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Hallucinating the Ukrainian Cityscape: A Reevaluation of Walter Benjamin's Urban Experience for a Postsocialist Context

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Abstract

This thesis project explores the correspondence between Walter Benjamin's conception of modern urban experience and postsocialist representations of urban space in Ukrainian literature. By examining how urban experience influences the mobilization of formal strategies in literature and critical theory, this project articulates the normative assumptions about the interpenetration of social practice and political economy latent in Benjamin's own writing and the scholarship of his works about the modern city. The project compares the theory and practice of shock, fragmentation, and allegory in Benjamin's cultural criticism with Oksana Zabuzhko's "Prypiat," Yuri Andrukhovych's *Moscoviad*, and Serhiy Zhadan's *Depeche Mode*. The project performs a comparative literary analysis while incorporating scholarship on urban experience from the fields of art history, human geography, and sociocultural anthropology. This project challenges the assumption that the postsocialist fragmentation of collectivity and critique of modern historical metanarratives are incompatible with Benjamin's concept of utopian desire. Rather, an analysis of Benjamin's work and postsocialist literature illustrates how their embeddedness within particular socioeconomic and historical contexts affects their respective representations of the connection between subjective and universal historical experiences.

Keywords

Walter Benjamin, Modernity, Ukraine, Oksana Zabuzhko, Yuri Andrukhovych, Serhiy Zhadan, Postsocialism, Urban Experience.

Summary for Lay Audience

How does the experience of daily life in the city influence our ideas of community and history? A cultural critic attentive to the significance of urban experience for philosophies of history and society, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) suggested that modern societies, often unknowingly, strive after the realization of social utopias, a form of collective desire that nevertheless faces psychological and economic obstacles. Although his descriptions of these social utopias come from his understanding of urban experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars sometimes use Benjamin's descriptions of these utopias to judge cultures today and to discount experiences that fail to conform to our preconceptions.

To counter this tendency, my project compares Benjamin's descriptions of urban experience with those found in Ukrainian literature after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian authors central to this study are Oksana Zabuzhko (1960-), Yuri Andrukhovych (1960-), and Serhiy Zhadan (1974-). Through a careful reading of these authors, and with the aid of research from a variety of fields on daily life in postsocialist society, this project shows that there are significant differences between the psychological and economic pressures that these authors describe and those that Benjamin describes in his own writing. Since Benjamin uses such pressures on the city dweller to establish his ideas about life in the modern city, this difference suggests that his ideas of community, history, and utopia are not universal, are not necessarily true for all cultures and time periods. Instead, this limitation forces us to qualify Benjamin's claims about urban experience. Only by thus adapting his philosophy to the conditions of life in postsocialist society will Benjamin help us understand the unique conceptions of community, history, and utopia in Ukrainian society and culture. In my comparison of Benjamin's writing and Ukrainian literature, I focus on representations of shock (how we receive events that challenge our preconceptions), fragmentation (the lost sense of collective identity), and allegory (how our ideals interact with everyday reality) to argue that we can use aspects of Benjamin's philosophy to understand life in different societies and cultures without projecting his expectations onto cityscapes today.

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Introduction

This research project explores the relevance of critical theorist Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and his characterizations of modern urban experience to the study of postsocialist historical experience. In particular, it investigates the interpenetration of aesthetic and sociocultural experience in Benjamin's representation of life in the modern city alongside literary representations of postsocialist urban experience in Ukraine during the 1990s. The Ukrainian authors central to this study are Oksana Zabuzhko (1960-), Yuri Andrukhovych (1960-), and Serhiy Zhadan (1974-). While there exists an apparent, and perhaps forgivable, dearth of major scholarship taking as its central topic the correspondence between Benjamin's cityscapes and postsocialist Ukrainian literature set during the 1990s, legitimizing such a comparison is not the principle end of this project. Through a comparative reading of Benjamin's cityscapes and the works of postsocialist writers, this project contributes to the efforts of contemporary scholars to understand how historical, and specifically urban, experience influences critical theory's normative assumptions and philosophy of critique in general. A comparative reading of Benjamin's writing on the city and postsocialist literature of the city also yields some noteworthy themes on historical and urban experience after the fall of the Soviet Union. Specifically, Benjamin's effort to unsettle the distinction between private and public spheres in mass society complements the critique of gender dynamics as they relate to the interconnection of domesticity and myths of national unity, while his work on altered and allegorical perception intersects with the necessity of negotiating self-censorship and social stagnation to locate a revitalized sense of collective identity.

This investigation proceeds alongside several other studies attempting to situate Benjamin's conception of the modern city in relation to his broader philosophy of historical

experience. Graeme Gilloch's study of Benjamin's relation to urban experience, *Myth and Metropolis* (1988), delves into the formal strategies Benjamin adopts in his cityscapes to reproduce his ambivalent experiences of cities in prose, and to explore themes of technology and progress in modernity. Likewise, Michael Jennings emphasizes in his *Dialectical Images* (1987) the significance of these stylistic devices for Benjamin's representation of the subject's relation to history in a capitalist society. More recently, Thijs Lijster, in his *Benjamin and Adorno on Art and Art Criticism* (2017), calls attention to the significance of everyday objects and experiences to contrast Benjamin's reflexive, politicized sense of aesthetics with the ostensible universality of Enlightenment progress narratives, such as those of Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel. Although Gilloch's, Jennings', and Lijster's respective studies effectively situate the formal strategies at play in Benjamin's conception of urban experience in relation to his particular place as a significant fixture of European modernity, this treatment of form and composition in Benjamin's cityscapes largely relegates the significance of his experimental representations to the critique of Enlightenment philosophy and the history of European modernity. Against this tendency, the present study utilizes Benjamin's writing about experience to bring his philosophy of history into conversation with themes, spaces, and experiences outside the modernist canon, attempting to facilitate the illustration of historical experiences unique to the postsocialist context, and likewise, allowing these revelations to reconstitute the relationship of subjectivity to the apprehension of the universal in Benjamin's work.

Parallel to this emphasis on Benjamin's sensitivity to the violent and dehumanizing potential of European modernity within the context of the socioeconomic structures of nineteenth- to early twentieth-century cities, such as Berlin, Paris, and Moscow, scholarship on Benjamin emerging in fields such as postcolonial theory increasingly recognizes the possibility

of transposing Benjamin's writing on the modern city to an analysis of the postcolonial city. In his "Benjamin's *Arcades Project* Today" (2011), Rolf J. Goebel utilizes the image of nineteenth-century Paris reconstructed in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* as a framework for analyzing transnational capitalism in contemporary Hong Kong. In a similar vein, Caitlin Vandertop draws on Benjamin's *Arcades Project* to illustrate the interplay between colonial politics and the Parisian metropolitan consciousness in her article, "The Colonies in Concrete" (2016). Rajeev Patke also expands on the postcolonial potential latent in Benjamin's *Arcade Project* in his critical book review, "Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and the Postcolonial City" (2000), to argue against confining the significance of Benjamin's work to Marxist scholarship and a European context. Although each of these twenty-first-century scholars expands the scope of Benjamin's writing on the city beyond an early twentieth-century European context, Goebel's and Vandertop's studies largely focus on the correlation between nineteenth-century and contemporary consumer culture, while the limitation of all three articles can be seen in their overdependence on the *Arcades Project* as the defining text of Benjamin's conception of urban experience.

With these limitations in mind, the present study focuses on how an analysis of the characteristics of urban experience expressed through the formal arrangement of elements in Benjamin's cityscapes offers a means of understanding the basis for many of Benjamin's assumptions, as well as allowing for a more nuanced juxtaposition of Benjamin's critical theory with contemporary urban contexts. Through an analysis of the formal symmetries between Benjamin's writing and the works of postsocialist writers—namely the prevalence of fragmentation, shock, and allegory, and the significance they place on perception and embodied experience—this research project attempts to elaborate three main themes pertaining to the

mobilization of Benjamin's critical theory to interpret historical experience in the late twentieth-century. The first theme addresses the assumption that a critique of modern metanarratives is incompatible with Benjamin's conception of utopian desire, the self-reflexive critique of urban experience with reference to the intimation of some form of social utopia. The second theme explores the connection between perception and revolutionary consciousness to illustrate the critical potential of provocation and shock against the demand for cohesive counternarratives. The third theme involves the relationship between universal and particular historical experiences, dealing specifically with how embeddedness in a particular socioeconomic and historical context affects the use and development of formal strategies and philosophical concepts.

Apart from the similarities in how they choose to represent their respective cityscapes, their shared style and literary strategies, the postsocialist Ukrainian writers offer a unique and substantial perspective on Benjamin's conception of urban experience. Thematically, Zabuzhko's "Pripyiat," Andrukhovych's *Moscoviad*, and Zhadan's *Depeche Mode* each intersect with major themes in Benjamin's writing on the city. The tension between grand utopian promises and the lived urban experience under Soviet rule animates the writers' confrontations with resurgent national myths and attempts to locate new utopian projects after the end of communism and with the rise of capitalism. The lingering trauma of life in the Soviet Union also provides an important point of comparison for Benjamin's representations of life in modernity, with these repressive forms of historical experience transforming the character of modern interiority and perpetuating itself in perception. The distinct political economies of postsocialist Ukraine and the modernity of early twentieth-century Western Europe likewise offer an important means of contextualizing the formal strategies of these authors, illustrating how the transition from socialism to capitalism produced a unique context of reception for the commodity

that can be used to distinguish between Benjamin's conception of allegory and that of the postsocialist Ukrainian writers. In addition to these thematic overlaps, some of the English-language scholarship on Ukrainian literature already recognizes the correspondence between Benjamin and postsocialist writers, albeit in a relatively peripheral sense, as in Slavic literature scholar and translator Vitaly Chernetsky's allusion to the end of the Cold War as a confrontation with the "ruins of modernity" (Chernetsky xvi). This project attempts a more prolonged engagement with this correspondence, investigating the connections between representations of urban experience in Benjamin's writing and Ukrainian literature while demonstrating the value of the new perspectives each brings to an understanding of the other.

The first chapter of this project explores the significance of experience in shaping Benjamin's conception of a modern utopian project. The chapter begins with a deconstruction of Susan Buck-Morss' "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe" (1995), where Buck-Morss argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union signals the loss of an alternative mass utopian project to capitalist consumerism and a more general disillusionment with the social utopias of modernity. In "City as Dreamworld," Buck-Morss draws on Benjamin to claim that this lost desire for utopia results in an ahistorical, apolitical urban experience, a postmodern "dreamworld" incapable of either imagining or realizing a revolutionary social project. The remainder of the first chapter draws on a comparative analysis of Benjamin's conception of modern storytelling and Zabuzhko's poem about the Chernobyl disaster, "Prypiat," to argue against the precedence Buck-Morss lends to modernist utopian projects over the revelation of a project from collective experience in Benjamin's work and postmodern cultural production. Rather than reiterating the national myth of the Chernobyl disaster as a moment of mass tragedy and unification, Zabuzhko suggests that such an event serves as a welcome occasion to repress

the trauma of everyday life and domesticity in Ukraine. Through this provocative inversion, Zabuzhko's poem helps articulate the demand in Benjamin's writing about the city to understand utopian projects as expressions of social practice and collectivity rather than transcendental moulds for recasting the otherwise malleable masses.

The second chapter juxtaposes Benjamin's representation of Moscow after the revolution in his "Moscow Diaries" (1926-1927) with Andrukhovych's *Moscoviad* (2003), a novel about life in Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, this chapter takes up the significance of altered perception in each of the works to contest the sense of reality or legitimacy of repressive political discourses. The chapter focuses on intoxication and the effort to decenter narrative perspective from the representation of the city. In Andrukhovych's work, this takes the form of a confusion of imagery and jarring shifts between first-, second-, and third-person narration, whereas Benjamin's *Denkbilder*, literally "thought-images," likewise perform this decentering of the author by attempting to represent objects as they appear within a given discursive framework. Though these narrative strategies actively resist establishing something approaching a cohesive counternarrative, a complaint registered by scholars analyzing both Benjamin's and Andrukhovych's work, this chapter argues that the critical potential of these techniques lies in their provocative unsettling of appeals to a direct experience of the city. Rather, the content of Benjamin's *Denkbilder* and Andrukhovych's narration derive their critical import from demonstrating how and to what extent narrative mediates the reception of reality. Where for Benjamin an awareness of this mediation destabilizes the efforts to naturalize modern capitalism and suggests an opportunity for creative intervention in sociopolitical organization, Andrukhovych represents an attempt to cleanse Ukrainian authorship of the repressive elements of Russian and Soviet imperial culture, invoking a sense of community out of this collective

trauma while cautioning against a similar perpetuation of mass violence and delusion in the formation of new national myths.

The third chapter compares Benjamin's conception of modern allegory with allegorical representation in Zhadan's *Depeche Mode*. The emphasis of this chapter is on showing how the different consumer cultures of 19th-century Paris and postsocialist Ukraine inform the use of allegory in the authors' respective works. Where Benjamin's sense of allegory responds to the manipulation of utopian fantasies of material abundance into the aimless consumption of fashionable and ultimately disposable commodities, Zhadan's use of allegory confronts the nostalgia for the social networks that emerged in relation to material scarcity under socialism. In addition to Zhadan's novel, this chapter incorporates the scholarship of sociocultural anthropologists studying socialist and postsocialist consumer practices in Eastern Europe. Apart from illustrating the interplay of political economy and cultural expression, however, this chapter attempts to illustrate how Benjamin and Zhadan each use allegory to express what they see as the ontological conditions for the emergence and perpetuation of their contemporary consumer cultures. The chapter closes with an exploration of the implications these modern and postsocialist ontologies have for Benjamin's and Zhadan's understanding of political action in their respective socioeconomic contexts. For Benjamin, this requires a reflexive attitude to the detritus of modern society, an attempt to excavate the idealized content of archaic commodities to rediscover the promises they once possessed in their particular sociocultural context. For Zhadan, conversely, this means recognizing the arbitrary organization of society towards a futile goal, and affirming this farcical experience as the basis for postsocialist collectivity.

Chapter 1

Repressed Dreamworlds and the Dreamworld of Repression: Buck-Morss, Zabuzhko, and the Storytellers of Utopia

In “The City as Dreamworld and Collapse” (1995), Susan Buck-Morss mobilizes Walter Benjamin’s notion of the dialectical image to illustrate the stagnation of postmodern cultural discourse at the end of the Cold War. Drawing on Benjamin’s analysis of the cult of commodities in 19th-century Paris and of the efforts of the Russian avant-garde after the Russian Revolution, Buck-Morss posits a sort of world historical, dialectical tension between the utopian pretensions of the Eastern and Western blocs, with each actively cultivating a distinct ideological project, a “dreamworld,” predicated on their own respective organizations of society, while also responding to the claims of the other. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, this utopian desire, as Buck-Morss terms it, though manifestly unrealized in any sphere, and perhaps ultimately unrealizable in any sense, disappears from cultural production and from discourse in both the East and West. Instead, Buck-Morss suggests that the cult of commodities Benjamin excavated earlier in the century reemerges in the guise of artistic dissent and cynicism, thus affirming global capital’s manipulation of daily life by negating the legitimacy of alternative visions of reality. That is, Buck-Morss argues that the postmodern artwork’s aversion to modernist utopian projects deprives it of radical political significance and so becomes complicit with global capitalism as merely an object of consumption. Where Buck-Morss draws on Benjamin to illustrate the mediation of urban reality and its consequent socio-political construction as dreams that, consciously or unconsciously, structure the cultural context in which one receives phenomena and, thus, experiences the world, the correspondence she assumes between the everyday and an ostensibly universal, globalized cultural discourse remains largely

tentative. Indeed, though Buck-Morss effectively utilizes Benjamin to decode the relationship between socioeconomic structures and cultural production at the scale of grand, global metanarratives, the absence of a prolonged analysis of the particular and everyday risks isolating the significance of her argument from the very world in which she hopes to reawaken a lost desire for utopia.

A Cold War tension between Eastern and Western political imaginations serves as the point of departure for Buck-Morss' ensuing discussion of globalization in the postmodern city. Drawing on a comparative analysis of modern and postmodern art and architecture in Russia, Buck-Morss grounds this tension between the East and West's distinct socioeconomic structures—of socialism and capitalism, production and consumption—in a shared utopian vision of a “mass society beyond material scarcity, and the collective, social goal, through massive industrial construction, of transforming the natural world” (“Dreamworld and Collapse” 3). Whereas the Cold War represents a moment in which the material culture and urban fixtures of East and West, ranging in Buck-Morss' examples from factories to pollution, took on their significance in relation to concrete social goals, postmodern cultural discourse after the Cold War represents “the disintegration of cultural forms,” where artists mobilize capitalist, socialist, and fascist cultural forms interchangeably, irrespective of their distinct “social and political purposes,” against the “outmoded” pursuit of mass utopia itself (“Dreamworld and Collapse” 3-4). That is, the emergence of the postmodern artwork marks a shift away from socially and politically relevant art to a whimsical play of forms. Here the distinction Buck-Morss posits between modern, Cold War cultural discourse and a global, postmodern discourse, permeating in a sense the apprehension of material objects, such as art and architecture, rests on a changed attitude towards mass social utopia. While latent utopian impulses mediated both the

construction and apprehension of the modern cityscape during the Cold War, postmodern cultural discourse involves an ostensibly aloof preoccupation with this form of mediation as such, one nonetheless involving a particular construction and apprehension of reality.

To elaborate on how the political imagination of modern and postmodern cultural discourses mediate the apprehension of the modern and postmodern cityscape, Buck-Morss utilizes Benjamin's characterization of history as a phantasmagoria, or in Buck-Morss' words, a "dreamworld." Contrary to the conception of history as a singular narrative composed of a linear series of facts and events, Benjamin's definition of history emphasizes the role of perception and collective fantasy in the construction of historical narratives. In his introduction to "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (1939), Benjamin claims that history, quite apart from its nineteenth-century conception as "an inventory... of humanity's forms and creations" or a "series of facts congealed in the form of things," is a "phantasmagoria," a socially transmitted mode of perception serving to "illuminate" the subject's immediate situation within Paris' emerging capitalist modernity ("Paris" 14-15). He then associates "phantasmagoria" with "illusory senses" and "mythic anguish" in the spirit of nineteenth-century Paris ("Paris" 15). Here, the nineteenth-century depiction of history as an "inventory" of "things" made up of a "series of facts" subverts the ostensibly objective character of history. Rather, Benjamin's emphasis on the accumulation of "humanity's forms and creations" into an inventory styles historical discourse after the industrial culture of its capitalist context. Thus, history becomes complicit with capital in assuming the form of a warehouse, furnishing modern material culture with the legitimacy of a perceived relationship to the past. This subversion of a sense of history removed from its context suggests that the documentation of objects and events, as well as the categories utilized for their apprehension, necessarily embody the economic and technological contradictions of history's

alleged subject matter. Insofar as history offers a narrative construction of the past from within the material context of the present, then, Benjamin's analysis suggests that the aesthetic relation of subjects to their everyday surroundings produces an anthropologically inflected sense of history, a sense likened to the construction of myths out of a sort of collective psyche.

In her formulation of a globalized postmodern culture, Buck-Morss develops this sense of cultural discourse as a dreamworld through Benjamin's conception of shock and the disjunction between perception and experience in the modern and postmodern world. Citing Benjamin's work on Baudelaire's modern poetry in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), Buck-Morss describes shock as the revelation of history's phantasmagoric character in the form of a sensuous response to the industrial city ("Dreamworld and Collapse" 8). She distinguishes, though, between the postmodern perception of shock and the modern experience of shock. The mere perception of shock, associated with the postmodern world, denotes the isolation of some destabilizing realization from other "sense-memories of the past" and entails a "blocking out of reality" ("Dreamworld and Collapse" 8-9). The experience of shock, however, provides insight into the tentative social organization of reality in the form of everyday, phantasmagoric narratives and serves as the basis for "the human organism's power to respond [to its environment] politically" ("Dreamworld and Collapse" 8-9). Although in both instances the subject perceives something they find shocking, this account qualifies an experience in terms of whether the perceived realization affects how one subsequently, and retrospectively, sees the world. In other words, a subject merely perceiving a shock represses its content, whereas a subject experiencing shock identifies with it in the sense that this moment reconstitutes their relationship with their past and present environment. Buck-Morss then draws on Benjamin's conception of shock to implicate the senses in the cultivation, or hinderance, of a collective

“human” memory informing a given mass political project. With regards to modernity and postmodernity, their respective sensitivity and aversion towards utopian projects represents their success and failure to establish everyday aesthetic relations with a broader collective memory. The modern impetus to utopian projects, however flawed, then, gains no small measure of validity from access to the ostensibly true form of historical reality, granted by experience, while the postmodern antipathy represents either a failure to realize this truth at the level of the everyday, or a top-down conditioning of popular aesthetic judgement.

While Buck-Morss uses this distinction between perception and experience to account for a postmodern opposition to mass utopian projects in terms of a sort of flawed attunement to history, Benjamin supplies a much more ambivalent conception of experience’s political potential in his characterization of experience as *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. In his study of Benjamin’s lifelong confrontation with the modern city, *Myth and Metropolis*, Graeme Gilloch notes the distinction Benjamin makes between *Erfahrung*, “experience as the accumulation of knowledge,” and *Erlebnis*, which concerns “the domain of inner life... the chaotic contents of psychic life,” with the emergence of the modern city marking a mass urban “transformation of *Erfahrung* into *Erlebnis*” (Gilloch 143-144). Where *Erfahrung* represents the “coherent, communicable, readily intelligent” experience of a “storyteller” who has “witnessed many things,” *Erlebnis* represents the experience of “shocks of the metropolitan environment,” which are “unassimilable by the consciousness of the individual, and are parried or deflected into the realm of the unconscious where they remain embedded” (Gilloch 143). From Gilloch’s account of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* emerges the sense that the shock and desensitization of *Erlebnis*, which Buck-Morss characterizes as mere perception in postmodern cultural discourse, not only coexisted with modern mass political movements, but also involves a preoccupation with a

relatively marginal sphere of experience in her diagnosis of both modern and postmodern culture, the sphere of the repression of everyday life in the city. In this sense, Benjamin's distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* suggests that the confrontation with mass utopia in modern and postmodern cultural discourse necessarily involves a reevaluation of the collective's apprehension of a shared history, as well as the isolated individual's apprehension of this collectivity's political projects.

While Buck-Morss' treatment of Russian Constructivism's intervention in Soviet consumer culture successfully stakes out one such instance of reshaping mass society's relation to a socialist utopian project, this treatment privileges the role of Constructivists as storytellers over an elaboration of how their efforts combatted the repression and fragmentation of experience endemic in modern city life. Though she concedes that their projected transformation of Soviet consumer culture was ultimately unrealized, Buck-Morss interprets the Constructivist's efforts to remake commodities into "comrades" as an attempt to treat "things as humans, subjective agents that collaborated with the consumer in his or her daily existence," thus "bringing the industrialized environment inside" into the private environment of the individual ("Dreamworld and Collapse" 17). In this way, the creation of objects imitating the hard geometric lines of factories and industrial society suggests that the Constructivists attempted to foster Benjamin's conception of *Erfahrung*, that is, an experience of the direct connection between private existence and participation in a socialist society, one whose efforts were to bring about utopian ends. However, the extent to which individuals reciprocated the experience of this conception of the ostensible materialization of their relation to a collective history remains underexplored. Rather, in her analysis, the theoretical formulation of mass utopia in cultural discourse takes precedence over the quality of mass participation in this discourse, thus

surrendering the facility of historical storyteller to an image of mass society and further repressing everyday life in the modern city for the reception of this narrative dreamworld.

This vindication of Constructivist consumerism over capitalist consumption leans on Benjamin's conception of the formative influence of the domestic interior on the subject's own interiority. Characterizing the development of the individual during the nineteenth century as a process of gradual liquidation in "Paris," Benjamin compares the interior of individual houses and apartments with the subject's interiority, tracing a movement from "the interior [as] the asylum where art takes refuge," to the "mold[ing]" of inhabitants to these interiors. Finally, in the attempt to distance the self from modern society and technology, these "inner flights [lead] to [the individual's] downfall" through the "modern styl[ing]" of this space ("Paris" 19-20). Here, Benjamin collapses the distinction between fantasy and material culture in his criticism of how subjects delimit private and public space. In bourgeois culture, the apartment represents a space for private living, sustaining a sort of escapist, illusory "inner flight" from society. This flight reflects the subject's identification with the everyday objects decorating "their" space, alienating these objects from the labor required for their construction. Instead, Benjamin asserts that identifying with the ostensible novelty, or ahistorical "modern styling," of an arrangement of objects in an apartment leaves the uncritical subject open to passively internalizing, or being subsumed by, its literal social construction. This analysis appeals, primarily, to the latent social and mythical contents of material objects. Situating the ostensible individual amidst these objects represents the impossibility of distancing, or otherwise emancipating, the self from its social context while refusing an engagement with the technical apparatus and social structures framing this desire. In this sense, Benjamin destabilizes the distinction between private and public life for the modern immersion of the individual in the social, with this sense of

individuality and personality shown to be an illusory distance rendered mythical by the social contents of material culture. Far from demonstrating that socialist and capitalist order display a qualitatively different engagement with their surroundings at the level of historical narrative, Benjamin's characterization of modern interiority seems to correspond more to a form of perception, in Buck-Morss' terms, and a mere extension of *Erlebnis*, experience in the private sphere, at the expense of a conscious participation in the project of mass utopia.

Likewise, while Buck-Morss emphasizes the link between material context and historical narrative in her analysis of postmodern cultural discourse, she appears to give precedence to the narrative of an unrealized promise of utopia over an apprehension of the everyday. In her analysis of Russian artist Alexei Sundukov's painting, *The Queue* (1986), itself presented as a parody of a 1927 poster for the Soviet publication, "Новый мир" ("New World"), the contrast between the diagonally arranged lines of people rests on their orientation towards history as such: "*The Queue* uses the diagonal to depict not the working masses as producers of world history, but the waiting masses as consumers, faceless, passive, enduring history as empty time" ("Dreamworld and Collapse" 23). In this analysis, *The Queue* represents the "disenchantment" of "the dream as dream," but in line with Buck-Morss' characterization of the work as a postmodern cultural artefact, it merely posits a cynical attitude towards the utopian promises of socialism, experienced in their dehumanizing "dystopian actuality," without supplying an alternative vision for the sociopolitical organization of reality ("Dreamworld and Collapse" 23). Beyond the vanishing point of the queue, Buck-Morss' analysis posits a socialist utopia for which the people suffer an interminable wait and, in this sense, frames her interpretation of the painting with a sort of transcendental formulation of historical progress. Such a formulation, however illuminating, obscures the relevance of the everyday material reality in the formation of

historical narratives and in so doing risks projecting a narrative rather than determining the conditions in which one emerges.

Though Buck-Morss illustrates the significance of *The Queue* as a commentary on the Soviet utopia of production at the level of a broad, socialist metanarrative, this alienation of Sundukov's painting from the daily urban reality of queueing for food and other consumer items undermines the painting's deployment of farce and irony. In her article introducing the study of Soviet queue culture, "100 Years of the Queue," Jillian Porter briefly surveys the changing character of the Soviet queue in relation to the objects desired and the perception of the line itself, describing the era of Gorbachev's reforms, the time contemporaneous with *The Queue*, in terms of the shortage of staple goods in urban centers (Porter 490). In *The Queue*, this parody of the masses mobilized for the realization of a utopia of production bleakly depicts the absurdity of such interminable shortages through the sheer mass of unsatisfied consumers. Far from suggesting a sense of mass solidarity in this everyday ritual, this ironic representation of mass society gestures towards an alternative organization of society, one in which goods are available in abundance to individuals for efficient consumption. In this sense, the ironic illustration of a fixture of urban reality affirms the legitimacy of the utopia of consumption that Buck-Morss locates in the West during the Cold War and that she dispels at the onset of the postmodern, globalized order. Despite complicating the transcendental critique of dreamworld and utopia that she illustrates in Sundukov's *Queue*, this scholarship on the relationship between the apprehension of space-time and queueing in Soviet culture corroborates the connection Buck-Morss posits between collectivity and memory.

In her analysis of postmodern cultural discourse, however, Buck-Morss deploys Benjamin's conception of ruin and the dialectical image to pronounce the death of utopian

desire, a pronouncement divorced from an engagement with the everyday preoccupations of postmodern cultural production. The ruin of a particular phantasmagoric organization of reality, as a consequence of repeated shocks, and emerging from Benjamin's own formulation of the modern city as a series of static images, serves as the occasion for apprehending the city dialectically, in terms of its polarities and extremes, which in turn inform and inspire political action ("Dreamworld and Collapse" 9). However, the antinomy that emerges most prominently in her analysis involves the two poles of modern and postmodern culture, particularly with regards to their ostensibly disparate orientations towards utopian projects: modernity represents an attempt to unite culture and history in a cohesive project, and postmodernism represents cultural and historical decadence, with a "mélange of neo-, post-, and retroforms that deny responsibility for present history" ("Dreamworld and Collapse" 26). In this figuration, the dialectic characterizing the postmodern city operates at the scale of world historical macro-narratives, as a tension between the modern and the postmodern. By establishing two conflicting cultural discourses as the central tension embodied in the postmodern city, Buck-Morss alienates Benjamin's ruin from the shock of the everyday and in so doing risks locating the impetus for social and political change beyond mass society's engagement with a tangible urban context. Rather, the site of engagement shifts from the shocks of an individual embedded in a particular urban context to the shocks of the historian regarding the apparent ruin of tradition. In this sense, the opposition Buck-Morss suspends between modern and postmodern culture in the contemporary city of her criticism performs the dialectical image of Benjamin's theory of the modern city, offering the occasion for reflection on the state of cultural discourse in the hopes of inspiring a renewal of the revolutionary, utopian impulses latent in the bygone modern culture.

As a methodology, this form of intervention in the postmodern cultural discourse of the city fosters a critical distance and broad schema to account for a plethora of lived encounters and postmodern cultural phenomena. In elaborating her dialectical image pitting the city against utopian desire in postmodern cultural discourse, Buck-Morss provides a number of illuminating examples to justify her claim that “dreams are divorcing themselves from the space of the city”:

Recent urban planning has been more concerned with security against crime than with staging phantasmagorias for the crowd’s delight. Shopping malls as shrines to consumption have detached themselves from the urban landscape and are capable of relocation anywhere. While the automobile as dream-image is now tarnished by the sobering awareness of ecological realities, the accommodation of this individualist mode of mass transportation was disastrously destructive of urban space. (“Dreamworld and Collapse” 25)

Where “security,” “malls as shrines to consumption,” and “ecological realities” serve as the shocks that destabilize the image of mass celebration, novelty in consumption, and individualized transportation, these moments of shock represent opportunities to reinterpret our past engagement with urban planning, consumption, and transportation for a new understanding of their significance to the intention of realizing a mass utopian project. As previously mentioned, the indictment against postmodern culture stems from this inability or reluctance to foster such a utopian project to guide political action, and in the “divorce” of dream and city, a tendency to interpret the deficits of festivals, malls, and transportation as deficits in utopian projects themselves. In the space of Buck-Morss’ analysis, however, the presentation of tensions and shocks forgoes an engagement with particular responses to these phenomena for a performative construction of a Benjaminian dialectical image of postmodern culture from these

disparate instances. That is, she abstracts the necessity for a sense of cohesive social destiny from the presence of a mass identity that unifies disparate aesthetic responses. Rather, this subsumption of individualized responses to a mass identity effectively anticipates the revelatory moment of shock that serves to inspire a reevaluation of the subject's sense-memory. With the significance of shock commuted to the entrenchment of the normative sense-memories of a homogenous mass, the precedence of a mass identity over subjective experience alienates the members of a collective, *a priori*, from participatory political action.

In her "City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe," Buck-Morss establishes a dialectical tension between the postmodern city and mass utopia to illustrate the failure of postmodern cultural discourse to develop a substantial continuity with modernity after the Cold War. This tension draws on Benjamin's formulation of historical narrative as a socially constructed phantasmagoria informing the daily experiences of the subjects of mass industrial society. Within this formulation, Buck-Morss characterizes modernity as the productive development of society towards a utopia, while postmodernity represents the renunciation of historical narrative and the abandonment of utopian projects. However, the apparent distinction Buck-Morss creates between the ostensible attunement of the modern subject to a collective history and the postmodern subject's isolation from such a history obscures this same isolation that Benjamin located in modernity. Rather, in privileging the Russian avant-garde's efforts to reshape consumer culture in the Soviet Union, this distinction deprives postmodern cultural producers of this same capacity to engage with history as storytellers, as witnesses drawing on a unique set of sense-memories. The strength of this arrangement lies in the creation of a broad, world historical dialectical image, one artfully juxtaposing the sociocultural construction of the postmodern urban context and the hopefulness of modernity to produce an image of the necessity to unite mass

society behind a common goal. This image, insofar as it emerges in spite of lived urban experience, fails to develop a cogent correspondence between the shocks of everyday urban experience and the historical context of the postmodern city, with each informing the other. Instead, the projection of this dialectic onto the everyday appears to remove mass society from participation in its own utopian project and as such vindicates a postmodern aversion to utopian projects as inherently coercive.

In addition to demonstrating the capacity of his concepts of modern urban experience to project an image of contemporary cultural discourse at the scale of world history, though, Benjamin offers an avenue for mediating the reception and transmission of world historical forces at the level of the seemingly isolated object, self, and environment, that is, at the scale of the micronarrative. In Ukrainian poet Oksana Zabuzhko's "Prypiat – Still Life" (1996),¹ an ostensibly ahistorical catalogue of domestic objects in an abandoned apartment introduces a sort of dissonance between experience in the domestic sphere and the image of domesticity in grand historical narratives. Suspending a tension between voyeurism and documentation, the poem appeals to the apprehension of space as a sort of sense-memory in Benjamin's formulation, disrupting the ease with which disparate fragments become integrated into a cohesive, and ultimately illusive, historical narrative. While this subversion of the unity of historical narrative suggests the poem's acquiescence to the aimless, ahistorical tendencies Buck-Morss locates in the postmodern cultural discourse of the city, the suspension of time and dispersion of elements in the poem provide a self-reflexive moment of shock disrupting the seemingly inalienable categories of storyteller and story content. In so doing, "Prypiat" offers an image of the interpenetration of history and domesticity in everyday urban experience, as well as a corrective

¹ Originally published in Ukrainian as "Прийп'ять – Натюрморт" (1990)

to the precedence given to historical narrative and to a sense of utopia removed from the context of life in the postmodern city.

Rather than illustrating the revelation of utopian fantasy in mass society's engagement with its sociopolitical context, Zabuzhko's work often juxtaposes conceptions of mass society with personal experience and identity. In her examination of Ukrainian women authors in a Post-Soviet context, "Women's Literary Discourse," Maria Rewakowicz locates a tendency in Zabuzhko's work to unsettle the distinction between fiction and autobiography, lending the individual negotiation of national and personal identity the character of a confession (Rewakowicz 286). Drawing primarily on Zabuzhko's widely celebrated novel, *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* (1996), Rewakowicz and other scholars note that, although this "unmediated self-exposure" lends the "dynamic interaction between the personal and the sociopolitical/national" in Zabuzhko's novel the sense of a "cathartic and transformative" transcendence of this tension, Zabuzhko's feminist works refrain from expressing solidarity with feminism as a mass movement (Rewakowicz 286-287). While her protagonists often aspire to a transcendence of their social setting, Zabuzhko seems to deliberately avoid pursuing the formulation of a broader communal identity in her work (Rewakowicz 287). Although Rewakowicz's criticism of Zabuzhko's feminist literature largely focuses on her novels, and *Fieldwork* in particular, Zabuzhko's poem, "Prypiat," seems to invite a similar criticism by setting its supposed representation of the Chernobyl disaster amidst the everyday detritus of an isolated apartment unit.

Merely alluding to the infamous Chernobyl disaster through the evocation of the evacuated nuclear town, the domestic setting in "Prypiat" represents an anomaly in the context of the poem it ostensibly introduces. Describing the Chernobyl disaster as the "final blow" to

popular confidence in Soviet socialism, Marjolein van der Veen's "After Fukushima: Revisiting Chernobyl and the Collapse of the Soviet Union" (2013) draws on scholarship on the collapse of the Soviet Union to argue that similar nuclear disasters, such as the then topical example of the Fukushima disaster, provide such a shock to popular trust in institutions and the promises of the existing state as to inspire a "switch to anything else rather than maintain the status quo" (van der Veen 127). Such scholarship appears to corroborate the narrative posited by Buck-Morss, namely, that events in the postmodern period she stakes out provide opportunities to inspire radical social change in line with a robust vision of mass utopia. Likewise, the seeming political quietism of the setting in "Prypiat"—still, internal, ubiquitous—appears to vindicate Buck-Morss' charge that, despite events in the world, postmodern cultural products fail to mobilize this revolutionary potential towards the realization of utopian visions in cultural discourse. Far from engaging directly with the seemingly world historical force of the Chernobyl disaster, the title of Zabuzhko's "Prypiat" frustrates the expectation of a prolonged, sentimental recounting of human tragedy and state coercion for a representation of interiority and domesticity.

This effort to introduce questions of gender into a national canon speaks to a broader trend in Slavic literature from the early twentieth century forward. Noting a general tendency in Ukrainian literature to allegorize and objectify female characters, Slavic literature scholar Vitaly Chernetsky describes the subsumption of embodied experience to national myths as a form of "gender cleansing," with many of the attempts to represent the perspectives of women protagonists in post-Soviet Ukraine largely amounting to acts of "narrative cross-dressing" (Chernetsky 254). Against these works that were often aesthetically "pitiful" and "reactionary in [their] vision of the gender dynamic," Chernetsky calls attention to the works of women writers in this context, such as Zabuzhko and her contemporaries, who work to invert this paradigm

through “a combination of a foregrounding of the corporeal experiences with a more nuanced version of an allegorization [sic] of the individual experience as a metaphor for the national condition” (Chernetsky 254). Where these postmodern women writers retain the body and individual experience as a site for exploring themes of national identity in Ukrainian literature, their emphasis on experience and gender dynamics challenges the legitimacy of national myths to organize the representation of everyday experience. Likewise, the significance placed on gender and experience proposes an alternative configuration of the everyday and of myth, with the everyday implicated in the perpetuation of national myths just as these myths attempt to attribute a particular figurative content to the everyday. While this preoccupation with everyday experience appears apolitical, the everyday in Ukrainian women’s writing often destabilizes national myths by challenging the correspondence of these myths to a shared sense of reality.

In a similar vein, Zabuzhko’s poem juxtaposes popular memories of a collective trauma with the representation of everyday remnants in the domestic sphere. This juxtaposition coincides with what historian John Brewer’s “Microhistory and the Histories of the Everyday” (2010) describes as the “critique of grand narratives” over the “issue of scale and point of view” in the writing of history (Brewer 92). Aligning this preoccupation with the works of thinkers such as, among others, Walter Benjamin, “Microhistory” suggests that the impulse to challenge such grand narratives stems from the desire to transform “alienated and fragmented existence into human wholeness” for the recuperation of “strong collective attachments and local solidarities” (Brewer 92). This predication of collectivity and solidarity on “human wholeness” seems to correspond with the ostensibly authentic mode of experience Benjamin terms *Erfahrung*, where the sense-memories of a culture mediate the subject’s reception of phenomena in their urban environment and inform collective political action. While in Buck-Morss’

formulation these sense-memories seem to come exclusively from the subject's interface with inherited traditions, and in particular from modern capitalist and socialist narratives with their respective mass utopias, Brewer's account seems more in line with the attempt to reclaim a repository of memory accumulated in the person of the storyteller, one who witnesses and transmits wisdom to a broader collective. In Zabuzhko's "Prypiat," the juxtaposition of a ubiquitous everyday setting and an international disaster destabilizes the seemingly immanent significance of particular events, as well as the foundations for an event's or perspective's authority in a cultural discourse.

Where this contrast of title and setting contests the scale of grand narratives at the level of their correspondence to individual and collective experience, the voice manifest in the poem fosters an awareness of tradition and historical narrative as an act of storytelling. In "Prypiat," the voice of the poem expresses an ostensibly aloof documentation of abandoned objects in a room that has "no witnesses." The voice evinces an ironic voyeurism in its documentation, a voyeurism that exhibits curiosity ("Did a couple live here?"), touristic delight ("How amazing this silence beyond the boundary!"), and that enjoins the reader to "Come in, look around" (Zabuzhko 42). This ironic voyeurism distances both the poetic voice and the reader from the familiar space of the apartment by withholding an unmediated image of the space, while simultaneously implicating both voice and reader in the apprehension of this apartment as the paradoxical witnesses of an absence of witnesses. The paradoxically abandoned and inhabited apartment provides an image of a lost experience of everyday life reconstructed from a perspective not only alienated from this experience, but also intruding on it as a spectator. This distance belongs to the very act of documenting the apartment, a perspective removed from the particular sense-memories of it. In this attempt to apprehend the domestic space of the apartment,

furthermore, the voice supplants its interior with the interiority of this spectator, withholding an experience of this domestic life as a living sense-memory, while expressing the life of the spectator's active projections. That is, the poem appears to withhold the voice of an authentic storyteller connected to the experiences of the domestic sphere and instead provides a voice that depicts the apartment to be the space of phenomena repressed in the collective memory.

Likewise, though the suspension of time in the poem appears to produce an intimacy with the contents of the apartment, this same suspension of time provides an ambiguous image of the apartment as a space both embedded in and removed from a broader historical narrative. Apart from the title signaling that the poem is a still life after the genre of painting, the poem utilizes this stillness to foster a sense of the apartment's removal from external referents, opening with the ambiguous line, "It could be dawn" (Zabuzhko). In the original Ukrainian version, Zabuzhko utilizes the verb "здається," which has the connotations of seeming, appearing, and looking to convey the sensuous quality of this ambiguity (Дирижер 18); "It could be dawn," but without further knowledge of the space, the lighting could just as easily indicate that it is dusk. This sense of time, far from cultivating a stable, static image, suspends the representation of the apartment between two poles, night and day, further emphasizing the ambiguous relations of the poetic voice. In depriving the image of stabilizing external referents, this ambiguity comes to characterize each fragmentary object depicted in the room. In the case of the opening lines, "A moment ago twin tears shimmered/On polished wood," and the closing lines, "On the polished wood, two stains," this repetition without clarity not only frustrates the interpretation of these tears, whether they belong to a couple forced to abandon their home in the wake of a disaster or instead originate in a latent domestic violence, but also seems to question whether these "stains"

are tears, or whether, as stains, they are merely evidence of poor housekeeping soiling an otherwise immaculate interior.

Apart from isolating the inner life of the apartment from the assimilation into a preconceived narrative about the Chernobyl disaster, the fragmentation latent in the poem's structure and in the dispersion of the apartment's objects resists efforts to accumulate a coherent reconstruction of events. Gilloch characterizes Benjamin's notion of the ruin in terms of the fragmentation of a formerly whole structure that, in this state of decay and disintegration, forms a picture illustrating the artifice of the present sociocultural organization of reality (Gilloch 93-94). The poem provides precisely such an image of domestic decay and disintegration. Fragmentation manifests in the English translation of "Prypiat" in the frequency of full-stops, and in the Ukrainian in the proliferation of subordinate clauses, set off with commas, and long line spacing, which emphasizes both the aforementioned suspension of time, as well as the disintegrated sense-memory of life in the apartment. Each object, in its separation from a continuous narrative, now appears to form an isolated whole for the alienated curiosity of the observer, suggesting not only the loss of a cohesive account of this everyday scene, but a lost capacity to engage with this private space from a collective narrative sense. Rather, the dispersion of objects in time and space mimics the dispersed perception of domesticity in a collective memory and further discloses the repression of even the most ostensibly familiar shared spaces in cultural discourse.

What emerges from these disparate fragments is an image of the ruin of the everyday domestic setting as a stable fixture within a universal historical narrative. While the title unavoidably conjures up associations of mass evacuation, state deception, and nuclear desolation through reference to the town most immediately devastated by the Chernobyl disaster, the

fragmentation of the apartment resists elision with this broader narrative of mass displacement and oppression and instead restages this displacement and oppression for the isolated, voyeuristic observer within the apartment, out of “Just the breathing air, crushed/As though by a tank” (Zabuzhko). This image of a far more ubiquitous repression of everyday life pervading and yet isolated from collective memory destabilizes the comparatively romantic image of mass tragedy’s capacity to unify an otherwise fragmented populace. Instead, the poem suspends the self-reflexive shock of the Chernobyl disaster, repeating the trauma indefinitely, before, during, and after the event itself, in the domestic sphere of mass society. The Chernobyl disaster, then, becomes not a frame for understanding the abandonment of this apartment, but rather another instance of how the collective abandons a confrontation with the disaster of life in mass society. In this sense, the poem challenges the status of the Chernobyl disaster as such in cultural discourse by juxtaposing the illusory sense of mass identity produced in the wake of Pripjat’s displacement, which functions as a sort of defense mechanism against the trauma of everyday life.

Here, the isolation of storytelling from the sense-memories of the everyday domestic sphere fixes these sense-memories as the repressed consciousness of a collectivity incapable of experiencing this shared aspect of collective life. Indeed, the very sense of collectivity implied in this formulation of mass society suggests that this universal form of repression, this alienation from sense-memory through the phantasmagoria of a defensive historicism, serves as the binding force that makes this collective a collective. Far from Buck-Morss’ concluding remarks that, in postmodern cultural discourse, “Utopian fantasy is quarantined, contained within the boundaries of theme parks and tourist preserves” never to be “allowed expression at all” (“Dreamworld and Collapse” 26), in Zabuzhko’s poem, as one such example of a postmodern cultural product, the

everyday functions as the site of a phantasmagoric projection, upholding the fantasy of a mass society, one actively constructing a historical narrative to disavow the fragmentation of collective identity in daily life. Where Buck-Morss posits a fragmented postmodern cultural discourse, one unable to strive, in an immanent collective sense, for the utopian visions of mass society dreamed of in modernity, Zabuzhko's "Prypiat" questions the extent to which mass society allows everyday experience expression at all in its particular organization of reality.

In alluding to and subsequently frustrating the image of a Ukrainian mass society betrayed by the Soviet state, whose mishandling of the Chernobyl disaster resulted in the displacement of a community from an idyllic domesticity, Zabuzhko conflates the apparent significance of the Chernobyl disaster and the experience of everyday life to show how Chernobyl functions as a mythical fixture in domestic life. Where this conflation impedes the perception of storytellers and stories gaining their significance from the scale of the event's or story's reception, the figuration of poetic voice and reader as voyeuristic intruders on the apartment's interior illustrates the significance of domestic life as the site of both a shared communal experience of the world and a sphere effectively repressed in the representations of popular cultural discourse. Though the suspension of time in the poem extends to the suspension of historical memory, with the ambiguous representation of the apartment shifting between the violence of the Chernobyl disaster and domestic violence, this ambiguity intensifies the fragmentation of everyday life in a communal memory, disclosing the image of a collective desperately appealing to the ostensible tragedy of grand historical events to defer a necessary confrontation with the ubiquitous trauma of their everyday existence. In illustrating the ubiquity of this trauma, "Prypiat" inverts the modern impetus for a unifying utopian project to express that, in the alienation of mass society's narratives from its own daily experiences, such a unity

and project already predate the theorization of any given mass utopia, existing in the ever-recurring demand to articulate new defenses to cope with this ostensibly ceaseless repetition of violence.

This sentiment also finds expression in the cyclical conceptions of historical progress Benjamin puts forward in “Paris.” In his representation of the subject’s relation to technology and the natural sciences, through a passage from the radical French social and political activist, Louis Blanqui, Benjamin depicts nineteenth-century Paris as a vision of hell whose apparitions recur with the “hallucinatory power” of Nietzsche’s eternal return, as a “resignation without hope” to the century’s inability to “[respond] to the new technological possibilities with a new social order” (“Paris” 25-26). Following from the aforementioned impotence of both escape from and critique of modernity within its own social coordinates, Benjamin presents radical social and political activism entangled with the conceptual apparatus of the dominant discursive framework, where resistance either takes the form, or serves to expand the interpretative powers, of the century’s commercial organization of society. Taken as a vision of history, then, the future figures as the mere repetition of present forms of social repression, while the truly progressive, emancipatory moment lies, ironically, in the irretrievable past, when the inception of modern technology might still have spawned an enlightened, demythologized society. Modernity and modern technology, then, serve as the occasion for the reinstatement of premodern mythological structures, and though Benjamin suggests that an awareness of this process might be possible, this awareness alone simply inspires a sense of damnation, an aesthetic resignation to a blind, unceasing procession of history.

Both Buck-Morss and Zabuzhko confront this sense of damnation and recurrence through such an awareness of how historical narratives structure urban experience. Where Buck-Morss

claims that the recuperation of modern utopian projects might help navigate confusing and disparate experiences to guide collective action towards a shared goal, Zabuzhko's poem interrogates the existing structure of cultural discourse to question the extent to which such a notion of collectivity, alienated from these disparate experiences, might ever attain something like progress towards a shared goal. In both instances, the texts manifest a longing for progress tempered with a weariness of the present moment. For Buck-Morss, the chaotic urban planning and cultural production in the postmodern city evince the loss of tradition as a repository of communal sense-memories; the impetus for change is a revitalized connection to modernity's utopian projects. For Zabuzhko, urban existence becomes a mere ornament ordaining the interior of a neurotic collective fantasy, one whose notions of progress and unity merely serve to isolate and repress the traumatic reality of the social organization of the domestic sphere in everyday urban experience. Though the scope of each formulation differs drastically, ranging from world historical theorization to the minutia of the everyday, both figure as attempts to reclaim the authority of the storyteller from the meaning-making inertia of their respective dreamworlds. Each actively stakes out and contests a repository of authentic experience, a sensuous attunement which ought to inform the collective negotiation of historical events and mediate social relations.

Chapter 2

A Trip in the Heart of the Magic Empire: Moscow, *Moscoviad*, and a Cursory Glance at the Imperial Vomitorium

In his exploration of perception and London's cognitive cityscape, *The Soft City* (1974), travel writer and urban critic Jonathan Raban invokes the presence of a "soft city" of sensuous impressions and unconscious associations coexisting with a material "hard city." Considered a forerunner of cognitive mapping and postmodern urban geography (Dear and Flusty 141-142), Raban largely mobilizes this play of cognitive and material cities to illustrate the estrangement of the city dwellers' private worlds from "love for [their] fellow man" and the repression of Christian morals more generally (Raban 4). Raban then turns his conservative critique on the intoxicating character of city life, an intoxication that ostensibly corresponds to the surreal character of Londoners' relations to their material context. In his disparaging illustration of busy outdoor markets and the reemergence of *Jesus Christ Superstar* in theatres, Raban attempts to lend a sense of import and urgency to the entanglement of secular modernity with a magical "primitive" inwardness, an entanglement responsible for the immanent ruin of an industrial "Eden" as London slips further from reality into a decadent orgy of "natural magic to which the fragmented industrial city unconsciously aspires" (Raban 177). Here, rather than supposing that an attunement to a shared material reality will necessarily provide a concrete foundation for the reconstruction of a "rational" Christian cultural discourse, this account gives precedence to the transformative powers of perception in the individual and collective apprehension of urban geography. In this transformative power, the city itself provides the intoxicating catalyst for a surreal divorce of everyday experience from reality, as well as the infiltration of surrealistic themes in the academic discourse of human geography.

The following chapter develops this theme of altered perception and the city through a comparison of Walter Benjamin's stylistic experiments with surrealism and intoxication alongside Yuri Andrukhovych's mobilization of magic and the carnivalesque in his 2003 novel, *The Moscoviad*. Though Benjamin and Andrukhovych occupy disparate sociocultural geographies, with Benjamin writing his "Moscow Diaries" in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and Andrukhovych in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, both writers advance a notion of perception that implicates the subject's sensuous reception of their urban environment in the constitution of a political identity. Much as Raban's soft city calls attention to the impressions and associations latent in the subject's negotiation of the built environment of their everyday life, Benjamin and Andrukhovych disrupt the possibility of merely living in and observing an environment by invoking an altered perception that illustrates the tenuous validity of such associations for grounding a particular means of organizing the reality of a cityscape. However, in predicating this shift between modes of perception on the intoxication of an individual subject, both writers risk superimposing a contrived, artificial mediation on the urban environment divorced from a collective experience of the everyday, or else perpetuating a form of mysticism akin to Raban's sententious critique of life in 1970s London. As such, this chapter will be devoted to exploring how Benjamin and Andrukhovych use similar stylistic and narrative strategies to destabilize the reader's apprehension of cityscapes, and Moscow in particular, while reevaluating the significance of intoxication in their works as a form of resistance to both a homogenized sense of subjectivity and a stratification of dominant political discourses.

Andrukhovych's *Moscoviad* follows the adventures of the sometimes protagonist, sometimes narrator, Otto von F., an identity that, through frequent shifts in narrative perspective to the second person, the reader also intermittently assumes. A Ukrainian poet studying at

Moscow University, von F.'s rambling stream of consciousness narration comes to resemble his increasingly drunken, increasingly labyrinthine passage through the city. Beginning in his bedroom on the top floor of the university dormitory, von F. descends into the ruins of the former Soviet capital, with beerhalls and soup-kitchens a veritable carnival of cultures, ideologies, and past figures from the Russian and Soviet imperial history. The impetus for von F.'s journey through Moscow comes from a small set of eternally deferred errands in preparation for his return to Ukraine that night. Eventually, von F. becomes lost in the basement of a large toy store where he makes his way to the Moscow subway. Descending further below the subway, von F. discovers a beerhall populated by KGB officers and parties sympathetic to Russian imperialism across time. At the climax of the novel, von F., disguised as a clown, attends a symposium of Russian leaders from throughout the country's history, who are plotting a return to Moscow out of the ashes of the Soviet Union. After their speeches, von F. shoots everyone at the assembly, followed by himself, only to emerge extremely hungover on the midnight train to Kyiv.

In confronting this carnivalesque aesthetic in Andrukhovych's deployment of the magical realist genre, scholarship on *Moscoviad* often emphasizes the power of the narrative to deconstruct fixtures of imperial and anti-imperial mythologies while remaining decidedly apolitical. Writing on the entanglement of Russian and Ukrainian political and cultural discourse, Slavic history and literature scholar Myroslav Shkandrij's *Russia and Ukraine* describes how a physical and spiritual intoxication allows Andrukhovych to highlight "immediate sensory awareness" to parody the sententious political representations of nationalistic and imperial discourses (Shkandrij 263). Through a narrative that "concentrate[s] on the contemporary individual's relationship to the surrounding environment" over and against the "overarching

metanarratives” or “history and teleology,” Andrukhovych’s *Moscoviad* comes to represent the attempt to locate a form of experience beyond the “narratives of both colonialism and anticolonialism” (Shkandrij 266). While Shkandrij’s account illustrates how Andrukhovych’s playful deconstruction of the symbolism of national and imperial discourses as mere tropes develops one aspect Andrukhovych’s narrative style, it does so by relegating intoxication itself to the status of mere trope. In so doing, Shkandrij precludes a sustained engagement with the form of altered perception in the text and instead suggests that the perception induced by intoxication serves only to heighten the farce of the narrative, as well as to provide a self-reflexive disavowal of any overt political agendas the reader might attempt to locate in the text. This chapter will attempt to reimagine the significance of altered perception through a comparison of the formal strategies at play in *Moscoviad* with similar techniques more or less explicitly elaborated in Benjamin’s stylized treatment of perception.

Exploring Moscow, conversely, at a moment when it most vividly reflects the Soviet Union’s attempt to legitimize its power through the manipulation of the city’s built environment, Benjamin’s “Moscow Diary” (1926-1927) calls attention to the role of an ostensibly passive perception in facilitating or stifling a critical reception of a given material context. In a letter from Benjamin to Martin Buber quoted in Gershom Scholem’s introduction to the “Diary,” Benjamin distinguishes between life in the city and theoretical frameworks that attempt to divine or judge its meaning in his rendering of *Denkbilder*, or thought images:

My presentation [of Moscow] will be devoid of all theory. In this fashion I hope to succeed in allowing the creatural to speak for itself: inasmuch as I have succeeded in seizing and rendering this very new and disorienting language that echoes loudly through the resounding mask of an environment that has been totally transformed. I want to write

a description of Moscow at the present moment in which ‘all factuality is already theory’ and which would thereby refrain from any deductive abstraction, from any prognostication, and even within certain limits from any judgement... (Benjamin in “Preface” 6)

Much as a photograph might be said to merely reproduce a given environment, Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* attempt to decenter the significance of the author from their own descriptions, thus facilitating an “immediate, concrete representation... of the material” (Gilloch 38). This material is none other than the “new and disorienting language” of Moscow after the revolution, a language that ought to “speak for itself” through Benjamin’s ostensibly immediate descriptions of the city. In so far as the city possesses its own particular language that spatially reflects the social transformations of its moment in time, Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* represent an attempt to fragment and arrange the physical elements already present in the city such that these elements communicate latent social, economic, political, and/or cultural contents without the need for a theoretical intervention foreign to this context.

This effort to fragment and reconfigure the elements of modern cultural discourse possesses an ambiguous critical potential in Benjamin’s writing after *Moscow Diary*. Alert to the ambiguous potential of fragmentation in literary composition, Benjamin attempts to qualify his own use of fragmentation for cultural criticism in his *Arcades Project* as a form of “literary montage,” stating, “I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them” (*Arcades Project* 460). Here Benjamin suspends a tension between ostensibly valuable formulations, or totalities, and the detritus of modernity, his reorganization of scattered rags and refuse. In her

own analysis of Benjamin's use of fragmentation and montage, Susan Buck-Morss distinguishes between a mobilization of montage that "makes visible the gap between sign and referent" by drawing attention to its own artifice and "another use of montage that creates illusion by fusing the elements so artfully that all evidence of incompatibility and contradiction, indeed, all evidence of artifice, is eliminated" (*Dialectics of Seeing* 67-68). Characterizing modern cultural discourse as a montage of otherwise disparate elements, Benjamin's conception of literary montage unsettles the seeming totality of these "ingenious formulations," drawing attention to the artifice of his method with his selection of materials, while simultaneously destabilizing the seemingly natural configuration of cultural discourse by demonstrating the critical use-value of elements neglected or repressed in popular culture. In this sense, Benjamin's use of montage draws attention to the artificial, sociocultural construction of modern discourse but refrains from enshrining an alternative construction attempting to enact a form of fragmentation without evoking another illusion.

One of the principal techniques Benjamin utilizes in his attempt to decenter himself from his own travelogue manifests in his juxtaposition of objects, which punctuates an otherwise seemingly realist description of his surroundings. Detailing his first impressions of the Krestiansky Club in Moscow, an association for peasants residing in the rural outskirts of the city, Benjamin notes:

I was struck by the fact that the walls of the reading room were entirely covered with visual aids, just like at the children's sanitorium... [T]he walls are also covered with displays of tools, machine parts, chemical retorts, etc. Intrigued, I approached a shelf from which two African masks were grimacing down at me. But on closer inspection they turned out to be gas masks. (Moscow Diary 49-50)

Here Benjamin inspects the industrial products on the walls of the peasants' club as though documenting the material culture of a primitive civilization. Where the comparison between the reading room and a "children's sanatorium" effectively infantilizes the peasants of the modern city, the juxtaposition of African masks and gas masks, themselves characterized as "displays," lends the effort to mechanize the Russian peasantry the air of a modern civilizing mission, one nevertheless implicated in the mystification of labour and its products in an ostensibly secular industrialization of Moscow's rural periphery. In this sense, Benjamin's seemingly immediate documentation of the club attempts to allow the club's decoration to speak to a sort of burgeoning cult of production in the Soviet Union. Although, again, the repetition of impressions suggests quite a bit of artifice in Benjamin's "immediate" descriptions of the material landscape, Benjamin's *Denkbild* of the modern Russian peasantry illustrates his efforts to invoke a latent semiotic system in the arrangement of industrial objects at the expense of a direct authorial intervention in the narrative.

However, Benjamin's effort to decenter himself from his representation of Moscow does not explicitly translate into a cohesive critical account of the city's shifting sociocultural context. In his analysis of Benjamin's Moscow *Denkbilder*, Gilloch notes a tension animating the appropriation of Surrealist and materialist elements in Benjamin's methodology: "namely, the need to reconcile an approach that does justice to the phenomena under consideration (immanent) with one that retains critical insight and power (redemptive)" (Gilloch 39). Unable to merely record his surroundings as a camera, and reluctant to draw explicit structural critiques from his representation of elements in the city, Gilloch concludes: "Benjamin's *Denkbilder* are mosaics of urban images and incidents... where one encounters conflicting and incongruous images" that take after the form of the city itself by becoming "kaleidoscopic entities, filled to

‘the point of bursting’ with such constellations of old and new, archaic and modern, enduring and fleeting” (Gilloch 49). Gilloch’s complaint highlights the difficulty of locating the “redemptive” potential in Benjamin’s *Denkbilder*, a difficulty arising from the sheer proliferation of disparate images. While the prior evocation of a latent semiotic system offers the possibility of discerning some sociocultural critique from the thematic arrangement of elements in an image, Gilloch suggests that Benjamin’s reluctance or inability to likewise arrange these images into a cohesive film destabilizes the critical potential of his “Moscow Diary.” Instead, such scholarship seems to conclude that Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* possess a merely mimetic quality, reproducing the confusion of the metropolitan city dweller in the guise of an ostensibly theoretical mode of perception.

In the case of his *Moscoviad*, Andrukhovych perpetuates a similar destabilization of narrative cohesion and intentionality by juxtaposing the figurative contents latent in people and objects, but does so by removing them from the narrative contexts that invest them with this symbolic value. Following after a song emanating from the women’s shower room in the basement of the dorm, Otto von. F. makes his way barefoot between piles of dirty laundry, scummy standing water, and a homeless, zine-dealing chauvinist to find himself before a “lambada, madonna, quetzalcoatl, popocatepetl [sic]”, an African exchange student singing in the shower (Andrukhovych 19-20). Consistent with the confused imagery from indigenous and Western folklore, the moment remains ambiguous, with the second-person narration of shower sex, ostensibly between the reader and the variously styled, primordial “black orchid,” “slave girl,” “high priestess,” culminating in a dialectic of civilization and savagery, or else a skulking, self-gratifying voyeurism (Andrukhovych 20-21). This ambiguity, paired with the overt exoticization of the woman and the grungy showers, appears to decenter the narrator’s authority

over the narrative by allowing the preconceptions and fantasies of the reader to actively reconstitute the characters and the built environment in the novel. Insofar as he anticipates and reproduces these fantasies, however, the narrator also seems to consciously withhold the actual story of the novel, and in this way asserts a sort of sovereignty of immediate experience over mere representation. Unlike Benjamin, then, who attempts to communicate a critical content through the stark immediacy of Moscow's built environment, the ironic play of fantastic elements in *Moscoviad* decenters the narrator by gesturing at a concrete content beyond the imposed figurations of a given narrative on experience.

Despite such a gesture in Andrukhovych's work, the apparently ahistorical character of this sort of intoxicated narrative perspective seems to contradict the critical potential scholars associate with the genre of magical realism, namely, the capacity to posit novel historical allegories for the present. In his survey of Russian and Ukrainian literature after the fall of the Soviet Union, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*, Vitaly Chernetsky attributes a postcolonial thrust to Andrukhovych's work by describing his narrative in terms of an "ontological engagement with the world" through the entanglement of the "historical landscape and the psyche," and quoting from Lois Zamora and Wendy Faris's *Magical Realism*, suggests that this formulation asserts that "historical narrative is no longer chronicle but clairvoyance" (Chernetsky 188). This emphasis on a historiographical clairvoyance, the penetration of the built environment to divine a latent historical meaning in the present, shifts the significance of history from an aloof sequence of facts to a way of seeing the world. Such a way of seeing, however, appears deliberately obscured in *Moscoviad*, given the manifest intoxication of the subject position and the lack of a cohesive narrative perspective. This criticism also holds for Benjamin's *Denkbilder*, which attempt to historicize the present without an overarching

historical narrative. While both Benjamin and Andrukhovych appeal to the historical valuations latent in everyday perception, their commitments to the surreal and inebriated frustrate the possibility of locating a stable subject position for their apprehensions of space. Returning to Gilloch's criticism, this begs the question of the extent to which a decentered historical perspective might be both attainable stylistically and sufficiently critical as a whole.

Both Benjamin's *Denkbilder* and Andrukhovych's utilization of magic realism attempt to decenter authorial intention from the representation of an ideologically charged urban landscape. Though critics like Gilloch and Chernetsky point out that this decentralization stymies the emergence of cohesive critical narratives of Moscow's sociocultural context, Benjamin and Andrukhovych's mobilization of this perspective as a form of altered perception operates relationally, in terms of opportunistic inversions of a dominant discourse rather than attempts to establish holistic counter-narratives. In adopting this other way of seeing, however, Benjamin and Andrukhovych also seem to conflate the urban masses with the built environment, figuring an ostensibly homogenous mass itself as a fixture of the urban metropolis. Rather than giving voice to people occupying the space of a city, people acquire a symbolic value that figures them as objects within a given discourse. In the case of Benjamin, Moscow's rural peasantry come to embody the tension between primitivism and civilization in the broader sociocultural effort to industrialize rural Russia by the communist regime after the revolution. For Andrukhovych, this symbolic content becomes intensified to the point of caricature, willingly relegating Moscow's migrant population to the status of exoticized objects. While this preoccupation with the urban population as a fixture of the built environment evokes a sense of the human's embeddedness in a given sociocultural context, Benjamin's and Andrukhovych's surrealistic narrative inversions risk perpetuating the dehumanization of Moscow's urban population. Where Benjamin's

conception of a profane illumination emerging from an altered perception of the environment helps to elaborate the critical thrust of Andrukhovych's relational destabilization of Soviet multiculturalism, the two differ in the redemptive potential they locate in a ritualistic understanding of intoxication.

Benjamin's distinction between religious illumination and profane illumination underpins his experiments with surrealism and the decentralized narration in his *Denkbilder*. Where religious illumination acts on a momentary inspiration to attribute hidden, transcendental meanings to a particular arrangement of objects in the world, profane illumination dwells on the formal properties of these revelations at the level of perception:

For histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further; we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday. ("Surrealism" 133)

Here Benjamin does seem to suggest that there exists a presence to objects that is masked from everyday perception, but this presence remains inaccessible. Instead, Benjamin shifts his attention from locating an essential content latent in social relations towards describing how the formal arrangement of objects in consciousness produces the affects that lend ideological frameworks their capacity to perpetuate themselves in experience. Likening the concepts of bourgeois society to a form of religious illumination, Benjamin presents an alternative in the form of profane illumination: "[T]he true creative overcoming of religious illumination does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a *profane illumination*, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson" ("Surrealism" 132).

That is, for Benjamin, the experience of intoxication can serve as a sort of ritual to aid in comprehending how objects acquire their transcendental properties in a sociocultural discourse.

Taking up his experiments with opium in the 1930s, Benjamin draws on the effects of intoxication to destabilize the sense of reality produced in the everyday experience of modern material culture. In his “Crock Notes,” Benjamin’s reflections on a small collection of notes from his experiments smoking opium, Benjamin writes that “There is no more valid legitimation of [opium] than the consciousness of having suddenly penetrated, with its help, that most hidden, generally most inaccessible world of surfaces which is constituted by the ornament” (“Crock Notes” 81). In this quote, Benjamin emphasizes that the significance of intoxication is in experiencing a hidden meaning. His reflections, though, distance intoxicated experience from the attainment of an inherently authentic wellspring for thought by framing this experience as a consciousness of such authenticity, or the feeling of attaining universal truth from one’s reception of the banal and decorative. Elsewhere he describes the decorations in his room conjuring “a multiplicity of aspects, contents, [and] meanings” (“Crock Notes” 82), with each an enchanting reconfiguration bringing a sense of primal religious revelation to a seemingly reasoned engagement with his surroundings. In these notes, this production of a religious experience in relation to otherwise insignificant objects offers a sort of anthropological illumination of how intoxication reproduces bygone mystical properties through the formal arrangement of objects. The value of intoxication, then, is not the revelation of a specific content, but the experience of a myth-making process latent in everyday perception. Here Benjamin is not so much concerned with the manifest content available when intoxicated, as with how intoxication reveals the subject’s imposition of a mythical content on their surroundings as a way of ordering the world.

The profane illumination of the modern stems from this consciousness of how the subject's perceptions actively impose a mythical content onto the objects, thus revealing the ubiquity of myth in the modern. At the end of his "Crock Notes," Benjamin sums up his reflections on smoking opium with a short note he made of his room while under the influence: "For me, the handkerchiefs hanging on the wall occupy the space between 'torch' and 'torchon.' Red is like a butterfly alighting upon each shade of the color red" ("Crock Notes" 85). In this representation of his intoxicated perception of a handkerchief, the handkerchief lacks a stable identity with itself as well as its everyday context. Rather, Benjamin describes an object caught between an everyday fixture and a source of illumination for the rest of the room, with the ceaseless movement of its redness suggesting a lack of internal cohesion. This image of the handkerchief points to the object's capacity to inspire an altered perception of one's situation from the everyday, while likewise preserving the object's otherness to itself and the subject. In this sense, Benjamin's profane illumination of the everyday serves as an opportunity to reevaluate the situation of the contemporary subject within a given sociocultural context by destabilizing the authority of a given reality communicated through a predetermined signification and arrangement of objects.

Much like the artists working within the surrealist movement, Benjamin understands everyday perception in terms of aesthetic conventions that structure our reception and response to phenomena in the world. Pairing surrealism with Marxism, Benjamin attempts to illustrate the sociopolitical implications of formal artistic and literary conventions with his appeal to the "revolutionary energies" latent in the experience of abandoned industrial buildings and materials, stating: "[Revolutionary experience] cause[s] the mighty forces of 'atmosphere' that lie hidden in these things to explode. What form would a life take, do you think, that in a crucial moment

allowed itself to be determined by the latest popular song” (*Other Writings* 148). For Benjamin, formal conventions possess a latent force, one which actively influences the collective perception of an everyday environment. In this sense, the language of cultural products acquires particular significance, with formal conventions providing a basis for collective organization in many ways as forceful as a shared material context. With Benjamin this can be seen in his illustration of the contrast between a revolutionary consciousness drawing inspiration for political change from the everyday with a sort of alienated consciousness popular culture perpetuates in relation to the built environment. This contrast between an alienated and attuned orientation to the environment suggests that a sense of reality takes shape in relation to the ideologically inflected language of perceptions and judgements.

However, in treating social and political organizations at the level of formal perception, Benjamin’s conception of intoxication seems removed from the concrete material conditions of modern life. In particular, this becomes especially apparent in his treatment of addiction:

A moralizing attitude, which gets in the way of essential insights into the nature of [opium], has also drawn attention away from a decisive side of intoxication... [I]t is not going too far to say that a principal motive for taking the drug is, in very many cases, to augment the drug-taker’s resources in the struggle for existence. (“Crock Notes” 83-84)

The passage makes clear that the central tension of Benjamin’s notes regards the contrast between the critical introspective potential he locates in opium and its negative public perception. To challenge this perception, he implicates the whole of society in a struggle for existence and provides some anecdotal evidence to suggest that people who smoke opium regularly are better members of society than the moralizers due to their disposition (“Crock Notes” 84). Benjamin’s critique suggests that the negative perception of addicts is symptomatic

of a modern bourgeois mythology. To destabilize this perception, Benjamin performs an inversion of this preconception by positing an alternative configuration for addiction in relation to social norms, namely that social survival seems to demand the effects of opium to survive, but does so by privileging the experience of intoxication over the experience of being addicted to opium. In a sense, Benjamin's figurative treatment of addiction as an element of bourgeois discourse is consistent with his formulation of profane illumination insofar as this inversion of the bourgeois subject and the addict ostensibly reveals the repressive character of modern capitalism, as well as the artifice of the figurative content ascribed to the addict by the bourgeois subject. In treating people as objects of a given discourse, though, he seems to deprive others of their agency and to treat them like the ornaments in his room. Although Benjamin's representation of opium smoking effectively inverts the seemingly privileged position of the bourgeoisie in modernity, this provocation comes at the expense of an engagement with the lived experience of subjects suffering through addiction.

In Andrukhovych's *Moscoviad*, intoxication affords a similar recognition of the absurd proliferation and intensification of associations and meanings attributed to seemingly innocuous objects. Apart from earlier manifestations of the absurd and fantastic in the narrator's representations, such as in the case of the African exchange student, the general trajectory of the narrative involves the subsumption of social setting to interiority and perception. One of the chief motivations for the narrator's movement through Moscow is his plan to join with other Ukrainian students to found a pro-independence literary magazine. Nevertheless, throughout Otto von F.'s drunken ramblings, he continuously defers his participation through various reconfigurations of the significance of this meeting away from its overt political aims. The ceaseless reconfiguration of the meeting's symbolic content culminates in an inane phone call

where he confesses his love to the organizer's girlfriend, Lyuba, whom the reader first encounters here and henceforth never again (Andrukhovych 104-105). The narrator's spontaneous and fleeting enchantment with Lyuba, a diminutive of "Lyubov" that literally translates to "love" in English (Andrukhovych 105n16), serves as a parodic response to the demand that the narrator account for his literal absence from the meeting to the organizers of the magazine. His sudden preoccupation with the mere etymology of the otherwise peripheral Lyuba's name parodies the sense that literature can be readily allied to a given political movement by pointing to the formal instability of literary sentiments. Much as in Benjamin's elaboration of a profane illumination, the sudden equivalence of the narrator's infatuation and the literary group's political activism dispels the authority of each in representing the reality of life in Moscow. Instead, the narrative utilizes intoxication as a catalyst to relativize the contents of sociocultural and political discourses in order to produce an awareness of the processes at play following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Where Benjamin locates the impetus to such a relativization in the formal properties of consciousness itself, however, Andrukhovych's irreverent play of symbolic contents alludes to the trauma of recognizing one's own appropriation into an otherwise external narrative. In *Moscoviad*, this takes the form of Otto von F.'s rare confession of having been approached by the KGB, the Soviet secret police, and as a result of threats to his German grandfather in Ukraine, being forced to enter into a short lived and ultimately unsuccessful collaboration with some blundering KGB agents (Andrukhovych 100). Addressing this confession towards the reader, who becomes in this moment his King of Ukraine, Otto von F. writes:

I am not guilty towards anyone... I am guilty towards myself. For coming to their summons. For stretching a hand out to them because of my good upbringing, thinking,

finally, that they are people too, if mutilated. That I wrote that scrap of paper, which is still there, in their archives—yellow, fading, crumpled, but it exists, the proof of my weakness, the witness of my spiritual confusion and perplexity, signed with the stupidly pretentious name, hateful for me since then. Such is my confession—of my many sins, My King, and only You I would like to beg for forgiveness. (Andrukhovych 101)

In one of the odd moments of sincerity in the novel, this confession gestures at the source of the heavily self-reflexive character of the narration thus far, namely the weaponization of the narrator's writing in the hands of the police. However, the narrator continues to struggle with his past, resorting to mutilating his own name, and in the manifest vanity of this confession, he is apparently unable to represent this event without attributing a likewise farcical character to the reader he addresses. This appropriation by the KGB appears to foster a sort of proclivity for a defensive self-censorship, one constantly in tension with the proliferation of meanings and associations produced while drunkenly descending into the depths of Moscow.

Through this tension between intoxication and self-censorship, the narrative utilizes an altered perception towards discovering a condition where subjects recognize themselves in relation to the urban environment. Against the subordination of consciousness to the status of an inferior other in imperial discourse, postcolonial cultural critic Edward Said describes the process of resisting imperial culture in terms of a "reinscription" of ideological images, projections, and territories (Said 210). Drawing on the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, Said elaborates that, for the colonial subject, "[t]o achieve recognition is to rechart and then occupy the place in imperial cultural forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior Other" (Said 210). Here Said defines a form of resistance

that contests the negative valuations of a colonizer over the colonized, a contest that produces a new basis for sociocultural unity among an indigenous population. In *Moscoviad*, however, this act of inscription itself becomes the site of contention, one tending towards fragmentation rather than unity. The narrator's act of resistance disavows a sincere attempt at reinscription out of the fear of producing another document that might be appropriated for use against himself or his friends. Contesting this form of self-censorship, then, the narrative transposes the demand to reevaluate the ideological claims made on nations, artworks, and practices to a symbolic renunciation of the authority of the past to narrate the present.

In the end, this renunciation amounts to a literal and figurative flood representing at once a cleansing of and basis for departing from the past. Having shot himself and a number of famous historical figures during a conspiratorial meeting to reinstate a form of Russian imperial authority in Moscow, the narrator awakens, alive and hungover, in the now submerged city on a train bound for Kyiv. Here the narrator again addresses the reader as the King of Ukraine and reflects on the significance of his return to Kyiv after this strange adventure:

Since tonight I am not running away but coming back, angry, empty, and with a bullet in my skull to top it all off, why the hell would anyone need me? I don't know that either. I only know that now almost all of us are like this. And what remains for us is the most persuasive of all hopes, passed on to us from our glorious ancestors—that it will work out somehow. The main thing is to survive until tomorrow. To make it to a station called Kyiv. And not to fucking fall off this bunk on which I am now completing my unsuccessful round-the-word journey. (Andrukhovych 189 translation modified)

At the close of the narrative, this relatively stark reflection on the preceding day effectively evacuates the competing historical discourses in the city of significance, along with that of the

story itself. What remains, instead, is merely a hopeful disposition and the narrator's awareness of his present subject position, as one of a mass of hungover authors trying to return home. The narrator's drunken adventure becomes a means of cleansing himself of the traumatic associations of the past. While this cleansing fails to establish a more concrete ground for future discourse beyond that of the narrator's precariously jostling bunk and his equally precarious pun, this experience of intoxication offers a sense of illumination allowing the narrator to overcome both his real and his imagined separation from the other dubious survivors who make up the community of the train.

Where Benjamin's profane illumination historicizes the transcendental attributions produced in a sociocultural discourse, Andrukhovych utilizes the experience of intoxication to relativize the other narratives encountered in the story, showing each to be the product of affected, sententious communities. Benjamin, however, dwells on the production of these discourses at the level of formal consciousness, with a reflection on intoxication affording the subject the opportunity to intervene in a given discourse at the level of perception to imagine another, more or less inspired, configuration of reality. Andrukhovych also mobilizes this form of experience to illustrate the affect of ideological contents on the perception of the built environment, but does so by introducing a tension between the lost inhibitions of this altered perception and a paralyzing reflexivity born of a defensive self-censorship. In *Moscoviad*, the experience of intoxication becomes a ritual through which the narrator negates the monumental authority of Russian imperial culture and the debilitating demands made on him to occupy a prescribed position of resistance within Ukrainian national discourse. Instead, the narrative appeals to a sense of demystification at the end of the story to reconstitute the narrator's

relationship with other members of a community hoping to break a traumatic historical cycle of mass violence and delusion.

Chapter 3

Dwelling in Ruin: *Depeche Mode* and the Allegory of the Postsocialist Hero

Douglas Rogers and Katherine Verdery begin their article on postsocialist political economy by distinguishing between historical contexts in which capitalism might be viewed as in a process of construction or expansion. Against this trajectory, they posit an Eastern European context facing “deconstitution” and an unprecedented capitalist infiltration into the sociocultural sphere (Rogers and Verdery 439). From the widespread collapse of socialist structures and institutions, Rogers and Verdery cite deviant postsocialist consumer practices to illustrate how the public’s idiosyncratic consumer practices and attachment to the patterns of consumption under socialism characterized the introduction of an ostensibly “mass” mode of consumption. At the level of the commodity, new consumer goods imported a distinct political content; what was supposed in the West to initiate the postsocialist subject into the “democracy and freedom” of choice, however, in reality inspired anxiety, superstition, and nostalgia as families suspiciously retained socialist-era products and appliances alongside the latest goods, and individuals self-consciously confronted now unrecognizable staples, such as foreign-looking breads (Rogers and Verdery 446-447). The commodity, then, comes to represent a form of shock to Eastern Europeans dwelling amidst the ruins of socialist political economy. The commodity inspires, in effect, an incessant revaluation of the postsocialist subject’s standpoint in relation to the fragmentation of socialist historical narrative. Coupled with this fragmentation of historical narrative, the commodity likewise signals the destruction of past social networks, seeming to demand that the subject excavate some sense of collectivity from amidst a dilapidated sociocultural scaffolding.

Drawing on this effort to understand the transformations of postsocialist society through everyday consumer culture, this chapter takes up the allegorical significance of the commodity in Benjamin's writings on consumer culture in 19th-century Paris to explore the interplay of commodity and social space in Serhiy Zhadan's *Depeche Mode* (2004). Both Benjamin and Zhadan mobilize an allegorical reading of the subject's relation to the commodity to express the character of ruin immanent in their respective apprehensions of the past. While Benjamin's description of the allegorical character of the commodity and the treatment of the commodity as the object of a modern allegory offers a means of developing the sociocultural significance of Zhadan's caricatures of postsocialist life in Kharkiv, Ukraine, the distinct modes of production between the two contexts need to be addressed prior to interpreting Zhadan's representations of postsocialist urban allegories. In Benjamin's formulation, the commodity's significance in modern urban experience belongs to its existence within a cycle of production and obsolescence, one in which the commodity lacks a substantive use-value and in which the symbolic value attributed to the commodity is itself slated to become irrelevant at the whims of the fickleness of fashion. For Zhadan, however, nostalgia appears to take precedence over fashion, with the significance of the commodity subverted, not by fashion, but with reference to the aforementioned "deconstitution" of productive labour and social practice. This chapter, then, will begin by determining the extent to which a comparison of the emerging capitalist mode of production in Paris and the disintegrating socialist modes of production in Kharkiv might likewise reconstitute Benjamin's formulation of the commodity, and later, how an appreciation of this changed context might offer a means of apprehending postsocialist urban allegories for everyday life in Zhadan's work.

In Benjamin's writings on allegory in the Baroque German *trauerspiel* and 19th-century Paris, the allegorical mode of perception derives its critical potential from the expression of the transience and incessant ruination of history. In his initial formulation of allegorical representation in *The Origins of the German Trauerspiel*, Benjamin's withdrawn habilitation thesis on Baroque drama, Benjamin describes the connection between history and allegory in terms of an accumulation of fragmented experiences into a "ruin":

When, with the *trauerspiel*, history enters the scene, it does so as script. "History" stands written on nature's countenance in the sign-script of transience. The allegorical physiognomy of natural history, which is brought onstage in the *trauerspiel*, is actually present as ruin. In the ruin, history has passed perceptibly into the setting. And so configured, history finds expression not as process of an eternal life but as process of incessant decline. Allegory thereby positions itself beyond beauty. Allegories are in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things. (*Trauerspiel* 188)

In such a configuration, the allegorical mode of perception relegates history to the status of a backdrop for human action, but one in which this "setting" represents a melancholic accumulation of thoughts that "incessant[ly]" fail to construct a coherent framework for human experience. Furthermore, the analogy Benjamin uses between allegory and thought, on the one hand, and ruins and things, on the other, suggests that this configuration of the allegorical functions at two levels. Allegory both arranges isolated elements of the Baroque drama against a celebration of human life in a holistic, cyclical conception of nature, and signals its own impotence as an attempt to establish a coherent conception of human action and history. Allegory, then, becomes not merely a convention for representing the relations between humans

and the world, but is “beyond beauty” insofar as it operates at the level of everyday perception as an expression of a particular sociocultural mode of experiencing the world.

Benjamin later extends the allegorical fragmentation of historical experience into a critique of progress and modernity. In his analysis of Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* from “On the Concept of History,” Benjamin distinguishes between the telos of modern historical narratives and the experience of historical time embodied by the “angel of history,” writing:

Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling up wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.
(“Concept of History” 392)

Apart from the contrast established between “*us*” and the angel, “progress” and “*this* storm,” through the emphasis placed on these pronouns and the article “this,” Benjamin undermines the attempt to organize history into a “chain of events” that “we call progress” with his image of modernity as an “irresistible” storm that “drives [the angel] into the future,” “piling up wreckage upon wreckage” into “one single catastrophe.” Against the sense of agency the historicist attributes to humanity’s movement through time, the capacity for human action and thought to serve as a foundation to realize some ideal conception of existence and civilization, Benjamin’s angel of history inhabits a standpoint sufficiently removed from history to recognize it as a ceaseless process of ruination and yet is nevertheless unable to intervene so as to lend the past a definitive form of cohesion. In this sense, Benjamin’s angel of history is allegorical insofar as he

represents a mode of relating to modernity as the fragmentation of historical experience and is likewise unable to establish a form of narrative cohesion out of this awareness.

In Benjamin's study of allegory in Baudelaire's poetry, the reemergence of allegory in modern Paris represents the ruination of mid-19th-century conceptions of social utopia signaled by the rise of commodity culture. Writing on the decadence of the Parisian bourgeoisie in an unpublished essay on Baudelaire and allegory, "Central Park," Benjamin supplants the role of nature in Baroque allegory with the "nature" of the market in Baudelaire, where the rise of commodity culture represents a continuous failure both to imagine and to realize a utopian organization of industrial society ("Central Park" 37). As an attempt to "humanize the commodity," Baudelaire's mobilization of allegory possesses, "in contradistinction to that of the Baroque, traces of wrath which was at such a pitch as to break into this world and to leave its harmonious structures in ruins" ("Central Park" 42). That is, Benjamin's commentary on Baudelaire's poetry draws attention to the poet's capacity to reproduce the power of Baroque nature to subvert historical narrative and in so doing to situate bourgeois preoccupations with the commodity amidst the ruination and detritus of the broken promises invested in these objects. As an object produced within a particular socioeconomic context, the isolation of the commodity in Baudelaire's deployment of allegory represents an attempt to demystify reified commodities by illustrating the ensuing ruination of contemporary social relations and experiences from this process. In another sense, however, the secondary significance of allegory as a melancholic mode of perception immanent in the poet ties this form of experience to a specific context, namely the falling out of fashion of the social utopias conceived earlier in the 19th century.

Benjamin's preoccupation with allegorical form, then, represents an attempt to address how the modern city dweller confronts the tension between mysticism and materialism in a

political economy characterized by commodity fetishism. In a recent article that challenges the seeming contradiction between Marxist and theological motifs in Benjamin's work, "The Angel of History and the Commodity Fetish," Duy Lap Nguyen draws attention to the correspondence of Benjamin's mixture of theology and materialism with Marx's own understanding of mysticism and political economy in *Capital*:

In Marx's critical analysis of capitalism, commodity fetishism is defined not as an empty illusion or ideology, but rather as an objective form of appearance, one that does not simply distort or disguise an underlying economic reality, but which, on the contrary, constitutes the illusory and mystical foundation of the economic as such. In texts such as *Capital*, therefore, the question of the relationship between the base and the superstructure is displaced in a critical analysis in which "religion"—in the secularized form of commodity fetishism—constitutes the condition of capitalism itself. (Nguyen 341)

Here, Nguyen defines commodity fetishism, not as a particular ideological expression or reality, a "superstructure," constructed on a capitalist political economy, the "base," but rather as representing "the condition of capitalism itself," "the illusory and mystical foundation of the economic as such." According to Nguyen's analysis, Marx's and Benjamin's engagement with commodity fetishism seems to offer an opportunity to go beyond the reduction of sociocultural discourses to political economy. Instead, both explore how experience and social practice give rise to particular socioeconomic structures. Benjamin's exploration of the modern allegory of the commodity derives its significance, then, not merely from an understanding of the critical potential of allegory in poetic representation, but also in suggesting that allegory approximates a

form of existence characteristic of the spiritual life of the modern city dweller responsible for the perpetuation of a capitalist political economy.

This preoccupation with commodity fetishism as a condition of capitalism distinguishes Benjamin's work from that of other critical theorists engaging with capitalism and culture through the play of economic base and sociocultural superstructure. In their description of mass culture and commodification in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer define mass culture in terms of the manipulation of consumer needs into a unified system, a "rationality of domination" that organizes reality into a "cycle of manipulation and retroactive need" predicated on "the power of those whose economic position in society is strongest" (Adorno and Horkheimer 95). Here, Adorno and Horkheimer subordinate the formal arrangement and particular expressions of consumer culture to the power of monopoly capitalism. With this subordination of culture to economics, artistic production and the reception of art likewise become subject to the demands of the market:

[A]s the demand for the marketability of art becomes total, a shift in the inner economic composition of cultural commodities is becoming apparent... In adapting itself entirely to need, the work of art defrauds human beings in advance of the liberation from the principle of utility which it is supposed to bring about. What might be called use value in the reception of cultural assets is being replaced by exchange value; enjoyment is giving way to being there and being in the know, connoisseurship by enhanced prestige.

(Adorno and Horkheimer 128)

Where art prior to the intervention of "marketability" derived its use value from being useless, from liberating the subject from "the principle of utility," the commodification of the artwork under capitalism supplants "enjoyment" and "connoisseurship" with "being there and being in

the know” and “enhanced prestige.” That is, Adorno and Horkheimer understand the transformation of use and exchange values in terms of how the market and economic power reconstitute sociocultural values. In such a configuration, consumer culture in general, and commodity fetishism in particular, merely represent an expression of political economy, an expression that subsequently works to bolster the legitimacy of this economic system. Though Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis of experience and commodification reflects a portion of Benjamin’s treatment of the ruination of experience and social relations in allegorical representation, namely the attempt to understand the influence of political economy on cultural expression, Adorno and Horkheimer largely forego an analysis of subjective perception and appearance themselves, relegating to the relation of base to superstructure what Benjamin understands as a significant constituent of how political economy takes its form.

While scholarship on Benjamin’s urban allegories tends to emphasize this connection between ruin and the commodification of experience in his treatment of the modern metropolis, the assumption of a common trajectory for the development of a global capitalism tends to obscure how sociocultural responses to commodification differ between regions. In *Myth and Metropolis*, Graeme Gilloch stresses that the interconnections between commodity and allegory in Benjamin’s analysis of Baudelaire of necessity derives their significance from an urban context, without which scholars miss the melancholic aspect animating Benjamin’s representations of both Baroque and modern experience (Gilloch 138). Drawing attention to this urban context for modern allegory, Gilloch’s concern with a particular urban context in itself presupposes a singular mode of capitalist political economy originating in Paris, and yet serving as a universal concept for other regional and urban contexts common to an ostensibly ubiquitous urban modernity. Likewise, Susan Buck-Morss’ treatment of commodity and allegory in *The*

Dialectics of Seeing generalizes the context of commodity culture from the 19th century to establish her defining theme for the analysis of the commodity and historical experience. In Buck-Morss' configuration, the appropriation of Baroque allegory in modern poetry illustrates the "political resignation of Baudelaire and his contemporaries which ultimately ontologizes the emptiness of the historical experience of the commodity, the new as the always-the-same" (*Dialectics of Seeing* 201). That is, the modern "historical experience of the commodity" represents the loss of contiguous social relations and experiences to the consumption of reified consumer goods, themselves caught in a cycle of production and disposal subject to the whims of fashion in contemporary consumer culture.

This sort of ontology predicated on the subversion of utopian projects by cycles of artificial consumer demand endemic to capitalist political economy, however, differs from the artificial scarcity that served as the setting for postsocialist society's encounter with commodity culture. Drawing on ethnographic data and a structural analysis of consumption in socialist societies, Katherine Verdery describes a process she refers to as the "politicization of consumption," where the state's neglect of consumer desires spurred the emergence of an intricate web of social relations, a "second economy," directed at reappropriating products from a centralized state economy (Verdery 27). In her study, Verdery reports that farmers and labourers routinely stole tools and other materials from their state-run workplaces to perform services outside of their scheduled work hours for extra pay, and store clerks often secretly hoarded scarce consumables to sell at a premium to wealthier and more influential customers against the dictates of the organized economy (Verdery 27). Along with this subversive network of social relations, the politicization of consumption represents the contestation of what constitutes a basic need, so much so that Verdery offers the following distinction between the

treatment of consumer desire in capitalism and socialism: “[Capitalism] repeatedly renders desire concrete and specific, and offers specific—if ever-changing—goods to satisfy it. Socialism, in contrast, aroused desire *without* focalizing it, and kept it alive by deprivation” (Verdery 28).

Where capitalist consumption amounts to “[n]aming troubled states, labeling them as needs, and finding commodities to fill them,” socialist consumption “rested not on devising infinite kinds of things to sell people but on [the state] claiming to satisfy people’s basic needs,” regardless of customer demands or the actual availability of goods to the people (Verdery 28). So where capitalist production commodifies the desires of consumers, supplanting social relations and experiences with a cycle of fashion and obsolescence, central planning in socialist societies effectively produced desires, relations, and experiences out of material scarcity. Turning to Zhadan’s *Depeche Mode*, this sense of the politicization of consumption serves as the setting for allegorical representations of the emergence of commodity culture in postsocialist Ukraine.

Deeply ironic and self-effacing, Zhadan’s *Depeche Mode* follows the rambling and often drunken adventures of three loosely associated comrades set in Kharkiv, Ukraine, 1993. Each character serves as a particular configuration of internal tension and contradiction that often borders on caricature: Dogg Pavlov is an antisemitic Jew, Vasia the Communist is a would-be entrepreneur, and the poet-narrator Zhadan struggles with documenting the apparent non-event of being young, unemployed, and homeless amidst the smoldering ruin of socialism. The impetus for the story is the somewhat arbitrary external demand on the trio to find another of their associates, Sasha Carburetor, to tell him that his step-father has committed suicide. This underlying demand to deliver the news of this most recent death belies the characters’ actions and spurs a number of side-adventures and encounters with a cast of equally disenchanting and complicated youths. Punctuated by rabid marketers, American evangelists, nostalgic

communists, corrupt police, and pop music, the fragmented narrative shifts between listlessness and erratic action without sign of any concrete conflict or resolution until the concluding chapter. Littered with time-stamps breaking up each subsequent chapter, the final chapter features the long-anticipated meeting between the narrator and Carburetor at a train station in the country. Here it is revealed that the entire narrative is the narrator's recollection of events up to this point, an ambiguous act aimed in part at determining, but mostly deferring, whether or not to deliver news of the suicide to Carburetor at all. The story ends without resolution, as the oblivious birthday-boy, Carburetor, blathers on about how nice the country is, and the lone narrator broods over the seemingly meaningless and cyclical nature of existence.

While scholarship on Zhadan's *Depeche Mode* often focuses on the sense of community produced amidst broader social decay, the mobilization of allegorical perception and the socioeconomic dimension of the encounter between East and West in a postsocialist context remain largely unexplored. In Ukrainian language and literature scholar Maxim Tarnawsky's chapter on *Depeche Mode*, "Images of Bonding and Social Decay," Tarnawsky develops an analysis suggesting that the narrative takes as its theme the attempt to establish a sense of community through the collective negotiation of socioeconomic collapse, with the occlusion of human contact in postsocialist society spurring moral and cultural decadence (Tarnawsky 268-269). Tarnawsky extends this failure to the East-West encounters epitomized in representations of, among other things, the concert of a Southern Evangelist and a broadcast of the British rock band Depeche Mode. In his analysis, the comic failure of these stand-ins for western culture to relate to the youth of Kharkiv results from a concrete language barrier, the frequent mistranslations and general incompetence of the audience and producer (Tarnawsky 269-270). This emphasis on mistranslation effectively essentializes the differences between East and West

at the expense of the narrative's more pervasive skepticism towards authority, be it the continuity of a corrupt police force or the slick corporate spokesperson. Likewise, this emphasis downplays the narrator's sense of alienation from the introduction of new, globalized cultural products to postsocialist society, which risks supposing the narrative might in any case acquiesce to the equation of western pop culture formulas to the everyday experience of widespread sociopolitical and economic collapse in Kharkiv.

Tarnasky's analysis also understates the allegorical potential of the imagery in *Depeche Mode*. In one of the most anticipated encounters of the novel, the narrator, Vasias, and Chapai, a self-described Marxist-Leninist agitator riddled with clap, travel across Kharkiv to a Roma camp to buy some weed from Yurik, a former member of the Kyiv cultural committee under Soviet rule. Redolent in medieval imagery and arcane practices, a comic but palpable sense of tension underlies the narrator's confrontation with the makeshift cinderblock camp. Cataracts, chickens, cannons, axes, and instruments of torture, real and imagined associations, loom in the narrator's peripherals, culminating in a disturbing encounter with a dead fish, hollowed out by a swarm of bees, on Yurik's windowsill:

Yurik enters with a package of dope, sees me by the fish, and can't tear his eyes from it either, the bees crawl in again, and there's something so horrific in this that we all gaze transfixed at this devilish fish—me, and Vasias, and Chapai, and Yurik—and even the crucified Jesus visible under the latter's shirt looks very attentively at the Roma fish that has been devoured by bees and cannot turn away... I still hear how the bees quietly move their feet in the fish's belly, though, perhaps, it only seemed to me that I did. (Zhadan 96)

In Tarnawsky's estimation, the fish symbolizes social decay through its "initially enticing exterior and putrid substance" (Tarnawsky 274). However, apart from the initially anxious

description of the dead fish disturbing Tarnawsky's claim that it ever possessed even a figuratively "enticing exterior," the isolation of this image from the context of the passage, and from the broader setting of the narrative, unsettles the possibility of locating a stable symbolic content in the dead fish. Rather, the comic shock and revulsion produced by the image of the dead fish results from its apparently arbitrary, yet focal, placement within an equally arbitrary, yet captivating, diversion from the supposed plot of the story. That the very narrative of this story develops as a cyclical effort to forestall its own resolution destabilizes the attempt to locate a symbolic content for objects outside of this sort of eternal return of the same dead fish.

Though an initial reading of the narrative holds out the possibility of locating a redemptive symbolic content in the representation of the world, the revelation of the narrative's cyclical structure stymies the elevation of objects as symbols and instead locates their significance as objects of a melancholy, allegorical gaze. At the end of the novel, the narrator sits alone with the oblivious Carburetor, reflecting on his absurd journey to deliver the ultimately unwanted news of the suicide of someone neither known nor particularly liked:

I look at the asphalt and see a snail crawling up to my bread, he's tired, exhausted by depressions, he stretches out his disgusting mug in the direction of my bread, then disappointedly pulls it back into his shell and begins to crawl back away from us to the west—to the other side of the platform. I think there's enough road there to last him his whole life. (Zhadan 198)

As the closing lines of the novel, the narrator's melancholy preoccupation with the snail comes to represent the allegorical trajectory of the narrative up to this point. A reprehensible snail reaches its ostensible goal, and after attaining a fruitless victory that effectively renders the whole arduous journey futile, slides "back into his shell" and begins to repeat the degrading,

Sisyphian struggle after nothing all over again. This cyclical, melancholy, and futile aspect of lived experience provides the impetus for what Benjamin describes as the allegorical mode of perception in *Trauerspiel*. Against a symbolic mode of representation that aims to redeem a tragic human existence through the spiritual realization of absolute ideals, the allegorical preoccupation with the material world and body in the Baroque *Trauerspiel* demands that “the characters... die because only thus, as corpses, do they enter the allegorical homeland. They go to rack and ruin not for the sake of immortality but for the sake of the corpse... From the standpoint of death, life is production of corpses” (*Trauerspiel* 236). That is, this allegorical mode of perception derives its legitimacy from an *a priori* ontological claim, a claim that insists on perceiving human action as a series of repeated and inevitable failures to realize a meaningful existence for ideal conceptions of the world. Insofar as the ending of *Depeche Mode* posits such a claim through the narrative’s cyclical formal construction and general lack of resolution, an analysis of the images in the text reveals their demand to be understood allegorically and in relation to the particular setting produced by the ending of the narrative.

Much like Yurik’s dead fish, the appearance of the band, Depeche Mode, resists the attempt to locate a symbolic content for this ostensible encounter between Eastern and Western youth cultures. In one of the novel’s signature moments of profound inactivity, Vasia and the narrator sit stoned on a stranger’s couch listening to an apocryphal radio show about Depeche Mode, with musical accompaniment by one “stepan haliabarda [sic],”² a description of which is worth quoting at length here:

The composition really does begin, and immediately drives us insane, this stepan haliabarda puts so much hallucinogen into his synthesizer, the sound is so terrible, that it

² A strange transliteration of Степан Галябарда, in Ukrainian popular culture a poet and former radio executive

can't fail to drive you insane, they probably deliberately hired [him] to work on the radio, just so they can mess things up and drive listeners out of their minds after five seconds of their musical compositions, just so that he—this incredible and unreal stepan haliabarda—can touch the plastic of his synthesizer with his soft hairy fingers—and snap—your guts start turning inside out and you're transformed into a weapon of the Lord's providence and cannot move from the radio until they give you the weather forecast... (Zhadan 150-151)

At the level of immediate experience, the composition of stepan haliabarda, and the radio program more generally, represents an abortive encounter with the band that gives the novel its name. Marketed as a symbol of artistic resistance and freedom by the radio station (Zhadan 152-153), neither the band nor its music appears in any substantive form in the passage, but instead, merely serves as a means of rebranding the radio station's authority to determine popular culture. In this sense, the radio program perpetuates the deprivation of desire that Verdery draws from her analysis of socialist consumer culture, but does so in the guise of fashion and access to foreign cultural products. This immediate experience of Depeche Mode in the novel, then, functions allegorically insofar as this seemingly insignificant fragment illustrates the continuity of repressive sociocultural structures between Soviet rule and globalization.

Apart from the allegorical character evinced by the apparent stagnation of historical experience in the narrative, the narrator's impotence lends the passage an allegorical quality in the vein of Benjamin's conception of modern experience. In the narrator's lost encounter with Depeche Mode, the paranoid, rambling stream-of-consciousness narration further undercuts the narrative's juxtaposition of Soviet rule and globalization. Here, the narrator's intoxication serves as the impetus for a rant that vacillates between paranoid conspiracy, the transformation of the

listener into “a weapon of the Lord’s providence,” and the creatural minutia associated with the instrument of this conspiracy, the transformative power of stepan haliabarda’s “soft hairy fingers.” While the context of the passage develops the repressive aspect of cultural institutions between socialist and capitalist political economies latent in the broadcast, this ambivalent narrative perspective itself operates within a more global allegorical framework that defines the character of perception in the narrative. As the narrator’s capacity to depict the abuses of power endemic to socialist and postsocialist society increases, the narrator’s own sense of authority diminishes and his capacity to produce something approaching an immanent critique of his surroundings declines. Rather, the narrator’s reception of the postsocialist commodity appears to reproduce the material scarcity of socialist society in perception, thereby suspending a sort of erratic desire for a commodity that will never exist.

To understand the reception of the commodity in postsocialist Kharkiv, then, requires an awareness of how the failure of socialism produced a particular sociocultural context with an affinity for an allegorical apprehension of the world. Where Benjamin’s conception of allegory reemerges from the Baroque in the poetic representations of modern Paris, representations brooding over the broken promise of an industrialized political economy to produce an egalitarian society out of material abundance, *Depeche Mode* establishes a continuity between the experience of arbitrary authority in both socialist and the emerging capitalist political economies. This insight fails to attain the redemptive character of symbolic representation, the enshrinement of some ideal beyond the corrupt machinations of socialist and postsocialist consumer culture, due to the implication of the narrative’s perspective in the perpetuation of this repressive historical condition. The narrative functions allegorically, then, through the subsumption of narrative structure and imagery to the incessant failure to define a positive

expression of freedom in historical experience, a failure extending from socialist to postsocialist urban experience. While the emergence of commodity culture initiates this allegorical mode of perception's precedence over utopian fantasy in Benjamin's conception of modernity, the introduction of the commodity into postsocialist consumer culture merely perpetuates the material scarcity experienced under socialism as a sort of interiorized, spiritual confrontation with the city. In this sense, however, the postsocialist commodity presents an alternative means of realizing what Benjamin later refers to as the heroism of modern city life, a characteristically two-fold confrontation of the poet-hero with the city who perceives their world allegorically as a form of resistance, and lives allegorically, as a consequence of their embeddedness in a cyclical conception of historical experience.

In Benjamin's account of modern heroism, the poet-hero struggles in vain against their allegorical condition. In his work on social experience and modernity, *Fragments of Modernity*, David Frisby describes the relationship of the poet to an allegorical framework in terms of a self-effacing resistance to boredom with the alleged novelty of modern fashion, as well as a melancholy brooding over the detritus of abandoned social fantasies for the future (Frisby 263-264). In Gilloch's account, this form of self-effacement culminates in the internalization of the archetypes of modern urban experience: "the *Flâneur*, gambler, prostitute, and ragpicker" (Gilloch 166). Just as Baudelaire's commodity becomes an allegorical object, one pointing to the decline of modern historical experience without providing a symbolic or redemptive content, the poet becomes an "allegorical figure," self-reflexively appropriating the dominant characteristics associated with passersby without the hope of reconstituting or escaping the ruined promise of meaningful urban experience (Gilloch 166-167). That is, this formulation of modern heroism affirms a melancholy struggle against the boredom of an eternally recurring and superficial ebb

of fashionable objects and thoughts not only deprived of a future, but actively subverting the possibility of an alternative from emerging. Here, the subject not only disappears into the crowd, but becomes a stand-in for a veritable crowd of urban caricatures, attaining the status of hero only insofar as they recognize their situation within a modern Trauerspiel.

This modern Trauerspiel, however, corresponds to Baudelaire's particular struggle with the eternal present of modern fashion in 19th-century Paris. Counterposing the then fashionable Rimbaud to Baudelaire, Benjamin sums up the representation of modern heroism in Baudelaire's poetry with the paradoxical statement: "Baudelaire's poetry makes the new appear within the ever-always-the-same and the ever-always-the-same within the new," thus demonstrating his commitment to spurn nostalgia for a life "at the heart of irreality (of appearance)" ("Central Park" 43). This concomitant collapse of the same and the new within one another supports Frisby's emphasis on the role of boredom in Baudelaire's poetry insofar as his poetry represents a repetitive effort to unsettle the sense of novelty ostensibly "at the heart" of modern life. Against the nostalgic appeal to some past or otherwise lost token of affection, Baudelaire challenges the artificial cycle of consumption and disposal endemic to his contemporary consumer culture by appropriating its self-destructive logic as a personal motto. The invective against nostalgia, here, derives from an aversion towards identifying with a commodified experience, an identification which might leave the poet vulnerable to the whims of fashion. Although this disposition offers a sort of reprieve from the immediate context of 19th-century consumer culture, one characterized by social impotence and historical decline, the poet's intervention at the level of appearance to contest the illusions of the marketplace commits them to yet another allegorical bind. The modern poet's futile attempt to distance themselves from the cycle of fashion imposed by the marketplace entails an isolation from contemporary social

practice and lived experience, an isolation that seems to acquiesce to the slow grinding inertia of this stage of capitalist political economy.

Despite Benjamin's valorization of the modern poet-hero's self-reflexive, allegorical orientation to their surroundings, the isolation of this hero from social practice and lived experience risks depriving their ostensible struggle of even the semblance of conflict with their socioeconomic context. In her *Dialectics of Seeing*, Buck-Morss illustrates the implicit "political resignation of Baudelaire and his contemporaries," a resignation that "ultimately ontologizes the emptiness of the historical experience of the commodity, the new as the always-the-same" (*Dialectics of Seeing* 201). In this sense, allegorical perception represents a mode of existing amidst the collapsed meaning of historical experience and coping with the inevitability of these collapses brought about by the dominance of the commodity in the public imagination. As Buck-Morss continues, however, Benjamin does not himself dwell in the allegorical, but figures the allegorical as a moment in the object's "cultural transmission," itself an "ur-history" that aspires to a "political actualization" of "the traces left by the object's after-history, the conditions of its decay" for the sake of spurring a "political awakening" through the "presence of mind" of the object's utopian potential (*Dialectics of Seeing* 219-220). Returning to the significance of the modern allegorist in Benjamin's critique of 19th-century commodity culture, the allegory of the modern hero preserves the conditions of decay and transmission necessary for the political actualization of utopian projects in the 20th century.

As demonstrated previously in this chapter, however, the context for Zhadan's allegorical representation of postsocialist Kharkiv follows a different pattern from the wasted abundance Benjamin cites in his analysis of Baudelaire's poetry and Western political economy in general. Drawing on interviews with the inhabitants of Moscow to form an ethnography of postsocialist

consumer culture, Olga Shevchenko, in her article “Between the Holes,” describes the pervasive distrust of “trade as opposed to production” and “members of ethnic diasporas which are stereotypically considered to be the ones carrying out the bulk of trading activity” (Shevchenko 845). Although Shevchenko suggests that this prejudice is as misplaced as it is pervasive, this attitude emphasizes a more universal distrust for the exchange value of commodities and “highlight[s] the responsibility of the police for [the] perpetuation of the unfair market practices” in postsocialist consumer culture, one indelibly tied to both the unrealized promise of abundance and the historic scarcity of resources in everyday experience under socialism (Shevchenko 845-846). While the ceaseless imposition of exchange value at the expense of social relations served as the focal point for the allegorical setting of Benjamin’s formulation of consumer culture in 19th-century Paris, the inverse presents itself in the context of postsocialist consumer culture. Rather, production and the social relations associated with the commodity’s production remain central to consumer practices, and instead, an apparently nebulous but malign force, sometimes institutional, sometimes ethnic, subverts this network of relations to perpetuate socioeconomic scarcity and spread suspicion amongst members of a collective.

This pervasive yet equally scarce sense of external authority becomes the focal point for Zhadan’s own allegorical mobilization of a postsocialist hero. In this vein, *Depeche Mode* actively parodies the sporadic appearance of Soviet propaganda for its blundering attempts to inspire the revival of communism while betraying its own alienation from the community. In a pamphlet the narrator reads to pass time on the train, the Party of Ukrainian Communists preface their instruction manual on how the average school child can assemble explosives ranging from napalm to nitroglycerine by noting how “if correctly assimilated, [the materials of the pamphlet] will help you understand not only theoretically but also practically the principles and tendencies

of development of the social-productive relations in contemporary society” (Zhadan 166). As the pamphlet continues, the ever-increasing scale and complexity of the explosives expected for a schoolchild to manufacture at home illustrates both the antisocial and destructive character of the communist party’s understanding of “social-productive relations.” Instead, the narrative’s momentary lapse into the perspective of seemingly anachronistic propaganda represents the ubiquity of an insidious, if comic, force of social subversion, amounting to a call for cohesion at the expense of the collective and its future. Much like Benjamin’s modern allegorical figure, the narrative self-consciously adopts the perspective of propaganda to locate an otherwise vague, global sense of coercion in everyday experience.

Although this expression of a repressive external authority through the narrative displays a sort of self-effacement characteristic of Baudelaire’s mimicry of the modern metropolitan crowd, the narrator in *Depeche Mode* presents these allegorical figures to preserve a sense of authentic social relation beyond the corruption of ideological or institutional repression. During another intoxicated interlude with Chapai the communist, Chapai elaborates his theory of “permanent fuck-all-ism,” which he derives from the correspondence between Marx and Engels, and advocates the total cessation of any productive labour and living off the accumulated wealth of capitalism and socialism for the 67 years that these resources would ostensibly last (Zhadan 99-100). In a tangent appended to the theory of permanent fuck-all-ism, the narrator unwittingly draws the following allegory of everyday social life from the conversation:

Life is a spaceship, and once you have climbed into it you have to sit still and not touch anything, just be ready for radical changes in your life. In any case, you sure will not have any children. Or even—good sex. You have to take this into account from the very beginning—you have to choose between sex and outer space, and it is an important

choice, because any fucking in the world, even the most subversive fucking, is not worth the sublime and beautiful that opens up before your eyes in the field of the spaceship's searchlight; there are horizons in your life, there are landscapes that are worth paying for with the most precious thing you have, namely your erection, but to understand this, you need to be at least an astronaut, or an angel, which in the conditions of capitalism's collapse amounts to one and the same thing. (Zhadan 106-107)

The superimposition of this passage over the theory of permanent fuck-all-ism plays at offering an interpretation of permanent fuck-all-ism's latent meaning from an aloof perspective, and in the process, simultaneously posits an even more obfuscating allegory of intoxicated conversation that only further implicates the narrative perspective in this setting. Parsing this confusion of images, a spaceship stands in for life, with the arbitrary demand to not have sex, that is, to be productive, a precondition for inclusion in a cohesive social life oriented towards an ideal nevertheless external to life, an ideal whose comprehension requires one to stand outside of life, as an astronaut-angel. In this sense, the utopian dimension Benjamin aspires to actualize in the excavation of the modern allegory already presents itself in *Depeche Mode*. However, this promise of utopia serves to impose arbitrary and exclusionary conditions to provide an ideal form for social relations that is already immanent in everyday life, or more pointedly, immanent in the languid philosophizing of a loosely associated community.

Benjamin's modern poet-hero and Zhadan's postsocialist narrator-hero each represent allegorical figures with respect to their historical settings. Where Benjamin's modern hero struggles against the appropriation of social relations under capital by standing in for a crowd alienated from historical experience, Zhadan's postsocialist hero stands in for or posits the nebulous institutional power responsible for the historic fragmentation of social relations. Each

hero represents a futile attempt to cope with their historical setting, with Baudelaire unable to actualize a political stance capable of challenging the dominant socioeconomic order, and Zhadan's narrator unable to establish a lucid alternative to the play of superstition and domination without effacing the authority of his claims. Through the cultural transmission of this modern bind, Benjamin suggests that the excavation of this content from archaic commodities offers the possibility of awakening the early 19th century's proclivity for social fantasy in modern politics. Conversely, Zhadan's narrator shifts the focus from the commodity to the cultural transmission of power in social discourse, suggesting that the simple sense of collectivity necessary to produce a utopian project, and not the project itself, ought to be the desired end of sociocultural organization.

Conclusion

Each of the preceding chapters seeks to illustrate the interplay of three major themes shared between Benjamin's writing on urban experience and the works of Oksana Zabuzhko, Yuri Andrukhovych, and Serhiy Zhadan: the compatibility of a critique of historical metanarratives with the pursuit of a utopian project; the value of fragmentation and shock in critical discourse; and the correspondence of the everyday with universal experiences. Just as elements of shock, fragmentation, and allegory appear in both Benjamin's writing and the works of Zabuzhko, Andrukhovych, and Zhadan, these themes interrelate and find a unique form of expression in each of the works.

In Benjamin's characterization of experience as *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* and Zabuzhko's inversion of the significance of the Chernobyl disaster as a national myth, each writer interrogates the historical metanarratives legitimizing a particular sociocultural expression of collectivity. The superimposition of a fragmented domestic experience onto national narrative unsettles the attempt to represent a disruption of the private and domestic as an extension of a singular historical tragedy. Rather, this inversion of the private and public spheres provokes a reevaluation of the relation between domestic life and national narrative, with narratives of national tragedy serving to repress the mass trauma of everyday gender dynamics. Against viewing the domestic as an extension of the nation, or else some separate sphere of innocence momentarily and tragically the victim of historical events, the repression of the domestic inspires the transmission of national myths that promote a conciliatory sense of mass identity. In this sense, the national scale of the myth corresponds to the ubiquity of the disruption in everyday domestic experience. That is, it is not the mass identity mobilized in national myths but a universal compulsion, the defensive identification with this mass identity that represents a

legitimate expression of collectivity in this context. While this sort of revelation demystifies the attempt to predicate social utopian fantasies on an idyllic, and ultimately illusory, conception of domestic life, the recognition of this tendency provides the basis for a reimagined sense of collectivity and productive collective action.

Likewise, Benjamin's *Denkbilder* and the use of magical realist strategies by Andrukhovych illustrate the intoxication of myth in modern cultural discourse. Each writer appeals to an immanence of experience in their representations of Moscow that both implicitly and explicitly manifests as a sort of ecstatic intoxication with their surroundings. Far from an occasion to merely project their idiosyncratic fantasies onto their surroundings, this form of altered perception serves to illustrate the pervasive influence of historical metanarratives in the conscious apprehension of the modern cityscape. Indeed, the built environment and urban population come to embody specific elements of these narratives and approach the form of merely discursive objects. The incessant and often irreverent combination and recombination of these discursive objects as such performs the contemporary disparity between historical narrative and everyday experience and, by demonstrating the inherent artifice of the narration of experience, simultaneously intimates the possibility of creative intervention in the sociopolitical organization of everyday life. With this creative potential, however, remains a preoccupation with the complicity of everyday perception in the maintenance of the status quo and the repetitive expression of violence from ostensibly unique narrative accounts of historical experience. Though an awareness of the extent to which this creative potential might be and has been coopted as a means of naturalizing historical repression and violence tempers the explicit expression of this potential as a coherent system or critique, the ecstatic and provocative enactment of this ideal gestures at the possibility of founding an alternative organization of

society while preserving the demand that this alternative represent a revolutionary departure from a contemporary sensibility.

Benjamin's and Zhadan's conceptions of allegorical representation further dwell on the ruined promise of ostensibly novel historical forms for everyday urban experience. Despite the influx of commodities and seeming material abundance accompanying the rise of modern capitalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union, these new consumer cultures nevertheless fail to provide the conditions for a utopian organization of society. Rather, the commodity's claim to embodying the desires of the urban populace merely alienates the subject from their ideal sense of existence, and furthermore, stymies the manifestation of this ideal form in reality. The mobilization of allegory as a formal strategy of a composition possesses this self-reflexive, as well as outwardly critical, aspect. Allegorical representation works to illuminate the complicity of both social norms and their critique in the cyclical constitution and deconstitution of ideal forms of social organization. Through allegory, the modern and postsocialist heroes embody the tension between powerlessness and desire symptomatic of their time and place in history. Although allegory draws on specific and fragmentary experiences of a particular historical moment, the allegory of the modern and postsocialist poet-hero also possesses a sort of transhistorical content separate from modern socioeconomic structures, where the poet-hero's daily struggle becomes an expression of the collective experience of history.

Given the persistent slippage of this exploration of urban experience from the concrete to the metaphysical, to say nothing of the proliferation of "gestures," "intimations," and general figurations throughout, this project appears to suffer for omitting a protracted engagement with Benjamin's conception of history and the messianic. In brief, it does, and the messianic ought to be pursued more fully in future work. As some small consolation, though, this project might

instead be seen to perform what Benjamin describes as the task of the critic in his early essay on the philosophy of history, “The Life of Students” (1915), thus approximating the shape of the messianic in Benjamin and postsocialist Ukrainian literature at the expense of a preoccupation with the concept as such:

The following remarks... concern a particular condition in which history rests concentrated, as in a focal point, something seen from time immemorial in the utopian images of thinkers. The elements of the ultimate condition do not manifest themselves as formless progressive tendencies, but are deeply embedded in every present in the form of the most endangered, excoriated, and ridiculed creations and ideas. The historical task is to give shape to this immanent state of perfection and make it absolute, make it visible and ascendant in the present. This condition cannot be circumscribed with a pragmatic description of details (institutions, customs, and so on); in fact, it eludes them. Rather, it can be grasped only in its metaphysical structure, like the messianic realm or the idea of the French Revolution. (“The Life of Students” 197)

Throughout this project, each chapter has worked towards elaborating the “ultimate condition[s]” manifest in the themes and formal strategies of the works of select postsocialist writers and in Benjamin’s writing on the modern city. The onus of the project has not been on establishing a correspondence between the sociocultural contexts of, say, Benjamin’s Paris of the nineteenth century and Zhadan’s Kharkiv at the end of the twentieth century. On the contrary, the effort has been on comparing how representations of distinct urban experiences come to intuit a sort of “metaphysical structure” of history. However, just as Benjamin employs the messianic as a simile for this metaphysical structure in the passage above, this project only engages with the messianic in this limited, figurative sense. All this is to say that, given time, future work directed

at the role of experience in the formation of Benjamin's own and other literary philosophies of history would benefit from an explicit examination of their metaphysical presuppositions.

That said, even in stopping short of this "messianic realm," the effort is still productive. While the various treatments of historical experience in Benjamin's and postsocialist writing on the city tend towards these metaphysical structures, attention to the embeddedness of their writings and experiences in distinct sociocultural contexts reveals a number of normative assumptions unique to Benjamin's apprehension of the modern cityscape. Benjamin's description of modern utopian desire does not refer to some universal object, but, on the contrary, emerges from the ruins of utterly contingent social fantasies. Though these fantasies gesture towards metaphysical conditions present across disparate times and places, the characteristics of such utopian desires must be sought with reference to indigenous storytelling conventions and narratives, and not solely through the conformity of the story with preestablished modernist narratives. In the case of Benjamin and the postsocialist writers, this means departing from a nostalgia for the familiar modernist forms of the socialism and capitalism of the twentieth century. While Benjamin seems to have idealized the utopian projects of the Paris of the nineteenth century and Soviet rule remains a significant memory, and in some cases a lasting trauma, in Ukrainian postsocialist literature, their constitution and subsequent deconstitution represent an aspect of the contemporary cityscape more than they do lost plans to recoup and implement. They now furnish, impose upon, and sprawl across the everyday experience of the city dweller, forming a variously enchanting and tedious setting whose tantalizing promise nevertheless lies elsewhere.

In the meantime, however, relics and spaces produced during Soviet rule enjoy a persistent, and in some cases, even revitalized fascination in contemporary global culture.

Publications such as “The Calvert Journal” circulate photos and articles illustrating the ubiquity of Soviet architecture, fashion, and lifestyles in postsocialist youth culture to an English speaking audience. Here Zhadan’s resignation to the cyclical constitution and deconstitution of the ideal returns as a fashionable pose, a menagerie of one-piece jumpsuits and the unsmiling face of an ugly model. Likewise, Soviet products such as the infamous Trabant automobile have since reentered into limited production, more to satisfy the curiosity of foreign tourists than to serve as a legitimate commercial or technological alternative to major automotive brands. Indeed, Andrukovych’s irreverent criticism of Soviet and Ukrainian myth palls in comparison to the giddy contempt of these connoisseurs for such products. More than ever before tourists from across Europe, North America, and China flood into Chernobyl through a plethora of licensed tour companies, with the release of a recent miniseries on the Chernobyl disaster by HBO, and another state-sponsored work on the event allegedly in the works in Russia, inspiring the most recent glut of visitors to the city. Revisiting Zabuzhko’s “Prypiat” in this light, one just as readily imagines her voyeurs in fanny-packs and Hawaiian shirts, sweating and cursing profusely as they lumber up and down the stairwells, crowding into and out of the apartments, and all without revising a single word of the poem.

Far from a mere aesthetic, “postsocialist” represents something of a global brand. Like the former residents of Benjamin’s Pompeii who return “not to reestablish their lives there... but on the off-chance of digging for and finding their belongings... and [are] buried alive under avalanches of debris” (“Herculaneum and Pompeii” 156-157), the excavation and subsequent commodification of postsocialist experience seems to intimate a yet more advanced iteration of the cyclical dissolution of historical ideals. Without the understanding, the experiential content that animates the negotiation of collectivity in postsocialist society, such ideals fail to inspire a

concomitant reconfiguration of a sociocultural context. The struggle for recognition becomes repressive; the paralysis of self-censorship expresses a demand for silence; the search for collectivity gropes at a shapeless mass. The study of postsocialist experience provides a compelling foil to the contemporary pastiches played out in postsocialist settings. More than a foil, though, the disparity between postsocialist experience and the global consumption of postsocialism heralds the emergence of a new cast of historical agents and commercial interests blundering through today's urban settings. The experiences of the tourist, motorist, and virtual spectator rush to the fore, these subjects in constant motion lending the brooding, rambling, and sedentary the airs of a modern anachronism. Despite this apparent rupture between postsocialism and the global consumption of postsocialist space, an analysis of form and experience will doubtless remain an important avenue for understanding the particular expression of the universal latent in globalization and global culture.

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