightly frightened of dogs and had an idea of standing nearer Ivan to help guard against any potential threats.

‘He will not hurt you, Josef,’ Ivan said softly. ‘He’s just here like you are, lost.’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t understand any of this. And I’m not afraid of dogs anyway.’ Josef was adamant. In the wind came the soft sound of music again. Josef didn’t recognise it but it sounded like a choir. The dog sat at Josef’s feet.

‘Josef, there will soon be a big outpouring of grief, you know? Uncle Joe won’t last much longer,’ Ivan said, he stared beyond Josef as he did. His glance was fixed on something behind Josef

which distracted the younger of the two. ‘Don’t turn around, just keep going forward. Think of this as a film and you are the cameraman, what do you want the audience to see, Josef?’

‘Where even is this place?’ asked Josef, as the rain started to pour again. This agitated him now and the previous cinematic vision; the sun escaping from the clouds, had turned to greyness which was matched with a bleak cold.

‘This is Russia, Josef,’ said Ivan, matter of fact. ‘Not the Soviet Russia that you know, this is the real Russia. The Motherland.’ Josef admitted to himself that the place he had found himself in did not have the same feel as bombed out Leningrad. There was an air to breathe here and a sense of overwhelming natural beauty. The green landscape was intoxicating and seductive, Josef was ready to let the land swallow him whole as the rain ran down his face and drenched his clothes. He could sink in the mud and stay forever. There was a name for mud season, it was rasputitsa and had helped with the Nazis’ defeat. Even their tanks couldn’t move. Josef was stranded and bonded with rasputitsa right now. However, when the spring thaws occurred and the ice melted it was a sign of renewal and strength, but there was always mud dragged everywhere from the damp streets and detritus left behind off people’s shoes. The light brought with it a dank dirtiness also.

The now wet dog by his feet sat almost motionless but for the occasional sound of whimpering. Despite Josef’s guttural reaction to his surroundings the smell of a wet animal was rank to him. He wouldn’t be able to stand it but he felt the dog was his only loyal friend in the world at this moment. Josef bent down and patted his new acquaintance on the head, which was greeted with the dog licking its lips and yawning. Ivan watched this brief exchange and began to speak again.

‘You need to watch others, Josef. Be a good member of the intelligentsia but also the Druzhinniki too. Keep watch on the neighbourhood. Make sure you see nothing untoward.’ There came a pause and a sigh. ‘It’s a shame, Josef. You’ll soon have some freedoms ... and you’ll want to bury the West with your artistry ... but it will go again ... and you’ll have nothing but defence of the Politburo on your mind. The defence of stagnation.’ Ivan gave a laugh as he closed his eyes to avoid the blindness the downpour wrought. ‘But you can enjoy your washing machine and television in your

khrushchoby that they will build for you.' Ivan's speech became unnatural and as he opened his eyes there was a look of intensity in them. He now didn't blink despite the shards of rain hitting them both like flying daggers. 'We will meet again, Josef. But you will not remember me when it happens. You will guide me here; your vision will bring us.'

As the rain subsided to a drizzle, Josef shook his head in disbelief at the strangeness he'd just heard. His mind searched for sense amongst the muddled green landscape surrounding him. There seemed to be a fog drifting in over in the distance but at the same time a rainbow began to appear, almost penetrating it. Josef turned away from Ivan to look at the surroundings and still believed he would wake up at any moment. When he turned back to Ivan there was nobody there. The dog sat up beside him and began to whimper again. The drizzle stopped.

'Well, where shall we go now?' Josef asked himself. He could hear the distant sound of birdsong now, which was coming from the forest he'd left behind. Josef knew somehow that he couldn't go back there and didn't want to see Baba Yaga again anyway. He moved forwards down the hill where Ivan had once stood and proceeded into the valley bottom where there was only a wooden fence for company. The weather was still strange and he felt compelled to follow the mist which continued its creep down and across his distant vision. The dog followed and trotted by his side. The ground was slippery underfoot and Josef came close to tumbling on a few occasions as he descended. The sun snuck out again and he stared whilst gently closing his eyes so as to see the kaleidoscope that develops at the corners of the eye. What a great shot this would make in a film.

Josef's mind wandered further and he thought to himself what a great film this would make. A man stranded in an unknown zone of strangeness. It reminded him of a Danish film he'd seen some clips of once with a man wandering a terrifying vampiric land, but the dreamscape he was lost in now didn't feel as threatening a place, despite Baba Yaga. This place was Russia, as Ivan had called it. Not the Russia that Josef knew, he only ever saw the new unfinished blocks of apartments which were disfigured concrete beasts in what was meant to be a new urban jungle. There were the old buildings too which were built during the reign of the last Tsar and had survived. They were old and tired looking, from a bygone age. The fascists had done their best in destroying them, but still some of

them stood firm with a sense of civic pride. Everything seemed tatty though to Josef. It was only now that he could find some air. He knew it wouldn't last; something would snap him back to the dank reality.

A feeling occurred to Josef that he had lost sense of all time and hadn't even thought to glance at his watch. The frontage was cracked anyway and he always struggled to read what the hands said. When he looked, Josef saw that they had stopped at around three fifteen. This was the time Mikel and he had entered the apartment block. He gave it no more thought and faced onwards.

But then where was Mikel? Why wasn't he here? Was he back in Leningrad alone? Would Josef ever see him again or his own family? Would he ever return? How did he leave this place? Ivan had told him they would meet again but Josef wouldn't remember. Therefore, he had to be allowed to leave. He could only go forward though, this place, this 'Mother Russia' had infected him in some way and he felt connected to this muddied Edenic landscape he stood on. As Josef strode on, he began to grow a feeling of understanding about who he was. Despite the unreality of his situation, Josef had a visceral sense of the real. The earth was suddenly key to him, he felt the urge to run fast as the sun slowly baked his face. He did something he'd rarely had time for in his life and that was laugh. As he became breathless an overwhelming giddiness transported him to a feeling of enjoyment. He leapt over the wooden fence and sprinted onwards as the dog chased after him, now barking. There were no more odd characters to meet, this was Josef's place of freedom.

He deliberately tripped himself and fell to the grass below him. Josef rolled around in the mud and grass. What did it matter now? The dog leapt danced around him, barking with excitement. He put his hands on the dog's face and tickled its chin.

'I'll call you, Mikel,' said Josef and he laughed loudly. Tears began to stream from his eyes and he began to blink quickly to hold them back. It was at this moment that his mind told him he had had enough. He had to calm down and think about what to do next.

There was a distant noise like soft thunder coming from somewhere. Josef thought, surely no more rain? The sky was clearing now though, the clouds just wisping away as the sun burned through

them. Josef sat up and looked at the forest he'd left behind earlier. It was very distant now and also flat land down in the valley base in front of him. He listened intently and clasped Mikel to him to calm his furry friend down. The noise sounded again. Josef's hearing was drawn to the forest and he stared at the darkened collection of thick trees and entangled branches. He knew he wasn't to go back; his feet would only take him forwards.

Josef stayed quiet and listened harder, but there was nothing. He got to his feet and slowly walked forwards and began to ascend the hillside which was a much less steep angle. Looking back at the forest was not something he contemplated.

The sun was at his back and he began to gather some neck sweat which made for an awkward irritation; adding to his now growing anxiety. With the dog trotting by his side, he thought about giving his companion a name again but unnervingly smirked because he could only think jokingly of 'Molotov' or 'Beria' which would sound stupid so he stuck with Mikel.

As Josef made his way over the crescent, he started to notice what looked like a building down in the opposing valley. It seemed utterly incongruous within his surroundings. Dirtied stone façade with two levels of dusty windows. An impressively carved old wooden door being the focal point. There was smoke teasing out of a chimney. Nothing else stood for miles around, just the hills and the sky. Heaven and Earth separated by this old monstrosity.

There was only one thing to do. Josef trotted down towards the house and felt driven by a feeling in his legs. He felt as though he was powerless to do anything else, he couldn't go back or even to the side of this chosen path, a presence unknown to him pushed Josef on. He'd forgotten momentarily about his furry friend at his feet and looked down to reassure himself only to find that Mikel was gone. He heard a gentle yelping sound but saw no animal anywhere, then a barking noise, again, nothing. There was only the regular mass of muddied green everywhere.

By the doorway the ground became more slippery underfoot as Josef's feet squelched. It felt like many others had stood here as the ground was worn away like the six yard box on a football pitch. Others had followed the same path Josef felt himself on, searching for an answer and trying to

find a way to escape. It was at this point that Josef suddenly felt a visceral longing for home and to be back in the tunnel with Mikel. His breathing became slightly laboured and a light-headedness crept in. The open beauty of his surroundings became a source of anxiety, like millions of eyes searing upon him, watching his every move. Josef felt the urge to lay down to help with the dizzy sensation attacking him. Instead, he decided he would wait to get to the door to rest against it, if he could hang on without fainting. He wasn't far now and the house became focused in his vision; the door was solid oak featuring a huge knocker which was his target. This kind of building was something Josef only usually saw in the old quarters of Leningrad, which had not been ripped apart by Nazi shells.

Losing his footing slightly under the whirling effect of his faintness, he stumbled into the door frame and then spun; hitting his head against the knocker. The force of Josef's collision unwedged the door and he felt his body tumbling forwards towards the ground. His downward destination was not the mud he'd become used to though, this was a hard surface. He managed to put his hands out to cushion the fall and they found purchase on what felt like cold granite. Josef laid for several minutes getting his breath back without energy to do anything else.

The gentle sound of running water vibrated in his ears and a distant dripping motion. Josef's uncomfortable spinning head had instantaneously ended when he dropped to the ground. Feeling calmer, he rolled onto his back to glance up above. There was nothing to see, just darkness. Josef settled his breathing and gave himself a few moments of peace before making any decisions about trying to stand. There was just the continuous dripping from somewhere, the rest was silence. Life must exist here somewhere he thought as he closed his eyes and thought of Mikel again back in Leningrad and the tunnel they were exploring earlier. He wondered what he would tell his friend if he ever saw him again.

Josef flinched suddenly as something grizzly and wet touched his forehead. A moment of absolute terror was quickly replaced by Mikel the dog's reassuring crying. Josef stroked his companion.

‘How did you get here? Where did you go?’ knowing there would be no answer of course. However, this inspired Josef to get to his feet. In doing so he found himself in what was a dark room with scattered stone pillars just vanishing into a short ceiling above, into a cloud of black. The dripping sound emanated from above but directly in the centre of the chamber was a rectangular pool of sorts with an open exit above and beyond it.

It was sensible to walk around the pool and head to the far doorway. As Josef began his stride, Mikel followed and gently jogged along. When Josef was poolside, it was difficult to judge the depth of the water so he merely walked on. Within seconds of doing this there quickly emerged a bright light from above which temporarily blinded him. But all soon became clear as the pool was a projector for film. Black and white images appeared below him, swishing about in motion. Josef couldn’t quite make out what he was observing initially, until a spark ignited in his mind.

*Stenka Razin*, the first ever proper silent film was running. Images of the bearded hero with his huge boots trudging along filled the pool. It was the film that in 1908 had given birth to Russian cinema, as Josef had read somewhere once. He’d never seen it, but he’d seen old posters with the hero on, he recognised the imagery. Suddenly another title appeared, *Princess Tarakanova*. This was a film Josef knew nothing of and seemed to contain shots of a richly-dressed aristocratic Tsar figure prancing around in the frame. This was imperialist and he turned away into the darkness, even in this place of the unknown he didn’t want to be accused of watching Tsarist propaganda.

A grating sense of loneliness flooded through Josef as he stood there. He began to think of things he was missing in his life. In his world. There was art out there that he would never be privy to and it made him feel suddenly full of angst and regret. A longing for more swelled in his mind and he turned away from the pool. Over his shoulder, another film began playing and rippling on the water. Josef missed the young woman with a silver crown and cloak standing before a tree as the light gently pulsed across the lens, encapsulating a kaleidoscope of colour fragments. Such artistry he turned his back on.

Josef turned back. Ignoring the aquatic cinema, he moved forwards towards the tunnel and quickly walked through. Mikel followed suit. It was pitch-black with the only sound still being that of dripping water. He placed his hands out in front of him but was met with empty air. His feet led him onwards though, this was a direction he had to take, into the darkness.

As he progressed, Josef began to wonder if he had been here before. There was now an air source blowing down ahead, much like the tunnel back in Leningrad. Mikel gave out a short cry but carried on nonetheless.

‘You know more about this place than I do, let’s face it,’ Josef thought. ‘You know what’s coming.’ With this, Josef chuckled as he again recognised the absurdity of where he found himself. He also remembered his matches that he carried. As he patted his pockets to retrieve them there appeared a small light. It was tiny but clearly, he was approaching something. A small feeling of relief relaxed him briefly as his right hand made a connection to the matchbox. Even such a small object was a mental bridge back to home.

Mikel was startled slightly as the rasping sound of the igniting match tore through the air. The small pool of light that Josef now had at his disposal showed a replica blank wall from the tunnel back home. He felt he was right about his surroundings, the only difference being that there was no sound of rodents at his feet. There was less threat in the air. The ceiling was dripping with damp and not far above Josef’s head. Sometimes he felt the urge to lower his shoulders slightly in case of his scalp brushing against it. The source of the water was a mystery. He dropped the match.

The light at the end never seemed to grow as Josef approached. He quickened his pace and Mikel trotted alongside. Determination grew in him to get to where he needed to be, or where he thought he needed to be. But even with his faster pace, the light just wouldn’t draw any closer.

Josef felt frustrated and began to run towards his glowing target. As his pace got faster and faster there was still no end to his pursuit. The small light remained static and tiny. He sprinted hard, hitting the surface, and almost slipping as he did so. Mikel kept up the pace but remained slightly behind him. The tunnel was endless. A stark realisation began to creep into his thoughts; there was no

way out of this situation, the only option was to turn back, back to the cinema pool. Back to the chamber. But he had been warned that was not allowed. The journey was only forwards. What would happen if he had no choice? The light in front felt like an insult now as though taunting him. Josef wouldn't quit just yet though. He forced his way on and on trying to go faster, but the light still just remained the same size. His legs were starting to ache about his shins and a small stitch prodded his abdomen. The sprinting was taking its toll and Josef couldn't maintain it. He slowed down and began to draw breath.

As he now stood in the tunnel, he placed his hands on his knees and looked down at the floor. Josef was trying to catch his breath and Mikel walked around him. The dog then looked ahead at Josef's tormentor and gave a small cry. His companion still had his head down staring at the floor. The only sound was still the continuous dripping of water, though neither of the two felt any effects.

Finally, Josef raised his head as his pulse was stabilising. He placed his right hand against the wall to steady himself. Starting forward again he decided to keep going. Baba Yaga had told him you cannot go back here. But what did she know? If he went back then what would be the consequences, really?

He decided to pace onwards again, very slowly this time. He would try and let the light come to him and not chase it. Josef walked and Mikel accompanied him as his loyal friend. He patted Mikel on the head and gave him a quick scratch behind the ears which he seemed to appreciate. This had a calming sense on Josef and his attitude began to change slightly. The light was beginning to have a hypnotic quality to it.

As he gently put one foot in front of the other, Josef began to feel calmer and at ease. The frenetic anxiety from before had passed. He was merely being led on now by something unknown up ahead. There was a feeling of manipulation; seduction by a power. Everything was utterly beyond his control.

Outside in the open landscape, he'd felt a sense of liberation at times, despite the weird characters that Josef had met. In the chamber, this new zone, things felt very different for him. There

was an edge of uneasiness, as though Josef was being tested and getting things wrong now. He'd followed a path and not ever turned back, but something was stopping him now. Nevertheless, he wanted to press forward again and just keep trying.

The pacing was gentle and Mikel loped by Josef's side. The light ahead still wouldn't draw any closer.

'Hello? Is there anybody up there?' he suddenly felt compelled to shout. His voice echoed down the passageway. The sound of dripping persisted but nothing more. Josef felt deflated and embarrassed somehow. There was no change. Everything stayed the same.

As he walked on a little further, there was a new sound that he thought he could hear at last. The chamber was giving him something back, or so he thought. Josef stopped to listen. It felt like a gentle humming sound. He couldn't pinpoint the location at first, but as he started walking again it soon became noticeable that it was in front of him. A soft whirring, nothing else, like a distant bee hive, of sorts. Mikel continued to trot by his side and seemed unperturbed by the small disturbance.

Josef listened harder; he focused on the detail of the sound. There was a vibration, just on the tip of the air like a distant flapping. It was miniscule at first, but Josef could start to feel a rhythm. It slowly grew in level as he got closer.

'Hello?' he desperately cried out again in hope. Sweat began to dribble down his forehead and anxiety grew in his chest again. A tightness and a straining. He thought his heart fluttered slightly, which was a strange sensation and left him feeling light-headed and wanting to catch his breath. It was just a bit of anxiety he told himself and patted Mikel by his side.

Ahead of him, Josef thought the light quickly flashed to darkness but then returned. It may have been his imagination. Something felt wrong now. Fear froze Josef to the spot as the light flashed again. He squinted and waited. Nothing happened, just the perpetual dripping and humming. Walking on, Josef felt the air begin to freshen. There was a breeze which came in waves down the tunnel. Every time it hit Josef; his anxiety lessened. He felt there was a means of escape.

The flash came again suddenly but this time he thought he saw the cause. Josef paused and stood. This whole place was one plane of unreality and so anything could happen, he reminded himself. Could it be that a human body kept blocking out the light? Running across but then back again?

Josef waited and waited; Mikel sat patiently by his side. On and on. But just then, again, an image ahead running across the beam. He saw a torso and legs but it all happened in such quick motion. They were small.

‘Who are you?’ he asked. There was no response, of course, so he started walking again. The light flickered quicker now which made the tunnel flash from dark to light. Mikel gave out the occasional cry. ‘It’s okay, Mikel,’ reassured Josef. ‘Come on, now.’ Off they went together again, into the unknown.

Josef could now start to make out the source of light which had tormented him. It looked like some kind of projector bulb. The humming gently grew in stature and he began to understand he was perhaps looking at a distant film projector. This was the light that had blazed down the tunnel. But then if that was the case and the light shone on Josef, then wouldn’t that mean that he was potentially the film being projected? He was the star of the show? His journey was a film, but by who and for what purpose?

He felt the only control he had was to keep moving forwards and find the being blocking the light. As Josef got nearer and nearer, he had to look to the ground to stop the light from irritating him. There was a heat which hit his scalp from the projector. It got warmer and warmer as he approached but he continued glancing below as he walked. Mikel seemed unperturbed by anything and just trotted on. Sweat coursed down Josef’s face and some down his back. The humming of the projector became an intense flickering. The light still occasionally dipped in and out.

There was a sudden change. Josef thought he could smell the aftermath of a lit match but hadn’t lit one for a considerable time. His nose then breathed in a stronger cloud of burning; it was not a match strike. His eyes began to sting slightly as a whiff of smoke softly passed around him. The

light ahead now alternated and flickered in and out until there was a banging sound which startled Josef and made Mikel duck down and turn away in fright ...

The piercing bright light was replaced now by a softer orange glow. The projector had caught fire and exploded. This kind of thing would happen occasionally, so Josef had heard. One of the local cinemas in Leningrad was closed for months after fire damage. There was talk of a KGB conspiracy and the place had been showing anti-Soviet works, but that was far-fetched so far as Josef was concerned. Film could be so dangerous.

Emboldened by the removal of the blinding light, Josef marched onwards into the heat. Mikel yelped slightly, but nonetheless carried on beside him. Finally, they reached the end of the tunnel to be greeted by the remnants of what was a small oak table, which had collapsed under the charring. The projector was mangled, blackened, and still burning away. Beyond the burning mess was what seemed to be the continuation of the tunnel, a darkness stretching out as before. There was no sign of the person.

The blackness which led out in front of him again, made Josef feel utterly despondent. He would carry on but not for much longer.

\*

*INT. COURTROOM*

**PROSECUTOR**

Comrade Stalin has decreed that all traitors of the state must face trial and justice. That the treacherous pigs must be found and made an example of in the name of our great nation. It's why we're gathered here today as a people, to show these scumbags what happens when you choose to be an enemy of the party and our nation state. To prove again that there is no place for sedition under Stalin's great leadership, and those who dare undermine his power will face the maximum penalties. The Union Soviet Socialist Republics is now a powerhouse in the world and the envy of all other nations on Earth.

Those who chose the path of disloyalty to the great communist cause shall be hunted like animals and stamped on like rats in the street. Everyone in our country demands one thing, the traitors and spies who attempt to destroy our motherland should be shot like vile dogs! Ivan Fyodor Sartorius. You are charged under Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code with conspiracy to commit treason. How do you plead?

**IVAN**

Not guilty.

**PROSECUTOR**

It is my intention here that you be found guilty by our presiding judge.

*[In walks a uniformed officer/judge who sits centre stage-stage behind Prosecutor]*

**IVAN**

Ridiculous! They came on late for God's sake.

**PROSECUTOR**

Silence in court!

**IVAN**

This is like a school production; I hope everyone has learned their lines thoroughly or Stalin will be angry.

**PROSECUTOR**

Enough of this insolence, you dog! You're an embarrassment.

**IVAN**

This whole process is an embarrassment.

**PROSECUTOR**

It's not a film set now, you ignorant degenerate.

**IVAN**

It might as well be. Though I'm looking forward to my last days of freedom and listening to all the lies.

**PROSECUTOR**

See how he mocks us. The traitor faces justice for his crimes, and he can't take it. Shouldn't have been so cocky in that editing room,

should you? Shouldn't have held that camera in the wrong place for too long. Caught with your hand in the sweeties jar.

**IVAN**

Garbage. I know I'm going to die; you might as well just get on with the charade. No one will print the truth as to what I said anyway. None of the truth will go in print, I guess I'll just be erased from history. I thought I'd make good drama for you, though. The courtroom is a great source of drama. The Greeks loved it, apparently.

**PROSECUTOR**

The contempt you find yourself in is unbearable to watch. We've a series of witnesses who'll support your utter guilt.

**IVAN**

Could just shoot me now and be done with it?

**PROSECUTOR**

Stalin gave a personal note that you were to be tried and humiliated first. Your crimes are so grave.

**IVAN**

Wow, amazing.

**PROSECUTOR**

Our first witness is Leonard Brodovkin.

**IVAN**

My old neighbour? Jesus.

[Enter BODOVKIN]

**PROSECUTOR**

Please identify yourself for the benefit of the court.

**BODOVKIN**

My name is Leonard Ilyich Brodovkin, industrial systems operator at the Moscow State Aircraft Factory no.7.

**PROSECUTOR**

What is your relationship with the accused?

**BODOVKIN**

He was a neighbour and friend.

**IVAN**

[As voice over *internal monologue*]) I wouldn't go that far, BODOVKIN. Why are you here then?

**PROSECUTOR**

Tell the court what you saw on the night of August 12<sup>th</sup> of this year.

**BODOVKIN**

I saw Ivan Sartorius conspiring with others outside his home, there were 3 other men and they were discussing the overthrow of our great leader Stalin.

**IVAN**

You know they'll just shoot you too, Bodovkin.

**PROSECUTOR**

And what exactly did you hear them say?

**BODOVKIN**

I heard Ivan say that it was time to overthrow the tyrant Stalin and the 3 men nodded in agreement. They were talking in whispers but I still know what I heard. I thought it was sick that they'd say such things.

**IVAN**

Why on earth would I stand outside in public so I could be overheard saying things like that? Credit me with some intelligence, even if I was guilty.

**PROSECUTOR**

Very good. Why did you not report this to the authorities?

**BODOVKIN**

Well, I was scared, you see.

**PROSECUTOR**

Scared of what?

**BODOVKIN**

Ivan.

**PROSECUTOR**

Why? What happened the following morning?

**IVAN**

Yes, what happened, Bodovkin? Dying to know.

**BODOVKIN**

Ivan Sartorius entered my home and threatened me, you see. He said he'd kill me if anyone found out what he'd been up to.

**IVAN**

I've spoken to you about twice in my entire life, Bodovkin. Always about the weather or the factory.

**PROSECUTOR**

Bodovkin, this was obviously an awful threat to contend with, how did that make you feel? Having a violent and dangerous traitor next door?

**BODOVKIN**

I felt awful, worried, I have a family.

**IVAN**

No, you don't, Bodovkin.

**PROSECUTOR**

Let it be noted by the presiding officer that Leonard Bodovkin has an impeccable work record and has served the state to an exemplary level. His wife and family are excellent examples of domestication under Stalin's great leadership.

**IVAN**

This is absurd. He's not married, right? He's a factory worker who comes home smelling of shit every night and goes to work smelling the same!

**BODOVKIN**

May I say also ...

**PROSECUTOR**

You may say anything you wish, comrade. [Addressing IVAN] May I remind the accused that he has no right to interrupt the court's procedures.

**IVAN**

I have said nothing... May I remind you that this is a farce and there will be no justice today.

**PROSECUTOR**

Please continue, Bodovkin.

**BODOVKIN**

I saw that film of his, an early one. The one called, *Victory Boys*. It shook me.

**PROSECUTOR**

Why? What was it about that film that caused you such upset?

**IVAN**

That film was warmly received by everyone, can I just add.

**BODOVKIN**

There was a moment in that film when, a fight scene, yes, a fight scene. The person being attacked in the street by revolutionaries, he looks exactly like comrade Stalin, our great leader. How he is beaten is shameful. I thought, how can this be the case? This must mean something important.

[IVAN sighs]

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‘My bloody leg!’ yelled Mikel, ‘you’re on my bloody leg.’ They had both tumbled over in the dark, one on top of the other.

Josef was disoriented and was faced with the impenetrable blackness again. He blinked to get his eyes to adapt but struggled to make anything out. ‘What happened?’ he asked as he crawled from the ground and prised himself away from his friend. ‘Get up, Mikel.’

Mikel suddenly yelped with an animalistic horror which sent a shudder through Josef. He leapt up off the ground reaching and clinging to Josef. It was then that the rat which had casually strutted across Mikel’s face made its way back to the floor and decided to join the several other companions who resided in the same space. And what a space it was.

Josef lit another match and managed to find a small light switch on the wall next to him. It was futile to try but he flicked it anyway. A small bulb ignited from the ceiling, flickering and failing, which gave the two boys a glimpse of the underworld they had uncovered.

There were rodents running around and darting between the remnants of three beds, which resembled something you would find in a hospital. They were haphazardly positioned against the walls and encircled a central wooden table which looked to be riddled with rot. There was a rancid stench which wafted through occasionally but then died again. The walls were tiled but stained with infection from long ago: brown and red splurges added to the intimidation Josef and Mikel felt. Distantly a gentle buzzing could be made out, just softly on the air.

‘This is disgusting,’ said Mikel, ‘but what a den, what a find.’

‘You said we’d go, Mikel. I think we’ve seen enough,’ There was a trepidation in Josef’s voice. He felt they were seeing things that were not made for their eyes.

‘What is that smell?’ Mikel was blatantly ignoring Josef’s protests.

‘It’s vile, and we’re surrounded by rats, Mikel,’ Anger began to build in Josef but it was only slightly stirring. Fear was consuming Josef now beyond any control and he began to shake as if in a state of shock. ‘I’m going, Mikel,’ he cried out. Josef no longer felt like the daring explorer he and Mikel pretended to be. He just wanted to be at home as the child that he was and be enveloped in the comfort of his mother.

‘Don’t screech like that, please,’ For Mikel this discovery meant so much more and Josef knew that deep down, but he still desperately wanted to get out. Mikel’s father had been missing for three years, having vanished walking home from the munitions factory workplace one night. Mikel was convinced that he had been taken for holding certain views publicly. There was talk of strike action over health and safety conditions at the plant and Mikel’s father was rumoured to be involved. An aching paranoia clouded Mikel but he also carried with him a determination to find his father, somewhere.

‘I understand why you want to stay, Mikel, I get it. We need to leave though; we’re seeing things we shouldn’t be.’

‘I know you’re scared, Josef. I say we stay though and see exactly what we aren’t meant to see. Something happened here, it might have been innocent, it might have been a treatment centre or something.’ It was then that the putrid and ghastly sight of the scattered needles revealed themselves on the floor. They lay there, empty and rusting.

Not knowing how to react they just stood and stared for a few moments. There was something intimidating about the pointed weapons. They may have uncovered an entirely innocent situation as Mikel suggested, but there was an unspoken chilling acknowledgement that it would be too easy to think along those lines. Death had occurred in this place, that was obvious.

‘What would they be used for, then?’ asked Josef with a tremble in his voice. His teeth were chattering as he tried to speak. His question was also laced with sarcasm.

‘Try breathing slowly,’ suggested Mikel. ‘You need to calm down, take deep breaths.’ He knew it would take more than a few breath related exercises to calm his friend down. ‘I’m scared too, okay? I didn’t think we’d find anything like this. It’s weird and creepy but think about it, Josef, we’re the only ones here. Nobody is going to hurt us and we know the way out, so it’s okay. It’s creepy but we’re safe, right?’ There was little conviction in Mikel’s tone.

‘I’m going, Mikel. We need to leave now.’

‘Wait, wait. There’s a door in the corner, let’s just see what’s behind it ...’

‘I agreed to come this far but I’m not going any further, this whole place stinks of death.’

‘Please, Josef. Just a bit further.’ Mikel had already set off for a door which at first had appeared to not even exist until the light had enabled the boys’ eyes to adapt. It had a frosted window and carried the compulsory brown stains on it. Mikel skilfully avoided the needles on the floor and dodged any nibbling rodents which had decided to greet him in his journey. Josef remained standing on the steps.

When Mikel reached his destination, he looked for a handle only to discover there wasn't one. Only a hole where one could have been placed.

‘What’s the matter, Mikel?’

‘There’s no handle. That smell that kept wafting through is stronger around here though.’

‘Just leave it then, come on.’ Josef urged his companion back but out of nowhere came the sound of Mikel’s kicks against the woodwork. ‘Mikel, for God’s sake, what are you doing?’

‘I’ll kick it in,’ and with that the violence became stronger and eventually frenzied as Mikel’s determination to see what was hidden possessed him. It was a pent-up violence that Josef had not witnessed before. It had been clearly residing in Mikel for a very long time and needed to be unleashed. It was dangerous though, and untamed.

‘Pack it in, Mikel. Someone will hear us,’ but Josef’s protests were in vain. He had an inkling now to turn his back and run up the tunnel and away from the madness. As those brief thoughts came and disappeared there then came the silence. Josef could only hear his own attempts at slow breathing. Mikel had quickly finished his attacks, he had either succeeded with the breaking the door or yielded to defeat. Josef hoped for the latter.

The silence persisted and Josef stood reflecting in the dim light, he would not call out to his friend, he would be unable to even if he tried. Something stirred away from Josef though, it was the gentle buzzing sound from earlier, it seemed to be becoming more predominant, like a whirring sound. It was then that the putrid smell which had previously wafted through in waves emerged again. It was a stench that gripped the back of Josef’s throat causing him to wretch.

A disturbance suddenly filled the air, a motion came from where Mikel had vanished. In seconds Josef was knocked to the side as out of the murk came his companion who charged straight forward. Mikel ran straight down the tunnel they had come from and away from the room.

‘Wait, Mikel, wait...’ Josef twisted his winded body to pursue but also had a curiosity just to see what Mikel was running from. He began to pursue his friend in the gloom but stopped still.

Despite the terror Josef had felt the whole time, a compunction germinated in him to just look, one quick look.

The buzzing sound was flies. They were everywhere and Josef had to swat them away. He took a few cautious steps forward and found himself standing in the middle of the room, the detritus at his feet. To his right in the bottom corner was a now open door. It was damaged but open, nonetheless. He was breathing through his mouth because of the stench and the flies were getting so much worse. The scuttling sound was there again. His body shook and clattered, and he was nervously unsteady on his feet. Josef tiptoed towards the door, but it was too much. He needed to be bolder, walk on, see what was there. He paused as he could see nothing, the lightbulb was feeble, there was only darkness where he wanted to see. The flies were now landing and crawling on him, and he felt them dance across his feet and the whipping feeling as they buzzed about his ankles. This would have to wait for another day. Nature was now warning him off, there were things here which were not meant to be seen. As he gave one last glance into the murky darkness. Staring around the door's frame revealed something on the floor. He couldn't make it out at first, maybe a glove? Another flicker brought a better view. A human hand shrivelled and green.

Josef ran. He stumbled and fell but managed to avoid the needles and rodents which had previously plagued him. He understood now they were there to warn him and Mikel off, they had both paid the price for ignoring those warnings. Mikel had seen more though; he'd been in that room.

'What did you see, Mikel?' Josef asked when they both found themselves gasping for breath outside the building later. There was litter blowing in the streets and the cold air whipped down their spines. They were both shaking as they held a moment of silence together. A shrivelled old woman limped by. She was coated in rags, her face a haunting warning of the future to come. She stared straight ahead and paid no attention to the boys, passing by without sound.

'Nothing, I saw nothing, okay?' cried Mikel. 'We saw nothing in there, we never speak about this again.' But it wouldn't take long for them both to retrace their steps out of a madness of curiosity. Within three days they were both back on the same spot in the foyer of the building and ready to

explore again. There was a self-confidence now that nothing could harm them. They had been through the worst. The problem they both faced was when they arrived there, they found to their horror that the tunnel entrance was filled in with concrete.

‘This is ridiculous, Mikel, what the hell is all this about? Are we even in the right building?’

‘Of course, we are,’ Josef’s friend remonstrated. But there was a seething disappointment riddled across his face and a growing sense of fear. Mikel closed his eyes and said, ‘let’s just get out of here and forget about it like it never happened. We saw nothing.’

The truth was that Josef had seen nothing. His story about the human hand was just something he made up to frighten his younger sister. Josef had run out of that room as soon as Mikel had done the same. His friend was never the same after that day though, there was an even greater iciness at times and a tendency to lash out violently without any serious provocation. Mikel was deeply disturbed by whatever he had seen that day and even more so by the fact that there were obvious powers working beyond his control in the shadows of life.

When they exited the building that day the old lady materialised again from somewhere. Her tiny scrunched face showed the battering life had bestowed. She carried with her a witch-like quality that was both frightening but equally intriguing. In a slow and almost whispered chant she addressed the two boys in the street. ‘Nothing to be seen in there.’ And with that message she limped on. Josef and Mikel ran away quickly but when Josef glanced back the woman was out of sight.

So as Josef stood calmly amongst the green sprawl of countryside and thinking about the young director he was having to endure now, he could only begin to well up as thoughts of Mikel haunted him. Where he was now Josef had no idea. Though that was the lie he told himself. Mikel was either dead or dying, probably freezing to death in jail. Josef could only think about the duty he had done.

Josef had tried to make a success of his life the best he could, but Mikel could only spiral downwards. He found a way of making money through smuggling goods. It was something Josef would never contemplate being involved in but Mikel found himself attempting to take revenge on the

authorities at every possible moment. It was a private war he waged; it was something Josef understood. The difference was that Josef knew there was conformity or nothing, Mikel thought the opposite. He contacted obscure people near the borders who managed to somehow bring goods in from the other places. They were decadent gifts: women's dresses, makeup and crucially there was food. Meats, cheese, and chocolate, all for sale on the black market. Mikel was a puppet for these people and was often ripped off, but he didn't care. For him it was an act of rebellion.

Josef had lost touch with his old friend during this time and wanted nothing to do with smuggling. However, their paths would cross several years later whilst Josef was out filming. It had been a genuinely relaxing day for once on set out by the borderlands. The weather was warm and calming, the shoot had finished on time and the crew decided to go swimming in a nearby gulf. Josef had been content throughout the day and felt like making the most of it. He ventured to a large park rather than expose his body to the others. They'd called him a few playful names for doing so but he didn't care. As he sat on a bench surrounded by tall trees he could smell an abundance of fragrances from the seasonal gardens. There was an array of whites, yellows, pinks, and purples in which to drown his eyes. However, he noticed a figure seemingly out of place from the Edenic scene. There was a family playing a makeshift game of football on the large lawn just in front of him, framed by a square pathway of gravel and bushes. The ball was a distance away from the family after one of the children had been over enthusiastic with their striking technique. Josef watched the ball cruise towards the edge of the lawn and land in the pathway of a man. He had a shaved head and dressed in overalls with a long coat. For such a warm day this looked incongruous and Josef felt the man must take no comfort from being dressed like that.

The ball stopped by his feet and there was a brief pause as he seemed to contemplate the natural response. He looked down for a few moments but then kicked the ball back into the family's direction. His face broke to reveal a smile to himself which crafted an unnerving feeling in Josef because he began to look familiar. It was the face of Mikel. His old friend looked ill though, thin and unkempt. The coat was long and shabby as Josef focused his eyes more, he saw holes in the overalls. What on earth was Mikel doing here, like a cloud casting shadow over a moment of tranquillity?

Events took a sinister turn when two men approached from behind the bench on which Josef was sitting. They were dressed plainly, built stockily, and walked with a strong purpose. Josef recognised the signs immediately and would make no eye contact with them as they both glanced back at him. It was the safest action to take. His pulse quickened slightly during this moment but then slackened off when he realised he was not the target today and they carried on walking straight forward.

Any relief was short lived though as Josef quickly noticed the men were heading towards Mikel. It could just be a coincidence that they both happened to be walking that way but he knew better than that. Mikel was about to face the consequences. His old friend hadn't noticed anything and was still reflecting on the family he had just assisted. Staring into the open green. Josef wanted to warn him but was powerless. It would be too much of a risk. As the children played and approving parents smiled on, there came a sudden noise. Josef leapt out of his skin at the sudden noise of Mikel shouting a torrent of expletives. There was no question as to who he was taking aim at with his verbal weapons, as Josef's predictions had come to fruition. The two men ran towards the target. Mikel began to sprint towards the family. Josef could see the scenario playing out and stood up from the bench.

Mikel careered into the scattering family, two children ran screaming, but Mikel took hold of one of them and scooped her up in his arms, she could be no more than four years old. The child screamed and roared tears from her eyes. Mikel paused to catch his breath and take full control of the wrestling child.

'Don't come anywhere near me, I'll break her neck,' he shouted at the two men who were now standing off having given a brief chase.

'Don't be a fool, let the child go,' one of them spoke. 'Come with us quietly and do yourself a favour.' The man turned to the quivering family who had now huddled together after the initial shock. 'This man is a known traitor. We will not let any harm come to your daughter, be reassured he will be dealt with accordingly.' It was the matter-of-fact tone which was the most chilling.

‘I’m walking away from here with her, come after me and I’ll break her neck. Can’t you hear me?’

Josef couldn’t believe this was happening on such a beautiful spring day. There was a moment of calm where nobody spoke but just heard a chorus of bird song emitting from the trees. Everyone was still if just for those brief seconds of tranquillity.

Josef approached the drama whilst the players were still in their freeze frame. He gently raised his hands to show Mikel he meant no harm.

‘Mikel, I can’t believe it’s really you. Do you know who I am? Do you remember?’ Josef looked at his old friend directly in the eyes without a thought of blinking. The two KGB operatives who were intent on capturing Mikel were not particularly enamoured by Josef’s intervention.

‘Stand aside and leave this dangerous lunatic to us,’ one said. The other had his hand in his jacket pocket but seemed reluctant to draw any weapon in front of the family.

Mikel’s face erupted with acknowledgement. ‘My God,’ he said, ‘if it isn’t my old friend? Of all the parks in all the world ...’ he began to laugh. ‘You remember that film we watched, the American one. It’s years old now but still better than the shit we produce.’ He laughed again but with an edge of insanity as though he was losing control. The child’s father began to look angry; his initial shock had gone.

‘Listen Mikel, or whatever your name is, let my daughter go. Your crimes have nothing to do with us.’

‘Crimes?’ Mikel became even more agitated, turning to face the man. ‘Crimes? People are starving. Life is utter crap.’ He clasped the child tighter. ‘I’m just trying to earn a living and bring some quality to people’s lives at the same time. Is that so bad?’ The two KGB looked at each other and rolled their eyes harmoniously as though this was a script they’d heard before. It was no use, the gun appeared and it was pointed at Mikel’s head. The family edged away further as their daughter simply froze out of terror. She stared blindly forward. The KGB moved forward.

‘Listen, Mikel. We will have to shoot you if you don’t come with us. Do the right thing.’

Mikel was livid, ‘You see,’ looking back at Josef, ‘they know my name thanks to you.’

Josef could merely plead and said, ‘Mikel, they will have known who you are way before I got here. Don’t you get it? It’s over for you, I’m sorry but it’s over. This is making things much worse, let the girl go, for God’s sake.’

‘Stalinist,’ Mikel spat out the word. Josef felt an energy growing. It was an anger of some kind which began to manifest as movement. After all they’d been through as children Josef found himself suddenly enraged by that word. He felt the anger rise, there was frustration which had been dormant but always present within him. Josef had a sudden compunction to use the anger of the situation as an energy. Completely out of character he leapt at his old friend diving forwards at him but with no clear strategy in mind, just blind rage. Mikel dropped the girl and began to run as Josef missed his target but caught hold of his old friend’s ankle in the fall. It became a slapstick scenario. Tumbling into the ground but pulling Mikel down with him. The KGB men both grappled with Mikel who tried to scramble away but lost his footing facing the ground. It was over for Mikel. They’d place him in a prison or psychiatric hospital, either way he was as good as dead. The KGB were both quite pleased with Josef despite the haphazard conflict which had unfolded.

‘Comrade,’ they called him.

Josef had been a good comrade ever since, Mikel’s desperation made him realise he didn’t want to be next. Lenfilm was the place to make the experimental cinema and it was also a place to raise any concerns he may have to the Ministry of Culture who had connections to the Central Committee. Josef didn’t want to be the next person being followed by men in plain clothes and being accused of being anti-Soviet. They were the ones who booked out the restaurants in the cities whilst other people queued for food. Josef had seen them on a visit to Moscow once, a weekend away, Sunday night he was hungry. Supplies for the hotel menu had not arrived and any food left was limited to their ‘premium’ guests.

Josef continued his walk amongst the trees and felt there had been enough reflection for one day. He needed to stop thinking.

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## **Leningrad Special Psychiatric Hospital**

### **Article 70: Paranoid Development of the Personality**

I can feel the grip tighten on my back. It's here. I'm caught by it again. Arms clamp themselves like pincers around my emaciated torso. I'm sweating despite the freezing cold. Why come here again? What does it need from me? Questions left unanswered as all I can do is close my eyes and try to grasp my breath as it tightens its grip. The tongue then caresses my face.

*The artist is the individual from birth, it whispered. Individualism, true freedom and strength can flourish only under socialism.* Words I remember from long ago but can never place them precisely. It is the routine of the night now. It comes to embrace me and recite the past. *Only under socialism, freed from the cares of daily bread, from worries about tomorrow, will the artist be liberated, well provided for materially. He needn't care about the tastes of the majority... but on the contrary, asserting his individual will in his creative work, will establish these tastes himself.*

I try my hardest to slither from this snare but I'm weak and woeful in my attempt. There's nowhere to go should I escape, and no one will respond to my crying out. My shrieks are only matched by everyone else's here. The only escape is death. But the wretched voice goes on and keeps me alive. It's the voice of an actor. A performance that slithers, weaves, and bounces beyond the wretched norm of reality. He wanted to be an actor, I'm sure, before he became the man, before the supremacy. Lenfilm, what was I thinking? Why did I go with them? Goskino is the death to creativity. I can only blame myself, total hubris. That's how me and him are so alike, but he wears a uniform.

*True individualism will prevail, then everyone will freely be able to assert his spiritual self.*

On and on. *For individualism to flourish, slaves are needed.* There are hands massaging my face, fingers like tentacles sculpt and contort as my eyelids are forced open. I must see, but there is only darkness. *Under socialism, these slaves will not be people but soulless, compliant machines.* A machine is what I have become here, 'the essence of technology is the death of humanity,' someone once wrote in one of those books that were forbidden. These thoughts are only fleeting though as the pressure builds on my skull. I feel a cranial pressure, my head caught in a twisting vice, slowly and mercilessly. I can't forget his thick eyebrows. Those uniforms they wear always make me think of war, a permanent state of war. But that's all shit. Couldn't even get a croissant in the capital, that's how well off we all are. But it looks good when you meet the American to try and avoid another holocaust. Looks good on television. A great performance.

The pain is enough to lead me towards a total and inexorable conformity as I become its possession. I am suddenly transfixed and desperate to join in and shout the very words that hold me hostage. Obedience will help drive it away.

'Art is for all whose soul possesses either a conscious or an unconscious thirst for beauty. Everything created by a man's talent, everything that bears the true mark of creativity, everything that enters the concept of art all this and only this is the subject of the freedom of art.' As we merge the pain recedes slightly and I feel my chest raising again. This act of surrender helps to unleash my freedom. It's been like this for years. We're all haunted by it. By him. A metamorphosis occurs but with no change. Different face but same monster. This one only lurks and does nothing for us, the most boring beast on Earth.

Before I can begin the next recital, a rattling grows from somewhere. A knocking which feels like a mark of normality in this labyrinth of cruelty. The sound is too distant though and I can only try to reach out both physically and aurally to no avail. My torment will last just that little longer as I feel talons are shredding my back. My hidden torturer becomes jealous of the attention I give to noises from elsewhere.

‘New seeds will be sewn onto the soil. Today for the very first time a foundation will begin to be laid whose name is The Rights of the People.’ I have no understanding of language now; words are but a vociferous din. The more I please the puppeteer the more it relinquishes its clench. But I must be unrivalled in my servitude, otherwise the injections of agony overwhelm me. It’s an agony we’ve all felt. Sheer unrelenting boredom of existence. Maybe I’m better in here, at least we feel and think rather than out there with the queues and the total confusion as to what is actually going on. The perpetual queues while he speaks into a camera. The queues whilst we acknowledge he was made for tv with the way those medals glisten under the lights. They’re a perfect contrast with the black holes that stare at us. Everyone knows it’s all shit now, total shit. Maybe the bomb would be a good thing, put us out of our misery. I can see people cheering in the streets as a mushroom cloud arrives to scorch the earth. People are dancing and singing before the inevitable vaporisation. But he’s messed that up now, him and the yanks are always signing stuff to keep everybody safe. Limit our arms whilst the dirge drips on. Sixty-five years and now beyond.

I can hear the outer sound again. This time I’m determined to let it break into my psyche and I brace myself for the further pain to come. It does not.

‘Shut up in there,’ is all I hear now.

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*Nowhere anything for eating,  
All of Russia fading, freezing,<sup>4</sup>*

There came a shaft of sunlight through a crack in the clouds which made Larisa squint. It would've made a wonderful frame, the sun's glint radiating back through the camera lens as the light is bent and refracted causing a kaleidoscopic mirage. An unreal representation of the reality: the queue was still in total lockdown. Larisa was enjoying the distraction of meeting her old acquaintance once again though. It felt clandestine and slightly criminal to be associated with Mirza, but Larissa also knew that thoughts like that were totally ludicrous. Nobody cared really.

'So, no more projects, no more proposals?' she asked quietly. The people in the queue were chattering away, though not in any treacherous manner. Talk of Avilov's marriage to Kozyr and 'what would their children look like?' as they're both so athletic and disappointed over the USSR team's refusal to play in South America, something to do with 'the military' there. Larissa could only contemplate the irony in the sporting bodies having some form of moral stance.

Mirza rolled her eyes at the noisy crowd surrounding them. 'I'm not so sure, I'd love to, maybe under a pseudonym but it's too risky.' Mirza felt the urge to lower her head slightly and look around. This made Larisa chuckle again slightly.

'You're fine, no one cares around here, be free.'

'It's not as simple as that though, it's been frightening for me.'

'Don't be frightened. What is there to be frightened of anymore, Mirza? They didn't like your draft and they want to find it. They'll move on soon enough but take a number and join the queue because you're not the first person to suffer the system like this. You know that.'

'There's more going on than what you may think. I have others to think about now.'

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<sup>4</sup> Arseny Tarkovsky, 'How It Was,' trans. by Robert Chandler, *ibid.*, p.407.

‘What do you mean?’ Larisa gave a hard stare and there was a moment of discomfort between them.

‘Ivan and I have got married.’

‘Really? Why would you do that?’

‘Believe me, it’s just easier that way right now.’

Larisa began to understand the situation a little better though the uncertainty still troubled her.

‘What if you’ve done the right thing, Mirza? There are alternatives, I’m not being facetious. I know people who can help’-

‘No, no. I couldn’t do that, that’s not an option.’ Mirza began to wish she’d never approached Larisa in the first place. Why do this? Larissa was a face from the past, a lost future never reimagined.

Larisa needed to close this off. From a shop window she felt observant eyes suddenly burrowing into her. She was still cynical and felt no paranoia, but it was uncomfortable, nonetheless.

‘It’s fine, Mirza. Forget I said anything.’ The queue moved forward. The woman in front tutting. ‘It’s nice of you to come over and share the good news about Ivan’s film. I hope it works out well.’

Mirza played out the scene and continued the improvisation. ‘He’s working with Natalya...’

‘Bondarchuk?’

‘No, they couldn’t get her, she wouldn’t do it. She’s had enough of science fiction.’

‘Did you see *Solaris*?’

‘No, didn’t get to see it.’

‘I saw it, it was quite something. Though I heard Lem hated it, took too much away from his novel.’

‘Well, either way, they asked her, but she said, no.’

‘That’s a shame, so which Natalya?’

‘Soranova.’

‘Oh.’

‘That’s okay, isn’t it?’

‘Yes fine,’ Larisa paused and remembered the stories of Soranova being younger and wholeheartedly supporting the avant-garde movements, only to turn against them at the price of recognition and what she called a ‘purer movement image.’ Everyone knew she was talking shit.

Mirza said, ‘I think Ivan is doing okay with her. I spoke to him just yesterday over the phone. He’s somewhere near the Azov.’

‘That’s a long way to go, Mirza.’ The queue trampled on again. Larisa felt suddenly guilty at her tone and needed to change tack. The eyes were still bearing down on her from across the way. Or was she imagining it? Was it she who was watching? ‘It’ll be nice down there this time of year. I’m sure the spring will move in soon and Ivan should get some excellent cinematography.’

‘Hopefully, if they have enough film, there’s a shortage. You must know that?’ Mirza was becoming agitated with the conversation now, she felt she’d said too much and just then felt a sudden urge to get away. There was a man behind Larisa, several bodies back in the queue who Mirza believed was watching her. It was probably nothing though. He probably just recognised her from the television, though no one ever acknowledged her if they did, just watched.

‘Who’s his director of photography?’ Larisa continued the conversation, though it appeared Mirza was becoming distracted.

‘Josef somebody? I don’t know his full name.’

Larisa stared across the way and up into the distance. Her thoughts coasted towards Josef Stankovic, he’d been a follower of Eisenstein’s theories about the representation of objects in the actual and absolute realism being the incorrect form of perception. Larisa didn’t pretend to understand

all of that, but she knew Stankovic was once broad minded and an experimenter. She had heard the stories of him regaling the Lenfilm studios with his own visions of what the camera can perceive to trick the human eye. He was a passionate advocate of film theory and yet now she only knew him as an obstinate old man who just wanted to point and shoot.

Larisa said, 'Well, Ivan is in good hands there,' she decided to stifle her thoughts.

'Yes, he says he's really great to work with,' this was a lie from Mirza and she knew that, but she must keep up the pretence.

The idle chatter from the queue began to die down as a message was conveyed which hit like falling dominoes. What first started as a distant murmur snaked down amongst the cold and deluded: the shelves were now empty. There was an initial roar of choral expletives from various sources, but then the usual recognition that there was no point in raising complaint. There was nobody to listen.

Larisa sighed and shivered. The eyes were no longer burning into her. Her stomach rumbled lightly. She couldn't be bothered to queue up anywhere else today, it was too cold and getting darker.

Mirza shivered and felt almost guilty about the situation, though it was normal.

Larisa spoke first, 'I guess I'll go home then, or I might try the studio canteen. Magda sometimes has a few spare vegetables that she passes under the counter. She once gave me a steak, would you believe it? Come with me if you like?' There was no real conviction in Larissa as she knew it was rare that Magda did such things.

'I better not. I just thought I'd come over and see how you were.' Mirza felt a certain sadness.

Larisa sighed again; it had been yet another futile food attempt. She would have to have come earlier tomorrow if she got the chance or try somewhere else. But she was working on editing a proposal with a young writer and really needed to do him justice. The studio was proving disinterested, but she wouldn't give in on this. But it was either art or food. That was the choice Larisa faced.

Mirza began to walk away and clutched her stomach. She worried about her job, worried about climbing the steps in her apartment block again, worried about the contents of her fridge being still fresh and worried about Ivan out in the middle of nowhere working with people who had no respect for him. Once great artists, now cynics. But as Mirza walked away from her old collaborator, she could only reflect, who wasn't cynical?

\*

**IVAN**

[VO] The Tsar looked a little like the young Stalin. It was not an attempt at subversion.

**PROSECUTOR**

I hope the court can hear this awful truth. Ivan Sartorius filmed images of comrade Stalin being beaten to death. Not only was *The Nile Queen* a total abomination, but his other works also. Thank goodness those films are now confined to history and can be viewed no more.

**BODOVKIN**

It brings me great sadness to see my old friend plotting and conspiring like this. I used to think he was a great man.

**IVAN**

[VO] Bodovkin, what are you doing to yourself? What is this all about? What have they promised you?

**PROSECUTOR**

Your concerns are noted by the court. A difficult time for you no doubt, but you have done the correct thing. Showing us the Stalin evidence will be crucial in this conviction.

**IVAN**

[VO] It was the Tsar, everyone knows that. That film was a triumph. People adored it. Now it is manipulated against me? Jesus Christ. Unbelievable. (Addressing the court) You do realise that is utterly absurd! How can you have such ridiculous evidence from a man I've

barely spoken to? *Victory Boys* was loved by the masses and now you want to change its meaning because one of the characters happens to look like fucking Stalin!

*[There is silence in court. Disbelief that IVAN could use such language closely connected with Stalin]*

**PROSECUTOR**

How dare you say that! You will remain silent or I will take you outside now and put a bullet in your brain, personally!

*[Pause. PROSECUTOR begins to control his emotions again]*

Thank you, Bodovkin. We will now call another witness.

*[BODOVKIN exits]*

**PROSECUTOR**

We call, Vadima Yusov.

**IVAN**

*[VO] Vadima? They got to her as well?*

*[Into shot walks a young female who positions herself centre stage]*

**PROSECUTOR**

Could you please identify yourself.

**VADIMA**

I am Vadima Yusova, I have acted in over 12 productions for Mosfilm, all in honour of our supreme leader.

**PROSECUTOR**

Please relay to the court the events that took place on August 15<sup>th</sup> of this year.

**VADIMA**

I had been working with the accused on the film, *The Nile Queen*. It had been a long hot day on location by the Azov coast. I was alone in the makeup tent when the accused entered. He sidled up to me from behind and whispered into my ear, 'You know what we're doing here don't you?' You understand the vision?'

**PROSECUTOR**

Why on earth would he do that?

**IVAN**

*[VO] I was alone with you but I never whispered anything.*

**PROSECUTOR**

[To IVAN] Do you deny this also? That you were trying to recruit your leading actress to your plotting?

**IVAN**

I never *whispered* anything [Pointing at **VADIMA**] in her ear.

**PROSECUTOR**

Did you say those words?

**IVAN**

I spoke, but I was referring to the vision for the film. Is it not obvious? I was making conversation; I was looking for something in there. I can't remember what.

**PROSECUTOR**

What vision? In fact, don't answer. Let's let the witness carry on. What happened next?

**VADIMA**

I moved away from him, not being sure what he meant. It seemed strange.

**IVAN**

[VO] Utter rubbish.

**VADIMA**

He said he wanted to show the consequences of the brutal revolution. Where the revolution has left us.

**IVAN**

[*Interrupting*] I didn't say it like you say Vadima. You know that's not true. Yes! I wanted to show the consequences of revolution, but the positive consequences. The successes... the film was a celebration of our great revolution. A celebration of Soviet ingenuity. Not a conspiracy! My words have been twisted and mangled against me. Why Vadima? Why?

**PROSECUTOR**

Ignore him, comrade, please continue. This must've been very upsetting for you. What then happened?

**VADIMA**

He pressed himself against me. He put his arms around my waist. I tried to move away but he wouldn't let go.

**IVAN**

[*Interrupting*] No, no. Our relationship wasn't like that. I'm a married man... admitted, the film industry can be touchy feely sometimes, but I am not that kind of man. I know men who are... but that's not me. Not ever!

**PROSECUTOR**

Stop interrupting, you dog, and let the witness proceed.

**VADIMA**

He said things could work out for us both if I stuck by him and this film will show how far the Soviet movement has come. It will, he said, 'represent the truth.'

**PROSECUTOR**

But, *The Nile Queen* is a brutal tale of a Roman invasion and oppression of an innocent people.

**VADIMA**

He then started to undo his trousers, he said that I 'really would be his queen when the cinematic revolution comes.'

**IVAN**

[VO] My trousers were tight and I was hot, I never undid them, just adjusted. I was talking about making great films, revolutionising cinema as great art! Nothing more.

**PROSECUTOR**

What disgusting behaviour. Using so-called *art* as a weapon of tyranny and misogyny. An engineer of the soul becomes an engineer of filth. The fabric of our great nation ripped to shreds.

[*Scene begins to change. The camera pans away from the court to open fields. There is the sound of a distant murmuring and a knocking sound projected. It is a chilling, haunting sound. Camera goes to CLOSE-UP - IVAN stares forward, the voice eventually can be understood as saying ...*]

A film is never taken in any one way only, it can never be signified as meaning one thing. A spectator will interpret a film from their own idiosyncrasies. Some concepts are incongruent to others. Repeated, over and over. The old masters had the same ideas...

**IVAN**

What does that even mean? Total bullshit jargon rotting us all. Everything can be explained in simple terms; it must be. It's not reductive to say that.

*[Voice repeats as a traditional Eastern European folk song plays in the background - Kalimankou Denkou (The Wedding Gathering) - and repeats]*

Art versus capitalism, that was always my motivation. I never worried about taking bullets or gulags. I saw the revolution happen; I was part of the masses that wanted freedom. I fulfilled my responsibilities as an artist. Part of the group putting socialism first, making the Soviet Union great. A world power.

*[Music fades, camera reveals IVAN in CLOSE-UP lit, the characters before have gone, IVAN is alone. There is the sound of birds and running water, it is as though we are now in a rural summer setting. In the background images of the Carpathian Mountains can be seen. It is a complete transformation]*

#### **IVAN**

I am awake. Home. Truskavets. A beautiful place. Idyllic childhood.

*[He begins to run around the scene as though childlike. Camera follows]*

Incredible. The springs have not lost their romance. Purity everywhere. Divine. No hate, nor division.

*[From somewhere the PROSECUTOR, from before, appears and speaks through a megaphone]*

#### **PROSECUTOR**

Art is infinitely bound up with its creator. Intimate emotions of each person are manifest in a language of cinematic reality. A cosmology of the senses, a journey through time. A temporal explosion of reality, of meaning and meaning beyond meaning. Facts are opaque. The screen is the truth, a truth of one's own. Formed through fire, through work. The pit of Hell is the doorway to Heaven. You must never look down...

*[He drops the megaphone and runs towards IVAN]*

Never look down Ivan, it's too high up here. That's what your mother always said wasn't it? Or was it your father? Do you remember this? We were both here, from your childhood. We've always known each other. I've followed you and vice-versa. Me, me, Ivan. Don't you remember? *[a pause here as IVAN thinks with a bewildered face. PROSECUTOR seems unusual]*

#### **IVAN**

Why the uniform, comrade? Out here. How can you exist here?

#### **PROSECUTOR**

[Laughs] Comrade? Where do you think you are, Ivan?

**IVAN**

It's what I'm used to.

**PROSECUTOR**

Really? This is a different time, Ivan. Liberated.

**IVAN**

I remember this place from my childhood. The springs, the mountains. How can it be now? This is a dream?

**PROSECUTOR**

Ivan, when did you last sleep? What have you been doing the past few years?

**IVAN**

Me? I ... I'm not sure. I'm not sure what's happening.

**PROSECUTOR**

What's wrong with you, Ivan? Did you walk from the village?

**IVAN**

[Confused] I don't recall... sorry who are yo-

**PROSECUTOR**

Well, if you didn't walk up then how on earth did you make it up here? How did you reach such sublime heights?

**IVAN**

Forgive me, I'm confused. I don't know how I got here. I was in a courtroom, I think.

**PROSECUTOR**

A courtroom? [Laughs] Ivan, old friend, why on earth would you be in a courtroom? I saw you from down below and watched you climb. I thought I'd join you. See how you were getting on.

**IVAN**

But who are you? I don't know you. You're dressed as a prosecutor.

**PROSECUTOR**

Just clothes, Ivan, nothing more.

**IVAN**

You were interrogating witnesses.

**PROSECUTOR**

Me? Interrogating witnesses? I'm just a farm hand, Ivan.

*[IVAN becomes increasingly confused. He is looking and searching for something]*

Well, what is it now, Ivan? What are you looking for? [Pause] Come on, let's walk back down together. We can talk.

**IVAN**

I've done plenty of talking. *[Becomes angry]* I've done plenty of talking!

**PROSECUTOR**

Ivan, please. Just calm down. If it was winter, you'd cause an avalanche.

**IVAN**

All this can't be, it's unreality.

**PROSECUTOR**

Ivan, will you just stop this madness, and join me down in the valley. It can go dark quickly around here.

*[IVAN collects himself and stops fighting against the situation]*

\*

'You see, Ivan, can you see? All this stuff, detritus everywhere,' said Josef as they both waded through the flea market. 'It's as though we are at the end of the world here and we could fall off into nothingness...ha! Being and nothingness.'

Ivan breathed in the sights and sounds of the poor and damned who were desperately offering their trinkets. They were on a break from shooting as they had run out of film and were waiting for a special delivery from the Dovzhenko Film Studios. Lenfilm held a certain influence even hundreds of miles away. It was quiet on the cobbled street and the whole scene felt rather pitiful; not even tables for selling on, just old rugs. Lines and lines of jaded, blackened faces who were hungry. This wasn't the thirties anymore, but Ivan thought it was the closest he'd get to seeing a famine. A famine of physical starvation but also a famine of intellectual death. This place was just waiting for something

to happen, in the meantime nothing happened, ever. There were medals, badges, and even random pieces of cutlery all now soiled and grimed as sellers sat cross-legged surrounded by the sorrowful offerings. To add insult, it was cold today despite the spring air defiantly trying to seethe through. Ivan had wanted to film in Odessa to emulate Eisenstein and yet found himself near the Russian border but hundreds of miles away from home. Lenfilm could not place him further away, but it was cheap here, everything cheap; this was the end of the world. Ivan was here to make a film though and he would.

‘Tell me, Josef, is it always like this down here?’ asked Ivan.

‘Yes, fascinating, isn’t it? Have you noticed the bullet holes everywhere on some of these buildings? It’s the same everywhere you go with these countries. The old buildings are still marked.’ Josef gave a long-drawn breath of pride. ‘Fighting the fascists, you see. We all need to be reminded how we liberated the east from tyranny.’ Josef almost believed what he was saying. Ivan said nothing.

There was a small badge consisting of a sword with a shield set beside it which caught Ivan’s gaze, laid out before them at one of the stalls, amongst the sea of rusted articles. Josef followed Ivan’s glance.

‘Oh, that’s a KGB,’ explained Josef.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Ivan.

‘Well, you’d get that for good behaviour. Think they’ve changed the design these days to be fair. That’s an older version.’

Josef’s knowledge of KGB decorative regalia came at a slight surprise when Ivan really considered everything. He knew there was an edge to Josef that he had to be aware of, but he was also relieved just to be out with him and doing something different. He could learn from Josef.

‘How often have you been at one of these things, Josef?’ asked Ivan.

‘Oh, they seem to spring up wherever I film these days, like a ghost following me around. You see you wouldn’t know the old ways, how we used to live. My parents were born not far from here really, near Zaporizhzhia.’

‘Oh, near Brezhnev then too?’ jerked Ivan.

Josef gave a brief smirk to himself but kept within his soul. ‘Yes, you could say that, I suppose.’

‘Mine were too, you know? It was a struggle for them, they paid a dear price.’ Ivan stopped as he realised, he was saying too much.

‘No, I didn’t know.’ Josef simply pushed the comment away as though insignificant but knew there was a weighted haunting to Ivan’s words.

There was a pause between the two of them as an unwritten spectre loomed in the conversation. A mutual acknowledgement of hauntings past. Ivan thought it better to not say another word, but it sent a trembling feeling through him. There was an unveiling here between them. They both just stared around their surroundings: the sellers sat on the rugs, the trinkets, the cold.

An old woman emerged carrying a small yellow tulip wandering amongst the detritus. Her hair was covered by a black head scarf and what remained of her dress was dank, torn, and grey. Her face was shrivelled but also suggested that she was much younger than her appearance let on. Josef nodded at her.

‘You see people like that? Holocaust survivors.’

‘How do you know?’ Ivan wasn’t expecting this angle of conversation, especially after their recent meeting of minds about another Ukrainian tragedy. Josef remained silent as the woman approached.

‘Please, please, buy,’ she said.

‘Go away,’ said Josef. ‘Move away from us, we’re not buying that shit you’ve pulled out of the ground.’

Ivan was quite astonished by Josef’s reaction, and felt the urge to defend the woman, when something inside him broke, and the pitifulness of humanity struck him suddenly. He stood silently as they both watched her shuffle past to approach the next potential buyer.

Ivan remained silent.

Josef spoke: ‘You see this place, haunted, isn’t it? If it’s not the Holocaust, then it’s something else.’

Ivan knew what he was talking about but again just didn’t want to ask. Josef continued.

‘We stand on such sacred ground here, the place where the Mongolians invaded and pushed our previous generations away up into the trees like animals. It’s like the drop off point of the world here,’ he laughed. ‘Then the Nazis came too ... not much point, is there?’

Ivan wanted to mention Stalin but again knew this may provoke Josef further. This was a man who recognised KGB regalia after all. There was a cool sentimental breeze brushing past them both, which felt troublesome for Ivan. He began to shiver slightly despite a recent break in the greyness above them. There was a shaft of sunlight which clashed with everything Ivan felt at that moment. He closed his eyes briefly and shook with cold.

Josef spoke up, ‘You see, Ivan, the image can stretch to infinity.’ He paused. ‘You can have a composition in frame, a moment of character and colour and it can mean many things to many different people. This is what you must be careful of. Creativity is both a gift and a curse in these times. You never know what the visionaries above us are really thinking until you find yourself put away.’ Josef’s warning seemed to complement the chill which stood Ivan in his ground. But nonetheless he had to say something.

‘Well, I’m just here to shoot what they agreed to, Josef. Besides which...I thought we were okay with what we were doing. I’m just following the script ...’ –

‘Yes, as so many do, or so they think. All I’m saying, Ivan, is do your dutiful duty and try not to vanish down the rabbit hole of *meaning*, shall we say. It’s not worth it.’

The unspoken haunting which had occurred between them just moments ago had no doubt provoked this reaction from Josef. There were things left unsaid between them about the land they stood on, but those words just couldn’t be uttered by Ivan, though he’d love to have Josef talk about the past. The ghosts were everywhere.

Ivan was suddenly intrigued by a building which stood domineering at the end of the flea market space and encroaching upon a forested zone. He hadn’t noticed it before, yet it stood two storeys high with a stone front, built at the turn of the century no doubt. Bullet holes riddled the oak door and the windows were smashed. It gleamed with faded grandeur, which had long since departed. He simply left Josef to his cinematic theory and walked towards the old oak. There was an actual knocker. The sounds of the flea market abandoned him, he glanced at Josef who said something unrecognisable; muffled. After which, the older man just looked at him. Ivan stepped forward, turned, and stared back at Josef again. Josef said something but it was indistinct. Then he just looked at Ivan as the young director made his way to the door. He had to go in there and see for himself. Something drew him to this building. There were secrets in there that needed to be understood. There was an understanding that Ivan had to realise. A *meaning*, a journey which would lead to a voice of knowledge.

Ivan opened the doors with ease despite their ancient mass and size. He stepped into a darkness. A darkness that was broken by two pillars either side of him, as though entering a Roman temple, Ivan thought. The sounds of the outer world were silenced here, all you could hear was the sound of dripping. It was soothing and hypnotic, soon Ivan felt an immersive tranquillity. His breathing slowed but he felt he had to move on. As he began, he became aware of an abject presence surrounding him. There was nothing to do but relent and walk forward into this new alien zone. Despite the strangeness, Ivan felt no fear. His mind told him to step forwards and not back, he could never go back. He had a sudden thought which he repressed as soon as it came to him, it was the thought of a novel he’d tried to read recently called *Roadside Picnic*. It was all nonsense and Ivan had

dismissed it as garbage, as men exploring some out of bounds landmass created by extraterrestrials. And now he felt haunted by his cynicism. Here he was, after all, making a sci-fi film for the pleasure of those around him and above.

The dripping soon gave way to the fuller sound of gentle flowing water. There was a source of light growing in front of him distantly which began acting as a guide. As this vision became clearer, it became apparent that a tunnel lay beyond him. The water became more audible as the steady movement of his feet brought his body into the light. Ivan felt like a machine as he strode, he no longer had any sense of real control. Something wanted him to see something here.

As Ivan walked through the small shaft, he found himself emerging outside into green space. Hills overlooked him in the distance. Before him lay a large pond surrounded by a meadow. Myriad flowers blazoned through his vision. He wanted to peer down into the water. He turned back and checked the entrance for his return journey, it was gone. He looked downwards into his reflection. There was nothing there, like he simply didn't exist in this world. This beautiful place, so captivating, didn't want him there. He felt suddenly damned and wanted to lash out at something, to tear this world to pieces. But the water rippled and an image began to appear where Ivan's very own should have been. It was a face. But not a face he recognised initially. The lips were moving but Ivan couldn't understand what the face was saying. The eyes had a look of anguish, he couldn't tell at first if the vision was male or female. Something told him that it didn't matter either way. There came a realisation that Ivan had seen this face before, but not in reality, only in his thoughts. A presence from long ago. Real to him but not real to anybody else. It was pure imagination. What if? He had often asked himself, what if that was who he thought it was? Why? What did it matter either way? Who cared really?

The national anthem played at the back of his mind. *United, mighty Soviet Union, hail our free Fatherland ... May it lead from victory to victory, through the storms the sun of freedom shone for us, And the great Lenin lit the way for us, we were raised by Stalin – for loyalty to the people, He inspired us to work and deeds, Hail Fatherland more free!* It stopped abruptly to be met with the sound of the breeze, the face in the pond still there. Raskolnikov? Was it really him, could it be? Did

he find God at the end of that novel? Could Ivan ask him now? *Am I already dead?* asked Ivan to himself as the eyes focused back on him. There came no answer, *no answer from beyond* he thought. The face rippled and shattered on the surface. There were darkened clouds looming on the horizon, it was clear a storm was coming but he felt a strange sense of comfort in those thoughts. It was a snow storm; Ivan could now smell the cold in the air. The hazy whiteness now creeping towards him. The snow would soon envelop Ivan. He thought of Mirza and that evening she'd told him the news. It felt like a scene from a film now looking back, maybe too dramatic though, hammed up like a Hollywood noir. He'd not seen one of those for years. There was long grass which tickled his hands in the breeze. It felt unnecessary though. The snow fell gently upon him and began to dampen his hair. A trickle of cold wetness trickled down his forehead. Again, Ivan felt no discomfort. There was nowhere else to go, this had become his place, the place where he belonged.

On the hillside behind him and some distance away he saw the house and the fence, a small chimney smoking. It all looked very familiar to him. Ivan wanted to walk out that way and begin the trek, but he also knew it would be empty when he got there, it was effort for nothing. He could sum up the entire state with that phrase, *effort for nothing*. There was little he could do about it. Ivan had had his moment, he'd given his best and it was met with retribution, stone walls, and the noose. He was a traitor after all. This was his punishment, a continuous cyclical nonexistence. How long had he been dead? That is a question he could not answer anymore, had he ever been alive?

\*

**IVAN**

I used to come here... as a child. I'd walk up here on my own.

**PROSECUTOR**

That's right.

**IVAN**

It's wonderful out here.

**PROSECUTOR**

It is.

**IVAN**

You say you saw me and came up to see me? That's very kind... A long way to come to say hello.

**PROSECUTOR**

Think nothing of it, Ivan. *[pause]* You and I are old friends ...

**IVAN**

Wait, let me think for a second. Things keep happening to me. I'm not sure what it is. I keep seeing and hearing people from my past. Things aren't right though.

**PROSECUTOR**

What do you mean?

**IVAN**

It's like there's an alternate reality, an unreality, where the truth is very different from what I remember. It's a place of, well, post-truth.

**PROSECUTOR**

Post-truth? Ivan, have you heard yourself?

*[IVAN begins to slowly chuckle to himself]*

**IVAN**

I'd love some vodka right now!

**PROSECUTOR**

Well, let's go down the hill and forget all this madness, go back ho-

*[IVAN stops chuckling and begins to get angry again]*

**IVAN**

But wait... who are you? I've seen you playing prosecutor in my trial. But how can you and I be here? I don't know who I am anymore, or what anything is. Was I arrested ... was I arrested for treason? You would know, surely? You've got to help me here... am I in an asylum... who are you!

**PROSECUTOR**

It's time, Ivan, I'm afraid. The charade needs to end. We need to go back, forever this time. Others are coming to take your place. Ivan needs to move on.

**IVAN**

What do you mean?

**PROSECUTOR**

It's over, you've had your time. If you look around you, search for reality. The court beckons for you. The noose. You're a traitor who never stood a chance, Ivan. You must know that? You've been gone a long time.

**IVAN**

I don't know what you mean. The court was a farce. I really did nothing wrong; everyone knows that.

**PROSECUTOR**

Let the future slide away. It was a lost future. Just some damaged celluloid projecting in your head. Chaotic, and to be honest, shambolic. The images of a mad man.

**IVAN**

I had a life, work, meaning.

**PROSECUTOR**

Meaning stretches beyond the frame and into infinity, didn't you used to think that? Well, you're wrong. Everything is framed to have a set meaning, to go beyond that is egotistical. It's dangerous. There's a message everyone had to get behind, the message of powerful statehood via socialist realism. You spoke of infinite meaning? How pretentious, beyond the cause of the Party.

**IVAN**

It's the spectator, film can be transcendental. The viewer can interpret meaning within themselves spurred by the image. But what's the problem with that if everything is aimed at the power of the worker, the strength the worker has? Why is that a crime? To make the worker think about the glory of the revolution and beyond? Their role in the glorious dawn of socialism?

**PROSECUTOR**

Because there are still rules. Rules which must be obeyed. You thought it clever to create work that was so-called provocative -

**IVAN**

I did not. It wasn't meant that way-

**PROSECUTOR**

Don't interrupt. It's done anyway. You swung for this either way.

**IVAN**

So why are we here, standing here like this?

**PROSECUTOR**

It's the motherland, Ivan. The place you betrayed with your visions. You need to breathe it in, one breath at a time before the end again. Then let fate reveal what it has in store for you, a fantastical journey, or just darkness. Either way, your corpse has already been disposed of.

**IVAN**

Oh don't worry. Nothing has ever been real to me anyway. I couldn't even tell you what reality is anymore. There was truth once, I'm sure, but it all seems to have died now. The cinema is the most important art...for what though? I feel like I'm in a film now, and a schlocky B-movie at that. No grand narrative, no beginning, middle and end. Just a cycle of unreality. Death offers no finality to this state. Truth is shrouded and vision is opaque. Yet there's still a visceral feeling which you cannot take from me. Mirza, Josef, and Natalya, all my characters, all my creations. They represent something. They exist.

**PROSECUTOR**

In your mind, nowhere else.

*[PROSECUTOR sets fire to a roll of film as IVAN looks on defiantly]*

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## **Leningrad Special Psychiatric Hospital**

### **Article 70: Paranoid Development of the Personality**

Ivan is here somewhere, he came to visit earlier, he can be so passionate sometimes, still talking about his project out near Georgia. The film stock caught fire. Terrible. The heat, the blistering on his face.

‘We’re all burning internally,’ said Josef.

Ivan laughed as his flesh was wretched from his hands. They just do not make films like that here.

It was so nice to bump into Larisa. Though she is no help to anyone. I saw her queuing up for food by the canteen recently. It made a change, being allowed to look at one another and speak. They are normally much tighter with things like that these days.

I had a dream where Chernenko was the leader but acting in a hospital scene of his own deterioration. He was good. Brezhnev was squinting at something in the corner and kept adjusting his large glasses, repeatedly.

#### **ORDERLY**

Are you ready to go yet? It’s nearly time?

Brezhnev’s latest autobiography was out of course. Who knew he was such a war hero? It could have been so inspiring to have him on the channel to speak about his time in Ukraine. We could have talked about Nixon and the West. The West?

Larisa said she’d come at some point, or did I dream that? My film was so strong she said, shame it never got made. They liked the proposal at least, just not the script. Or was it made? Did Ivan make it eventually?

It’s warm here sometimes, it’s like there’s always something on fire outside, something burning, I can smell it. I dreamt the other night of tanks crossing the border. How I sometimes wish I’d joined the forces. Journalism is so dishonest. It gets you television, I suppose, until people wonder where you are, but then again, do they ever wonder about anything anymore? So many questions.

## ORDERLY

We need to get moving now, it's nearly your time. You will cause a delay. We have a very important visitor. You want to look your best, don't you?

It's unbelievable how they make you queue these days. Almost like a roll call for food, you get to know your comrades so well too, I've noticed. What stories people tell on those long afternoons to each other. It's like reading Platonov or Bilibin, though I'm not sure who's banned these days, maybe both, maybe neither. Still, we can't complain. Imagine living in the decadent West. I noticed recently that our team wouldn't play in Argentina because of the cruelty inflicted on its citizens. A moral protest. The irony – *these deeds must not be thought of. After these ways. So it will make us mad.* A huge talking point for those who knew. But what a narrative I created, what a twister. I wonder if Ivan will ever materialise again. Or is that it for him now? Is there nothing else I can give? They'd only lock me up anyway.

## ORDERLY

Okay, this is getting ridiculous now. You do yourself no favours whatsoever. All this imagination, where has it got you?

It was once called St Petersburg, named after Peter the Great. The Swedish were so troublesome back then sometimes. I wonder if they would ever join the Warsaw Pact? That makes me chuckle, why the hell would anyone do that exactly? If they had a choice? It's funny how the world always stands on the brink. One miscalculation and we're all dead in about, what? some say twenty minutes. I'd hope it was quicker to be honest. But Leonid hates war, but he's a hero from the last one so he says in his book. So, he hates it but he also dines out on it. That's clever, I think. Chin injury down near where Ivan was filming, in a jeep, or something like that, charging forward into the fascist barrage. Such bravery. Or was he just involved in a crash of some kind and never actually saw any fighting? What a

terrible thing to think about Leonid. Still, a hero is a hero and I'm sure Tolstoy could write a great war epic given half the chance?

Onanov was in Paris so Larisa told me, what was the name of that film? unimaginable, truly unimaginable. I'd like to go to Paris, or London, or even West Berlin. Anywhere but here. The White Nights are so picturesque though. I remember the first time I saw them. It was my mother of course who spoke of their legend and I believed her instantly. I also believed that Khrushchev was a Supreme Leader like I was told, until he wasn't anymore. Leonid is better. There was a rat being kicked around on the floor like a football but I thought it would be dark soon so it was okay, but it never went dark. The rat was still there to see. Its eyes stung me with their look of pitiful death. It had fought bravely but was no match. When a rat is cornered it will fight so we all found out that day. Ivan was a rat in my script, a traitor. Where is he now, I wonder? I haven't seen him for so long. Just white walls and cold but warm if the sun gets in. Like winter and summer together, but winter always wins.

I wonder how Larisa is too? I've not chatted in the corridor for what seems like an age, or was it recent? Never quite sure. She was good though, to have someone at Lenfilm working beside you would be a miracle and much like Onanov going to Europe, unimaginable. It happened though, it all happened.

#### **IVAN**

I wasn't born for this. We are becoming like the forest creatures connected with the natural environment, where does the human being end and the machine begin? I stare at my watch but for what purpose? Does time have a bearing on our lives? There is only the party and socialism and work. We must work, work is art and artistry comes in work. We are becoming one great machine of socialist endeavour. Together as one breath, one body, one life. I am no-one now, we are nowhere but-

#### **MIRZA**

Oh, I hear him somewhere. He's out there in the Motherland making art. I'm sure of it. He's no machine. What do you think, Ivan?

**IVAN**

Mirza, where have you been? Will you ever return to me? We are the same, remember? Do you remember me? Can I transgress into your zone, your thoughts? You destroyed me...

**MIRZA**

He's such a rat, such a traitor. The KGB would grind him up now like butchers. Maybe that was a better finale, they might have let me make it if he was seen as an actual traitor?

**IVAN**

I'm still out here, Mirza. Still shooting with Josef and Natalya. They all send their regards. We will one day finish. We will tear this place down and rescue you from the white walls or the White Nights, whichever you prefer. It's green here though and I can feel the earth churn under my feet, it's like being rooted with the trees. Unmovable. You can stand out here for hours and just dream...

I can feel another presence, I sometimes talk to the greats: Dostoevsky, Ivan IV... but I like Vladimir the Great. He's so full of charm and wisdom. But not like Leonid, of course, that is entirely different.

There was a queue in the cafeteria last week, normally we are herded through like bovine beasts of the fields, nobody speaks. But I got to speak to a few people. I'm not sure what we spoke about but they all lived in Petrograd as they called it. There was a woman who claimed that as a teenager she'd stormed the Winter Palace and had met Lenin once. I'm not sure if I can believe that.

**VLADIMIR THE GREAT**

Every crime must have its punishment. The liberal idea has become obsolete. It has come into conflict with the interests of most of the population.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Lionel Barber, Henry Foy, Alex Barker, 'Vladimir Putin says liberalism has 'become obsolete,' *The Financial Times*, June 28 2019 <<https://on.ft.com/2SYhvTU>> [accessed 30 August 2023].

**IVAN**

But Vladimir, the liberal idea has never existed in Russia anyway. It's always been dominated by autocrats with expansionist ideology. We're all so tired.

**VLADIMIR THE GREAT**

The Cold War was a bad thing ... but there were at least some rules that all participants in international communication more or less adhered to or tried to follow. Now it seems there are no rules at all.<sup>6</sup>

**IVAN**

I followed the rules and was punished for it.

**VLADIMIR THE GREAT**

Treason is the gravest crime possible and traitors must be punished. I am not saying that the Salisbury incident is the way to do it ... but traitors must be punished.<sup>7</sup>

**IVAN**

Vladimir I've no idea what you are talking about. I had a wife and family and they were all taken from me. I had a vision, a vision on celluloid but a vision for them too. All the Union in fact. I could have got to Paris like Onanov for God's sake!

**VLADIMIR THE GREAT**

Let everyone be happy, we have no problem with that. But this must not be allowed to overshadow the culture, traditions and family values of millions of people making up the core population.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Ivan gets so wrapped up sometimes, there's no challenging Vladimir the Great. He's invincible. I was accused of reading a piece of samizdat. I think that's when things changed for me. I can't remember what it was about. I heard eight people were going to protest in Red Square against the queues but nothing seemed to come of it. They might as well try for what it's worth. You can only end up in a white room consequently. I always wanted to travel to Vladivostok as a deliberate up yours to the Americans. But it's miles away and if you made it there you were so close to freedom, it was too tantalising a prospect just to look further east from there and think about what lay ahead. Another time and place, another zone.

#### ORDERLY

Okay, no more talking to yourself, it's time to go. It's bath time, remember?

I've got places to go, people to see. Scripts to write. Worlds to imagine.

\*

*'My first impressions of Kabul – sand, a mouthful of sand.'*<sup>9</sup>

It was early evening in Leningrad and the last flurry of snow delivered the usual icy prickles. Hope rested on the fact that it would soon be spring and the sun would begin to warm the lives of the workers as they spewed onto the city pavements. A burst of sunlight fever to counteract the immobility that the long winter infects everybody with. It would be a short-lived novelty. There was stagnation in the air haunting the landscape like the traumas of the past. These ghosts would not abate.

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<sup>9</sup> Svetlana Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, trans. by Andrew Bromfield (London: Penguin, 2017), p82.

The spectre of communism spread like a virus and killed any progress people felt. It was easier to stay quiet though, speaking out now could still land you in jail if you were unlucky.

Mirza went to set her iron samovar to boil. It was an old model from the nineteen fifties which she'd found recently, but it looked well and had stood the test that time provides for all of us. Her flat was adorned with an Orthodox shrine which she kneeled at daily. A picture of her son's face still smiling back at her amongst the Holy detritus. This would be frowned upon by some on the committees, but Mirza didn't care anymore. She was too old to be locked up again, they weren't going to bother her now. There was death in her family, and she'd sacrificed far more than many other people.

She'd visited Moscow briefly to see what all this was for, to see the Necropolis in Red Square. She stood in Novodevichy Cemetery and glanced at the gravestones as Russia's favoured ghosts looked on. She had not wanted any military acknowledgement for her son's burial back home. This had angered them but Mirza was past caring about upsetting anybody. He had died in a foreign land surrounded by men he hardly knew in a war which was lost before it had even really begun. Just in his late teens, he was expecting to be stationed in East Germany to merely wave back at Americans all day, but instead was sent to Kandahar. Mirza had never approved of him serving in the military, but he wanted to give it a go. He wanted to travel. Now he is dead.

It was another nail in the coffin of Mirza's existence. As the evening was settling in, she was inclined to try and get some ham slices she had forgotten to get previously. The queues may be quieter now she thought, and if they had none left then she could just buy something else. It would be a trip out to break the boredom she was starting to feel. The samovar was boiling though and she would need her *tea with the elephant*. It was an important ritual she'd kept up since her twenties when she considered herself intelligentsia. She smirked to herself when she thought of that word.

Nonetheless, she sat and supped her brew and reflected on days past. Her rocking chair still gave her a comforting rhythm. Mirza was not ever sure what the future would hold. The economy was stagnant as ever. There had never been any difference so far as she knew. Maybe a brief period of

happiness as a child. All these thoughts churned whimsically through her like this and whirled in her mind without logic or reason. Mirza remembered a burning barn from her childhood, an image of fire and the smell of woodsmoke. Her eyes stung at the thought. But whenever she asked her mother about that, it was as though it had never happened. Those were somebody else's memories. It was maybe a dream which she thought of as real, it felt so visceral. But nothing could ever bring the truth back. She remembered chasing Vladimir after he stole the badge she'd found on the pavement by Block 34. Mirza was also puzzled by the small daggers festooned with a shield next to it. It looked important but also sent a chill down her neck. There was a level of discomfort found with that kind of regalia, even more so now. Vladimir stole it and she relented.

Mirza decided quickly to break her childhood reflections and just go out just to see what the queues were like. The ghosts were too much. If she didn't go out then she would end up talking to them like she sometimes did. She had gone off her tea now, the need for a breath of fresh air was greater. As she put her boots on and a ushanka hat she'd owned since her early twenties, there was a sound. The person in the flat below had put their television on and they often had it at high volume during the evening. It seemed that this was the time they woke up. There came a muffled vocalisation from below. It could have been an evening bulletin; Mirza was no stranger to those.

It was only a short walk down the stairs and out onto the street. Mirza was fortunate that she could walk to her shopping destination on Nevsky Prospect and didn't need to use the metro. She didn't always feel safe these days and didn't have the energy to defend herself down there if needed.

There was a dusting of snow beneath her and she wriggled within her old peacoat to generate some more heat. She was not romantic enough to consider herself a flaneur of the city, she only looked at the buildings with a sense of dreariness. Some still had bullet holes in them from the Great Patriotic War. She'd been to the cinema a couple of years ago to go and watch Klimov's *Come and See*. It was an amazing work, Mirza thought. But that was before a bullet ripped through her son's armpit and scrambled his heart. It was now a film that haunted her. A film that will haunt the spectator forever, as the wars still do.

Mirza strolled amongst the populace, eyes sometimes catching hers and giving that knowing look. It always felt like everybody else was travelling in the opposite direction, determined to block her path. She wore the same uniform as everybody else at this time of year. If you didn't have a good coat for winter, then you were doomed to suffering. She'd sometimes see young men in their late teens with short sleeves on laughing and joking with each other, it was almost like an act of rebellion. Anything to not conform. It was an act of reckless vandalism, Mirza thought.

The lights were starting to slowly deteriorate from shop windows but the sun was also trying to counteract that by slowly breaking through the late afternoon clouds. Mirza hoped the gentle snow shower would cease soon; it had snowed consistently for the past three days. You could never tell how the weather was going to turn out at this time of year. The Neva was starting to thaw through at least, and Mirza allowed a small smirk as she noticed the giant snake coming back to life again.

The streets were still crammed though and people were perpetually joining queues here and there. Mirza wanted her butchers of choice which was often busy but she would get her meat from nowhere else for threat of food poisoning. As she crisscrossed the pavements and avoided the occasional car, she began to see that her quest was in vain as Nevsky Prospekt came into view. Once the home of the revolution and freedom fighters ... she could now see bodies lined up with nowhere to go.

Mirza trotted on further to see if there was anybody she might know who could offer her a space, though this was running a large risk of being sneered at for doing so. It was all in vain. The faces weaselled back at her, like a pack of hungry animals.

She heard a voice she recognised. Further towards the front of the queue and holding a samizdat in her hands, reading from it loudly, was someone she knew...but she had to think of the name. She was from Mirza's Lenfilm days? A time when there was a brief sense of ambition and excitement in Mirza's life. She had written creatively back then and felt on the brink of being able to work on film projects, but her imagination had got the better of her. It was always getting the better of her. She thought of a joke she had heard recently but couldn't place the words or the punchline.

Seeing the queue lined up just tickled her, she wanted to laugh out of irony. But had to maintain her sombre look like everybody else. The name came though, Larisa, that was her name, and the joke ...

*A man goes into a shop and asks: 'You don't have any meat?'*

*'No, replies the sales assistant, 'we don't have any fish. It's the shop across the street that has no meat.'*

'We suffer too much,'<sup>10</sup> announced Larisa ...

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<sup>10</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago – 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (London: Vintage Classics, 2023), p.66.

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