TRIUMPHANT BOWLS OF SOCIALISM: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE SOVIET TOILET

BY

NADIA G. HOPPE

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Lilya Kaganovsky, Chair
Associate Professor David Cooper
Associate Professor Kristin Romberg
Professor Valeria Sobol

ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the role of the toilet in Soviet art, film, and literature from the 1917 Russian Revolution through the end of the twentieth century. It analyzes the toilet as art object, as trope, and as metaphor in order to identify the particularities of Russian artistic and literary movements throughout the twentieth century and also to examine how they are informed by narratives of the body. The toilet – unique in the universality of its need and its liminality between private and public – becomes a symbolic means to understand how the literal and metaphorical "mess" of the human body does or does not conform to the real-life transformation of interior and exterior spaces.

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Introduction: The Toilet Lived, The Toilet Lives

In 1917, Marcel Duchamp purchased a urinal from a sanitary-ware supplier and submitted it as an artwork by "R. Mutt" to the newly established Society of Independent Artists for their inaugural exhibition. Despite the Society's commitment to inclusivity (the only requirement to be exhibited was to pay a $1 entry fee and $5 yearly dues), the board members rejected Duchamp's Fountain from the exhibition claiming that it was indecent and not a work of art. Since then, the work has become iconic as a challenge to taste and continues to exert an enormous power over narratives of high culture.

A staple in the modern home, the toilet plays an important functional role. Yet, in the last century, various artists beyond Duchamp have taken the toilet out of the context of the home and repurposed it as museum art, thus revealing the shifting and unstable boundaries between binaries such as the private/public, functional/decorative, and clean/dirty. According to historians of the home, such as Witold Rybczynski and Alain Corbin, shifting attitudes towards hygiene contributed to the change in construction of toilet spaces. In his book *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, Rybczynski attributes the increasing value of comfort and commodity in the 1700s to the increased presence of bathrooms (rooms with bathtubs and often bidets, but not toilets, which usually were a stool that stood alone in a small, separated room).[1] As Rybczynski describes, the technology of the private toilet becomes more popular during the Bourgeois age when intimacy and privacy become increasingly valued. According to him, they are a "fashionable accessory" for wealthy at the time, rather than a necessity. According to Rybczynski, the domestic technology of the toilet began to develop in the late 1700s, beginning with the Bramah Valve closet, "a toilet bowl that maintained a water seal to prevent cesspool smells from entering the

[1] Witold Rybczynski. *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. (New York: Viking Press, 1986), 191.

room."[2] However, it took over 50 years for this technology to gain popularity, and even as late as the 1900s the older technology of the chamber pot was still used due to a lack of pressurized water in homes.

Similarly, in *The Foul and the Fragrant*, Corbin recognizes a shift in ideas of cleanliness and hygiene in the 18th and 19th centuries, when domestic architecture was concerned with meeting new standards of comfort.[3] According to Corbin, along with the emergence of a modern city came the desire to compartmentalize smell as a protective measure. While concerns about disease and asphyxiation affected public space, as Corbin writes, "'The family atmosphere' synthesized the individual atmospheres in the dwelling in the same way that the atmosphere of the city represented the sum of social emanations."[4] Thus, sanitary concerns in the public sphere were transposed onto the private sphere in the effort to reserve pure air and control the flow of air. Corbin writes, "The sudden awareness of the characteristic smells of the rooms that composed the private home created a desire to promote the specific smell of individual rooms and thus abolish the offensive mixture of the family atmosphere […] Like the promiscuity to which it testified, confusion of smells had become obscene."[5] However, Corbin notes France's hesitance (as compared to the United Kingdom) to embrace innovations in water supply that would do away with family odors. Thus, sanitary reformers were challenged in creating latrines, which were seen as the springboard for home-wide cleanliness. Corbin writes, "cleaning up the privies was expected to produce a chain reaction resulting in the deodorization of private space."[6]

[2] Rybczynski, 128.
[3] Alain Corbin. *The Foul and the Fragrant.* (London: Papermac, 1996), 161.
[4] Corbin, 163.
[5] Corbin, 169.
[6] Corbin, 173.

Rybczynski and Corbin's assessments shed light on the toilet's role within the home. While the development of domestic technologies related to hygiene and toilets coincided with a peaked interest in comfort, a key role of the early toilet is also to separate and compartmentalize "unclean" from the "clean." Thus, the toilet takes on a functional role within the home, ensuring the perpetuation of particular hygienic codes. As a room, the toilet acts as a threshold, a physical barrier to that which could "contaminate" the rest of the home. As a fixture of the home, the toilet comes to represent not merely bourgeois comforts, but a necessary barrier that protects the family, as well as the public (in the case of the public restroom) from the dangers of contamination with the unclean.

In the context of the Soviet Union, the toilet holds all these connotations and more. While the toilet remains a separate room in which its usages are contained, communal living pushed these boundaries. As such, artists and writers of the Soviet period commented and explored the toilet as a symbol of their time. For some, the toilet provided a window into the intimates lives of characters, while others use the room to reflect upon the surveillant experience of the communal apartment. This dissertation will cover the span of the entire Soviet Union from its conception and until after its fall. Consequently, this dissertation covers artists and writers of different traditions, time periods, and goals, all who use the toilet as a symbol in seemingly disparate ways. However, as this dissertation will argue, these works unite in their explicitly grotesque and carnivalesque formulations of the toilet, with the exception of literature from the socialist realist period which avoids discussion of the grotesque when describing the toilet. Thus, the use of the toilet as a symbol in Soviet literature further supports arguments that the socialist realist period of literature is unique to Russian literary history and possessing its own method of social critique.

The Grotesque

This dissertation relies on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque and its connection to his theory of the carnivalesque. In his book *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin defines the grotesque in its hyperbolism, exaggeration, and excessiveness, particularly of the "improper" when considering grotesque satire.[7] When the grotesque is applied to the body, the representation of the body differs greatly from classical depictions. As Bakhtin argues, the grotesque is interested in the body in the act of becoming, as well as interchange and interorientation. He writes, "Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing, as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body."[8] Because of the toilet's connection to the grotesque body (defecation and other elimination), the toilet becomes a grotesque space.

What is important about Bakhtin's grotesque, is his argument for the effect of its portrayal. As he writes, "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity."[9] The lowering of the high and the elevation of the low, according to Bakhtin, unleashes the power of the common people by reversing the social system.

Having completed the book in 1940, Bakhtin certainly had the 1917 Soviet Revolution in mind as he describes the inversion of high and low. Consequently, much of the works that use the toilet as a symbol do so in order to engage with themes of social inversion. One apparent

[7] Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2009), 303.
[8] Balhtin, 317.
[9] Bakhtin, 19-20.

example in this dissertation is Sergei Eisenstein's 1928 film *October*, which depicts the storming of the Winter Palace, in which Bolsheviks penetrated the lofty halls of the rich and proceed to aggressively handle the Tsaritsa's toilet.

The inversion of high and low relates to the theory of postmodernism, which has the tendency to mix high and low styles as a reaction to the staunch high style of modernism. As such, images of the toilet are a natural friend of the postmodern writer. Furthermore, despite being a contemporary of the modernists and part of the Dadaists, Marcel Duchamp, artist of one of the most famous toilets, is considered by some as the father of postmodernism.[10] The invocation of Duchamp as the father of postmodernism is due to the direct influences and references by American artists of the 50s and 60s.[11] Though his roots lie within the Dadaist period of French modernism, "Duchamp was a perfect idol, mentor, inspiration for the younger generations of artists and desirists, whether consciously or not, opposing themselves beyond the histrionic genius identification and austere self-important aesthetics of Greenbergian modernism."[12] Furthermore, the readymade, a term first used by Duchamp to describe the works of art he made from manufactured objects, became privileged as an "originary gesture in the dislocation of the market politics of modernism."[13]

Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1984-1990)* often serves as the defining text of the postmodern.[14] Although his theory relies on Western (more specifically American) history, economics, and cultural production, and, thus does not address the cultural specificity of Russia that Groys and Epstein discuss, his notion of

[10] Amelia Jones. *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp*. Cambridge UP, 1994.
[11] Amelia Jones. "Amelia Jones on Marcel Duchamp." *Walker Art Magazine.* 30 July 2012. Accessed February 14, 2018. https://walkerart.org/magazine/amelia-jones-on-marcel-duchamp. Paragraph 3.
[12] Jones, "on Marcel Duchamp," par. 8.
[13] Jones, "on Marcel Duchamp," par. 9.
[14] Frederic Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1984-1990)* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1992)

Postmodernism can help us understand why so many artists — Russian and non-Russian — make the toilet a central feature of their art. Most helpful for my purposes is Jameson's discussion of commodification and low culture. For Jameson, sheer commodification is also an important component in identifying postmodernism. This includes representations of "popular" culture, as well as commercial culture, such as advertisements and packaging.[15] Furthermore, he notes the blurred distinction between high and so-called mass (low) culture, a distinction that Modernism relied on. He describes texts that emerge in this era as, "infused with the forms, categories and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern."[16] For example, he notes the "degraded" landscape of kitsch, advertising, motels, the murder mystery, the fantasy novel and more as "materials they no longer 'quote,' as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance."[17] "Low" culture, of course, includes the toilet, which is most associated with hidden bodily functions, such as defecation. But the toilet is also a product of commodification. As the next section will explain, the Russian word itself (*unitaz*) stems from the brand name of a Western manufacturer, marking the commodities connection to the West.

Similar to Duchamp's gesture, as we will see throughout this dissertation, how the toilet was used in art and literature changes throughout the decades and corresponds to the literary and political trends. Most stark within a century of toilet art is the portrayal (or lack there of) during the height of socialist realism, an officially sanctioned method of crafting literature that placed its focus on accessibility to the people and capturing the spirit of the party.

[15] Jameson, 63.
[16] Jameson, 2.
[17] ibid.

As postmodernism responds to modernism, Russian postmodernism also responds to socialist realism. As such, Russian theorists find important connections between socialist realism and Russian postmodernism. Both Boris Groys and Mikhail Epstein establish the connection between postmodernism and Soviet tropes. In "A Style and a Half: Socialist Realism between Modernism and Postmodernism" (1997), Groys argues that socialist realism and Modernism are related because of their emphasis on oppositions (high/low and Soviet/non-Soviet, respectively). He calls socialist realism "a style and a half," as "its proto-postmodernist strategy of appropriation" of "readymade cultural forms [are deployed] in contexts at odds with their normal functioning."[18] That is, socialist realism uses artistic devices and forms for propaganda and to achieve a historically original society, rather than enjoyment and catering to the tastes of the masses as commercial art does. While Duchamp brings his readymade from the home to the museum, causing the art world to question the definition of art itself, socialist realism brings the readymade forms of high modernism into literature for the masses, which "continued to serve the modernist ideal of historical exclusiveness, internal purity and autonomy from everything external."

Groys also calls to attention the Western origins of the concept of "postmodernism" and illustrates its Soviet specificity. He writes, "The Soviet specificity [of postmodernism] lies primarily in the fact that from the outset the dictatorship of Socialist Realism under communism differed on the institutional level from the dictatorship of Modernism over the institution of art and criticism in the West."[19] He compares the struggle against a system of censorship in the Soviet Union to Western postmodernism's struggle against the "aesthetic censorship of

[18] Boris Groys. "A Style and a Half: Socialist Realism between Modernism and Postmodernism." *Socialist Realism without Shores*. eds. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), 78.
[19] Groys, 76.

modernist cultural institutions."[20] Thus, the failure of Soviet cultural institutions caused all Soviet culture to be relegated to the status of "low," mass culture in the post-Soviet context and contemporary Russian culture finds itself without any institutionalized tradition against which it might transgress.

Similarly, Epstein in his article "Postmodernism, Communism, and Sots-Art" (2000), argues that communism is nascent postmodernism.[21] As he explains, the end of communism and the emergence of postmodernism in Russia coincided – an event that he does not think was coincidental. In fact, he believes that postmodernism is a "deeply Russian phenomenon," like communism, and this explains why Russia was so ready to adopt the method once Communism fell. He identifies several Communist elements of Postmodernism: hyperreality, determinism and reductionism, ideological and aesthetic eclecticism, posthistoricism, and more.

The stark difference in the toilet as literary symbol within the socialist realist period corresponds to how Russian scholars have conceptualized this period in the context of Russian literary trends. As Mark Lipovetsky explains in *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos,* postmodernism is characterized by its "revitalizing, antihierarchical, and playful approach to any and all authoritative discourses."[22] He argues that Russian postmodernism plays upon the metadiscourse that was aesthetically formed by socialist realism, which served as the ideological foundation of Soviet culture.[23] The use of the toilet also plays into these depictions and acts as an inversion of the authoritative discourses of both modernism and socialist realism.

[20] Groys, 82.
[21] Mikhail Epstein. "Postmodernism, Communism, and Sots-Art." *Endquote: Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style*. ed. Marina Balina, Nancy Condee, and Evgeny Dobrenko (Chicago: Northwestern UP, 1999), 3-31.
[22] Mark Lipovetsky. *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos.* ed. Eliot Borenstein (New York: Routledge, 1999), 107.
[23] ibid.

Toilet as a Word

Because of the varying history of floor plans between Russia and the United States, it is worth taking a moment to outline the differences between the language surrounding the toilet. In American English, the word "toilet" can refer to the object itself, as well as the room that holds it. However, the word "bathroom" may be a more common way of referring to this room, which typically also includes a tub or shower. Even when it does not include a bath or shower, it is still often referred to as a bathroom (i.e. half bath). Of course, the room also has informal names, such as "the can," "the pisser," and "the John," to name only a few.

While in American English "bathroom" may be a common way to refer to the to the room that houses the toilet, the "bathroom" has a separate meaning in the Soviet Union, where the bath and the toilet were often located in separate rooms. For this reason, this dissertation will avoid the use of the word "bathroom" unless I am referring to a room that indeed has a bath in it. Rather, this dissertation will use the word "toilet" to refer to both the room and the object itself.

As for the original Russian, the texts of this dissertation use differing Russian words for the toilet, all with individual etymologies and connotations. One of the most commonly used is the word *tualet*, which is like the English word in that it can refer to the room or the object itself. The Russian term *tualet* originates from the French *toilette*, that is, "little canvas/linen/cloth."[24] The now archaic *toilette* referred to a dressing table (typically covered in cloth, trimmed with lace) or the act of personal grooming.[25] The word can refer to the room in which a toilet is located or the act of dressing, however never the object itself.

[24] *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka*, M. Fasmer, tom 4, Moskva, 1973. (116)
[25] *The Encyclopedia of Diderot and d'Alembert*, Jaucourt de chevaller Louis, vol. 16, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/did2222.0003.137/--toilette?rgn=main;view=fulltext

The word is *unitaz* exclusively refers to the object itself — the basin in which bodily waste drains. The word stems from the name of a product introduced by Thomas William Twyford in 1883. The "Unitas" incorporated the WC pan with an integral trap as one piece of pottery without the need for a surrounding wooden cabinet.[26] As such, its name reflects the "oneness" or "unity" of its design (from the Latin *unitas*, meaning the state of being one[27]). It was considered the "Perfection of Cleanliness," as it prevented anything that caused offensive smells to accumulate. Because it was so hygienic and cost effective, vast quantities were manufactured and exported, including to Russia.[28]

Figure 1: Twyford Bathrooms proudly presents the absorption of "Unitas" into the Russian language. "The Development of the Flushing Toilet." Twyford Bathrooms. <https://www.twyfordbathrooms.com/about-us/history/>

Vannaia is a word short for *vannaia komnata*, literally "bathroom." As such, it is used to refer to the room that includes the bath. This is true for the separate Soviet-style bathroom, as

[26] "Unitas" from the Latin for "oneness." Этимологический словарь русского языка. — СПб.: ООО "Виктория плюс". Крылов Г. А.. 2004. It is also associated with the Russian word for "pelvis" (*taz*). See: *Толковый словарь Ушакова.* For Twyford history see: https://twyfordshistory.blogspot.co.uk/p/milestones.html

[27] See Charlton T Lewis and Charles Short. *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), s.v. unitas, unitatis f., "the state of being one, oneness."

[28] "Our History." Twyford Bathrooms. Accessed October 26, 2021. https://www.twyfordbathrooms.com/about-us/history.

well as contemporary bathrooms which include both a bath and toilet. Another frequently used word is *ubornaia,* which refers to the room in which one can use the toilet or straighten up one's appearance, but also can refer to the room where actors prepared themselves to go on stage. *Sortir* is another word used for the toilet as a room. It originates from the French word *sortir*, meaning "to exit," which was used among aristocracy to politely excuse oneself to use the toilet. However, now it can also be used to refer to an outhouse, an outdoor toilet without connection to plumbing.

Another word for the toilet as the object itself is *tolchok.* While it is clear that the word stems from the word for "push," why it is used for the toilet is unclear. In etymological dictionaries, the word is used for an open-air market.[29] As far as the word's connection to the toilet, some claim that the slang originates from the connection between "pushing" and the mechanism of using the toilet, meaning the mechanism of the human body as well as the technology of the toilet itself. Others claim it came from military or navy slang, also related the specific mechanism of submarine toilets or to refer to the experience of cleaning barrack toilets. Another less commonly used word is *klozet*, originating from the English "closet," referring to a water closet.

Among the various ways to talk about the toilet the words are either metaphoric or metonymic. Words such as *klozet, ubornaia*, and *sortir* all avoid the actual function of the that which they describe. Instead, they act as euphemisms that try to conceal the function of the room. Just as sanitary technologies work to better conceal the smells of human waste, the language that describes the act also separates itself from the grotesque reality of what it is meant

[29] Zaur Zurumov. Русскоязычный жаргон. Историко-этимологический толковый словарь преступного мира (Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2015), 578.

to depict. On the other hand, words like *vannaia* and *unitaz* represent a metonymic relationship to the toilet, relating to the room in which it is housed or its mechanics and design.

Housing in Russia: A Battle between Private and Public

From the inception of the Soviet Union, the regime dealt with housing crises that made it difficult to properly house its population. The regime inherited a housing crisis from the Tsarist era, in which they saw an opportunity to restructure housing in accordance with socialist principles.[30] The goal was to transform daily life, free women from domestic servitude, and promote collective sentiments. However, as Christine Varga-Harris notes, like many of the ambitious politics of the socialist state, Soviet housing plans "amounted to little more than 'a brilliant failure.'"[31] Although the Soviets promised mass housing and the redistribution of private dwellings, they had inherited an insufficient supply of housing from the tsarist regime.[32]

The next crisis came when cities grew at an unprecedented and unanticipated speed as rural residents fled to urban centers. More housing had to be built and part of the solution was the communal apartment. However, by the 1930s, the housing crisis still had not been solved. Despite this, Joseph Stalin focused the nation's resources to industrialization, land collectivization, and war preparation rather than consumer needs, such as housing.[33] What existed of Soviet housing stock was only further deteriorated during World War II and this shortage persisted into the 1950s.[34]

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[30] Lynn Attwood. *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private Life in a Public Space* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2010), 1.
[31] Christine Varga-Harris. *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2015), 1.
[32] Varga-Harris, 1-2.
[33] Varga-Harris, 2.
[34] Varga-Harris, 2.

The prevalence of the communal apartment waned during the Khrushchev era when more single-family apartments became available, as part of Khrushchev's ambitious plan to solve the housing crisis by providing each family a "separate apartment."[35] As Varga-Harris remarks, more housing was built during the 1956-1960 Five-Year Plan than during the entire period from 1918 to 1946 and exceeded the project's target for the plan by 8 percent.[36] However, demand still outpaced supply and communal apartments persisted until the privatization reforms of the 1990s (and still exist today to some degree).[37]

However, the long period of communal living influenced the nation's conception of home and privacy. The Soviet Union encouraged its citizens to develop a broader sense of "home," such as the city and its open spaces. Nevertheless, citizens took extreme measures in order to procure better housing. Citizens would marry in order to procure better housing and neighbors would denounce each other in hopes of securing a better living space.[38] Housing was used as a punishment and a reward by Soviet authorities and class enemies were denied the right to housing. It was also used as a means to control workers, as much housing became tied to jobs.

By the end of the Soviet era, the Soviet Union was still experiencing a housing shortage. Despite the introduction of single-family apartments in the 1960s, housing was still crowded and unsuited to the needs of a growing family. The solution this time was to privatize housing, which was meant to encourage a supply of available housing.

While this dissertation discusses the changes in housing as a shift in the spheres of private and public, the concept of "private" in the Soviet Union is one that is debated. A number of scholars have pointed out that the concept of a private or personal life was foreign, even

[35] Varga-Harris, 2.
[36] Varga-Harris, 2.
[37] Attwood, *Gender and Housing*, 3.
[38] Attwood, *Gender and Housing*, 4.

before the revolution. Rather, the idea of a private life is a concept of the individualistic West, whereas the Russian people belonged to the *narod*.[39]

In his book *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jurgen Habermas traces the private and public as historical concepts. As he explains, private and public are modern concepts that did not exist in ancient Greece or the middle ages, for example. Rather, they only came about with the development of a modern state and economy, in particular with the emergence of early finance and trade capitalism.[40] His definition of "public" is complex and dynamic, ranging from that which is open to all to the state as "public authority," and public as a realm of freedom and permanence. He writes, "Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all."[41] According to Habermas, the modern sense of the term "public" brings about a new sphere – the "public authority," which assumed existence in a permanent administration or standing army. In a sense, he says, it is synonymous with the state.[42]

Similarly, in her book *The Human Condition,* Hannah Arendt looks to the ancient world to examine private and public spheres. As she notes, in the Greek city-state the private realm was concerned with necessary household and biological tasks, however the public sphere was connected to political activity and freedom. According to Arendt, this changes in the modern world with the introduction of the social domain (that is, a concern for the state providing for biological needs) and labor into the public sphere. She argues that in the modern era society constitutes the public organization of the life process. She writes, "Society is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance

[39] Attwood, *Gender and Housing*, 11.
[40] Jurgen Habermas. *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 14.
[41] Habermas, 4.
[42] Habermas, 18.

and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public."[43] In other words, what should remain private is publicly exposed resulting in a confusion of the distinction between the public and private.

In the Soviet context, the notion of the private sphere was nearly eliminated from discourse in the 1920s and 1930s. This is apparent especially in the context of the communal apartment. In "Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment," Katerina Gerasimova discusses the missing concept of privacy within the communal apartment, which neither belonged in the social sphere nor the private sphere. She describes the space within a communal apartment as being divided into sections—the places of common use (such as kitchens or hallways) and rooms for families or individual (such as bathrooms or toilets). She gives each type of space a "main social characteristic," identifying the place of common use with the "inescapable and undesired company of others" and the place of individual use with the queue. She argues that the communal apartment hardly belongs to the social sphere, yet it cannot be identified as in the private sphere as the home is in a Western perspective. She says, "While collective use of facilities and space do promote a kind of community, it is not one united by shared ideas, goals and a conscious commitment to the common good or social background. On the contrary it is shaped by hierarchical (vertical) and mutual (horizontal) control."[44] This is apparent in the literature of the 30s and beyond that grapple with this dynamic, often centering disagreements between tenants in their narratives.

As expected, ideas of home and privacy changed with the introduction of more single-family homes after Khrushchev's pledge. Citizens had a greater sense of home and home life was

[43] Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1958), 46.
[44] Gerasimova, 212.

celebrated and encouraged through women's magazines.[45] However, by the time Gorbachev came into power in 1985, 17% of the population still resided in communal apartments or other forms of temporary housing and Khrushchev's cheaply built apartments were now dilapidated.[46] Unable to provide the large amounts of money required for the apartments' renovation, the state put forward a privatization campaign that would transfer ownership to the residents, as well as the responsibility for maintenance. As Attwood found in her 2012 study, privatization was generally seen as a positive thing among Russian citizens and ownership contributed to their sense of home, even though people in the Soviet era generally did treat their single-family apartments as if they were private property.[47] Women who chose to live alone were particularly impacted with a new sense of home after privatization, as having their own single-family home in the Soviet era would have been impossible.[48]

More than Just a Toilet

The communal apartment and the dynamic of shared space in the Soviet Union is clearly an important facet of understanding Soviet daily life. In *Common Places,* Svetlana Boym writes, "If there had been such a thing as the Soviet cultural unconscious, it would have been structured like a communal apartment—with flimsy partitions between public and private, between control and intoxication."[49] She marks the toilet specifically as both the battleground and playground of the apartment, as it is the most frequent ground for communal disagreement. As such, Boym

[45] Lynn Attwood. "Privatisation of Housing in Post-Soviet Russia: A New Understanding of Home?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 5 (July 2012), pp 903-928, p. 906.
[46] Attwood, "Privatisation of Housing in Post-Soviet Russia," 907.
[47] Attwood, "Privatisation of Housing in Post-Soviet Russia," 916.
[48] Ibid, 925.
[49] Boym, Svetlana. *Common Places*. 123.

argues that the home is a microcosm for society and connects the structure of the communal apartment to the Soviet cultural unconscious.

The toilet is more than *just* a toilet. As the evidence of this dissertation will make clear, artists and writers use the toilet throughout the Soviet period to directly comment on political, social, and cultural change. Not only is it a means to discussing shifting cultural paradigms, but for some it also maintains the intimacy of its original intent. For some, in the communal apartment it was the *only* space where one could be alone. Though wide-ranging and differing in their approach, the uses of the toilet as a symbol transcend decades, literary and artistic groups, and even countries. This dissertation aims to demonstrate the significance of the toilet as a literary symbol, and also identify how the conditions of its use relate to one another across decades.

Summary of Chapters

Following the cultural-historical shifting of the 20th century, along with the creation of the texts themselves, this dissertation moves chronologically, starting with the 1917 Russian Revolution. The first chapter examines Sergei Eisenstein's film *October* (1928), in which the camera focuses upon the imperial toilet during the storming of the Winter Palace; Dziga Vertov's *Stride, Soviet!,* in which the opening sequence that features Soviet triumphs shows a flushing toilet; Yuri Olesha's *Zavist'* (*Envy,* 1927), which opens with protagonist Nikolai Kavalerov listening to Andrei Babichev singing in the bathroom; Evgeny Zamiatin's *My* (We, 1924), in which the protagonist, amidst great chaos retreats into a bathroom to solve the answer to a seemingly impossible mathematical problem. Each of these examples engages with the transition from Imperial Russia to the Soviet Union and as such, the toilet is used as a key symbol in

marking the forceful transition from tradition to revolution, and the ways in which the realities of the human body fits into the new era.

The second chapter will examine the toilet in the context of the communal apartment and will set the stage for the succeeding chapters, whose texts engage with the tropes of the communal apartment. In the literature of the 1930s, depictions of the toilet often manifest in concerns over practicality, usually in the form of light-hearted, humorous depictions of failures of characters to "correctly" and efficiently use the shared space of the toilet. As examples of this phenomenon, this chapter will examine Mikhail Zoshchenko's "Guests" (1927) and "The Crisis" (1925), as well as Ilf and Petrov's *Golden Calf* (1931). However, the chapter will also examine a different set of texts: texts written long after this era that display similar communal apartment conflict, though in a much different manner. These texts include Abram Tertz's "Pkhentz" (1957) and "The Tenants" (1963), which combine themes of surveillance with fantastical elements.

The third chapter will focus on two differing examples within Moscow conceptual art: Ilya Kabakov's toilet installations (including "Toilet in the Corner" [1991], and "The Toilet" [1992], "Toilet on the Mountain" [1992], "Toilet on the River" [1996]) and the SZ Group's action "Self Defense Against Things" (1981-82). This chapter will examine these works of toilet art in order to investigate the toilet's essential role in Soviet memory. Kabakov's toilets explore themes of peace, utopia, and storytelling. On the other hand, the SZ Group's action invokes objects to fight against each other. Like Duchamp's readymades, the SZ Group works with everyday objects in order to illuminate their absurdity. Rather than recontextualizing (Duchamp) or rebuilding (Kabakov) everyday life, SZ group use the artifacts of Soviet life and transform

them into metaphorical heroes and villains and simultaneously using them as metaphors for class struggle.

The fourth and final chapter will focus on the late-Soviet period, as well as the immediate post-Soviet period. This chapter will argue that the toilet becomes a critical space in metaphorically depicting the cultural anxiety of the transition away from Soviet rule. It will examine the 1988 film *Malen'kaia Vera*, Viktor Pelevin's short story "Deviatyi son Very Pavlovny" (1991) and Moscow's Historical Toilet located in the GUM shopping center. These examples show the toilet as a site of tension, as well as a space that transcends and reflects the effects massive political change.

This dissertation is indebted to the various studies on the communal apartment across decades and its contribution to the cultural spirit and understanding of the Soviet Union. Works by Svetlana Boym, Lynne Attwood, Ekaterina Gerasimova, Christine Varga-Harris and Steven Harris were particularly influential in driving this dissertation to its conclusion. Likewise, another essential line of scholarship followed the cultural impact of hygiene practices and city planning (see: Alain Corbin, Tricia Starks, John Hutchinson). Histories and cultural studies of the toilet have also already been addressed by scholars, such as Sheila Cavanagh, Igor Bogdanov, Svetlana Boym, Olga Gershenson, Barbara Penner, and Svetlana Matsson. Similarly, the Soviet kitchen and the "things" of Soviet Russian (Alexey Golubev) have been examined, with consideration to how their construction, advertisement, and public opinion impacted their cultural meaning.

However, there has yet to be a study on the symbolic use of the toilet in Soviet art, literature, and film that addresses the entire Soviet period. While Boym does touch upon this subject in her article on Kabakov, this dissertation expands upon her observations by considering

creators across multiple decades. As a result, this dissertation pieces together the many nuances and complexities of the toilet's role in art and culture of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, this dissertation elucidates connections between not only historical events and the changing symbolism of the toilet, but it also illustrates how literary trends impact the manner in which creators depict the toilet itself.

Chapter 1: The Mess of Our Bodies

Not long after Duchamp's 1917 *Fountain* became a controversy in New York, Russia's early and most prominent authors and filmmakers were using the toilet to tell a story in their works. This chapter will discuss Vertov's 1926 film *Stride, Soviet!,* Eisenstein's 1928 film *October*, Zamiatin's 1925 novel *We,* and Olesha's 1927 novella *Envy.* While the symbolic uses of the toilet vary from a emblem of Soviet technological progression to a critique of the mechanization of life, one common thread that runs throughout each work is an examination of private life in the Soviet Union. For Zamiatin, the toilet as the last place of refuge, an idea of the toilet that will resonate with the installations of Kabakov. Eisenstein's *October* highlights a failure of privacy and refuge as revolutionary soldiers penetrate the Tsaritsa's inner chambers, a sentiment that is later echoed in postmodernist texts. And Olesha's *Envy* and *Stride, Soviet!* convey the complexities that arise when the public body inserts itself into private spaces, a theme constant throughout examples of Soviet toilet art (particularly in the next chapter, which discusses the communal apartment). These common themes are not singular to each example but overlap and weave themselves through one another.

As this chapter will show in its analysis of the texts that try to understand the implications of the public entering the private, the toilet is a vehicle through which one can speak to consumption and production – both bodily and otherwise. As Russia moves towards notions of collectivization, the importance of the individual fades, as actual space is reconstructed to also reflect this notion (the communal apartment). Not only do the spaces in which soviet citizens housed themselves change, but a wave of industrialization sparked a new attitude towards machines, productivity, and their relationship with the body. The early 1900s is marked by scientific and technological discoveries, as well as a population boom in cities that swiftly

changed the urban landscape, starting in Western Europe and then taking over Russia. Technologies, such as cars, airplanes, and film transformed contemporary life and the way people moved. As such, various fields, such as art, sociology, and engineering attempted to explain this phenomenon and the results of their examinations is the modernist canon.[50]

Modernism is characterized by its resistance to tradition and rejection of convention. This coincided with a Western "crisis of representation," in which the world was changing at such a rate that artists could not keep with capturing the spirit of the time.[51] As a result, avant-garde artists sought out new modes of representation. As the Russian Futurist manifesto "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" famously says, "Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc. etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity."[52] Aesthetic relativism, highly subjective art, and verbal and visual abstraction were some solutions to conveying rapidly shifting viewpoints.[53]

Expectedly, modernist works featured the machine prominently. As Starks remarks, "In a society obsessed with progress and industrialization, the machine, the ultimate symbol of the modern age, became a metaphor for the perfection of humanity."[54] However, the mechanization of the world was not met by all with positivity. Rather, many critiqued the realities of modernity, such as the alienation of the individual, violence, and decadence brought about an atmosphere of anxiety as the old world disappeared.[55] As the new society privileges the mechanized body and increasingly values productivity, literature reflects the tension between the unpredictability of

[50] Harte, Tim. *Fast Forward: The Aesthetics and Ideology of Speed in Russian Avant-Garde Culture, 1910-1930* (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 9.
[51] Harte, 9.
[52] David Burliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Victor Khlebnikov. "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste." (1917)
[53] Harte, 10.
[54] Starks, 164.
[55] Harte, 13.

human nature and the organized productivity-driven goals of society. Literature asks the question: how are we going to fit the mess of our bodies into this new mechanized society?

As mentioned in the introduction, important for this chapter, and for this work, is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the "grotesque."[56] Theory of the grotesque deals with gross exaggeration, excessiveness, and hyperbole in picturing the body and food.[57] It is born from the concept that the body is a whole and confined from the outside world, thus that which disrupts the wholeness of the body is considered grotesque.[58] According to Bakhtin, the bodily element of grotesque images is not simply satire, but rather it helps to overturn ideology and order.[59] In its basic function and proximity to defecation, the toilet represents the grotesque body. As this chapter will outline in its analysis of the toilet in early Soviet films and novels, the presence of the toilet works to challenge notions of hierarchy and order and, rather, often overturns imagined hierarchies. Similar to Duchamp's famous challenge to taste, because of their usual demarcation as a "private matter," the grotesque elements in these narratives mark important shifts in imagined and real hierarchies.

Early Russian Cinema

In Vertov's 1926 film *Stride, Soviet!* and Eisenstein's 1928 film *October*, there are series of montage sequences that feature close-up shots of the toilet bowl, that are remarkably similar to Duchamp's readymade.[60] Vertov and Eisenstein's cinema, as part of the avant-garde movement of the early Soviet period, challenges ways of filmmaking through their montage and Cine-Eye

[56] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*.
[57] Bakhtin, 303.
[58] Bakhtin, 315.
[59] Bakhtin, 312.
[60] Although Duchamp's Fountain is a urinal and not a "full" toilet, in this paper I deal with the urinal and the toilet together, considering them as both places of elimination, and thus similar in their connotations. However, I will elaborate on their differences where gender is concerned.

techniques. Using the image of the toilet assists in the aim to overturn traditional ideas of art and filmmaking. However, in both films the toilet also plays an important role in highlighting Soviet victory.

Stride, Soviet! premiered on 23 July 1926 and was intended to publicize the work and accomplishments of the Moscow municipal council in preparation for local elections. The film firmly juxtaposes the contemporary daily life and the chaotic past of starvation, shortage, and destruction of the Civil War. The first two minutes of the film make this juxtaposition obvious, and also feature the toilet in question. The first shots feature city streets until an iris fade marks a clear break and a move towards the next sequence of shots. These shots are introduced by an intertitle that reads "Today" followed by a room filled with clapping people immediately denoting a sense of accomplishment. Then come the images of success: factories, electricity, plumbing (where we see the toilet), steam heating. The subsequent intertitle denoting "a time of nightmares" strikes a different tone both in imagery and musically as the film looks into the recent past. The film goes on to show dead bodies, rampant fires, starving children, a lack of firewood, a horse that has fallen because of hunger. But, as the intertitles and shots that follow tell us, despite all these horrors, the Soviets have emerged victorious.

The indoor toilet (and therefore, plumbing) stands in as one of the representations of Soviet success. However, notions associated with the object of the toilet itself beg the question: Why is it here representing Soviet triumph? The toilet is a physical object that stands in as image for the private events of defecation or urination. Though an inevitable part of everyday human existence, the acts of defecation and urination are often unspoken. We imagine our heroes, leaders, and even the "fairer" sex (women) without a need to use the toilet, as if those regarded to a "higher plane" of importance and existence are so pure that they evade the dirtiness of the

toilet. This is a trope so prevalent in the Western cultural imagination that villains are relegated to the toilet as a method to humiliate and undermine their power.[61] The idea of it as a representation of any "higher" idea is so offensive that Duchamp's critics rejected it, calling it "indecent" and "not a work of art." Thus, how can a toilet come to represent the successes of the Soviet project? And why in particular *this* toilet, with its dirty porcelain and water damage in the bowl. It seems strange with the preceding shots of pristine machines of the factories and the clean lines of light versus dark that we see in the electricity sequence.

It makes sense that Vertov would show such an image, particularly in this film, as it is riddled with images of the everyday: streets being cleaned, people being taken care of by doctors, schools being built, people moving into a new apartment (during which, by the way, another toilet is shown). Sometimes these are intimate, even grotesque moments, such as a doctor pushing on a pregnant woman's stomach. Vertov does not only document everyday life, but he celebrates it. The film itself sets out to prove that the Soviets are victorious, yet there are no apparent images of nationalism, such as parades. Rather, the victory comes from the ability to carry on with the simplicity of life without the fear of death, hunger, and illness. Furthermore, the film famously follows objects, rather than people. These objects also often have anthropomorphic qualities, performing their intended function without a human present. The camera shows the toilet flushing without the prompting of a human hand, just as the handles of the voting machines cast votes on their own. Vertov eliminates people from the diegesis and shows Soviet progress through *things*, rather than people.

[61] For example, consider Guggenheim curator Nancy Spector's offer to install Maurizio Cattelan's America, a golden toilet, in the Donald Trump White House; or Jurassic Park's "bloodsucking lawyer," who dies while sitting on a toilet. To name a non-U.S. example, consider Milan Kundera's novel The Unbearable Lightness of Being in which Stalin's son is rumored to leave an enormous mess of excrement in the bathroom.

In response to Viktor Shklovsky's critique of the film "Where Is Dziga Vertov Striding?," Izmail Urazov praises Vertov's attention to simplicity and everyday life, saying "The epic, strict simplicity is the main thing in the film."[62] In the article, which is entitled "He is Striding Towards Life as it Is," Urazov juxtaposes a birth scene with the scene of the toilet flushing, saying,

> "They bathe a newborn baby, which is still smeared with its mother's blood. Or, water starts to flow in a flat. You have a close-up of the toilet bowl through which merrily, like a spring torrent that has burst its way through a dam, joyously seething and foaming, pours a torrent of victorious water. Water in a tap would have been a cliche. Vertov, playing on semantic contrast, has managed to portray the emotional power of the victorious water mains."[63]

The power of new life is visually mapped onto the power of water flowing through the toilet bowl, suggesting one is just as joyful and triumphant as the other. Both events not only engage with the everyday, but they also engage with the inevitable cyclical nature of life (everyone is born of their mother, "everyone poops"). Their victorious natures stem from a society that allows, as well as encourages, this cycle to continue.

Another example of the presence of the toilet in Soviet cinema features events far from everyday moments. Eisenstein's *October* tells the story of the 1917 October Revolution. The film was commissioned to mark the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, and covers the events from February to the October Revolution. It contains powerful symbolic images of the fall of the old world order, such as the dismantling of the monument to the Tsar, as well as the storming of the Winter Palace.[64] It is within the storming of the Winter Palace that we encounter a toilet — the imperial toilet. (~1:45:00 - 1:48:00)

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[62] Yuri Tsivian (ed.). *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 175.
[63] ibid, 172.
[64] Birgit Beumers. *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford; Berg Publishers, 2009), 59.

In this scene, we witness the occupation of the Tsaritsa's bedroom. The scene offers fast-paced music (in the version that features music), along with fast-moving bodies, and flying blankets and feathers — elements that set a stage of chaos. The camera focuses on the imperial toilet, as a soldier lifts the seat. The camera cuts to his smiling face, and cuts back to the toilet, as the solider moves his hand around the inside of the seat. The chaos continues as the room is torn apart and the film cuts back and forth between the bedroom and shots of the soldiers outside, blasting guns, then suddenly — it stops. A close-up of one soldier's face sparks a moment of reflection as he looks around the room of religious icons and figures. These shots alternate with close-ups of the Tsaritsa's bedpan and bidet. The pace of the montage quickens until the soldier begins rifling through a box of mass-produced crosses of St. George and an intertitle exclaims "For what were we fighting?"

This scene seems to continue what earlier shots in the film do — they illustrate a new world order, and the falling of the old world order. Symbols of the Russian Orthodox Church, which were once so powerful, now belong amongst the toilets, amongst human waste, and thus, the Church is discredited. Furthermore, the toilet is handled by the solider in a very specific manner, which the camera carefully documents for us. Not only is the Tsaritsa's room ripped apart, illustrating imperial weakness, but also the haptic qualities of the first shot of a toilet invite the viewer to join along in the destruction of imperial power.

In her chapter "Skin," Jennifer Barker emphasizes the way that materiality, movement, and touch permeates the film experience.[65] She argues that the viewer is not a passive receiver of a film, but rather that part of the film experience is a mutual touching — the film touches the viewer, and the viewer touches it back. For example, she writes, "The viewer caresses by moving

[65] Jennifer M. Barker. "Skin." *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

the eyes along an image softly and fondly, without particular destination, but the film might perform the same caressing touch through a smoothly tracking camera movement, slow-motion, soft-focus cinematography, or an editing style dominated by lap dissolves."[66] In the case of Eisenstein's film, a closeup of a hand touching the underside of a toilet seat, invites the viewer to imagine their own fingertips touching the porcelain rim, as the only things left in the frame are the toilet itself and an arm, cutoff at the elbow. In between a shot of the hand lifting the toilet seat and a shot of the hand stroking it, the face that belongs to the hand *is* revealed — only to show us a wide smile of childlike glee, a joy in violating not only everyday boundaries, but the ease in violating the everyday boundaries of a once powerful individual. His smile, along with the sequence's haptic qualities, invite the viewer to feel this same joy — the triumph of storming the Winter Palace.

Similarly, in her monograph *Socialist Senses,* Emma Widdis zeroes in on the sense of touch, reminding us that sensory experience is not innate, but rather it is shaped by society and environment. As Widdis writes, the "young state" was explicitly engaged with the creation of "'new' Soviet bodies," which highlights the importance of focusing in on sensory experience.[67] In order to understand Soviet sensory history she examines film, thus intersecting with the theory of haptic cinema. She writes, "haptic perception privileges not what the object *is,* but *what it is made from*, so it brings the spectator to an awareness of what we might cal the 'thinginess' of the thing." In other words, when an object is encountered, it is encountered by its surface (it is felt).[68]

[66] ibid, 32.
[67] Emma Widdis. *Socialist Senses: Film, Feeling, and the Soviet Subject, 1917-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 7.
[68] ibid, 9.

Widdis argues that a haptic analysis of Soviet cinema reveals how Marxist-inflected theories of the self "placed the body at the center of a new model of knowledge of the world."[69] Furthermore, as she argues, many of the concerns and preoccupations that shape haptic theory were anticipated by Soviet film theorists and practitioners, who asked larger questions about the relationship between human and material, as well as machine and handcraft.[70] For example, in Vertov's 1923 essay "The Cine-Eyes. A Revolution," Vertov praises the film camera, or the "mechanical eye"/"cine-eye" over the human eye. Furthermore, in his 1922 "We. A Version of a Manifesto," he writes, "In the face of the machine we are ashamed of man's inability to control himself […] For us the joy of dancing saws in a sawmill is more familiar and easier to understand than the joy of human dancing."[71]

As Widdis writes, the role of cinema of the early Soviet period was to articulate a relationship with the world, rather than to merely present a picture of the world. Furthermore, this relationship was to be "of heightened sensory proximity, enabled by the conditions of socialist revolution."[72] As she writes, "According to the Marxist-materialist worldview, Soviet man and woman would be constituted from the outside in, in concrete relationship with the world" and cinema was uniquely equipped to reveal material conditions and shape human life.[73] This all seems to converge in Eisenstein's scene of the soldier caressing the imperial toilet. The scene forges a connection between man and the material world, as considerable time is spent showing the process of physically touching the toilet itself. Furthermore, as Barker's chapter illuminated, the haptic qualities of the scene invite the viewer to "touch" along with the actors in

[69] ibid, 10.
[70] ibid, 11.
[71] *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939.* eds. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London: Routledge, 1988), 69.
[72] Widdis, 10.
[73] ibid.

the film. Widdis similarly argues that the Soviet case contests the prevalent assumption that sensation, touch, and affect always work against the dominant ideology. Rather, she writes, "The Soviet project sought to appropriate the spontaneous, dynamic, intuitive force of bodily sensation to Marxist ideological frameworks."[74]

Thus, Eisenstein's film not only invites us to touch the imperial toilet, but it also invites us to join the soldiers in the rape of the imperial bedroom and the humiliation of Tsarist power. In this scene, socialist revolution is, quite literally, achieved by the hands of the soldiers (and by extension, the hands of the audience). This is displayed through the touching of the toilet, but also through the hands that plunge into the pile of Crosses of St. George and the feathers from the destroyed mattress and pillows that float among the soldiers as they violently stab the imperial bed with their bayonets.

Outside of its haptic qualities, the introduction of the bidet alongside the toilet brings into question another important element of the scene: gender. Specifically, it highlights the Tsaritsa's womanhood. The focus on the bidet, a plumbing fixture used to wash your genitals and inner buttocks, alerts the audience to the fact that the Tsaritsa, in fact, has these body parts. Thus, by centering the bidet, the film emphasizes the Tsaritsa's possession of female genitalia and the emphasis on the existence of the Tsaritsa's female genitalia also notifies the audience of her sexuality. As mentioned earlier, this is significant because leaders and other important figures are often imagined without lower extremities that require care and maintenance. Although it is a seemingly obvious observation, as typically all humans do have genitalia (like all humans use the toilet), it is atypical to imagine an empire's leader in the vulnerable position of urinating, defecating, or washing one's genitals, as this vulnerability is reserved for the everyday person.

[74] ibid, 44.

Additionally, the gender divide of the scene is further cemented as only male occupiers enter the bedroom, even though there are originally females among them. They proceed to violently and forcefully stab the bed with bayonets. The phallic nature of the bayonets, coupled with the male-only presence in the room suggests that metaphorical rape of the Tsaritsa has occurred.

Beyond Vertov and Eisenstein's films, the use of the toilet as imagery in art seems widespread at this moment in time outside of the Soviet Union. As previously mentioned, the controversy of Duchamp's *Fountain* takes place less than a decade before the films' releases. American photographer Edward Weston's 1925 *Excusado* examines the form of the toilet, which he considers to have "sensuous curve[s] of the 'human form divine' but minus imperfections."[75] In the realm of literature, Iuri Olesha's 1927 *Envy* opens with a character listening to his rival singing while he uses the bathroom; and the main character of Evgenii Zamiatin's 1925 dystopian novel *We* has a major breakthrough on the problem he has been solving the entire novel in a public bathroom. While the references to toilets in art, literature, and film continue throughout the 20th century, the cultural and historical events of the first two decades of the twentieth century offer perspective as to why artists may have gravitated towards the profane subject of the toilet. From the multinational formalism movement, to avant-garde movements such as constructivism, to the Russian revolution itself, artists and thinkers were actively challenging the trajectory of art and life in the '20s and forging for themselves a new path.

Both Eisenstein and Vertov were part of a post-Revolutionary Soviet cultural life, which overthrew traditional notions of art.[76] Soviet Montage was the medium of Vertov and Eisenstein's art and both theorized the method in their writings. Their method of montage, along

[75] *Excusado*. 1925. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/283282> (Last accessed 21 July 2018).
[76] *The Eisenstein Reader*. ed. Richard Taylor (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 3.

with their additional ideas of how to shoot and edit film, such as Vertov's Cine-Eye, directly respond to the previous ways of filmmaking. In their own words, as illustrated below, Eisenstein's and Vertov's methods work against polished, acted, romanticized styles of filmmaking that came before them, and instead work towards a different style of filmmaking, one that emphasizes raw material, the machine, and the "fact."

Important to Eisenstein's early montage theory was the concept of attractions. In his 1923 essay "The Montage of Attractions," Eisenstein writes, "An attraction is […] any aggressive moment […] calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole."[77] In his own words, Eisenstein calls this type of work a "cinema of action," comparing it to "a cinema of a polished style," differentiating his filmmaking from others.[78] Furthermore, Eisenstein writes on the aesthetic consequences of a readymade Soviet style. In his 1928 essay "Our October. Beyond the Played and the Non-Played," Eisenstein writes that *October* spans two epochs in film: AKhRR and *Zaum,* and thus is a creation of a transitional time.[79] Later in this essay, he writes on the "fetish for raw material" that occurs in this new era of film. He writes, "At a time when the slogans of the previous stage have achieved 100 per cent success. At a time when they are generously recognized. At a time when these slogans are reduced — through stages of obviousness, vulgarization and truism — the level of the absurd."[80] As he goes on to say, it is at this time that a "cult" of raw material emerged, replacing the "played film" (that is, the acted film), by fact. Eisenstein writes that in some reels, *October* attempts to take the next step beyond the fuss of material, towards "abstract social evaluation." He himself identifies the discrediting of deities, the "what we fought for" intertitle

[77] ibid, 30.
[78] "Montage of Film Attractions" (1924). *The Eisenstein Reader*, 36.
[79] *Eisenstein Reader*, 74.
[80] ibid, 76.

over mass-produced crosses of St. George, and the debunking of the Winter Palace as a "primitive" example of abstract social evaluation could look like, towards a "direct materialization of a slogan."[81]

Vertov also expresses his desire for a push towards "unplayed" film in his 1926 article "The Factory of Facts." In this essay, he touts the ways in which the unplayed film (his films) "oust" the played film. He called the acted film "decrepit" and "degenerate," unfit for the proletarian audience. He proposes the creation of "a film factory of facts," an archive, in which every non-played film would be held in one place with an accompanying film laboratory. He writes, "Flashes of facts! Masses of facts! Hurricanes of facts! And individual little facts. Against cinema sorcery. Against cinema mystification. For the genuine cinefication of the workers' and the peasants' USSR."[82] Vertov's call for the unplayed film illustrates his desire to establish difference within his filmmaking.

Vertov's penchant for facts emerges from his "Cine-Eye" method. He outlines this method in his 1922 essay "We: A Version of a Manifesto"[83] and his 1923 essay "The Cine-Eyes: A Revolution."[84] The Cine-Eye method rejects the theatricality and romanticism of "old films" and instead looks to the future of cinema. Vertov writes, "We [the Cine-Eyes] affirm the future of cinema art by rejecting its present," calling for the "acceleration of its [the old, the present's] death."[85] The Cine-Eyes, rather, "[turn] like propellors, take off into the future on the wings of hypotheses."[86] In the place of the "old" style of film which romanticizes, the Cine-Eye aims to "organiz[e] the necessary movements of objects in space and time into a rhythmic artistic

[81] ibid, 77, 79.
[82] "Dziga Vertov: The Factory of Facts." *The Film Factory*, 150-151.
[83] "Dziga Vertov: We. A Version of a Manifesto." *The Film Factory*, 69-72.
[84] "Dziga Vertov: The Cine-Eyes. A Revolution." *The Film Factory*, 89-94.
[85] "We: A Version of a Manifesto," 69.
[86] ibid, 72.

whole, in accordance with the characteristics of the whole and the internal rhythm of each object."[87]

Most important to Vertov's definition of the Cine-Eye is that it has the power to manipulate time and space. It does not merely capture, but it creates. In his 1923 essay, Vertov writes, "I am the Cine-Eye. I construct things. I have planted you, who were created by me, in a most remarkable room that never existed before and that I also created. […] In combining shots of the walls and of the details with one another I managed to put them in an order that will please you and to construct a cinematic phrase […]."[88] Furthermore, the Cine-Eye does not only create what did not exist before, but it combines parts to achieve a whole perfection. Vertov writes, "I am the Cine-Eye. I take the strongest and most agile hands from one man, the fastest and best proportioned legs from another, the most handsome and expressive head from a third and though montage I create a new, perfect man."[89] In addition to its ability to create and achieve perfection, the Cine-Eye moves beyond where the eye can see, capturing images and angles usually impossible to reach. Vertov writes, "*I am in constant motion.* […] I move alongside the muzzle of a running horse, I tear into a crowd at full tilt, I flee before fleeing soldiers, I turn over on my back, I rise up with aeroplanes, I fall and rise with falling and rising bodies."[90] The Cine-Eye calls into question "the human eye's conception of the world" and presents its own "I see!"[91] According to the Cine-Eye method, the camera does not merely capture and copy what the eye sees, but rather, the Cine-Eye goes beyond this to show what the eye cannot see, to reach beyond where the eye can go. The method's ability to transcend time and space and to capture what the

[87] ibid, 71.
[88] "The Cine-Eyes," 92.
[89] ibid, 92-93.
[90] ibid, 93.
[91] ibid, 94.

eye cannot, establishes its superiority in not only gathering "facts," but also in the construction of film material. Considering the Cine-Eye's ability to capture and construct what the eye does not typically see, Vertov's representation of the flushing toilet as a triumphant symbol fits is an appropriate example of his method, as the object typically not fit for cinematic portrayal.

Beyond film, international movements that defined themselves in sharp contrast to their predecessors also take form in the early twentieth century. Among these are formalism and futurism, which both have strong presences in Russian literature and art. Written by David Burliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Viktor Khlebnikov, the 1917 Russian Futurist manifesto "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," famously states, "Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity," suggesting a complete overhaul of traditional literary style.[92] Similarly, the formalist movement challenged the study of poetic language in its advocation for examining language without the traditional cultural-historical approach. In art, constructivism aimed to reshape material reality. Constructivist theorist Aleksei Gan distinguished the post-revolutionary view of material and texture from what he called the "traditional artistic understanding." Similarly, a key member of the LEF movement, Nikolai Chuzhak, differentiated between these two modes of art, underlining their duality.[93] According to them, socialist art was to meant to construct and reconstruct.

Elements of these contemporaneous movements reach avant-garde film and film theories, illustrating that the movements and their participants were intertwined. For example, constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko collaborated with Vertov to illustrate words for his film's

[92] David Burliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladmir Mayakovsky, Victor Khlebnikov. "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste." (1917) Accessed August 6, 2018. https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/mayakovsky/1917/slap-in-face-public-taste.htm.
[93] Widdis, 30.

intertitles.[94] Additionally, Eisenstein emphasizes the idea of construction (constructivism) in his theorization of the "montage of attractions," writing that it "liberates film from the plot-based script and for the first time takes account of film material, both thematically and formally, in the construction."[95] Furthermore, Nikolai Izvolov argues that Vertov's montage style is most closely compared to the creative methods of collage and photomontage.

Letters that jumped and moved across the film screen illustrate Vertov's attraction to verbal culture and expressive words. The focus on the word itself connects both Vertov and Eisenstein to the formalist movement, which places its focus on the word itself, rather than a text's outside influences. As Izvolov shows, Vertov's discussion of a "montage of intervals" in his "We: A Version of a Manifesto," can be compared to a "montage of words," illustrating his interest in semantics. In "Montage of Film Attractions," Eisenstein also likens film to word, writing that we must, "…establish the montage approach as the essential, meaningful and sole possible language of cinema, completely analogous to the role of the word in spoken material."[96] In her book chapter "Ostranenie, 'The Montage of Attractions' and Early Cinema's 'Properly Irreducible Alien Quality,'" Annie Van den Oever shows that formalist Viktor Shklovsky's manifesto "Art as Device" was part of the avant-garde's cultural response to early cinema.[97]

Lastly, and perhaps most apparent in its overturning of the "old," is the impact of the 1917 Revolution. Like the film, literary, and artistic movements that followed, the revolution succeeded in its attempt to overturn a regime. As a result, years after, filmmakers and artists theorize as to how to create art for this new era. Eisenstein writes that "The attractional approach

[94] Nikolai Izvolov. "Dziga Vertov and Aleksandr Rodchenko: the visible word." *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, vol 10, 1 (2016), 2-14.
[95] "Montage of Attractions," 35.
[96] *Eisenstein Reader*, 41.
[97] Annie van den Oever. "Ostranenie, 'The Montage of Attractions' and Early Cinema's 'Properly Irreducible Alien Quality,'" *Ostranenie: On "Strangeness" and the Moving Image. The History Reception, and Relevance of a Concept.* ed. Annie vanden Oever. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2010.

the construction of all elements" is not an "affirmation of personal taste or of the search for a polished style for Soviet cinema," but rather it is "an assertion of the method of approach to the montage of effects that are useful to our class and of the precise recognition of the utilitarian goals of cinema in the Soviet Republic."[98] Similarly, as Barbara Wurm explains, Vertov's *Stride, Soviet* "stands for establishing a technically advanced and device-oriented non-fiction film with the broader field of the common (communist) tasks of Soviet cinema…"[99] Furthermore, as is the case for both *Stride, Soviet!* and *October*, the successes of the revolution itself were demonstrated through early Soviet film, which was the "first and certainly most effective propaganda for the new Soviet regime."[100]

In this era, whose art, literature, and film aimed to overturn and challenge the customs of the past and the present, the toilet also becomes a symbol of subversiveness that further accomplishes this objective. In *Stride, Soviet*! shots of the toilet remind us of the wonders of everyday life and the successes of the Soviets that allowed us to enjoy them. In *October*, the intrusive and violent handling of the Tsaritsa's bedroom and toilets both underline the powerlessness of the old regime, and also invite the viewer to participate in its demise. Thus, in both films, the toilet is a key symbol of forceful passage from one regime to the next, from tradition to revolution. The toilet, not a stranger to representing challenges to high narratives thanks to Duchamp and others, logically finds itself a home in early cinema, and the avant-garde movement as a whole.

[98] "The Montage of Film Attractions," *The Eisenstein Reader*, 52.
[99] Barbara Wurm. "From the Old to the New: Stride, Soviet!" *Senses of Cinema*, par. 3. Accessed August 12, 2018. http://sensesofcinema.com/2017/soviet-cinema/1926-stride-soviet/.
[100] "Introduction: Soviet Cinema. A Heritage and its History," *The Film Factory*, 2.

Zamiatin's We

Zamiatin's *We* was first written in 1920, revised and edited until 1921, and first published by Dutton in English in 1924. Various translations and foreign publications followed, however a full version of the original Russian was not published until 1952 by the Chekhov publishing house in New York. The novel was finally published on Russian soil in 1988, more than fifty years after Zamiatin died in exile in Paris.[101]

Zamiatin's dystopian novel take place in a futuristic society called OneState (*edinoe gosudarstvo)* ruled by the Benefactor. OneState is concerned with upholding the beauty and grandeur of it its society, which promises to bring its citizens "mathematically infallible happiness (математически-безошибочное счастье)."[102] However, it is clear that the cost of "mathematical happiness" includes a complete lack of individuality, privacy, and personal control. All people are named after numbers. The State dictates when couples can have sexual interactions, granting them specific "sex days." There's a wall that surrounds the city and no one has ever been to the other side. Everyone's time is dictated by The Table which tells exactly (to the second) when to get up and go to work. Our narrator D-503 describes this moment, saying, "Every morning, with six-wheeled precision, at the very same hour and the very same minute, we get up, millions of us, as though we were one (Каждое утро, с шестиколесной точностью, в один и тот же час и в одну и ту же минуту, — мы, миллионы, встаем, как один.)."[103]

The conflation of machine and person is apparent in D-503's descriptors and also in the behavior of individuals. As part of their work, the people conduct Taylor exercises, named after the American engineer who completely disregarded the worker in his quest for industrial

[101] Clarence Brown. "Introduction: Zamyatin and the Persian Rooster." *We*. By Evgenii Zamiatin. Trans. Clarence Brown (New York: Penguin, 1993).
[102] Zamiatin, Evgenii. *My* (Moskva, 1988), Zapis' 1-aia.
[103] Zamiatin, Zapis' 3-aia.

efficiency. D-503's only criticism of the State's equation for happiness is the continued need for Personal Hours. He hopes to be rid these one day, as they are a reminder of the "disorganized wildness" of the times when people lived in freedom.

D-503 is the builder of INTEGRAL, a spacecraft made for the purpose of spreading the will of OneState to other planets. The book *We* is a collection of his notes on OneState, and, he hopes, an epic. In his 1993 translation of the novel, Clarence Brown writes in the introduction, "Zamyatin's nightmare is a nightmare of the early twenties, and it is specifically the nightmare of a Russian who has spent time in the industrial north of England and read H.G. Wells, never forgetting his native Dostoevsky nor what he could see out the window."[104] Though the novel responds to a particular time and place, the echo of dystopia rings familiar throughout the Soviet period and beyond.

What makes *We* a subject of analysis for this dissertation is the role of defecation and the toilet in the narrative arc. D-503's attitude towards defecation reveals a shift to a mechanical understanding of the body, a common response to the industrialization of the 20s. Less expected is that in the final chaotic pages of the book, after an entire novel of easing into the idea of unpredictability, our protagonist encounters in the bathroom a person who insists that he has calculated that the universe is finite – there is no infinity. As readers, we are left with no real answers, as the narrative moves swiftly from the questions about infinity to the aftermath of The Operation, which removes D-503's imagination and cures his illness (having a soul).

[104] Brown, "Introduction," xvii.

Infinity in the Toilet

Throughout the novel, D-503 struggles with the ideas of infinity and finiteness. The conflict represents a key tension in the novel. Efraim Sicher writes, "the satire is mainly directed at a civilization whose infallible mathematical logic does not account for the irrational, primeval instincts which complement the rational side of man."[105] As such, D-503 states multiple times throughout the novel his disdain for irritational numbers. This disdain begins in childhood when his math teacher introduces the concept of irrational numbers. D-503 reacts by crying and bawling and begging for someone to take the idea of irritational numbers (specifically the square root of -1) out of him. He writes, "That irrational root grew in me like some alien thing, strange and terrifying, and it was eating me, and you couldn't make any sense of or neutralize it because it was completely beyond *ratio*. (Этот иррациональный корень врос в меня, как что-то чужое, инородное, страшное, он пожирал меня – его нельзя было осмыслить, обезвредить, потому что он был вне ratio.)[106] As he plunges deeper into the conspiracy against OneState and deeper into his relationship with I-330, he feels that he must confront irrationality again, just as he did when he learned of the square root of -1.

Despite D-503's association with OneState as rational, the tension between the finite and infinite is present within OneState as well. For example, the society is finite in that it is enclosed by the green glass. Yet, D-503 is part of an effort to build the spaceship INTEGRAL that will be launched outside of the wall and into space, a seemingly infinite place. As D-503 describes it, the mission of INTEGRAL is "to integrate the indefinite equation of the universe" (проинтегрировать бесконечное уравнение Вселенной) and to "place the beneficial yoke of

[105] Efraim Sicher. "By Underground to Crystal Palace: The Dystopian Eden." *Comparative Literature Studies* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1985), 385.
[106] *We*, 39.

reason round the necks of the unknown beings who inhabit other planets." (Вам предстоит благодетельному игу разума подчинить неведомые существа, обитающие на иных планетах.)[107] Thus, D-503 and OneState recognize the existence of irrationality and indefinability outside of the Green Wall. Yet, they enter this mission with the belief that this irrationality can be harnessed and transformed into rationality.

Later in the novel, I-330 warms D-503 towards to notion of a revolution using ideas of the finite and infinite. D-503 insists there cannot be another revolution because OneState's revolution was the final one. I-330 asks him to tell her the final number in mathematics and D-503 answers that the number of numbers is infinite. Through this analogy, I-330 explains to him that the number of revolutions is infinite as well. D-503 responds to this by writing, "A hot flashing whirlwind – I'd never seen her like this, and she was all around me, she was all around me, I vanished into her… (Разгоревшаяся, вихревая, сверкучая – я никогда еще не видел ее такой – она обняла меня собою, вся. Я исчез...)"[108] Though it is still unsettling, D-503 grows more comfortable accepting the idea of a revolution beyond OneState's.

In the final chapters, acts of civil disobedience increase, including those performed by D-503 himself. He attempts to steal INTEGRAL and fails and then is called to the Benefactor's chambers. There he is condemned for his disloyal actions and his relationship with I-330 is put into question. Their relationship has turned cold and D-503 decides to undergo the Operation, a lobotomy-like procedure that will cure his imagination. As he enters the Bureau of Guardians, he runs into S, a member of the OneState police force, who turns out to be a double agent. This reality causes D-503 to dash out of the room and run to the bathroom. As he groans and grieves, his neighbor in the toilet next to him touches his shoulder to tell him about a discovery that he

[107] *We*, 3.
[108] *We*, 169.

has made: He has calculated that infinity does not exist. Everything is done, simple, and calculable. D-503 responds by forcefully asking, "There where your finite universe ends – what's there…beyond? (а там, где кончается ваша конечная Вселенная? Что там -- дальше?)"[109] But his neighbor does not have time to answer before the Guardians take D-503 for the Operation. The last chapter is a distinct shift in his tone, as he distances himself from his pre-Operation self.

The tension between the "mess" of our bodies and the mechanical nature with which they are perceived in the Soviet 20s represents a similar tension between the finite and infinite for D-503. Although D-503 only categorizes the toilet as a place of useful function, it is appropriate that the final moments of his revolutionary spirit live in the toilet. As discussed early in this chapter, the toilet is related to the grotesque in its proximity to the act of defecation. It is apt that D-503 takes shelter in a toilet where he continues to question the idea of infinity as he exists in a moment of carnivalesque activity.

Furthermore, the solution for infinity is given to D-503 like a gift. This in conjunction with the setting of the toilet call to mind Sigmund Freud's analysis of the anal eroticism. As Freud describes in his 1917 essay, feces are the infant's first gift. He writes that they are "a part of his body which he will give up only on persuasion by someone he loves, to whom, indeed, he will make a spontaneous gift of it as a token of affection […]."[110] As he asserts, the fecal mass also represents the "first penis" because of the relationship between intercourse and the passage of a fecal mass through the mucous-membrane-lined passage of the rectum.

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[109] *We*, 223.

[110] Sigmund Freud. "On Transformations in Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism." *The Penguin Freud Library*, ed. Angela Richards, et al., Vol. 7: On Sexuality - *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, [trans. from the German under the gen. editorship of James Strachey, pp.295-302; prev. printed in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. VII (London: Hogarth Press, 1953)

In other sections of the novel, as D-503 grapples with the idea of infinity and the validity of OneState, he describes the body in both grotesque and phallic terms. He writes, "Picture this: a human finger, cut off from its body, its hand…a separate human finger, running hopping along, all hunched over, on a glass sidewalk. I am that finger. (…вообразите себе человеческий палец, отрезанный от целого, от руки -- отдельный человеческий палец, сутуло согнувшись, припрыгивая бежит по стеклянному тротуару. Этот палец – я.)"[111] He follows this statement by saying that the finger has no desire to be on the hand with the other fingers, a clear reference to his separation in thought and loyalty from OneState. This is just before he gazes upon his shadow and describes feeling as if it is not his body. By describing this feeling through terms of dismemberment and separation from the body he illustrates his relationship to OneState with characteristics of the grotesque and the phallic. In multiple ways, D-503's journey further into the revolution against OneState is connected to grotesque images of the body that also imply a desire for force or power over their hierarchy.

The Crystal Palace

As Julia Chadaga remarks in her book *Optical Play,* Russia provides many examples of texts on glass. As Chadaga argues, these glass objects often possess animate qualities and refer to the fragility of the human body. The production of glass itself had grotesque elements. Chadaga notes that in order to create large panes of glass requires for windows, "artisans had to swing the blown cylinders, weighing as much as fifty pounds, over specially dug pits to stretch them out, and the workers had to be chained to pillars to prevent them from falling into pits."[112] This was

[111] *We*, 100.
[112] Julia Bekman Chadaga, *Optical Play: Glass, Vision, and Spectacle in Russian Culture*. Studies in Russian Literature and Therory. ed. Gary Saul Morson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2014), 119.

also the method used to create the Crystal Palace, an all-glass British structure that housed one of the first public toilets and also becomes an extensive topic of debate among Russian authors.

The Crystal Palace has its roots in Russian literature tracing back to Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* The original structure, as well as Chernyshevsky's depiction, project a sense of success and the positive progress of society. However, Zamiatin's "Crystal Palace" differs greatly from the positive visions towards the future that it typically represents, following in the footsteps of Dostoevsky, who also pushes against Chernyshevsky's utopian vision in *Notes from the Underground*. The real Crystal Palace was a cast iron and plate glass structure originally built in Hyde Park, London to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. After the Exhibition it was rebuilt at the top of Penge Peak, next to Sydenham Hill. Vitally, for my purposes, the Palace housed the earliest paid public flushing toilets.[113] For the price of one penny, visitors could have a clean toilet seat, a towel, a comb, and a shoeshine. It was the world's introduction to the public toilet. The Great Exhibition was the first in a series of World Fairs that showcased culture and industry. The Crystal Palace was considered an architectural masterpiece and an engineering triumph that symbolized the importance of the Exhibition.

Famously, in Chernyshevsky's novel, Vera Pavlovna's fourth dream projects the image of the Crystal Palace, which becomes a utopian symbol for the future of the revolution. As Chadaga notes, gratifying labor and glass houses were frequently at the center of dreams of progressive thinkers who wished to rectify labor injustices.[114] The dream portrays the aftermath revolution. It features descriptions of idyllic nature (where there used to be barren desert) and flawless expressions of community among people. Often mentioned is the people that are so perfect that

[113] The Royal Parks. "Press Release: Toilet remains from 'spend a penny exhibition uncovered in Hyde Park." <https://www.royalparks.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/toilet-remains-from-spend-a-penny-exhibition-uncovered-in-hyde-park>
[114] Chadaga, 119.

they resemble statues (the athletic body), all carrying themselves as the paragon of health and elegance. Upon an invitation to see how people will live when "the goddess" rules over everything, Vera is introduced to an enormous cast iron and crystal palace, with a colossal house inside. She likens it to the palace at Sydenham. She observes a utopian workforce that enjoys their work so much that they sing and are able to partake in merriment every evening. Perhaps they are in such good spirits because machines do almost all the work for them. The goddess tells Vera that this utopian dreamland is just a snippet of what the future will be.

References to the Crystal Palace do not end with Chernyshevky, but they are also present in several of Dostoevsky's works. First, Dostoevsky responds to Chernyshevsky's utopian vision in *Notes from the Underground,* by calling the Crystal Palace a "chicken coop and a miserable tenement slum." Chadaga writes, "by attacking the palace, Dostoevsky attacked a set of concepts: the denial of free will, the advent of industrial capitalism, false unity, and the triumph of materialism over spirituality."[115] He mocks the logic that the Crystal Palace will come into being when mankind achieves mathematical perfection by referring to the bird Kagan, who appears in his novel *House of the Dead* a folkloric bird that is supposed to bring happy tidings, however proves to be an empty promise in this fictionalized prison memoir. He also associates the Palace with visions of inevitable decay and destruction with references to toothaches that continue to persist and metaphorically replacing the Palace with a chicken coop. Dostevsky's hesitance towards glass is also present in *Crime and Punishment,* when Raskolnikov sticks out his tongue in a restaurant called "The Crystal Palace."[116]

[115] Chadaga, 110.
[116] Sicher, 384.

Dostoevsky's derision of this imagined utopia is similar to Zamiatin's, whose warning responds to issues of Russian society, as well as English. What intends to be a utopian future in which society has eradicated that which brought the "ancients" great tragedy, actually reads as a nightmare scenario where the sources of the greatest joys are stripped from individuals in order to be made calculable and predictable.

In *We*, the reader is not exactly taken into The Crystal Palace of Syndeham, though the novel makes it clear that there is a parallel. Namely, a larger green glass enclosure houses the nation of OneState, a place where humans live in a mix of perfect harmony, happiness, and mechanical labor. According to D-503, defecation is described as a mechanical operation and a useful function. As we will see in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, using the toilet is far from as simple as fulfilling a bodily need. However, D-503 uses defecation as an example of how sex, hunger, and other unpredictable emotions and actions had been changed to conform to a predictable model of being. As he explains the Table of Sex Days, he writes, "And the very same thing that the ancients found to be a source of endless tragedy became for us a harmonious, pleasant, and useful function of the organism, like sleep, physical work, defecating, and so on." (И то самое, что для древних было источником бесчисленных глупейших трагедий, у нас приведено к гармонической, приятно-полезной функции организма так же, как сон, физический труд, прием пищи, дефекация и прочее.) [117]

As Chadaga's contribution makes clear, glass is deeply connected to our understanding of the human body. She writes, "Glass functions as skin; glass vessels evoke the divided condition of being alive – the sense that our bodies are containers for soul, spirit, mind. We feel an affinity for this material as an idealized form of our own material."[118] Furthermore, like the toilet, glass

[117] *We*, 23.
[118] Chadaga, 125.

embodies a wealth of contradictions: strength, stability, potential, immortality, yet also fragility. Chadaga writes, "These contradictions speak to us of our own situation, poised as we are between safety and peril, desiring both protection and freedom."[119] Additionally, both the flushing toilet and structures such as the Crystal Palace are made possible by the rise of industrialization. They are used as symbols of monumental progress (as seen in both the Crystal Palace and Vertov's *Stride, Soviet*), yet it is a success on the brink of failure as seen by the vulnerability of the body on the toilet and the fragility of glass. This contradiction culminates in a post-Soviet depiction of both the toilet and the Crystal Palace in Pelevin's short story, "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream" to be discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation. Pelevin's story weaves together the space of the toilet and a failed utopian vision. This final reference to The Crystal Palace illustrates how the toilet is intertwined with literary concepts of progress (or failed promises of progress).

Iurii Olesha's Envy

Zavist' or *Envy,* a novella written by Iurii Olesha, first appeared in a 1927 edition of *Red Virgin Soil*, the most significant literary journal of the 1920s.[120] The novella was published just before the editor of the journal was fired, a sign of intensifying propaganda efforts, which coincided with the lashing out at the artistic avant-garde and the expulsion of Trotsky from the Party. While nonconformist artists continued to create for several more years, their efforts were abruptly stopped by Party-dictated socialist realism (to be discussed in further detail in the next

[119] Chadaga, 125.
[120] Ken Kalfus. "Introduction." *Envy*. By Iurii Olesha. Trans, Marian Schwartz. Illustrations by Nathan Altman (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004).
See also: Robert A. Maguire. *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2000).

chapter).[121] The novella was an immediate success in Russia, and its popularity quickly spread to Russian readers abroad. The novella also curried Party favor, seen as an exposé on the "conspiracy of feelings" against the country's reorganization.[122]

The novella's main characters represent societal "types" in a post-Revolutionary era that represent either the opposite or a parallel of themselves. The story is mediated through the eyes of Nikolai Kavalerov, a spiteful young intellectual. An unreliable, yet sympathetic narrator, Kavalerov often imagines many of the scenes and dialogues in the novella. Most notably from his vantage point, we witness the private life of Andrei Babichev, an ambitious apparatchik and the trade director of the Food Industry Trust. He is proud of his invention of a thirty-five kopek sausage and intends to build a giant communal dining hall. In the second half of the book, we meet Andrei Babichev's subversive brother, Ivan, after Kavalerov "runs into him" in a mirror. A poet, dreamer, and inventor of the robot named "Ophelia," Ivan Babichev is the opposite of his brother, but a quick friend and confidant to Kavalerov. Also present is Andrei Babichev's protégé, a young athlete named Volodia, who is meant to be the paragon on the Soviet "New Man," however he shows no emotional or intellectual depth. One of the only (human) women in the story, Valya, is the subject of male rivalries in the text, yet is an underdeveloped character figure in the novel.

The Mechanized Body

In an age of rapid industrialization and advances in technology and science, the way the Soviet Union and its citizens conceptualized the body also shifted. The body became part of the package of the ideal Soviet Man, mainly a body that performed with the precision, strength, and

[121] Kalfus, vii.
[122] Kalfus, xi.

productivity of a machine. This athletic body is an essential component to the New Soviet Man, the imagined protagonist of Soviet modernity and an aesthetic blueprint for citizens to embody, as well as through political figures such as Stakhanov, famous for his superhuman ability to exceed productivity goals. The figure of the virile man is strongly present in Stalinist monumental art, visual culture, and film. However, as Lilya Kaganovsky shows in her monograph, traditional critical approaches that interpret only virile and heteronormatively masculine bodies discount the ways in which Stalinism produced an ideological and cultural fantasy around the "radical dismemberment of its male subject."[123] Thus, Kaganovsky notes the possibility of multiple masculinities existing together, all creating the ideal Stalinist man.

Furthermore, less apparent is the narrator's disdain for the mechanized body. During the climax of the novella, during which Kavalerov has set out to kill Babichev, both Ivan and Kavalerov observe athletes' bodies in action, including the body of Volodia, Andrei Babichev's protege and Kavalerov's "competitor" for Babichev's couch. Ivan and Kavalerov observe vaulting exercises, narrating in detail the way the athletes' bodies move over the obstacle and land back on the ground. They notice that one of the athletes is Volodia, whose body is described as "nearly naked, stepped to one side, favoring one leg, probably an athlete's way of showing off."[124] (Прыгун, почти голый, отходил в сторону, слегка припадая на одну ногу, должно быть, из спортсменского кокетства.) The sharp focus on the athlete's body, with particular attention to its form, recalls the portrayal of the athletic body in Dziga Vertov's films. For example, in *Kino-glaz* the film pictures the toned body of a diver diving into the water, then reverses the film to show the action in repeat, and backwards. *Man with a Movie Camera*

[123] Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).
[124] Olesha, 130.

features a long sequence of athletes (many shirtless) in slow motion jumping over hurdles, pole vaulting, playing volleyball, throwing hammer, all while spectators observe. At one point, the picture freezes as hurdlers are mid-air, as if to showcase the powers of the camera, while also placing emphasis on the powerful bodies of the athletes.

Keith Livers also notes the ideologically hybrid character of Stalinist culture. Livers describes the writing of this era Olesha's era as "an encounter between a femininely passive nature, and the phallic thrust of socialist technology,"[125] while Ken Kalfus writes, "The era's governing trope was the machine that would give rise to the envyless, emotionless, well-greased mechanized man, per the strictures laid down by the American efficiency expert Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915), whose mathematical streamlining of the industrial workplace became integral to Marxist-Leninist practice."[126] This is certainly reflected in the novel. In both parts of the book, from the narrator's perspective, there are strong feelings against all those involved with Two Bits, a Taylorized approached to communal eating, and also fear of an actual machine, Ophelia. Ophelia — Ivan Babichev's creation that is intended to salvage emotions that the "new era" has deemed extinct — is intended to take revenge on those who have ushered in the new era of no emotion, of (ironically) mechanization. However, Ivan himself is terrified of his creation. When discussing the machine with Kavalerov, Ivan exclaims, "She scares me! She scares me! […] She hates me…She betrayed me…She's going to kill me."[127] According to Ivan, she sings the ballads of the old era, picks the flowers of the old era, falls in love, feels jealousy, cries, and dreams. Though her intended purpose is to betray the new generation, in what seems to

[125] Keith Livers. *Constructing the Stalinist Body* (Lanham: Lexington Book, 2009), 2.
[126] Kalfus, x. See also: Scoville, James G. "The Taylorization of Vladimir Ilich Lenin." *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society* (Vol. 4, Issue 4). 17 December 2002. pp 620-626.
[127] Olesha, 116.

be Kavalerov's fever dream at the end of the novella, Ophelia betrays her own creator, Ivan. However, Kavalerov awakes to find Ivan and himself sharing a bed with the landlady.

It is no accident that the machine built to destroy this new society is named Ophelia. She is named after Shakespeare character who Ivan notes, "went out of her mind from love and despair – Ophelia…the most human and touching name of all…"[128] Borenstein calls Olesha's postrevolutionary society "thoroughly a man's world," represented in not only the characters themselves, but what drives them. He writes, "The domestic sphere is under attack by men such as Andrei Babichev, who wishes to subsume the customarily female world of the kitchen under a hyperrational, coldly masculine plan. The new world, like the old, has a feminine idol, but it is an entity that nonetheless represents relentless, masculine efficiency: the machine."[129] He interprets Kavalerov's observation of Volodia's body as an exacerbation of his feelings of inadequacy due to his sudden feelings of shame and fear.[130] As Borenstein explains, the moment also emphasizes Kavalerov's need for a father figure, Volodia being the symbol of Kavalerov's loss of Andrei Babichev, the first substitute father that Kavalerov adopts.[131]

While *Envy* has clear depictions of the virile body, it also features the socialist labor hero Andrei Babichev: a fat, sloppy, effeminately endowed man. The novella opens with a grotesque examination of Andrei Babichev — and, of course, a toilet:

> "Он поет по утрам в клозете. Можете представить себе, какой это жизнерадостный, здоровый человек. Желание петь возникает в нем рефлекторно. Эти песни его, в которых нет ни мелодии, ни слов, а есть только одно "та-ра-ра", выкрикиваемое им на разные лады, можно толковать так: "Как мне приятно жить... та-ра! та-ра!.. Мой кишечник упруг... ра-та-та-та-ра-ри... Правильно движутся во мне соки... ра-та-та-ду-та-та... Сокращайся, кишка, сокращайся...трам-ба-ба-бум!" Когда утром он из спальни проходит мимо меня (я притворяюсь спящим) в дверь, ведущую в недра квартиры, в уборную, мое воображение уносится за ним. Я слышу сутолоку в

[128] Olesha, 115.
[129] Eliot Borenstein. *Men Without Women* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001), 126
[130] Borenstein, 142.
[131] Borenstein, 142.

> кабинке уборной, где узко его крупному телу. Его спина трется по внутренней стороне захлопнувшейся двери, и локти тыкаются в стенки, он перебирает ногами." [132]
>
> Mornings he sings on the toilet. You can imagine the joie de vivre, the health this man enjoys. The urge to sing bubbles up like a reflex. These songs of his, which have no melody or words, nothing by 'ta-ra-ra," which he belts out in a variety of styles, go something like this: 'How sweet my life is…ta-rá! ta-rá…bowels are flexing…rá-ta-tá-ta-ra-rí…the juices are flowing just right, straight through…ra-tí-ta-doo-da-tá…squeeze, bowels, squeeze…tram-ba-ba-boom! In the morning, when he walks past me (I pretend to be sleeping) going from his room to the door that leads into the depths of the apartment, to the washroom, my imagination takes off after him. I hear commotion in there—it's a tight fit for his large body. His back rubs against the shut door, his elbows jut into the walls, he shifts from foot to foot." [133]

The grotesque depiction of Andrei Babichev continues throughout the chapter, as Kavalerov observes Andrei's calisthenics and his washing routine. According to Kavalerov, Babichev is an exhibitionist glutton with breasts that bounce as he walks down the stairs. "He'd like to give birth to food."[134] He focuses on the skin, fat rolls, and moles on his back, and the scar on the front of his shoulder.[135] The Bakhtinian grotesqueness in Olesha's novel is apparent, and has been already noted by Ronald D. LeBlanc in his 2001 article "Gluttony and Power in Iurii Olesha's *Envy*."[136] According to LeBlanc, Olesha uses gastronomic motifs in order to advance the story's central power struggle between "the romantic old world values of heroic individualism, free imagination, and personal glory […] and the new Soviet ethos of science, industrial progress, and collectivism […]."[137] LeBlanc writes, "As the two Babichev brothers vie against each other to enlist the ideological and personal loyalties of the members of their country's younger generation […], the socioeconomic and political ramifications of this

[132] Iurii Olesha. *Zavist'*. Part 1, Chapter 1.
[133] Olesha, 5.
[134] Olesha, 11
[135] Olesha, 17.
[136] Ronald D. LeBlanc, "Gluttony and Power in Iurii Olesha's Envy." *The Russian Review* 60, no. 2 (April 2001): 220-237.
[137] LeBlanc, 221.

competition are conveyed largely in sexual, gastronomical, and alimentary terms."[138] Thus, he argues that Olesha's *Envy* is an example of what Eric Naiman calls the "ideological poetics," that is, the phenomenon of food, sex, and the body figured prominently in Soviet Fiction's discourses on War Communism, NEP, and socialist construction.

Also present in Kavalerov's description of Babichev is the detailing of Babichev's child-like behaviors and female-like characteristics. Kavalerov observes, he "washes up like a little boy," "he squawks when he gargles," and "he looks like a fat little boy all grown up."[139] He continues by insulting Babichev's groin. Kavalerov writes:

> "His groin is exposed. His groin is magnificent. A tender scorch mark. A forbidden nook. The groin of a Producer. I saw a groin of the exact same sueded matteness once on a bitch antelope. One look from him and his girls, his secretaries and shopgirls, must get love shocks."[140]
>
> (Открывается пах. Пах его великолепен. Нежная подпалина. Заповедный уголок. Пах производителя. Вот такой же замшевой матовости пах видел я у антилопы-самца. Девушек, секретарш и конторщиц его, должно быть, пронизывают любовные токи от одного его взгляда.)

Kavalerov's insult calls into question Babichev's masculinity, sarcastically calling his phallus-less body "the groin of a producer." The hyperfocus on the groin and the inclusion of its owner's role as a "producer" works to aggrandize the role, and by doing so puts into question Babichev's worthiness of taking on such a role. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that Kavalerov himself does not believe the role of producer is worthy of praise and aggrandizement, but rather he is critiquing this system in which Babichev places his belief. Furthermore, Babichev's grotesque body is an important contrast to the Soviet perfection of Volodia's athletic, masculine

[138] LeBlanc, 221.
[139] Olesha, 6.
[140] Olesha, 6.

body. By placing attention on this difference, Kalaerov's observations work to further discredit not only Babichev's power in the new Soviet system, but also the legitimacy of the system itself.

Kavalerov finds himself struggling to belong. In this new world order, he constantly feels as if he is losing his place, even if that place is Babichev's couch. Kavalerov's early rantings set up an immediate opposition between him and Babichev. The first chapter ends: "He, Andrei Petrovich Babichev, is the director of the Food Industry Trust. He's a great sausage and pastry man and chef. And I, Nikolai Kavalerov, am his jester."[141] (Он, Андрей Петрович Бабичев, занимает пост директора треста пищевой промышленности. Он великий колбасник, кондитер и повар. А я, Николай Кавалеров, при нем шут.)

Furthermore, as Kavalerov notes: things don't like him, things like Babichev. He elaborates, "Furniture purposely sticks out its leg for me. A polished corner once literally bit me. My blanket and I have always had a complicated relationship. Soup served to me never cools." (Меня не любят вещи. Мебель норовит подставить мне ножку. Какой-то лакированный угол однажды буквально укусил меня. С одеялом у меня всегда сложные взаимоотношения. Суп, поданный мне, никогда не остывает.)[142] Kavalerov expresses fears of Volodia's reentrance into Andrei Babichev's life because he knows that Volodia will replace him on Babichev's couch. Though, the couch could easily be a metaphor for Kavalerov's replacement in the world. Outside of Babichev's apartment, things continue to attack Kavalerov: "Things don't like me. I'm hurting the street," he thinks as he steps over cracks in the road.[143]

Kavalerov, who cannot quite find a place in this new era, is the opposite of a New Soviet Man, Babichev. However, Babichev as described by Kavalerov is hardly the visual picture of the

[141] Olesha, 10.
[142] Olesha, 6.
[143] Olesha, 32.

New Soviet Man (as Volodia is). Despite his lack of a chiseled body, Babichev achieves Soviet success through his Two Bits project, an exemplary project that weaves communal eating with mechanized efficiency. Because of the rampant personification of "things," perhaps it is not a surprise when we are introduced to Babichev's sausage. At the opening of Two Bits, as people enter, Babichev holds a sausage, "a sweating surface, yellowish dots of under-the-casing fat." (Вспотевшая поверхность, желтеющие пузырьки подножного жира.)[144] Kavalerov observes, "The sausage was resting in Babichev's raised pink hand like something alive." (Колбаса свисала с розовой сановной ладони Бабичева, как нечто живое.) Later, Babichev puts the sausage on the table and Kavalerov describes him as "lovingly arranging its bedding."[145] Kavalerov had been hearing about the sausage since he moved in with Babichev, and, "Finally the species was bred. Out of mysterious incubators crawled a fat, tightly stuffed casing, swinging heavily like an elephant's trunk." (Наконец порода была выведена. Из таинственных инкубаторов вылезла, покачиваясь грузным качанием хобота, толстая, плотно набитая кишка.)[146]

As Borenstein notes, the fat, sweaty sausage has a marked resemblance to Kavalerov's physical description of Andrei Babichev.[147] It also is directly linked to Babichev's bowel movements in language, as both the casing of the sausage and the Babichev's digestive tract are referred to with the word *кишка,* literally the intestine, but can be used to refer the casing of a sausage (also made from intestine). Borenstein interprets the sausage as a phallic symbol of achievement, and yet another sign that Kavalerov is incapable of making peace with the physical world, and thus, incapable of accepting parental supremacy. Furthermore, the sausage functions

[144] Olesha, 36.
[145] Olesha, 36.
[146] Olesha, 39.
[147] Borenstein, 152.

as both an extension of Babichev, as well as a perfect "son" (it is even "circumcised" by the butcher with an obviously Jewish-sounding name).[148]

A 1966 article by William Harkins interprets the sausage to be an excremental symbol based on its shape and the "lovingly sensual description" given by the narrative.[149] Harkins asserts that a child may confuse the act of defecation with that of giving birth, thus explaining the pride and careful handling of the sausage. Borenstein expands upon this argument, pointing to additional evidence that the sausage is treated as a newborn baby. However, the sausage does not have to be akin to childbirth in order to be a symbol of pride. Given the manner in which Andrei Babichev flings around his naked body and loudly sings on the toilet (that is, according to Kavalerov's portrayal), it is not a stretch to say that such a man would be proud of the excrement that he produced. By looking towards Freud, we can see how excrement can be an origin of the same pride that is linked to sexual organs. Freud describes a stage of infantile sexuality in which the child derives pleasure from defecation. Beyond the pleasurable sensation inside the bowel, pleasure is also derived from the concept that the excrement is a part of the infant's body and thus a "gift." Freud writes, "…by producing them he can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them, his disobedience.[150]

Kavalerov is incapable of understanding Babichev's pride for the sausage. The chapter continues with Kavalerov carting the sausage around town, showing it to Babichev's warehouse man and keeping it safe. As Kavalerov carries out this duty he feels incredibly spiteful, noting that at several times he was ready to chuck the package in the river.[151] He wonders, "Is this really

[148] Borenstein, 153.
[149] William Harkins. "The Theme of Sterility in Olesha's *Envy*." *Slavic Review* 25, no. 3 (September 1966): 447.
[150] Freud, "On Transformations in Instinct…"
[151] Note the connection to Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, as well as the Underground Man and Gogol's *Nose.*

glory?" and contemplates on Babichev's contributions to the world, saying, "He, the ruler, the Communist, was building a new world. And in this new world, glory was sparked because a new kind of sausage had come from the sausage-maker's hands." (Он правитель, коммунист, он строит новый мир. А слава в этом новом мире вспыхивает оттого, что из рук колбасника вышел новый сорт колбасы). However, Kavalerov cannot understand this glory. He thinks, "What did it mean? Biographies, monuments, history had never told me of glory like this…[…] It was in this world that I wanted glory! I wanted to beam the way Babichev was beaming today. But a new type of sausage was not going to make me beam." (Я не понимаю этой славы, что же значит это? Не о такой славе говорили мне жизнеописания, памятники, история…[…] Именно в этом мире я хочу славы! Я хочу сиять так, как сиял сегодня Бабичев. Но новый сорт колбасы меня не заставит сиять.)[152] In his failure to recognize the glory of the sausage that so many show pride towards, Kavalerov once again fails to integrate.

The sausage, the toilet, and the push for mass production are inextricably linked in the novel. In an era of both rapid industrialization and the overturning of old values, the toilet and its contents are elevated. We are constantly confronted with Babichev's success in the new era and Kavalerov's failure. These successes and failures are connected to their ability to adjust to the new era – that is, their ability to produce. While sausage is the source of Babichev's success, the sausage is a complex figure, representing both phallic and fecal properties. Not only is Babichev's sausage production successful, but he is also portrayed as (literally) a master producer in the toilet in the opening paragraphs of the novel. This suggests that part of the success of the new era lies in the ability to conform to changes notion of private and public. Not only is Kavalerov underproductive, but also he displays deep discomfort in carrying the sausage

[152] Olesha, 40.

around the city, illustrating his discomfort with the "mess of the body," a concept that successful Babichev exudes with his clamorous toilet time, his worship of the sausage, and his own sausage-like body.

Conclusions: The Mess of our Bodies

In an era of rapid industrialization, coupled with shifting political and cultural spheres, Olesha's *Envy* questions how the human body fits into the new order of life. In the novella, we see a clear divide between those who thrive in this changing society, and those who are left to feel as if there is no longer a place for them. Accordingly, the functions of their bodies also reflect this divide. Those moving forward with the times are just as mechanized and productive as the solutions that they present to the world that bring them success.

In the case of Andrei Babichev, whose body is mostly described by an unreliable and outcast narrator, the idea of efficient, Soviet production comes into conversation with the production of excrement. Kavalerov's opening description of Andrei Babichev on the toilet acts as the foundation to the reader's understanding of the two characters' opposition to each other– and Kavalerov's opposition to the new world order. Though the mechanized body and the mechanization modality of production (whether excrement or sausage) become symbols of the New Soviet Man's success as a Producer and provider for the state.

The tension between mechanization and the body is present in Zamiatin's *We* as well, though in the form of the tension between rationality and irrationality. Defecation is meant to be a mechanized, rational, and predictable part of life. Yet, the satire of the novel coupled with the ending scene and subsequent Soviet references to the toilet illustrates that the toilet exists beyond the realm of "rationality" as D-503 understands it. While defecation and the toilet may be painted

as a productive aspect of daily life, life in the toilet is beyond just relieving a bodily need. This is made apparent in the novel itself, which ends in the toilet during a climax of tension in D-503's understanding of infinity. As much as the narrative's societies want to confine what we do in the toilet to just relieving a bodily need, narratives repeatedly illustrate to us that the toilet cannot be confined to an automatic and unemotional function. Narrative continue to tell us that as humans, we cannot confine the "mess" of our bodies and the mess of our spirits for it is our irrationality that makes us human.

In Eisenstein's *October*, the handling of the Tsaritsa's toilet is a revolutionary tool that is part of the humanization/dehumanization of royalty. The admission that royalty also partake in defecation humanizes them and renders them just as powerless to control the "mess" of their bodies, while the violent handling of the toilet seat and the Tsaritsa's other belongings is an act of dehumanization. Even Vertov's *Stride, Soviet* presents to us these unclear boundaries between the progress towards containment of human mess and the inherent inability to contain the mess of the human. As part of a representation of Soviet progress we are presented with imagery of the flushing toilet. However, not even this beacon of Soviet progress is resistant to the mess of human life. Oddly, the toilet pictured is not a pristine bowl, but rather it is quite dirty.

The examples of this era challenge notions of what should be seen and what should not be seen and reorganize ideas of private and public. The 1920s represent a moment of mass reorganization and revolution, both politically and artistically. Duchamp overthrows old ideas of art, while Soviets overthrow an entire regime. As such, what is allowed to be shown and described in public is also reimagined. Curiously, during this era, the first public toilet is housed in a glass structure, exposing the false dichotomy of private and public. Toilets as a sign of privacy are exposed for all to see. Accordingly, Kavalerov's gaze follows Babichev into the

toilet and Kavalerov also carries the sausage (feces) around the city. Vertov showcases the toilet, while Eisenstein uses it a symbol of violation and exposure.

This common theme of the tension between the mess of the human body, the grotesque reality of human life, and societal efforts and pressures to contain is present throughout the works presented in this chapter and will persist throughout this dissertation. Though as we will see as time progresses, the mess of the body expands into daily life and eventually literally explodes (Pelevin) in a symbol of the failed progress and promises that suppressed it.

Chapter 2: "We're No Moneybags Here!":

Enforcing the Everyday in the Communal Toilet

Anxieties abounded in the communal apartment, where one could get a beating for leaving the light on in the toilet. The idea of the communal apartment was presented only a few weeks after the October Revolution of 1917, when Lenin drafted a plan to expropriate and resettle private apartments.[153] The Soviet regime had inherited a housing crisis from the Tsarist era and their solution included reorganizing housing to adhere to socialist principles. The state took ownership of 80% of urban housing so that it could control its distribution and ensure that all citizens had similar living conditions. [154] Each person was to be assigned 10 square meters of living space or 13 square meters per family. Thus, space was divided mathematically, and as a result, many apartments in major cities were partitioned in an often unfunctional manner.

Separate apartments became a sign of special privilege, or special luck, until the late 1950s when the housing system was restructured once again. The concepts of "home" and "privacy" differed greatly from their capitalist counterparts and the Soviet Union put emphasis on using cities' open spaces, such as parks, squares, and communal recreation centers.[155] Furthermore, by the late 1920s, the communal apartment had become "a major Soviet institution of social control and a form of constant surveillance."[156] In each apartment, a "senior tenant" was appointed to facilitate the smooth running of the apartment. They would track and dictate bathroom usage, chore distribution, and charges for shared services, such as telephone and electricity.[157]

[153] Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995), 124.
[154] Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia*, 1.
[155] Attwood, 4.
[156] Boym, *Common Places*, 125.
[157] Attwood, 5.

As this dissertation has discussed, the toilet is usually a place where one expects near-complete privacy due to nature of its function. However, the communal apartment upsets this dynamic, as the toilet becomes a room shared by multiple families. As a result, tenants of communal apartments show a need to self-manage and self-regulate shared spaces, continuing to upset the boundary between private and public around the toilet. The organization of the communal apartment allows them to easily identify "others," or those who do not properly function according to socialist values. As a result, both fictional and nonfictional tenants (consciously or unconsciously) keep track of each other's bathroom habits, such as length of use, frequency of use, and who always leaves the light on. Thus, "laws" and customs around everyday living are established, often centering on the space of the toilet and its rules of use.

In literature and film, anxieties about conforming to customs of the communal toilet often manifest themselves in the form of light-hearted, humorous depictions of failures of characters to "correctly" and efficiently use the shared space of the toilet. As Jeremy Hicks notes, Zoschenko excels in turning, "the disappointment and let-downs of everyday Soviet life into a vision of an existence structured in such a way to humiliate and destroy the average citizen and to undermine the noble aims proclaimed by the Bolsheviks."[158] This chapter examines works of literature that humorously approach the topic of the communal toilet, including Mikhail Zoshchenko's "Guests" (1927) and Ilf and Petrov's *Golden Calf* (1934). Although humorously and hyperbolically presented, the stories' comedy stems from real-life concerns over post-revolutionary changes to space and home. Thus, physical space, and the changing dynamics surrounding the toilet become important points in which to examine the ways in which political and social change impact private life. Themes of surveillance and anxiety continue to be

[158] Jeremy Hicks. "Introduction." *The Galosh and Other Stories.* By Mikhail Zoshchenko (New York: Ardis Books, 2000): 15.

explored in later texts that place themselves in the communal apartment. In Abram Tertz's "Phkentz" (1957) and "The Tenants" (1955-1961), Tertz incorporates these same themes into narratives with fantastical elements that go further than illustrating the dynamics of the communal apartment to also include discussion of non-belonging.

Although the communal apartment was partly a solution for rising populations in cities, it was also an ideological tool that that abolished the idea of private life. As Katerina Gerasimova asserts, "Everything closed to and detached from the State or the collective was considered counter-revolutionary."[159] Thus, private ownership of housing was abolished and the home was considered part of the public sphere. Critical analyses of Soviet satirist such as Zoshchenko and Ilf and Petrov note their "subversive" humor that, while appearing to conform to Soviet norms, in reality heavily challenged them.[160] Despite Ilf and Petrov's caustic and unstable relationship to Soviet orthodoxy (despite their loyalty to the regime), for some readers, "their satires could continue to function as anti-establishment, regardless of their simultaneous position within the pantheon of Soviet classics."[161] On the other hand, Zoshchenko, who experienced much success early on, was subjected to increasingly severe criticism from Soviet officials beginning in the 1930s and was eventually expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers.

In this dissertation, the context of the communal apartment is particularly important in fostering a cultural memory of the toilet. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the toilet takes a central role in the representation of revolution, which prompts the private to thrust itself into the public as a rapidly changing world renegotiates boundaries. Later, the communal toilet is

[159] Katerina Gerasimova. "Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment." *Socialist Spaces*. eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (New York: Bloomsbury, 2002), 209.
[160] Vinokour, Maya. "Books of Laughter and Forgetting: Satire and Trauma in the Novels of Ilf and Petrov." *Slavic Review* 74, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 334-353.
[161] Vinokour, 353.

used as a metaphor for anxieties surrounding the end of the Soviet Union, for example in Pelevin's "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream" and the SZ Group's actions. Furthermore, Ilya Kabakov frequently uses the toilet and the communal apartment in his installations as a means of telling the story of his youth and asking broader questions about humanity. Thus, in the context of my larger project, this section will ultimately argue that texts, such as Zoshchenko's "The Guests" and "The Crisis," and Ilf and Petrov's *The Golden Calf,* and the general practices pertaining to the communal apartment are foundational for the multitude of literature, conceptual art, and film that follow, setting the stage for the toilet as a trope of anxiety in the late-Soviet period.

Zoshchenko's "Guests" and "The Crisis"

Through tropes of humor in literature, we can begin to examine how the changing dynamic of living space affected everyday life. In Zoshchenko's *Guests* (1927), the narrator recounts a Christmas dinner to which he invited fifteen guests. Two out of the three hosts "fall by the wayside," one getting so drunk that he can't say "mama." Despite the drunkard, the party goes on and all are enjoying themselves and playing games. Suddenly, the third host, who is the only host that remains of sound mind, walks into the room, "pale as death," and says, "– Это, – говорит, – ну, чистое безобразие! Кто-то сейчас выкрутил в уборной электрическую лампочку в двадцать пять свечей. Это, – говорит, – прямо гостей в уборные нельзя допущать." ("This," he says, "is a sheer disgrace! Somebody unscrewed the 25-watt lightbulb in the toilet. This," he says, "is exactly why we shouldn't let guests in the toilet.") The news is so shocking that the drunkard immediately sobers up, women scream, and the men suggest a search. But the lightbulb is not found. They find another lightbulb to use in the toilet, but the mood of

the party is ruined, and the guests leave. The next morning one of the hosts wakes to find that he himself had presumptuously unscrewed the lightbulb out of fear that the guests would steal it, and when he fell asleep on the windowsill, crushed it with his body.

The communal apartment in Zoshchenko's short story (and several others with similar themes) serves as basis and catalyst for the strange, hyperbolic behaviors of others. In his 2000 introduction to his translation of Zoshchenko's short stories, Hicks remarks that, "If it exemplified the collective ideal, the communal apartment embodied some of its worst aspects – above all its self-righteous intrusion into the individual's personal life and the resulting lack of privacy."[162] Ideally, members of a communal apartment would equally participate in the management of the apartment. Gerasimova writes, "Mutual control and discipline should serve to unify the collective."[163] However, this notion is taken to the extreme in Zoshchenko's stories. Zoshchenko intentionally crafts situations of hyperbole, yet, at the same time, the stories are not as far from reality as their humor would lead us to believe. For example, in a 1925 short story titled "The Crisis," the housing crisis leads a man to live in the bathroom of a communal apartment, a seemingly purposely ridiculous scenario, made even more ridiculous by his growing family that moves into the bathroom with him as well. However, as we later learn from Ilya Kabakov's work, "The Toilet," exhibited in 1991, the scenario is not far from reality. Kabakov's installation featured an apartment set in a public toilet. When speaking of the inspiration for the work, Kabakov recounted how his mother lived in the old toilet of his school, where she worked as a cleaner, because she could not obtain the necessary permits to find a proper room of her own.

[162] Hicks, 11.
[163] ibid.

Ilf and Petrov's Golden Calf

Similar to Zoshchenko's "Guests," Ilf and Petrov's *Golden Calf* (1931) illustrates a relationship of surveillance and distrust among fellow inhabitants (guests or otherwise) in the communal apartment. Furthermore, this is illustrated also through the concern for electricity and its use. A similar conflict involving a toilet lightbulb ensues in a chapter titled "Vasisualy Lokhankin and His Role in the Russian Revolution." Vasisualy Lokhankin, an unemployed intellectual, is beaten by tenants for repeatedly leaving the light on in the toilet. Ilf and Petrov are well-known for their satirical novels, *The Golden Calf* being a sequel to *The Twelve Chairs.* The driving force of the novel is the cunning con man Ostap Bender and his quest to amass a fortune through trickery. Along the way, the novel takes much time to introduce us to various characters, often individuals just as questionable in their ideological purity as Bender, including other thieves and tricksters, drunkards, and bourgeois intellectuals.

Although there is important caricature work throughout the novel, the caricature of the spaces in the novels also contributes to the satire. Maya Vinokour uses the novel's unique markers of time to argue that time in the novel as a literary method for creating satire. For example, she discusses the way in which Ilf and Petrov poke fun at a quickly disappearing prerevolutionary past, while conflating it with the inconveniences of the Soviet present, such as red tape, bureaucratic bungling, and crowded living conditions.[164] This collapse of prerevolutionary and Soviet time is also present in the descriptions of the spaces the characters inhabit. Early in the novel, a description of the change in office furniture highlights the fulfillment of both practical and ideological concerns in the chaos after the revolution. The narrator observes that the furnishing of government offices were standardized during pre-

[164] Vinokour, 351.

revolutionary times to be, Vinkour describes, "consisting of flat cupboards reaching almost the ceiling, wooden settees with three-inch-polished seats, tables with thick billiard-style legs, and oak barriers separating the officials from the troubled outside world." However, in post-revolution, people "forgot" how to furnish the offices of administrative officials and they began to be filled with objects from private apartments: a mirrored shelf with porcelain lucky elephants, bookcases, extendable leather armchairs, and blue Japanese vases.[165] Closing factories, changing tastes and economy, caused the abandoning of tradition and pre-revolutionary standards, inviting furniture that would usually only be appropriate for the home to be permitted in administrative spaces.

The caricature of physical space continues in Chapter 13, "Vasisualy Lokhankin and His Role in the Revolution" – a chapter devoted to the caricature Vasisualy Lokhankin, though the personality of the space itself provides important context for the chapter's commentary. Lokhankin is an unemployed intellectual, pathetically protesting his wife's failure to return his love with a hunger strike. He is illustrated with dramatic pitifulness. As he is reveling in his grief, he realizes that he is talking in iambic pentameters although he has never written or enjoyed reading poetry. Iambic pentameter is the common meter used for elegies, in which often a pathetic figure is pining away about unrequited love.

In addition to his excessive romanticism, the text continues to remind us that Lokankin is counter to the Soviet "new man." One of the reasons he longs to stay married to his wife, Barbara, (along with her large bosom) is that she has a job. A job is something that Lokhankin has no desire to possess because, "a job would have prevented him from thinking about the significance of the Russian intelligentsia." This is also a further testament to Lokhankin's anti-

[165] *The Golden Calf*, trans. John C. Richardson, 8.

socialist spirit, as all his thoughts boil down to his own role and significance (in the intellegentsia or otherwise), or highly philosophical questions, such as the importance of the soul and the mortification of the flesh. Furthermore, Barbara and Ptiburdukov use language to insult Lokhankin that places him further in opposition to the goals of the revolution. Barbara calls him a "rotten capitalist" and a "крепостник" who is holding her hostage with his hunger strike. Ptiburdukov asks how he could do this during the second year of the five-year plan.

However, the drama is not only between Lokhankin and his wife, Barbara. When Barabara's lover, Ptiburdukov enters the apartment, "Квартира оживилась. Хлопали двери, проносились тени, светились глаза жильцов, и где-то страстно вздохнули: -- мужчина пришел." (The apartment came to life. Doors banged, shadows flitted past, the tenants' eyes gleamed, and from somewhere came a passionate sigh: a man had arrived.")[166] The entire apartment's watchful eyes observe and weigh in on the soap opera. The narrator also discusses this dynamic, saying,

> "Prolonged cohabitation had hardened them and they knew no fear. The household balance of power was maintained by military blocks of the tenants. Sometimes they all ganged up against a tenant, and the one in question came off badly. The centripetal force of barratry seized him up, sucked him into solicitor's offices, swept him through the foggy law-court corridors like a whirlwind, and pushed him into the courtrooms."[167]

> "Продолжительная совместная жизнь закалила этих людей, и они не знали страха. Квартирное равновесие поддерживалось блоками между отдельными жильцами. Иногда обитатели "Вороньей слободки" объединялись все вместе против какого-либо одного квартиранта, и плохо приходилось такому квартиранту. Центростремительная сила сутяжничества подхватывала его, втягивала в канцелярии юрисконсультов, вихрем проносила через прокуренные судебные коридоры и вталкивала в камеры товарищеских и народных судов."

[166] *Golden Calf,* 143.
[167] *Golden Calf,* 147.

The novel's communal apartment, apartment #3 or *Voronia slobodka*, became an important reference in Soviet culture and its name because a term for communal apartments and non-communal apartments with many family members. The tenants have a reputation for being ornery and are known in the building for their frequent and fierce squabbles. As the passage describes, at times the tenants would gang up on one person, causing deep misery for the unlucky chosen one. The courtroom and military imagery of this description illustrate the readiness of the tenants to jump to confront so-called injustices. This dynamic is illustrated in the main conflict of the chapter, which begins as tenants start to confront Lokhankin about leaving the light on in the toilet. The first to inform him was a tenant, whose eyes had a "diabolical glint" (При этом глаза у него были решительно дьявольские) as he said it, conveying an important diplomatic move.

However, Lokhankin continues to forget to extinguish the light in the "most used room in the apartment." His mind full of the tragedy of his wife leaving him, and also his musings on the significance of the Russian intelligentsia, "Could he be expected to think that the miserable bronze light emitted by the eight-watt bulb would arouse such strong feelings among the neighbors?"(Мог ли он думать, что жалкий бронзовый светишко восьмисвечовой лампы вызовет в соседях такое большое чувство?"[168] Even after many warnings and a letter signed by all the tenants, Lokhankin continues to forget about the light, eventually leading the tenants to forcefully hold him down while they all take turns beating his bare bottom with birch (another reference to the lower bodily stratum). As the tenants hold him down, Lokhankin pleads for help, insisting that he is not guilty. He insists first that he did not do anything of the sort, then that his depression is to blame because his wife left him, then begs them to be gentle because he is

[168] *Golden Calf*, 152.

anemic. The tenants show him no mercy. They say flatly they are all depressed, all their wives left them, and they are all anemic.

The Lightbulb

As is apparent by the main conflict in both incidents "The Guests" and *The Golden Calf*, the issue of electricity is a significant one. The electric meter was a heavily monitored resource in the communal apartment and acquired a status of its own. Besides being one of the few things that required individual payment within the communal apartment, electricity also held ideological significance. A Country-wide electrical grid was introduced in Russia in the 1920s along with collectivization and industrialization campaigns later in the decade that reconceptualized the national map from privately-owned and scattered land into a continuous, state-owned body. As Emma Widdis asserts, "In particular, [an examination of the visual and verbal terms through which these projects were described] reveals a rhetorical emphasis on the creation of the new *connections* between centre and periphery and the expressed intention to construct an alternative spatial organization: a socialist space."[169] These early-1920s initiatives worked to "overcome the separation of town and countryside, urban and rural spaces, through (in Engel's word) 'the unification of town and village in a single whole.'"[170] Furthermore, as Widdis continues, it was a project not only of unification, but also equalization, as a single network of interconnected spaces closed the space (literally) between village and worker, uniting all as Soviet citizens. Widdis writes, "As a symbol, the [electrical] grid was broadly understood – and promoted – as a radical equalizer that made periphery equal to the centre."[171]

[169] Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, 21.
[170] Widdis, 21.
[171] Widdis, 24.

The monumental Plan for Electrification was announced in 1920. The plan represented the first unified, single plan for the reconstruction of the economy. While it addressed practical issues of large-scale industrialization, Widdis discusses how it also offered much more by "transfom[ing] everyday life in every corner of the Soviet territory, providing a network that would integrate centre and periphery."[172] Furthermore, as evidence of Lenin's words in 1920[173], electricity (Lenin's little light bulbs) were to bring not only light, but enlightenment, to the "dark corners of the Soviet state."[174] That is, by conquering the distance between the town and village, it would be possible the raise the cultural level of the village and "vanquish the remnants of backwardness, darkness, degradation, illness, and poverty, even in the most remote corners of the country."[175]

However, as creative works reveal, there was a more unfortunate effect to the unified electrification of the country. The lightbulb literally illuminated the private space of the toilet, giving light to a room often built without windows. Yet, with electrification and unification (through the power grid and through collective living) also came a sense of surveillance and an intrusion of private space. The lightbulb, also dubbed as "Lenin's little lightbulbs," symbolized the state. Thus, in a metaphoric sense, the state also resided in the communal apartment. The electrification of the nation symbolized the penetration of Sovietness into the home, making it visible and public even the most private spaces.

However, while the authors comment on the symbolic intrusion of the Soviet state and the tangible intrusion of surveillant neighbors, their method is anything but dark and anxious.

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[172] Widdis, 22
[173] Vladimir Lenin. "Communism is Soviet Power + Electrification of the Whole Country." *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*. < http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1921-2/electrification-campaign/communism-is-soviet-power-electrification-of-the-whole-country/>
[174] Widdis, 24.
[175] Widdis, 25.

Both Zoshchenko and Ilf and Petrov are famous well beyond the early-Soviet era for their humor and satire. Their use of satire, along with the physical location of the bathroom, calls upon images of the grotesque body bring the stories in connection with Bakhtin's idea of carnivalesque. Thus, the stories are more than just laughter, but they are a form of subversion. In a carnival sense of the world hierarchy and society are turned upside down and dynamics of power are challenged. Furthermore, in these examples, there is no direct mention of the state, but rather the anxiety over the lightbulb remains entirely private.

The stories place their character in conflict with the declared ideals of socialist societies, insisting on a culture of anxiety and unrest surrounding national unification projects. They call to attention the impracticality of the communal apartment itself and also issues of perceived and real intrusion into private life by highlighting issues surrounding the electrification of the toilet. The toilet holds potential for crude humor and also grotesque subversion, and thus aids in presenting a challenge to systems of power, as part of this dissertation intends to illustrate.

The Housing Crisis and Everyday Life

Zoshchenko's short, accessible stories represent a starting point in examining the toilet's role as a commentary on the changing conceptions of home. In Zoshchenko's "The Crisis," a man recounts his arrival to Moscow. Because of "the crisis," as he says, meaning the housing crisis caused by a rapid influx of people into cities, he cannot find a room for weeks. Finally, someone offers space in a communal apartment's bathroom, which is separate from the toilets. He goes on living there, eventually marrying and inviting his spouse to live there because she also cannot find a room. Eventually, they have a baby, who also lives in the bathroom with them.

This short story points to the very real housing crisis of the 1930s. Communal apartments were just one part of a city-wide development project that conceived urban design as a means for political and social change. In *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941,* David L. Hoffman discusses how Moscow's unique urban environment affected the living standards of its residents. For the Soviet Union's urban planners of the 1920s and 1930s, he writes, "Their model cities were to produce model citizens – cultured urbanites who would enthusiastically join forces and build socialism."[176] However, the 1935 reconstruction plan that set out to do this did not account for rapid urbanization and growth, ultimately undermining their own vision, particularly outside of the city center where urban services were all but nonexistent and housing was insufficient.

Housing in particular fell short of the urban developers' plans to create a clean and efficient environment. Although there were calls for large-scale housing projects, the city council's budget did not keep up with demand until the city was already hopelessly crowded.[177] This resulted in the average amount of people in a room rising to 3.91 from 2.71 in a matter of 15 years. Shared spaces, such as the kitchen, bathroom, and hallway were noisy, filthy, and required tenants to form a line to use their own utilities. As Hoffman points out, privacy among tenants was impossible and "trivialities could assume dangerous proportions in the highly politicized environment of the 1930s."[178] This is reflected in literature, such as Ilf & Petrov's *Golden Calf* mentioned above.

Communal apartments were not only a partial solution to the housing crisis, but they also became an ideological symbol for a society that operated communally. In *Gender and Housing*

[176] David L Hoffman. "The Urban Environment and Living Standards." *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941.* Studies of the Harriman Institute (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 129.
[177] Hoffman, 137.
[178] Hoffman, 141.

in Soviet Russia, Attwood discusses the ways in which official messaging grappled with the realities of the blurred boundaries between public and private. As she explains, living space was not subjected to the same degree and scrutiny as public places, however this was only because the state had limited resources. Despite the greater freedom in private spheres compared to public, living spaces still did not function as a private space, as we have seen illustrated in the literary examples in this dissertation. Thus, as Attwood goes on to explain, Soviet citizens were encouraged to see the "socialist city" as their home. As such Soviet authorities made a conscious effort to place emphasis on the city's open spaces, such as parks, squares, and communal recreation facilities, which promoted collective leisure, rather than relaxation at home.[179]

Furthermore, the housing crisis was manipulated to punish those that were thought to be enemies of the Soviet state and reward those that conformed to the idea of an ideal Soviet citizen. As Attwood writes, in the 1920s certain people, such as members of the bourgeoise or other class enemies, were denied housing. During the Stalin era certain individuals, like shock workers, would receive better quality housing. Also, an increasing number of factories and enterprises began to offer housing and thus became a means to control workers through their living spaces.[180] However, the actual degree of intentional state surveillance within the communal apartment is debated among critics. Some argue that communal housing was a solution to the housing crisis and the ideological pressure and surveillance was an unintentional byproduct. However, others argue that their physical and theoretical construction was quite intentional and part of the plan for mass surveillance and control.[181] Svetlana Boym claims that the idea of the

[179] Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet,* 4.
[180] Attwood, 5.
[181] Steven Harris. "In Search of 'Ordinary' Russia: Everyday Life in the NEP, the Thaw, and the Communal Apartment." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 607-608.

communal apartment, like so many things in Soviet Russia, "sprang from Lenin's head."[182] What she is referring to is a plan Lenin drafted shortly after the October Revolution for an expropriation of apartments whose rooms exceeded the number of occupants. She identifies communal apartments made from existing homes as a compromise with the utopian idea of house communes, "and the first tacit acknowledgement that the drive for the new *byt* might not be fully successful."[183] Mark Meerovich goes farther to say that communal housing was always an intended means of controlling people, their work, and their behavior in the interest of effective industrialization.[184]

The "Upper Half"

With attention and anxiety towards the surveillance and control of the communal apartment, perhaps it makes sense that literature would turn to carnivalesque humor in an attempt to capture the absurdities of everyday life. Bakhtin's idea of carnivalesque is a literary tool used to subvert dominant power structures, as is seen in times of festival. Interactions between unlikely characters, impolite or typically unacceptable behavior, and blasphemy of the sacred are all qualities of carnival that Bakhtin transposes onto literature as the mixing of high and low styles, mixing of genres usually separated, and multi-toned narration, which he calls the carnivalization of literature.[185] Related to carnivalesque is the grotesque, which involves the "lower half" of the body, as discussed in this dissertation's introduction. In her article, "Books of Laughter and Forgetting: Satire and Trauma in the Novels of Il'f and Petrov," Maya Vinokour

[182] Boym, "Everyday Culture: An Oxymoron?" UNLV Center for Democratic Culture. <http://cdclv.unlv.edu/archives/nc1/boym_everyday.html>
[183] ibid.
[184] Mark G. Meerovich, *Ocherki istorii zhilishchnoi politiki v SSSR i ee realizatsii v arkhitekturnom proektirovanii (1917–1941 gg.)* Irkutsk: Izdatel´stvo Irkutskogo gosudar-stvennogo tekhnicheskogo universiteta, 2003.
[185] Mikhail Bakhtin. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 108. < https://archive.org/details/problemsofdostoe00bakh>

discusses the carnivalization of literature and the unique form of laughter that the 1920s and 1930s theorists employed.[186]

A main source of humor in both writers' works is caricature, a practice that extends back to medieval grotesque, carnivalesque figuration, and in the wearing of masks.[187] Yet, as Vinokour notes, the "new" society needed only "the 'upper' half of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque," that is, an accessible and outward-oriented laughter.[188] Vinokour argues that satirists of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Ilf and Petrov, owe their canonization to the nature of their humor, which "refers to, but discourages dwelling on, the trauma Soviet citizens suffered during and after the revolution."[189] She asserts that they create a particular kind of Soviet laughter, one that "used trauma in the service of social discipline […] by encouraging readers to laugh in this way – not *through* tears but, as it were, *in their stead.*"[190] As Vinokour argues, the satirists of the 1930s create humor by referring to, but discouraging dwelling on the trauma that Soviet citizens experienced during and after the revolution.

It is the satire's simultaneous "trauma-revealing" and "trauma-concealing" nature that makes it of service to social discipline, despite its appearance as critique of Soviet society and culture. The elements of Soviet society that were "critiqued" were not excluded from public discourse, though it did depict seemingly anti-Soviet characters as empathetic. Vinokour's arguments illuminates why satirist literature of the 30s so subtly referred to the toilet compared the other works that have and will be discussed in this dissertation. Unlike other works, there is no direct mention of defecation, intestinal gas, or other "lower-body" functions that are often

[186] Vinokour. "Books of Laughter and Forgetting."
[187] Annie Gerin. *Devastation and Laughter: Satire, Power, and Culture in Early Soviet State 1920s-1930s* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2018), 129.
[188] Vinokour, 353.
[189] Vinokour, 336.
[190] Vinokour, 336.

associated with the grotesque. Rather, more common is only the mention of the room itself. This perhaps explains why satirists of the 20s and 30s are more concerned with lightbulbs than they are with being able to use the toilet in peace.

The Toilet and The Fantastic: In Opposition to Socialist Realism

Several decades apart from the "upper half" communal apartment humor of the 1930s, comes the work of Abram Tertz (Andrei Siniavskii). Though written in the late 1950s, several of Tertz's short stories place themselves in the 1930s communal apartment. Far from the situational humor of Zoshchenko and Ilf and Petrov, Tertz's stories instead take a more serious tone with fantastical elements.

Incorporating imagination and fantastical images was a conscious choice on Tertz's part, which is made apparent in his essay "On Socialist Realism." Circulated in samizdat in the 1950s, the essay is a reflection on the loss that art has endured as a result of socialist realism. He criticizes an excessive desire for realism and return to classicism, calling all works that attempt "excessive verisimilitude" a failure in capturing the truth of life.

To initially define socialist realism, Tertz directly quotes Andrei Zhdanov's speech at the 1934 First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, where the guidelines for creating socialist-aligned art were established:

> "Socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands from the artist a truthful and historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism."[191]

[191] First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934, 716.

Zhdanov's speech to the 1934 Congress on Soviet literature further defines elements of the socialist realist text. He identifies elements such as a hero that chooses labor and organizes labor so that is easy and more productive ("raising it to the level of art"). The socialist realist text should show a "morally authoritative force" and be "purged of all philistine forces," such as the "superfluous people" of the literary romantic period. He asserts that writers are to act as the "engineers of the soul," (first stated by Stalin) which places them in a position to construct a new life for all.[192]

Similarly, in his speech during the 1934 Congress, Zhdanov also considers literature as a driver for the success of socialist construction, also calling the writer an "engineer of human souls." He praises Soviet literature for its richness in ideas, its revolutionary spirit, and the truthfulness with which it represents the Soviet Union. He criticizes bourgeois literature for its lack of material and thus inability to create great works of art. He states, "Characteristic of the decadence and decay of bourgeois culture are the orgies of mysticism and superstition, the passion for pornography." According to Zhdanov, because they try to conceal the decay of the bourgeois system they rely on these literary tactics, as well as heroes that are thieves, prostitutes, and hooligans.

Soviet writers on the other hand have a wealth of material, he says. The Soviet writer derives their material from "the life and experience of the men and women of Dneprostoi, of Magnitostroi. Our writer draws his material from the heroic epic of the Cheliuskin expedition, from the experience of our collective farms, from the creative action that is seething in all corners of our country." He defines what is means to be an "engineer of the soul," a true Soviet writer, as depicting life truthfully, rather than in a "dead, scholastic way." He defines it as

[192] H. G. Scott, ed., Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress (Moscow: Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R, 1935), 53-54, 64-67.

writing with historical concreteness, as well as with ideological education. He says, "To be an engineer of human souls means standing with both feet firmly on the basis of really life. […] Our literature, which stands with both feet firmly planted on a materialist basis, cannot be hostile to romanticism, but it must be a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism." As such, literature and the mastery of writing was essential in constructing the ideal of the new Soviet society.[193]

In her 1981 study *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual,* Katerina Clark comments on these exact characteristics, though she defines them using socialist realism's founding novels. As she asserts, socialist realist texts do not follow a single doctrine, nor do they all follow the "master plot" completely. However, they are all shaped by the goal of illustrating the major tenets of ideology. As Clark argues, this is partly done through highly symbolic language that resulted in the homogenization of Soviet literature, which was over time colored and diversified by new "speakers" and divergent groups of socialist realist authors.[194]

This observation is an echo of Tertz's "On Socialist Realism," where he relates the blind belief in Communism to a belief in religion and criticizes its failed promises. Most of all, he criticizes the effect of this omnipotent belief in Communism on the failures of Soviet literature. He writes, "Works produced by socialist realists vary in style and content. But in all of them the Purpose is present, whether directly or indirectly, open or veiled. They are panegyrics on Communism, satires on some of its many enemies, or descriptions of life 'in its revolutionary development,' i.e. life moving towards Communism."[195] He argues that socialist realism does not

[193] *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (New York: International Publishers, 1935).
[194] Katerina Clark. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. 3rd Edition (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000), 14.
[195] Abram Tertz. "On Socialist Realism." Trans. George Dennis. *Dissent* (Winter 1960): 59. In the original Russian: "Произведения социалистического реализма весьма разнообразны по стилю и содержанию. Но в каждом из них присутствует понятие Цели в прямом или косвенном значении, в открытом или завуалированном выражении. Это либо панегирик коммунизму и всему, что с ним связано, либо сатира на его

depict reality, but rather it starts from an ideal, which it then adapts to reality. He describes it as "really nothing but a summons to view truth in the light of the ideal."[196] He criticizes socialist realism for combining the positive hero, allegory, elevated style, prosaic descriptions of ordinary life – elements that Tertz's considers to be incompatible, resulting in a "loathsome literary salad" that is "a half-classicist half-art, which is none too socialist and altogether not realism."[197]

Furthermore, Tertz comments on symbolic language and the way in which it contributed to a homogenization of language. He reflects on his own use of language and the way in which Civil War songs of his childhood influence the way in which he chooses language. He writes:

> "While working on this article I have caught myself more than once dropping into irony – that unworthy device! I caught myself trying to avoid the phrase 'Soviet Power.' I preferred to use its synonyms, like 'our state,' 'the socialist system' and so on. No doubt this was due to the fact that when I was young, the words of one of our Civil War songs went straight to my soul:
>
> All of us into the fight
> For Soviet Power
> And as one man we'll die
> Fighting for it.
>
> It is enough for me to pronounce the words 'Soviet Power' to make me see the Revolution with my mind's eye. I see the taking of the Winter Palace, the cracking motion of machine-gun belts, the bread cards for on eighth of a pound, the defense of Red Petersburg. In a strictly logical judgement, 'Soviet Power' and 'the socialist state' are the same thing. But if I have a few things against the socialist state – trifles, all of them – I have absolutely nothing against the Soviet Power. Ridiculous? Maybe. But this is also Romanticism."[198]

многочисленных врагов, либо, наконец, — всякого рода описания жизни, «в ее революционном развитии», т. е. опять-таки в движении к коммунизму." (Mark Barbakadze, ed. "Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realism." *Antologiia samizdata.* <http://antology.igrunov.ru/authors/synyavsky/1059651903.html#_ftn1>)

[196] Tertz, 59.

[197] Tertz, 64.

[198] Tertz, 60-61. In the original Russian: В работе над этой статьей мне приходилось не раз ловить себя на том, что, пользуясь кое-где недостойным приемом иронии, я стараюсь избегать при этом выражения «советская власть». Я предпочитал заменять его синонимами - «наше государство», «социалистическая система» и другими. Вероятно, это объясняется тем, что с юности мне запали в душу слова одной песни времен гражданской войны: Смело мы в бой пойдем/ За власть Советов/ И как один умрем/ В борьбе за это. Стоит мне произнести «советская власть», как я тут же представляю себе революцию — взятие Зимнего, тарахтенье пулеметных тачанок, осьмушку хлеба, оборону красного Питера — и мне становится противно говорить о ней непочтительно. Рассуждая строго логически, «советская власть» и «социалистическое

The potential to evoke strong associations with particular words and phrases frequently used within the Soviet Union is reflected not only in Tertz's personal observation, but widely among writers and artists of the Soviet Union and in Post-Soviet Russia. This point is particularly salient when considering the topic of this dissertation: the toilet in Soviet literature and art over the course of the Soviet period. Each example of its presence in a novel or art installation is wrought with Soviet symbolism, and sometimes even romanticism for a specifically Soviet experience. The romantic aspect is particularly apparent in the works of Kabakov (to be discussed in Chapter 3), while the use of Soviet symbology is particularly apparent in Pelevin's short story (which will be discussed in Chapter 4).

In his cynicism towards socialist realism's contribution to literature, Tertz looks to the future for a path to reconstruction after Stalin's death. He writes:

> "Right now I put my hope in a phantasmagoric art, with hypotheses instead of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life. Such an art corresponds to the best of the spirits of our time. May the fantastic imagery of Hoffman and Dostoevsky, of Goya, Chagall, and Mayakovski (the most socialist realist of all) and of many other realists and non-realists teach us how to be truthful with the aid of the absurd and the fantastic."[199]
>
> "В данном случае я возлагаю надежду на искусство фантасмагорическое, с гипотезами вместо цели и гротеском взамен бытописания. Оно наиболее полно отвечает духу современности. Пусть утрированные образы Гофмана, Достоевского, Гойи, Шагала и самого социалистического реалиста Маяковского и многих других реалистов и не реалистов научат нас, как быть правдивыми с помощью нелепой фантазии."

государство» — это одно и то же. Но эмоционально — это совсем разные вещи. Если против социалистического государства у меня что-то есть (самые пустяки!), то против советской власти я абсолютно ничего не имею. Это смешно? Может быть. Но это и есть романтизм.

[199] Tertz, 66.

In Tertz's view, it is through the fantastic and the grotesque that we achieve truth in art, not from the "realism" proposed by socialist realism. This is certainly reflected in his writing, including the two short stories in this chapter: "Phkentz" and "The Tenants."

On privacy and non-belonging: "Phkentz"

The 1957 short story "Pkhentz" is a window into the life of a hunchbacked individual (Andrei Kazimirovich, presumed to be an alien) living in a communal apartment. Much of the story revolves around his attempts to understand the people and world around him. The narrative implies that Andrei came to this world by way of a crash of which he was the sole survivor. It is implied that Andrei is an alien, stuck on Earth, waiting to be saved. At one point he writes, "You can see for yourselves – I'm a creature from another world. Not from Africa or India, not even from Mars or one of your Venuses, but from somewhere still more remote and inaccessible. You don't even have names for such places, and if you spread out all the star maps and charts in existence before me, I honestly couldn't show you where that splendid point of light, my birthplace, has got to."[200]

Although the narrator identifies himself as an alien, scholarship has pointed to the autobiographical nature of the story. Catharine Nepomnyashchy points to Andrei Kazimirovich Sushinskii's name echoing Andrei Donatovich Siniavskii, as well as the alien's arrival date in Earth corresponding to Siniiavskii's birthdate.[201] Similarly, she identifies a similarity between both individual's pseudonyms: Pkhentz and Tertz. As she argues, these similarities imply two realities for both characters: the "true" self and the "real life" roles which they must play for the

[200] Andrei Sinyavsky. "Pkentz." *The Portable Twentieth-Century Russian Reader*. Trans. Manya Harari (New York, Penguin Books, 1985), 497.
[201] Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy. "The Writer as Criminal: 'Pkhents' and 'At the Circus.'" *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1995).

sake of their "legal" identities. Thus, "Pkhentz" is not just a story about a lost alien, bumbling to find his way through life in the USSR, but it is a story about circumstances in which one must conceal what they consider to be their true self.

Nepomnyashchy notes the name "Pkhentz" and the way in which the narrator discusses his relationship to his native language. She writes, "The name thus becomes a metaphor for the impossibility of the text itself, which struggles vainly to explain the meaning of the word and fails because of the inadequacy of human language to convey the concept."[202] The idea that the intent of a speaker and the language received do not align is a concept not only present to express non-belonging, but also an illustration of Tertz's ideas about language and storytelling. As Nepomnyashchy mentions later in her book when speaking about the "Tenants," Tertz is more concerned with questions of metaphor and language than he is with the political issues that appear in his texts. Even in "Pkhentz," the light left on in the bathroom is a running theme. Near the beginning of the story Veronica and Andrei discuss how the landlady (Kostritskaya) threatened to complain to the superintendent about the light on in the bathroom.

When Andrei has the opportunity to take bath he, with great pleasure, tears off his clothes, wig, "genuine India-rubber ears, and unbuckles the straps that confine his back and chest. He recounts, "My body opened out like a potted palm brought home from the shop in wrapping paper. All the limbs which have grown numb in the course of the day came to tingling life."[203] In this scene we finally receive a thorough picture of Andrei's true body: four arms; water-absorbent, slimy skin; a neck that swivels in a half circle; and eyes on his hands; feet, crown of head, and nape of neck. The force of shaping his body into the mold of a human has caused him to lose sight in some of his eyes, his rear hand is permanently twisted, and his entire

[202] Nepomnyashchy, 67.
[203] *Pkhentz*, 501.

body has lost its suppleness. In this open and unhidden state, Andrei can look at himself from different angles by just raising one hand. Despite his mangled condition, he looks upon his body with positivity, as it is his one lasting connection to his homeland.

In this short story, the toilet is only directly referred to when discussing the "caustic aroma" of Kostritskaya. Of her Andrei thinks, "Even her excrement must smell of perfume, instead of boiled potatoes and home comforts, as is usually the case."[204] The idea of an individual with pleasant-smelling excrement is a common way to elevate an individual (cue the Outkast song), however when Andrei implies that her excrement smells like perfume he does not intend to compliment her. Rather, he is overwhelmed with her scent, complaining that she is "saturated through and through with this scent."[205] He contrasts this with boiled potatoes and home comforts, the scent that excrement should exude. By implying that excrement should smell like home comforts, he directly connects the toilet with the rest and rejuvenation that a home is intended to have, the rest and rejuvenation that is often connected also with feelings of privacy. This suggests that his feelings towards the toilet are similar to his feelings towards the bath: it is a space of privacy within which one may find comfort. This is notable in that it defies the typical pattern of sentiments towards the communal toilets. As we have seen in this chapter, the toilet can especially be a space of surveillance. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this sentiment is shared by Ilya Kabakov, who also at times felt hopeless in his situation.

The Everyday Fantastic: The Tenants

[204] *Pkhentz*, 494.
[205] ibid.

In another short story, Tertz uses the same elements of the fantastic, but this time in a more familiar portrayal of tenant relationships within a communal apartment. In the short story, the narrator is a house spirit (*domovoi)* who is introducing a new tenant, Sergei Sergeievich to the dynamics of his new apartment.

Quite notably, the story begins in a familiar way: a comparison of two different types of men: "Alas my dear Sergey Sergeyevich! Can there really be any comparison between you and Nikolay Nikolayevich? The very idea is absurd. You haven't got any claim to looks and, if you'll forgive the comparison, your biceps hang down just like the nipples of some skinny old bitch."[206] (Эх, Сергей Сергеевич, Сергей Сергеевич! Да разве вы сравняетесь с Николаем Николаевичем? Смешно даже. У вас и виду нет никакого, и бицепсы на вас обвисли все равно что, простите за сравнение, сосцы на какой-нибудь исхудалой собачке.)[207] The speaker, who is a spirit living in Sergey Sergeyevich's new apartment, compares the new tenant with the old tenant. However, this manner of comparison is quite similar to the opening of Iurii Olesha's *Envy*. Olesha's *Envy* also begins with a comparison of two very different men who share a living space. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kavalerov's describes Babichev in terms of his bodily functions, as well as insulting him with female-like characteristics. The comparison establishes an immediate separation between these two "types" of Soviet men.

While the spirit's description of the men never devolves into the level of gastronomical grotesqueness that Kavalerov's does, the spirit does compare the two men in terms of vigor and bodily appearance and capability. He says: "He was in a different class from you! He used to sing! Did push-ups! He'd wake up early in the morning, do all his exercises to the sounds of the

[206] Abram Tertz. *Fantastic Stories.* Trans. Ronald Hingley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), 125.
[207] *Siniavskii A.D. (Abram Tertz). "Kvartipanti."* https://protivpytok.org/dissidenty-sssr/sinyavskij-a-d/abram-terc-kvartiranty

radio, clean his teeth with a brush, and sing the Air Force march…"[208] (Куда вам до него! Певун был! Физкультурник! Бывало, проснется рано утром, всю гимнастику под звуки радио сделает, зубы щеткой почистит и начинает…) Similar to Babichev, Nikolai Nikolaevich wakes early to do calisthenics and groom his body, all while singing. On the other hand, in Tertz's story, Sergei is the one who is insulted with female animal attributes, with his biceps that hang "like the nipples of some poor starving dog."

The similarity between the two stories is perhaps not a surprise. In his 1993 article "At the Circus with Olesha and Siniavksii," Neil Cornwell discusses the connection and continuity between Olesha and Siniavskii, which has been noted before by Richard Lourie and Edward J. Brown, who even argued that Olesha had written some of the stories attributed to Tertz.[209] He elaborates on their similarity in theme, style, and imagery in their similarly named stories, "At the Circus." Cornwell credits Siniavskii with "re-encouraging and refurbishing the literary devices of a previous generation and applying them imaginatively to his own age."[210] However, he notes that Siniavskii's stories also "contain within them a strongly implicit critique of the caution, the compromise and the conformism which had facilitated and was continuing to maintain even now, the demise of the very style he was himself reviving,"[211] echoing Tertz's own words in his essay on socialist realism.

However, Tertz's "Tenants" is not at all devoid of gastronomic grotesqueness. The spirit tells Sergei about each of the tenants and according to him, all of them have some sort of supernatural quality. Among these tenants is a witch who uses a lavatory pan in lieu of a broom.

[208] *Fantastic Stories*, 126.
[209] Neil Cornwell. "At the Circus with Olesha and Siniavskii." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 71, no.1 (January 1993).
[210] Cornwell, 12.
[211] ibid.

In fact, all female tenants who become romantically involved with a tenant named Anchutker (wood devil) seem to turn into "witches." The spirit bases this claim on either their appearance of greying, thinning hair, and sunken eyes, or on the strange occurrences in which they seem to be involved. For example, every time Nikolai's wife Ninochka cooks in the communal kitchen, the witch Krovatkina is involved in some kind of strange happening. First, she finds grey, dirty hair in her pea soup, and then a dead cat in her chicken broth. Other than causing kitchen chaos, these witches also practice the art of riding around on a lavatory pan. "Like a jet engine," he says, "powered by intestinal gas."[212] (Даже стала учиться по ночам на унитазе летать. Как ракетный двигатель. С помощью кишечного газа.)

As part of his campaign to convince Sergei that none of the people among the tenants is alive, the spirit also tells Sergei about the apartment's water nymph. According to him, industrialization and the increased use of technology caused pollution in the streams, rivers, and lakes. The water nymphs began experiencing ringworm, eczema, and recurrent venereal diseases and were forced to find new shelter in the water-supply network. He says you can still hear the sobs and curses of the ones that have gotten stuck in the water mains when you turn on the kitchen tap. There is even one inhabiting Sergei's apartment, says Nikolai. A "former water nymph," she spends hours in the bathroom doing aquatic exercises, splashing around, and singing in German.[213]

Although we are discussing the bath here (to be distinguished from the toilet, often a different room in a communal apartment), the queue for the shared amenities is a common problem, often colorfully depicted in literature about the communal apartment. As have been discussed in this chapter, tacit rules about using the shared spaces in the apartment were expected

[212] *Fantastic Stories*, 134, 140.
[213] *Fantastic Stories*, 131.

to be kept, and this expectation bred a culture of surveillance among tenants. In the earlier examples, offenses such as keeping the bathroom light on were monitored closely and punished accordingly. In literary depictions, the one committing the offense is often a questionable type according to official Soviet standards, such as Lokhankin in *Golden Calf.*

Similarly, in the case of the witches who ride on lavatory pans, the spirit seems be defamiliarizing a common communal apartment occurrence by recasting it as supernatural capabilities. While he describes the witches riding on the lavatory pans like a jet engine that runs on intestinal gas, what he seems to really be observing is the sounds of the toilet room, amplified at night when the communal apartment is quiet.

It is also worth noting the relationship with technology that is illustrated within the spirit's story about the water nymphs. The story casts a negative impression on industrialization and the rise of technology use, as it describes these as the reasons that the nymphs were cast out of their natural homes. The negative view of technology is particularly worth noting considering Tertz's connection with literary works of the 1920s (discussed above), which were often preoccupied with the question of industrialization. While some (like *Stride, Soviet!*) welcomed the rush of technology as a sign of Soviet success, others (like *Envy)* showed great hesitancy. This is another point on which Olesha and Tertz's texts agree.

The hesitancy towards industrialization is directly related to communal apartments, their shared toilets, bathrooms, and kitchens, and changing ideas of private and public. As Atwood explains, the stark separation between public and private was largely brought about by industrialization and urbanization. She writes, "In pre-industrial societies there were no distinct boundaries between the workplace and the home, but in industrialised societies paid work took place in a separate location, and the home assumed a new role as the place where workers would

rest and recuperate."[214] This also led to separation of private and public along gender lines and despite its efforts towards gender equity, the Soviet Union certainly was not immune to this split.

Images related to the toilet also appear towards the end of the narrative when the spirit tells Sergei that the other tenants want to put him on trial for "betraying their secrets." He says to Sergei:

> "Do you understand what this means, Sergey Sergeyevich? They will separate us. They'll take away my last human being, deprive me of my home and roof. They'll send me under the floor. Into the damp and cold to join the micro-organisms. Or they'll launch me head first along the sewage system. And I'll be compelled to circulate there until the end of the world. Like the Eternal Jew called Ahasuerus. Have you read the novel of that name by Eugene Sue? Well, there you are. It'll be done the same way. From one toilet to another."[215]

> "Понимаете, Сергей Сергеевич, что это означает?! Разлучат они нас. Последнего человека отымут. Дома-крова меня лишат. Под пол отправят. В сырость, в холод, к микроорганизмам. Или по канализационной системе вниз головою спустят. И буду я вынужден там циркулировать до скончания света. Наподобие Вечного Жида по имени Агасфер. Вы одноименный роман Эжена Сю читали? Вот-вот. Тем же способом. Из клозета — в клозет."

In her book *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime*, Nepomnyaschy discusses Tertz's use of metaphor in "The Tenants" and how it relates to his commentary on everyday Soviet life. She writes that the story clearly pokes fun at the institution of the communal apartment, as well as suggesting a bleak picture of the Soviet process of "reducing unruly writers to silence or exiling them to the underground ('under the floor')."[216] However, as she asserts, the political commentary in Tertz's works take a backseat to his attention to language. She writes, "Yet, as with all of Tertz's works, the

[214] Attwood, 7.
[215] *Fantastic Stories*, 138.
[216] Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy. "The Fantastic as Metaphor: 'Tenants," "Icy Weather," and "Lyubimov." *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime*. Yale UP, 1995. 114.

political satire in 'Tenants' is a collateral issue to deeper questions about writing, reading, language, and act."[217]

She echoes an idea argued by Andrew R. Durkin in his 1980 article "Narrator, Metaphor, and Theme in Sinjavskij's Fantastic Tales."[218] Durkin argues that there is a narrative connection between "Tenants" and "Pkhentz" in that the narrators restrict clear communication with the audience because of their borderline humanity.[219] In the case of "Pkhentz," we are presented with a diary of an alien who describes the world in the device of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*). In "Tenants," we witness a one-sided "conversation" between the spirit and Sergei, who either never answers or is reported as in a state ranging from drunken stupor to unconsciousness. Thus, it is unclear to the reader whether the characters that we are presented with are truly a conjuring of the supernatural, or whether they are normal, everyday tenants whose actions are interpreted through the unreliable and fantastical lens of our narrator.

However, as Durkin and Nepomnyashchy both point out, the narrator seems to conjure his own metaphors. What begins as a narrative device later becomes realized. For example, Ninochka is called a witch at the height of an argument, only to later turn into one, even joining Krovatkina in her lavatory pan flying. Nepomnyashchy writes, "Putting something into words makes it happen. Metaphor is realized. Words become acts."[220] However, the narrator's metaphors are a force he cannot control, which leads him to a tragic end of eviction and banishment from the apartment. Durkin writes, "These living

[217] ibid.
[218] Andrew R. Durkin. "Narrator, Metaphor, and Theme in Sinjavskij's Fantastic Tales." *The Slavic and East European Journal* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 133-144.
[219] Durkin, 134.
[220] Nepomnyashchy, 113.

metaphors – all apparently created by the narrator himself, who, like some sorcerer's apprentice, can conjure with the forces he cannot control – surround and ultimately destroy him."[221]

Nepomnyashchy writes, "The story enacts the author's inability to control his own text, the impossibility of using narrative to realize authorial intent."[222] This chaotic nature and the apparent inability to realize authorial intent through his own narrative sheds light on Tertz's sentiments regarding portraying true life through literature and the impossibility of doing so through socialist realism.

The Communal Apartment as a Foundation

The institution of the communal apartment and the internal cultures that evolved with it are foundational for Soviet culture as it evolved from the 1920s to the 1980s, and to the remainder of the works of literature and art that will be discussed in the following chapters. As a key symbol of Soviet everyday life, housing and the way in which it changed throughout the Soviet period is vital to understanding the questions of self and self in relationship with others. Communal apartments blur the lines of privacy and help to construct narratives around the communal toilet that stretch much beyond the bodily need to use the toilet. As a core shared space in the communal apartment, it is more than purely a need, it is an opportunity for tenants as Soviet citizens to mix in ways never planned or imagined. It becomes a space of established rules, of surveillance, and for some, even the lone place of privacy. And as we will see, at the end of the Soviet era the deconstruction and destruction of the toilet are used as metaphors for the end of the Soviet Union.

[221] Durkin, 136.
[222] Nepomnyashchy, 114.

Chapter 3:

Toilets of Moscow Conceptualism: Remaking the Soviet Everyday

Moscow Conceptualism

In the tradition of the 19th century *kruzhok* as a "critical refuge for cultural experiment," the intimate circle of Moscow Conceptualists began meeting in the 1970s and their production continued through the 1980s.[223] According to Ilya Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualists "placed utmost emphasis on the cultivation of a conversational atmosphere, rather than on the production of individual works of art."[224] Although Kabakov has been called the "leader" of Moscow Conceptualism, he resists this designation, insisting that cultural heroes often achieve their status by repeating the observations of their friends and colleagues.[225] Boris Groys refers to this unofficial movement as Moscow "Romantic Conceptualism" (NOMA) and considers it as not so much a school, but a subculture and way of life.[226] Taking place in the 1970s-1980s, the work of this movement was seen as a Soviet equivalent to pop art. However, instead of the consumer culture of the West, Moscow Conceptualism used the "trivial and drab" rituals of Soviet everyday life, which were "too banal and insignificant to be recorded anywhere else, and made taboo not because of their potential political explosiveness, but because of their sheer ordinariness, their all-too-human scale."[227] The Moscow Conceptualists often used found objects to portray everyday life, while also using Soviet symbols and emblems. As Svetlana Boym

[223] Marek Bartelik. "The Banner without a Slogan: Definitions and Sources of Moscow Conceptualism." *Moscow Conceptualism in Context.* ed. Alla Rosenfeld (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2011), 2.
[224] Bartelik, 4.
[225] ibid, 3.
[226] The artists Komar and Melamid, who were close to the movement and emigrated in 1979, called themselves "sots-artists."
[227] Svetlana Boym. "On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes." *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter, 1998): 504.

writes, "The word and the image collaborated in their work to create a rebus-like idiom of Soviet culture."[228]

In 2012, Yuri Albert commented that, "not all conceptual artists are alike, and painting them and their texts with a single critical brush obscures important creative, art historical, and philosophical difference."[229] In the spirit of this observation, in this chapter, I strive to highlight and honor the specificities of the artists I chose to examine: Ilya Kabakov and the SZ Group. As I will detail in the following pages, although Kabakov and the SZ Group both choose the toilet as a central figure of their work, the message that they convey differs greatly.

Kabakov's toilets

The Kabakovs

Historian and curator Ksenia Nouril calls Ilya and Emilia Kabakov the most consistently and widely recognized Russian-born artists now living in the United States.[230] They have produced dozens of large-scale installations, most of which foreground the materiality of the communist experience. Ilya Kabakov was born on September 30, 1933 in Dnepropetrovsk (then USSR, now Dnipro, Ukraine). From 1945-1951 he studied at the Secondary School of Art in Moscow (then Московская средняя художественная школа [МСХШ], now Московский академический художественный лицей [МАХЛ РАХ]) and from 1951-1957 at the V.I. Surikov State Art Institute in Moscow (the most prestigious art school in the Soviet Union[231]),

[228] ibid.
[229] Mary Nichols. "Rereading Moscow Conceptualism" *Slavic Review* 75, no. 1 (Spring 2016), pp. 22-51, p. 23.
[230] Ksenia Nouril. "Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Soviet Art History in a Global Art World." *Utopian Projects*. (Washington DC: Hirshhorn Museum, 2018), 14.
[231] Matthew Jesse Jackson. *The Experimental Group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualism, Soviet Avant-Gardes* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2016), 9.

where he studied graphic design and book illustration, and then started a career as a book illustrator during the 1950's.[232]

In the 1950s and 1960s Kabakov was part of a group of underground artists and derived inspiration most prominently from Erik Bulatov, close friend and, at one point, roommate of Kabakov.[233] In fact, the first public display of Kabakov's unofficial works were in dual exhibition with Bulatov.[234] By the end of the 1960s, Bulatov and Kabakov (along with others, such as Ülo Sooster, Viktor Pivovarov, and Vladimir Yankilevsky) became known as "The Sretensky Boulevard Group," loosely associated with each other based on their exchanges of ideas on unofficial art and also through their association with "chief artist" at Znanie publishing house, Yuri Sobolev.[235] As Matthew Jesse Jackson observes, many of the roots of Moscow Conceptualism can be traced back to this group.[236] It was the late 1950s when Ilya Kabakov began to develop the device of creating fictional characters, "masking his own self and taking on various guises with which to depict life in the Soviet Union," including his 1966 character who worked for ZhEK (the bureaucratic housing administration for the Soviet state), whose regulations controlled everyday life.[237] In fact, Kabakov's debut as "unofficial" artist began with his Shower series (1965), 20 colored pencil drawings of a man standing in different poses in the shower. The series features a person standing underneath a shower head for water that never

[232] "Biography." *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.* https://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/biography/
[233] Jackson, 20.
[234] Jackson, 21.
[235] Jackson, 34.
[236] Jackson, 108.
[237] Juliet Bingham. "Introduction." *Not Everyone Will Be Taken into the Future*. ed. Juliet Bingham (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 12.

comes. The figure's cold, naked body in wait led critics at the time to interpret the work as "a lack of material reward and an absence of spiritual fulfillment under Soviet communism."[238]

In the 1980s, Kabakov creates the character of an untalented Soviet artist, imitating and satirizing commissioned propaganda Socialist Realist pieces through narrative paintings.[239] On Kabakov's art's relation to his Soviet past, Juliet Bingham writes, "Thematically, Ilya's works have grappled with the position of the 'unofficial' artist in the former Soviet Union, drawing upon his own artistic past, which was bound up with the utopian promises of the Soviet Union and ultimately with the failure of the Communist project and its loss of relevance."[240] As I will show in the analysis to follow, many of Kabakov's toilet installations echo this sentiment of utopian longing bound with failure. After his emigration from the Soviet Union in 1987, and even into the 2000s, Kabakov's work continued to demonstrate characteristics associated with Socialist Realism and the Russian avant-garde of the early Soviet period. For example, in his 2004-2006 series of oil paintings "Under the Snow," white expanses are interrupted with holes that depict scenes of Soviet parades, "the snowy ground acting as a metaphor that covers layers of memory."[241]

[238] Dorian Batycka. "Ilya Kabakov Harnesses His Inner Misanthrope to Maintain Artistic Independence." *Hyperallergic.* 22 February 2019, https://hyperallergic.com/486148/ilya-kabakov-harnesses-his-inner-misanthrope-to-maintain-artistic-independence/ (par. 5)
[239] Bingham, 13.
[240] Bingham, 16.
[241] Bingham, 16.

Figure 2*: Under the Snow #2*, Ilya Kabakov, 2004

Kabakov left Russia in 1987 when he received an invitation for an extended artist's residency at the Graz Kunstverein in Austria. It was also around this time that he went from "obscure Soviet illustrator to hot commodity" in the art market. He secured a visa to visit the United States in order to install a solo exhibition in New York, offered him by Ronald Feldman, gallerist to Komar and Melamid and Joseph Beuys. Kabakov eventually settled in New York City. By July 7th, 1988, the world of "unofficial" art had come to an end with the first auction of contemporary art in the Soviet Union. Held at Sotheby's, the auction "rendered void" the Conceptualists' "rituals of unofficial creation."[242] By the 21st century many artists from the Conceptualism movement had long dispersed into other countries, and were enjoying

[242] Bingham, 244.

commercial success in the international art world. For Kabakov, entrance into the international art world also changed the way he viewed his own art creations. Rather than produce enigmatic objects and texts, Kabakov concluded that it would be better to conform to the art world's own ethnographic expectations of a contemporary Russian artist. As Jackson writes, "the 'Western' Kabakov thus assumed the role of an extravagant Russian storyteller who portrayed 'communal Soviet life,' but in an outrageous, exotic medium that evoked both the classics of nineteenth-century Russian literature and the achievement of the historical Soviet avant-garde."[243]

After 1989, Kabakov's wife, Emilia (née Lekach), became an important co-author to his work. Emilia was born December 3, 1945 also in Dnepropetrovsk. From 1952-1959, she studied at the Music School in Moscow and then at the Music College in Irkutsk from 1962-1966. From 1969-1972, she studied at Moscow State University, focusing on Spanish Language and Literature.[244] She emigrated to the United States in 1973 and worked as a professional musician, curator, and art advisor.[245] Although he knew her from his youth (she is his distant relative), they did not marry until later in life.

Emilia reconnected with Ilya shortly after he settled in New York, pulled to his work "The Labyrinth (My Mother's Album)," (1990) because of her relationship with Ilya's mother.[246] By the time he presented his second exhibition in New York, Emilia was already assisting him in the creation of his work. At first, she assisted in the construction of Ilya's visions, pasting flies on rope and translating texts, but soon became essential in developing and executing these

[243] Bingham, 244.
[244] "Biography," Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.
[245] Tamara Bekhova. "Эмилия Кабакова: «Все думали, что я играю из себя такую холодную красавицу, поэтому не разговариваю»" *Colta*. 14 September 2018. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://www.colta.ru/articles/art/19137-emiliya-kabakova-vse-dumali-chto-ya-igrayu-iz-sebya-takuyu-holodnuyu-krasavitsu-poetomu-ne-razgovarivayu.
[246] The large-scale installation features seventy-six assembled collages that recount the memoirs of Kabakov's mother, Betha Solodukhina. Ilya Kabakov, Labyrinth (My Mother's Album), Tate Gallery, 1990, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kabakov-labyrinth-my-mothers-album-t07923.

artistic visions.[247] Emilia also became Ilya's manager, accountant, and publicist. She is responsible for making Ilya internationally known. By demanding higher prices for Ilya's work, she convinced gallery owners and auctioneers that his work was a worthy investment.[248]

The Kabakovs have received numerous and awards and honors, including the Order of Friendship (which honors those whose efforts have been aimed at the betterment of relations between the Russian Federation and its people), the Innovation Prize for Russian Contemporary Art, as well as multiple international prizes for achievement in art.[249] They are responsible for inspiring a huge amount of interest in Russian art during the era of Perestroika.[250]

The Kabakovs' work details the individual's experience. Groys observes, "Every installation by Kabakov tells a story—almost always the same story about an isolated soul living in an uncomfortable, menacing environment."[251] When asked how Soviet monumental art (such as the totalitarian grandiosity of Stalinist architecture) compares to their work, the Kabakovs respond: "Soviet monumental art was not about the grandiosity of size, but about the grandiosity of ideas: how to change the world, destroy it and build something new. What we do is completely different. In fact, it is really just the opposite: in a way, it is about a small person dreaming big and impossible dreams, not about dominating the world, but about changing it to become 'smaller.' more 'human' in size and more open to human emotions and achievements."[252] This is certainly clear in most of his works, which typically focus on the either the life of an individual and its tangible details ("The Toilet," "Ten Characters," "Shower"

[247] Bekhova, "Эмилия Кабакова"
[248] Irina Popova. "Kontseptual'nye zhuki, sovetskii byt i begstvo ot real'nosti Il'i Kabakova." *Bird In Flight.* 7 June 2017. Accessed November 13, 2018. https://birdinflight.com/ru/pochemu_eto_shedevr/20170706-ilya-kabakov-i-ego-kontseptualnye-zhuki.html.
[249] ibid.
[250] ibid.
[251] Groys, "Re-Inventing Authorship," *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Not Everyone Will Be Taken into the Future.* ed. Juliet Bingham (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2017), 37.
[252] *Utopian Projects*, 8.

series), or emphasize the value of peace and contemplation ("Toilet in the Corner," "Toilet on the Mountain," "Toilet on the River.").

Boym notes that with the end of the Soviet Union, Kabakov's work becomes more unified and total, documenting the "endangered species" of the Soviet period — "from the household fly to the ordinary survivor, homo-soveticus, from lost civilizations to modern utopias." She notes the pangs of nostalgia in his work, asking "What is the artist nostalgic for?" Groys asks this same question differently, arguing that Kabakov's installations address the same question, to which Kabakov returns to again and again, almost obsessively: "What is left?"[253] Usually, his answer is material, creating installations in which characters leave behind remnants of their own existence. Balancing between producing unofficial and official work, which conformed to a prescribed Soviet reality, Kabakov's unofficial work appropriately drew upon Soviet Socialist Realism, along with the historic avant-garde, the Russian literary tradition of the nineteenth century, and the conceptualism of unofficial art in the 1970s and 1980s.[254]

In discussing Kabakov's various toilet-centric pieces, Boym suggests that the toilet is an important stopping point in the discussion of Russia and the West, pointing out that the quality of personal hygiene is often a marker of the stage of the civilizing process. She writes, "Perestroika started, in many cases, with perestroika of public and private toilets […] In cultural imagination, the toilet stands right on the border between private and public, Russia and the West, sacred and profane, high and low culture." As I will argue in the next chapter, this takes shape in Viktor Pelevin's short story, "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream," in which a toilet attendant witnesses the changes of perestroika through the changes to the toilet she inhabits. Furthermore, as I have

[253] Groys, "Re-Inventing Authorship," p 41.
[254] Bingham, 12.

already illustrated in the first chapter, Soviet films and literature of the 1920s use the toilet and its contents are a key representation of revolution.

However, Kabakov's toilets provide a unique perspective for the metonymic potential of the space. Similar to Duchamp's installation, Kabakov's toilets certainly challenge the obscenity of the toilet and its potential as art. Defining the obscene as something "eccentric, off-stage, unfashionable or anti-social," Boym describes the juxtaposition of the toilet with the two-room apartment in Kabakov's "The Toilet" by saying, "Everything is proper here, nothing appears to be obscene."[255] However, Kabakov's toilets give the space further meaning than a means for overturning traditional ideas of art. As Boym argues, for Kabakov, the toilet becomes the artist's diasporic home, "an island of Sovietness" with its "insuppressible nostalgic smell that persists even in the most sanitized Western museum."[256] Objects in the rooms and around the toilets have been placed as "metonymical memory-triggers" of Soviet everyday life.

Boym specifically notes Duchamp's *Fountain* as a contributing factor to Kabakov's toilet installations. However, Kabakov's "The Toilet" installation differs from Duchamp's readymade in that it is "not merely about radical defamiliarization and recontextualization," but rather "we have here an intimate environment that invites walking through, storytelling, and touching."[257] She writes that in the Russian press, Kabakov was accused of insulting the Russian people and Russian national pride by criticizing his homeland in front of foreigners: "Kabakov's evocative domestic trash of the Soviet era was regarded by the Russian reviewers as a profanation of Russia."[258] However, Kabakov rejected this interpretation. Boym writes, "[Kabakov] recreated

[255] Boym, Svetlana. "Ilya Kabakov: The Soviet Toilet and the Palace of Utopias." *ArtMargins.* 12/13/1999, https://artmargins.com/ilya-kabakov-the-soviet-toilet-and-the-palace-of-utopias/, para 11.
[256] Boym, para. 15.
[257] Boym, para. 17.
[258] Boym, para. 24.

his toilets with such meticulousness — working personally on every crack on the window, every splash of paint, every stain — that the inhabited toilet turned into an evocative memory theater, irreducible to univocal symbolism."[259] As Boym argues, Kabakov's toilets are never symbols, but allegories: "a narrative collage of material objects tells an allegory of Soviet reality. […] There is an excess narrativity, or narrative potentiality in Kabakov's installations."[260]

Kabakov's attention to the serenity of the toilet and his consideration of the space as retreat is unique compared to other toilets examined in this dissertation. Boym notes this as an important similarity between Kabakov's installations and the actual (Soviet) toilet: both should be visited in solitude. Boym writes:

> "The visitor finds herself stranded in the toilet; there are so many things to see, to read, and to touch here. She feels a little guilty lingering in this obscene, yet strangely human space – like the communal apartment neighbor who has occupied the communal toilet for too long, caught up in daydreaming and reading foreign magazines. It seems that any moment the other neighbors are about to come knocking, threatening to break the precarious solitude, to violate this moment of stolen pleasure."[261]

This interpretation works in opposition to the typical presentation of the Soviet toilet as a potential place of privacy violation, that prompts feelings of fear, shame, and anxiety. From Einstein's early-Soviet film *October*, which features the symbolic rape of the Tsaritsa through the caressing of her toilet (chapter 1 of this dissertation) to the aggressive badgering of Venichka by his roommates for his lack of toilet use in Erofeev's late-Soviet "poem" *Moscow to the End of the Line* (Chapter 4 of this dissertation), in many ways the narrative of shame surrounding bodily functions has persisted. Kabakov's insistence on the toilet as utopian space challenges this narrative directly, suggesting that the toilet was actually one of the only places of privacy and

[259] Boym, para. 20.
[260] Boym, para 22.
[261] Boym, para 23.

peace in the Soviet era. The following sections will detail Kabakov's toilets chronologically. An extended analysis will follow.

Toilet in the Corner

"Toilet in the Corner" is an installation that was first shown from August 27th to October 27, 1991 at the Rooseum, The Center for Contemporary Art in Malmö, Sweden. A similar version appeared as Room 13 in the installation "The Mental Institution or the Institute of Creative Research" in a 1994 exhibition. It appeared in this version four times total, the last time in 1999. A second version appeared at the Kiasma Nykytaiteen Museo in Helsinki, May 1998-1999 and a third version appeared in 2002 at the Sprovieri Gallery in London. The installation last appeared in its third version at the Lugano Arte e Cultura in Switzerland as part of the September 2016- January 2017 exhibition *Ilya & Emilia Kabakov: The Kabakovs and the Avant-Gardes*.[262] The installation is positioned in the corner of an ordinary exhibit hall, among hanging paintings and other works. The installation itself is a pair of folding doors with peeling white paint and plywood sheets painted gray from the top of the doors to the ceiling. The word "toilet" (*tualet*) is written in white paint by a finger on the glass of the folding doors, among smears of white paint. A yellow light of a "dull electric bulb" emanates from inside. Also coming from inside is the loud, melodious singing of Neapolitan songs.[263]

[262] Kabakov, Ilya. "Toilet in the Corner." *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.* Accessed November 5, 2018. https://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/installations/toilet-in-the-corner/.
[263] ibid.

Figure 3: "Toilet in the Corner," Ilya Kabakov, 1991,
< http://www.kabakov.net/installations/2019/9/14/toilet-in-the-corner>

There are small, but notable differences between the three versions of the installation. In the earliest version the installation is not identified yet by the name "Toilet in the Corner." Rather, it is untitled and integrated into the whole of the room[264] or it is called "In the Toilet (V tualete)" (see: *Cloaca Maxima*). Furthermore, the music behind the doors is not Neapolitan, but rather described as an aria from a classic opera or romance, sung by a professional voice. As the accompanying text to the *Cloaca Maxima* installation describes, "It feels as though the singer is performing with passion, he does not stop in between songs, rather sings one song after another."[265] The second version, only on display from May 1998-May 1999 in Helsinki, is not

[264] The full installation is called "The Mental Institution or the Institute of Creative Research," and the toilet is part of Room 13, depicted alongside the Doctor's Waiting Room
[265] Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Dieser Katalog erscheint aus Anlass der Ausstellung *Cloaca Maxima* im Museum der Stadtentwaesserung, Zurich, vom 10 Juni bis 30 Oktober 1994 (Ostfildern, Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1994), 155.

well documented and the differences are unclear. The main difference of the third version is the style of singing. Based on notes and photographs from the Sproveri Gallery in London (2002) and the Lugano Arte e Cultura (2017), "behind the door somebody is singing, sometimes coughing or stopping for a pause," differing from the first version, in which the singer does not stop. Additionally, the style of the door changes, and the door itself has more details (notches and other craftsmanship), as thus more chipping paint and space for signs of wear.[266] These details place emphasis on the human element of the work, making it possible to imagine the door in a communal apartment.

In one of its first iterations, the installation appeared in the exhibition *Cloaca Maxima* (named after the sewage system constructed in Ancient Rome), where it was displayed among scatological art from around the world, including Duchamp's *Fountain*. The exhibition took place June 10, 1994 - October 30, 1994 at the Museum der Stadtentwässerung (The Drainage Museum) in Zurich, Switzerland. The exhibition featured art about water, lavatories, digestion, including toilet bowls, toilet brushes, sewage maps. As one review on the exhibition states, "The artists in 'Cloaca Maxima' do, on the other hand, know that what comes out at the rear goes back in at the front. In art at least, we have proof that the public has a private origin."[267] According to the exhibition's curator, art opens up the possibility of oscillation between the private and public and frees excrement from its negative connotations.[268] Alongside Kabakov's installation are swimming objects glued onto bases of dried excrement, various paintings of animals eliminating on humans and vice-versa, and a megaphone system which amplifies the sounds made in the

[266] CRI, *Ilya Kabakov Installations 1983-2000 Catalogue Raisonné* (vol 1). Ed. Toni Stoos. Texts by Oskar Bätschmann and Boris Groys (Dänischenhagen: Richter Verlag, 2003), p330; hereby referred to as CRI vol.1, p400, accessed November 5, 2018, http://www.sprovieri.com/london/ilya-and-emilia-kabakov_6/press-release/
[267] Marius Babias. "Review: Cloaca Maxima." *Frieze*. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. 6 September 1994, accessed January 24, 2021, https://www.frieze.com/article/cloaca-maxima.
[268] ibid.

bathroom.[269] Also featured in the exhibition one of Duchamp's Fountains, firmly putting Kabakov and Duchamp in conversation with one another. Furthermore, the exhibition features work that directly speaks to Duchamp, such as Otto Muhl's "Marcel's Grüsse," (Marcel's Greetings) a painting depicting excrement flowing from a urinal identical to Duchamp's.

As Marius Babias writes, Kabakov's "Toilet in the Corner" positions the toilet as a refuge from daily socialist life.[270] Kabakov has described being overcome by fear once he realized that his work, taken out of its Soviet context, could become completely unreadable. He acknowledges its connection to Western conceptual art, however insists on the existence of fundamental differences between Russia and the West's artistic spaces. Boym writes, "In the West, conceptual art originated with a ready-made. What mattered was an individual artistic object sanctioned by the space of the Museum of Modern Art. In the absence of such an institution in the 'East,' objects alone had no significance, whether they were drab or unique. It was the environment, the atmosphere, and the context that imbued them with meaning."[271]

The text that accompanies the installation recounts how as a child, the author loved to climb into wooden dressers and hide there. The author is not Ilya Kabakov, but the (presumably) fictional Aleksandr Nikolaevich Voevodin.[272] He writes:

> "I would sit there for a long time, alone, in my crowded, dark shelter, protected from others. I would hear everything that went on in the room: there's mother setting the table for dinner, there's father asking where I am, did I go to the neighbors…And the thought that they didn't know where I was — and I was yet right there, next to them, I

[269] Obrist, see: John Miller, Otto Muhl, Gerhard Richter.
[270] Babias, par 3.
[271] Boym, Svetlana, "The Soviet Toilet and the Palace of Utopias."
[272] The incorporating of other "authors" comes from the first appearance of this installation: *The Mental Institution or the Institute of Creative Research.* In this project, a maze of rooms was constructed and each room featured was accompanied by a narrative written by fictional characters. (see: CRI vol.1)

> could almost see them, while I remained invisible — filled me with some sort of unusual feeling, a mixture of mystery, safety and a fun game."[273]

As the narrator notes, not only would he climb into the dresser for long periods of time, but he would also do the same in the toilet down the hall. However, the toilet was a much more problematic hiding place, since the family lived in a communal apartment and everyone used the same toilet. He writes:

> "Often they would knock on the door when I was in there and ask me to come out — but I wouldn't open the door. Why should I? I was alone there, in relative safety, while on the other side of the wall raged the world of the communal apartment with the bustle of shouts of two dozen people; and in 'our' room (the five of us lived in it — my parents, my brother and I, and my grandfather), I was always with others and was terribly tormented by this…Lord! How can I build and preserve the wall between myself and others, so that 'they,' these others, would only appear over the edge of that wall and that they wouldn't jump in at me, into this space that was partitioned off from them? We would send each other happy smiles for a moment, and 'they' would again disappear there, beyond the wall, into that other, and to me unfamiliar and undesirable world…"[274]

In an interview with Ilya Kabakov, Joseph Bakshtein points out that the installation tells much about the communal apartment. He says, "Like a lighted information board at an airport or train station, it carries colossal information: which one of the resident's light was turned on in the toilet, and consequently, who is sitting in there."[275] Of course, the light in the communal toilet was an important point in etiquette and rule following, as it was a serious offense among tenants to leave on the light (see previous chapter for more discussion on this and Ilf and Petrov's *Golden Calf*). The singing, however, as Kabakov notes, are "utter lies" in terms of the communal reality, presumably because the of the Neapolitan songs. Rather, this portion of the installation

[273] CRI vol. 1, p339.
[274] ibid.
[275] ibid.

emphasizes the division between the two spaces: in front of the door and behind the door. The viewer can hear the music long before they actually see that it is coming from behind the door, and once the they realize its source, they are still unable to come truly face-to-face with it, as the door blocks their path. This highlights much of what Kabakov says regarding the toilet as a sanctuary. The viewer of the installation remains firmly outside the door, leaving that which is inside the door mostly mystery. Thus, the individual behind the door (whoever they may be) gains a sense of privacy, a coveted feeling in a communal apartment where most spaces are shared. The pleasure of finding this sense of privacy is projected through joyful singing, which, although unlikely in communal reality according to Kabakov, is included in this representation.

The Toilet

In 1992, Kabakov exhibited his installation "The Toilet." The piece, built in the exhibiting museum's backyard, was an (almost) exact copy of the toilets that were built in the 1960's and 1970's in the provinces of Russia near bus and train stops. There are two entrances: one for men and one for women. Men and women line up and enter at their respective doorways to see an unusual scene. On the one side, the expected: small cement raised places, in the middle of which are black round holes — "Turkish" toilets. One the other side, and bleeding into the "toilet space" is a typical Soviet two-room apartment, with the men's half being the living room and the women's half being the bedroom. This includes furniture: a table with a tablecloth, a couch, chairs, a bookshelf, a children's corner with toys and a small rug, paintings on the wall. Additionally, there are details that give the space an everyday, lived in appearance: dishes left on the table from mealtime, clothes hanging on chairs and couches, books and knickknacks strewn

on side tables, and even toys and bags lying on the toilet seats.[276] The concept description reads, "Life goes on here normally. A quiet, decent, friendly family lives here, and it's possible that they just stepped out for a minute to see the neighbors…"[277]

The installation was first exhibited in 1992 as part of a Documenta IX, an exhibition of contemporary art which takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany. In 1999, the work became part of the permanent collection of the Stedelijk Museum Voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Ghent, Belgium. The structure itself is familiar to those who have seen provincial Russian toilets. In the concept description of the work, they are detailed as "dreary small stone structures, smeared outside and inside with white lime, with filthy curses written on the walls, soiled and neglected. The sight alone invokes loathing and vomiting."[278] Furthermore, like the outside, the inside of the structure is so equally filthy, that it is customary to avoid sitting directly on the toilet, and instead squatting "eagle style." Privacy is almost nonexistent, as there are no doors on the stalls and anyone who walks inside can perfectly see everyone "taking care" of their business.

In his commentary on the installation, Groys reads the piece as an examination of privatization of public space in Russia. He says, "The public toilet has a pathos of collectivity about it because it was the public space of communism, a space where all people would go and participate in this collectivity. […] Yet here, it is suddenly privatized, some private person moves into it." Groys observes, in a later writing, "The family concerned was apparently living a peaceful, carefree existence inside a public toilet — a fact that Kabakov did not overly

[276] "The Toilet," *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov*, 1992, accessed November 27, 2021, http://www.kabakov.net/installations/2019/9/14/the-toilet.
[277] CRI, p.389
[278] CRI, p388.

dramatize."[279] While Kabakov agrees that he had a social reading in mind for "The Toilet," he also emphasizes other impulses for the piece: his memory of childhood, and the circumstances under which this situation could arise and be realized. Specifically, he recounts how his mother, in an effort to participate in Ilya's life, followed him to art school in Moscow. However, this was only possible if she were to work in the school as a cleaner. Having no other place to live, she took up residence in the pantry where all the clean linen was kept — located in the former bathroom — until she was found and reported on to the director. Kabakov says, "Here, as you see a whole set of problems — homelessness, and defenselessness before the authorities, and the fact that a person of unbelievable decency, cleanliness, and honesty was forced to drag out an existence in the most unbelievable place. My childish psyche was traumatized by all this and by the fact that mama and I never had a corner of our own."[280]

The initial reception of "The Toilet" highlights the divide between imagined West and Russia. During its exhibition in Kassel, Germany some critics did not understand that it was a metaphor, and instead thought that it was an ethnographic object. Kabakov was even asked what percentage of the Soviet population lived in toilets. He also received questions about whether it was a rule to designate the men's toilet as the dining room, and the women's toilet as a bedroom. These questions even inspired one Russian reviewer to write an article titled, "We Do Not Live in Toilets," an attack on Kabakov, who, according to the reviewer, slandered his homeland.[281] Contrary to these Western observations, Kabakov says that the piece is about the fact that life in general is "shit" and "that shittiness is kind of a social glue, one that exists in every culture and every society — not only in Moscow, but in Kassel, too."[282] Kabakov observes, "All people

[279] Groys, "Re-Inventing Authorship," 39.
[280] CRI, 388-389.
[281] Bingham, 193.
[282] Batycka, par. 15.

talked about were the ethnographic details of Russian life, which had to be accurate because a Russian artist had made the installation. This is the traditional colonial effect at work, that we Westerners are complex and subtle people, but the savages from Russia to Cuba can only depict their lives."[283] Though this installation was not the very first to be exhibited outside of Russia ("Toilet in the Corner" was included in the Cloaca Maxima exhibition in Zurich a year prior), Kabakov's attention to detail and talent for creating characters and the things they leave behind perhaps encourages an ethnographic approach to interpreting the work. The characters, now missing from the scene, become real through the things they leave behind. Although fictional, Kabakov makes realistic choices about which objects to include, where to put them, and how to "rustle up" the space just enough so that it looks as if his characters have just walked away from the scene. So realistic, that even an art critic could think that one could realistically carry on life in a toilet.

Toilet on the River

Kabakov's search for tranquility within the toilet continues with his installations "Toilet on the River." The wooden temporary toilet was first exhibited in 1996 at The Twentieth Annual Exhibition of Visual + Art in Limerick. More recently, the work was shown at the Herning Museum of Modern Art in Denmark in 2017. The toilet is modeled after temporary toilets, such as those built at seasonal summer places and construction sites. It consists of two stalls, both without doors. The work is placed on the bank with the stalls facing the river. As the concept description reads, "If one were to sit in these 'stalls,' one would have an expansive, beautiful

[283] Bingham, 193.

view of the river, toward the peaceful, overgrown forest opposite the bank, at the tranquil green horizon."[284]

However, the work is absolutely not to be understood in the literal sense — as in, it is not meant to be used as a toilet. The artist himself suggests placing a plaque in front of the toilet that clarifies that "before the viewer is an original, complete work of art, and that it should be understood more in some sort of metaphysical-philosophical sense than in a vulgarly naturalistic one."[285] This note is important because it clarifies that Kabakov is working with the toilet, but not the "stuff" of toilets (excrement). Rather, he is focused on what it means to sit alone in the toilet — peace, tranquility, reflection, beauty. For him, as Boym points out, the toilet is a refuge, a utopia. Furthermore, the work brings daydreaming into the experience of using the bathroom. Kabakov explains, "Being in the bathroom and daydreaming in nature are two sides of the same experience; quiet, meditative states, one is alone, in isolation from the frustrating social world, with a marvelous feeling of solitude, tranquility and peace – which is contrary to your usual state of perpetual anxiety; finally, a feeling of time standing still."[286] In his commentary on the piece, John Bakshtein reflects upon its paradoxical nature, calling the installation an "unsurmountable task" for the viewer. He says "In what way should [Kabakov's] installation, in this case toilet, be used? If the viewer stands 'near' it, then the viewer will not be able to experience any sort of 'meditation,' no sort of poetic view toward the distance…"[287]

[284] Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. "Toilet on the River," 1996, accessed November 27, 2021, https://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/installations/toilet-on-the-river/.
[285] ibid.
[286] "The Toilet on the River, 1996-2016," Art Basel, https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/39322/Ilya-Emilia-Kabakov-The-Toilet-on-The-River.
[287] Bakshtein, John. "Commentary." *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov*, https://fineartbiblio.com/artworks/ilya-and-emilia-kabakov/2176/toilet-on-the-river.

A similar installation, entitled "Toilet on the Mountain," was also exhibited in 1996.[288] The construction of the piece was similar (a two-stall temporary outhouse) and like the "Toilet on the River," the two stalls have no doors, and are labelled with "M" (for men) and "W" (women). However, instead of being situated on a river bank, the toilet was placed on top of a mountain, on the edge of a precipice. The front of the outhouse faces the precipice, a design that is perhaps unlikely for real-life situations, in which the front would usually face the rest of the property (not the edge of it). Kabakov writes, "And this is intentional. An extraordinary view of the river flowing below the precipice, of the sandy bank on the other side, of the distant forests beyond the fields, opens up from the steep precipice."[289] He compares the work to a "Chinese pavilion," which is intended for meditation, "in which a number of things are combined in marvelous harmony: a withdrawal from people, total isolation, seclusion, a 'heavenly,' high point from which to view the world, nature, spiritual, and it's impossible not to add, physical concentration."[290]

These installations continue Kabakov's trend of finding tranquility and much-coveted privacy in the toilet. In fact, his two-stalled outhouses immersed in nature, "Toilet on the River" and "Toilet on the Mountain," place even more emphasis on the tranquil state of their spaces than installations such as his communal bathroom door with a joyful voice singing behind it, "Toilet in the Corner." Rather, "Toilet in the Corner" assumes an outside position to the work and those who are finding tranquility. On the other hand, "Toilet on the River/Mountain" actually invites the viewer to take part in the peace themselves. Furthermore, while other pieces require an explanatory note (such as Aleksandr Nikolaevich Voevodin's narrative for "Toilet in

[288] It is not clear if the installation was actually exhibited, or whether it was sketched and modeled with the intention of exhibiting it.
[289] *The Utopian Projects*, 46.
[290] ibid.

the Corner"), the work of "Toilet on the River/Mountain," requires no explanation, as its purpose is clear in its scenery. Among tranquil mountains and a flowing river, there is no doubt that one is find peace and seclusion in this environment, an expected connection for Kabakov, who found peace among chaos in the communal toilet.

Concert for a Fly

Departing from the toilet as centerpiece, Kabakovs' 1993 "Concert for a Fly" takes a different approach to the bathroom space. The installation is a small, closed-off space with 10-12 (plastic) flies hanging against the background of a window. A music stand sits in the center of the room with the musical score "A Fly Symphony" resting upon it. In the corner is a toilet. As part of the installation, a dramatic symphony plays. The music was written by Vladimir Tarasov specifically for Kabakov's piece and included the real sound of flies. In his online catalog Kaakov describes this detail as: "What appears to be the ordinary buzzing of flies is transformed into a precisely and strictly harmonized three-part concert as soon as [the viewer/listener] begins to really pay attention to the music."[291]

The work is a permanent installation in the Château d'Oiron in France. In fact, it was specially designed for the space after director Jean-Hubert Martin suggested an installation should be created. The Château d'Oiron is a decrepit castle from the 16th century, where despite restoration efforts, "a sad melancholy reigns in many from its current corners and rooms. […] It is difficult to imagine a more depressing and yet at the same time cheerily sentimental place: an

[291] Kabakov, Ilya and Emilia. "Concert for a Fly," 1993, accessed November 27, 2021, https://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/installations/concert-for-a-fly/.

old but simple dust-covered window."[292] Around the window, the floor is covered with plaster from crumbling walls and ceiling. The toilet itself is also old, "virtually an antique."

Although the toilet seems to be the centerpiece of the of the room, the installation places most of its attention on the "secondary center": the window. Kabakov writes, "It attracted me not only because of its marvelous view and the edge of the fortress wall, but also because of the multitude of flies that were flying around and warming themselves on the window in the rays of the warm sun. The toilet and flies —- this combination was entirely sufficient for my installation."[293] And the toilet in "Concert for a Fly" does have one important thing in common with Kabakov's other toilet installations: it is not intended to ever be used. He writes, "The old toilet speaks not so much of its own function, as of its antiqueness."[294] Furthermore, as mentioned, the room itself is closed-off, meaning that there is a barrier in the doorway that prevents anyone from walking into the room, further keeping viewers away from the toilet. As Kabakov explains, the barrier acts like a second window for the viewer that complements the window that is the centerpiece of the installation. While the central window looks out into beautiful rolling fields, the barrier "window" looks into a stranger scene: a concert for flies in a decrepit, dirty "concert hall."

Departing from previous toilet pieces, "Concert for a Fly," is not intended to invoke tranquility or utopia neither for the viewer nor for an imagined character who occupies the space. Rather, the effect of the work is an elevation of the fly, so small and ever-present that it becomes part of the scenery of a room. However, one cannot ignore the presence of the fly in Kabakov's

[292] ibid.
[293] Ibid.
[294] CRI, 463

installation, as it the piece's title, along with the grandiose music, making the room's flies the centerpiece of the room and thus placing focus on the "lower" aspect of the scene.

Context and Analysis

Kabakov uses the space of the communal apartment to create full-blown habitats for the Soviet characters of his world. Around the same time as the toilet installations, Kabakov also had a body of work that centered the communal kitchen. Even in his early paintings, Kabakov typically depicted the banal subject matter of everyday life that posed absurdist questions and responses. A later example is the 1991 installation, "In the Communal Kitchen," which consisted of six cupboards leaning against the walls, with mixed-media paintings from the 1980s "Kitchen Series" above them. The paintings contained kitchen utensils, such as meat grinders, colanders, knives, cups and dishes.[295] Along with the dishes in the paintings were dishes on the tables, and also grains on the shelves inside the cupboards. The paintings also include the recording of voices, which are to help evoke recollections of voices in the communal kitchen. Kabakov writes, "Conversations in this place are not at all like dialogues. Each person present, it seems, tosses out phrases simply into emptiness, as though not really addressing anyone in particular." However, in the multitude of voices, any phrase tossed out will find its response on the other end of the kitchen.[296]

Kabakov's *Ten Characters* (first developed as a series of albums in 1970 and 1974, later transformed into a major installation in 1988) is also a total installation that stems from the layout of a communal apartment. For the 1988 exhibition, two halls of the Ronald Feldman Fine

[295] Bingham, 12.
[296] "In the Communal Kitchen," *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov*, accessed October 10, 2019, https://www.kabakov.net/installations/2019/9/14/in-the-communal-kitchen?rq=kitchen.

Arts Gallery in New York were transformed into two large communal apartments. The front wall of the rooms is missing, and someone who is walking along the hallway can easily see inside and enter each room. Each room contains a multitude of objects that belong to the room's inhabitant, arranged with a "memorial" or "museum" quality. That is, objects are arranged carefully like memorabilia, while traces of everyday life are erased. Unlike installations like "The Toilet," there are no dirty plates left behind or sweaters draped over the back of chairs. Rather, the rooms only contain enough to display the basic information about who its inhabitants were, but it is clear that the rooms are to be viewed rather than to be lived in. Additionally, a long narrative about each inhabitant is posted outside their door. The apartments house ten characters, including "The Man Who Collected the Opinions of Others," "The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment," "The Untalented Artist," and "The Man Who Describes His Life Through Other Characters."[297]

In his installations, Kabakov focuses on the communal apartment to convey the way in which the seemingly dull everyday shapes our individual and collective histories. Kabakov writes, "When I think about our life, one of the main images that unites everything is that of the communal apartment."[298] The communal apartment straddles the line between public and private space, and Kabakov grapples with this idea, particularly in "Toilet in the Corner" and "The Toilet" which call to the viewer's attention the elevated level of privacy of the toilet in a shared space. Not only do these toilets emphasize a sense of privacy, but this sense of privacy is elevated to possessing utopic qualities in its relation to the decreased sense of everyday privacy in other areas of the communal apartment.

[297] "Ten Characters," *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov*. accessed March 9, 2019, https://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/installations/ten-characters/.
[298] ibid.

Interestingly, the tension between the public and the private is also a significant theme in Kabakov's installations that reference the art world, especially the Moscow Conceptualist Circle. As Boris Groys observes, Kabakov purposely includes solely artists among the personages in his *Ten Characters*.[299] Another example is his 1993 installation *NOMA or The Moscow Conceptual Circle*, designed like a monastery or hospital with rooms in a circular shape. The characters featured in the installation are depicted with a selection of artworks that correspond to the real members of the Moscow Conceptual Circle. As Groys observes, the asceticism of the space yields a peaceful and serene environment, free from the tension and conflict of the public sphere.[300]

Kabakov's installations are specific to their context within the Soviet Union, particularly the dynamics of the communal apartment and how it affected the details of everyday life. Furthermore, Kabakov's attention to the "little man" (the fly) in installations such as "Concert for a Fly" is reminiscent of the 19th century literary character type, who represented a helpless victim of an unjust system. Notable examples, such as Gogol's "The Overcoat," Dostoevsky's "Notes from the Underground," and Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman," are classics of nineteenth century Russian literature that experienced a resurgence in the Soviet era, particularly in the time of Stalin.[301] However, Kabakov insists that the purpose of his art is not to comment on the politics of the Soviet Union. When asked in an interview about his identity as an artist versus his identity as a citizen of the Soviet Union, Kabakov responded, "No, the art world was completely apolitical. The century I was born in was completely oriented toward art. And I myself perceived Soviet power not as political, but a power of climate. Soviet power was perceived as an eternal

[299] Groys, Boris. "Re-Inventing Authorship," 36-37.
[300] ibid, 39.
[301] See Jonathan Brooks Platt's *Greetings, Pushkin! Stalinist Cultural Politics and The Russian National Bard* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

climate of darkness and rain. I had no desire to protest – you can't stick your head out the window and shout 'Stop raining!'"[302] Beyond the question of "Soviet" and "non-Soviet," finding the toilet as a space of peace and relishing the simple pleasure of being completely alone is a notion that extends far beyond Kabakov's homeland and beyond the heyday of the Moscow Conceptualist Circle. For example, in 2013 Tokyo-based architect Sou Fujimoto built a glass-walled stall toilet that is surrounded by 200 square feet of cherry blossom gardens.[303] Another example, which also plays with a high/low culture dynamic, is the Opera Toilet in Vienna, Austria, which combines the high pleasure activity of listening to opera with urination.[304] Thus, while Kabakov's roots are placed firmly in the Soviet communal apartment, his utopian toilet is a message that can and is understood universally, perhaps speaking to his international success.

SZ Group

Self Defense Against Things

Part of the later generation of the Moscow Conceptual Circle, the SZ group began their activities in the early 1980s. According to fellow conceptualist Yuri Albert, the group brought something new to Moscow art, including a full set of important themes: appropriation, simulation, narrative, exhibition itself as a work of art, new relationships with the viewer, new relationships with mass culture, and, most importantly, the rebirth of the ready-made.[305] In 1980,

[302] "Ilya Kabakov: Even in the Soviet era, the West was always present." By Maria Semendyaeva. *Russia Beyond.* 5 February 2014. Accessed February 20, 2019, https://www.rbth.com/arts/2014/02/05/ilya_kabakov_even_in_the_soviet_era_the_west_was_always_present_33823.html

[303] "Come Sit Awhile in Sou Fujimoto's Bucolic Toilet Garden." By Lily di Costanzo. 30 October 2013. Accessed March 14, 2019, https://www.curbed.com/2013/10/30/10181400/come-sit-awhile-in-sou-fujimotos-bucolic-toilet-garden.

[304] "Public Toilets, Who Makes it Extravagant." *Orange Smile*. Accessed March 15, 2019, http://www.orangesmile.com/extreme/en/exotic-toilets/vienna-opera-toilet.htm.

[305] Albert, Yuri. "About SZ Group." *Moscow Conceptualism*. http://www.conceptualism-moscow.org/page?id=368&lang=en

the SZ Group released their first work, entitled *Porno Series* — photos that displayed a couple of small wooden matches imitating pornographic photographs. By 1981, they released the project *Self Defense Against Things* (*Zashchita i kursy samooborony ot veshei*). The project was a series of actions, including, *Playing off a Chair and a Lavatory (Stravlivanie stula s unitazom*, more accurately translated as "Pitting a Chair and a Toilet against Each Other"*), Intimidation of a Table and a Door (Zapugivanie stola/dveri)*, and more. The project also included two classes in self-defense against things, which were held in the park in Orekhovo-Borisovo in Moscow. During these classes, the participants studied methods of counteractions against objects.

Unlike Duchamp and Kabakov, in their time, the SZ group did not have many viewers. In fact, their only viewers were usually the artists themselves. Even today, they are a less discussed artist group in the movement of Moscow Conceptualism. Scholarly material on their work is sparse, although many of their contemporaries tout their work as important and relevant to the time. Perhaps this is because they were often considered "outsiders" in the world of Russian conceptualists. Alexandra Oboukhova writes, "In the narrow world of Russian conceptualists, SZ looked like strangers, as if they had wandered into modern art by chance."[306]

As part of *Playing off a Chair and a Lavatory*, the SZ group wrote magical spells for the toilet ("A Spell for the Toilet / Zaklinanie unitaza"), as well as creating a series of photographs that served as guidelines, along with notes addressed to objects invoking them to fight against each other including a chair and a toilet:

> My pale-bellied friend, you're like the wonderful lily, blossoming in a foul place! Oh, how unhappy I am that you, You! cannot be free like a bird flying among the white clouds. Oh, how beautiful you would be, pulling the tinkling cast iron into the sky! But who? Who bolted you down to the floor? Who poured the cement over your base? Who is now wickedly celebrating your immobilized state? The Chairs! Squeaky-legged bastards of a soft-eared dog, plagued by an inferiority

[306] Alexandra Oboukhova. "Strangers from the Future." *Gruppa SZ: Sovmestnye raboty, 1980-1984, 1989, 1990.* Artkhronika, E.K. ArtBiuro, Fond Khudozhestvennye proekty: 2004. p. 9.

> complex because of their darkness and weakness, they maliciously torture and torture you, the son of Hercules.[307]

> Мой белокурый друг, ты, как прекрасная лилия, распустившаяся в этом зловонном месте! О, как я несчастен, что ты, Ты! не можешь подобно птице лететь под облаками. Сколь бы прекрасен ты был, тянущий в облака журчащий чугун. Но кто? Кто? Приковал тебя к полу стальными болтами? Кто залил цементом твое основание? Кто теперь злобно радуется твоему состоянию? Это стулья! Скрипоногие ублюдки вислоухой собаки, одолеваемые комплексом неполноценности из-за своей чернявости и хлипкости, злобно стулят да стулят над тобой, сыном Геракла.

The spell invokes the toilet as a "friend," and proceeds to place it on a higher plane of existence. The spell calls the toilet a "beautiful lily blossoming in a fetid place." It names the toilet as the "son of Hercules," suggesting that it has a godly lineage. Furthermore, the spell invokes the toilet as You! (capital Y, or Ты), also highlighting the importance or godliness of the toilet. The note attempts to convince the toilet that the chair is the reason that it is "chained to floor" and unable to "fly like a bird." As they are painted in this narrative, the chairs are malicious and spiteful. They not only bolted the toilet to the ground, but they also poured the cement that keeps the toilet permanently grounded. According to Albert, SZ group entered the ranks of renowned artists using the objects of their study, such as a toilet, like Duchamp, or an armoire, like Kabakov. He writes, "SZ bravely entered the fight with them, threatening, flattering, and egging them on to fight each other, as long as they stayed in their own places and did not move into art."[308]

Furthermore, the authors transform and create words in the spell that further implicate the chairs in the toilet's suffering. In the original Russian, the last line of the spell reads: "… злобно стулят да стулят над тобой, сыном Геракла." The verb "стулить" found in Dal''s 1863-1866

[307] Translation with my own edits and additions. Original in *Gruppa SZ: Sovmestnye raboty.*
[308] ibid.

dictionary, can mean to being together two sides of a wound. However, because it is now obsolete, in the spell the verb sounds made up. Though this "made-up" word is very intentional as it relates to the word for chair — "стул." Thus, "to chair" becomes a verb that means something like to torture or to humiliate. Furthermore, a 1982 drawing that accompanied the project features the chair in starkly drawn black and white lines with abstract birds (the SZ Group logo, as I will later discuss), perching on and around it. The dark, heavy lines along with the ominous birds also contribute to the demonizing of the chair.

The group also writes a spell for the chair:

> Oh greetings, my lifelong friend, helper in all my pleasures! Oh, thin-legged darling of destiny, helpless in Your majesty. Oh You, who captivates all around with your caress and fluttering (quivering?) love. O You, proud of your spotless wood. Know your enemy! From whom you must endure constant fetid burps and nasty cries. The one whose slimy, faceless ignorance is inundated with horror. The one who wears the scars and dirty name of the toilet.

This time, the chair takes on the elevated position. It is described as a "lifelong friend," a "helper of pleasures." Again, the authors employ capital letters in their addresses to the chair (Ты) in order to highlight its majesty. As expected, contrary to the first spell, this narrative casts the toilet as the enemy. It describes the toilet as something that must be endured, with its "fetid burps" and "nasty cries," referring to the sound of a toilet flushing. In this narrative, not only is the toilet the bearer of disgusting noises, but also is it described as "inundated with horror" and "slimy, faceless." The two spells side-by-side make the intentions of the invocations clear: to pit the chair and the toilet against each other.

However, in reality, it is the people themselves that have placed these objects in their respective positions. Who has chained the toilet to the floor? Humans. Who designed the toilets "fetid burps" for their own purposes? Humans. Thus, it is not the chair or the toilet that is the

enemy, it is people themselves. The same people who are writing the spells. The same "beings" that wrote the spells themselves. And the beings responsible for the containment of these objects are the same beings that are pitting them against one another. The authors of the spells are, perhaps, the true enemies.

The title of the project, *Self Defense Against Things,* and the accompanying self-defense courses suggest that we need protection from the things that surround us. This implication gives agency and life to objects usually seen as created and controlled by humans. The authors claim that the chairs torture the toilets because of an inferiority complex stemming from their inherent weakness. However, it is the humans who create this conflict, which suggests that it is humans who carry an inherent weakness against objects. Self-defense lies not only in physical actions[309], but in the "mental" manipulation of the objects — convincing them that they are each other's enemies, distracting from the fact that humans are their true captors.

Objects as Carnivalesque

The SZ Group's action is a form of the carnivalesque, as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin, carnivals are occasions during which political (church and state) authority is temporarily inverted. As outlined in the introduction and previous chapters of this dissertation, for Bakhtin, this inversion is also a phenomenon that occurs in literature, manifesting itself as the spirit of carnival, or the "carnivalesque." The SZ groups brings about the spirit of carnival in their *Self Defense Against Things,* in suggesting that the everyday object has power over the human.[310] By creating spells to turn objects against each other and also teaching people to

[309] As can be seen in photos, SZ Group's self defense courses and actions involved physical defense against objects. See: http://www.conceptualism-moscow.org/page?id=375&lang=en (No longer available)
[310] This line of thinking assumes that the human is privileged over the nonhuman. This works against philosophical theories of object-oriented ontology, which rejects the privileging of human existence over nonhuman objects.

physically defend themselves against objects, the SZ Group's actions imply that the object is a threat to the human. Furthermore, Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque is also anchored in the grotesque body, specifically what he calls the "bodily lower stratum." The lower bodily stratum, including actions such as defecation and urination, directly relates to objects such as the toilet, which the SZ Group highlights in their action. The use of the grotesque body furthers the carnivalesque nature of the action, more fully suggesting an overturned hierarchy between human and object.

The overturning of hierarchy can be compared to Duchamp's *Fountain*, which inverts the hierarchy of art by placing a readymade urinal in the context of high art. Dealing with the lower bodily stratum, the urinal already is in the realm of the carnivalesque. Additionally, the initial rejection and subsequent criticism of the piece's validity as "art" highlight the inversion that occurs when it is placed in an art exhibition. Not only is the urinal a taboo, unclean object, but also it is an object that represents functionality, rather than aesthetic pleasure and beauty, as "art" prior to Dadaism is thought to exude.

It is likely that the SZ Group would have been familiar with non-Russian Modernist pieces such as "Fountain." By 1969, edited collections of essays by Russian critics on Western art had already been published, and included comprehensive information about Modern artists, even including reproductions of Duchamp's work.[311] According to Andrew Solomon, all of the artists knew this book.[312] While Duchamp's iconic challenge to taste and narratives of high culture and SZ group's actions both represent carnivalesque spectacles, Duchamp's challenge derives from the recontextualization of the urinal, which differs from the SZ Group's approach to

[311] *Modernizm: Analiz i kritika osnovnykh napravlenii* edited by Viktor Vanslov and Yuri Kolponsky. See: Jackson, *The Experimental Group*, p109 and p274.
[312] Solomon, Andrew. *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost. (*New York: Knopf, 1991), p83.

their objects. That is, Duchamp makes meaning by placing an unexpected (and unwelcome) item in a museum space, thus declaring it as "art." However, the SZ group does not merely recontextualize their objects in order to make meaning — in fact, they do not recontextualize their objects at all. Rather, the SZ Group works within the original space of the objects, instead reimagining objects as violent and dangerous by taking action against them.

According to Oboukhova, The SZ Group became pioneers of the field by declaring an anti-bourgeois war against material terror, sowing resistance against the servile culture of fleshiness. Oboukhova writes, "Leaving time behind, SZ explored a future reality, where artists used attributes of fleshiness as instrument of social criticism."[313] Beyond their ironic fighting against the violence of things, their other works frequently deal with the corporeal world, featuring naked bodies or objects and actions that threaten contact or penetration of the body. Even their logo resembles a chubby buttocks with wings. The fleshiness of their work contributes further to its carnivalesque nature, as the carnival is connected to the grotesque, an affirmation of the metabolic, fleshy, and cyclical process of the body. Similarly, the war against objects might be thought of as a kind of anti-materialism, and anti-Soviet stance against the material world, as well as "class struggle" between material objects rather than people.

Furthermore, the stakes of "the action" were very important to SZ Group's artistic vision. Group member, Viktor Skersis, comments that the "activity" is rigidly bound in time, in contrast to the picture. He writes, "A performance starts and ends: now we are watching it, now we are not. […] The picture can be a still painting or a moving film or even a live performance; it might even surround the viewer. However, it fundamentally remains a picture, and is watched by the viewer."[314] As he observes, the activity embraces the "unbound continuity of the real world,"

[313] Oboukhova, 10.
[314] Skersis, Victor. "Notes on the Activity of S-Z." *Moscow Conceptualism in Context*, 372.

allowing the artist's work to bleed into the artist's environment and erase the dichotomies of artist/artwork and artwork/viewer. Skersis observes, "We don't know where the work starts or ends, what is included in it, and what is not."[315]

Figure 4: "Intimidation of a Door" (Zapugivanie dveri, 1981)[316]

[315] ibid.
[316] *Gruppa SZ*, 66.

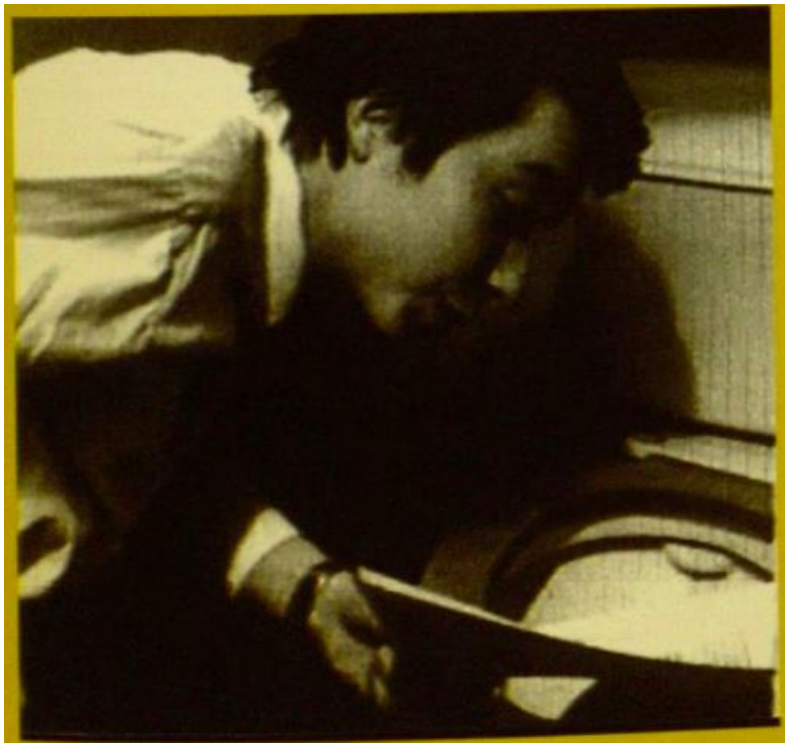

Figure 5: “Playing off a chair against a lavatory. Casting a magical spell on lavatory.” (Stravlivanie styla s unitazom. Chtenie zaklinanii unitazu, 1981)[317]

The SZ Group’s actions were recorded in photographs that capture their content and atmosphere. Their facial and bodily expressions are exaggerated, either in pleasant softness or violent aggression depending on the context. Interestingly, the depictions of their actions that involve interacting with an object directly differ from their depictions of preparations to interact with objects. In actions such as “Intimidating a Door” and “Casting a magical spell on a lavatory,” the image is limited and cramped. Likely a result of the truly limited space within Soviet apartments, the photographs include close range shots that are about half human and half object in question. These cramped photographs imply a conflict between the corporeal and the material. There is a tension between the body and the objects that must cohabitate in this space

[317] *Gruppa SZ*, 63.

that barely has enough room for both parties. In fact, in “Intimidating a Door,” the action is shown to be successful by a photograph that depicts the door taking up less space than before the intimidation.

However, in the action “Courses of Self Defense Against Things” the scene is much different. Rather than a crowded apartment, the action is held outside in a park, with the forest behind them. The camera is able to capture a much wider, spacious scene. In these photographs, we see multiple people, all making dynamic movements simultaneously. This action is meant to prepare individuals for defending themselves from objects. Yet, there are no objects to be seen, as if they have purposefully separated themselves from the objects that threaten them. Like the indoor actions, this outdoor action grants a sentience to the objects in that humans must prepare to defend themselves away from them, as if they are going to battle and they must keep their defense secret from the enemy. In addition to the perceived sentience of the objects, the action also allows for the full movement of their bodies. Unlike the apartment, among the objects that torment them, the participants are able to practice their corporeality to its full extent.

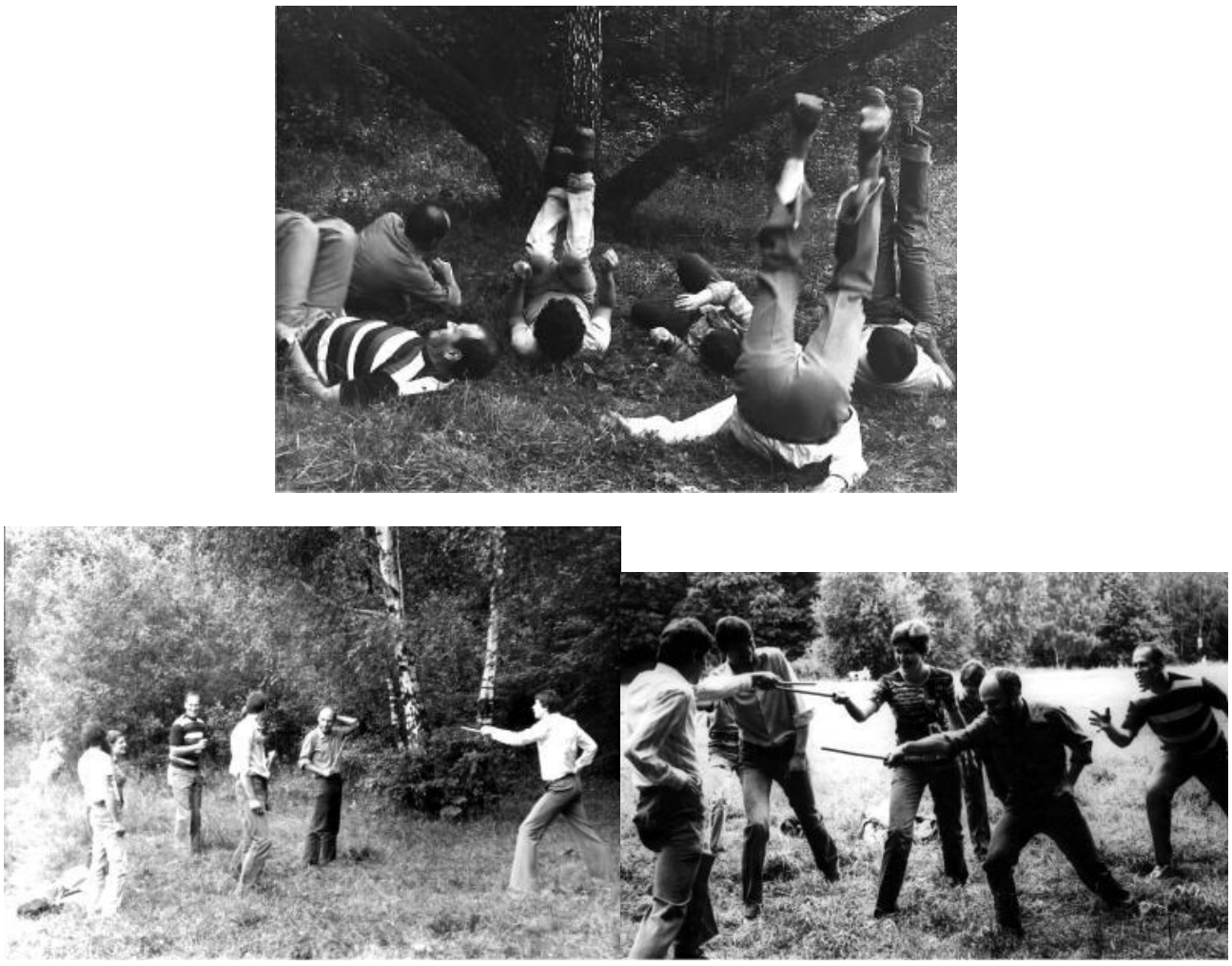

Figure 6: "Courses of Self Defense Against Things" (Kursy camooborony ot veshcei, 1981)[318]

According to Skersis, for SZ Group, their art became a part of NOMA and the larger Soviet society, including its culture and infrastructure. Accordingly, in their action *Self Defense Against Things*, the artists use the artifacts of Soviet everyday life and transform them into metaphorical heroes and villains. In particular, the toilet represents a crucial Soviet "artifact." As I have shown in other sections of this dissertation, in literature, film, and art the toilet takes on a particular role in Soviet memory due to its connotations within the communal apartment.

[318] *Gruppa SZ,* 69.

Examples of this include Kabakov's installations, which serve as a "metaphor of vanished Soviet life" (Svetlana Boym) and an aesthetic symbol of transition from Soviet to Post-Soviet life. Examples of the toilet as key aesthetic figure in the description of Soviet life are Pelevin's "Vera Pavlova's Ninth Dream," which illustrates perestroika from the perspective of a toilet cleaning woman; or Soviet-era depictions, such as the film *Khrustalev, mashinu!* or Ilf and Petrov's *Golden Calf,* which both feature moments that center the toilet and the unspoken rules of its use in a communal apartment. Thus, a central figure in the communal apartment, the toilet is a crucial figure in the Soviet experience. Thus, The SZ Group's action, which focuses on the toilet, engages with the details of Soviet experience.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the action is tied to the carnivalesque, inverting the hierarchy between object and human. However, the inversion goes further than the relationship between object and human. By engaging with the Soviet experience and inverting the Soviet subject's relationship with the Soviet object, the SZ Group plays with hierarchy of art — that is, the official art (Socialist Realism) and unofficial art. Early ideological projects, everyday Soviet life, and official imagery played a crucial role in formulating Moscow Conceptualism. Furthermore, playing with the hierarchy of art is exactly the effect of Duchamp's famous toilet. However, different from Duchamp, The SZ Group is also recording their own version of everyday Soviet life. As Jackson explains, Conceptualists set out to be the "ethnographers" of Soviet life in the 1970s and 1980s.[319] They channeled their energy into a "nearly infinite discussion, one designed to encompass the depth and breadth of Soviet civilization and the history of art."[320] In other words, using the toilet in their art was part of their ethnographical ways of approaching culture, as they turned an archeological eye on the objects that surrounded

[319] Jackson, 170.
[320] ibid.

them. Official imagery of Soviet times, which was constant and inescapable, but said nothing of value according to artists, was critiqued in works such as Komar and Melamid's banners featuring blank slogans.[321] Furthermore, as Jane Sharp writes in the introduction of *Thinking Pictures: The Visual Field of Moscow Conceptualism*, sots art (a later form of Moscow Conceptualism), is the phenomenon that distinguishes Moscow Conceptualism from its Western counterparts because it utilizes and reworks Soviet artistic practices and ideological clichés.[322]

While the SZ Group's "Self Defense Against Things" may conceptually engage with mass ideology of Soviet culture, the accompanying text of the actions more closely presents itself as a mixing of classical and folkloric tradition. The text, written in a high elevated style, with archaic language and the invocation of classical mythology clearly resembles an ode, which in its simplest definition aims to ceremoniously address and celebrate a person, place, or thing. In this case, we see the celebration of the toilet and the chair, respectively. However, stylistically, the texts do not conform to any one tradition of odes, be it Greek or 18th century Russian.[323] In addition to the odic tradition, the texts also play with the folkloric tradition as is evidenced by their titles. Both texts identify themselves as a "Заклинание" or "charm." Charms or incantations were used in pre-Petrine Russia as a cure for hexes or other ailments[324] and the genre is invoked in folklore, as well as into the 20th century by poets such as Velimir Khlebnikov.[325] A pastiche of styles leaping across time and genre, the texts display a postmodern

[321] Terry Smith, "Questions of the Experimental Group: Moscow Conceptualism Compared to What?," *Thinking Pictures: The Visual Field of Moscow Conceptualism.* ed. Jane Sharp (New Brunswick, NJ: Zimmerli Art Museum, 2016), 21.
[322] Sharp, Jane. "Introduction." *Thinking Pictures: The Visual Field of Moscow Conceptualism.* ed. Jane Sharp (New Brunswick, NJ: Zimmerli Art Museum, 2016), 10. See also: Matthew Jesse Jackson, Marina Balina, Evgeny Dobrenko, Gerald McCausland, Viktor Lettsev, Nancy Condee.
[323] See, for example, Mayakovsky's "Ode to the Revolution" which is similar in style in that it uses a direct address
[324] Zguta, Russell. "Witchcraft and Medicine in Pre-Petrine Russia." *The Russian Review* 37, no. 4 (October 1978): 438-448.
[325] See Klebnikov's "Zaklinaie mnozhestvenym chislom."

approach, placing the SZ group's work among that of postmodern writers, such as Venedikt Erofeev and Viktor Pelevin (both authors who also invoke the toilet, and will be discussed in the next chapter).

As discussed in the introduction, Boris Groys discusses the importance of understanding the context of socialist realism in Russian postmodernism. In his essay "Text as Ready-Made Object," Groys discusses the emphasis on the use of visual and textual material of Soviet mass culture in sots-art.[326] He compares the use of Soviet mass culture in sots-art and Moscow conceptualism to the use of mass culture in Western pop-art.[327] He writes that Moscow conceptualists use the texts (objects) of daily life, ideological bureaucratic texts, or literary texts that form a part of Soviet mass consciousness. He argues that Moscow Conceptualism treats these texts in the same way — with distance and ironically. He writes, "It does not identify with these texts, but cites them as symptoms of that culture within which it lives and that it nevertheless is capable of analyzing from an external position. […] It deconstructs the customary opposition: ironic play with images of mass culture versus serious work with a text."[328] However, the toilet itself also functions as "text," the readymade component being the symbolic, ideological component of the toilet itself. Boris Groys writes that Socialist Realism uses the readymade technique. He writes, "A simple, banal, insignificant object is given weight by means

[326] Groys, Boris. "Text as Ready-Made Object." *Endquote: Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style.* eds. Marina Balina, Nancy Condee, Evgenii Dobrenko (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2000), 32-45.
[327] Groys differentiates between the terms "sots-art" and conceptualism by explaining that sots-art emphasizes the use of visual and textual material of Soviet mass culture, and "conceptualism" refers chiefly to the use of the text in the visual space of art. He attributes the convergence of these terms to the extreme literariness and text orientation of Soviet mass culture. (32)
[328] Groys, 35.

of a interpretation that lends it the status of art."[329] As he specifies, in this case, the work of art is not the object itself, but rather the interpretation itself. [330]

The fascination with objects is not a new development in Soviet literature or in art. In his 1925 essay "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing," Russian Constructivist artist Boris Arvatov imagines how socialism will transform the passive capitalist commodity into an active socialist object.[331] We see this in *Envy*, when Kavalerov insists that objects dislike him, and that the table sticks its leg out to trip him.[332] In *Man with a Movie Camera*, seats in a theater hall move on their own, opening and closing as if preparing for the show. Later, we see a camera dancing on its tripod. This difference in the SZ Groups action with objects is the *bathos* with which they perform, that is, the abrupt transition from a grand style to a vulgar one. In particular, this is illustrated through the photographs of the action, in which Zakharov and Skresis throw their bodies dramatically on the ground and tense their limbs into combative poses in front of everyday objects like the chair and toilet, which sit peacefully in their corners. This is further demonstrated in the accompanying odes, of course, which, as discussed, use an elevated style to elevate the vulgar toilet and lifeless chair.

The SZ Group, although considered an outlier within Moscow Conceptualism, joins the string of late-Soviet works of art and fiction that use the toilet as social commentary. Their magical spell to the toilet invokes it as an elevated figure, held back from its greatness; while, at the same time, marking the toilet, among other objects, as a danger to the human (referring to the text's title, *Self Defense against Things*). The carnivalesque nature of the toilet with its ties to the

[329] Groys, Boris. *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 61.
[330] However, Groys specifies that socialist realism as it is presented in each individual artist's works is their own reading of socialist realism. He writes, "It would be naive to consider that we are speaking here of attempting an adequate reconstruction of socialist-realist aesthetics. (42)
[331] See Christina Kaier's "Boris Arvatov's Socialist Objects." *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 105-118.
[332] This novel is discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

lower-body stratum, along with the inversion of hierarchy between human and object, give the action humorous and ironic qualities, asking its audience to laugh along with it. The SZ Group intentionally chooses to conduct their actions in their own apartments, among everyday objects, and thus connects its audience and its message to its audience's most familiar place: the Soviet home.

Acts of Unintentional Conceptualism and Conclusions

In 2002, followers of a pro-Putin nationalist youth group constructed a giant papier-mache toilet outside of the Moscow Bolshoi Theater and commenced to symbolically flush copies of Sorokin's 1999 novel *Blue Lard,* offensive because of its depiction of an erotic encounter between a clone of Stalin and one of Khrushchev.[333] I use the term "unintentional conceptualism" with tongue in cheek, as this group, of course, had nothing to do with the Moscow Conceptualism Circle or with underground art at all. Rather, in their protest of Sorokin, who ran in the same circle as the Moscow Conceptualists, their stances were quite the opposite.[334]

Nevertheless, I categorize this protest as "conceptual art" in its very basic sense: the concept of the piece takes precedence over the aesthetics of the work. I have included it here to demonstrate that by nature, the image of the toilet often functions this way. Hardly ever an aesthetic prop, the toilet instead is used almost in a conceptual manner, exclusively to convey an idea. This is true of Duchamp's iconic readymade, and also of the SZ Group's actions and Kabakov's installations. While, Kabakov's installations do have an aesthetic quality to them in

[333] "Vladimir Sorokin's Absurdist Excess." By Ben Ehrenreich. *The Nation*. 4 February 2016. Accessed March 13, 2019, https://www.thenation.com/article/vladimir-sorokins-absurdist-excess/.
[334] "NOMA or The Moscow Conceptual Circle." Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. accessed March 13, 2019, https://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/installations/noma-or-the-moscow-conceptual-circle/.

their everyday details, as well as the scenery in “Toilet on the River/Mountain,” the toilet itself stands to represent serenity and solitude, rather than to enhance the aesthetics of the work itself. Most significantly, the toilet in its essence evokes the carnivalesque, prompting the inversion of high/low cultures, and encouraging their mixture. This is certainly true for the SZ Group, whose odes to the toilet exude a mixing of high and low tones. For Kabakov, the carnivalesque is more subtle, and, perhaps even nonexistent. Kabakov’s installations do not exactly invoke irony or laughter, like the SZ Group’s ode to the toilet. Rather, the toilet is taken as a serious component to the everyday, from its practical use to its metaphor for “shittiness” as a fact of life. While the SZ Group may be the outliers of Moscow Conceptualism, it is apparent that Kabakov is an outlier among a string of artists and writers that use the toilet as ironic trope.

Chapter 4: Witnessing Perestroika from the Toilet

As this dissertation has already discussed, the housing crisis extends back to the turn of the century when many rural residents moved into urban centers. It continued through the 1920s, and although more housing desperately needed to be built, in the 1930s Stalin's policies diverted resources from consumer needs (such as housing) to rapid industrialization, land collectivization, and war preparation. World War II only brought more destruction and depletion. This situation continued into the 1950s until 1957 when Nikita Khrushchev announced a decree to solve the housing crisis and provide each family with a "separate apartment."[335]

Thus began the transition from communal apartments to one-family dwellings. Most significantly, the shared kitchen, bathroom/toilet, and storage spaces were to be abolished, giving each family their own small kitchen and bathroom, along with at least one main room and combined bedroom, living room, and study. This shift was met with some controversy, with some claiming that separate spaces would lead to less concern for the collective and turning inward to the individual. However, others countered that concern with the consideration that more convenience and comfort would lead to a happier Soviet citizen, and thus, a better Communist life.[336] This transition is important for this chapter because it marks a significant change from the communal-style toilet, so important to everyday life. However, the drama surrounding the toilet continues. Rather than transgressing the tacit rules of communal toilet usage, violence and shame stem from the toilet as a locale of privacy. This is especially apparent in the examples discussed below: Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* (1969-1970), in which the protagonist is aggressively confronted about his lack of flatulence; "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream," in which the crisis of Perestroika is depicted inside a public toilet; *Osennii Marafon,* in

[335] Varga-Harris, Christine, *Stories of House and Home*.
[336] ibid.

which the protagonist's inability to stand up for himself is punctuated by his attempts to please by pretending to use the toilet; and *Malen'kaia Vera,* in which much of the tension of the film emerges from the family toilet.

Postmodernism and the Emergence of Cultural Stagnation

By the 1980s, Soviet Conceptual Artists had long been using the images of socialist realism to express the meaningless in a once meaningful ideology. Notably, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid had a series of paintings (Nostalgic Socialist Realism, 1982-83) that used the sacred images of Soviet socialism rendered devoid of their original meaning by their new context. For example, "The Origin of Socialist Realism," parodies the grandiose idea of Stalin by picturing him sitting in a grand hall, with a Greek goddess gently caressing his chin.[337] In a later series (Monumental Propaganda/Lenin's Tomb, 1993), Lenin hails a cab in New York in front of a red McDonald's flag, parodying famous propaganda images of Stalin reaching his hand forward, red flag denoting the Soviet Union in the background.

To some extent, sots art of the 80s and 90s reflected a growing sentiment of the general public as described by Aleksei Yurchak in his book *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More.* Yurchak explores a common paradox among the public during late socialism: the paradox of a public that felt simultaneously shocked and prepared for the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yurchak writes, "A peculiar paradox became apparent in those years: although the system's collapse had been unimaginable before it began, it appeared unsurprising when it happened," stemming from the "profound feeling of the Soviet system's permanence and immutability, and

[337] This painting references 1811 painting by Jean Auguste Dominique *Thetis and Jupiter*, casting Stalin in grandeur

the complete unexpectedness of its collapse."[338] The late 1980s marks a widespread realization that the once thought to be eternal Socialist system might actually be coming to an end and the first inklings were found in the extreme loosening of publication censorship (Grossman and Solzhenitsyn were published, among others who compared communism to fascism and openly discussed horrors and atrocities of Soviet Union).

Yurchak discusses how common forms of ideological representations, such as documents, speeches, ritualized practices, slogans, posters, monuments, and urban visual propaganda became increasingly normalized and predictable (see: Komar and Melamid's *Ideal Slogan* [1972], a banner with nondescript symbols that denote the lost sincerity in its ritualized act).[339] As he argues, the uniqueness of the late-socialist period lies in the fact that even the most loyal of communists understood that many ritualized acts and texts had been reinterpreted from their original meaning.[340] He writes, "They therefore emphasized the centrality of the performative dimension of this discourse in the reproduction of social norms, positions, relations, and institutions. […] It became increasingly more important to participate in the reproduction of the form of these ritualized acts of authoritative discourse than to engage with their constative meanings."[341]Although the ritualized acts were distant from their original meanings, Yurchak is careful to point out that they were not "meaningless" or "empty," but instead reproductions of ritual acts "actually enabled the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings in everyday life."[342]

[338] Aleksei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princetion< NJ: Princeton UP: 2006), 1.
[339] Yurchak, 14.
[340] Yurchak, 25.
[341] ibid.
[342] ibid.

Discussing the same time period from a Western standpoint, Jameson explores the postmodern condition. Jameson discusses sheer commodification and reproduction as important components in identifying the postmodern condition, similar to Yurchak's later discussion on the effects of over-ritualization. This includes representations of "popular" culture, as well as commercial culture, such as advertisements and packaging.[343] To illustrate his point, Jameson compares the high modernist painting of peasant shoes by Van Gogh and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*, as a contrast between Modernism and the postmodern. As he writes, in sharp opposition to Van Gogh's shoes which convey a world of "agricultural misery, stark rural poverty, and whole rudimentary human world of backbreaking peasant toil," Warhol's shoes center around commodification, "no longer speaking to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's footgear."[344] Rather, its foregrounding of fetishization of the transition to late capitalism without making any critical political statements, gives the work a sense of depthlessness.

Furthermore, Jameson notes the blurred distinction between high and so-called mass (low) culture, a distinction that modernism relied on. He describes texts that emerge in this era as, "infused with the forms, categories and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern."[345] For example, he notes the "degraded" landscape of kitsch, advertising, motels, the murder mystery, the fantasy novel and more as "materials they no longer 'quote,' as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance."[346] As he describes, postmodernism is often defined in opposition with other movements, such as modernism.

[343] Jameson, 63.
[344] ibid, 7-9.
[345] ibid, 2.
[346] ibid, 3.

According to Jameson, with the postmodern comes new modes of representation. While the modern focuses its thought around the New, "the postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same […], or, better still, for shifts and irrevocable changes in the representation of things and of the way they change." (ix) He writes that postmodern theory includes "antifoundationalism that really eschews all foundations altogether, a nonessentialism without the last shred of essence in it."[347] According to Jameson, one aesthetic feature of postmodernism is the shift from parody to pastiche. Like parody, pastiche is the "imitation of the peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language."[348] However, pastiche differs in that it functions without "parody's ulterior motives." It is "amputated of the satiric impulse." It is a "blank parody," a "blank irony." Much of these blurred high/low, parody, and pastiche qualities are apparent in many of the works analyzed in this chapter, particularly the literature.

However, Jameson's theories rest on a capitalistic system of understanding. He asserts that postmodernism is not the cultural dominant of a wholly new social order, but rather it is "only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself."[349] Yet, as Jameson writes, there are theories of the postmodern that assert the arrival and inauguration of an entirely new type of society – the "postindustrial society."[350] He notes that this is also often designated as consumer, media, information society, and the like. Jameson identifies late capitalism as the "natural" attitude with which we relate to the expansion of the

[347] ibid, xii.
[348] ibid, 17.
[349] ibid, xii.
[350] ibid, 3.

state sector and bureaucratization, and the "vision of a world capitalist system fundamentally distinct from older imperialism."[351]

Given these assertions that place Jameson's ideas firmly in the capitalist West, theorists have asked how we can conceive of postmodernism in Soviet Russia, free of the type of consumerism present in Jameson's West. To answer this question, both Groys and Epstein establish the connection between postmodernism and Soviet tropes. In his article "A Style and a Half: Socialist Realism between Modernism and Postmodernism," Groys argues that Socialist Realism and Modernism are related through their emphasis on oppositions (high/low and Soviet/non-Soviet, respectively). He calls Socialist Realism "a style and a half," because of "its proto-postmodernist strategy of appropriation" of "readymade cultural forms deployed in contexts at odds with their normal functioning."[352] He also calls attention to the Western origins of the concept of "postmodernism" and illustrates its Soviet specificity. He writes, "The Soviet specificity lies primarily in the fact that from the outset the dictatorship of Socialist Realism under communism differed on the institutional level from the dictatorship of Modernism over the institution of art and criticism in the West."[353] He compares the struggle against a system of censorship in the Soviet Union to Western postmodernism's struggle against the "aesthetic censorship of modernist cultural institutions."[354] Thus, the failure of Soviet cultural institutions caused all Soviet culture to be relegated to the status of "low," mass culture in the post-Soviet context and contemporary Russian culture found itself without any institutionalized tradition against which it might transgress.

[351] ibid, xix.
[352] Groys, "A Style and a Half," 78.
[353] Groys, 76.
[354] Groys, 82.

Similarly, Epstein in his article "Postmodernism, Communism, and Sots-Art" (2000), argues that communism is nascent Postmodernism.[355] As he explains, the end of communism and the emergence of postmodernism in Russia coincided – an event that he does not think was coincidental. In fact, he believes that postmodernism is a "deeply Russian phenomenon," like communism, and this explains why Russia was so ready to adopt the method once Soviet communism fell. He identifies several elements of postmodernism that are comparable to Soviet communism: hyperreality, determinism and reductionism, ideological and aesthetic eclecticism, posthistoricism, and more. Epstein specifically discusses the transition from socialist realism to sots-art, observing that is was sots-art more than any other literary movement, that inherited the basic, "native" features of socialist aesthetics, even though it is perceived as the antithesis of official Soviet art (socialist realism).[356] He writes, "While socialist realism is communism at the moment of its break with its modernist past, sots-art is communism at the moment of its recognition of its postmodern future."[357] As he argues, sots-art's proximity to socialist realism caused it to be the most unpopular movement of the time for officials — he cites Kabakov and Bulatov as examples, observing that they were "much less 'authorized' and 'acceptable' in Soviet culture than the neo-modernists […] who were nonetheless permitted on occasion to hold exhibits."[358]

However, as Epstein writes, "only sots-art carried within it the mystery of the coming carnival death and mock crowning and decrowning of socialism itself, a perspective on its

[355] Mikhail Epstein. "Postmodernism, Communism, and Sots-Art." *Endquote: Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style*. ed. Marina Balina, Nancy Condee, and Evgeny Dobrenko (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999), 3-31.
[356] ibid, 25-26.
[357] ibid, 26. Also note: Epstein clarifies that the difference between sots-art and postmodernism is that: 1) postmodernism encompasses many different artistic movements, including conceptualism; and 2) sots-art concentrates of the sign system of socialist civilization.
[358] ibid, 26.

disintegration into sign components freed from any connection with signifiers."[359] His observations about the importance of sign components and signifiers in sots-art, as well as the "decrowning of socialism" illustrates a clear connection to Yurchak's observation regarding the effects of the reproductions of banners and symbols in the last decade of the Soviet Union. Thus, as both Groys and Epstein have argued, Russian postmodernism is not merely transplanted from the West, but rather, it develops in its own unique environment, emerging from the nation's own literary movements.

Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki

Venedikt Erofeev's 1970 *Moskva-Petushki* (translated as *Moscow to the End of the Line* and *Moscow Circles*) is regarded by scholars of Russian literature as one of the first and most notable works of Russian postmodernism.[360] The story documents the travels of Venichka (no doubt named after the author himself[361]), as he goes from Moscow to the suburban town of Petushki, where he will visit his child and her mother. A fantastic drunk, Venichka spends the time on the train recounting his own hooch recipes, telling anecdotes, and alluding to Russian literary history, while also hallucinating in his drunken stupor. The *poema* (as its full title *Moskva-Petushki: Poema* indicates) features images of the toilet that invoke fear and shame in the protagonist, along with references to the toilet that undermine Soviet greatness.

[359] ibid.
[360] See Shneyder, Vlasov, Geisser-Schnittman, Levin.
[361] The text itself has interesting autobiographical parallels with Erofeev's life, beyond the protagonist sharing his name. For example, he often visited his first wife and child in Myshlino, a settlement near Petushki, where his wife was teaching. (See: Ryan-Hayes, "Beyond Picaresque," 59) Moreover, by Erofeev's own account, the book was written while he was living in a train car. (60)

This *poema* is Erofeev's "claim to fame," as he became known as the mysterious author of the samizdat/tamizdat work.[362] Karen Ryan-Hayes remarks that it is likely that he will be regarded by future generations as the author of a single book: *Moskva-Petushki*.[363] Though completed in 1969, the *poema* first appeared in the Israeli journal *AMI* in 1973 and later was published in Paris as a separate edition, in both French and Russian. An English translation came out in 1980. In Russia, *Moskva-Petushki* was first published serially and in a substantially shortened version in the journal *Trezvost' i kul'tura (Sobriety and Culture)* in 1988 and 1989. The nearly complete text was released by the independent publisher Vest' in 1989. The "first authentic text" was issued by publishing house Prometei in the same year.[364]

The *poema* is an apparent parody of Soviet ideology. Venichka himself acts in antithesis to the New Soviet Man, a key character in socialist realism, which aims to boast the successes of the Soviet system. Venichka's continuous drunkenness, his inability to stay employed, and his ultimate failure to meet his family in Petushki all contribute to portraying the New Soviet Man's opposite, causing many to consider Venichka as a postmodern reimagining of the superfluous man archetype of the 19th century.[365] His degeneration throughout the story also challenges the typical structure of a socialist realist text, which was to project a prevailing sense of optimism and futurity. Instead, Venichka asks his readers, "Where is that happiness which they write about in the newspapers?" and threatens to commit suicide.[366] He also directly attacks the origins of the Soviet regime, standing in opposition to post-Stalin calls to the return of Leninism and the notion

[362] Karen L. Ryan-Hayes."Beyond Picaresque: Erofeev's *Moscow-Petushki*." *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 58.
[363] ibid, 60.
[364] ibid, 60.
[365] "Analysis of Moscow to the End of the Line," *The Toro Historical Review*, https://thetorohistoricalreview.org/2018/04/12/analysis-of-moscow-to-the-end-of-the-line/.
[366] Erofeev, Venedikt. *Moscow to the End of the Line*. Trans. H. William Tjalsma (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP), 150-153.

that Stalin's regime was not exemplative of true Soviet vision. Perhaps most striking is a dream in which he is attacked by the figures of the statue *Rabochii i kolkhoznitsa,* the depiction of the unity of worker and peasant, and a quintessential example of socialist realist monumental art. Figuratively attacked by the regime that promised him utopia, he also literally does not ever reach his utopia — Petushki — but rather is violently beaten to death before he can ever arrive. Furthermore, he is beaten to death just after he sees the Kremlin, a symbol of the Soviet state.

Oddly enough, it is his first time seeing the Kremlin, despite having lived in Moscow for a long time, giving the symbol more significance in the moments before the failure of his utopia. In fact, the novel opens with Venichka's admission that he has never seen the Kremlin. He writes: "Все говорят: Кремль, Кремль. Ото всех я слышу про него, а сам ни разу не видел. Сколько раз уже (тысячу раз), напившись или с похмелюги, проходил по Москве с севера на юг, с запада на восток, из конца в конец, насквозь и как попало – и ни разу не видел Кремль." ("Everyone says, 'The Kremlin, the Kremlin.' I hear about it from everybody, but I've never seen it myself. How many times (thousands) I've walked, drunk or hung over, across Moscow from north to south, east to west, from one end to the other, one way or another, and never did I see the Kremlin.")[367] About this opening, Shneyder remarks, "Not only history itself, but even the metanarrative that obscured it — as well as the very metonym of Soviet power — have disappeared."[368] As I will show in this section, other metonyms of Soviet power and success are obscured in particular by references to the toilet.

The parody of Soviet culture is accented by references to the toilet and its use. A consistent image throughout the text, the toilet is used to both undermine the grandiosity of the

[367] *Moscow to the End of the Line*, 13.
[368] Vadim Shneyder. "The Problem of Postmodernism in Russian Literary History: A Comparative Reading of *Summer in Baden-Baden* and *Moscow to the End of the Line*." *Studies in Slavic Cultures* 9 (2012): 34.

New Soviet Man, and also to emphasize the cyclical nature of the text itself. The most stark example of parody on Soviet ideology is the detailing of Aleksei Stakhanov's toilet use. The celebrity shock worker became famous for setting records for work production in the 1930s. He became a symbol for the Stakhanovite movement, which encouraged worker productivity and aimed to demonstrate the superiority of the socialist economic system. In Erofeev's *poema*, Venedikt encounters a Sphinx, who gives him the following riddle:

> "The well-known shock-worker Aleksei Stakhanov went to the toilet for number one two times a day and once for number two. But when he was on a drunk, he went four times for number one and not once for number two. Calculate how many times per year shock-worker Aleksei Stakhanov went for number one and how many for number two, if we consider he was drunk three hundred and twelves day per year."[369]

Firstly, to suggest that Stakhanov was drunk most days of the year undermines the idea of the New Soviet Man, who was to be the paragon of health and virility.[370] The New Soviet Man not only boasted his own vigor, but also "spoke to the health and vigor of the collective, of a new nation marching toward the bright future."[371] The Stakhanovite became a "familiar figure of Stalinist iconography" and was conceived as a perpetual builder of socialism. While suggestions of Stakhanov's alcohol use may not have been far from the truth, as by the fortieth anniversary of the movement in 1975, Stakhanov was living in a hospital in a "state of mental breakdown and alcohol-induced depression,"[372] the image of the legend of the Soviet Union as anything other than the pinnacle of health and productivity challenges its ideological narrative. The focus on Stakhanov's toilet use has the same effect. By placing focus on his bodily needs, Stakahnov's image as the ideal (perhaps even mechanized) Soviet Man is compromised.

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[369] *Moscow*, 136.
[370] Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade.*
[371] Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 6.
[372] Zemstov, Ilya. *Encyclopaedia of Soviet Life* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Other than the Stakhanov riddle, mentions of the toilet are scattered throughout the book. Early in the story, Erofeev recounts how his roommates confront him about his lack of flatulence and toilet use, despite his heavy beer drinking. They sit him down (intervention-style) and tell him to "cut it out," "it" being "thinking that you're better than anyone else."[373] While Venichka remains dumbfounded, his roommates continue, saying, "As if you don't know. It works out like this: we're nothing and you're tops. […] You suggested it every day since you moved in with us. Not in word but in deed. No, not even in deed but by the absence of deed."[374] The roommates are flabbergasted at Venichka's lack of need to use the toilet and interpret it as an affront to them, as a suggestion that Venichka is above them. Venichka tries to defend himself saying, "In this world there are spheres where it's impossible to simply get up and go. Because of self-restraint or whatever, [and] the precepts of shame…"[375] Also in his musings, Venichka assigns the bliss he feels towards women to the manner in which they use the toilet. He writes that he (like Karl Marx) likes that they have weakness in them, particularly how they "are compelled to squat down when urinating."[376] His lack of toilet use is meant to show his inadequacy and abnormality. It sets him apart from the others. He unlike Olesha's Babichev whose virility is in part portrayed by his ability to produce excrement.

Furthermore, references to the toilet also attach themselves onto one of the key images in the *poema* — eyes. Most vividly, the eyes represent the love of Venedikt's life, whom he is traveling to see. As he tells it, the "end of the line" — Petushki — is really a goal of being reunited with her and his son, who live there. He writes, "There, every Friday, exactly at eleven o'clock, I'm met on the platform by that girl of the white eyes, white to off-white, that most

[373] *Moscow*, 31.
[374] ibid.
[375] *Moscow*, 32.
[376] *Moscow*, 55.

beloved of trollops, that red-haired she-devil."[377] When angels appear in front of Venichka and remark that they are afraid that his drinking will once again impede his ability to arrive at his heavenly destination, he responds, "Won't get where? I won't get to Petushki? To her? To my shameless Tsaritsa with eyes like clouds? You're really funny."[378] In remarks such as these, Venichka is clear in the representation of his love's eyes: they are white, they are heavenly.

But at the end of the novel, he exits the train to find he is somewhere other than Petuhski. The novel, separated by train stops, marks this last stop as "Petushki. The Kremlin." This is an apparently impossible combination, given that the Kremlin is famously in Moscow. As Venichka is frantically searching for Kursk Station, four men surround him and begin to attack him for reasons unknown to him. The men, whom Venichka recognizes, but "won't tell [him] who they [are]" terrify him with the look of their eyes. He writes, "…in the eyes of all four — have you ever sat in the toilet in the Petushki Station and do you remember how, far below the round openings, that reddish-brown piss-water splashes and glitters? That's the kind of eyes they all had."[379] As he is running away from these men, a new location title appears: "Moscow/Pethuski. An Unidentified Front Hallway." Still unable to admit that he is not in Petushki, although he has seen the Kremlin, he hides from the men. However, he is unsuccessful. The men find him and proceed to beat him to death. Before he slips out of consciousness, a "clotted red letter 'ю' spread across [his] eyes and started to quiver." The letter ю is also a symbol of Petushki and his family there, as we learn earlier in the story when he writes, "And there beyond Petushki where the sky and the earth merge and the she-wolf howls at the stars […] flowers the pudgiest and dearest of little ones — *my* little one. He knows the letter ю and expects some nuts from me for

[377] *Moscow*, 43.
[378] *Moscow*, 48.
[379] *Moscow*, 158.

that. How many of you knew the letter ю at three years? Not one. But he knows and doesn't expect any reward but a cupful of nuts."[380] The beginning of the *poema* and the end make a full circle, ending in Moscow, however, with sharp contrasts in imagery. What was supposed to be a heavenly, blissful arrival to a place where the jasmine never stops blooming has ended with evil, piss-water eyes rather than the cloud-like eyes of his lover and the letter ю written in blood instead of uttered from the lips of his beloved son.

The circularity of the story, as well as Erofeev's epic-hero qualities, suggest the story is a divine one. The *poema*, also referred to as narrative poem, is a long epic or epic-lyric work, akin to Homeric epics and the Russian Byronic poems written in imitation of Byron's epic poems.[381] It was most used in the eighteenth century in its hero-epic version. In the nineteenth century tastes changed and the lyrical Romantic *poema* gained popularity. In contrast, the Romantic *poema* had a "new, subjective attitude to life, a new interest in man's inner conflicts and emotions." This differed from the hero-epic *poema,* which was characterized by "lofty subjects and matching stilted style, […] conventional idealized heroes with whom the impersonal author has no emotional contact, […] slow-moving episodic narrative which throws no light on the faceless characters but merely serves to illustrate the unreal, almost mediaeval struggle between good and evil, between black and white…"[382] Karen Ryan-Hayes highlights the dual structural nature of the *poema,* that is, its circularity and linearity. She notes that the work has thematic similarity to two preceding *poemas* — Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Gogol's *Dead Souls.* Like Dante and Gogol's models, Erofeev's *poema* also conveys a vision of hell and the journey

[380] *Moscow*, 44.
[381] Dmitrii Cizevskii. *History of Nineteenth Century Russian Literature, vol 1: The Romantic Period* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1974), xxiv.
[382] *Nineteenth Century Russian Literature: Studies of Ten Russian Writers.* ed. John Lister Illingworth Fennell (Oakland: University of California Press, 1973), 14.

through it.[383] As Ryan-Hayes explains, Erofeev uses various rhythmical techniques that give the *poema* a musical quality. For example, he uses the Gogolian *poliv*, "the long, continuous stream of rhetoric interwoven with phonetic and semantic associations," which in this case becomes a drunken stream of consciousness.[384]

Beyond its own declaration of *poema*, the story includes many details that connect Venichka to godliness, such as the presence of his own personal angels. This further contributes to the pastiche qualities of the story, as it plays with the elevation of Venichka the drunkard to godliness. Many critics have argued for Venichka as a postmodern version of the "holy fool."[385] Furthermore, the cyclical nature of the story itself gives it eternal qualities. Evidence of its cyclical nature lie in the setting of the *poema.* Though as readers we believe we are on a linear track from Moscow to Petushki, we find by the end that we are once again in Moscow. Whether Venichka travelled in a circle or travelled not at all is unknown to us, however narratively we have clearly come full circle. Furthermore, the *poema*'s location (Moscow) also calls to mind the Moscow metro, which runs in a circle around the city center, with the Kremlin approximately in the middle. However, of course, Venichka himself is not eternal, as he is killed at the end of the story, which have led some to compare Venichka's journey to Christ's passion.[386] For example, Gaiser-Shnitman shows that Erofeev's story contains references to Christ's passion throughout the text and Petushki represents resurrection after torment.

Furthermore, by the end of Venichka's journey he has descended into a hell-like place. Before he is chased and beaten, Satan appears to him. Then, a creature with a heavy tail and a "carnivorous laugh" appears to him — it is the sphinx who refuses to let him pass into Petushki

[383] Ryan-Hayes, 76.
[384] ibid, 96.
[385] Including Sedakova, Epshtein, Lipovetsky, and others.
[386] See Chitnis, Gaiser-Shnitman.

unless he solves five riddles. As Alexander Zholkovsky notes, the image of the sphinx as riddle-poser is one that is used as early as Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin,* and is also referenced in Boris Pasternak's early lyrics and Velimir Khelbnikov's works through the image of the nail of a lion. As Zholkovsky writes, Onegin's nail-markings are used "as a guide to his mysterious character by the heroine, Tatiana, visiting his library."[387] In Erofeev's text, the sphinx appears at the end of Erofeev's journey as a symbol of his descent into hell, and also as yet another intertexual display. Furthermore, the connection between Onegin and Venichka, strengthens the notion that Venichka is a postmodern reimagining of the superfluous man.

The communion of Venichka and angels, which descends into his relations with Satan and the riddle-demanding sphinx, give the *poema* epic qualities and Venichka's untimely death after miles of suffering give the anti-hero Christ-like qualities. Furthermore, the works own declaration as *poema* highlight its cyclical and grandiose nature. However, these grand notions are used in a clear critique and parody of Soviet ideology. The elevation of a drunkard and postmodern superfluous man, serve to challenge the greatness of the Soviet Union. References to the toilet only further contribute to this, and in some cases, notions about the toilet and human elimination are vital to this message. A boundary-smashing image since Duchamp's *Fountain,* the toilet continues on in Russian postmodern as a challenge to official taste. Against the convention of socialist realism, Venichka does not progress dialectically towards utopia, but instead ends where he started. Furthermore, any lofty language and references towards "angels" are undone by the references to the "lower bodily strata," making his sacrifice at the end of the *poema* a parody of Christ's suffering.

[387] Alexander Zholkovsky. "Pushkin Under our Skin," accessed November 27, 2021, https://dornsifecms.usc.edu/alexander-zholkovsky/push134.

Late-Soviet Film: Fall Marathon

Several late-Soviet films use the toilet to help depict the atmosphere of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Georgiy Daneliya's 1979 *Osennii Marafon* follows the tangled relationships of Andrei Buzykin, an English-to-Russian translator in Leningrad, in order to illustrate the sentiment of stagnation in the Breznev era. He struggles to stand up for himself in his relationships with his wife and his mistress, along with his neighbors and his co-workers. In one scene that particularly embodies Andrei's inability to assert his agency, he finds himself in a bathroom (~22:00). The scene begins in the apartment of his mistress, Alla. While they are conversing in her room, the other resident (Uncle Kolia, who is like a father to Alla), interrupts and joins them. Making it clear that he knows about their situation, Kolia begins to pressure Andrei to marry Alla, not knowing that Andrei already has a wife. When Andrei is on his way out of the apartment, he passes by Kolia who is peeling potatoes. They make eye contact, and Kolia assumes that Andrei is on his way to use the bathroom. Too shy to correct him, Andrei goes into the bathroom and pretends to use it, flushing the toilet when he is "done." Once he exits the bathroom, Kolia stops him again to suggest that he wash his hands, to which Andrei, of course, complies.

When we first enter the bathroom, the camera stays close on Andrei's face, avoiding filming the toilet and its surroundings. Instead, we see Andrei, checking his watch, as he has and continues to do constantly throughout the film as he balances all his half-hearted commitments. After a slight pause, Andrei looks down and then looks up as the camera pans to his hand flushing the toilet. When he re-enters the bathroom to "wash his hands," the camera again follows Andrei as he turns on the faucet, and pauses on his face, catching his reaction, a slight frown, as he recognizes the absurdity of his own behavior, but is unable to break the cycle.

In her 2009 article, "The Cultural Logic of Late Socialism," Lilya Kaganovsky notes *Osennii Marafon* as emblematic of the absence of desire in Soviet cinema of the last decades of the Soviet Union. As she argues, "Literature and cinema responded to the economics of 'stagnation' with a metaphorization of desire, by repeatedly staging its absence."[388] As she observes, on screen "sad comedies" such as *Fall Marathon* and *Irony of Fate* entirely eliminate sexual desire. For example, in *Fall Marathon*, sex is replaced with eating, such as in one scene where Andrei sits with his back to Alla as she talks about having kids. As she argues, Andrei's compulsion to repeat (daily morning jogs, the inability to insert his own preferences in the demands of others) places the narrative in "circular movement around an objectless void." Thus, the film, as Kaganovsky writes, points us "to the 'graveyard' of late socialism, a state when there should be nothing left to want."[389] Thus, the film's depiction of a lack of desire reflects the cultural stagnation of the Breznev era. Though a more prosperous and calmer time in the Soviet Union, the era's "sense of status quo" gave rise to a sense of stagnation not only economically, but culturally and ideologically.[390]

In the beginning of the century, the toilet is used as a symbol of revolution and advancement as illustrated particularly in Vertov's *Stride, Soviet!* However, in this film the toilet is merely a pawn in Andrei's charade, just another piece in Andrei's compulsion to repeat the same patterns and avoid confrontation. Like the examples in previous chapters, character's attitudes towards the toilet reflect the cultural and ideological state of their respective eras. In Andrei's case, the flushing of the toilet is only another reminder of his personal stagnation, but also the stagnation of the late-Soviet era.

[388] Kaganovsky, Lilya. "The Cultural Logic of Late Socialism." *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 3, vol. 2 (2009): 185-199.
[389] ibid, 187.
[390] ibid, 185.

Little Vera

In sharp contrast to late-Soviet films like *Osennii Marafon*, which emphasize an absence of desire, the perestroika-era *Little Vera* (Vasili Pichul, 1988) flips the script by featuring unprecedented sex scenes. The film is categorized as cinema of *chernukha*, a bleak and dark film trend that often "indulged" in sexuality.[391] Although the script was written in 1983, it was not filmed until after Gorbachev was elected General Secretary allowing for *glasnost* and a greater freedom of expression.[392] As Frank Beardow writes, like many films of perestroika, *Little Vera* took advantage of the spirit of *glasnost* and "set about debunking many of the cherished myths of the Soviet Union, the family, and the working class."[393]

Little Vera follows main character, Vera, a young woman who has just finished high school. Instead of applying for university as her parents wish, she prefers going out with friends and partying late into the night. She lives with her alcoholic father and her mother, who constantly compare her "lifestyle" to that of her brother, a doctor in Moscow. Vera meets Sergei at an underground dance party and they start a passionate affair. They eventually decide to marry and when Vera's parents object, they lie and claim that Vera is pregnant. From their first meeting, Sergei's relationship with Vera's parents is disastrous, and then tension only grows when Sergei comes to live with them.

With the family apartment at the center of much of the film's conflict, the film is a portrayal of the typical single-family Soviet dwelling. The Western viewer may note the multi-use rooms (bedroom during the night, living room during the day, and dining room when guests are over), due to the small size of the typical family apartment. Also because of this, one may

[391] Volha Isakava. "The Body in the Dark: Body, Sexuality and Trauma in Perestroika Cinema." *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 3, no. 2 (2009): 201-214
[392] Frank Beardow. *Little Vera: The Film Companion* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2003), 10.
[393] ibid, 12.

also note the proximity of the rooms to the kitchen and bathroom, as if with just a couple steps, you could be in any room in the apartment. Accordingly, shots inside the apartment often sit tight on their subjects, as if emphasizing the cramped quarters.

The apartment's bathroom becomes an important site of tension in several points in the film, all culminating is the film's climax. The first appearance of the bathroom occurs one of the opening scenes of the film (~6 min). After enduring a scolding from her parents for her lack of motivation and drive in life, Vera flushes American dollars that she "found" down the toilet while her father pounds on the bathroom door and her mother loudly expressed her woes about Vera to the golden child, Vitya, over the phone. These moments often center around the father's (Kolia) alcoholism. In another early scene (~21 min), Vera returns home to find Kolia drunk and alone, listening to loud music. After some failed attempts to get Kolia to eat, she urges him to quiet down, as her mother will be home soon and if he is acting up then surely there will be drama. Vera is visibly annoyed herself, marching around without making much eye contact, robotically preparing him food, as if she's done so many times. As we soon find out, she in fact has — Kolia drunkenly reminisces how Vera and Viktor (her brother) used to put him to bed. After the mother returns, Kolia decides it is time for a shave and promptly leads himself into the bathroom, the only room that we the viewer never sees during the course of film, as the camera's view does not reach there due to the narrow hallway and the bathroom's own small quarters. However, he is never successful in his venture, as he cannot find his razor, and furthermore, an argument breaks out between him and the entire family. Kolia suddenly slinks to the floor, claiming his heart hurts, but the family brushes this off as drunken whining, only becoming more annoyed at his theatrics. Vera drags and tucks him into bed, as he yells about how nobody loves him, despite how hard he works for everyone.

Later in the film (~1:25), the family begins to argue at Kolia's birthday dinner, with Sergei at the center of Kolia's criticisms. Sergei pulls Kolia from the table and locks him into the bathroom. Vera, upset and crying, clears the dinner table while Kolia yells profanities from behind the closed bathroom door, even tearing off the sink (so we hear, but never see). Vera eventually opens the door for him to find that he has cut his hand. Kolia emerges and the entire family (Kolia aside, as he has settled in another room) begins bickering — Vera telling Kolia that he shouldn't have drunk so much, Kolia protesting, and the mother upset about the state of the torn apart bathroom. From the other room, Sergei screams, "Shut up, you brute," sending Kolia into heated yelling and leading into the climax of this film — when Sergei walks into the room, Kolia promptly stabs him in the side and the women scream as Sergei slides to the floor between the bathroom and the kitchen, and Kolia walks away, hands at his mouth, then collapses on a bed. Towards the end of the film, the audience catches their first glimpse (just a glimpse!) of the bathroom: through a crack in the door we see Vera hunched over, vomiting. Struggling to deal with the trauma of seeing her father stab Sergei (compounded with the difficulty in dealing with her life before), Vera is emotionally struggling, and often takes pills and breaks down crying.

Although the site of much action in the film, the bathroom is never fully pictured in the film. After decades of struggling for privacy in the bathroom, we finally see a bathroom in which the characters find some sense of aloneness (at least from the audience). Although the toilet is not immune to the chaos of the apartment, including yelling and banging on the bathroom door, the characters are able to disappear almost completely from sight while behind the bathroom door. However, this sense of privacy is not met with celebration, but instead only aggravates existing tensions.

Pelevin's "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream"

Though almost completely hidden from the public, granting very few live interviews to journalists, Viktor Pelevin is one of the most popular postmodernist writers today. He was born in 1962, spending the formative years of his youth in Brezhnev's "era of stagnation." After the Soviet Union's collapse, he emerged as a literary phenomenon, winning the Russian Booker Prize for his collection of short stories *Blue Lantern* when he was just 31 years old. Since then, he has written a number of popular works, including *Omon Ra* (1992), *Chapaev i pustota* (1996), and *Generation P* (1999), which have been translated into numerous languages, and received reviews in the West.

His educational and professional biography find immediate expression in his writing. His experience with computer programming and affinity for internet games is apparent as he plays with virtual and actual reality in his novels. Pelevin frequently visits Buddhist monasteries and eastern mysticism also plays a significant role in his works, including one of his most notable novels (although met with very mixed criticism), *Chapaev i pustota*, a deconstruction of the socialist realist classic *Chapaev* (1923). Joseph Mozur theorizes that Pelevin's fascination with Zen Buddhism stems from its central belief in the impermanence of all things. He writes, "Given the social, political, and economic upheaval that rocked Russia for the past ten years, Pelevin's message to his readers seems to be to strive to view those changes with equanimity."[394] Another well-known novel, *Generation P*, also toys with the idea of virtual reality, while focusing on themes of consumerism and drug use. Pelevin continues to be prolific, producing a novel almost every year in the past decade.

[394] Joseph Mozur. "Viktor Pelevin: Post-Sovism, Buddhism, and Pulp Fiction." *World Literature Today.* Spring 76, vol. 2 (2002): 63.

Novels such as *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia/The Sacred Book of the Werewolf* (2004) and *Empire V* (2006) feature supernatural protagonists, including vampires and a shapeshifting 2000-year-old fox (named A Hu-Li, a strong Russian cuss word for the male genitalia [хуй].). In his most recent novel, *Tainye vidy na gory Fidzi/ Secret Views of Mount Fuji* (2018), themes of Eastern mysticism continue as he tells a story of a businessman attempting to sell happiness through a startup called "Fuji Experiences." Other recent novels, *iPhuck 10* (2017) and *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011), play with themes of sex and technology, *iPhuck 10* featuring the most expensive sex machine of all time, and *S.N.U.F.F.*, in which the elite members of an advanced artificial flying city use robotic women as sexual objects because sex and pornography with people under 46 is prohibited.

The focus of this chapter is on Pelevin's 1994 short story "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream," which is part of the short story collection titled *A Werewolf Problem in Central Russia.* Like *Blue Lantern,* the collection won a Booker Prize. The collection's stories all include absurd depictions of life in the Soviet Union. Vera Pavlovna's story in particular illustrates how the toilet served as a literary representation of transition during Perestroika. After warning signs, a foul, black brown flood tide finally breaks through the walls of a public restroom and carries the protagonist, Vera, down Tverskoi Boulevard in Moscow. During this scene, symbols of the 19th century literary canon and classic Soviet symbols are regurgitated and mixed together in order to convey the hesitance and anxieties of the transition of Perestroika.

In Pelevin's story, Vera, the female attendant of a men's public restroom observes the changes of perestroika from her post in the toilet. Yet, as she comes to terms with the physical changes in her immediate surroundings, she constantly hears a roaring beyond the toilet walls, a force desperately trying to push through, denoting something ominous about the times. The story

heavily references 19th century literary giants, such as Chernyshevsky, Pushkin, and Dostoevsky in order to both parody these Russian literary gems and to challenge the literary canon. The text begins by declaring that "Perestroika erupted into the public lavatory on the Tverskoi Boulevard from several directions at once," immediately defining Vera's toilet as a locale of Perestorika. This becomes more apparent as Vera witnesses both the reactions of individuals and the physical changes within the public restroom. After the eruption of Perestroika, clients squat longer in their cubicles, their faces buried in the newspaper.[395] And, soon, Vera also observes physical changes to her surroundings. One day, a group of men enter the toilet not to relieve themselves, but instead come with tools and measuring devices, walk back and forth, occasionally stopping to meditate on something invisible to Vera and the other visitors. Though her duties stay the same, her surroundings completely change. According to Vera, "Gradually, yet rapidly, with no delays or stoppages, the place was repaired."[396]

The "pale Soviet tiles on the wall" are replaced with large tiles with images of green flowers. The cubicles are remodeled and the "severe white porcelain bowls of triumphant socialism" are replaced by "festive pinkish-purple chalices"; a turnstile is installed at the entrance. As she describes, she now sits beside the turnstiles "in a special booth like the throne of the Martian Communists in the film *Aelita,* smiling and changing money," in her new work clothes which feature a red peaked cap and a black garment halfway between overalls and an overcoat.[397] She notes that her movements acquire a "smooth joyful rhythm," like that of a "blonde, bright" and womanly sales assistant that she remembers from her childhood." Pieces of soap appear on the sinks, as do electrical hand dryers. One regular client even compares his visits

[395] Viktor Pelevin. "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream." *A Werewolf Problem in Central Russian and Other Stories.* Trans. Andrew Bromfield (New York: New Directions, 1998), 36.
[396] Pelevin, 41.
[397] Pelevin, 42.

to the toilet to a visit to the theater, a comparison which does not surprise Vera. As Vera observes, "Life was gradually getting better and better."[398] In fact, the only thing that bothers Vera is the "distant rumbling and roaring that she sometimes heard beyond the walls of the toilet," which she decides is the noise of the subway.[399] By replacing the old design of the toilet and its Soviet fixtures of "triumphant socialism," architectural details and physical space is placed in direct connection with the changes of perestroika. Because the modifications are taking place specifically in the space of the toilet, the public restroom is marked as a space of transition. And in this case, it seems as though the transition is positive. The elimination of Soviet fixtures coincides with updated technologies and higher standard of cleanliness in the restroom, elements which Vera connects to a bettering life. Notable is that in this story the toilet is a public one, as opposed to the private toilets that have compromised the rest of the examples in this dissertation. While examples like Kabakov's installations are about finding a sense of privacy in the toilet, the boundaries of public and private are not as much of a concern in Pelevin's story. Pelevin's story is not about individuality in an era that values participation in public spheres, but rather it is about the public as a whole confronting the mass transition of the fall of the Soviet Union.

Not only does the physical space of the toilet change, but Vera feels a change within herself, though this change is less positive. As the text reads, "It all began on that afternoon when Vera thought for the first time, not of the meaning of existence, as she usually did, but of its mystery."[400] According to Vera, the realization was "unconnected with anything in her surroundings" and just "simply manifested itself in a head into which nobody had invited it." Eventually, Vera's sanity begins to deteriorate: "Her hatred was reflected in her surroundings:

[398] Pelevin, 42.
[399] Pelevin, 43.
[400] Pelevin, 39.

there was something shuddering behind the wall, and the customers in the shop, or the toilet, or the subterranean niche where she had spent her entire life — Vera was no longer sure of anything — would sometimes break off their inspection of the shit plastered along the shelves and look around in startled anxiety."[401] [И ее ненависть отражалась в окружающем – что-то содрогалось за стенам, и посетители магазина, или туалета, или просто подземной ниши, где прошла вся ее жизнь (Вера ни в чем теперь не была уверена), иногда даже отрывались от изучения размазанного по прилавкам говна и испуганно оглядывались по сторонам.] Finally, her rage manifests itself through the Dostoevskian fantasy of murdering a fellow attendant. She says in a "crazed voice": "I want to smash your head with an ax…. right across the braid, just like in Dostoevsky."[402] She swings her arm to bring the ax down onto the attendant's head and as she hears a "ringing and rumbling" (the same lingering rumbling that has been bothering her throughout), she faints. Regaining consciousness, still clutching the ax in her hands, she sees "a tall mirror almost the height of a man, towering over her, and in it a gaping hole with the contours of an immense snowflake." In Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment,* the moments leading up to the old woman's murder is wrought with liminal spaces. As he approaches the apartment, Raskolnikov pauses in archways, stairways, and hallways, concrete representations that he is on the edge of internal transformation. Vera's sudden internal realizations and changes harken back to Raskolnikov, who observes that which takes place in him after the murder as "totally unfamiliar, new, sudden, never before experienced."[403]

However, Vera did not smash the attendant's head at all, but rather the mirror that showed her own reflection. She realizes that "she herself had changed" and it was as if "part of

[401] Pelevin, 52-53.
[402] ibid.
[403] Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Crime and Punishment*. Trans. Larissa Volokhonsky and Richard Pevear (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 103.

her soul had disappeared, a part that she had only just become aware of…"[404] Vera feels like a "two-dimensional" version of herself, and "her two-dimensional soul generated a two-dimensional hatred for the two-dimensional world around her."[405] Vera's self-understanding shifts with the political shifts of Perestroika and this change is embodied in the physical fixture of the mirror. In a symbolic action of rupture, Vera smashes the mirror, smashing her former self.

Most ominous in the narrative, however, is the lingering rumbling and roaring behind the toilet walls. She notes again, that "some tremendous force was pressing against the walls from the outside; there was something trembling and quivering behind the thin surface as it flexed inwards."[406] She imagines it as an "immense fist" that is holding a paper cup on which Vera is sitting, and it is "squeezing only gently as yet, but capable at any moment of totally crushing Vera's entire reality."[407] One day, this moment comes. The rumbling outside becomes "unbearably loud" and the walls begin to tremble, bulge inward, and crack open. "And flowing out of the crack, overturning the counter with the clothes as it advanced on the terrified shrieking people, came a repulsive, black-brown flood tide."[408] The floodtide takes her outside and she floats along Tverskoi Boulevard on a floodtide so immense that it has already reached second and third stories of buildings.[409]

As the current takes her along Tverskoi Boulevard, she is confronted by images of the revolution and the Soviet Union. She sees three women in muslin dressed and an officer of the White Guard and realizes that they must have been performing Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, denoting the sentiment of stagnancy and suggesting that perhaps things have not changed as

[404] Pelevin, 52-53.
[405] ibid.
[406] Pelevin, 53.
[407] ibid.
[408] ibid.
[409] Pelevin, 54.

much as she has perceived. As she drifts further, a stroller drifts past her, carrying a baby dressed in a blue cap with a big red star, reminiscent of the infamous image of a baby carriage rolling down the Potemkin steps in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. Far in front of her, Vera sees "somber distant peaks with their summits crowned by barely visible ruby-red pentagrams."[410]

The globe from the Central Telegraph Building, a symbol of Soviet transition and media power, floats beside her, and she climbs and sits on top of it. She sees roofs ahead of her, submerged so much that they look like islands, and another red star drifting towards her over the surface of the water. At this moment, "Vera took another look around and was amazed for a moment at the ease with which a centuries-old city had disappeared…She wanted to sleep, and stretched out on the convex surface of the USSR, resting her head on her mop-calloused hand."[411] She wakes to find "nothing else to be seen," for the "ruby-red stars had long sunk out of sight and God only knew what depth they were at now."[412] In the sky she sees a patch "shaped exactly like the outline of the USSR […] The familiar silhouette — which all her life had reminded her of a beef carcass hanging on the wall of the meat department in her local food store — suddenly seemed the most beautiful thing it was possible to imagine."[413] She thinks, "apart from it, there was nothing left at all."[414] In other words, "everything" is lost.

In this scene, when the walls of the toilet rupture, sweeping Vera down the boulevard, the remodeled, restructured toilet that came to represent the changes of the Perestroika is also swept away. As Vera is swept down the Boulevard she is bombarded by symbols of the Russian Revolution and of Soviet triumph — Kremlin's red stars, the Central Telegraph Building,

[410] Pelevin, 54.
[411] Pelevin, 55.
[412] ibid.
[413] Pelevin, 56.
[414] ibid.

Eisenstein's film of revolution. However, though the walls of Vera's public toilet are swept away, we have not entirely escaped the toilet. The foul-smelling black-brown flood tide — clearly excrement — keeps us in the realm of the grotesque.

In her monograph *Russia on the Edge,* Edith Clowes discusses the use of the grotesque to denote an era of transition. She agrees that Pelevin's story features a Moscow of a "world in flux"[415] and writes, "The Soviet order has toppled, and the lower, grotesque phenomena of human existence have taken over."[416] However, not only has Soviet order toppled, but Russia's grand literary tradition, too. The story parodies the revolutionary spirit of Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to be Done?,* Russia's literary giant, Pushkin and his poem "The Bronze Horseman," and, as I have already mentioned, it references Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

The title of Pelevin's story recalls Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel, as does its ending, which is the exact words of Chapter 27 of Chernyshevsky's novel. This implies that Pelevin's story is a missing fragment of the novel.[417] Famously, in *What is to be Done?*, Vera Pavlovna's fourth dream projects the image of the Crystal Palace, which becomes a utopian symbol for the future of the revolution. Furthermore, the ending of Pelevin's story, in which the flood of excrement sweeps Vera away, resembles Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman." Like the wave of excrement behind the bathroom walls in Pelevin's story, the Neva's "noisy waves" and constant "splashes" and its "rebellious stream" remind of the imminent danger that is to come[418]. By replacing

[415] Edith W. Clowes. *Russia on the Edge*: *Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011), 36.
[416] ibid, 3.
[417] Gerald McCausland. "Viktor Pelevin and the End of Sots-Art." *Endquote: Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style*. Edited by Marina Balina, Nancy Condee, and Evgeny Dobrenko (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000).
[418] "He did not hear/ How the wrathful roller neared/ Greedily licking his shoe's soles/ And how flagged him the rain coarse,/ And how fierce wind there wailed,/ Or how it'd blown off his hat/…The waves, impatient,/Had risen there, like tallest crags,/ Lifted from waked deeps in a madness,/ There wreckage swam, there wailed a tempest…"

Chernyshevsky's Crystal Palace and the powerful Neva of Pushkin's poem with a public toilet and excrement, the grand symbols of change and transition in 19th century literature are replaced with the grotesque, suggesting that there is no future to look forward to, but rather we are left with shit and perhaps even no past.

The mixing of the Soviet, post-Soviet, and the 19th century has been identified as a marker of Pelevin's prose and also of post-Soviet literature. This is elaborated upon by Alexander Genis[419], for whom Pelevin is a representative example of post-Soviet culture. According to Genis, everything in Pelevin's stories takes place on the "windowsill," that is, the boundary between different worlds. He writes, "Along these limits or border areas, the features of one's own culture and those of the other, neighboring culture, are not erased, but emerge more boldly."[420] Thus, as he argues, the boundary serves as a "bonding material" despite difference. This is apparent in "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream," as Vera finds herself existing between two eras: the Soviet and the post-Soviet. She watches herself and her surroundings change, just to be abruptly swept back into the past, which lingered behind the walls, groaning as a reminder of its existence. The abrupt intrusion of the flood-tide, and, thus, the Soviet symbology, suggests the indelible nature of the Soviet past.

In conclusion, the public toilet in Pelevin's short story "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream" acts as a transitionary space during Perestroika. The regurgitation and manipulation of classic 19th century literature, such as Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* and Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman," functions to parody the classic works by replacing their grand elements with

[419] Alexander Genis. "Borders and Metamorphoses: Viktor Pelevin in the Context of Post-Soviet Literature." *Russian Postmodernism: Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture.* Edited by Mikhail Epstein, Alexander Genis, and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover. Translated and edited by Slobodanka Vladiv Glover (Oxford, NY: Berghahn Books, 1999).
[420] ibid, 217.

excrement, suggesting a rupture with Chernyshevsky's call towards the future and the undermining of a Soviet return to classics, such as Pushkin. Furthermore, the intrusion of Soviet symbols in the form of a forceful floodtide, denotes the inescapability of the Soviet past in the post-Soviet world.

Conclusion

Osenii marafon ends with a coalescence of events that remind Andrei that he is not in control (Alla calls, his wife demands answers from him, and Bill walks in ready for a jog), while *Little Vera* ends with her father dying alone in the kitchen from a presumed heart attack. The Soviet Union had moved far from the struggle of communal living and shared use of the toilet, however the toilet is still centered in these dramas of everyday life. Similarly, *Moskva-Petushki* and "Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream" use the toilet as a mechanism to depict uncertainties and anxieties. Ranging from 1970 to 1994, these works cover a large time frame, and one of particularly great transition. From the stagnation of the Breznev era, to the new freedoms of *glasnost*, and ultimately to the collapse of Soviet Union, these literary and cinematic examples depict a timeline of anxiety in the impending end of ideology, buttressed by increasingly diverse modes of expression (postmodernism, newfound relaxed rules on content). The toilet acts a site of transition and a site of violence and anxiety, a failed place of refuge. The toilet reminds Venichka of his incompetence, and the fear he should feel for others; the toilet's current sends Vera Pavlovna to face the symbols of Soviet past; the toilet acts as a reminder to Andrei of his failure to access his own desire; the toilet is a reminder of Kolia's alcoholism, and the starting point of his violence against Sergei (the climax of the film). Differing greatly from Kabakov's

illustration of the toilet as refuge in the communal apartment, in the age of single-family apartments, it instead becomes a center of expression of the era's anxieties.

Conclusion: From Readymades to Golden Toilets

In 2016, almost 100 years after Duchamp's *Fountain*, Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan created a sculpture called "America." The sculpture is a fully functioning 18-karat solid gold toilet that is displayed in the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Hundreds of thousands of people have waited outside of this bathroom to use this toilet. Although Cattelan has declined to give his own interpretation of the work, critics have linked the sculpture to the excess of Donald Trump, whose campaign was in full force when the sculpture first exhibited and who has an affinity for gold-pated bathroom fixtures.[421]

Before Cattelan's sculpture, in 2002, a Hong Kong businessman built a $38 million solid gold toilet as a tribute to his boyhood hero, Lenin, citing Lenin's comments on the use of gold after the victory of socialism.[422] In 1921, Lenin writes:

> "When we are victorious on a world scale I think we shall use gold for the purpose of building public lavatories in the streets of some of the largest cities of the world. This would be the most "just" and most educational way of utilizing gold for the benefit of these generations which have not forgotten how, for the sake of gold, ten million men were killed and thirty million maimed in the "great war for freedom", the war of 1914-18, the war that was waged to decide the great question of which peace was the worst, that of Brest or that of Versailles; and how, for the sake of this same gold, they certainly intend to kill twenty million men and to maim sixty million in a war, say, in 1925, or 1928, between, say, Japan and the U.S.A., or between Britain and the U.S.A., or something like that."[423]

However, given that we still have not "achieved" socialism, this Hong Kong businessman's message falls flat. The toilet may be luxurious and it may exude a sense of success, but its intention to honor the achievements of socialism renders it devoid of its intended meaning.

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[421] Caitlin Dover. "Game of Throne: Maurizio Cattelan's 'America' Comes to the Guggenheim." *Guggenheim.* September 16, 2016. https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/checklist/game-of-throne-maurizio-cattelans-america-comes-to-the-guggenheim.
[422] "Hong Kong gold toilet shrine to Lenin a 'dream come true." *South China Morning Post.* March 2, 2002. https://www.scmp.com/article/375029/going-gold?module=perpetual_scroll&pgtype=article&campaign=375029.
[423] Lenin, Vladimir. "The Importance of Gold Now and After The Complete Victory of Socialism." *Pravda* no. 251. November 6-7, 1921. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/nov/05.htm.

Similarly, Cattelan's toilet illustrates broken signifiers and a sense of meaningless. If the work is to reference the excess of our era, Cattelan makes a mockery of excess as a marker of success by giving the public open access to his golden toilet. As he remarks, one-percent art for the ninety-nine percent.[424] Furthermore, Cattelan gives his audience unprecedented access to a work of art. Not only is the audience able to touch and interact with the work, but the interaction itself is urination and defecation, an act usually would be interpreted as derogatory towards a work of art.

Like Duchamp's sculpture, the work invites us to rethink how we interpret and interact with art. However, the work is not met with the criticism that Duchamp's sculpture endured. Rather than questioning whether Cattelan's sculpture is in fact art, the public and critics alike welcome the sculpture with excitement. *New York Times* art writer Randy Kennedy titled his 2016 article on the piece, "Duchamp, Eat Your Heart Out: The Guggenheim Is Installing a Gold Toilet."[425] Meanwhile, Twitter users get a kick out of Guggenheim curator Nancy Spector offering the Trump administration to borrow Cattelan's sculpture in lieu of a Van Gogh. Rather than a shock to taste, Cattelan's toilet comes to an art world that is very ready to accept its message, which Cattelan refuses to explain, but we all seem to "get."

The public's openness and excitement towards Cattelan's toilet and the meaninglessness of the Hong Kong businessman's tribute to Lenin are sentiments not at all far from the explosive ending of Pelevin's short story. It is as if the floodgates (of shit) have opened, leaving us all in acknowledgement of the loss of meaning in our postmodernist age. And in this era, the toilet acts as vital symbol in conveying this absurdity. Its connection to the "lower bodily strata," the

[424] Dover, "Game of Throne."
[425] Kennedy, Randy. "Duchamp, Eat Your Heart Out: The Guggenheim Is Installing a Gold Toilet." *The New York Times.* April 19, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/20/arts/design/duchamp-eat-your-heart-out-the-guggenheim-is-installing-a-gold-toilet.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article.

grotesque and, as a result, the carnivalesque. In the age of Cattelan's toilet, anyone can sit on a golden toilet, not only the rich, stripping the powerful of this symbol of success.

This is a far cry from the works in this dissertation, like Kabakov installations, that explore the toilet and its materiality as an item of nostalgia and storytelling for Soviet everyday life. The communal apartment has already been described as a site that points to the trajectory of Soviet history, politics, and culture as a whole. As Gerisimova writes, "[Коммунальная квартира] была одной из основных арен, где формировалась и воспроизводилась советская повседневность, поэтому исследование КК это своего рода археология советской повседневности (С. Бойм, С. Коткин, П. Мессана, Ш. Фитцпатрик)." (The communal apartment was one of the main arenas where Soviet everday life was formed and reproduced, for this reason the study of the communal apartment is a kind of archeology of Soviet everyday life.)[426] If the study of the communal apartment is an archeology of Soviet everyday life, then the study of the toilet is an archeology of something more hidden, everyday private life, or the attempt to have a private life.

As we have seen in the examples of the 1920s, the use of the toilet as a symbol consistently pushes the boundaries of public and private in order to comment upon revolution and the stark changes of an era. However, for Conceptualist Kabakov the toilet is a storytelling mechanism that details the search for peace and privacy in a public society. By the late-Soviet period, the toilet is a source of anxiety, symbolizing a crisis in meaningless. These examples all use the toilet as an illustrator of the qualities of the "lower bodily strata," a direct connection to the grotesque and carnivalesque messages of the works.

[426] Gerasimova, "Советская коммунальная квартира: историко-социологический анализ (на материалах Петрограда-Ленинграда, 1917-1991)." Автореферат кандидатской диссертации, 2000. *http://www.el-history.ru/node/321*.

However, there is one outlier and that is the examples written in the 1930s. As discussed, these literary works are concerned with the surveillance within a communal apartment, particularly around the light in the communal toilet. Despite its setting of lavatory, the stories are devoid of any illustration of the toilet itself or the elements of the "lower bodily strata." As Vinokour mentions, instead, the humor is a sort of "upper half" laughter. The 1930s is also the decade among the examples in this dissertation that is most affected by the restrictions of socialist realism. As such, it seems that the literary effect of socialist realism disallowed and discouraged the type of writing that engaged with the lower half and grotesque descriptions. Instead of toilet noises and grime, we are left with lightbulbs.

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