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**Imaginary Interiors:
Representing Domestic Spaces in 1910s and 1920s
Russian Film and Literature**

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
TRINITY 2015

SHORT ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an exploration of the ways in which a number of important Russian writers and filmmakers of the 1910s and 1920s appropriated domestic interiors as structural, visual and literary metaphors. My focus is on the artistic articulation of the closed space of the Russian domestic interior, in particular as it surfaced in the narratives of the modernist literature and cinema of the time and became an essential metaphor of its age.

In my discussion I take issue with two standard ways of understanding domestic space in existing literature. I argue that representations of home spaces in early twentieth-century Russian culture mount a challenge to the conventional view of the home as a place of safety and stability. I also argue that, at this point, the traditional approach to the room and the domestic space as a fixed closed structure is assailed by representations that see domestic space as kinetic. The importance of the 'room in motion' means that I address cinematic as well as literary representations of domestic space, and show that even literary representation borrow cinematic techniques.

My different chapters constitute case studies of various separate, but complementary, aspects of the representation of home space. The first chapter shows how domestic space is reflected in the poetical language of Anna Akhmatova. The second chapter focuses on the parallel exploration of rooms and a child's consciousness in *Kotik Letaev* by Andrei Belyi. The third chapter discovers the philosophy of a room built by Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii in his short stories of the 1920s. The next three chapters focus on interiors of three different cinematic genres. The fourth chapter looks closely at films created by Evgenii Bauer, showing the director's innovative techniques of framing and set-design. The fifth chapter explores the film *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* by Abram Room, focusing on the director's employment of the room as a structural device of the film. The last chapter analyses two lyrical comedies by Boris Barnet to show the comic effect produced by the empty room and domestic objects in his films, and also focuses on the image of staircase. In conclusion, I speculate that the representation of interior spaces in the period in question goes beyond genre, medium, and narrative structure and becomes an important and culturally dynamic motif of the time.

LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a close look at varied representations of domestic interiors in modernist Russian film and fiction of the 1910s and the 1920s with the emphasis on movement and the boundaries between the interior and the exterior.

In the context of the widespread assumption that each national culture produces and manipulates its own ways of representing space artistically, Russia is traditionally associated with open space. One of the largest countries in the world, Russia has always been defined and redefined by means of spatial tropes. However, it is rarely noted that parallel to these paeans to the breadth and boundlessness of Russia, this country has also given rise to metaphors drawn from interior spaces: rooms, doors, windows, walls and curtains. The quintessentially delimited space of the room thus has also played a crucial role in the culture's self-perception in artistic reality. Peter the Great is said to have hacked a *window* into Europe; the Soviet Union built a wall between Europe and itself and decorated it with an iron *curtain*, and even up to the present day this country is often described as a single communal apartment by writers. However, this process of concentration on internal space developed particularly in the late 1910s and the 1920s, when many Russian intellectuals found themselves, for the first time, actually confined to the space of just one room by the policy of *uplotnenie*, yet also saw this limited personal space as highly creative, thus the room became a key setting of imaginative self-exploration.

My intention, therefore, is to foreground the room setting as both a problematic and creative site that has been marginalised in discussions of spaces in modern fiction and film, which tend to concentrate on either city and urbanism, or landscapes and nature. Moreover, taking for my investigation examples from the two media — film

and literature, I wish to show that the representation of interior spaces goes beyond genre, medium, narrative structure and becomes an important motif of its own.

My analysis acts to complement important existing studies of dwelling in literature and film which, as my overview of the criticism shows, have tended to be either historically and socially bound, or oriented on psychology and cultural and national identity. Unlike these studies, in this thesis, I am concerned first of all with the artistic dimension of the representations of the rooms in Russian modernist fiction and film; specifically with the way in which this basic locus functions as a problematic site for, and an active component of, the text's structure and the author's artistic intentions.

The range of analysed texts and films is representative rather than exhaustive. I take the three major film directors of the decades that are most connected to the house theme (two films from my list have the address of a particular Moscow home in their titles). My literary choice does not pretend to the same representative status, since there are, at this period, many more literary treatments of home than cinematic ones. However, the works selected are by major authors, yet have been less extensively discussed in the secondary literature than, say, the representation of home in Mikhail Bulgakov's work, and they facilitate a comparison of three different artistic treatments: poetical, psychological, and philosophical.

This study opens with a definition of the interior as a subject of analysis for the modern humanities. Following such scholars as Walter Benjamin, Penny Sparke and Charles Rice, I trace the development of the idea of the interior in European culture from the Renaissance to the beginning of the twentieth century. It was around the turn of the century, that the concept of the interior in European culture dramatically shifted, and what used to be a private individual's shelter from the outside world

turned into a space that welcomed the uncertainty, violence and dynamism of the outside. Russia shared deeply these visions of European modernity at that time, and this study provides close reading examples of how Russian writers and directors treated the image of the interior in their works.

My first chapter is an exploration of poetic interiors in the works of Anna Akhmatova of the 1910s and 1920s, in which the domestic setting is shown predominantly through its liminal details — thresholds, doors, windows and stairs. Akhmatova produces an image of the interior that is unstable by describing these areas on the threshold and the way her heroine moves through them. This approach challenges the previous criticism of Akhmatova's imaginary interiors, which has suggested that these were stable and immovable.

The second chapter, 'Andrei Belyi. The Apartment's Consciousness', concentrates on the interior imagery in the autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* by Andrei Belyi. The connections between the interior of the self and the private interior are described through the various transformations of interior spaces seen through the child's eyes. My discussion explores the complex connections between the constructing of the child's consciousness and the topology of an apartment that is based on the image of the spiral.

The third chapter, 'Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii. 'Четырехугольная несущая', offers an in-depth exploration of the interior spaces in the short stories of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, and the way the writer employed interior spaces to explain his view of space in general. In my close reading of Krzhizhanovskii's stories of 1920s, I argue that the image of a square room becomes of dominant importance, and influences also the depictions of other types of spaces, such as cities and even the universe.

The next three chapters open the discussion of cinematic interiors, each of them tracing a specific method of deploying interior imagery as a cinematic technique. The fourth chapter concentrates on interior space in the films of Evgenii Bauer, the pre-revolutionary Russian filmmaker who was most famous for his creative use of set-design. It also highlights those functions of interior imagery that were essential in filming melodramas, and his use of doors and windows in directing the complex *mise-en-scène* and creating the sense of depth on the screen.

The fifth chapter, 'Abram Room. A Travelling Room', looks closely at one important set of Abram Room's film *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, and its connection to the images of the city and the railway. It explores different cinematic theories of the period related to the representation of objects and sets to show that Room's approach to set-design in this film was highly creative. It also explores how Room employed the image of a 'travelling room' to suggest different kinds of meaning connected to the changing reality of the late 1920s Soviet society.

Finally, the last chapter, examines the representation of interior spaces through comedies of the late 1920s by Boris Barnet. It demonstrates the way domestic objects are used to produce a comic effect, as well as to suggest a new way of connecting the urban outside to the domestic inside. It also looks at the innovative use of an empty room that Barnet employed in his first lyrical comedy *Devushka s korobkoi*, and the way these techniques were developed in his later film *Dom na Trubnoi* by introducing a highly elaborative set built on a staircase.

In treating the imaginary interior as itself a unit of analysis through which to understand and approach Russian culture of the beginning of the twentieth century, rather than a symptom of wider social relations, this thesis makes a new contribution to the understanding of the artistic reality of the period.

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND REFERENCES

All Russian quotations in the text are given in Cyrillic characters. Transliteration of Russian titles and proper names follows the Library of Congress system throughout with the following exception: when a Russian name has an established English version (such as Eisenstein, Mandelstam) that is preferred; so too when a Russian scholar has a preferred spelling of his or her name in English (D.S. Mirsky; Yuri Tsivian; Alexei Yurchak). The endings of proper names in 'ий' or 'ый' are transcribed throughout as 'ii' or 'yi' except in quotations from published texts, where I follow the original as cited (for instance, Dostoevsky, Bely).

For references and bibliography, I have been guided by the handbook of the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA, 2008). Forms of quotation marks have been normalised to English. I have given the titles of short stories and poems in quotation marks and italicised the titles of all novels and films.

Throughout the course of the text, full details of every source are given at first citation. Thereafter they are referred to by author's name only, or by author and an abbreviation of the title if more than one work by the same author is used. Where the author of a selected text is also the author of the collection from which the text is taken, the author's name will not be repeated.

When referencing Russian periodicals that have both the number of the issue and the exact date of publication on the front page, I use the MHRA form of referencing: newspapers and magazines published once a week or more are cited by exact date (for example, Lev Kuleshov, 'Priamoi put', *Kino-gazeta*, 25 November 1924, p. 5; or Boris Barnet, 'Na podstupakh k sovetskoi komedii', *Kino*, 19 April 1927, p. 3); newspapers and periodicals published less frequently are cited by

numbers (for example, ‘V stsenarnoi kukhne “Doma na Trubnoi”’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 35 (1928), 15; or Leo Mur, ‘S”emki na nature i v atel’e’, *Kino-front*, 5:2 (1926), 2–7). In the bibliography the indication of pages (p. or pp.) are used for articles in all media – newspapers, journals, magazines or books.

For bibliographic entries from some Russian sources, I have kept the format of initials followed by surname, if that was the format used in the original (for example, N.V.Vul’fert and T.A. Selant’eva, *Khudozhniki sovetskogo kino* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1972).). In the body of text, however, I prefer to call these authors by their last name.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Professor Catriona Kelly who supervised this thesis for her generosity with her time, her many ideas, and for shaping my way of thinking about my subject.

My research has become what it is thanks to help and advice of many other specialists, and I would like to thank Dr Emma Widdis and Professor François Penz, who inspired me to write about this topic; Professor Andrei Zorin and Dr Philip Bullock for their valuable advice during our discussion of my thesis; Dr Reidar Due for our long talks on metaphysical intuitions; and the convenors of the Russian Cinema Research Group at SSEES Professor Julian Graffy and Dr Philip Cavendish for making me feel a part of their inspiring community of film scholars.

I have been fortunate to receive support from a number of institutions while working on my thesis, and I thank particularly the Clarendon Research Fund and Magdalen College, Oxford for their help.

I also thank my family for their support and unconditional love.

Finally, I thank my amazing V., who suddenly made all possible – to finish and to begin – in Pimlico.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I examine interior space as a crucial locus of Russian literary and cinematic modernism of the 1910s and 1920s. Modernism, as a cultural movement, has a very particular relation to spaces. If modernist practice is critically recognised and identified against other cultural paradigms as ‘living and experiencing “new times” not in the abstract location of literary history, but in specific spatial histories: rooms, cities, buildings, countries and landscapes’,¹ my thesis examines the smallest unit of these ‘spatial histories’, one hitherto overlooked in analysis of modernist geographies, especially in the context of Russian criticism — the room.

This understanding of the multiple material geographies of modernism is guided by one of the key sets of terms found in recent geographical and spatial theory: the opposition between space and place. To a number of geographical theorists, space indicates a sense of movement, of history, of becoming, while place is often thought to imply a static sense of location, of being, or of dwelling.² And if in a pre-modernist tradition the representation of a room or interior has been largely associated with the sense of place and statics, the modernist authors discussed in this thesis present interiors filled with a revolutionary sense of space and movement.

Pre-Modernist Rooms: Stability, Privacy, Domesticity

My understanding of the primary connotation of a room as a place of stability and comfort comes from the theoretical model established by European cultural historians

¹ Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 13.

² The critical writing on place and space is extensive; see, for example, John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan, *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Social Imagination* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989), and *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, ed. by Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin (London: SAGE Publication, 2004).

of interior representations. According to the German cultural critic Walter Benjamin – probably the first writer of a scholarly kind to acknowledge the cultural importance of interior space — the concept of the *modern interior* emerges ‘under the reign of Louis Philippe’, when for the first time in social history ‘the places of dwelling are [...] opposed to the places of work’.³ This opposition of private and public, according to Benjamin, plays a key role in establishing the interior as ‘not just the universe of the private individual’, but also as an ‘étui’,⁴ protecting the individual from the rapid development of the modern city, guarding the border between the inside and the outside.

Following Benjamin, scholars have argued that the traditional understanding of the interior is strongly associated with the notions of family, intimacy, privacy, and domesticity. Indeed, the interior is often seen as the embodiment of such sentiments. For example, the two recent monographs on the topic — Charles Rice’s *The Emergence of the Interior* and Penny Sparke’s *The Modern Interior* — establish privacy and domesticity as the key aspects of the interior as a private space for middle and upper classes in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe.⁵ In his pioneering monograph on the idea of home in European history, Witold Rybczynski also argues

³ Walter Benjamin, ‘Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century (Exposé of 1939)’, in *The Arcades Project*, trans. by H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 14–26 (p. 19). The term ‘modern’ and the subject of ‘modernity’ in general is of course complex. Having attracted many writers and scholars, this term collected an impressive pedigree of definitions and interpretations. For some it is bound up with the idea of ‘consumer culture’, see Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Oxford: Polity Press; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); some connect modernity to the experience of living in the city, see *Tracing Modernity: Manifestations of Modern Architecture and the City*, ed. by Mari Hvattum and Christian Hermansen (London: Routledge, 2004); some see ‘the modern’ as a sum of the experiences of continuous disintegration and disconnections, loss of structure, flux and incompleteness, see Marshall Berman, *All that Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988). All these definitions are elaborative and self-sufficient; however, for the purpose of this research, I adopt the point of view expressed by Walter Benjamin (quoted above), for whom the emergence of modernity is bound up with the emergence of the private individual, and, by extension, his private space – the interior.

⁴ Benjamin, ‘Paris’, p. 20.

⁵ See, Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 4–5; Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), p. 7.

that, beginning in Holland in the early sixteenth-century, the sense of intimacy and privacy becomes a constant attribute of interior representations in European culture.⁶ Although similar to most European and American histories, this idea of safe and secure interior space received slightly different reincarnations in different national cultures.⁷ A preliminary step in my discussion, therefore, must be an analysis of to what extent the analytical principles evolved in the discussion of other cultures and societies (mainly America and Western Europe, and at a variety of periods up to the early twentieth century) are helpful to the study of Russia, my subject of investigation here.

Russian Imaginary Rooms in European Context: ‘внутренность комнаты’

According to the overall patterns in post-Petrine history, throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the image of Europe, and France in particular, dominated the minds of many Russians, forming a new Russian identity of a self-

⁶ Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (London: Heinemann, 1988), p. 15. Other cultural historians name a slightly later date (though still earlier than Benjamin’s) from which they start tracing the development of the idea of home in Europe. For Steven Parissien the concept of home was fully articulated in European culture from the very beginning of the eighteenth century, see Steven Parissien, *Interiors: The Home since 1700* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2009). Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant name the year of 1650 as the birth date of ‘The Interior Defined’. It was not until the mid-seventeenth century, they argue, that architects (a new profession at that time) started considering the interior as a separate part of the building, see Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant, ‘The Interior Defined’, in Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant, eds, *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance* (London: V&A Publications, 2006), p. 100. Although defining the opening chronological frame of the concept of the European interior as 1650, this volume also provides highly informative examples of representation of domestic spaces and their significance in earlier epochs, including the Renaissance, the Middle Ages, and even Antiquity. Although understanding this legacy, my research does not go into many details of these earlier representations, as the main body of theoretical work on interior representation connected to my research belongs to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For more on the earlier studies of ‘interior portraits’ and their cultural significance see, for example, Cary Howie, *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Naming different dates and origins of the birth of the concept of the interior, all these scholars, however, agree that very soon after its emergence, the interior becomes a most popular and discussed cultural phenomenon, and ‘a dominant visual strategy’ of European culture, see Hannah Greig, ‘Eighteenth-Century English Interiors in Image and Text’, in *Imagined Interiors*, pp. 102–127 (p. 112).

⁷ Julia Prewitt Brown, for example, analyses a particular ‘Victorian addiction to dwellings’ in Charles Dickens novels, see Julia Prewitt Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior: How the Middle Class Imagines Itself in Literature and Film* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2008); for an extensive discussion of dwellings in American novels, see Marilyn Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

consciously ‘European’ kind.⁸ According to the cultural historian Iurii Lotman, the Russian nobility and bourgeoisie of that time adopted a set of values that was based on the imitation of foreigners, which became crucial to the social, political and cultural life of the country. The Russian nobility of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Lotman suggests, was, like Russia itself, constantly in the process of becoming Western — starting with dress and behaviour that imitated Western style, and ending with a whole range of goods and fashion items (including furniture and interior decoration) that often actually were of Western origin.⁹ In his history of Russian furniture, Antoine Chenevière confirms this picture, and notes that, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the industry of producing furniture in Russia ‘became submerged in the new style which spread throughout Europe during the second half of the century, a style which aimed at comfort rather than elegance, lavishness rather than refinement.’¹⁰

Examples of such interiors could be seen in the new genre of *inter'ér* that was formed in Russian art during the first half of the nineteenth century and soon became particularly popular. As noted in the first Russian study of the genre, in the first half of the nineteenth century, ‘не найдется художника, который хотя бы однажды не изобразил бы “внутренность комнаты.”’¹¹ Most of the artists who depicted the ‘interiority of a room’ — from the leaders of the genre Aleksei Venetsianov or Fedor Tolstoi to many ‘провинциальные дилетанты’ practising the genre — were highly influenced by the traditions and techniques of seventeenth-century Dutch art and

⁸ On the foreign influences on Russian identity, see Section II ‘Constructive Identities: “Us” and “Them”’ in *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, ed. by Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 51–92.

⁹ See for example, Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. by Ann Shukman, transl. by Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor, Mich: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), p. 233; pp. 141–161.

¹⁰ Antoine Chenevière, *Russian Furniture: The Golden Age 1780-1840* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), p. 238.

¹¹ E.Ia. Longvinskaia, *Inter'ér v russkoi zhivopisi pervoi poloviny XIX veka* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1978), p. 3.

eighteenth-century French works,¹² and the appearance of such works was very close to those seen in contemporary continental Europe. These pictures represented interiors as secure and comfortable spaces with light coming in from the windows allowing the viewer to see all the details of these symmetrical and perfect rooms — a place to dwell, to be, to read, to think, and to relax, a place that was well protected from the hostile environment outside.

The same influence could be traced in the literary representations of this secure and comfort private interior of the upper class. These ideas have been extensively explored by scholars of Russian literature and culture of this period.

In his many articles dedicated to the topic of the domestic interior in Russian culture during this period, Shchukin analyses how for the Slavophiles¹³ the idea of the house (as embodied above all in the life of the country estate with its many private interiors) became identified with the notion of ‘спасительный кров’ for the whole nation, and how it was reflected in many descriptions of interiors and home in Slavophile texts.¹⁴

Under Romanticism, on the other hand, the domestic interior became an embodiment of dreams and high aspirations, as explored by Bugrova and

¹² For a detailed explanation of these influences, see Longvinskaia, pp. 5–9; and Mario Praz, *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration from Pompeii to Art Nouveau* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), pp. 274–281.

¹³ The term Slavophiles, or *slavianofily*, refers to the members of an intellectual movement who wanted Russia to be developed according to the values derived from Russian and Slavic culture as opposed to Western history and tradition, see Chapter 6, ‘The Slavophiles’, in Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 92–114.

¹⁴ V.G. Shchukin, ‘Spasitel’nyi krov (O nekotorykh mifopoeticheskikh istochnikakh slavianofil’skoi kontseptsii Doma’, in *Iz istorii russkoi kul’tury (XIX vek)*, ed. by B.F. Egorov and A.D. Koshelev (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul’tury, 1996), pp. 588–609; idem, ‘Kontseptsiiia Doma u rannikh slavianofilov’, in *Slavianofil’stvo i sovremennost’* (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1994), pp. 33–47; idem, ‘K evoliutsii zhanra usad’bnoi povesti v russkoi literature XIX veka (Turgenev i Chekhov)’, *Slavica*, 23 (1988), 277–303; idem, ‘Poeziia usad’by i proza trushchoby’, in *Iz istorii russkoi kul’tury (XIX vek)*, ed. by B.F. Egorov and A.D. Koshelev (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul’tury, 1996), pp. 574–588; idem, *Mif dvorianskogo gnezda. Geokul’turologicheskoe issledovanie po russkoi klassicheskoi literature* (Kraków: Wyd-wo Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego, 1997).

Kartashova.¹⁵ According to the scholars, Russian Romantic writers always depicted interiors as a temporary stop, a haven before the lyric hero's next voyage to exotic worlds. Radomskaia has illustrated how the discussions of family values and state construction in early nineteenth-century literature were reflected in the concepts of the house and Fatherland, and addressed their close relationship with the spiritual development of the family and the state.¹⁶ There was no break in this tradition in the mid-nineteenth century either. As Pavlova has argued, the family, house, and state represent crucial points of departure for Saltykov-Shchedrin and other writers of his generation.¹⁷

The traditional representation of the interior in pre-modernist Russian literary texts is probably best summarised by one of the most prominent Russian critics (and a major figure of the Russian modernist movement) Mikhail Bakhtin, in his book on Dostoevskii's poetics. Describing the traditional space of the Russian novel that was contemporary to Dostoevskii (and the one that Dostoevskii just 'jumps over' — 'перескакивает'), Bakhtin refers to it as 'обжитое, устроенное и прочное, далекое от порога, внутреннее пространство домов, квартир и комнат'.¹⁸ According to Bakhtin, all sorts of private interiors become primary loci of the imaginary geography of the Russian novel of that period in order to demonstrate the biographical life of the characters — these are the interiors of 'гостиных, столовых, залов, кабинетов, спален, в которых проходит биографическая жизнь и совершаются события в

¹⁵ L.V. Bugrova, I.V. Kartashova, *Motiv doma v russkoi romanticheskoi proze 20kh-30kh godov XIX veka* (Tver': Forum, 2007).

¹⁶ T.I. Radomskaia, *Dom i otechestvo v russkoi klassicheskoi literature pervoi treti XIX veka: Opyt dukhovnogo, semeinogo, gosudarstvennogo ustroeniia* (Moscow: Sovpadenie, 2006).

¹⁷ I.B. Pavlova, *Tema sem'i i roda u Saltykova-Shchedrina v literaturnom kontekste epokhi* (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 'Nasledie', 1999). Valuable studies of these ideas based on the Western material, both historical and literary, include Douglas Anderson, *A House Undivided: Domesticity and Community in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Laura Fasick, *Professional Men and Domesticity in the Mid-Victorian Novel* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963), p. 228.

романах Тургенева, Толстого, Гончарова и других'.¹⁹ In this 'обжитом внутреннем пространстве', the characters 'живут биографической жизнью в биографическом времени: рождаются, переживают детство, юность, вступают в брак, рожают детей, стареют, умирают.'²⁰

As Bakhtin argues, in realist novels, which represent the most detailed description of all sorts of interiors in Russian literature, rooms become a place of stability, domesticity and comfort, of the display of bourgeois values, and locus of the private, biographical life of their inhabitants in opposition to their public life. One of the most brilliant examples of this is the description of Oblomov's milieu in the novel by Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov* (1859), in which a room becomes an almost grotesque symbol of bourgeois comfort, a display of bourgeois values of consumption and vanity. It is probably the best example of an imagined interior that is stable, static, and that lacks any sense of dynamism and movement. Il'ia Il'ich Oblomov would spend all his days just in one room ('Когда он был дома — а он был почти всегда дома, — он все лежал, и все постоянно в одной комнате, где мы его нашли, служившей ему спальней, кабинетом и приемной').²¹ This room represented the aesthetic taste of the time in every possible interior detail:

Комната, где лежал Илья Ильич, с первого взгляда казалась прекрасно убранною. Там стояло бюро красного дерева, два дивана, обитые шелковою материею, красивые ширмы с вышитыми небывалыми в природе птицами и плодами. Были там шелковые занавесы, ковры, несколько картин, бронза, фарфор и множество красивых мелочей.²²

¹⁹ Bakhtin, *Problemy*, p. 230.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 228-229.

²¹ Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Khudozhestvennaia literatura', 1967), p. 26.

²² Ibid., p. 27.

This description leaves the reader with a strong sense of the comfort and frivolity of the life that Oblomov leads. One's imagination follows the author in his long description of everyday interior decoration whose function, other than scene-setting, is purely to evoke the personality of the main character and his way of life. For instance, Goncharov also stresses that Oblomov felt very uncomfortable about his room:

Сам хозяин, однако, смотрел на убранство своего кабинета так холодно и рассеяннo, как будто спрашивал глазами: "Кто сюда натащил и наставил все это?" От такого холодного воззрения... вид кабинета, если осмотреть там все повнимательнее, поражал господствующую в нем запущенностью и небрежностью.²³

The room does not really have any existence beyond the shaping force of the human personality, and that in the most fortuitous sense ('Кто сюда натащил...?'). The idea that things might have their own dynamism is remote from Goncharov's world-view.

Similar long descriptions of interiors, with all their furnishings and decorative details arranged according to the taste of the time, appear in many novels by other prominent Russian novelists belonging to the school of classic realism, such as Ivan Turgenev and Lev Tolstoi.²⁴ Most of these descriptions give us a profound idea of the

²³ Goncharov, p. 27.

²⁴ See, for example, one of Turgenev's most detailed descriptions of an interior — the description of Anna Sergeevna's living room in *Ottsy i deti* (1862), which lasts for eleven lines: 'Полчаса спустя Базаров с Аркадием сошли в гостиную. Это была просторная, высокая комната, убранная довольно роскошно, но без особенного вкуса. Тяжелая, дорогая мебель стояла в обычном чопорном порядке вдоль стен, обитых коричневыми обоями с золотыми разводами; покойный Одинцов выписал ее из Москвы через своего приятеля и комиссионера, винного торговца. Над средним диваном висел портрет обрюзглого белокурого мужчины — и, казалось, недружелюбно глядел на гостей. "Должно быть, сам, — шепнул Базаров Аркадию и, сморщив нос, прибавил: — Аль удрать?"', see Ivan Turgenev, 'Ottsy i deti', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 28 vols, (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo 'Nauka', 1960-1978), viii: *Sochineniia: Nakanune. Gamlet i Don-Kikhot. Ottsy i deti* (1964), pp. 193-403 (pp. 274-275). Although these descriptions were rather detailed, they still were not as long as European examples. Compare Balzac's seven-page description of the lodging-house and the sitting room of Madame Vauqueur at the beginning of *Le Père Goriot*

values that obtained at the time among comfortably-off members of the society. The room is a showcase for the display of taste to the general visiting public, a safe haven, and a background for the events in the characters' lives. Moreover, these descriptions are highly detailed and pretend to verisimilitude ('life as it is'); at the same time, most of the details in these rooms have stable social or moral significance. We could say that they are barometers of the domestic ideology of the time. These examples from Turgenev's *Ottsy i deti* perfectly illustrate how each character has his or her own particular space, all individually characterised:

Удивительное дело, – продолжал Базаров, – эти старенькие романтики! Разовьют в себе нервную систему до раздражения... ну, равновесие и нарушено. Однако прощай! В моей комнате английский рукомоиник, а дверь не запирается. Все-таки это поощрять надо – английские рукомоиники, то есть прогресс!²⁵

While Bazarov is connecting English basins to the idea of progress, another character, Arkadii, is happy in his old and cosy family house:

Базаров ушел, а Аркадием овладело радостное чувство. Сладко засыпать в родимом доме, на знакомой постели, под одеялом, над которым трудились любимые руки, быть может руки нянюшки, те ласковые, добрые и неутомимые руки.²⁶

Another character, Pavel Petrovich, is enjoying the fireplace in his cabinet:

(1835), see Honoré de Balzac, *Father Goriot: Le Père Goriot*, trans. by Ellen Marriage (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), pp. 7-14.

²⁵ Turgenev, p. 210.

²⁶ Ibid.

Брат его сидел далеко за полночь в своем кабинете, на широком гамбсовом кресле, перед камином, в котором слабо тлел каменный уголь. Павел Петрович не разделся, только китайские красные туфли без задков сменили на его ногах лаковые полусапожки. Он держал в руках последний номер *Galignani*, но он не читал; он глядел пристально в камин, где, то замирая, то вспыхивая, вздрагивало голубоватое пламя...²⁷

In the text, these descriptions follow each other, and we can see how in just a couple of paragraphs Turgenev presents the showcase of rooms and the characters that inhabit them, something like a literary dolls' house, and that each room in its own way subscribes to the values of old times, memories, comfort, and stability. Bazarov indicated that even new progressive English basins were still displayed in the old order of things, where even the doors to the bathroom were not closed.

However, already in Tolstoi's descriptions of the interiors there are some examples that tend to contradict this rule. *Anna Karenina* famously opens with a household made chaotic and unstable by the adultery of its head Stepan Arkadevich Oblonsky: 'Все смешалось в доме Облонских. Жена не выходила из комнат, мужа третий день не было дома. Дети бегали по всему дому, как потерянные.'²⁸ To establish this sense of chaos, Tolstoi chooses to describe a dislocation in the use of traditional interior spaces; we learn that Stiva wakes up not in his bedroom, but on the couch in his study, where he is not supposed to be: 'На третий день после ссоры князь Степан Аркадьевич Облонский — Стива, как его звали в свете — в обычный час, то есть в 8 часов утра, проснулся не в спальне жены, а в своем кабинете, на сафьяновом диване'.²⁹ The dislocation in interior space indicates the dislocation that has happened in the social and private life of the household — the

²⁷ Turgenev, p. 211.

²⁸ Lev Tolstoi, *Anna Karenina* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928), p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid.

normal function of the interior is lost, everything is chaotic, the bedroom can no longer protect its dwellers from the outer world. Instead, the chaotic outside world has entered in, and changed everything.

Dostoevskii: ‘на пороге’/‘на площади’

This tendency to show the irruption into private space of the external world in its most hostile manifestations becomes even more evident in Dostoevskii’s descriptions of domestic spaces. Critic Mikhail Bakhtin specifically analysed the way Dostoevskii uses interior space in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (1866), and other novels. Bakhtin comes to the conclusion, that unlike other authors of the same time, Dostoevskii chooses to represent very unusual spaces. In Dostoevskii’s novel’s, there are few interiors of shining drawing rooms and well-organised studies exercising a function of stability and comfort – such common features of the writing of the time. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevskii uses in his works just two specific, and what is important – one is an interior and one is an exterior. Bakhtin calls them ‘на пороге’ and ‘на площади’. What is specifically interesting in these locations and important for this study is that Bakhtin is the first critic to define the functions of two absolutely opposite imaginary spaces. ‘На площади’ represent the centre of the open, public space; ‘на пороге’ – is a threshold within or leading to interior space. What unites them, however, is the sense of catastrophe, of a tragedy, anxiety, chaos that is about to emerge within these spaces (and possibly even caused by these locations).

Dostoevskii, according to Bakhtin, does not fall under the category of so-called ‘cosy family writer’, or as he puts it in Russian, Dostoevskii ‘был менее всего усадебно-домашне-комнатно-квартирно-семейным писателем’. Instead, Dostoevskii moves at speed (to use Bakhtin’s word, ‘перескакивает’) through this

cosy space of private rooms – to describe a life far away from these cosy spaces. His characters are the characters that always stay on the threshold – literally and metaphorically. The only time when Dostoevskii describes his characters in so called ‘central interior zones’, such as drawing rooms and halls, is when these locations are too infected by the qualities of threshold, qualities of the square:

Внутреннее же пространство дома, комнат, далекого от своих границ, то есть от порога, Достоевский почти никогда не использует, кроме, конечно, сцен скандалов и развенчаний, когда внутреннее пространство (гостиной или зала) становится заместителем площади.³⁰

‘Порог’ and ‘площадь’, Bakhtin argues, are united by yet another quality, the quality to transform the time, and to redefine it as the time of crisis.: ‘На пороге и на площади возможно только к р и з и с н о е в р е м я, в котором м и г приравняется к годам, десятилетиям, даже к “биллиону лет”’.³¹

I perceive both Tolstoi and Dostoevskii as transitional figures, no longer classic realists, but standing themselves on the threshold of modernism. As Bakhtin’s interpretations of Dostoevskii’s narrative sets make clear, the function of interior space is also transitional, moving in the direction towards the imaginary interior spaces of Russian modernism of the beginning of the twentieth century. At this point, the interior, which used to be a primary locus of stability and comfort, clearly becomes the place of catastrophe and scandals, the place where everything is shattered and nothing is stable. Similarly, the writers and directors whom I am going to describe transport this sense of instability and catastrophe into the interior as a

³⁰ Bakhtin, *Problemy*, pp. 228-229.

³¹ Ibid., (emphasis original).

whole (not just thresholds), so that the shifting and treacherous space of the room becomes one of the identifying features of Russian modernism as an artistic direction, rather than of an individual psyche or a shared emotional crisis within the text itself.

Rooms of Russian Modernism

Coming to the Russian imaginary rooms of the beginning of the twentieth century, I would reiterate that I see them as an integral part of modernist aesthetics. As a true space of modernism, I argue, the interior borrows all the modernist characteristics of flux and instability, creativity and paradox, movement and chaos: notions that were not associated with the private domestic space earlier.

This shift in the understanding of interiors, this move to regarding them as a part of the modernist aesthetics of speed and flux, has been described and theorised by several notable cultural historians. In her history of modern interiors, Sparke notes that during modernism the boundaries between the public space of the city and the private interior became ‘fundamentally unstable’.³² It was this instability, Sparke argues, that ‘defined modernity, and by extension, the modern interior, reflecting the constantly shifting identities and the increasingly fragmented experiences of inhabitants of the modern world’.³³

What Sparke understands by the interior in the ‘modern world’ received, perhaps, one of its strongest and most emotional expressions in *The Poetics of Space* — a field-defining study of the significance of interior spaces by the French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard. Initially, for Bachelard, the private rooms represent the ontology of the individual’s intimate being — the sense that was associated with the interior in the early nineteenth century. Consequently, Bachelard

³² Sparke, p. 11.

³³ Ibid.

refers to the house as ‘one of the great interrogative forces in man’s life’.³⁴ According to the notion of ‘topophilia’, developed in *The Poetics of Space*, every part of the House — drawers, chests, walls, corridors, and cabinets — is permanently linked to what Bachelard calls ‘cosmicity’; an absolute space of human existence. This harmony, however, is not eternal. In the twentieth century, it is shaken by the emergence of the modern city — the process Bachelard introduces with his description of modern Paris, where ‘there are no houses’, and ‘the inhabitants [...] live in superimposed boxes’³⁵ that no longer provide its dwellers with the intimate feeling of home.

Although referring to Paris, Bachelard’s theories can be applied to Moscow or St Petersburg of the time – which will be the locations of imaginary rooms in this work. Many accounts of representation of everyday life and interiors in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century are similar to that given by Bachelard of Paris and run in parallel with the European canon, and should be understood ‘as forming a part of the history of modernity, rather than its totalitarian “other.”’³⁶

Such a paradigm is of value because of its comparative range and its recognition of the similarity between the Russian and the European modernist experience. Mark D. Steinberg writes more precisely on the modern city as an embodiment of the modernist ambiguity both in Russia and Europe:

In literary and interpretive writings about the city, which have proliferated in modern Europe and beyond, the urban terrain [...] has often appeared as an exemplar of the contradictoriness of the modern: of the interdependence and inextricability of rationality and disorder,

³⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 5.

³⁵ Bachelard, p. 26.

³⁶ Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman, ‘Introduction’, in *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, ed. by Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 1–22 (p. 2).

opportunity and peril, imagination and perversion, community and solitude, positive faith and existential unease.³⁷

Russia, as Steinberg continues, shared these traditions of modernity — ‘the more deeply because it was so late to embrace and experience economic and social modernization and the contradictory drives of modern discipline and disorder’.³⁸ At the same time Steinberg emphasises this ubiquitous sense of ‘vitality, and flux of city life’ that is immanent to any kind of modernity.³⁹

But if the Russian experience was partly universal, the sense of speed and flux being shared across all modernising countries, there were also some specific features in the understanding of domestic space in Russia. As Tim Harte observes:

When modernisation and the technologies of speed did finally arrive in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, they elicited distinctively Russian aesthetic forms and achievements. By the second decade of the twentieth century, painters, poets, sculptors, and filmmakers in Russia had begun to seek out innovative artistic means for conveying the velocity of their rapidly industrializing, urban landscape.⁴⁰

These artists were bound to work in very specific economic and historical circumstances. In the years after the Bolsheviks came to power, private property was abolished in the Soviet Union. For the first time in its history the state ‘obtained the possibility of determining who has the right to build housing, what housing, [...]’

³⁷ Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 147–183 (p. 147).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴⁰ Tim Harte, *Fast Forward: The Aesthetics and Ideology of Speed in Russian Avant-Garde Culture, 1910-1930* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), p. 4.

where and with whom one may live.’⁴¹ This period between the October Revolution and the early 1920s is also known as an epoch of ‘housing distribution according to class affiliation,’⁴² and is characterised by the emergence of processes such as *samouplotnenie* (subdivision of apartments on a voluntary basis) and the New Economic Policy campaign for *novyi byt*.⁴³ This led to the emergence of the communal apartment; a cultural phenomenon often seen ‘as a weapon to mould revolutionary consciousness and behaviour’,⁴⁴ or indeed taken as a uniting metaphor for the overall experience of living in the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

The communal apartment was central not just to lived experience, but to the Soviet imaginary. Writers such as Mikhail Zoshchenko set their stories in communal apartments, and its social relations are fundamental to memoirs of the period too.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Katerina Gerasimova, ‘The Soviet Communal Apartment’, in *Beyond the Limits: The Concept of Space in Russian History and Culture*, ed. by Jeremy Smith (Helsinki: SHS, 1999), pp. 107–130 (pp. 109–110).

⁴² For details on the ‘redistribution of housing’, see A.I. Chernykh ‘Zhilishchnyi peredel: Politika 20-kh godov v sfere zhil’ia’, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 10 (1995), 71–78. This process was also represented through and popularised by the cinematic medium. A year after the Revolution, Anatolii Lunacharskii, the head of Narkompros, commissioned a film entitled *Uplotnenie* (1918), dedicated to the new conditions of Soviet housing. The fact that Lunacharskii co-wrote the script of the film demonstrated the importance of the topic for Soviet ideology.

⁴³ For a discussion of *byt* in Russian culture, see Catriona Kelly, ‘Byt: Identity and Everyday Life’, in *National Identity in Russian Culture*, ed. by Franklin and Widdis, pp. 149–168; specifically on the NEP campaign to re-establish a new Soviet everyday life, see Viktor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 41–62.

⁴⁴ William Craft Brumfield and Blair A. Ruble, ‘Introduction’, in *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History*, ed. by William Craft Brumfield and Blair A. Ruble (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1–6 (p. 3). For a history, anthropology, and sociology of the communal apartment, see Nataliia Lebina ‘Kommunal’nyi, kommunal’nyi, kommunal’nyi mir...’, *Rodina*, 1 (1997), 16–21; for a symbolical, mythological, and anthropological meaning of the communal apartments, see V. Semenova, *Sud’by liudei: Rossiia XX vek* (Moscow: AST, 1996), pp. 373–390; and Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 120–150. Valuable exceptions to this tendency of depicting communal apartments as a particularly Russian (Soviet) type of interior space include two monographs published in 2003 on different types of Russian housing. These are a study of the Russian estate and its historical significance for Russian culture, literature, and theatre in E.E. Dmitrieva and O.N. Kuptsova, *Zhizn’ usadbnogo mifa: Utrachennnyi i obretennnyi rai* (Moscow: OGI, 2003); and Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), in which the author explores different configurations of summer cottages throughout Russian history.

⁴⁵ Yuri Slezkine, ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism’, *Slavic Review*, 2 (1994), 414–452.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Mikhail Zoshchenko, *Nervnye liudi* (Paris: Biblioteka noveishikh pisatelei, 1927); Iurii Tomashevskii, *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko* (St Petersburg: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1995); Viktor Shklovskii, *Zhili-byli: Vospominaniia, memuarnye zapisi, povesti o vremeni. S*

Most of the writers and artists that I consider here had direct first-hand experience of such places, as is made clear by their own writings and biographies (and I shall cite these records in my text). But to focus simply on the *kommunalka* in its everyday sense would be to risk repeating material that has become very familiar. The last few decades have seen an impressive number of publications dealing with the question of Soviet and Russian society that include the exploration of the domestic interior in both its real and imaginary incarnations. These studies shed interesting light on Soviet houses and their relation to post-socialist politics and economics,⁴⁷ attitudes to banality and kitsch,⁴⁸ mechanisms of power,⁴⁹ ways of life under communism,⁵⁰ social and cultural ‘hegemony of form’,⁵¹ and ways of being ‘cultured’.⁵² Yet for all that, they do not consider imaginary interiors as a specific locus of Russian modernity that borrows all the characteristics of modernist open spaces.

Therefore, the most relevant theoretical study concerning the Russian dwellings during the 1910s and the 1920s is the one written by the architect and scholar Vladimir Papernyi. In his pioneering study of the spaces of Russian modernity, Vladimir Papernyi famously claimed that the culture of the early years of Russian avant-garde, what he calls ‘Culture One’ was characterised as ‘культура перемещения, изменения состояния, неустойчивости, нестабильности. Это

kontsa XIX veka po 1962 god (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1964); and *Kommunal'naia strana v fotografiakh i vospominaniakh*, ed. by Elena Lavreneva (Moscow: Eterna, 2009).

⁴⁷ Slezkine.

⁴⁸ Boym, *Common Places*; and eadem, ‘The Archeology of Banality: The Soviet Home’, *Public Culture*, 6 (1994), 263–292.

⁴⁹ Buchli.

⁵⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Il'ia Utekhin, *Ocherki kommunal'nogo byta* (Moscow: O.G.I., 2001).

⁵¹ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁵² Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

“вечный бой”, “перманентная революция”, “земля дыбом””.⁵³ This describes quite precisely the feeling of constant movement that was experienced and captured by major artists of this time, for example, Vladimir Maiakovskii, who in 1914 deliberately emphasises the shift from rural to urban space, from open to closed, from outside to inside:

Телефоны, аэропланы, экспрессы, лифты, ротационные машины, тротуары, фабричные трубы, каменные громады, копать и дым — вот элементы красоты в новой городской природе. Электрический фонарь мы чаще видим, чем старую романтическую луну. Мы, горожане, не знаем лесов, полей, цветов — нам знакомы туннели улиц с их движением, шумом, грохотом, мельканием, вечным круговращением.⁵⁴

However, perhaps *because* the popular idea of this age has been associated with high speed, fluidity, uncertainty, and alienation, the interior, conventionally considered to represent belonging and stability, has often been marginalised in criticism of the period. Even those scholars who are primarily concerned with different interior spaces in their analyses, such as Iurii Leving in his *Vokzal–Angar–Garazh: Vladimir Nabokov i poetika russkogo urbanizma*, have addressed not the interior structures themselves, but the types of movements between those structures.⁵⁵ Similarly, scholars writing specifically on architecture, such as Papernyi, have tended to approach it from the level of the façade and architectural construction and the movements between the houses rather than as interior spaces that are perceived from the inside.

⁵³ Vladimir Papernyi, *Kul'tura Dva* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1996), p. 61.

⁵⁴ A quotation from Maiakovskii's speech. Quoted in commentaries for Vladimir Maiakovskii's 'Dostizheniia futurizma' in Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1955–1961), i (1955), pp. 453–454.

⁵⁵ See Iurii Leving, *Vokzal–Angar–Garazh: Vladimir Nabokov i poetika russkogo urbanizma* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ivana Limbakha, 2004).

Moreover, most of the examples from the domestic sphere used by Papernyi and other architectural critics of the time belong to the area of not just imaginary interiors, but utopian ones, as generated by, for example, futurism and constructivism; i.e. as visions belonging to just one left-leaning section of the Russian modernist intelligentsia. Many of the buildings that he focuses on were never actually built.

At the same time, some of Papernyi's insights are helpful for my study of 1910s and 1920s Russian imaginary interiors. According to Papernyi's concept of 'Culture One', the architectural constructions of this time are fluid and movable, as the whole idea of movement was essential to the artistic thought of the time. Houses built or imagined during the period of 'Culture One' were usually presented 'поворачивающимися к солнцу, разборными, комбинированными и подвижными [...] с меняющейся планировкой комнат, мебели'.⁵⁶ Papernyi also remarked that the ideal character of this culture is someone who could freely and rapidly embark on a new travelling route, a kind of 'человек с чемоданом' or 'баба с мешком' — the typical *flâneurs* of the new age.⁵⁷ The houses for such fickle dwellers are turned into 'кабинки пассажирского парохода, аэроплана или спального вагона';⁵⁸ or 'ящик из гнутого стекла или походную каюту, снабженную дверью с кольцами, на колесах со своим обитателем внутри'.⁵⁹ Indeed, according to canonical texts from the period, a typical traveller was supposed to merge with interior space in the process of travelling. This process was strikingly evoked, for instance, by the poet Velimir Khlebnikov: 'Таким образом было достигнуто великое завоевание: путешествовал не человек, а его дом на

⁵⁶ K.L. Zelenskii, 'Ideologiia i zadachi sovetskoi arkhitektury', *LEF*, 3 (1925), 77–108 (p. 100; p. 105).

⁵⁷ Papernyi, p. 61.

⁵⁸ Moisei Ginzburg, 'Tselevaia ustanovka v sovremennoi arkhitekture', *Sovremennaia arkhitektura*, 1 (1927), 4–18.

⁵⁹ Velimir Khlebnikov, 'My i doma', in *Sobranie proizvedenii*, 5 vols (Leningrad, 1928–1933), iv (1933), pp. 275–286 (p. 279).

колесиках или, лучше сказать, будка, привинчиваемая то к площадке поезда, то к пароходу'.⁶⁰

So far as avant-garde artistic activity was concerned, there was a sturdy tradition of imagining new architectural and city plans that would, however, never become reality. Because of this utopic resonance, I have not included the objects of the left-wing artistic imagination in my discussion of modernist interiors in Russian culture. However, as I hope to demonstrate, the representation of interior spaces even in its less radical, everyday incarnations still tended to be highly elaborate, whilst following the same pattern of the flow, speed and instability of the modernist movement, which demonstrates its dependence on urbanism and the culture of the outside, rather than the conservative idea of the peaceful and comfortable home.

Cinematic Interiors

Tracing a link between cinema and modernity's fixation on the dynamic is nothing new. The most important characteristics of modernity are often seen as a derivative of the cinematic medium and even linked directly to the emergence of cinema.⁶¹ Indeed, the modern city's preoccupation with speed and motion perfectly fits in with the possibilities of the new cinematic medium, and is often directly compared to it as such.⁶² Yuri Tsivian observes that talking about cinema in the age of modernity, 'one comes into contact not with the film and not even with the cinema, but with the city,

⁶⁰ Khlebnikov, p. 279. Khlebnikov goes further in his description, pointing out that this kind of travelling should be recognised and legalised all over the world that is moving towards a new geography, and that 'каждый город страны, куда прибывал в своем стеклянном ящике владелец, обязан был дать на одном из домов-остовов место для передвижной ящико-комнаты (стекло-хаты)', see Khlebnikov, 'My i doma', p. 280.

⁶¹ See, for example, Tom Gunning, 'Modernity and Cinema: A Culture of Shock and Flow', in *Cinema and Modernity*, ed. by Murray Pomerance (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), pp. 297–315.

⁶² Cf. Maiakovskii's lecture on futurism, 'А самое главное — изменился ритм жизни. Все стало молниеносным, быстротечным, как на ленте кинематографа', see Maiakovskii, 'Dostizheniia futurizma', p. 454.

condensed into the cinematographic text.’⁶³

The secondary literature relating to these subjects is quite copious, and includes studies on modernity in film;⁶⁴ studies on the representations of trains and railways in early cinema;⁶⁵ phenomenological and semiotic cinematic approaches to the city;⁶⁶ utopian and dystopian representations of cities;⁶⁷ haptic mapping of the cinematic urban space;⁶⁸ and, finally, urban cinematics as a category in itself.⁶⁹

However, it is rarely mentioned that a room as a setting can provide vital material to explore cinematic modernism; at times much more vital than the image of the city, or the image of home.⁷⁰

Talking about interiors in cinematic terms, one is obliged to enter what the art historian Anthony Vidler characterises as of the most difficult and complex, but at the same time most privileged relationship in the history of cross-disciplinary study —

⁶³ Yuri Tsivian, ‘Early Russian Cinema and Its Public’, trans. by Alan Bodger, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 11:2 (1991), 105–120 (p. 110).

⁶⁴ Nezar AlSayyad, *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real* (London: Routledge, 2006); Ted Perry, *Masterpieces of Modernist Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera* (London: Sage, 1998).

⁶⁵ Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997).

⁶⁶ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*, trans. by Michael Wynne-Ellis (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2007); André Gardies, *L’Espace au Cinéma* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1993); Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁶⁷ *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City*, ed. by Gyan Prakash (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); David Butler, *Fantasy Cinema: Impossible Worlds on Screen* (Brighton: Wallflower Press, 2009); Dietrich Neumann, *Film Architecture: Set Design from Metropolis to Bladerunner* (New York: Prestel, 1996).

⁶⁸ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotions: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002); Tom Colney, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁶⁹ François Penz and Andong Lu, *Urban Cinematics: Understanding Urban Phenomena through the Moving Image* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 204.

⁷⁰ ‘Home’ is a notion that could be seen as a substitute for the two loci — the room and the city — and there are a number of studies that focus on the image of home and homeland in cinema; however, as I have noted previously with regard to the literary rooms, my cinematic analysis, too, will tend to move away from this notion and focus on a more precise and laconic idea of the ‘room’. For a discussion of ‘home’ in cinematic terms, see *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Space*, ed. by Hamid Naficy (New York: Routledge, 1999).

the relationship between film and architecture.⁷¹ Throughout the history of this relationship, Vidler continues, ‘the obvious role of architecture in the construction of sets (and the eager participation of architects themselves in this enterprise), and the equally obvious ability of film to “construct” its own architecture in light and shade, scale and movement, from the outset allowed for a mutual intersection of these two “spatial arts.”’⁷² And it is exactly on this crossing of the two disciplines that my study of cinematic interiors of the Russian modernism of 1910s and 1920s is located.

It is around this time that space, as has been pointed out earlier, gains the connotation of power and fluidity, and it is cinema that is recognised as the medium most able to reproduce this new quality. One of the first films to fully demonstrate the power of cinema to capture both space and time in their constant transformation was *Das Kabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920) by Robert Weine. As one of its first reviewers Herman G. Scheffauer concludes, this film demonstrated the victory of the ‘fourth dimension’ over the traditional two-dimensional space:

Space — hitherto considered and treated as something dead and static, a mere inert screen or frame, often of no more significance than the painted balustrade-background at the village photographer’s — has been smitten into life, into movement and conscious expression. A fourth dimension has begun to evolve out of this photographic cosmos.⁷³

⁷¹ Anthony Vidler, ‘The Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imagery’, *Assemblage*, 21 (1993), 44–59 (p. 45).

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷³ Herman G. Scheffauer, ‘The Vivifying of Space,’ *Freeman* (24 November–1 December 1920); reprinted in *Introduction to the Arts of Movies*, ed. by Lewis Jacobs (New York: Noonday Press, 1960), pp. 76–85 (p. 77).

Moreover, Scheffauer deliberately highlights the use of interior imagery in this process: ‘Einstein’s invasion of the law of gravity is made visible in the treatment of walls and supports; [...] furniture, room, house, street, city, landscape, universe.’⁷⁴

Scheffauer uses the interior imagery to express aesthetics specific to the expressionist movement to which the film belonged⁷⁵ in his study on space in cinema, Iurii Lotman universalises these ideas in relation to cinematic image in general. In his study of the semiotics of the cinema, Lotman focuses on the tension that exists between the two-dimensional space of the screen and the unlimited, four-dimensional, space of the world to which the film refers. Lotman argues that ‘ни в одном из изобразительных искусств образы, заполняющие внутреннюю границу художественного пространства, не стремятся столь активно ее прорвать, вырваться за ее пределы’. These dynamics Lotman calls ‘шторм плоской поверхности’.⁷⁶ This to some extent metaphorical image of space within the frame ‘rebellious’ against its dimensionality, gives an illustration of the way the interior functions in Russian 1910s and 1920s film, and by close-reading some of the films of the period in this work, I will come back to this Lotmanian term.

Moreover, this Lotmanian metaphor of a ‘rebellious’ inner space of the cinematic frame opens up the discussion of some technical elements of cinematic production and the cinematic image as a whole. Below I will touch upon those which are particularly important to this study.

⁷⁴ Scheffauer, p. 79.

⁷⁵ Later these ideas would be developed by other expressionist critics from Siegfried Krakauer to Rudolf Kurz. Cf. ‘Perpendicular lines tense towards the diagonal, houses exhibit crooked, angular outlines, planes shift in rhomboid fashion, the lines of force of normal architecture, expressed in perpendiculars and horizontals, are transmogrified into a chaos of broken form’, see Rudolf Kurz, *Expressionismus und Film* (Berlin: Lichtbildbühne, 1926), 123; cited in Vidler, *Explosion*, p. 58; and Siegfried Krakauer, *Nature of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁷⁶ Iurii Lotman, *Semiotika kino i problemy kinoestetiki* (Tallin: Eesti Raamat, 1973), pp. 105; 108-109.

Frame

Talking about cinematic frame and its relationship to the domestic interior, I refer to a study by Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, who have suggested an innovative way of looking at film theory through the methodological framework of interior-based metaphors, such as doors and windows. This framework allows us to see how deeply the interior imagery can influence film theory and film analysis, and at the same time provides us with useful methodology for analysing particular case-studies. The first two chapters of their 2010 monograph, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses*, entitled ‘Cinema as Window and Frame’ and ‘Cinema as Door — Screen and Threshold’, offer an in-depth exploration of different theoretical approaches to film study that have employed ‘interior metaphors’ in their lexicon. The chapter dedicated to ‘window as frame’ deals with the framing of the filmic image as its essential element and includes approaches such as Andre Bazin’s theory of filmic realism, David Bordwell’s study of staging in-depth, and Rudolf Arnheim and Sergei Eisenstein’s exploration of the principles of construction governing the image’s composition ‘within the frame-as-frame’.⁷⁷

In the section that reveals the ‘door’ metaphor and its application to film theory, Elsaesser and Hagener’s focus is on the ‘position that seeks to describe the transition from the spectator’s world to the world of the film, [...] physical entry into cinema and imaginary entry into the film’.⁷⁸ Importantly, in their approach Elsaesser and Hagener prefer to concentrate on formalist theories of cinema and cinematic space, which gives their approach a similarity to the method I am using in my thesis.

However, in their exploration of window as frame and door as threshold, the authors focus more on the latter part of each pair, using windows and doors in rather

⁷⁷ T. Elsaesser and M. Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.8.

metaphorical terms, suggesting they unite different film theories. I, on the other hand, try to analyse and close-read the doors and windows of the cinematic interiors and establish how they work as metaphors and as a specific artistic medium in the different films selected as case studies.

Set Design and Narrative

As well as raising issues about the treatment of space in a geometrical sense, the use of the domestic environment in the film raised other questions that were more specific to the cinema as an industry — the questions of set design and artistic direction. At the early stage of film-productions, both in Russia and abroad, set designers were not considered to be an essential part of the film. Rather, they played the role of the ‘masters of invisible sets’.⁷⁹ Due to this attitude, the contribution of set designers to the overall understanding of films’ narratives was significantly under-researched. There are some practical introductions to the profession of a set-designer, and some encyclopaedic articles devoted to the topic, as well as articles related to the exploration of specific sets.⁸⁰ However, there are still very few monographs or collections of articles that present detailed historical and cultural analyses of the significance of the set – and, particularly, the domestic set – in cinema.

Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron in *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* set out the basic question of the relationship between set design and the organisation of cinematic narrative. This book is considered to be ‘groundbreaking’ in describing the ways the set influences the narrative and vice-versa, importantly stating that the set could call upon ‘powerful images that serve to

⁷⁹ *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema*, ed. by Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), p. 11.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Michael L. Stephens, *Art Directors in Cinema. A Worldwide Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson, London: McFarland, 1998); N.V. Vul'fert and T.A. Selant'eva, *Khudozhniki sovetskogo kino* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1972).

organise the narrative; it exhibits an elevated level of rhetoric; [...] insists on values that are highly determining; [...] oblige the spectator to read design as a specific necessity of narrative'.⁸¹ Among other problems, the Affrons discuss a specific category of set design or, as they call it, 'design intensity', that is defined by the scholars as 'narrative' itself. This category is applied to films that take place almost solely in one apartment.⁸² In such films, 'décor becomes the narrative's organizing image, a figure that stands for the narrative itself'.⁸³ As the Affrons observe:

Where the set is narrative, décor's topography, no matter how complex, becomes utterly familiar. [...] In the end, this décor takes on for the spectator a relationship to the narrative akin to that which it had for the character.⁸⁴

On the other hand, C.S. Tashiro's *Pretty Picture: Production Design and the History Film* argues that some sets impose their presence beyond narrative and work against the story to highlight the sense of the image, and to suggest meanings that cannot be expressed within the frame; hence set design, according to Tashiro, becomes an independent part of the film that to some extent rebels against narrative.⁸⁵

Emma Widdis in her article on the use of *faktura* in early Soviet set design was one of the first scholars to approach this question from both historical and aesthetic perspective in relation to Soviet tradition. Widdis discusses the question of set design with regard to the artistic thought of the time, and introduces the contradiction of different approaches to the set as one between depth and surface on

⁸¹ *Film Architecture*, p. 18.

⁸² Several films described in this thesis fall into this category.

⁸³ Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 36.

⁸⁴ Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 177.

⁸⁵ C.S. Tashiro, *Pretty Picture: Production Design and the History Film*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), p. 6.

the screen.⁸⁶ Her article represents one of very few scholarly contributions to the topic of early Soviet cinematic décor.

My thesis, to some extent, aims to contribute to this field. However, it is important to note that I am neither predominantly concerned with the evolution of set design, nor entirely focused on the role of the designer in the process of filmmaking. Rather, my work primarily deals with the image of the room and the way it is constructed by the cinematic medium. My preference is to see the domestic interior not so much in terms of materialisation (as in sets), but as a problematic motif of the culture in question — an expression of the contemporary imaginary.

Two Media, Six Rooms

I deliberately made my choice of case studies so that they cover two different media – literature and film. The correlation of cinematic and literary interiors here highlights one important premise of this work – by exploring one motif in two different media, I follow the point of view expressed in the volume of essays *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts* by Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell, who refer to ‘the imitation of one art form in another’, especially concerning the coexistence of visual and narrative art, as a dominant feature of Russian and, by extension, European

⁸⁶ Emma Widdis, ‘Faktura: depth and surface in early Soviet set-design’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3: 1 (2009), 5-32. Widdis’ previous approach to the topic of Soviet cinema is her innovative book *Visions of a New Land*, in which the scholar explores the construction of space and landscape by cinematic medium, and the mapping of a new Sovietness on the screen. This monograph includes some pages on the employment of the domestic imagery in Soviet films of the 1920s; however they are discussed in the context of the complex relationship between public and private or as the feeling of ‘home in the city’, which is different to my approach to domestic space in the same films.

modernism.⁸⁷ The period in question is therefore seen ‘as an era in which the preference manifested in nineteenth-century Russian culture for the word over visual image was swept away’.⁸⁸ Containing manifestations of different forms of art and therefore being itself an interdisciplinary inquiry,⁸⁹ my study of the interior represented in film and literature of Russian modernism contributes to the paradigm outlined by Kelly and Lovell, suggesting new possibilities for reflections and interpretations. By this I also insist on the discussion of specific imaginary interiors as a distinct part of particularly modernist aesthetics.

With two media to discuss in this work, there remains the issue of how one should organise the representation of these literary and cinematic rooms as at once fixed and dynamic entities. In *Literary Architecture*, Ellen Frank refers to the five chapters of her discussion as ‘five rooms’: ‘each filled with the furniture of its subject matter, each very specifically located, separated by halls of space’.⁹⁰ Similarly, I shall structure my chapters as a gallery of six imaginary rooms correlating to the six chapters (in each chapter, however, there will be more than one room).

⁸⁷ Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell, ‘Introduction’, in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–20 (p. 5). For further theoretical discussion of the coexistence and interrelations of different forms of art, see James Heffernan, *Space, Time, Image, Sign: Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987); Ulrich Weisstein, ‘Literature and the Visual Arts: Intertextuality and Mutual Illumination’, in *Intertextuality: German Literature and Visual Art from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Ingeborg Hoestrey and Ulrich Weisstein (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), pp. 1–17; and Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). Film and literature as separate art forms create also a special paradigm of interconnection explored through cinematic adaptations of literary texts. For some of the most systematic analyses of the topic, see Brian McFarlane, *Novel into Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); as well as *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden: Blackwell, 2004).

⁸⁸ Kelly and Lovell, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

⁸⁹ Iurii Lotman demonstrates this ability of the interior to accommodate many different forms of art in his article dedicated specifically to the aesthetics of ‘бытовое пространство’: ‘Организация интерьера — это не только размещение мебели, украшений, картин и скульптур внутри данного помещения, не только художественное оформление стен, потолка и пола. Домашняя сцена в барском особняке XVIII в. в такой же мере вводила в интерьер театральное искусство, в какой телевизор вводит в современную квартиру кинематограф’, see Iurii Lotman, ‘Khudozhestvennyi ansambl’ kak bytovoe prostranstvo’, in *Stat’i po semiotike iskusstva* (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2002), pp. 376–387 (p. 377).

⁹⁰ Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture: Essays Towards a Tradition. Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, Henry James* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 3.

It is important to note that to represent the class of phenomena under investigation, I use the terms *interior* and *room* interchangeably. It is the enclosed space *within* houses with which I am primarily concerned. In particular, I generally prefer to use ‘room’, when dealing with texts originally written in Russian because it is a more usual and natural usage for this language than the borrowed *inter’er*. I see these terms as far more appropriate than *house* or *home* (*dom* in Russian), a category of philosophical, social, and anthropological enquiry that is far too multifunctional and has a complex shift of meaning in English, which is not applicable to the Russian context. Although many scholars use both sets of notions in parallel in their critical discussions of the topic (and I will refrain from challenging their preferences while establishing the theoretical and historical background for particular case-studies, as well as at some points in this Introduction), I use the interior, rather than the house. Sometimes I look briefly at the house in an overall sense when this is suggested by the text itself (as in *Dom na Trubnoi*, for example), but I quickly move ‘inside’ the house to look at the interior. The term ‘room’ is also helpful in suggesting that I focus on private domestic spaces, rather than on public interiors of factories and offices.

The thesis is organised not as a generalising, chronological exploration of the topic, but as a series of complementary, though autonomous, case studies. Each of the six chapters discusses a particular interior or set in literature and cinema of the period in question: the room in Anna Akhmatova’s poetry; the apartment in Andrei Belyi’s autobiographical writings; the rooms of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii’s short stories; the cinematic interiors of Evgenii Bauer’s melodramas; the set of Abram Room’s ‘бытовая фильма’; and the domestic sets depicted in Boris Barnet’s lyrical comedies. The particular films and literary works of these authors were chosen because they all take place in one or several domestic interiors and they represent the diversity of the

artistic employment of this particular setting by artists of widely different ambitions and orientations. Nevertheless, there are common features in their representation of interiors, which guided my choice of the authors and directors, and which were the point of embarking on this analytical journey.

All the case studies in this thesis emerge during a period of radical change in the understanding of space in general and interior space in particular. The new reality of fast urbanisation, such as the new experiences of travelling by train and automobile, required fresh modes of representation of space. The connotations of the house as a specific shelter from this destructive urban reality, a place of safety, comfort, and stability were so strong that this notion remained one of the last bastions of ‘the old regime’ while everyone in the outside world ‘летели на железном ядре из прошлого в будущее’, as the critic Viktor Shklovskii characterised the cultural experience of modernism.⁹¹

Another reason for this choice of authors was based on their specific interest in the interior as a creative location. Of course, many writers and directors of the time depicted different parts of interior imagery, but their vision was somewhat nostalgic. To give just an examples, Mikhail Bulgakov creates a cult of cream-coloured curtains and sees interior as a kind of refuge from the outside world.⁹²

Another tendency of the interior representation can be seen in Maiakovskii’s writings. Although playing with the notion of the room (‘Комната – глава в крученыховском аду’),⁹³ Maiakovskii’s protagonist tends to escape from any room

⁹¹ Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Po povodu kartiny Esfir’ Shub’, *Lef*, 8–9 (1927), 32–54 (p. 53).

⁹² Cf. ‘В романе того же Булгакова “Белая гвардия” кремовые занавески в гостиной, часы, исполняющие гавот, старинные гобелены, шкафы с золотыми обрезами книг, лампа под шелковым абажуром, жарко натопленная голландская печь с изразцами, разве это не символы, по мнению автора, мирной, старой доброй жизни, которой еще не коснулись бури революционной России?’, see Aleksei Losev, *Problema simvola i realisticheskoe iskusstvo* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), pp. 187–188.

⁹³ Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Lilichka! Vmesto pis'ma’, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1955–1961), i (1955), pp. 107–108 (p. 107). Here,

he may be in; the trajectories of his characters are either *out* of the room, into the street and the broader city space,⁹⁴ or *between* the streets.⁹⁵

Pasternak is a very important figure in the representation of interior spaces in Russian culture, however he sees a room as a medium to enrich the higher reality and higher harmony, what Zholkovskii in his article calls ‘высшая фаза’ of Pasternak’s poetics.⁹⁶

In my discussion, I try to go away from these three tendencies – nostalgic rooms, room as a starting point of escaping, and a room as a sign of higher reality. I want to look at very ordinary representations of interiors, and see to which extent they are converted to and affected by modernist aesthetics.

In this context, the rooms represented by the three authors whose works I am going to discuss – not escaped from but inhabited, though in an original and specifically modernist way – are as usual as they are significant. They precisely facilitate the emphasis that I wish to place on movements *within* interior spaces, on the mutability and dynamism of the domestic environment, allowing me to site the discussion of the Russian (including early Soviet) interior in the broader discussion of modernism, rather than representing it yet once more as a sociological account of *kommunalka* life.

The filmmakers on whom I focus had an equally idiosyncratic and revealing understanding of modern spaces, though for different reasons. The majority of the film directors of the time, including Eisenstein and Vertov, were not particularly

Maiakovskii is ironically referring to the work by Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov *Igra v adu: Poema* (1912).

⁹⁴ Cf. ‘Выбегу, | Тело в улицу брошу я’, in ‘Lilichka!’, and ‘Я бегал от зова разинутых окон’ in Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Pro eto’, iv (1957), pp. 135–184 (p. 169).

⁹⁵ See Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Iz ulitsy v ulitsu’, i, pp. 38–39.

⁹⁶ Aleksandr Zholkovskii, ‘Mesto okna v poeticheskom mire Pasternaka’, in Aleksandr Zholkovskii, Iurii Shcheglov, *Raboty po poetike vyrazitel'nosti: Invarianty—Tema—Priemy—Tekst. Sbornik statei* (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia gruppa ‘Progress’, 1996), pp. 209–239 (p. 230).

interested in detailed representation of private interior spaces, but preferred to focus on shared spaces such as factories and offices, or indeed on the cities' squares and public spaces.⁹⁷ On the other hand, the works by the three different directors analysed in this work offer extremely interesting examples of the cinematic use of interior imagery of the time. Where other artists took interior space for granted (by representing it conventionally, or by ignoring it), the figures on whom I focus deliberately manipulated the interior space within their works. Frequently, they divided the interiors into several areas featuring smaller spaces, like corridors, doors, windows, and chests, whilst introducing them by different mediums – cinema and literature, in order to show the interior in constant movement. This was also true of the writers on whom I focus.

After briefly setting out the critical reception of each cinematic and literary work in question (which generally has acknowledged the issue of interior space only in passing), I present my own reading of the role of interior imagery in the text. The bulk of each chapter consists of close reading and analysis of the interior motifs of selected works. Historical details and biographical information about the authors are

⁹⁷ For an intriguing discussion of the representation of these spaces in Soviet cinema, see Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*. Sergei Eisenstein, although undoubtedly interested in film architecture (being an architect himself), explores the montage possibilities of architectural images in his later films, especially in *Ivan Grozny* (1944), in which he, still, deliberately focuses on the 'giganticness' of the interior, see Sergei Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. by Herbert Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 152. Dziga Vertov as a pioneer of documentary filmmaking also preferred to shoot exterior locations, and there is hardly any scene in his films that is shot indoors. The exception would be the opening sequence of *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (1929) that takes place in a private room of a Soviet woman. However, as Jeremy Hicks points out, this scene was not shot for the sake of the showing intimacy and domesticity of a private dwelling, but rather was 'an attempt to upstage the private and domestic with the drama and dynamism of the public and social'. He continues, 'The interior scenes of the woman sleeping give way to the outdoor scenes of increasing activity. This opposition, implicit throughout Vertov's films, is explicitly thematised in the allegory of awakening', see Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), p. 70. For an interesting discussion of the outside location and the technique of Vertov's cinema, see Malcolm Turvey, 'City Symphony and Man with a Movie Camera', in *The Filming of Modern Life: European Avant-Garde of the 1920s* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), pp. 135–162.

included where relevant in order to contextualise the ideological and aesthetic content of a specific work.

My first chapter offers an exploration of poetic interiors using the works of Anna Akhmatova of the 1910s and 1920s, in which the domestic setting becomes one of the most popular imaginary locations in the author's work, and develops from joyful associations to sad and uncanny ones. I analyse the development of the interior imagery in Akhmatova's poetry, focusing as well on the specific play of metaphors connected to domestic imagery that pervades her works at that time. I look closely at the way Akhmatova describes different parts of interiors to indicate the mood of her heroine.

The second chapter — 'Andrei Belyi. The Apartment's Consciousness' — focuses on the employment of interior imagery in the autobiographical context. The connections between the interior of the self and the private interior are visible already in the double meaning of the word 'interior'. This chapter will analyse how these connections work in the artistic imagination. It explores the complex correlations between the construction of a child's consciousness and the topology of an apartment.

The third chapter offers an in-depth exploration of interior spaces in the short stories of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, and the way he employed rooms to explain his view of space in general. In my close reading of Krzhizhanovskii's stories of the 1920s, I argue that the image of a square domestic interior becomes of great importance. I demonstrate that the various aspects of his use of interior space, including the use of opposition between interior and exterior, the description of borders and enclosure — create a complex topology that links the domestic to the urban. Krzhizhanovskii's rooms become a fusion of a personal and paradoxical kind,

which illustrates the possibilities and potential of spatial imagery as a specific modernist technique.

The next three chapters open the discussion of cinematic interiors. The fourth chapter concentrates on interior space in the films of Evgenii Bauer, the pre-revolutionary Russian filmmaker who was most famous for his creative use of set designs. It also highlights those functions of interior imagery that were essential in the filming of melodramas, and Bauer's use of doors and windows in directing the complex *mise-en-scène* and creating the sense of depth in the screen.

The fifth chapter — 'Abram Room. A Travelling Room' — looks closely at one single set design of Abram Room's film *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, and its connection to the images of the city and the railway. It explores different cinematic theories of the period related to the representation of objects and sets in order to show that Room's approach to set design in this film was new and unique. It also explores how Room employed the metaphor of a 'travelling room' to suggest different kinds of meanings connected to the changing reality of late 1920s Soviet society.

Finally, the last chapter examines the representation of interior spaces through the genre of lyrical comedies by Boris Barnet. It demonstrates the way domestic objects are used to produce a comedic effect, as well as to suggest a new way of connecting the urban outside to the domestic inside. It also looks at the innovative use of the empty room that Boris Barnet employed in his first lyrical comedy *Devushka s korobkoi* and the way these techniques were developed in his later film *Dom na Trubnoi*.

As the approach to the individual authors and directors suggests, I have not aimed for encyclopaedic inclusiveness. I plan instead to demonstrate, through these complementary and interlinked case studies, that those selected authors were aware of

how interior spaces could constitute a specific metaphor within the narrative environment, which goes beyond the limits of genre and even medium. Through my focus on their work, I intend to revise the conventional truth that *byt*, or domestic life, was marginalised in the Russian modernist movement in order to represent different urban realities. Rather, as will be shown, the dynamism and creative transformation that we usually associate with the world *beyond* the domestic sphere was fundamental to the interior spaces represented in some key works of Russian modernism, suggesting a need for revision of standard ideas about how the movement functioned.

CHAPTER I

Anna Akhmatova. The Poetics of a Room

In this chapter, I examine a number of key poems by Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) created during the 1910s and 1920s.¹ In my analysis, I focus on the development of the imagery of interior spaces in Akhmatova's poems – from those written in the 1910s to those created in the immediate post-revolutionary years, and look at how the basic elements of the interior — doors, windows, beds, furniture, textiles and other domestic objects — interact with the protagonists of poetical texts, and how this interaction creates meaning. Although Akhmatova was not the first to use interior details poetically and may not even have explored their poetic potential as fully as some other poets,² these loci are profoundly embodied in her work, creating their own motifs and establishing a new poetic world within the four walls of a room.

The critical history of Akhmatova's imaginary homes can be traced from as early as 1921, when the critic Konstantin Mochul'skii built up an ascending paradigm of Akhmatova's architecturally-related poetic motifs ('камень' — 'дом' / 'здание' — 'комната'), putting the house in the very centre of it.³ Many scholars have followed Mochul'skii's line, expanding it in different directions. Susan Amert, for example, commented on the significance of the image of the house as a metaphor for memory in Akhmatova's late poetry, putting the house 'at the very centre of Akhmatova's

¹ These include the collections of poetry *Večer* (1912); *Chetki* (1914); *Belaia staia* (1917); *Podorozhnik* (1921), *Anno Domini MCMXXI* (1922), and the mini-cycle *Epicheskie motivy* (1914–1916).

² According to the critic Aleksandr Zholkovskii, the image of the window becomes a dominant motif in the poetry of Boris Pasternak, often associated with the transition to the field of the spiritual, see Zholkovskii, 'Mesto okna', pp. 209–239.

³ Konstantin Mochul'skii, 'Poeticheskoe tvorchestvo Anny Akhmatovoi', in *Anna Akhmatova: Pro et Contra. Antologiya*, ed. by S. Kovalenko, 2 vols (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2001–2005), i (2001), pp. 346–365 (pp. 360–361).

poetic universe'.⁴ Kikhnei assessed the role of what she called the 'locus' of home in the lyrical system of Anna Akhmatova, describing it, again, as being *central* in relation to other spatial images.⁵ All three studies, although relating to different periods of the poet's work, demonstrate a similar tendency to focus on the image of the house ('дом') rather than a room or interior. Another similarity of these scholars' approach to Akhmatova's use of interior imagery is the tendency to schematise the poet's treatment of the imagery of the home and analyse it in a rather abstract way — as a symbolic or geographic centre of her poetics. Although leading to many interesting conclusions, this technique of analysis does not allow us to divide the house into components and to study the schemes that emerge *inside* the house, as opposed to making connections between the house and other images.

Those few scholars who do divide the house image into its components, on the other hand, tend to treat Akhmatova's use of home images mainly in symbolic or allegorical terms. Sam Driver, for example, has remarked upon the association of house-related images, especially windows, with the theme of love in Akhmatova's poems.⁶ Kees Verheul, as a part of his general discussion of space and time in Akhmatova's poetry, has devoted some pages to such motifs as the house and window. For Verheul, the house in Akhmatova's poetry represents the source of nervous anxiety; it is connected to the death of beloved ones. At the same time, the window, according to Verheul, serves Akhmatova to indicate the symbolical division between past and present, dream and reality, sadness and happiness.⁷ Echoing these

⁴ Susan Amert, *In a Shattered Mirror: The Later Poetry of Anna Akhmatova* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 188.

⁵ L.G. Kikhnei, 'Lokus "doma" v liricheskoi sisteme Anny Akhmatovoi', in *Vostok-Zapad: Prostranstvo russkoi literatury*, ed. by L.G. Kikhnei and M.V. Galaeva (Volgograd: Peremena, 2004), pp. 198–204.

⁶ Sam Driver, 'Anna Akhmatova: Early Love Poems', in *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, 1 (1971), pp. 306–310 (p. 307).

⁷ Kees Verheul, *The Theme of Time in the Poetry of Anna Akhmatova* (Paris: The Hague, 1971), pp. 8–14; pp. 212–213.

studies, Wendy Rosslyn in her analysis concludes that the window in Akhmatova's poetry becomes 'a particularly appropriate symbol of the heroine's openness to love', while domestic motifs in general are 'the major vehicle for the theme of separation in several of its manifestations'.⁸ Importantly, Rosslyn accepts that 'not every image of a house in Akhmatova is, of course, symbolic, but the house does very frequently act as an image of, or correlative for, the self'.⁹ Nearly half of Akhmatova's poems of the 1910s and 1920s are 'played out' — at least partly — directly in interior settings, which has made some scholars point out the unusual 'frequency of rooms and interiors in Akhmatova's poetry'.¹⁰

My own analysis differs from these examples of criticism in several ways. Firstly, unlike most of the previous scholarship on this topic, which creates an overly static model of Akhmatova's lyrical universe with a defined centre in or around the house, I consider the house not as a holistic notion that could be compared to other units of poetic text, but as a set of different elements: rooms, doors, and windows. Secondly, these elements of the house appear in my analysis not in their static and immovable form but with regard to their active relationship and interaction with one another as well as, more importantly, with the author/narrator and his (or more accurately, her), movements through the room.

Moreover, I explore how the description of rooms and domestic settings become an important poetical device, a structural metaphor in Akhmatova's works. In this, I follow an idea echoed in the early reviews of Akhmatova's books from the 1910s and 1920s. The description of a room and its objects, of course, was a popular device for many poets. However, as Rafilovich notes, 'для всех это только фон,

⁸ Wendy Rosslyn, 'The Function of Architectural Imagery in Akhmatova's Poetry', *Irish Slavonic Studies*, 6 (1985), 19–34 (pp. 19–21).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰ Driver, p. 307.

более или менее удачно выбранный'.¹¹ For Akhmatova, the description of a room and interior objects becomes much more than just a background. The image of a theatrical setting, populated by different objects that could be regarded as true actors, is, in the eye of Rafilovich, an accurate metaphor for Anna Akhmatova's poetic world in general:

Если бы можно было себе представить такую пьесу, где обстановка, декорации, бутафория были бы самыми настоящими действующими лицами, совершенно равноправными людям, изображенным в ней, то она точнейшим образом соответствовала бы ахматовским стихотворениям.¹²

This chapter is designed to explore the limits of this imaginary environment; this everyday yet extraordinary stage set.

The Rooms of *Večer*: Window, Pillow, Curtain, Door

One of the most striking images of the interior in Akhmatova's first collection of poems, *Večer* (1912), is in 'Molius' okonnomu luchu' (1909).¹³ Straightforward in its approach, it acts as a useful illustration of the general treatment of interior imagery in Akhmatova's early works. In it, we see the heroine praying to the beam of sun that is coming from the window. She describes the sunbeam that is 'бледен, тонок, прям' and 'невинный и простой' (SP: 51). Unlike this beam, the heroine's heart does not

¹¹ S. Rafalovich, 'Anna Akhmatova', in *Anna Akhmatova: Pro et Contra*, ed. by Kovalenko, pp. 181–187 (p. 183).

¹² Rafalovich, pp. 183–184.

¹³ Here and later the citations of Akhmatova's poems are given from Anna Akhmatova, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, ed. by Viktor Zhirmunskii (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1976) in brackets with the abbreviation of this volume's title SP and page number. Individual titles of poems will not be cited in the bibliography.

feel that innocent and simple; instead, it is anxious, broken in two parts — ‘сердце — пополам’ (SP: 50). However, as she follows the journey of the sunbeam around her room, her state changes. From the window she points her gaze to the basin. It is old and its copper has already gone green (‘На рукомойнике моем | Позеленела медь’, SP: 50–51), but the play of light on the copper fills the heroine with joy (‘весело глядеть’, SP: 51). Finally, this dark, silent and empty room (‘в вечерней тишине’; ‘в храмине пустой’, SP: 51) changes completely. The journey of the beam around the room results in ‘праздник золотой’ (SP: 51), a kind of divine festival, which makes the heroine’s heart relax and her forget her troubles. The room here is depicted as a locus for transformation, for the fusion of opposite sensations and even states: light and dark, anxiety and joy. However, these states are not static — they move and are transformed.

A more detailed description of a room appears in the poem ‘Vecherniaia komnata’ (1912). This poem bears a title making an explicit reference to the title and theme of the whole poetic collection — *Vecher* — and therefore we could conclude that it is, if not central to the whole collection, then at least of a specific importance. The title of the collection represents a time of day when everything is vague and unclear. As day changes into night, everything is in flux and the scene is set for a change of states. These connotations are often enacted in open space, in a place where one can see the sunset and the natural change of light. Akhmatova, however, prefers to trace the qualities of this changing world inside an interior space. Here, she presents the room setting as a perfect space for creativity, inspiration and memory.

The poem starts with words that a reader takes as a promise of something unique and special: ‘Я говорю сейчас словами теми, | Что только раз рождаются в душе’ (SP: 43). However, having promised a kind of experience that could only

emerge once in a lifetime, the narrator goes into a description of the everyday surroundings of her room; and in the process of description, these objects indeed become extraordinary. Staying in the room for just one evening (and four strophes) turns out to become a rich experience that involves all possible senses of perception. The representation of the room combines a whole variety of sensory stimuli such as colours — ‘белых хризантем’, ‘желтый луч’, ‘букет ярких георгин’; stuffiness — ‘душно пахнет старое саше’, smells of the chrysanthemums and dahlias; memories — ‘помнит старину’; sounds — ‘жужжит пчела’, ‘звук виолы’, ‘редкие аккорды клавишин’; textures and forms — ‘блестящих севрских статуэток [...] глянцевиные плащи’; voice — ‘я говорю’; and even linguistic experience — ‘над кроватью надпись по-французски | Гласит: “Seigneur, ayez pitié de nous”’; sense of weight — ‘тяжелый [луч]’; and sense of time — ‘померкли’, ‘застыл’ (SP: 43).

Finally, there is also a reference to a sense of size — ‘комната, где окна слишком узки’ (SP: 43). The windows, the only detail that connects the room to the outer world, are too narrow. This might suggest a sense of confinement, and hence something ominous, especially given that the evening sun is setting and the room must be getting dark very quickly. However, this very quick change of light is something that interests Akhmatova, rather than oppressing her. She records every moment of this changing of the outside world reflected in the details of the interior world, and tries to capture this change within the interior (‘Последний луч, и желтый и тяжелый | Застыл в букете ярких георгин’, SP: 43). The room becomes, therefore, the final stop for the continuous change of time outside. Internal space and interior space are integrated.

This room also works as a locus for imagination and memory (‘комната [...] | Хранит любовь и помнит старину’, SP: 43), which later becomes a traditional

association for Akhmatova.¹⁴ However, the primary point of my analysis here is to show that the static setting of a room allows Akhmatova not only to describe different senses and memories, but also to focus on their flow and functions, capturing the movements of the gaze of both the lyrical persona and the reader's imagination.

Other important descriptions of interior spaces in *Vecher* are less detailed, but also become characteristic of her style. In 'Dva stikhotvoreniia' (1909) Akhmatova depicts a room through interior details that reflect the inner state of the heroine. The female protagonist has spent the whole night in her room without sleep. However, the reader learns this information indirectly: Akhmatova reveals a very special detail, that immediately gives us the sense of the protagonist's state, her instability and anxiety: 'Подушка уже горяча | С обеих сторон' (SP: 51). From this indirect description we learn that the protagonist has been trying to fall asleep and turning her pillow from side to side several times, so both sides of the pillow are hot. Perhaps she was even crying. As readers, we do not know what happened to the heroine, but another interior detail described in the poem makes us sympathise with her: 'Как нестерпимо бела | Штора на белом окне' (SP: 51). Here, Akhmatova makes a simple and ordinary part of interior decoration in the room seem strange, literally unbearable. This dislocated description ('нестерпимо бела') related to an interior detail ('штора') makes us understand the heroine's state of mind — a stylistic

¹⁴ Generally, Akhmatova's casting of memory in terms of an enclosed space of a room of some kind is constant throughout her work, but becomes more prominent in her later poetry. Susan Amert, for example, lists three tropes for memory: 'хоромы памяти'; 'терема памяти'; 'подвал памяти', not mentioning, however, the room as such, which is the focus of my analysis, see Amert, pp. 169–170. The tradition of association of memory with enclosed spaces is not specific to Akhmatova. In her study of the art of memory, Mary Carruthers lists different spatial images frequently used to locate memory in Classical texts; memory is located in such places as 'cella', 'arca', and storehouses. She also, more pertinently to the present discussion, traces the image of memory as a room or 'a spacious house with many rooms' back to Cicero and Quintilian; see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 107; p. 129. For more on different loci of memory in culture, see Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1992); Lina Bolzoni, *La stanza della memoria: Modelli letterari e iconografici nell'età della stampa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

and poetic device that will be seen more and more from that point on in Akhmatova's poetry. An equally unsettling detail also intrudes from the outside – the cawing of the crows, ushering in the new day in an ominous fashion.

Importantly, the poem ends with an emotion that is opposite to those described in the rest of the poetical text. 'Здравствуй!' (SP: 51), the heroine says. We do not know to whom this greeting is addressed — whether it is a visitor the heroine was waiting for, or if she is just greeting a new day, or saying hello to her imaginary lover; however, this 'Здравствуй!' welcomes a new rhythm, a new emotion. It opens up the poetical world of the text to a new experience, once more showing the high emotional potential of an interior location.

The second poem of 'Dva stikhotvoreniia' is also set in a room (perhaps the same one), this time during daytime. A visitor (perhaps the one the heroine has been waiting for in the previous poem) enters the room. This guest was here a year ago, and he has not changed since ('Тот же голос, тот же взгляд, | Те же волосы льняные, | Все, как год тому назад', SP: 51). However, despite everything being 'the same as always' and 'the same as last year', it is the present moment that the heroine values most — the present moment that is about to flow away. This moment is represented by a reference to an interior detail — the play of light that comes from the window and reflects on white walls ('Сквозь стекло лучи дневные | Известь белых стен пестрят', SP: 51). It is only by looking at these beams of sun on the wall that the heroine can locate herself here and now, and not a year ago. The room, once more, becomes a container of oppositions: past and present, memories and real moments; and once more presence is defined by movement from the exterior to the interior — in this case, of light.

Attention to different kinds of interior details that could represent the protagonists' unstable state of mind becomes emblematic of *Večer*. Using the room as a common setting for an intimate exploration of space, Akhmatova defines it in terms of zones and locations that are specifically significant for her poetic idea. Most of these zones have a common quality of representing a certain kind of threshold: spatial (between inside and outside); temporal (between past and present); social (between public and private), or emotional (between memories and reality). In the poems described above it is the window that separates these states of being.¹⁵ However, *Večer* introduces another threshold that helps Akhmatova develop her poetics of interior space — a door.

The door to the room is the primary threshold to an identifiable territory. It is generally very simple in its connotations and usually represents the choice of two states; it is either opened or closed, either inviting or prohibiting entry or departure. Yet, in her poetical language, Anna Akhmatova goes beyond these common meanings. It is in *Večer* that Akhmatova first introduces the motif of not showing a door as simply shut or open. In most cases, Akhmatova introduces the door-image indirectly; through a half-action, which alludes to the indecisiveness of her heroine.

‘Dver’ poluotkryta...’ (1911) begins this tradition. The door is left open by a visitor who has just left in a hurry (he forgot his gloves and horsewhip on the table). The heroine does not understand the reasons for his departure (‘Отчего ушел ты? | Я не понимаю...’, SP: 29), perhaps there was an argument between them. Despite her

¹⁵ The German Romantics immediately captured this particular connotation of a window. For their aesthetic, the open window in the enclosed room became one of the most striking and evocative images; one that enabled them to express the common romantic sense of the world bifurcated: one part close and familiar, and the other distant, longed-for and unfamiliar. As the art historian Sabine Rewald observes: ‘In it [the motif of the open window], the Romantics found a potent symbol for the experience of standing on the threshold between an interior and the outside world. The juxtaposition of the close familiarity of the room and the uncertain, often idealized vision of what lies beyond was immediately recognized as a metaphor for unfulfilled longing.’ See Sabine Rewald, *Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2011), p. 3.

confusion, she believes that the next morning will be bright and joyful (‘радостно и ясно’, SP: 29), and her heart should stay wise (‘Сердце, будь же мудро’, SP: 29). The last strophe, however, leaves an ambivalent feeling. The heroine addresses her heart, which feels weary, on the point of exhaustion (‘Ты совсем устало, | Бьешься тише, глуше...’, SP: 30). The poem ends with a sudden ‘Знаешь, я читала, | Что бессмертны души’ (SP: 30), as if the heroine cannot forget anything, and the visitor who had just left cannot leave forever — souls are immortal, hence nothing passes away completely.

From the beginning of the poem, the door separates different states of being — not only the inside and the outside, but also different states of the heroine’s mind, different possibilities of her future: in one strophe she regrets that her visitor left her, in the next strophe she feels joyful about it, while the following strophe adds a feeling of sadness and eternal return. The image of the half open door that appears at the very beginning of the poem dictates the mood — the heroine hesitates between the two states of mind in the same way she hesitates to close the door of her room and make the decision definite.

A very similar feeling of shifting emotionality comes from another poem from *Veche*, ‘Beloi noch’iu’ (1911). In this poem, the door is deliberately left open by the heroine (‘Ах, дверь не запираю я’, SP: 38). Once more, this image indicates the state of doubt that the heroine is in. The opened door invites the possibility that her lover might come back. She waits for him, every sound reminds her of his voice (‘Пьянея звуком голоса, | Похожего на твой’, SP: 38), and at the same time she knows that nothing is to be returned (‘все потеряно’, SP: 38). The poem ends with the quintessence of this paradox: ‘О, я была уверена, | Что ты придешь назад’ (SP: 38). Though the heroine asserts that she was sure he would come back, the past tense

in this sentence and its construction makes the readers realise that this did not happen. At the same time, the door from the beginning of the poem remains open as an indicator of the process of waiting, which the poem is dedicated to, and which is more valuable for the author than the result. And the open door also highlights another important feature of the poem — the slippage between interior and exterior worlds. In the second stanza the lyric heroine refers to her absorption in the forest landscape outside, not mentioning which aperture she is looking through — door or window — but enhancing the sense that this space is not closed off:

Смотреть, как гаснут полосы
В закатном мраке хвой,
Пьянея звуком голоса,
Похожего на твой.

The sense of uncertainty acquires a transgressive air as the heroine refers to the ‘intoxication’ that the exterior voices provoke.

In both ‘Dver’ poluotkryta’ and ‘Beloi noch’iu’, a ‘a ‘half open’ door — being in both cases the first images of the poems — allow the heroine to keep herself in the ambiguous space of the threshold until the very end of the poem. The image of the door lets her balance between the two worlds — reality and memories, the desirable and the actual — to create her own world where both scenarios are possible. Thus, the image of the doors allows Akhmatova to keep her poems themselves in the state of threshold and paradox. Threshold spaces inside the room guide the meaning in Akhmatova’s poems, create their architectonics and develop the plot in her later poetical cycles as well.

Vecher also introduces another interior detail that will soon become a

common feature of Akhmatova's poetry — the steps or the staircase. These images are introduced indirectly — mainly by the depiction of particular movements. Finding themselves on the steps in Akhmatova's imaginary rooms (or just outside the rooms), her protagonists never manage to walk calmly up or down the steps. Instead, they shake ('Он вышел, шатаясь', SP: 28) or rush down without touching the railings ('я сбежала, перил не касаясь', SP: 28). In 'Pesnia poslednei vstrechi' (1911), the heroine's descent of the staircase becomes a major moment of emotional dramatism, as it seems to her that there were many stairs, and it turned out there were only three. Even when just standing on the staircase, protagonists are not immobile: they may, for instance, use the railings to keep themselves steady ('И, прощаясь, держась за перила', SP: 30), as if about to faint (a motif that is introduced in 'Khochesh znat', kak vse eto bylo?' (1910)).¹⁶ In her interpretation of the locus of the staircase, Akhmatova comes close to the traditions of Dutch interior paintings, where the image of steps was regularly constructed as a space of jealousy, suspicions and seduction.¹⁷ In her poems, Akhmatova keeps this traditional connotation of the 'seductiveness' of the staircase — the poems that take place on the staircase are connected to a romantic drama or to betrayal by loved ones, accentuating the sense of anxiety and dynamism, movement and sudden changes to opposite meanings. In 'Khochesh znat', kak vse eto

¹⁶ Partly, this sense of anxiety and vertigo connected to the staircase reflects upon Anna Akhmatova's own feelings of illness — a complaint once shared with Lidiia Chukovskaia: 'У меня, кроме каверн во всех легких, еще, наверное, и миньерова болезнь. [...] Когда-то специалисты мечтали наблюдать хоть одного больного. Теперь таких больных много. Стоит мне двинуться, повернуть голову — головокружение и тошнота. Когда я иду по лестнице, передо мною бездна', See Lidiia Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi. Kniga I. 1938–1941* (Moscow: 'Kniga', 1989), p. 36. The self-diagnosis of Ménière's disease (characterised by fainting and vertigo) provided Akhmatova with quasi-objective evidence of her own fragility. Note that she emphasised also just how rare the disease was when she first had it: thus, frailty became the mark of exceptionality, in a sideways reference to the idea of the 'sick genius'.

¹⁷ See, for example, several paintings by Nicolaes Maes with speaking titles including *The Jealous Husband* (ca. 1656. Boston Museum of Fine Arts); *The Listening Housewife* (1655. London, Buckingham Palace); *The Eavesdropper* (1655–1656. London, Ashley House), which depict a character on the stairs, listening to or looking at the drama of seduction happening in another room. For an analysis of this motif in Dutch art, see Hollander, pp. 103–148. It is not impossible that Akhmatova was aware of these associations, since the Hermitage has a world-renowned collection of Dutch and Flemish art.

bylo?’ the heroine is in the dining room and, when the time comes (‘три в столовой пробило’, SP: 30), she needs to see a guest to the door. However, rather than simply saying good bye, she suddenly confesses her love ‘Ах, нет, я забыла, | Я люблю вас’ (SP: 30). In ‘Szhala ruki pod temnoi vual’iu’ the heroine follows her guest to the gates to beg him to stay, but gets in response a pragmatic ‘Не стой на ветру’ (SP: 28). This conversation happens outside the interior, but from the first line of the poem we learn that the main conversation has taken place in the room and, as we see, it led to a similar result — the combination of two opposite feelings, and their sudden change.

Having established the tradition of depicting various parts of the interior in the poetical situations of anxiety, choice, and indecisiveness, Akhmatova develops this tradition in her later writings.

The Rooms of *Chetki*: Insomnia and a Guest

In Akhmatova’s next collection, *Chetki*, we also find rooms that capture the heroine in transition, between different states of being. In ‘Potertyi kovrik pod ikonoi’ (1912), Akhmatova describes an interior setting that, at first glance, is calm and peaceful: the room is cool and dark, the ivy is covering the window, the icon-lamp is lit, the roses spread their sweet aroma. However, as is usual in an interior setting created by Akhmatova, we find out that this peacefulness is delusive; it only brings anxiety to the heroine. The room reminds her of the visitor who has just left this setting. His recent visit is indicated by two details: the embarrassment of the heroine who covers her fingers (‘Ты зацелованные пальцы | Брезгливо прячешь под платок’, SP: 80) and the smell of tobacco in her hair (‘И в косах спутанных таится | Чуть слышный запах табака’, SP: 80). These details speak of passionate scenes that have just

happened in the room, the room that seemed to be so calm and pleasant just a moment ago. Additionally, in the first two stanzas, there is another example of dynamism in the representation of interior imagery — an emphasis on how everything has been made: the ivy has ‘encircled’ the window (‘И густо плющ темно-зеленый | Завил широкое окно’, SP: 80), there are details ‘painted by the loving hand of the craftsman’ (‘Пестро расписаны укладки | Рукой любовной кустаря’, SP: 80). There is also the icon with a lamp that is always lit. The image of the icon might seem to provide evidence of the stability and peace (as opposed to dynamism) of the scene. However, in the poem the icon is not given any more weight than the secular details, and certainly does not resolve anything. In contrast, the candle in the lamp is barely burning — creating the sense of intimacy and fragility (‘Трещит лампадка, | Чуть горя’); and the rug before the icon is worn out — another sign of dynamism, assuming that inhabitants often come to pray for a moment here, and then leave, without taking care of the decoration (traditionally, the corner with the icon should be considered the best part of the house, and be respected and constantly cleaned).

‘8 noiabria 1913’ draws a similar picture of a combination of oppositions in one room. The heroine wakes in a room that is lit by the sun from the outside. She wakes up and remembers about her ‘милый’ (SP: 72). These thoughts make everything feel different: the snow outside seems ‘warm’ (‘Оттого оснеженная | Даль за окнами тепла’, SP: 72); the heroine, who usually suffers from insomnia, slept last night as deep, sound and safe as if she had taken communion (‘...я, бессонная, | Как причастница спала’, SP: 72). Once more, the interior location indicates the presence of a paradox, an unexpected connection of oppositional meanings.

The connection of an interior location (usually a bedroom) with

oppositional states of awakening and falling asleep, of evening and morning, is evident throughout the collection. In the poem ‘Bessonnitsa’ (1912), we learn that the heroine has not slept for three months because of insomnia. The poem is set in the atmosphere of half-darkness, which is indicated by an interior detail (‘Окна тканью белою завешены, | Полумрак струится голубой...’, SP: 69), the atmosphere that alludes to the change of states. Finally, after having evoked a long-standing state of insomnia (‘Ты опять, опять со мной, бессонница!’, SP: 69), the poem ends up with a quite different feeling: ‘мне легко с тобой’ (SP: 69) — a transformation of states that has already become a trope in Akhmatova’s early poetry.

This twist repeats in another interior setting in the poem ‘Vechernie chasy pered stolom’ (1913), in which the heroine is also preparing to go to bed. Many details link this interior to the ones mentioned previously: ‘Непоправимо белая страница’ (SP: 75) alludes to the curtain that was described as ‘нестерпимо бела’ (SP: 51) in ‘Dva stikhotvoreniia’ from *Vecher*. ‘Мимоза пахнет Ниццей и теплом’ (SP: 75) recalls the various flowers and aromas depicted in ‘Vecherniaia komnata’. The feelings that these settings arouse are also almost identical to those in previous poems: the combination of sadness and joy. ‘В окно гляжу я больше не грустя’ (SP: 75) — says the heroine, who seems to be proud to have overcome her anxiety. However, the last lines reveal that this victory is illusory. She is not able to control herself when she hears her lover’s voice: ‘Я не могу поднять усталых век | Когда мое имя произносит’ (SP: 76). The interior setting seems to have its own ‘memory’ of the heroine’s emotional states that change so quickly, and this in turn dominates her behaviour.

Importantly, in most of the cases it is a male visitor who causes these changes. He enters, or leaves a room, and everything in it is transformed; the heroine,

overcome by new emotions, sees her surroundings anew. The poem ‘Gost’ (1914) can be read as an example of this emblematic situation: the heroine is in a room; a visitor enters it, and her emotions change dramatically. The poem starts with an indication of the old order of things; everything is calm and peaceful, and the regular sound of the falling snow only increases this feeling: ‘Все, как раньше: в окна столовой | Бьется мелкий метельный снег’ (SP: 80). We are located inside a traditional dining room, looking at its windows. The contact with the outside world is not intrusive – the snow may ‘strike’ the window, but its impact is no more than a patter. However the guest brings a sense of anxiety to these peaceful settings. The visitor enters and straightforwardly tells the heroine that he wishes to go to hell with her (‘Быть с тобой в аду’, SP: 80). Then he tries to seduce her by asking how she kisses: ‘Расскажи, как тебя целуют, | Расскажи, как целуешь ты’ (SP: 80). However, she is certain that this is only a game, that he does not want anything:

О, я знаю: его отрада —
Напряженно и страстно знать,
Что ему ничего не надо,
Что мне не в чем ему отказать.

(SP: 80)

The room witnesses the combination of opposed feelings that is played out between the protagonists: the desire to change everything, and the confidence in its impossibility.

A similar allusion to the impossibility of change is made in the poem ‘Ne budem pit’ iz odnogo stakana’ (1913). Here, the private interior with its everyday routine is seen as a perfect location for the connection of the two lovers. However, the

first lines already indicate that this connection is impossible. The heroine only dreams of being in one room with her lover, and of living a happy life together, but she is convinced that it will never happen: ‘Не поцелуемся мы утром рано, | А ввечеру не поглядим в окно’ (SP: 61). Once again, a key role is played by the window, here as the facilitator of an act signifying harmony and settled domestic bliss. Describing these impossibilities throughout the poem, she nevertheless ends up with a sudden indication that the lips of her lover (which she already decided not to kiss) are now the most dear thing to her: ‘И если б знал ты, как сейчас мне любы | Твои сухие розовые губы!’ (SP: 61) — yet another combination of opposite desires played out in interior settings. Equally, the room stands both for the settled domestic life the lyric heroine cannot have, and for the transgressive passionate life that lies within her direct experience.

The connection of interior location to an old, regular set of things, and its impossibility of remaining so associated is evident in another poem ‘Zdes’ vse to zhe, to zhe, chto i prezhe...’ (1912). This time, the regular set of life is broken by a sudden death. Someone was hanged in the house, and now his ghost comes to visit the room: ‘На истертом красном плюше кресел | Изредка мелькает тень его’ (SP: 68). The domestic surroundings become scary and haunted. The heroine, however, is not scared, as she has got her protection — ‘Я ношу на счастье | Темно-синий шелковый шнурок’ (SP: 68). The poem ends with the breaking of rules; despite all indications of ‘близкое ненастье’ (SP: 68), the heroine believes in luck and happiness. And this is characteristic of interior imagery in both *Večer* and *Chetki*: however ambiguous and anxious, interiors in these collections still have a lot of positive and joyful connotations. It is true that this joy is not stable, but the heroine believes in a brighter future, her rooms do not scare her. This sense fades out as the

development of the interior imagery progresses in Akhmatova's later cycles, which she wrote during or after 1917. The haunting that she briefly evokes in 1912 becomes a regular presence, and she moves from a sense of the room as a primary locus of emotional upheaval and moral transgression to a sense of the room as the expression of serious threat to the heroine's vulnerable self.

The Rooms of *Belaia staia*: 'Controlled Terror'

The rooms we see in *Belaia staia* are genetically close to those described in the previous poetical texts — they also bear witness to dynamism, to the different, often oppositional emotions that pass through them — but, starting from this poetical collection, the imaginary rooms of Akhmatova's poetry gradually become less joyful and sunny, more dark and scary. This reflects the biographical and socio-political situation that started to occur during this period — the First World War, the Revolution, the Russian Civil War, and the emigration of Akhmatova's close friends. Describing the general tone of *Belaia staia*, Joseph Brodsky points out:

The intensely personal lyricism of *White Flock* is tinged with the note that was destined to become her imprimatur: the note of controlled terror. The mechanism designed to keep in check emotions of a romantic nature proved to be as effective when applied to mortal fears. The latter was increasingly intertwined with the former until they resulted in emotional tautology, and *White Flock* marks the beginning of this process. With this collection, Russian poetry hit "the real, non-calendar twentieth century" but didn't disintegrate on impact.¹⁸

This sense of 'controlled terror' is partly provided by the new treatment of

¹⁸ Joseph Brodsky, *Less than One* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 41.

interior imagery in this collection. ‘Gde, vysokaia, tvoi tsyganenok’ (1914) introduces a heroine talking to a woman who has lost her son. Her heart becomes anxious (‘Станет сердце тревожным и томным’, SP: 109) and, in order to find her son, she walks through dark rooms, knowing however that this search is in vain: ‘Все брожу я по комнатам темным, | Все ищу колыбельку его’ (SP: 109). For the first time, it is the interior in Akhmatova’s poem that is described as dark, rather than the surrounding world. Moreover, the interior spaces do not act as somewhere to enclose the heroine in a protective sense; instead, her movement seems never-ending (‘все хожу’).

Another image of a room that captures past sentiments is depicted in ‘Tam ten’ moia ostalas’ i toskuet...’ (1917). In this poem, in order to capture the past, the heroine has left her shadow in the room. The shadow now lives in this room (‘все в той же синей комнате живет’, SP: 121), feels anxious and makes all the inhabitants feel anxious as well (‘в доме не совсем благополучно’; ‘хозяйке новой скучно’ ‘хозяин пьет вино’, SP: 121). The room is full of paradoxes: ‘огонь зажгут, а все-таки темно’ (SP: 121). At the end of the poem we learn that it is not only the ‘тень’ of the heroine that is left in the room, but also the shadow of her guest: ‘за тонкою стеною | Пришедший гость беседует со мною’ (SP: 121). We see that the common scheme taken from the previous poetical cycles (where a guest enters a room and changes everything, making the heroine feel anxious and vulnerable) is depicted in *Belaia staia* in a transformed state: the room is real and has new tenants, but the heroine and her guest stay there as shadows, as memories. Moreover, this poem also introduces the sense of surveillance, of always being looked at, never being really alone in one room (that very ‘note of controlled terror’) — the sense that will become

characteristic of Soviet modernity.¹⁹

Another poem located in a room in *Belaia staia* ‘Besshumno brodili po domu...’ (1914) captures the moment of death. The heroine enters the room of a dying friend. The death makes the interior change, look strange and unreal (‘Казалось, стены сияли | От пола до потолка’, SP: 112). The dying man asks for the heroine’s forgiveness, which she gives to him. This room witnesses several changes of states: from life to death, from pain to forgiveness (‘“Скажи: ты простить не можешь? | И я сказала: “Могу”’, SP: 112), and from non-recognition (‘И я не узнала его’, SP: 111) to recognition (‘Я опять узнала его’, SP: 112). The moment of change, of the transformation of different states is still of central importance for Akhmatova, while the room remains the perfect locus for this transformation to take place.

Also reinterpreted is the motif of steps and staircase. The poem ‘Pobeg’ (1914) describes the escape of the two lovers. We do not know what they are escaping from, but we know the trajectory of the escape (‘“Нам бы только до взморья добраться”’, SP: 100). The narrative starts within an interior: the protagonists rush down the stairs and look for the keys (probably to unlock their flat). The staircase functions in this poem again as a place of transition, of decision-making — the heroine does not agree with the idea of escape when she first hears it, she prefers not to face it (‘“Молчи...”’, SP: 100). Their behaviour on the staircase still indicates the indecisiveness and rush with which the decision is being made (‘И по лестнице стали спускаться, | Задыхаясь, искали ключи’, SP: 100). The staircase keeps its connotation of transitional space, where nothing is stable. This connotation is borrowed from the previous cycles, but this time the protagonists go further from their

¹⁹ Christina Kaier and Eric Naiman suggest that ‘surveillance functions as a basic ontological principle’ and becomes ‘an essential part of Soviet life’, see their Introduction to *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 8.

rooms. They manage to escape, but the sense of fear stays with them ('Горло тесно ужасом сжато', SP: 100). Finally, we witness the successful ending of their escape attempt. Yet this does not produce a transition to unambiguously positive emotions; it is still interlinked with doubt ("Я не сплю?", SP: 100). Thus, while the basic emotional palette is the same as in *Večer* and *Chetki*, and the room remains the central locus for the dynamic shifts between divided states, the way in which the conflicts are resolved has shifted considerably.

The Rooms of *Podorozhnik*: Staircase, Window, Floor

The next poetical cycle *Podorozhnik* (1921) seem to lose the sense of 'controlled terror' and go back to the images of the interior developed in earlier cycles, almost completely repeating them. For example, a poem (parts of which take place on the staircase) appears in this cycle under the name 'Techet reka nespeshno po doline' (1917). Here, we see the description of the old order of things, of domestic comfort and routine (as evoked in 'Zdes' vse to zhe, to zhe, chto i prezhe' or 'Gost'), everything is as is used to be 'живем как при Екатерине' (SP: 146). Again, the visitor who has been away from this 'многооконный дом' (SP: 146) for two days comes back. As usual, he kisses the grandmother's hand in the drawing room ('Целует бабушке в гостиной руку', SP: 146), and breaks all rules of etiquette by kissing the heroine on the lips on the staircase ('И губы мне на лестнице крутой', SP: 146) — already a traditional location for the breaking of rules in Akhmatova's poems.

'Ia okoshka ne zavesila...' (1916) repeats the earlier tradition of separating two planes of being by an interior detail. The window is deliberately left uncovered by the heroine the same way the door was left open in 'Beloi noch'iu'. In *Podorozhnik* it also

separates the heroine from her lover. However, this time she is not just waiting for her lover, she plays with him. She leaves the window open in order to keep him staying under the window and looking inside. He cannot leave; he is lured by this open window, and she feels happy about it ('Оттого мне нынче весело, | Что не можешь ты уйти', SP: 142). The window here not only separates the protagonists, but also 'directs' their movements; it plays the major role in dictating their behaviour, becomes a device that develops the poetical situation.

'Na shee melkikh chetok riad' (1913) introduces yet another metaphor related to interior imagery that becomes significant for Akhmatova — a parquet floor. In it, we find a heroine who is confused and dislocated. From a rather detailed description of her portrait we learn that she wears a muff and a rosary on her neck, wears silk clothes, her skin is pale, and her fringe is long ('Почти доходит до бровей | Моя незавитая челка', SP: 146) — we see a woman perfectly prepared for a romantic assignation. However from the detailed description of her appearance, we go on into the description of her gait, and it is not a gait of a person who is looking forward to a date with a beloved one ('И не похожа на полет | Походка медленная эта', SP: 146). In fact, the heroine feels as though she is about to fall down, to collapse; she feels unstable and anxious: 'Как будто под ногами плот, | А не квадратики паркета' (SP: 146). Finally we learn that she even finds it hard to breathe ('Неровно трудное дыханье', SP: 147), because the meeting that her dress anticipated in fact did not happen ('небывшего свиданья', SP: 147). But the crucial image is that of the parquet floor, which appears to move (it is compared to a raft), underlining the instability of the heroine's condition. From the understanding that the interior space is a vessel for the dynamic processes of natural forces and human presences (light, visitors, the heroine herself), we have moved to a situation where the

room itself is unstable. Once more, in this poem, a simple interior detail turns into a complex metaphor of emotional upheaval, becoming one of the main devices to explain the heroine's state of mind — a technique so frequently used by Akhmatova that it became a kind of signature. The frequency which Akhmatova refers to interior details to explain her heroines' state of mind resulted in criticism from Osip Mandelstam in the 1920s, in which the poet used the same image of standing on a piece of parquet floor to encapsulate Akhmatova's place in Russian poetic evolution. When talking about the stylistic method of Russian symbolism as 'столпничество' ('pillar ascetism'), he defined Akhmatova's poetical style as 'столпничество на паркетине' ('woodblock ascetism'), meaning that Akhmatova uses very few words in her poetry, and most of them are related to everyday life: 'Воистину русские символисты были столпниками стиля: на всех вместе не больше пятисот слов. [...] Но это по крайней мере были аскеты, подвижники. Они стояли на колодах. Ахматова же стоит на паркетине — это уже паркетное столпничество'.²⁰

Importantly, in this poem we see another variation of a common scheme of 'a guest in the room': the guest has not arrived, but even his 'non-arrival' ('небывшее свиданье') changes the state of the heroine and her perception of her room.

The Room of *Epicheskie motivy*: Cage

The mini-cycle *Epicheskie motivy*, written between 1914 and 1916, introduces a new variation of this scheme. In the second poem from this cycle, 'Pokinuv roshchi rodiny sviashchennoi' (1914–1916), Akhmatova describes not a room of her own, but the

²⁰ Osip Mandelstam, 'Zametki o poezii', *Russkoe iskusstvo*, 2 (1923), 68–70 (p. 68). Much later, Akhmatova remarked to her friend Lidiia Ginzburg that she took this description to heart: 'В двадцатых годах Осип был очень радикально настроен. Он тогда написал про меня: "столпничество на паркете"', see Lidiia Ginzburg, *O starom i novom* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1982), p. 396.

room of the painter Natan Al'tman, whom she visited regularly in 1913 while sitting for a portrait. This real situation is transformed in the poetical text. The heroine remembers her way to the artist's room, as she used to leave her own house ('рано я из дома выходила', SP: 325) and approach the place where the artist used to live ('я подходила к старому мосту', SP: 325). As she approaches his house, she describes his room: it is narrow, in fact it looks like a cage ('Там комната, похожая на клетку', SP: 325), and it is situated in the attic, in an overcrowded house ('под самой крышей в грязном шумном доме', SP: 325).²¹ However the poetic imagination makes this small and untidy space expand and become beautiful. In her analysis of the poem, Catriona Kelly suggests that 'the poem expresses a desire on Akhmatova's part to control representation of her physical persona by 'feminising' the painter, and even 'diminishing him by referring to him as a "siskin" '.²² However Kelly does not mention another important point of control — the heroine's control over poetic space, represented by the room. Akhmatova's heroine deliberately 'closes' the painter's room, describing it as a cage. In this cage the artist himself is a 'siskin', everything is small. He keeps painting her portrait, and as the portrait gets more and more like the heroine herself,²³ her memories expand. She then remembers not the cage-room, but the 'голуб[ая] мансард[а]' (SP: 325). The cage opens up and the artist-siskin flies away with the heroine: they go out from this room through the window to the roof to look at 'снег, Неву и облака' (SP: 325).

²¹ The situation that resembles 'шумный, грязный дом' at Trubnaia square in Barnet's film, see Chapter VI of this thesis.

²² Catriona Kelly, 'Painting and Autobiography: Anna Prismanova's "Pesok" and Anna Akhmatova's "Epicheskie motivy"', in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Kelly and Lovell, pp. 58–87 (p. 62).

²³ Kelly stresses, and I agree with this point of view, that 'Al'tman's representation of Akhmatova is not created according to this poetic evocation, but simply emerges, as does a reflection in a mirror', see Kelly, 'Painting and Autobiography', pp. 63–64.

Importantly, to reach this transformation, Akhmatova's heroine leaves the room through the window ('через окно на крышу выходила', SP: 325). Such movements through the thresholds of a room (doors, windows or roofs) are very common to many of Akhmatova's poems of the period, and most of the time, lead her poetic persona to creating unexpected meanings. However, this cycle demonstrates probably the last example of interior imageries to be used in a positive, joyful context. Akhmatova's next poetical cycle, *Anno Domini MCMXXI*, demonstrates that the sense of 'controlled terror' has finally got inside the room, and there is no way out of it.

The Rooms of *Anno Domini MCMXXI*: Fear

Akhmatova's last poetical cycle before a long interval introduces significantly fewer images of interiors than her earlier poetry; however the poems that do evoke interiors point to a very important change. The everyday impression of living in a room and exploring it (perhaps at times supersensitive) has become unrelentingly dark and despairing, estranged and neurotic.

An important case that illustrates Akhmatova's new manner of representing interior space is 'Bezhet'sk' (1921). Central to the poem is the motif of the door, already long established as a feature of Akhmatova's poetic interiors. However, if previously the door was the symbol of indecisiveness and possibility in Akhmatova's poems, this time the heroine knows for sure what to do: she refuses to enter, she shuts the door: 'Но я не вошла, | Я захлопнула страшную дверь' (SP: 150). The door is described as 'страшная'; it is the door not so much of physical space as of the 'тепем' (SP: 150) of memory, which Akhmatova's heroine this time chooses not to enter. The dynamic works in the opposite direction from the dynamic of Akhmatova's

early poetry: here we move from the reassuring world of the Old Russian city with its moon the colour of honey, and the son's 'cornflower-blue eyes', to a door that opens on the abyss.

'Tebe pokornoi? Ty soshel s uma!' (1921) (the sixth part of 'Chernyi son') employs the traditional scheme of a visitor in a room. This time, as in *Epicheskie motivy*, the heroine becomes a visitor herself, going into her lover's room, which is seen as a state of captivity ('неволя', SP: 155). Moreover, by visiting her lover she just escapes from one prison to another — as earlier she described the house of her husband as 'тюрьма' (SP: 155). Experiencing 'тюрьма' and 'неволя' within the two interiors mentioned in the text, the heroine does not feel safer outside them. The atmosphere outside is scary and unwelcoming: 'ветры выли в поле', 'за окошком сторожила тьма' (SP: 155). In this situation, the heroine compares herself to a bird who tries to get in the room through the window and hurts herself: 'Так птица о прозрачное стекло | Всем телом бьется в зимнее ненастье, | И кровь пятнает белое крыло' (SP: 155). The window, rather than a liminal object, has become a barrier. Certainly, even this painful experience turns out to be positive for the protagonist. As she leaves her lover's 'неволя' she feels 'спокойствие и счастье' (SP: 155). But then the mood changes again. 'Прощай, мой тихий' (SP: 155), says the heroine, and we learn that it is the last farewell and that was their last meeting.

The poem 'Za ozerom luna ostanovilas'...' (1922) draws another picture related to the interior imagery that is full of anxiety. In this poem, Akhmatova confuses the inside and the outside by comparing the moon to a window of an uncanny house:

За озером луна остановилась

И кажется отворенным окном
В притихший, ярко освещенный дом,
Где что-то нехорошее случилось.

(SP: 158)

The protagonist is looking through this ‘window-moon’ trying to guess what has happened ‘inside’, and all the options that come to her relate to some kind of misfortune or loss:

Хозяина ли мертвым привезли,
Хозяйка ли с любовником сбежала,
Иль маленькая девочка пропала,
И башмачок у заводи нашли.

(SP: 158)

From below (‘с земли’, SP: 158) she cannot guess what has happened, but the feeling of terrible misfortune (‘страшная беда’, SP: 158) pervades the atmosphere. The sense of doom is everywhere — even in the sky above. Although the misfortunes that Akhmatova describes in this poem are of a private character, they seem to be inflicted upon almost everyone, and therefore it feels as though they are eternal, despite the fact that everyone remains silent (‘мы сразу замолчали’, SP: 158).²⁴ Importantly, to describe this feeling of universal anxiety, Akhmatova refers to interior imagery, to the sense of misfortune that originates within a private interior, in a family house. Moreover, the image of a ‘moon-window’ can also refer to the sense of total surveillance that emerged in these years, a sense of living in a place where everything

²⁴ This is one of a very few poems where Akhmatova uses ‘мы’ instead of pronouns in the singular.

can be seen, nothing can be hidden, and no one can be truly private (even in the sky-house).

The sense of ‘controlled terror’ that started to emerge in *Belaia staia*, fully opens up in *Anno Domini* and is especially supported by the images of interior spaces. ‘Strakh, vo t’me perebiraia veshchi’ (1921) becomes perhaps the major poem to illustrate the connection.

In the room that is described in this poem we meet all the details that we saw in earlier ‘interior’ poems, however here their connotations are turned into the complete opposites. As in many previously described poems, there is a room, the heroine and her guest. This time, however, the guest is not her lover, it is her fear — ‘страх’ (SP: 168). And it is this ‘страх’ that changes and directs everything in the room. In ‘Strakh, vo t’me perebiraia veshchi’, it is ‘страх’ that sets the light (‘лунный луч наводит на топор’; ‘спички спрятал и свечу задул’, SP: 168); creates various special effects (‘плещется водою’; ‘стук зловещий’, SP: 168); makes the inventory of the decorations (‘перебирает вещи’; ‘половицам шатким счет ведет’, SP: 168), and finally turns the room where Akhmatova’s lyrical persona used to pray to the window beam in ‘Molius’ okonnomu luchu’ and play with the objects of everyday life in ‘Vecherniaia komnata’ into a haunted house.

Many details that we met in previous poems become different here. The beam that goes through the window now is not a jolly and simple beam of sun that made the heroine happy in ‘Molius’ okonnomu luchu’, but ‘лунный луч’ (SP: 168) that points directly to an axe. The walls that were white and coloured by the sunbeams from the outside, and by which the heroine’s shadow was talking to her lover in ‘Tam ten’ moia ostalas’ i toskuet’ now are associated only with ‘стук зловещий’ (SP: 168).

The poem also has a reference to the floor. Previously, in ‘Na shee melkikh chetok riad’, from *Podorozhnik*, the floor was described as ‘квадратики паркета’ (SP: 146), on which the heroine, all dressed up, was waiting for her lover — and, because he did not come, she feels unsteady; the floor feels like a raft. This time we see ‘шаткие половицы’ (SP: 168). So the floor of the room is still very unsteady, but this unsteadiness invites different kinds of sentiments to those expressed in ‘Na shee melkikh chetok riad’. Now, the centre of the poem has moved from the heroine standing on the floor and waiting for her lover, to someone (or something) who counts the woodblocks, creating the sense of constant surveillance. Being in this room becomes so unbearable for the heroine that she feels she would prefer to be killed: ‘Лучше бы поблескиваньё дул | В грудь мою направленных винтовок’ (SP: 168). She tries to escape the feeling of anxiety that follows her in her room by every means: she holds her cross, she prays to God to bring back her peace (‘Боже, мир душе моей верни!’, SP: 168). In previous situations of this kind Akhmatova’s heroines managed to do so: in ‘Zdes’ vse to zhe, to zhe, chto i prezhe’, ‘темно-синий шелковый шнурок’ (SP: 68) saved the heroine from ‘нечаянье’ (SP: 68); praying to the beam of sun did bring the heroine ‘утешенье’ (SP: 51) in ‘Molius’ okonnomu luchu’; and even in ‘Tebe pokornoi? Ty soshel s uma!’ from *Anno Domini* the heroine managed to feel, if only for a short moment, ‘спокойствие и счастье’ (SP: 155). Here, all the prayers are in vain. The ‘deadly’ originates in the very centre of the room, on the bed sheet: ‘запах тленья обморочно сладкий | Веет от прохладной простыни’ (SP: 168). Many of Akhmatova’s earlier ‘interior’ poems also described different smells, but those were smells of roses, chrysanthemums and dahlias; in this poem, all the smells that used to originate in the room turn into just one ‘обморочно сладкий’ smell of decay, of dying. Many previous poems also featured a bed and sheets, but it was

‘горяча’ (SP: 51) as the pillow from *Dva stikhotvoreniia*, it was the place where the heroine slept and dreamt of her lover. Here, the bed is cold, no one sleeps on it. Moreover, the position of the bed and mention of the cold sheet and the smell of dying creates an image of a dying person.²⁵ This reflects the historical context of a poem written in 27–28 August 1921, just a few days after both the poet Alexander Blok’s and Akhmatova’s husband Nikolai Gumilev’s deaths (7 and 24 August 1921 respectively).²⁶ A room with its everyday objects becomes a transitional space between life and death, and the feeling of anxiety that originates here now cannot be escaped.

This poem from *Anno Domini* demonstrates the development of interior motifs in Akhmatova’s poetry throughout the 1910s and 1920s. We see that the most important details that Akhmatova employed in her descriptions of interiors in earlier poems are still here: the window and the light coming from the outside, the floor, the walls, the bed. However all of these details change their connotations to their complete opposite: everything becomes ‘зловещее’ and the room firmly positions itself as a locus of an eternal anxiety and fear.

²⁵ The link between bed and tomb is common throughout history, and concomitant with this parallel is the relation of sleeping and dying, where sleep may be an anticipatory symbol of death and death is euphemistically referred to as eternal rest, transforming the bed and the room where it is situated into a tomb-like space. For an interesting analysis of this motif in medieval literature, see Cary Howie, *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The image of the deathbed is also one of the favorite motives in Evgenii Bauer’s films. Like Akhmatova, Bauer shows death in the privacy of one’s bedroom, the location least associated with death during that time. Walter Benjamin observes that in the culture of modernity, unlike the medieval one, people live in rooms that ‘have never been touched by death’. ‘Dry dwellers of eternity’, as the author calls the modern people, ‘are stored away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs’ when their death approaches, see Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 83–109. The closed intimate space of a bedroom, which previously used to be a location of ritual and communal celebrations, repositions its meaning in both Akhmatova’s and Bauer’s works, becoming once again a space of death, representing the fusion of the old and the new. For a discussion of the shift in the meaning of a bedroom, see Roger Chartier, ‘The Refuges of Intimacy: The Chamber’, in *A History of Private Life III: Passions of the Renaissance*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 217–220.

²⁶ The same year, similar imagery appears in the poem by Osip Mandelstam ‘Umyvalsia noch’iu na dvore’ (1921). Although set outdoors (‘на дворе’), this poem creates the same sense of an enclosed, uncanny space. See Osip Mandelstam, ‘Umyvalsia noch’iu na dvore’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by G.P. Struve and B.A. Filippoff, 3 vols (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnoe literaturnoe sodruzhestvo, 1967), i: *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 96.

The image of interior spaces in Akhmatova's early poetry is diverse and dynamic. We see that in most of her early poems it is the emotions of her heroines — and their rapid changes — that are mediated or even explained by different interior objects: windows, doors, staircases, etc. Akhmatova uses interior details to indirectly indicate the changes that occur to her heroines ('Подушка уже горяча | С обеих сторон', SP: 51), to help them make a decision or never make one ('Ах, дверь не запирала я', SP: 38). As a rule, the decisions her heroines make within the interiors are of a paradoxical kind; the room becomes a locus where two opposite emotions coexist and interplay. Additionally, the room is a place of a meeting (or non-meeting, 'небывшее свиданье', SP: 147) of the heroine with her lover — and all the feelings connected to these meetings are expressed and mediated through interior imagery. As we have seen, this scheme of a meeting in a room remains in Akhmatova's poems till the last cycle. However, in *Anno Domini* it gains the connotation of death and loss — to reflect the political situation of the time and personal situation of the poet.

By always placing her poetic persona in domestic settings that are ambiguous and paradoxical, Akhmatova creates a heroine who is a fragile person in an age of change. Her rooms are full of instability, doubt and anxiety, full of actions that are not traditional to these settings. Welcoming and familiar in the 1910s or frightening and estranged in the 1920s, these rooms, however, remain the perfect loci to show the emotions of the poetical persona, and indicate sudden changes in her attitude and moods. In 1910s and 1920s Russia, as the pace of change accelerated, the social, intellectual, and social structures by which people had defined their lives weakened. New social and intellectual structures had not yet evolved to support the new self-definition. By poetically using everyday domestic imagery that is familiar to everyone, Anna Akhmatova demonstrated to her contemporaries her own experience

of fragility, dynamism and change that could be poeticised. For Akhmatova, during this age of change and expectations, the simple room becomes a perfect device to show the fluidity of time and inevitability of change.

CHAPTER II

Andrei Belyi. The Apartment's Consciousness

Andrei Belyi (penname of Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev, 1880–1934) created a distinctive stylistic universe that is particularly recognised for its use of poetic language and a complex philosophical system of symbols and signs. This chapter will explore how these philosophical and poetical ideas are exhibited in the images of the domestic apartment in his autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* (1917–1918).

Although interior worlds are important in Belyi's prose in general, most notably in his novel *Peterburg* (1916), I focus here on *Kotik Letaev* as representative of the genre of fictional autobiography, a genre that, as I argue, is better suited to demonstrating the direct connection between the apartment and the self.

***Kotik Letaev*: Style and Structure**

The writing of *Kotik Letaev*, Belyi's third novel after *Serebrianyi golub'* (1909) and the novel that remains his most famous prose work, *Peterburg*, started in October 1916 in Switzerland, where Belyi was at that time a member of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical circle.¹ Completed in September 1917, it was first published serially in the journal *Skify* during 1917 and 1918, and was printed as a book in 1922. It was

¹ For more on the anthroposophical idea and its connection to Andrei Belyi's works, see Andrey Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simbolistom i pochemu ia ne perestal im byt' vo vseh fazakh moego ideinogo i khudozhestvennogo razvitiia* (Ann Arbor, Mich: Ardis, 1982), pp. 9–11. For an outline of the character of the relationship between Steiner and Belyi, see the memoirs of Belyi's first wife Anna (Asia) Turgeneva, Anna Turgeneva, 'Andrei Belyi i Rudolf Shteiner', *Mosty*, 15 (1970), 236–251. The three most cogent analyses of *Kotik Letaev* through the pattern of anthroposophy are John Elsworth, *Andrei Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 17–37; Gerald Janecek, 'Anthroposophy in *Kotik Letaev*', *Orbis Litterarum*, 29 (1974), 245–267; and Michael Molnar, *Body of Words: A Reading of Belyi's 'Kotik Letaev'* (Birmingham: Dept. of Russian Language and Literature, University of Birmingham, 1987).

originally intended to be the first part of an uncompleted autobiographical cycle under the name *Moia zhizn'*, which was later transformed into a series of memoirs.

Kotik Letaev presents a skilfully masked autobiographical text that describes the author's childhood experience between the ages of three and five (1883–1885), but eventually goes far beyond this timeframe and includes the time before he was born and after he will die. The protagonist and narrator is an observer of all that is happening around him in his house and inside him in his consciousness. He is not mature enough to understand the meaning of all events correctly, to put them into chronological order, or to connect them with his own personal history. To reproduce the child's viewpoint, Belyi uses a highly original narrative that has become the main point of analysis and admiration for his critics. It is exactly due to this complex narrative structure that *Kotik Letaev* was called Belyi's 'most unique and original work' by the noted critic D.S. Mirsky.² Agreeing on the uniqueness of *Kotik's* narrative style, scholars, however, tend to disagree on the origins of its structure.

The majority of the commentaries on *Kotik Letaev* and its autobiographical nature focus on the novel's relationship to anthroposophy. These critics trace back the idea of creating *Kotik Letaev* to the time of Belyi's arrival at the Anthroposophical Colony of Rudolf Steiner at Dornach in 1914, and see the novel as 'an artistic embodiment of Steiner's precepts'.³ According to the founder of anthroposophy, there exists an objective, spiritual reality that can be experienced through inner development and intense training. Moreover, by following these specific spiritual exercises, it is possible to reconstruct one's previous reincarnations and go back to the origins of eternal spiritual reality and to the very origins of the human being; to the Garden of Eden, Christ and the Second Adam. *Kotik Letaev*, therefore, is seen through

² D.S. Mirsky, *Contemporary Russian Literature* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1926), p. 234.

³ Janecek, 'Anthroposophy', p. 245.

these philosophical patterns as a textual manifestation of Belyi's own spiritual development. Most 'initiated' critics suggest that there are 'links to Steiner's teaching [...] in nearly every page of the novel'.⁴

Another strand of scholarship, while not completely denying *Kotik Letaev*'s anthroposophical connections, does not find this 'anthroposophical initiation into occult mysteries'⁵ a sufficient basis to explain the novel's complex narrative structure. Putting the anthroposophical associations aside, these critics focus on the 'formal' aspects of the novel; its composition, plot, structural development and linguistic shifts. The body of text is seen therefore as a complex system of specific structural elements. Throughout the history of *Kotik Letaev* criticism, this system has gained different names such as 'кристаллизация',⁶ 'орнаментальная проза',⁷ or 'a new "mythical realism"',⁸ depending on what kind of structural elements would be defined as dominant.

D.S. Mirsky's *History of Russian Literature*, for example, sees the development of *Kotik Letaev*'s plot in the interactions of two parallel lines, one of which lies in the developing of the child's real life, while the other may be found in the complex interaction of the 'spheres' of Kotik's imagination. Throughout the text, this process is represented by the two terms 'рой' and 'строй', and the narrative can metaphorically be described as: 'кристаллизация хаотических бесконечных "роев" и четко очерченные и упорядоченные "строи"'.⁹ This opposition is multiplied by the fact that Belyi's father (and the father of Kotik as well) was a famous

⁴ Gerald Janecek, 'Introduction', in Andrei Belyi, *Kotik Letaev* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), pp. xi–xxii (p. xviii).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mirsky, p. 727.

⁷ Viktor Shklovskii, 'Andrei Belyi', in *Andrei Belyi: Pro et Contra*, ed. by A.V. Lavrov (St Petersburg: RKhGI, 2004), pp. 677–696 (p. 680).

⁸ Roger Keys, *The Reluctant Modernist: Andrei Belyi and the Development of Russian Fiction, 1902–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 233.

⁹ Mirsky, p. 727.

mathematician, who belonged to the world of order, ‘строй’. Having been under his father’s strong influence, Belyi, however, preferred the chaos and energy of ‘пой’, and the composition of *Kotik Letaev* is a skilful combination of these two oppositions.

The formalist critic Viktor Shklovskii also sees the development of *Kotik Letaev*’s plot in a linear form. For Shklovskii, *Kotik Letaev* is an example of what he calls ‘орнаментальная проза’, interwoven by the outer world and inner consciousness. However, unlike Mirsky (and in line with his own theory of literary language), Shklovskii sees that the novel’s *suzhet* is almost replaced by its autobiographical *fabula*: ‘Движение сюжета взято элементарно; можно сказать, что в действительности сюжета нет, есть одна фабула: человек живет, растет, старится’.¹⁰

This dominant line of ‘живет, растет, старится’ is supported by different types of metaphorical lines. Strikingly, in order to illustrate this scheme, Shklovskii describes it through a detail that is directly related to the topic of my discussion — houses:

На основе этой линии идут настройками, многоэтажными домами метафорические ряды. Ряды эти — представим их себе в виде домов — связаны друг с другом всяческими мостиками. Подвигаясь, фабула дает предлог для новых рядов, которые, подвигаясь, сейчас же связываются с уже существующими. Так написан ‘Котик Летаев’.¹¹

Having given an overview of the novel’s construction, Shklovskii continues with the further critical exploration of different structural and linguistic elements such as specific sonic effects (‘звукоходы’), rhythm, and metaphorical and allegorical

¹⁰ Shklovskii, ‘Andrei Belyi’, p. 680.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 684.

schemes. All of these elements would later help critics to establish Andrei Belyi as one of the best representatives of literary modernism, with particular affinities to Joyce.¹²

Among the cohort of critics who focus on Belyi's connection to modernism, I would single out Stephen Hutchings. Hutchings approaches Belyi's autobiographical works as a part of the modernist discussion of escape from the everyday into the eternal.¹³ Hutchings is one of the few critics who analyses Belyi's unusual attention towards the notion of the room and its architectonics. For Hutchings, however, the apartment is not treated on its own, but is depicted in its function of 'the archetypal locus of the modern Russian everyday' and the primary container of *byt*.¹⁴ This projects Hutchings's discussion onto the broader context of the '*byt/bytie*' dichotomy in Russian literature, which is, however, beyond the focus of my analysis.¹⁵ Although Hutchings describes many examples of how the apartment in *Kotik Letaev* is connected to the 'intimacy, creative interaction and the incarnation by the self of others, the capitulation of the self by an anonymous other,'¹⁶ he does not take the apartment as the main object of analysis. Instead, the room is used instrumentally, to prove Hutchings's thesis about a 'dynamic process that rewrites *byt* as myth and "refamiliarizes" the alienating abstractions of the routine'.¹⁷ As a result, Hutchings

¹² Although *Kotik Letaev* is also understood as a modernist text, most of the comparative studies on Belyi interpret his earlier novel *Peterburg*. See, for example, Peter I. Barta, *Bely, Joyce, and Döblin: Peripatetics in the City Novel* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Marshall Berman, 'Bely's *Petersburg*: The Shadow Passport', in *All that Is Solid Melts into Air*, pp. 255–269.

¹³ Stephen C. Hutchings, 'The Struggle with *byt* in Belyi's *Kotik Letaev* and *The Christened Chinaman*', in *Russian Modernism: The Transfiguration of the Everyday* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 141–167.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁵ The *Byt/bytie* dichotomy in Belyi's works is also the subject of analysis in L.K. Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman Peterburg* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988). However, if Dolgoplov treats the topic in a very classical way, representing *byt* as something to be escaped from into the abstraction of *bytie*, Hutchings sees this initial shift from *byt* into *bytie* as 'transcended', which would 'imply a contrast between a fixed state and a motion of transcendence', see Hutchings, p. 146.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

¹⁷ Hutchings, p. 145.

argues, the space of the apartment is able ‘to become again a site of creative intimacy between son and father, self and other’.¹⁸

Taking into account Hutchings’s discussion of the room as the embodiment of *byt* and imagination, I shall also base my analysis on Viktor Shklovskii’s scheme, and view the apartment as one of the constructive forces of the narrative — regardless of its relationship to *byt*. Following Shklovskii, I shall take the room as a dominant motif of the novel, and explore its artistic and poetic potential in the patterns of the text.

The Autobiography of the Apartment

Before proceeding to the analysis of the actual text, it is important to mention that, just like Akhmatova’s and Krzhizhanovskii’s imaginary rooms, the domestic topography of Belyi’s *Kotik Letaev* has strong autobiographical roots. Yet, this is an autobiographical *novel*, a work of fiction. In order to understand the nature of the artistic transformation of *Kotik Letaev*’s rooms, it is essential to compare them to their non-fictional version, which may be found in Belyi’s memoirs *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii* (1930).

As well as being considered one of the best accounts of Russian modernism,¹⁹ *Na rubezhe* shows the decline of what became known as ‘профессорская культура’ — the culture of the professoriate.²⁰ According to Belyi, the primary locus of this culture was ‘профессорская квартира’ — the apartment of his father, the famous professor of mathematics Nikolai Bugaev. The *byt* and traditions of this apartment were so strong that they defined its dwellers’ character and behaviour.

¹⁸ Hutchings, p. 145.

¹⁹ Lazar Fleishman, ‘Bely’s Memoirs’, in *Andrey Bely. Spirit of Symbolism*, ed. by John E. Malmstad (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 216–241 (p. 218).

²⁰ For more discussion of this culture, see V. Kantor, ‘Russkoe iskusstvo i “professorskaia kul’tura”’, *Voprosy literatury*, 3 (1978), 155–286 (p. 159).

Belyi's father, for example, is seen as a person divided into two by the apartment's topography: one side of him always exists outside the apartment in the high thoughts of mathematical integrals; and the other part is situated 'в малой клеточке этого мира, в квартире'.²¹ Here, in his flat, his high mathematical reflections are useless, and Professor Bugaev is doomed to run from one room to another, failing to find his own place: 'И его все гоняют из комнаты в комнату: за математику. Он математикой этой мешает нам жить'.²²

Moreover, Belyi's mother learns to define a professor only by his belonging to a big and proper study room, and therefore habitually criticises Professor Bugaev for the absence of such a study: 'Не комната, а комнатушка; [...] мать говорила, что у всякого профессора есть приличный кабинет, а у него — нечто вполне недопустимое для профессора'.²³

Seeing the life of his father, who has always been preoccupied with lectures and abstract thoughts about integrals, young Belyi starts to define all mathematicians through their relationship to everyday life. All mathematicians, Belyi is convinced, 'hire' their everyday life, cannot truly experience it: 'Быт жизни берется математиком вполне "напрокат", как мебель черт знает каковского стиля: было бы на чем сидеть'.²⁴

Finally, the whole social universe of young Belyi is defined by the structure of his apartment with his child's room situated at its centre:

²¹ Andrei Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989), p. 66.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 174.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

Я вылез из детской — в квартиру; и находил в ней среду; между нашей квартирой, Арбатом, Москвою, тогдашней Россией и детскою комнаткой был мне рубеж, потому что квартира уже — круг квартир, подчиненных единому правилу.²⁵

This single set of rules that defines Belyi's life is strongly connected to the topography of the flat. Reflecting on the main topics in his life, Belyi writes that all the misfortunes of his life were provoked not by people, but by his apartment. It is here where Belyi develops the idea of the violence and guilt of his flat, where the flat becomes animated and takes full responsibility for what has happened and what will happen to its dwellers: 'так, виноваты не они [жильцы], а квартира'.²⁶ This apartment expands, unites with other such apartments, and finally becomes abstract, a kind of statistical phenomenon: 'наша квартира, сплетенная с другими квартирами: виновата профессорская среда и профессорская квартира — не наша, а среднеарифметическая квартира профессора'.²⁷

The image of this 'среднеарифметическая квартира' is connected also to the final idea of Belyi's memoirs — the idea of an end. The end of this apartment becomes for the author also the end of the century and the end of the whole lifestyle: 'Тема конца — имманентна моему развитию; она навеяна темой другого конца: конца одной из профессорских квартир, типичной все же, ибо в ней — конец быта, конец века'.²⁸

However, if in the memoirs Belyi criticises the apartment and shows its end, in fictional works he diametrically changes the trajectories of this discourse. *Kotik Letaev* is not a chronicle of the writer's times, nor an autobiography, but a fictional

²⁵ Belyi, *Na rubezhe*, p. 176.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 445.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

novel that presents real events, people and places through the artistic imagination, and it is this artistic imagination that totally transforms the image of the apartment depicted in *Na rubezhe*. If, in the memoirs, the apartment marks the end of Belyi's development, in *Kotik* it remains strongly connected to his birth, forming the creative personality of the protagonist.

Corridors of Perception: The Emergence of the 'I'

As has been widely recognised by critics, *Kotik Letaev* is a novel that shows 'становление самосознающей души'.²⁹ This rise of spiritual consciousness is depicted through a multi-layered autobiographical narrative that contains myth, reality, imagination, and complex metaphorical constructions, all connected to domestic imagery.

The novel is set in the rooms of an urban apartment. However, as I shall prove, this locus demonstrates Belyi's ability to go beyond its usual narrative function as an urban background; instead, it *forms* the narrative structure of the text.

The birth and development of domestic imagery in the novel is strongly connected to the birth and development of Kotik's consciousness. In fact, it runs parallel to it. The first moment of Kotik's consciousness is seen as a dot, the geometrical centre of his universe: 'Первый сознательный миг мой есть — точка'.³⁰ The dot then turns into a sphere ('становится шаром')³¹ — another abstract geometric figure. At this stage, Kotik is unable to form the whole picture of perception; his consciousness is still very fragile, and could be easily destroyed by the

²⁹ Vladimir Piskunov, N. Aleksandrov, G. Parkhomenko, 'Stanovlenie samosoznaiushchei dushi', in Andrei Belyi, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by Vladimir Piskunov, 5 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Respublika', 1994–1997), v (1997), pp. 5–23 (p. 5).

³⁰ Andrei Belyi, 'Kotik Letaev', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, v, pp. 24–157 (p. 32).

³¹ Ibid.

surrounding chaos: ‘шар — разлетается: бессмыслица, пронизывая его, разрывает его’.³² It is only the next step in the development of Kotik’s consciousness that is able to hold together both his world and the narrative about his world — the novel itself. This is when the first image of a new spatial unit appears.

The next stage is marked by another spatial unit — the corridors of Kotik’s apartment. The image of the corridor emerges through the perception of the skin as a vault, which later is associated with the space of a long corridor. Following this line of ontological metaphors of the child’s consciousness, the corridor starts to represent space in general: ‘Кожа мне стала, как... свод: таково нам пространство; мое первое представление о нем, что оно — коридор’.³³

This metaphor starts a series of references playing on Kotik’s first impression of space as a projection of his own body. So far Kotik cannot distinguish his personal space from space in general. Therefore, the description of space shifts to some very detailed descriptions of Kotik’s inner body as a kind of sacred temple; spatial and corporal metaphors co-exist in one image: ‘чудесные дуги скелетного храма; впереди — проход... к белому алтарю; и там — череп; из огромности гулких зал, среди белого великолепия выступов вы повертываетесь назад — к выходу’.³⁴ In a single bound the narration jumps from Kotik’s body into the space of the outer, bigger world, and this first attempt to understand bigger space is frightening: ‘изумление, смятение, страх овладевает: действительность’.³⁵

The narration needs another spatial unit to represent the next stage of development of Kotik’s mind and its progression from the abstract to the specific. It is here where the concept of the room appears. This stage is characterised by the

³² Belyi, ‘Kotik Letaev’, p. 32.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁵ Ibid.

understanding that the body is not an abstract whole any more. The body has its shape, it is divided into parts. This understanding comes through the exploration of the apartment's structure, and the realisation that the apartment has rooms. Just as the apartment is divided into separate rooms, the body is divided into parts. Hence, rooms *become* the parts of Kotik's body: 'Комнаты — части тела'.³⁶

The rooms not only locate and divide the self, but also help the protagonist to understand the eternal cosmos that contains everything and is the beginning of everything. Going through the corridors and rooms that have helped Kotik to distinguish his own body, his young consciousness eventually reaches the universe. The universe appears to have the same structure as the apartment — and the same structure as Kotik's consciousness. The topography of the apartment acts as a universal structure of the outer world as well as of the 'inner interior'. The rooms represent both the body parts of an individual, and the parts of the eternal universe: 'это — органы тела... вселенной'.³⁷ The consciousness expands; represented by the dot in the beginning of the novel it turns into the universe. Following this transformation, the body turns into cosmos.

For the child, the apartment's topology, the rooms and corridors that surround him, become the only instrument of perceiving reality and, at the same time, of understanding it, making it familiar for the growing consciousness. There are three functions of the rooms that Kotik establishes: (1) resemblance — 'переходы, комнаты, коридоры напоминают нам наше тело'; (2) depiction — 'показуют нам наше тело'; (3) transformation — 'прообразуют нам наше тело'.³⁸ The last of these is the most important for this discussion, as it best illustrates my main argument about the mobility of traditionally immovable domestic space.

³⁶ Belyi, p. 36.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

³⁸ Ibid.

Transforming Time

One of the main levels of transformation generated by the rooms is the transformation of time. Having discovered space as an elemental quality of being, Kotik still needs to define himself in time. The representation and transformation of time has a rather complicated embodiment in the novel, and differs from the usual autobiographical chronology. Usually, the time structure of an autobiography could be represented as a certain point in the present, from which the past is remembered and described in chronological order.³⁹ However, *Kotik Letaev* has a much more complicated chronological structure that is built around the image of the rooms and its transformation.

In *Zapiski chudaka* (1922), his third autobiographical novel, Belyi gives a broad explanation of the nature of his autobiographical writings, and the way chronology is represented there:

В моей жизни есть две биографии: биография насморков, потребления пищи, сварения, прочих естественных отправлений; считать биографию эту моей — все равно что считать биографией биографию этих вот брюк. Есть другая: она беспричинно вторгается снами в бессонницу бденья, когда погружаюсь я в сон, то сознание витает за гранью рассудка, давая лишь знать о себе очень странными знаками: снами и сказкой... Пересечения двух этих жизней в сознании — нет: между ними — границы; меж тем пересекаются параллельные линии двух биографий в единственной точке: в первейшем моменте.⁴⁰

³⁹ For a competent discussion of chronology and linearity as a general principle in modern European autobiographies, see the article by Burton Pike 'Time in Autobiography', in which the author comments on 'a striking common characteristic' of autobiographically-oriented authors that lies in 'obsessive preoccupation with the chronological aspect of time', see Burton Pike, 'Time in Autobiography', *Comparative Literature*, 28:4 (1976), 326–342 (p. 327).

⁴⁰ Andrei Belyi, 'Zapiski chudaka', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, v (1997), pp. 280–496 (p. 418).

In the text of the novel *Kotik Letaev*, one cannot find such traditional ‘labels’ of the autobiographical chronological narrative (or the ‘biography of the trousers’ as Belyi calls it) as ‘yesterday’, ‘today’, ‘tomorrow’, ‘some days ago’, ‘some years ago’, and ‘when I was a child’. Instead, the spatial units such as rooms represent time in its abstract quality.

Throughout the novel, Belyi uses a specific way of introducing different moments in time that he calls ‘миги’. Every ‘миг’ is connected to a particular interior or domestic object.

The first moment of consciousness takes place in a corridor, and eventually becomes the corridor itself. Time here has a dual nature. On the one hand, this point in time is perceived spatially; a moment *is* a corridor. On the other hand, it is also the embodiment of a memory: ‘наш коридор представляется воспоминанием о времени, когда он был мне кожей’.⁴¹ The corridor also structures the process of remembering through different movements: ‘повернись назад — он сжимается сзади дырой; впереди открывается просветом; переходики, коридоры и переулки мне впоследствии ведомы’.⁴² On a metanarrative level it also structures the flow of narrative, the memory itself.

At the same time, the rooms and corridors are not only containers of the past and of memories, they act also as transitional elements. The rooms feature as a kind of time machine that is able to transport Kotik to different realities and different states of the past, including to the beginning of history: ‘Переходы, комнаты, коридоры, мне встающие в первых мигах сознания, переселяют меня в древнейшую эру жизни’.⁴³

⁴¹ Belyi, p. 32.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 35.

Entering these rooms might mean entering another time that could capture Kotik forever: ‘все комнаты, комнаты, комнаты! — в которые, если вступишь, то — не вернешься обратно, а будешь охвачен предметами’.⁴⁴

The narrator repeats this sequence (‘все комнаты, комнаты, комнаты!’) on three different occasions throughout the novel, set on each occasion in a new period of time. First, he finds himself in his mother’s womb — the rooms lead him to the beginnings of his own existence (‘довременное сознание’).⁴⁵ On the second occasion, the encounter with his rooms leads Kotik to the distant past, to mythological corridors where Kotik is accompanied by some strange mythological figures: ‘Странно было это суровое шествие по коридору квартиры — в сопровождении человекоподобного существа — со свечою в руке’.⁴⁶ The third time, Kotik’s imagination travels to the cosmos, where time is universal. Eternity is seen wrapped in the chair covers: ‘Вечность в чехлах’, as the subtitle of one of the novel’s chapters suggests.⁴⁷

Having distinguished three embodiments of general time (personal past before one’s birth — in the mother’s womb; mythological past; and universal eternal time) Kotik now needs to define more certain moments of his time. If rooms and corridors represent past, future and eternity in general, then parts of the rooms are associated with particular events and moments in Kotik’s life. Different domestic objects provoke particular memoirs about the events connected to them. The curtain, for example, is associated with the moment when Kotik’s father burned it; the chair is associated with Christmas and guests that sat on it.

⁴⁴ Belyi, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

These particular objects (and moments) build up the new chronology of the novel, which is not linear, but rather abrupt. Memories arise as the imagination is travelling through the rooms of the apartment.

However, very soon the particular days and moments in Kotik's life become the 'everyday', the routine. Once more, this new structure of time is embodied in the very fabric of the apartment — it hangs down from the ceiling: 'Дни текли вереницами в тени, которые свесились с потолков, от углов, сопрягаясь в огромное многорожие, которое есть теперь: [...] пустота; и она мне темна; и она мне грустна!'.⁴⁸

Finally, the future is also presented through and in the rooms. In the epilogue of the novel, having described all his past, Kotik is looking forward to what is ahead of him, and these new moments are embodied in the new rooms: 'Ожидают меня: МОИ НОВЫЕ МИГИ; и — НОВЫЕ КОМНАТЫ — КОМНАТЫ, КОМНАТЫ!'.⁴⁹

Transforming the Others: Wallpaper of Creativity

Having distinguished his own body and his own past in space and time, Kotik now needs to define what is beyond his body, what is *the other*. The universal structure of his apartment also comes to help. This outer world that is not 'I' first appears as an understanding of the difference between the inside and the outside.

This understanding comes with the estrangement of the rooms. As has been shown earlier, Kotik sees the rooms as parts of his body. Originally, he perceives himself as being in unity with his apartment; he moves through the apartment in the same way he moves through his own consciousness. However, very soon he detaches

⁴⁸ Belyi, p. 137.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

himself from the rooms: ‘Они [комнаты] сброшены мною; и — висят надо мной’.⁵⁰ This detachment marks the arrival of the understanding of the outer world in Kotik’s mind.

This detachment is also reproduced on the narrative level of the novel. As soon as Kotik starts to see the rooms as the other space, the separate chapter entitled ‘Комнаты’ appears in the text — the rooms grow into a new unit of text. It is in this chapter (and in these rooms) that the outer world is born: ‘Квартирой отчетливо просунулся внешний мир’.⁵¹ This outer world is defined as something that has been detached from Kotik, ‘что от меня отвалилось’.⁵² Having flown away, the outer world finds itself in the fabric of the apartment — on the wallpaper, ‘прилипая обоями к укрываемым комнатам’.⁵³

The process of detachment and estrangement is a very sad, dark and painful one: ‘Сквозь них, из углов, пошел ток мрачной жизни’ writes Kotik about the wallpaper and about the dreams that are attached to it.⁵⁴ The outer world is dark and scary, but it is still located inside, in the labyrinth of the dark rooms: ‘В лабиринт черных комнат [...] все чужие — оттуда’.⁵⁵ The labyrinth becomes the map of the ‘other’, inhabited by ‘the other people’.

All the characters of the novel have their specific locations in the dark labyrinth of the rooms. Mother and father are behind the walls; a servant appears from under the floor; aunt Dotia exists between the mirrors and the furniture covers; grandmother sits in the suite of the rooms; guests are seen running through the labyrinth. All this is unknown, unfamiliar, frightening, detached.

⁵⁰ Belyi, p. 32.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

However, very soon Kotik discovers that fear of this darkness can be overcome by creativity. This moment of creativity is mapped on the wallpaper — the place where ‘the other’ was initially located.

First, wallpaper is depicted as a passive container of spaces — ‘обой; меж ними — пространства’).⁵⁶ Then these spaces between the wallpaper start to be inhabited by ‘the others’ — ‘в пространствах заводятся: папа, мама и... няня’.⁵⁷ Sometimes these spaces even create the others: ‘Тетя Дотя в то именно время слагалась — в углу, на обоях, из теней; она еще не сложилась’.⁵⁸ Gradually, Kotik realises his own creative potential, and starts growing rooms, growing memories, growing spaces and times out of wallpaper flowers: ‘Помню: — я выращивал комнаты; я налево, направо откладывал их от себя; в них откладывал я себя: средь времен; времена — повторения обойных узоров: миг за миг — узор за узором’.⁵⁹

From this time on, wallpaper starts to represent Kotik’s creative potential that forms into a flying spiral of bright images of new encounters and new miracles of a day that has passed: ‘Вечером: — на летящих спиралях, с обой, кружевеют, горя, косяки красных зорь: бледно-розовым роем’.⁶⁰

Wallpaper as an image is strongly connected to seeing and imagining. It is the first thing that Kotik is looking at when he wakes up: ‘Из кроватки смотрю: на букетцы обой’.⁶¹ Wallpaper flowers immediately provoke his imagination. The process of looking at wallpaper soon turns into the process of the transformation of reality, of creating a new one. The walls covered with wallpaper start flying around

⁵⁶ Belyi, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 63.

like butterflies that eventually land on Kotik's nose. As an analogy, Kotik transfers this quality of seeing and creating to the wallpaper itself. The wallpaper and the walls become animated, the wallpaper's patterns turn into the wall's wrinkles, and the windows turn into eyes. Now, they are looking at Kotik, and by looking they create their own language. They *answer*: 'Смотрю: — и окнами, как глазами, без слов отвечают мне стены'.⁶² The room starts speaking its own language.

Language of the Rooms

The idea of the room having its own language is central to *Kotik Letaev*. It appears not only directly (as the walls start talking to the child), but also indirectly (or structurally).

On the metaphorical plane, the rooms are always situated between reality and imagination, present and past. In this respect, the rooms and corridors, wallpaper and windows act as a kind of language that is immanent to Kotik, the language that structures his chaotic thoughts. And 'like any language', as Hutchings puts it, 'it occupies a liminal status on the boundary between self and other'.⁶³

Moreover, like any language, it has its own rules. In fact rooms *are* the rules: 'С нянюшкой Александрю жили мы в правилах: была правилом комната; и жили мы в комнатах: в правильных комнатах, преодолимых и измеряемых, о четырех стенах'.⁶⁴

This language of the rooms provides the framework for the narrative. In order to start his narrative, Kotik only needs a copy of his room (or his rules) that he uses as the frame for imagination: 'И по образу и подобию копии комнат в моем

⁶² Belyi, p. 127.

⁶³ Hutchings, p. 150.

⁶⁴ Belyi, p. 45.

впечатлении тотчас же сфантазировал: образ; и этот образ себе начинаю рассказывать я; и рассказик мой — сказочка'.⁶⁵ Importantly, the language of the rooms becomes both the narrator and the narration.

Like any language, the language of the rooms has its own deviations from rules, its own mistakes. This very understanding of the room as a language with mistakes is what turns the work of Belyi into something deeply metaphorical. He is trying to unite the chaotic abstract imagination of his dreams with the strict structuralism of his flat. He arrives at the idea of a phrase that is based on a metaphor. What is important here is that he chooses the metaphor that is connected to the boundaries of a room — the parquet floor.

Kotik reconstructs the past by deconstructing an idiom. He uses the phrase 'упасть в обморок' by understanding it literally (and spatially) as to fall into the hole in his floor and to pass into another reality — to the room of his neighbour who in Kotik's imagination has the name 'обморок'.

This reconstruction starts with Kotik's understanding that he is a part of his room, identifying himself with a block of parquet: 'Мы, паркетные плитки, и я — мы попадали в обморок'.⁶⁶ Just like the ostensibly similar imagery in Anna Akhmatova's poem described in the previous chapter, this image is used to demonstrate the transparency, fluidity, and openness of the consciousness: Belyi compares the parquet woodblocks to the entrance to his own consciousness, and his consciousness opens just like the woodblocks do when Kotik imagines he is falling through them.

Here, Belyi uses graphical techniques to explain his creative transformations. He writes the word in a specific way: 'о б м о р о к' — spaced, so that this style of

⁶⁵ Belyi, p. 112.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

writing can be separated, supposedly compared to the pieces of parquetry which ‘open up’. Such design makes the reader enter the child’s consciousness and ‘see’ truly how the pieces of parquetry can open up the same way as the letters in a word. This multi-layered graphical and philosophical metaphor finishes with an image of an open apartment; now the rooms are not closed in the skull of consciousness anymore — the apartment is open; the consciousness is ready to perceive the outer world; the boy is growing up.

Spiral of Growing Up

In his other autobiographical novel *Zapiski chudaka*, Belyi comments on the spiral structure of *Kotik Letaev*’s phrase, and importantly for this discussion also starts his explanation in a room:

Вот — моя комната: чемоданы, бумаги; лежит недописанный ‘Котик Летаев’; архитектоника фразы его отлагалась в градацию кругового движения; архитектоника здесь такова, что картинки, слагаясь гирляндами фраз, пишут круг под невидимым куполом, вырастающим из зигзагов.⁶⁷

This ‘градация кругового движения’ embodied in an ascending spiral (or sometimes in a zigzag) is recognised in the novel on many levels. The word ‘спираль’ is repeated in *Kotik* twenty-two times. It is seen in the behaviour and movements of its protagonist: Kotik is constantly falling down, flying away, following a spiral trajectory, ascending and descending imaginary spiral steps, and he sees spiral structures in the flowers of the wallpaper. This movement also affects other characters

⁶⁷ Belyi, ‘*Zapiski chudaka*’, pp. 283–284.

in the novel; Kotik's mother's departure to the ballroom is depicted as 'spiral', and his father is constantly drawing mathematical spirals on a piece of paper. Moreover, the constant transition of the room's functions is seen not as a straight line, but rather as a growing spiral that constantly changes one direction of movement to the opposite: first, the room belongs only to Kotik; then, it inhabits the entire universe; then, one by one, the relatives come in; and again, the room is filled with the eternal cosmos. The movement of meanings in the novel could also be seen as a zigzag or a spiral. The temptation of discovery of the unknown rooms is always fighting against the prospect of the impossibility of coming back. Within this structure the consciousness of the protagonist is flying from one meaning to another, always detaching himself from one room and moving to another, balancing between 'I' and 'non-I', between the inside and the outside.

Such a spiral movement is seen by some critics as the most important motif in the novel.⁶⁸ This is hard to deny, but few have noticed the way in which the staircase as the main illustration of the spiral metaphor is integrated into *Kotik Letaev*. The staircase appears for the first time in the chapter entitled 'I' as a direct metaphor of personal development and growing up. This staircase consists of several steps that represent different levels of growing perception: the step of 'the moment', the step of 'the rooms' and the step of 'the world'. An almost identical image of the ascending staircase reappears in the epilogue:

Миг, комната, улица, происшествие, деревня и время года, Россия, история, мир —
лестница расширений моих; по ступеням ее я всхожу. [...] Ступень за ступенью

⁶⁸ Gerald Janecek, 'The Spiral as Image and Structural Principle in Andrei Belyi's *Kotik Letaev*', *Russian Literature*, 4:4 (1976), 356–364 (p. 356).

открыта мне спереди: Ожидают меня. Ожидают меня: мои новые миги; и — новые комнаты — комнаты, комнаты!⁶⁹

This paragraph sums up the importance of the image of the room and the staircase for the text in general. The first step is associated with the initial moment of consciousness ('миг'), the second step is the room, next steps represent bigger units of space and time ('улица', 'время года'), and finally the last step is the room again – a universal container that is ready to accommodate anything. These final rooms of the novel (and the last steps on the staircase of growing up) are situated in the future; they are still empty and are waiting to become full with the experience of a new life.

The Future of the Apartment

These new rooms that represent the future of the protagonist are shown in Belyi's next autobiographical novel *Kreshchenyi kitaets* (1920–1921), which describes the next stages of Kotik's life. Here, I shall not analyse the entire novel, but focus only on those new functions of interior imagery that could not be fully explored in *Kotik Letaev*. In *Kotik Letaev*, the elements of domestic space still exist and act according to the chaotic rules of a newly developing consciousness. Kotik's room could easily be transformed from the container of old centuries and myths into the mother's womb; it could represent both Kotik's inner world and the whole universe. In *Kreshchenyi kitaets*, the elements of the apartment become more concrete and gain specific connotations.

If in *Kotik Letaev* the reader often finds himself lost in the labyrinth of the dark rooms and cannot truly establish the links between the different elements of the

⁶⁹ Belyi, 'Kotik Letaev', p. 154.

apartment, in *Kreshchenyi kitaets*, the apartment acquires a concrete layout, to the extent that it even becomes possible to draw a plan of the flat.

In the second autobiographical novel, the space of the child's room is full of details: 'Передняя – комнатка – малая [...]; вешалка, столик и стул'.⁷⁰ From Kotik's description, we learn that his room is situated in a certain area of the apartment. There are three doors leading to other specific rooms, each of which has its name and its own functions: 'Три двери: в столовую, в кухню, в немой коридор'.⁷¹ Also, we learn that from the dining room one can get to the drawing room. These are the rooms that Belyi (following a standard usage of the time) calls 'парадные'. There are also the children's room, parents' bedroom and father's study room. Similarly to *Kotik Letaev*, the transformation of the apartment's elements forms the plot. However, this time the plot is not entirely dependent on just one character. Other characters, and other rooms, can transform the plot according to their own rules. Unlike *Kotik*, other inhabitants of the apartment — the child's parents — are also able to define the space. From this point of view, *Kreshchenyi kitaets* can be seen as a story of the transformation of the apartment's layout.

One of the most vivid examples of this is the result of a quarrel between Kotik's parents. After the quarrel, his mother moves from the bedroom to the drawing room. Having got a new owner, the drawing room changes colour from red into olive. According to the novel's symbolism, red is associated with the rationality of the father and his study room where he learns about integrals; olive, on the other hand, is the colour of the irrational mother.

⁷⁰ Andrei Belyi, 'Kreshchenyi kitaets', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, v, pp. 158–279 (p. 207). This layout is almost identical to the description of Belyi's real apartment that we find in his memoirs: 'Детская — внутренний мир, а гостиная — внешний, почти что Арбат; между ними отчетлив рубеж — коридор, из передней ведущий как раз мимо детской; в коридор выходили двери "парадных" комнат; гостиная, отделенная коридором, была против детской', see Belyi, *Na rubezhe*, p. 176.

⁷¹ Belyi, 'Kreshchenyi kitaets', p. 207.

This movement marks the beginning of a new period in the life of the apartment, namely, the olive period of ‘беспорядок и смута’,⁷² introduced by and associated with the mother. Every time the mother enters a room, everything becomes fluid, mixed up, as influenced by her chaotic female nature. She changes the layout of the flat as if by doing so she could change life itself:

Помню: — проснешься: столовая — здесь, а гостиная — там; это — мамочка: все-то она суежилась, перетирала, меняла, покрикивала, перегоняла меня, Генриэтту Мартыновну, папу из комнаты в комнату и заставляла надеяться, что наступает теперь, после всех изменений — прекрасная жизнь; оставалось по-прежнему: волосом, войлоком, пылью и псиною; псиною пахло разлапое кресло. — Напрасно старается мамочка все украшать очень сложным составом предметов, обильно снесенных с Кузнецкого Моста; составы предметов — неставы: распались!⁷³

The sense of everything falling apart in the flat is similar to that produced by the deconstruction of the phrase ‘упасть в обморок’ in *Kotik Letaev*. However, in *Kreshchenyi kitaets*, this sense expands to the entire apartment, and the entire future. One example illustrates this perfectly. The drawing room becomes a place where Kotik’s world falls apart. It is the place of transition from the rules of the father to those of the mother. As already mentioned, the father is associated with his red, rational study room. Naturally, he wants the whole apartment to resemble his organised study. His books and bookshelves gradually occupy the whole space of the apartment, starting first of all from the transitional drawing room: ‘Да, настырная

⁷² Piskunov, Aleksandrov, Parkhomenko, p. 13.

⁷² Belyi, ‘Kreshchenyi kitaets’, p. 242.

⁷³ Ibid.

книга грозила гостиной; как будто совсем невзначай, угнетенный обвалами книг, папа выдумал выставить книжную полочку: прямо в гостиную'.⁷⁴

This, of course, is met with strong resistance from the mother's side: 'Что тут было! Увидевши полочку, мама всплеснула руками; и личико все прохудело от скуки; и — кинулось прямо в глаза; и лицо ее встало одним сплошным взглядом, придирчивым: — "Вон!" — "Эту гадость?" — "Сюда?" — "Вон-вон-вон!"'.⁷⁵

The father cannot allow the mother to ruin his understanding of the apartment's layout, and the battle of *byt* progresses. The last detail that represents 'the beginning of the end' is the basin. First, it is situated in the bedroom. Soon, the mother moves it to the study room, and starts her daily routine of washing there. This, again, confuses the father. His space, the red study room, surrenders. The end of the red study room is therefore seen as the end of the father himself: it is ruined, and so is the father. Then, finally, after the quarrel, the mother moves to the drawing room and the drawing room changes colour from red to olive.

These spatial rearrangements not only represent changes in the parents' relationships, they also symbolise the further development of Kotik's consciousness. In the child's consciousness, red was associated with fairy-tales and myths. However, very soon the red wears itself out, replaced by the olive-green of reality.

Kotik is trying to get the red velvet of his childhood back, but he cannot. Now, everything is olive-green, but this green does not bring happiness and order any more. It is associated with everyday boredom, with the truth and the prosaicness of life — 'красная сказка предметов померкла в зеленую прозу'.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Belyi, 'Kreshchenyi kitaets', p. 161

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 161–162.

⁷⁶ Belyi, 'Kreshchenyi kitaets', p. 243.

In *Kreshchenyi kitaets*, the mythical reality of the child's development is demythologised and transformed into the understanding of the truth of the outer world. The 'new rooms' of *Kreshchenyi kitaets* do not meet the expectations of the narrator that have been expressed in the final lines of *Kotik Letaev*. They do not bring him to the bright new future. However, what is similar in both novels is that the structure and transformation of their narrative is closely connected to (and even derives from) the structure and transformation of the apartment and its space.

The concept of the room occupies a unique place in the metaphorical structure of Belyi's two autobiographical novels. It acts as a unit of both space and time, and becomes 'a primitive system of differentiation: a way of experiencing difference from the world'.⁷⁷ Copying the way in which the apartment is structured, the narrator tries to 'compose' his own growing consciousness. The apartment has rooms whilst the body has its parts; the passing from the beginning of the corridor to its end is seen by Kotik as passing through his thoughts; the temple ('храм') is associated with the skull and becomes the exact location for the 'I', as understood by the growing mind; the walls are seen as the skin of the body, and it is these walls that divide 'I' from 'not I'; getting in and out of a room is seen as getting in and out of one's mind: 'Я выйду из храма [of thought (M.P.)]: с той же легкостью мы выходим из комнаты'.⁷⁸

At the same time, the domestic imagery reveals itself on a metanarrative level. It structures the flow of Kotik's initially chaotic narrative. It becomes easier to understand Kotik when his thoughts are projected on and associated with the layout of the rooms. As Hutchings remarks, 'the apartment simultaneously halts the flow and enables it to be experienced, thus preserving elements of both the flux that it binds

⁷⁷ Hutchings, p. 146.

⁷⁸ Belyi, 'Kotik Letaev', p. 32.

and the act of creativity accomplished in expressing the concept'.⁷⁹ Rooms are the containers of certain memories for Kotik, and memories construct the chapters of his artistic autobiography, which becomes illuminated through creativity.

In his memoirs *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, Belyi describes the end of *byt*, and the end of the apartment as a social and symbolical representation of 'professor's culture'. *Kotik Letaev* presents not the end, but the birth of the apartment as an embodiment of his own life and creativity. In this novel, Belyi overcomes the fear of the professor's apartment by turning it into a vibrant, movable locus of creativity and growth, the container for the child's imagination. At the same time, the layout of the apartment serves as a scheme that demonstrates the essence of the author's artistic method — constructing meaning through the interior space.

Here we see the interior represented in a totally new way to the previous tradition — its description is equated to the description of Kotik's consciousness; it is not social or representative anymore; it becomes truly personal, and at the same time universal, as Kotik relates himself to the universe. The complex metaphor of space turning into language, mentioned on several occasions in the text, allows us to talk not only about the new tradition of interior representation, but also about the new mode of textual complexity that is seen in many modernist texts. Having chosen a private room of a family house as a primary location of his narrative, Belyi moves away from traditional modes of representing a family in a house; instead the descriptions of the rooms in Belyi's prose are dynamic, they run parallel with the descriptions of bodies, consciousness, times and places. Indeed, Belyi's representation of the room is one of the most complex and spectacular among my case studies.

⁷⁹ Hutchings, p. 149.

CHAPTER III

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii. ‘Четырехугольная несущая’

This chapter offers an in-depth exploration of interior spaces in the 1920s short stories of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii (1887-1950). The prose of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii is particularly distinctive for its use of spatial imagery. The famous cultural critic Vladimir Toporov, indeed, went so far as to argue that space was Krzhizhanovskii's main theme: ‘Большинство текстов Кржижановского — о самом пространстве и о том, в чем оно обнаруживает себя и/или становится доступным реконструкции’.¹

In my close reading of Krzhizhanovskii's stories of the 1920s, I argue that, for this reconstruction, the image of a domestic interior becomes of dominant importance. I demonstrate that the various aspects of his use of interior space, including the use of an *opposition between interior and exterior* and the description of borders and enclosure, create a complex topology that links the domestic to the urban — a fusion of a personal and paradoxical kind that illustrates the potential of spatial imagery as a specific narrative technique in Krzhizhanovskii's prose.

Non-Space, Moscow, Apartment

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii's talent as a writer of outstanding literary abilities and critical perception peaked in the 1920s and early 1930s. However, it was not until 1989 and the first posthumous publication of a collection of his short stories and

¹ Vladimir Toporov, “‘Minus’-пространство Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo”, in *Mif. Ritual. Simvol. Obraz: Issledovaniia v oblasti mifopoeticheskogo* (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia gruppa ‘Progress-Kul'tura’, 1995), pp. 476–574 (p. 498).

novellas by Vadim Perel'muter that the theoretical exploration of Krzhizhanovskii's works began. This publication history, and the 'fizzy nervous energy'² of Krzhizhanovskii's style could perhaps explain the fact that, even to this day, his legacy remains perplexingly unexamined by scholars, and many areas of scholarly interest relating to this writer are still to emerge. Although the handsome five-volume collection of Krzhizhanovskii's writings, finally published in 2010, contains careful and informative biographical commentaries by Vadim Perel'muter,³ there is still no single monograph dedicated to Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii. Those articles and book chapters that exist are either essentially journalistic in character,⁴ or concentrate on establishing the phenomenon of Krzhizhanovskii's poetic universe. Many critics are more preoccupied with putting his 'fascinating amalgam of language experimentation, scientific erudition and philosophical contemplation' and 'extraordinary dense style'⁵ into the avant-garde context, rather than closely analysing specific parts of his style.⁶

However, most scholars mention the specific construction of space that is inherent in Krzhizhanovskii's poetics, and it is this branch of scholarship that is particularly relevant to my analysis.

Among the interpretations of Krzhizhanovskii's interest in space, the most important contribution belongs to the leading representative of the Moscow-Tartu

² Adam Thirwell, 'The Master of the Crossed Out', *The New York Review of Books*, 23 June 2011, p. 57.

³ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. by Vadim Perel'muter, 5 vols (St Petersburg: Symposium, 2001–2013). All citations of Krzhizhanovskii's short stories in this dissertation are from this source.

⁴ V. Kamianov, 'Krasnyi ferz' pod boem', *Novyi mir*, 8 (1992), 239–243; Lev Ozerov, 'Strany, kotorykh net', *Oktiabr'*, 8 (1995), 183–184; and Thirwell.

⁵ Karen Rosenflanz, 'Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky: A Bat in Flight', in *Out of the Shadows: Neglected Works in Soviet Prose: Selected Essays*, ed. by Nicholas Luker (Nottingham: Astra-Press, 2003), pp. 19–40 (pp. 19–21).

⁶ The strikingly non-specific titles of such articles speaks for themselves (here, I list only those critical contributions which deal with Krzhizhanovskii's short stories and novels, omitting the branch of scholarship on his theatrical criticism), see Mikhail Gasparov, 'Mir Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo', *Oktiabr'*, 3 (1990), 201–203; Viacheslav Kuritsyn, 'O nekotorykh popytkakh protivostoianiiia avangardnoi paradigme', *NLO*, 20 (1996), 331–360; Joost van Baak, 'Mir po Krzhizhanovskomu', *Russian Literature*, 45 (1999), 361–371.

school Vladimir Toporov. Following the author himself, Toporov defines space in Krzhizhanovskii's fiction as a special paradoxical type of space that better deserves to be called 'anti-space'. It is closed, fragmented, and can only bring suffering to those who live in it. In his analysis, Toporov claims that this 'anti-space' is a fundamental structural part of Krzhizhanovskii's construction of space in fiction.

There is, however, another type of space in his fiction — the ideal 'plus-space' of the real life — though it can hardly be reached:

Это “настоящее” (“плюс”) пространство Кржижановский з н а л и л ю б и л [...] Это пространство, о котором писатель все же успел сказать многое в немногом, как раз и совпадало для него с гармонизирующей “классической” протяженностью, которая будучи укоренена в некоей онтологической и ноуменальной глубине, вместе с тем легко и естественно обнаруживает себя во всей своей смысловой полноте, имя которой — м и р как образ некой гармонической идеальности.⁷

It is Toporov's work that has influenced the majority of the later interpretations of Krzhizhanovskii's fiction, and I shall engage with it here as well. However, if by means of 'anti-space' Toporov creates an original philosophy of general negativity embodied in Krzhizhanovskii's work, my analysis will be more specific and try to examine how the space of the domestic interior is related to Krzhizhanovskii's understanding of poetic space in general.

The understanding of space starts for Krzhizhanovskii with the understanding of the city. The city of Moscow, as Perel'muter cogently argues, becomes the topic, character and material of Krzhizhanovskii's prose, having shaped his poetics more

⁷ Toporov, p. 477, (emphasis original). The important tension between 'minus' and 'plus', 'no' and 'yes' had been pointed out earlier by Gasparov in his short article 'Mir Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo' where the scholar traced Krzhizhanovskii's 'philosophy of oppositions' back to Kantian dualism, see Gasparov, p. 202.

than anything else, and turning Krzhizhanovskii into an urban writer (‘писатель-урбанист’).⁸

Toporov also dedicates the first part of his “‘Minus”-prostranstvo Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo’ to the author’s complex imagery of Moscow. According to the scholar, Moscow is the ontological centre of Krzhizhanovskii’s universe, which created and saved him as an author and as a human being: ‘Москва в течение двух десятилетий была для писателя не только родительницей, так сказать “приснородительницей”, заново порождавшей его каждый раз, когда он погружался в ее лоно, но и спасительницей’.⁹

Moscow is also the *medium* of Krzhizhanovskii’s exploration of space. In fact, Moscow is used to *create* space. As Toporov puts it, Krzhizhanovskii “‘разумно”, логосно делал его [пространство Москвы] “своим”, переводя его в знаковую сферу, в тексты на “естественном” языке, состоящие из букв, слов, фраз, абзацев, знаков препинания, цифр’.¹⁰

The transmutation of space into language is essential for Krzhizhanovskii’s poetics just as it was for Belyi’s works.¹¹ This transmutation occurs gradually, word by word, sign by sign. Echoing Toporov, Perel’muter suggests that the author himself becomes a structural part of this spatial language. Krzhizhanovskii masters this language through strolling across Moscow. This language of Moscow is so complex that it needs its own ‘biography’ and ‘genealogy’:

⁸ Vadim Perel’muter, ‘Posle katastrofy’, in Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. by Vadim Perel’muter, 5 vols (Moscow: Symposium, 2001–2013), i (2001), pp. 5–70 (pp. 21–22).

⁹ Toporov, p. 485.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 479.

¹¹ Cf. a similar process in Belyi’s *Kotik Letaev*, see Chapter II of this thesis.

Около трех лет — изо дня в день, из недели в неделю — Кржижановский исхаживает, исследует, осваивает столицу, уподобляя ее языку, в котором могли за века неузнаваемо измениться слова, но неизменными сохранились грамматические формы, определяющие его структуру. Поставив своей задачей активное, свободное владение этим языком, писатель изучает происхождение ('генеалогию') города, его историю ('биографию'), топографию ('начертание'), структурные особенности ('грамматику'), топонимику ('фонетику'), психологию, стилистику.¹²

Following both critics in their methodology of exploring Krzhizhanovskii's 'spatial language', I would argue that their focus on the urban space of Moscow has led to neglect of a smaller, but not less important space, namely, the domestic interior. In my analysis, I present the domestic interior as a crucial and often dominant element of the urban space's 'grammar', 'topography', and 'biography'. For these purposes, I treat Krzhizhanovskii's works of the 1920s as a unity of texts, which has one specific structure of poetic space. Additionally, my analysis will be supported by references to some of Krzhizhanovskii's non-fictional essays about Moscow and its spaces, including 'Moskovskie vyveski' (1924) and 'Shtempel'. Moskva (13 pisem v provintsiu)' (1925).

Another important example regarding the interpretation of Krzhizhanovskii's work that has influenced my analysis belongs to the critic and cultural philosopher Mikhail Iampol'skii. In his work on Kharm's poetics there is a chapter entitled 'Okno', where Iampol'skii analyses Kharm's frequent references to this simple architectural detail from the point of view of the philosophy of language and culture of the period, and compares it to the similar employment of this imagery in

¹² Perel'muter, pp. 21.

Krzhizhanovskii's fiction.¹³ Another chapter of this book, entitled 'Padenie', traces the cultural and semiotic trajectories of falling out of a window in Kharms's fiction. In parallel to Iampol'skii (as well as to the earlier methodology used in my chapter on Anna Akhmatova), I shall analyse Krzhizhanovskii's images of domestic interiors not only with reference to the holistic image of the house (or the room), but with reference to the essential individual elements (windows, tables, beds, wallpaper, etc.), and the characteristic movements that are associated with them (falling through a window, writing at a desk).

Apartment. A Biography

Looking at Krzhizhanovskii's works of the 1920s, it is hard not to notice that most of them feature some description of a room or interior space. After only a brief examination, it becomes clear that Krzhizhanovskii's representations of rooms have (similarly to Akhmatova's and Belyi's) direct biographical antecedents. Flat no. 5, 44 Arbat Street was the author's residence in Moscow for nearly thirty years. It is this very flat that becomes an 'ancestor' for most of Krzhizhanovskii's imaginary interiors and in many ways shapes the author's perception of space in general and Moscow in particular.¹⁴

Many of Krzhizhanovskii's descriptions of imaginary rooms mimic the layout of his apartment on Arbat. His real apartment was very small and hardly capable of containing a bed, a table and a chair, as the writer's wife Anna Bovshek recalled:

¹³ Mikhail Iampol'skii, *Bespamiatstvo kak istochnik. Chitaia Kharmsa* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998), pp. 42–73.

¹⁴ Critics and biographers point out that the difficulty of living in an extremely narrow communal apartment in Moscow not only influenced the interior imagery of Krzhizhanovskii's short stories, but also resulted in agoraphobia (fear of open spaces), which Krzhizhanovskii suffered from during the last five years of his life. See Toporov, p. 516; Perel'muter, p. 676.

Комната стала приобретать жилой вид. Появились деревянная койка с волосатым матрасом, простой некрашеный стол с двумя ящиками, перед ним кресло с жестким сиденьем, на противоположной стене полки с книгами. Самодельная скатерть и одеяло из кустарной материи покрыли стол и постель. [...] В таком виде она [комната] сохранилась до самых последних дней жизни Кржижановского.¹⁵

In another memoir entry by the author's close friend Natal'ia Semper, the same room is described as even more cramped and narrow: 'Тесная-тесная узкая комната, старомодное окно прямо в дом напротив; перегруженные книжные полки, кровать с одной плоской подушкой, стол у окна, два стула, шкаф'.¹⁶

Moreover, the author of these memoirs continues on the assumption that Krzhizhanovskii described this very room in his short story 'Kvadraturin' (1926), as well as in some other works. Indeed, almost the same layout of a bed, a chair and a shelf are described, for example, in the 1926 story 'Klub ubiits bukv': 'Кроме стола, служившего кладбищем вымыслов, в комнате моей находились: кровать, стул и книжная полка — в четыре длинных, вдоль всей стены, доски, выгнувшихся под грузом букв'.¹⁷

However, it is not only the descriptive similarities uniting the real and imaginary rooms of Krzhizhanovskii that concern me.¹⁸ The primary interest of this

¹⁵ Anna Bovshek, 'Glazami druga: Materialy k biografii Sigizmunda Dominikovicha Krzhizhanovskogo', in Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, *Vozvrashchenie Munkhgauzena: Povesti. Novelly. Vospominaniia o Krzhizhanovskom*, ed. by Vadim Perel'muter (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), pp. 465–528 (p. 486).

¹⁶ Nataliia Semper, 'Chelovek iz nebytii. Vospominaniia o S.D. Krzhizhanovskom. 1942–1949', in Krzhizhanovskii, *Vozvrashchenie Munkhgauzena*, pp. 547–567, (p. 563).

¹⁷ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Klub ubiits bukv', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ii, pp. 7–132 (pp. 8–9).

¹⁸ Although they are quite unusual in the context of early twentieth-century Russian literature and culture, and could only be compared to the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershoi, who depicted his own apartment in more than seventy oil paintings. On Hammershoi's devotion to interior space, see Poul Vad, *Vilhelm Hammershoi and Danish Art at the Turn of the Century*, trans. by Kenneth Tindall (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

analysis lies in the exploration of how this fixed square structure of a room becomes the subject of constant motion and disorder, a dynamic that shapes the actions, thoughts and motivations of its inhabitants, and which often ruins their lives. On a different level, I shall examine how the concept of the closed space of the room structures the narrative and the stylistic manner of the author, and influences the very construction of poetic space in his works.

‘Squaring’ the Imaginary

Despite all the similarities between Krzhizhanovskii’s real and imaginary rooms mentioned above, there is one strong difference between the two — the shape of the room.

All the descriptions of rooms in Krzhizhanovskii’s short stories are extremely minimalistic and geometric. The dominant geometric description in relation to domestic imagery could be seen already in the linguistic choices made by the author. In ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’ (1929), for example, 27 out of 59 times when a room or a flat is mentioned, they are described as square or cubic in shape. Among these, the most frequently used word combinations are ‘комнатный куб’, ‘квадрат комнаты’, ‘застенный квадрат’, ‘квадратная комната’ or just ‘квадратная’, and in several sequences just the noun ‘квадрат’ on its own comes to represent a room. However, it is not only nouns and adjectives that are used to describe the squareness of the room. In Krzhizhanovskii’s fiction, the room lives its own life and has its own specific modality: it ‘квадратуруется’, ‘оквадрачивается’, and ‘расквадрачивается’.

Squareness belongs to the room as its primal, fundamental quality that precedes other physical perceptions of any unknown interior space. In

‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, for example, the room is perceived and referred to as ‘квадратная’ even before anyone sees it. The neighbours have never been into the room, and therefore do not know whether it is square or round, small or large, but, hearing strange steps from behind the wall, they identify them as steps from the ‘square room’ (‘шаги внутри квадратной комнаты’)¹⁹ as if the ‘squareness’ could be perceived by hearing.

This shows an important structural move from the biographical representation of a room (which as described above was narrow and therefore could not be square) towards a poetical one, in which all rooms (even those we cannot see) appear to be square. In Krzhizhanovskii’s fiction, the room is represented not as a domestic space full of everyday details, but almost as an abstract, universal cube-form that has the ability to grow in geometrical progression (‘квадрат в квадрат, квадрат квадратов в квадрат’)²⁰ and therefore obeys mathematical laws. In fact, in his treatment of domestic imagery, Krzhizhanovskii takes the decisive step of interpreting the square of the room as an abstraction in itself, a constructive unit of the universe — the primary location from where everything begins and where everything eventually ends.

Krzhizhanovskii lived and worked at the time of large-scale avant-garde artistic experiments. Futurists experimented with the word and its limits, which resulted in different types of experimental languages such as *zaum'*; while artists experimented with the pictorial limits of visual art, which led to the development of forms of ‘nonobjective art’ such as abstraction, cubism and supermatism.²¹ Not

¹⁹ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ii (2001), pp. 337–430 (p. 379).

²⁰ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadraturin’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ii, pp. 449–460 (pp. 456–457).

²¹ See Chapter III, ‘Nonobjective Art’, in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, ed. by Bowlit, pp. 87–160. For a broader discussion of the limits of Russian avant-garde, see E. Bablinskaia, *Russkii avangard: Granitsy iskusstva* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006).

belonging to any of the artistic or literary movements of the period,²² Krzhizhanovskii was looking for his own ‘первоэлемент’, and, as I argue in this chapter, he may have found it in the square room. As Adam Thirwell suggests, the cube becomes the central unit of Krzhizhanovskii’s style: ‘By taking the cube as the primary, given form, he investigates what can be done with the elastic limitations of reality’.²³ Remaining in Krzhizhanovskii’s poetic world, I shall investigate how the ‘squareness’ rooted in the physical characteristics of the room influences all the other perceptions of spaces and objects in his short stories, as well as the development of characters and narrative.

Spatial Dimensions of a Personal World

First of all, the room shapes the characters’ minds. The room becomes not only the dwelling of Krzhizhanovskii’s protagonists, but also their main topic of thinking, the key element of their worldview, the equivalent of their personal world. In ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, the small hutch under the staircase occupied by Maks Shterer represents his consciousness, as the narrator compares the ‘I’ of the protagonist to a space of a cold room. Moreover, his life inside the square is totally different from his life outside it: ‘Жизни — вписанная в квадрат, что на Зачатьевском, и вокруг квадрата описанные — никак не пересекали друг друга’.²⁴ Again, Krzhizhanovskii uses mathematical terms to describe the way of life inside and outside the room (‘circumscribed’) to show that the square of the room is a powerful abstract unit that imposes its mathematical laws on everything that gets

²² Broadly considered an artist of his own style, certain aspects of Krzhizhanovskii’s writing could be associated with imagism, however. Meksh, for example, traces the writer’s usage of metaphorical imagery back to this artistic movement. See E. Meksh, ‘Traditsii imazhinizma v novelle Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo “Kvadrat Pegasa”’, in *Russkii imazhinizm: Istorii, teoriia, praktika*, ed. by Vladimir Drozdov (Moscow: Linor, 2003), pp. 338–348.

²³ Thirwell, p. 57.

²⁴ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, p. 387.

inside its borders. This very room inspires Maks to create a time machine in the form of the cubic room, and thus bring the structure of the room close to the structure of the universe, which according to Maks is also cubic.

In ‘Stranstvuiushchie “Stranno”’ (1930), a room literally turns into the whole world for the protagonist who magically becomes a speck of dust, and discovers his room to be as big as the universe.²⁵

However, for Krzhizhanovskii, it is not only an individual consciousness that is shaped and explained by interior metaphors (‘[комната] объясняет душу’).²⁶ Entire literary movements could also grow out of a small dark room — as happened, according to Krzhizhanovskii, to the Slavophiles: ‘В [...] глухой, тесной и темной комнате славянофилы, сев колени к коленям, и *изговорили* себя до конца’.²⁷ Moreover, a room becomes a kind of cultural laboratory for ‘изготовление’ not only of different philosophical movements, but also of poetical thoughts, united by Krzhizhanovskii under the concept ‘Мысль’. In ‘Zhizneopisanie odnoi mysli’ (1922) this unifying Thought also dwells in the room. It has its particular position and strictly defined coordinates in the room. In this imaginary geography of the dark and empty interior, the Thought occupies the position between the two bigger worlds: the sky and the city. The relationships between the Thought and both worlds are mediated through the room and its parts. Krzhizhanovskii shapes his Thought in the form of a stretching poetic line. One end of this line is turned towards the sky. The connection between the Thought and the sky is only possible through a window: ‘Левым концом

²⁵ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Stranstvuiushchie “Stranno”’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i (2001), pp. 279–346.

²⁶ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Shtempel’: Moskva (13 pisem v provintsiu)’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i (2001), pp. 511–548 (p. 515).

²⁷ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Shtempel’: Moskva’, p. 513.

строки она была повернута к окну; за окном — небо'.²⁸ The other end of the Thought is turned towards the room itself: 'Правым концом строки Мысль повернулась к комнате'. The room here, first of all, acts as the city's inner centre, the initial location from where the city is perceived. Secondly, the room acts as a constructional element of the city: 'Мысль повернулась к комнате: за комнатой комната, за нею крыльцо, за крыльцом улица, за улицей снова крыльцо, и комната, и еще комната — городок'.²⁹

Here, Krzhizhanovskii specifically repeats the word 'комната' five times, adding it 'brick by brick' to the image of the city. Mentioning other construction elements of the city ('улицы', 'крыльцо'), the author, however, starts and ends this sentence with 'комната' as the most important one. This constructing metaphor develops as the city that consists of rooms turns itself into a living being. The town falls asleep, closing its 'eyes': 'городок [...] поголовно, всеми своими комнатками, смежив ставни и веки, засыпал'.³⁰ The rooms are seen not as the bricks that build the city but as its heads, as if literally to deconstruct the word 'поголовно' and to unravel the metaphor of eyes and eyelids.

In this complex development of just one metaphor, Krzhizhanovskii reveals that the creative consciousness is explored and understood only through the space of a room. The room is where the creative Thought originates. It is also the *medium* for creating bigger imaginary spaces such as cities, and, more importantly, for animating them.

The description of the blinds as the room's eyelids becomes one of the most common interior metaphors for Krzhizhanovskii's short stories, and finds its

²⁸ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, 'Zhizneopisanie odnoi mysli', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i (2001), pp. 139–146 (p. 141).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

³⁰ Ibid.

paradoxical culmination in the story ‘V zrachke’ (1927). In this text, the metaphor is shown from the opposite perspective. If traditionally the image of the blinds produces the effect of eyelids when looked at from the outside, this story introduces the protagonist who literally inhabits people’s pupils, celebrates ‘зрачковое новоселье’.³¹ Here, Krzhizhanovskii compares not a window to an eye, but an eye to a window. His protagonist is very fond of his new ‘house’ that is actually a pupil: ‘Мне нравилось мое новое помещение: полное стеклистых отсветов, с окном в круглой радужной раме’.³² The eyelids in this ‘eye-room’ turn into a kind of ‘automatically rising blinds’: ‘Выпуклые стекла аккуратно промывало слезой, по ночам опускались самодвижущиеся шторы — одним словом, квартира с удобствами’.³³

‘Moving’ from one person’s eyes to another pair of eyes, this ‘eye-dweller’ changes the perceptions and the point of view, which resembles the cinematic technique of the subjective camera that could represent any individual’s view. The idea of a man inhabiting his own eye as a room comes very close to Dziga Vertov’s idea of a cine-eye that inhabits the room of imaginary reality.³⁴

In 1928 Vertov deconstructed this metaphor on the screen. In *Chelovek s kinoapparatom*, with the use of montage, Vertov compared the closing and opening of the blinds in a room to the closing and opening of woman’s eyes and to the focusing of the cinematic eye.

The room becomes a dynamic system of changing perceptions in both cases. However, if in the case of Vertov, the room is a creative starting point for discovering and constructing different kinds of reality, for Krzhizhanovskii the room acts as a

³¹ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘V zrachke’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i (2001), pp. 427–462 (p. 433).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Dziga Vertov, ‘Kinoki. Perevorot’, *Lef*, 1 (1923), pp. 135–143.

destructive power. It gradually captures and destroys the inner world of the protagonists by its shape, its narrowness, its darkness and its trajectories.

Inside the Room

The rooms' characteristics are similar to those of a coffin: narrowness (as in 'Kvadraturin', 'Avtobiografiia odnogo trupa', 'Klub ubiits bukv'), and darkness ('Chut'-chuti', 'Iakoby i Iakobi', 'Chetki' 'Zhizneopisanie odnoi mysli', 'Poetomu'). However, despite the dominant constant of darkness much attention is paid to the objects in the room. Below are several of the most important ones.

Table

In Krzhizhanovskii's stories, the table is a place of basic functions: working and eating. There are three types of tables with three different functions: a desk, a dining table and a chess table.

A desk ('Iakoby i Iakobi', 1918, 'Kvadrat Pegasa', 1921, 'Spinoza i pauk', 1921, and 'Poetomu', 1922) is linked to two narrative structures: working with manuscripts; and finding the manuscripts turning into living creatures. If in the first case the table is connected to the creativity, the second represents the 'other', which can see the darkness, and lead to death. The process of animation of words from the manuscripts on the table is shown in three stories, 'Poetomu', "'Iakoby" i Iakobi', and 'Bumaga teriaet terpenie'. In all three stories, the table becomes a locus of the poet's loneliness that emerges through the construction table/paper/words. The protagonist feels himself lonely at his desk, and even the words that become alive cannot stop this feeling.

Apart from meeting with the words that come alive, a table becomes a locus for the meeting with the other. In the story 'Chut'-chuti' the location of the heroine is articulated through the table: *'Она оперлась ладонью в стол,*

прищурившись на бумажные вороха, разбросанные повсюду;³⁵ *Пальцы гости, прижавшись к доске стола, ждали*'.³⁶ The guest is 'dependent' on the table, the table serves her as a pillar, as an object of support, and at the same time as a locus of rejection – the heroine not only meets her fate at the table, but also loses it, as the dialogue by the table suggests:

– Милый...

Но я ступил шаг назад:

– Простите. Бога ради. Это недоразумение...³⁷

Later in the story Krzhizhanovskii explains this importance of the edge of the table by the concentration of 'chut'-chuti', tiny little people who dwell in the room, exactly at this spot:

Вглядываясь пристальней, я увидел: все они — точечными россыпями толп — собирались к одному месту: у края стола.³⁸

Chut'-chuti start to gather on the table as soon as the heroine leaves. Soon the protagonist discovers that the king of this little people is dead on the table:

Я вгляделся еще пристальней — и вдруг стекло задрожало в моих пальцах: на влажных ворсинках черной скатерти лежал мертвый король чуть-чутей.³⁹

The image of the dead king on the table relates the table to a coffin, and this comparison expands to the whole room — 'в комнате тихо и пусто'⁴⁰ — the

³⁵ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Chut'-chuti', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i, pp. 83-92 (p. 89).

³⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Chut'-chuti', p. 91.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

people of chut'-chuti decide to take their revenge, leaving the protagonist alone in his empty room; the end that is so common in Krzhizhanovskii's short stories. The final paragraph emphasises the feeling of loneliness. The narrator puts the manuscript of his story (the very story we are reading) in the suitcase, and wishes he could jump into the case himself: 'И мне: в черный, глухой портфель: защелкнется — и ни солнц, ни тем, ни болей, ни счастлих, ни лжей, ни правд'.⁴¹

However, if the desk is associated with the loneliness of creativity, the dining table represents a space of connection, meeting. The first encounter of the protagonists in the story 'Chuzhaia tema' (1931) takes place at the dining table, that later will become a spatial centre of the narrative: '*Встреча произошла тут, у столика, за которым мы с вами сейчас. Было все как теперь: спины, согнувшиеся над тарелками, никелевый звон ложечек на прилавке*'.⁴²

In 'Prodannye slezy' (1922), the space of a room can be decoded by carefully tracing the positions of the characters in regards to the table. The table serves as a uniting centre: '*Аким Акимыч стукнул ладонью по столу: иди*';⁴³ '*Сели вокруг чайного стола*'.⁴⁴ However as soon as something goes wrong, the protagonists detach themselves from the table: '*Нема сняла локти со стола*';⁴⁵ or go away to a different table: '*Дочь сидела спиной к двери у тонконогого столика, спрятав лицо в ладонях [...]*'.⁴⁶

The central event of the story (when the protagonists find out that the child is crying not tears, but diamonds) takes place at the table. However, the opposite event (when the protagonists find tears instead of diamonds) takes place at

⁴¹ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Chut'-chuti', p. 92.

⁴² Krzhizhanovskii, 'Chuzhaia tema', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i, pp. 347-396 (p. 347).

⁴³ Ibid., p. 231.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 232.

⁴⁵ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Prodannye slezy', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i, pp. 224-232 (p. 224).

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 232.

the table as well: *‘Дочь не шевельнулась: крупные слезы [...] капали вниз, на деревянный круг стола’*.⁴⁷

Additionally, already in this story the space of the table is marked by a plate and spoon *‘разливая ложку, полная эфирно-желтого кипятку, дымилась над тарелкой’*.⁴⁸ However, this plate and spoon indicate surprise: *‘и вдруг... Мать отдернула ложку: посреди тарелки, вкатившись в серую трещину ее, лежал, тихо шевеля белыми остриями луча, алмаз’*.⁴⁹

The diamond gets into the plate and spills the soup, creating an animated spot: *‘жирное, шевелящее мокрыми щупальцами пятно поползло по скатерти’*.⁵⁰ As soon as the family discovers the diamond has got into the plate, it highlights the space around it — uniting everything under one colour, everything becomes yellow: *‘за обедом [...] — новые, с золотыми обводами [...] тарелки. На стене цокают круглые желтые часы. У окна свистит пестроперая канарейка’*.⁵¹ The golden round plate with the diamond inside it looks like the sun. The table here indeed becomes the centre of the universe, as if echoing the traditional understanding of this interior space, the table that unites. However, by the end of the story we realise that all this was not true, the diamonds-tears disappear, and the protagonists are left lonely.

In *‘Proigrannyi igrok’* (1921), we find another type of table — the chess table. Krzhizhanovskii will use this image again in later stories, for example *‘Moia partiia s korolem velikanov’* (1933) and *‘Shakhmatnaia doska i teatral’nyi pomost’* (1934). One of the main points of the author’s interest in this object is the idea of a game with strict rules within a closed space. In *‘Proigrannyi igrok’* the chess table becomes the centre of the narration. The soul of the main protagonist Pembrok is located in a pawn. And all the action is focused not in the room, but on the chess table. The table becomes a model of the world. The structure of the chess table is

⁴⁷ Krzhizhanovskii, *‘Prodannye slezy’*, p. 232.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 224.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 227.

repeated in the pattern of the floor, as the spectators of the game are equated to the chess figures:

Симметрично рассажены по обе стороны длинного и узкого стола, все двадцать думали. И подошвы их ног, прижатые к светлым и темным, темным и светлым квадратам паркета, и зрачки их глаз, притянутые к темным и светлым, светлым и темным квадратикам шахматных досок, — не двигались.⁵²

Several times in the story we read that the table is long and narrow. This form is copied in the form of the room: ‘Длинный и узкий стол с игроками и крохотными [...] фигурками был вдет, как в футляр, в длинный и узкий зал с узкими же прямоугольными прорезями окон.’⁵³ Moreover, even other parts of the room are perceived through and named after this form, such as a window as a ‘прямоугольник’: ‘он глянул за прозрачный прямоугольник из стекла’.⁵⁴ The impression is multiplied by the darkness (‘Это от сумерек’).⁵⁵ Here we can trace the functional dependence between Mr Pembrok and the space around him: ‘Мистеру Пемброку, сидевшему среди фигур, склоненных над фигурами, и игравшему у длинного стола свою партию черными, было не по себе.’⁵⁶ The world is turned into a chessboard. At the same time the shape of the table replicates the shape of the coffin. And it is here, on the table, where Pembrok (and his soul hidden in the pawn) dies. Therefore the semantics of the chess table go from indicating the game to indicating the game that results in death.

Bed

Along with the table, the bed is a usual component of a room in Krzhizhanovskii stories.

⁵² Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Proigrannyi igrok’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i, pp. 133-138 (p. 134).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Proigrannyi igrok’, p. 135.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 134.

In ‘V zrachke’, even love is described as ‘double-bedded’: *‘Любовь наша постепенно превратилась в общегражданскую, двуспальную, со сложным инвентарем — от мягких туфель до ночного горшка включительно’*.⁵⁷ The bed becomes the centre of the bedroom and of intimate life. Life is impossible without a bed: *‘В доме по Дягтерному переулку № 6-А одна угловая, не любимая Надеждой Васильевной комната [...]. Под столовую не годилась. Кроватей не поставить никак — значит, не спальня’*.⁵⁸ The ability to put a table or a bed into a room measures the grade of the room’s attraction for the heroine. The room without a table or bed is ‘не любимая’. The bed is also usually a female marker in Krzhizhanovskii’s stories. So having figured out that the bed cannot be put in the room, Nadezhda Vasil’evna gives the room to her husband.

Another function of the bed in Krzhizhanovskii’s stories is similar to the function of the table: the indication of loneliness. Sutulin from ‘Kvadraturin’, unlike Nadezhda Vasil’evna from ‘Kvadrat Pegasa’, did manage to squeeze his bed in his room. However, the room is so small that it almost equals the bed: *‘Сутулин, не подымаясь с кровати, протянул — привычным движением — ногу навстречу стуку и, вдев носок в дверную ручку, дернул’*.⁵⁹ The room is so small that Sutulin does not have to get up in order to open the door; he is always in the horizontal position. The bed equals the space of existence, which makes it impossible for anyone else to get in that room, and once again stresses the protagonist’s loneliness.

If the table is the centre of artistic space, the bed equals space. A single bed symbolises the transition to the world of creativity (‘Klub ubiits buk’v’), or the world of death (‘Kvadraturin’); a double bed is the transition from the world of creativity to the world of everyday life (‘Kvadrat Pegasa’, ‘V zrachke’).

⁵⁷ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘V zrachke’, p. 431.

⁵⁸ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadrat Pegasa’, p. 97.

⁵⁹ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadraturin’, p. 449.

Wallpaper

Wallpaper is another element that is frequently referred to in Krzhizhanovskii's short stories. Its semantics are linked to the changing of space from public into private.

The image of wallpaper often appears when the protagonists feel lonely, and want to think about themselves: *'Сердце ежедневно брало уроки у часового маятника, качавшегося меж двух одинаковых синих роз на обоях'*,⁶⁰ *'синие — по глупым вертикалям плющенные — розаны'*.⁶¹ The blue of the wallpaper is a symbolic colour of the sky with the presence of god. There also might be further religious symbolism: roses are a Christian symbol, the half moon is an Islamic symbol, the lotus a Buddhist one. In his story *'Bog umer'* (1922), Krzhizhanovskii uses wallpaper to design a church inside a flat: *'Опытная церковь [...] была оклеена серыми обоями с чередующимися вдоль длинных полос четкими изображениями: крест-полумесяц-лотос; крест — полумесяц — лотос'*.⁶² However all symbolism stops playing its role when wallpaper leads the main character to commit suicide at the end of the story.

In *'Poetomu'*, the only characteristic that is given to the wallpaper is the same that is given to the room itself — 'stupid'. In the first instance, this characteristic is linked through the wallpaper to the room itself, as well as to the character and his body: *'Не люблю ни своей глупой, в синие обойные лотосы, комнаты, ни своего узкого застрегнутого в платье тела, ни себя, запрятанного от себя'*.⁶³ The character exists in a space that was set up before he moved in, and this very space destroys him. Therefore the traditional scheme of the connection between the body and the room is as follows: first, he evaluates the space, then he evaluates himself through this room and in this room, and finally he kills himself.

⁶⁰ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Poetomu', p. 184.

⁶¹ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Avtobiografiia trupa', p. 512.

⁶² Krzhizhanovskii, 'Bog umer', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i, pp. 255-264 (p. 260).

⁶³ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Poetomu', p. 84.

A Body in a Room

Space, therefore, according to Krzhizhanovskii, is such a powerful medium that it is able to influence human beings on many different levels. In particular, it is able to shape a new body. One of the most powerful images of the relationship between space and body is given in 'Vospominaniia o budushchem'. Its protagonist describes his experience of walking through the city as 'dense and difficult' as if he was swimming through it: 'Пространство, прорываемое мускулами, казалось ему тугим и трудным. [...] Он чувствовал себя как пловец [...] в тесном квадратном сцене берегов'.⁶⁴

This passage is essential for the general understanding of how a body could feel in such narrow conditions of a square-room and a square-city. The image of a swimmer trying to find his way through the thick and dense matter that represents the space of the city makes it possible for the reader not only to imagine, but also to *feel* the space. As will be revealed later in the story, the space of the city is condensed in one square room.⁶⁵

Another type of moving through the space of the room (and the city as its continuation) is through counting the steps one makes. Many protagonists of Krzhizhanovskii's short stories have a habit of knowing the exact number of steps they need to make in order to get from one place to another in their rooms. The room's geometry becomes so familiar and so predictable for its dwellers that eventually it is coterminous with their minds; they cannot think without referring to the room any more. In 'Zhizneopisanie odnoi mysli', the Thinker needs to perform a ritual of stepping thirteen out of fourteen steps in order to come up with a thought:

⁶⁴ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Vospominaniia o budushchem', pp. 396–397.

⁶⁵ Cf. my discussion from Chapter V of this thesis that focuses on the metaphor of 'condensed' material of the film packed in just one room, which was given by Abram Room as an explanation of his artistic choice for the film *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*.

‘Рождение мысли произошло в тот момент, когда старый мыслитель, поднявшись, сделал тринадцать из четырнадцати заранее отмеренных от скамьи до скамьи шагов’.⁶⁶

Such partial perception of space (step by step) gradually transforms itself into a partial perception of the body in the space. In fact, it is hardly ever possible to find a full description of a protagonist’s body in Krzhizhanovskii’s short stories. What is depicted, however, is a metonymical portrait, a portrait of a corporal detail that is connected to a particular interior detail in the room.

One of the most vivid examples is the ‘0.6 of a man’ from ‘Avtobiografiia trupa’ (1925). At the very beginning of ‘Avtobiografiia trupa’, ‘комната’ is the first word that the protagonist Shtamm pronounces as soon as he arrives in Moscow:

‘Штамм, чуть только ступил с вагонной подножки на перрон московского вокзала, как стал повторять в мертвые и живые, человечьи и телефонные уши одно и то же слово: к о м н а т а’.⁶⁷

This very room reveals the difficulty of remaining oneself. When Shtamm moves into his new room in Moscow, he finds a letter from the previous tenant, a corpse who committed suicide and documented his madness for whomever moved in next to this room. The tenant-corpse describes how difficult it is to remain an ‘I’ and maintain one’s identity; he writes about ‘фикции’ that haunt him, ‘фикции’ of a man, who is not a ghost, not a person, but ‘0.6 of a person’. Later on in the letter the corpse tells Shtamm that he has already entered Shtamm’s ‘I’, and now Shtamm too has his own figment. The room becomes a container of some kind of disease: the corpse, haunted by the ‘0.6 of a person’, becomes haunted itself. Only in the last paragraph does the twist ending reveal a sudden paradox: the newly haunted Shtamm is happy to

⁶⁶ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Zhizneopisanie odnoi mysli’, p. 139.

⁶⁷ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Avtobiografiia trupa’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ii (2001), pp. 508–542 (p. 508), (emphasis original).

be haunted; now he depends on this room, as there is nothing else he can find:

‘другой комнаты, пожалуй, не сыскать. Придется остаться’.⁶⁸ Moreover, he is ready to do whatever it takes, as the room has captured him: ‘И вообще: мало ли что придется.’⁶⁹

This is a very characteristic story for Krzhizhanovskii’s treatment of the subject of interiors and the body inside them: it is morbid, it takes place in confined space, it is related to the unknown and fantastic. The notion of autobiography recalls the previous chapter. Indeed, both Belyi and Krzhizhanovskii set this genre in a room and use this ‘autobiographical room’ to refer to opposite notions of time and space and body. Belyi in *Kotik* is constantly talking of those who are not yet born, or those who will be born or live forever, and he also describes the parts of his body through the parts of his room; Krzhizhanovskii entitles the story as an autobiography of someone who is dead and haunted by a ‘0.6 of a person’. Moreover both ‘autobiographies’ analyse the nature of language down to the very shape and sound of individual letters: Kotik uses the word о б м о р о к, while Shtamm keeps reading words from different points of view. Both authors evoke fantastical imagery that is precise and at the same time very open-ended — as in the idea of the spiral in *Kotik*, and the notion of the ‘0.6 of a person’ referred to in ‘Avtobiografiia’. However, if Belyi shows a constructive attitude towards the parts of bodies which become parts of rooms — he is growing through this — Krzhizhanovskii’s mutated bodies are deconstructive; they escape, they suffer, they deform.

Similar notions of people who are not quite themselves appear constantly in Krzhizhanovskii’s short stories. For example, in ‘Sbezhavshie pal’tsy’ (1922) a famous pianist sits down to play in a concert hall as the fingers of his right hand

⁶⁸ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Avtobiografiia trupa’, p. 542.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

escape. On their way they visit the room where their owner used to be and explore ‘walking’ across the windowsill.

Another example is the description of ‘сутулость’. The back of a character’s body is often presented as ‘сутулый’, which even provides the surname for the protagonist of ‘Kvadraturin’ — Sutulin. The protagonist of ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’ opens the door with the help of his back as he finds the space too small to open it in the conventional manner: ‘Пятясь и приседая, открыл спиной дверь и — исчез за неслышно вжавшейся в стену створой’.⁷⁰ The architectural details of the room are often described as corporal; Krzhizhanovskii deliberately confuses corporal and architectural levels of imagery to melt the two worlds together — the space defines the posture and the shape of the body. The round back, in fact, becomes the main part of the bodies of Krzhizhanovskii’s characters, substituting for all other parts, and we read ‘обитатель Зачатьевского квадрата вдевал дугу спины [...] в пиджак’⁷¹ instead of ‘вдевал руку в пиджак’ or ‘надевал пиджак’, which would be a more traditional way of saying it. On another occasion, when a guest arrives in this square room, his back substitutes for his whole body. We read: ‘Жужелев увидел его слегка сутулящуюся спину у досок Штереровой клетки. Затем доски разомкнулись, и спина высокого посетителя исчезла внутри каморки’⁷² instead of ‘посетитель исчез’.

This metaphor develops even further in his non-fictional essay about Moscow, where Krzhizhanovskii presents the city as a body on its own. The autobiography of this body is seen as a history of its ‘walling’ — ‘остенение’.⁷³ The body, the city and

⁷⁰ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, p. 389.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 394.

⁷² Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, p. 427. *Kamorka* as an extremely narrow space is also shown in several films by Evgenii Bauer, which will be described in Chapter IV of this thesis.

⁷³ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Shtempel’: Moskva’, p. 522.

the room melt together in one single metaphorical chain, which Krzhizhanovskii keeps exploring throughout his fiction.

Another strong connection between the condensed space of the room and a body appears in ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, where Moscow is literally transformed into the character’s body as soon as this body moves into the ‘empty square’ of a flat: ‘Москва, гигантский сплюснутый человечник, тотчас же втиснулась в пустые аршины в лице тихошагого и бритолицего, с гнутой спиной и портфелем, вросшим в локоть, человека’.⁷⁴

The elbow, mentioned in this description, is a particularly important attribute for Krzhizhanovskii; it appears frequently in his stories to characterise male figures. Later in his career, Krzhizhanovskii developed the topic of the elbow in a separate short story ‘Neukushennyi lokot’ (1935). This later story of an unnamed man whose only purpose in life was to bite his own elbow (another play with language and space, a deconstruction of a cliché) reflects upon the whole philosophy of dismemberment and decapitation that was a common theme for many Stalinist texts of the period and, according to Lidiia Kaganovsky, offered ‘the blinded, limping, paralysed, and hystericised male body as a new kind of masculinity’.⁷⁵ My research, however, does not extend that far chronologically, but argues that, for some authors like Krzhizhanovskii, this fragmentation of a human body was rooted in the narrowness and squareness of the apartment. Such dependence of the body on the space in which it finds itself is evident already in his stories of the 1920s.

The elbows act as a manifestation of the geometry of the body that, together with the knees, equal the geometry of the room; it makes the body closed and square.

⁷⁴ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, p. 392.

⁷⁵ Lilia Kaganovsky, ‘How the Soviet Man Was Made’, *Slavic Review*, 63:3 (2004), 577–596 (p. 579).

It is the outer border of the human body. At the same time, it closes the body in its fullness, and does not allow any opportunity for contact from the outside.

In Krzhizhanovskii's fiction, images of the elbow appear at times of loss of communication. In 'Vospominaniia o budushchem', an elbow becomes the only 'bodily' detail that characterises the rare appearances of a mysterious unsociable dweller of the square flat. Just as the protagonist keeps his windows closed, he always keeps his elbows bent and pressed close to his body. His normal condition means that he does not want to change or disturb anything. Even when going down the stairs, he does not touch the railings with his hands, but rather with his elbow — 'локоть скользил по крутому поручню'⁷⁶ — to keep himself in a form of a square, closed to any contact from the outside.

Equally, every change of position in a closed room, the opening of a window or a door, for example, is accompanied by the straightening of an elbow. The room and the body mimic each other; the door opens, and the elbow loses its ability to hold objects tight: 'Открыть, распахнуть *дверь* в мнимость и изобличить нервы. Резкое движение — и портфель, выскользнув из-под *локтя*, грузно шлепнулся об пол'.⁷⁷

Similarly, other movements through the interior environment are performed through graphical, linguistic or psychological connections to the body. A passage from 'Vospominaniia o budushchem' demonstrates this tight linkage of the interior, the body and the language. Shterer is discussing the project of his time-machine with a companion. The dialogue forms a cross in a square room: 'Реплика скрестилась с репликой',⁷⁸ there is no possibility of mutual understanding — the room is crossed over by the language. To multiply this sense, Shterer suddenly draws another

⁷⁶ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Vospominaniia o budushchem', p. 364.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 395, (emphasis added).

⁷⁸ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Vospominaniia o budushchem', p. 387.

graphical ‘cross’, using a chair to ‘draw’ a horizontal line and using his body to ‘draw’ a vertical line: ‘Но в это время Штерер резко отодвинул стул и распрямился’.⁷⁹

The geometry of this scene is now as follows: the square room, the cross of the ‘реплики’ and the cross between the trajectory of movement of the chair and the body. All three — the body, the room and the language — interact to create the meaning of the impossibility of communication. To resolve this situation Shterer enters another space; he leaves the room and goes down the stairs. Stairs have a different geometry — a zigzag — an aggressive, active form that does not invite communication.⁸⁰ Importantly, the space is dark; Shterer is looking for the door (as if looking for an answer): ‘Штерер вышагнул в переднюю, ища в темноте выходной двери’. In the darkness, the two characters can only communicate through touch and movement. The answer is found. Shterer’s interlocutor tries to apologise whilst touching Shterer’s elbow: ‘Но вокруг него уже суетился путеец, приникая к локтю и вшептываясь [...]’. The elbow suddenly turns into an organ of communication. At this very point the language is represented by a staircase: ‘Они спустились вместе по узкой лестнице. Вопросов было больше, чем ступенек. Ответов не следовало’. The last step helps to produce an answer when Shterer’s companion takes Shterer’s elbow in both of his palms: ‘И только стоя на последней ступеньке, с рукой, охваченной двумя потными ладонями, Штерер наконец сказал: — Все равно’. After this ‘ладони выпустили руку’. Krzhizhanovskii chooses a very graphic way of showing the process of communication that is rooted in the geometry of the room and echoed in the geometry of the body. Space, body and language are tied together to drive forward the narrative of the story.

⁷⁹ All citations in this passage are from Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Vospominaniia o budushchem’, p. 387.

⁸⁰ Cf. the image of a zigzag staircase discussed in Chapter VI, pp. 231–265.

‘Kvadrat Pegasa’: Square and *Byt*

The image of the square of a room seems so all-absorbing that it could be used as a universal technique to describe not only the philosophical matters of Krzhizhanovskii’s style, but also the reality of the everyday, as seen in his short story ‘Kvadrat Pegasa’ (1921). The topic of ‘Kvadrat Pegasa’ is typical for Soviet culture of the time — the impossibility of the coexistence of love and everyday life, *byt*. It is a story of two lovers whose relationship develops under the starry sky of the tiny town of Zdesevsk.⁸¹ Ivan, the male protagonist, is full of romantic thoughts. He looks at the sky and sees a beautiful square formed out of four stars in the constellation of Pegasus. Krzhizhanovskii specifically chooses Pegasus as a symbolic representation of poetic inspiration — the protagonist is a true poet, he sees the stars everywhere. The square of Pegasus structures his mind, his living space and his mind, as a sudden joining of the two stars of Pegasus square is called a ‘kiss’ in his imagination. The square houses of his tiny city light up for him like the stars of his favourite constellation, and the city is just a projection of the square of Pegasus. As a true poet, he tries to bring all these poetic reflections to his beloved Nadia:

— И знаете, Надя, — продолжал голос, — вы думаете, мы в городке, среди освещенных лампами домиков? Нет, мы среди звезд. Вот там кто-то идет по мосткам. Остановить его, спросить: где ты? Скажет: в Здесевске. И не знает, подлец, что не в Здесевске он, а во вселенной.⁸²

⁸¹ The name of the town derives from the Russian word ‘здесь’, meaning ‘here’; another play with language that constructs spaces and vice versa. Importantly, it is one of the few stories that does not take place in Moscow.

⁸² Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadrat Pegasa’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i, pp. 93–102 (p. 93).

Nadia, however, represents a totally different mind-set that is associated with the routine of everyday life. When Ivan enthusiastically exclaims ‘Вселенная-Вселенной-Вселенную!’ she just thinks to herself: ‘Пока — пусть, но в моем доме никаких там вселенных — не потерплю’.⁸³

The contrast between the universe and the house is set from the very beginning of the story. The square of Pegasus keeps capturing Ivan’s mind, while Nadia is only preoccupied with the square of their room, where she would not let ‘any universes’ in. The square of Pegasus in Ivan’s consciousness is enormous and bright, but it would never fit into the domestic interior of Nadia’s dreams.

The capitulation of the hero before everyday life is depicted through the narrowing of the square of Pegasus into the square of their room, and this geometrical shift is present on many different levels. First of all, the candles from their wedding (which light up like the stars of Pegasus) are blown out and hidden in a chest. Then, the newlyweds themselves move from under the starry sky into a narrow room. For Ivan, the square of their room is no more than ‘четырёхугольная несущая’⁸⁴ — unlike the square of Pegasus it does not make any sense to him. Later, another ‘senseless’ square of everyday existence appears in the room — a bed. The process of its installation is depicted as a kind of complicated ritual that, for Nadia, bears the same high meaning as the stars do for Ivan. The double bed appears to be ‘огромный и сложный инструмент’;⁸⁵ its complicated installation requires careful control by Nadia’s mother: ‘под личным наблюдением Наденькиной матери, был внесен, тщательно собран — свинчен и поставлен на четыре лакированных ноги’.⁸⁶ The whole process of installing the bed is performed throughout an atmosphere of extreme

⁸³ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadrat Pegasa’, p. 94.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

⁸⁵ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadrat Pegasa’, p. 95.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

significance: ‘Лица у людей свинчивающих — ставящих — наблюдавших были серьезны; даже значительны’).⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Ivan still cannot find any meaning in it.

These two different attitudes towards the bed highlight the general process concerning the reconstruction of Soviet daily life in the 1920s. Olga Matich suggests that the bed became one of the main objects of revolutionary transformation that drew the attention of many artists and designers of the time such as Tatlin and the constructivists.⁸⁸ These artists intended to re-establish the meaning of ‘bourgeois sleeping habits’ and create a new revolutionary bed that would often take untraditional forms (such as a folding bed, a table as a bed, etc.), and that required complicated installation processes similar to that described by Krzhizhanovskii. Krzhizhanovskii’s bed represents a transitional link between the mystically oriented Symbolists for whom the bed was part of a high ritual of love and life and a post-revolutionary generation, which, as Olga Matich comments, was characterised by the ‘concrete material character of the dialogue’ [about bed and procreation matters, (M.P.)].⁸⁹ In Krzhizhanovskii’s short story, the bed is still seen as part of an important and serious ritual of moving into one’s own home. However, by the end of the story, this very ritual ruins the romantic intentions of Ivan; the small square drawn by the four legs of the bed drags Ivan into the routine and everyday, and makes him forget about the square of Pegasus — his true poetic universe.

Eventually, not only the bed, but also all other square parts of the room turn into a new border between Ivan and his distant square of Pegasus. In the fifth chapter, Nadia asks Ivan to pull down the curtain on the square of the window in order not to

⁸⁷ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadrat Pegasa’, p. 95.

⁸⁸ Olga Matich, ‘Remaking the Bed: Utopia in Daily Life’, in *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, ed. by John E. Bowlit and Olga Matich (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 59–78 (p. 60).

⁸⁹ Matich, p. 64.

see the sky; Ivan reluctantly obeys and destroys that last connection between himself and the sky. ‘Ну вот и хорошо’, Nadia remarks, as she wins yet another battle of the two squares.⁹⁰ This window was the place where Ivan would often sit and compose his poems, a kind of sacred place for him; it represented the connection of the two squares — the one of the room and the one of Pegasus. Now, cut off from the starry square of his eternal inspiration, the closed window becomes a point of doubt and transition. It is now ‘не окно, а “нет”-окно, “минус”-окно: оно наглухо закрыто ставнями, плотно зашторено; само слепое, не видящее того, для кого оно могло бы быть спасительным, оно и само не позволяет проникнуть через себя внутрь, делая и его слепым’.⁹¹

Sitting by the curtained window, Ivan is now visited by the devils of doubt. He is thinking whether to start building a new house or to stay in his room. The devils come to seduce him: ‘Квартира-то тесновата’, they say.⁹² After this, the hero finally decides to build a new house. This decision is again enclosed in the squares; made when Ivan was sitting by the square window, it is based on what Ivan was able to find in his square box: ‘Что-то подсчитав, пересчитав и отщелкав на желтых и черных костяшках, потолкавшихся внутри деревянного квадрата, Иван Иванович решился, наконец, **приобрести**’.⁹³ The whole preparation to build the new house is a preparation to enclose oneself in even more squares. The new study and children’s room should be of a square shape; the house should consist of four square rooms. Ivan has to take everything into account. Importantly, the first thing Nadia is worried about when moving into a new house is whether it has a proper roof: ‘Когда наконец

⁹⁰ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadrat Pagasa’, p. 99.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 97.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 98, (emphasis original).

настелят крышу?'.⁹⁴ This roof will symbolically close the last connection between the protagonist and the sky.

The last part of the story takes place in the sky. The angels are making a resolution on Ivan's fate. The square of Pegasus appears to be a stamp in their divine chancellery. With this stamp the angels seal Ivan's fate: 'Протянулась черная, в форме неравноугольного квадрата печать и ударила о пергамент. Четырехзвездие квадрата оттиснулось черными знаками на свитке: — Запечатлен, — промолвил архивариус'.⁹⁵

The story ends with the image of Ivan moving to his new house: 'Стучали колеса телег: это Иван Иванович, с семьей, на четырех площадках переезжал в свой **собственный дом**'.⁹⁶ Love and poetic inspiration are consumed by the square of the new house.

Transformations and Movements

The form of the room not only shapes the way of thinking, communicating and arguing; it also produces directions and trajectories. Krzhizhanovskii writes that it was exactly the shape, narrowness and closeness of the space of a room that made his protagonists run away from this room, and to look for a bigger, broader space:

Очень просто. Квадратура моей комнаты — 10 кв. арш. Маловато. Вы знаете мою давнишнюю привычку, обдумывая что-нибудь, возясь с замыслами, шагать из угла в угол. Тут углы слишком близки друг к другу. Пробовал: если стол вплотную к подоконнику, стул на кровать, — освобождается: три шага вдоль, полтора поперек. Не

⁹⁴ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Kvadrat Pegasa', p. 99.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

⁹⁶ Ibid., (emphasis original).

разгуляешься. И пришлось: чуть в голове расшагается мысль и самому захочется того же, защелкнув свои три шага на ключ, бежать на улицу, вдоль ее кривых длинных линий.⁹⁷

This explanation is given by Krzhizhanovskii as an answer to a question that was the starting point of his travels through the senses of Moscow — ‘как начались мои блуждания по с м ы с л а м М о с к в ы?’.⁹⁸ By giving such an answer, Krzhizhanovskii established a certain interdependence between the interior space of the room and the interior space of one’s mind. As Toporov comments:

Физическая теснота, достигнув некоего предела, начинает захватывать и духовную сферу: в ней тоже как бы индуцируется пустота: утесненная мысль начинает угнетать человека, отгораживать его от тех смыслов, которые — с каждым новым прорывом к ним — расширяют пространство. Ища спасение, человек инстинктивно ищет пространство.⁹⁹

According to Toporov, the exit from a narrow room to the outside equates to salvation for Krzhizhanovskii; his release from a narrow ‘minus-space’ of a room into a ‘plus-space’. Toporov described and categorised three possibilities resulting from such attempts to escape the narrowness of a room: (1) the initial inertia of domestic narrowness turns out to be so strong that the protagonist is able to notice only the same quality of narrowness in the city; (2) the initial inertia of domestic narrowness gradually fades in the city and is replaced by joy; (3) the initial inertia of domestic

⁹⁷ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Shtempel’: Moskva’, p. 514.

⁹⁸ Ibid., (emphasis original).

⁹⁹ Toporov, p. 516.

narrowness vanishes in the city.¹⁰⁰ However, as soon as the character finds himself in an open space, his fear of minus-space comes back in its opposite reincarnation, as ‘слишком широкое и пустынное “пере-пространство” или даже “слишком-пространство” (“сверх-пространство”)¹⁰¹

This structure, introduced by Toporov, is extremely important as it illustrates the priority of the interior space to any kind of movements performed by the protagonist — usually a movement out of the room and into the city. However, although Toporov agrees that the room creates a certain type of inertia that influences the plot, he explores these influences only outside the space of a room — in the city or in vast open spaces. In the analysis to follow I shall show what happens to the protagonist, and more importantly to the room, within the four walls, before the protagonist decides to leave them.

Following Toporov in his exploration of the movements of Krzhizhanovskii's protagonists, I mark out three possible mechanics of movement within the room: transformation, expansion and measurement. Often, these types of movement intersect with each other, thus creating a complex unity.

In Krzhizhanovskii's short stories, transformation is usually assigned to a specific location in a room — a window. One particular passage from the short story ‘Poetomu’ (1922) best illustrates the traditional loci of both restriction and transformation in the room: ‘Поэт и рассвет почти одновременно вошли в комнату: поэт в дверь, рассвет в окно. Встретившись, посмотрели друг на друга: оба были бледны и хмуры’.¹⁰²

Here, a poet and the dawn enter a room from two different sides — through the window and through the door. The door and the window are situated opposite

¹⁰⁰ Toporov, p. 520.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 519.

¹⁰² Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Poetomu’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, i (2001), pp. 176–193 (p. 181).

each other, and illustrate opposite meanings. In Krzhizhanovskii's poetic space, the door belongs to the space of the natural, constant, habitual, and the window to the space of the supernatural, sub-normal and extraordinary — something that is about to change. The dawn that enters the room through the window is ready to change into midday. The poet, however, is not expecting to change his state; entering through the door turns his actions into a minus: 'Рассвету — предстояло преобразиться в зарю, из зари сделаться днем и полднем. Поэту ничего не предстояло'.¹⁰³

In 'Kvadraturin', the process of opening the door is described as a quite extraordinary one. Due to the extreme narrowness of his room the protagonist learns how to open the door by putting his feet through the door handle. However, as the narrator describes this action, it becomes habitual, and we understand that it took a long time for the protagonist to develop such a habit, for he had been in this room far too long: 'Сутулин, не подымаясь с кровати, протянул — привычным движением — ногу навстречу стуку и, вдев носок в дверную ручку, дернул. Дверь наотмашь открылась'.¹⁰⁴

The door is now open. Through the open door the protagonist sees a figure that is associated with the window and therefore with change and transformation: 'На пороге, головой о притолоку, стоял длинный, серый, под цвет сумеркам, всочившимся в окно, человек'.¹⁰⁵ Although having entered through the door (the space of habit), the stranger is described by the attributes of the window (the space of change). He is as grey as the twilight leaking out from the window. All the qualities — the position on the threshold, the colour of grey that is the combination of black and white, the twilight that is the combination of day and night, and most importantly the projection of the window — are ambiguous, and belong to the cultural space of

¹⁰³ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Poetomu', p. 181.

¹⁰⁴ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Kvadraturin', p. 449.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

change. Later, the dominance of this position is explained in the plot; this man of twilight is going to change Sutulin's life and space dramatically.

The story offers a parody of an advertisement for a new technical device that is used to multiply the square metres of one's flat. It shows, in a grotesque manner, the poor living conditions of intellectuals in the early Soviet period. This technical device is a new product called Kvadraturin. The twilight stranger tells Sutulin, the protagonist of the story, to apply this product to the room's walls in order to increase its size. This seems to Sutulin to be worth trying, so he follows the directions and applies the new product on the four walls of his flat (he neglects the ceiling). On waking the next day, he discovers that the effects of Kvadraturin are dramatic. His room has notably expanded — the furniture and the walls have moved apart. That morning he goes to his office and, on returning, he notices that his small room that used to be characterised as 'спичечная коробка' has grown even bigger: 'Вся комната, растянутая и уродливо развороченная, начинала пугать и мучить'.¹⁰⁶ This now frightens Sutulin, and the shock stops him from breathing normally; the room has changed from a place of shelter to a place of terror.

The next morning, Sutulin is even more scared by the visit of the Room Remeasuring Committee, which needs to ensure that his room does not exceed ninety-seven square feet.¹⁰⁷ To prevent the commission and the curious neighbours from seeing his already huge room, Sutulin smashes his light switch. In the darkness the commissioners cannot see anything and leave. Sutulin recognises that the room will

¹⁰⁶ Krzhizhanovskii, 'Kvadraturin', p. 455.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. the famous House Committee that is appointed to split Professor Preobrazhenskii's apartment up in *Sobach'e serdtse* by Mikhail Bulgakov. Vadim Perel'muter comments that it is no coincidence that both Krzhizhanovskii and Bulgakov write about Soviet measuring committees. Krzhizhanovskii himself got his room as a result of remeasuring policy, and Krzhizhanovskii's wife Anna Bovshek had moved to a new flat for the same reasons. Interestingly, the previous occupant of Bovshek's new flat was a doctor called Sergei Ivanovich Preobrazhenskii — a prototype for Professor Preobrazhenskii from *Sobach'e serdtse*. See Perel'muter, 'Kommentarii', in Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ii, pp. 611–700 (pp. 677–678).

continue to grow forever in geometrical progression: ‘Вот — вытеснится этокое из тубика, расквдратится: квадрат в квадрат, квадрат квадратов в квадрат’.¹⁰⁸ The square shape of the room turns into a mathematical square, increasing the progression of growth. Terrified, Sutulin plans to run away from his room: ‘Надо думать в обгон: если его не передумаешь, перерастет оно и...’.¹⁰⁹ In order to be able to see in the darkness he lights a match, and manages to reach the middle of the room before it burns out. However, he very soon completely loses his bearings in his own room. Sutulin is now lost in the dark and frightening breadth of his formerly narrow room.

Krzhizhanovskii ends the story with another spatial paradox. The protagonist Sutulin and the readers are left in a place of ultimate dislocation, an eternal threshold; outside the endless cell of Sutulin’s apartment with the scream of fear coming from inside of it:

Жильцы квадратур, прилегавших к восьми квадратным гражданина Сутулина, со сна и со страху не разбирались в тембре и интонации крика, разбудившего их среди ночи и заставившего сбежаться к порогу сутулинской клетки: кричать в пустыне заблудившемуся и погибающему и бесполезно и поздно: но если все же — вопреки смыслу — он кричит, то, наверное, т а к.¹¹⁰

In this story, as in many others, the room becomes a manifestation of the minus-space of fear and emotional deprivation that comes from the ever-expanding space of a narrow room, ‘an accretion of impossible particulars’.¹¹¹ It is a space characterised by confinement, paranoia, instability, fear and displacement.

Krzhizhanovskii’s stories depict a single room as a dangerous ‘minus’-space, where

¹⁰⁸ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadraturin’, pp. 456–457.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 457.

¹¹⁰ Krzhizhanovskii, ‘Kvadraturin’, p. 460.

¹¹¹ Thirwell, p. 57.

‘омертвляется пространство жизни’ and ‘сама жизнь связана с пространством и зависит от него’, ‘это пространство пожирает своих детей.’¹¹² The dark space of the room in the story is depicted as a threat or, to use the metaphor of Anthony Vidler, ‘as harbinger of the unseen’, that ‘operates as medical and psychical metaphor for all the possible erosions of bodily and physical well being’,¹¹³ which finally leads its inhabitant to suffer a panic attack.

This room, like many other rooms in Krzhizhanovskii’s early fiction, features as a primal location for his unique construction of both narrative and poetic space. In the limited space of the room that could only accommodate a bed and a chair, Krzhizhanovskii manages to find space for the enormous and the impossible, the city and the universe, the tiny and the gigantic. The limited space of a room, this ‘угнетающе-пугающее’, ‘недо-пространство’, according to Toporov, becomes at the same time the most elaborated space in Krzhizhanovskii’s fiction, the one that interests him the most and that most influenced his stylistic manner.¹¹⁴ The borders of Krzhizhanovskii’s imaginary rooms are all geometrically adjusted and generously marked by metaphoric relationships that help readers understand the paradoxical nature of everyday existence and, in Adam Thirwell’s resonant phrase, ‘investigate how much unreality reality might bear’.¹¹⁵

Krzhizhanovskii’s rooms break with the tradition of static nineteenth-century interiors in that they are all rooms where his characters cannot be who they are (are often divided into parts), or cannot feel well. The characters try to escape their rooms, which usually results in a tragedy. Or, even when they like being inside, someone else is changing the environment of the room for it to become unbearable, as in *Kvadrat*

¹¹² Toporov, p. 543.

¹¹³ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 167.

¹¹⁴ Toporov, p. 519.

¹¹⁵ Thirwell, p. 57.

Pegasa. Yes, Krzhizhanovskii's rooms are all ultimately with the sign of 'minus' — they have no ability to protect and save. Instead, they are open, frightening and constantly changing.

CHAPTER IV

Evgenii Bauer. A Trapped Soul

This chapter offers an in-depth exploration of interior space in the films of Evgenii Bauer (1865–1917), the pre-revolutionary filmmaker frequently referred to as the pioneer of cinematic set design.¹ I analyse Bauer's particular status as a 'master of set design' and provide a cultural and formal analysis of his representation of domestic interiors in early Russian cinema. In my close reading of two of Evgenii Bauer's films, I demonstrate that the various aspects of Bauer's use of set design and interior space — including his use of *mise-en-scène* and camera movement — are combined specifically with visual elements that replicate aspects of modernity as a fluid urban space and create a sense of ambiguity that appears embodied within the four walls of the modern interior. Bauer's use of domestic spaces illustrates the possibilities of set design as a specific technique in the early cinema, turning it into a powerful cinematic tool that was later employed by many other directors. My analysis illustrates that the ambiguity that Bauer created with sets allowed for multiple interpretations by his viewers, both contemporary and modern. Additionally, Bauer's work represents an important but relatively unfamiliar case of how interior spaces were represented and perceived during the years preceding the Revolution.

¹ See e.g. Neia Zorkaia, 'Svetopis' Evgeniia Bauera', *Iskusstvo kino*, 10 (1997), 77–93; and Ian Christie, 'Set Design', in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 584–587 (p. 587).

The Master of Set Design

Since the rediscovery of his films in 1989 at the Eighth Festival of Silent Cinema in Pordenone,² the pre-revolutionary Russian director, artist, and cameraman Evgenii Frantsevich Bauer (1865–1917) has come to be recognised not only as the ‘outstanding *auteur* of pre-revolutionary Russian film’,³ but also, and more importantly for the purpose of this research, as a leading stylist of Russian silent cinematography, and its pioneering set designer, who placed particular emphasis on the pictorial aspect of film-making and ‘literally shed new light on the origins of modern film design’.⁴

Evgenii Bauer arrived in cinema after a varied career in stage design. A student of the Moscow College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture (from which he, however, never graduated), Bauer won recognition as a skilful stage designer of early musical comedies. In 1912, he was hired as production designer for the Pathé-Frères Company in Moscow, and a year later became a scenic director for Drankov & Taldykin’s historical film *Trekhsotletie tsarstvovaniia doma Romanovykh* (1913). Then, Bauer began directing films for Aleksandr Khanzhonkov’s company, where he remained for the rest of his career until his death in 1917. Bauer was Khanzhonkov’s leading director, and eventually became one of the company’s shareholders. He directed at least eighty-two films, of which twenty-six are known today, including his debut for Khanzhonkov, *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi* (1913), and his last film *Korol’ Parizha* (1917).

² This is a weeklong festival showcasing works of the silent era. The year 1989 was marked by rediscovery of more than 200 Soviet silent movies dating from 1908 to 1917, including most of the surviving films by Evgenii Bauer.

³ Rachel Morley, ‘Zhizn’ za zhizn’/A Life for a Life’, in *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. by Birgit Beumers (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), pp. 13–22 (p. 22).

⁴ Christie, p. 587.

Even the limited number of Bauer's surviving films shows his extraordinary devotion to cinematic interior space and set design (all of the twenty-six surviving films include elaborate scenes set in interior spaces). Study of his works makes it possible for the modern viewer both to get a sense of the importance that he attached to film design and to trace the development of his artistic techniques as embodied in the elements of interior space. In turn, close analysis of these techniques provides us with a fair grounding from which to examine the cinematic representation of interior spaces in pre-revolutionary Russia.

‘Почему так прекрасен Бауэр?’

Although Bauer is now recognised by major critics of early Russian cinema as ‘the only pre-revolutionary Russian film-maker routinely considered to have attained a high level of innovation in set design’,⁵ there is still no monograph dedicated solely to his visual style, nor is there a study devoted to his particular treatment of set design. However, a context for discussion of this is supplied by general studies of the era in which Bauer made his films,⁶ as well as by different memoirs by the filmmakers of the time.⁷

⁵ Emma Widdis, ‘*Faktura: Depth and Surface in Early Soviet Set Design*’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3:1 (2009), 5–32, p. 9.

⁶ See Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception*, ed. by Richard Taylor, trans. by Alan Bodger (London: Routledge, 1998), which is a pioneering work in the field of reception studies in Russia, demonstrating how various techniques and spaces influenced and created meaning in film; Denise Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror: Moviemaking in Russia, 1908–1918* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), which provides socio-historical analysis of film production in early twentieth-century Russia. However, both books are more concerned with the sociology of cinema than with film aesthetics. For more contextual details on the period, see V. Vishnevskii, *Khudozhestvennye fil'my dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1945); B. Likhachev, *Kino v Rossii: 1896–1926. Materialy k istorii russkogo kino* (Leningrad: Academia, 1927); R. Sobolev, *Liudi i fil'my russkogo dorevoliutsionnogo kino* (Moscow: Kniga po trebovaniu, 2012); S. Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963); Neia Zorkaia, *Na rubezhe stoletii. U istokov massovogo iskusstva v Rossii 1900–1910* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976).

⁷ See, first of all, memoirs of Bauer's owner of studio Aleksandr Khanzhonkov, in A. A. Khanzhonkov, *Pervye gody russkoi kinematografii: Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1937); as well as Lui Forest'e

With the rise of interest in early Russian cinema in the West, there have appeared several excellent articles that explore various aspects of early filmmaking and cinema aesthetics that are closely related to set design. I would select several works as the foremost amongst these. These include Yuri Tsivian's video-essays on early Russian film, exploring 'the anatomy' of the cinematic image;⁸ and his comparative study of stylistic techniques in Franz Hofer and Evgenii Bauer, which gives a deep semiotic exploration of Bauer's directing techniques.⁹ Alongside this I would mention Philip Cavendish's study of camera movement in early Russian films, which gives a deep insight into the profession of camera operators during the early stages of Russian cinematic culture.¹⁰ Finally, Emma Widdis's article on texture and depth on the screen offers an excellent exploration of set design techniques of the Russian cinema of the 1920s.¹¹ Further useful information about the cultural background of Bauer's films is available in a series of articles on Bauer and gender by

[Louis Forestier], *Velikii nemoi: Vospominaniia kinooperatora* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1945), and A. Levitskii, *Rasskazy o kinematografe* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964); valuable memoirs are also collected in the volume *Migaiushchii sinema: Rannie gody russkoi kinematografii. Vospominaniia, dokumenty, stat'i*, ed. by M. I. Volotskii (Moscow: Rodina, 1995).

⁸ Yuri Tsivian, *Immaterial Bodies: Cultural Anatomy of Early Russian Film* [on CD] (Philadelphia: Annenberg Centre of Communication and University of Southern California, 1999); and Yuri Tsivian, 'Video Essay', in *Mad Love. Three Films by Evgenii Bauer* [on DVD] (London: British Film Institute, 2002).

⁹ Yuri Tsivian, 'Two "Stylists" of the Teens: Franz Hofer and Yevgenii Bauer', in *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), pp. 264–276.

¹⁰ Cavendish, 'The Hand that Turns the Handle: Camera Operators and the Poetics of the Camera in Pre-Revolutionary Russian Film', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 82:2 (2004), 201–245.

¹¹ Widdis, 'Faktura', p. 9.

Rachel Morley,¹² as well as in the article by Ustiugova on the influence of Art Nouveau on early Russian cinema.¹³

Not all of the discussions provide a flattering view of the general condition of set design in pre-revolutionary Russia. Philip Cavendish, for example, describes the ‘blatantly artificial and physically fragile stage-sets’ of the early 1900s: ‘doors wobble when opened; mantelpieces sink under the weight of human elbows; pot-plants move in the breeze; and the scenes beyond the windows are clearly painted’.¹⁴ Emma Widdis describes pre-revolutionary film design as ‘theatre’s poor relation’, incapable of creating any elaborated set specific to the particular situation.¹⁵ However, both critics make an exception for Evgenii Bauer — as the first director to recognise the specificity of the artistic use of interiors, its parts and decorations, noticing ‘the complex architecture of his set’.¹⁶ Bauer was first among the Russian directors to become aware ‘of the symbolic and metaphorical dynamic of film space, with its attendant implications for cinematography and the function of the camera as a creative interpreter of the diegesis, rather than merely a passive and supposedly objective observer’.¹⁷

This was noticed by Bauer’s contemporaries in various reviews of his films.¹⁸

The first proper theoretical recognition of the director’s artistic influence that hinted at

¹² Rachel Morley, ‘Gender Relations in the Films of Evgenii Bauer’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 81 (2003), 32–69; eadem, “‘Crime Without Punishment’: Reworking of Nineteenth-Century Russian Literary Sources in Evgenii Bauer’s *Child of the Big City*’, in *Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature, 1900–2001: Screening the Word*, ed. by S. Hutchings and A. Vernitski (London: Routledge, Curzon, 2005), pp. 27–43; eadem, ‘Performing Femininity in an Age of Change: Evgenii Bauer, Ivan Turgenev and the Legend of Evlaliia Kadmira’, in *Turgenev: Art, Ideology, Legacy*, ed. by Robert Reid and Joe Andrew (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 269–316; eadem, ‘*Zhizn’ za zhizn’/A Life for a Life*’.

¹³ V. Ustiugova, ‘Stil’ modern v rannem russkom kinematografe (na primere tvorchestva E.F. Bauera)’, *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta*, Seriya ‘Istoriia’, 5 (2005), 133–150.

¹⁴ Cavendish, ‘The Hand that Turns the Handle’, p. 206.

¹⁵ Widdis, ‘*Faktura*’, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁷ Cavendish, ‘The Hand that Turns the Handle’, p. 214.

¹⁸ Praise of Bauer’s films appeared regularly in *Pegasus*, the journal of Khanzhonkov’s studio that was published from November 1915 to October 1916; as well as in *Vestnik kinematografii*, and *Kinogazeta*.

a deeper understanding of his set design techniques was given by the director Lev Kuleshov, who in 1917 opened up the theoretical field for the discussion of the role of film designer ('художник в кино') in his two articles for *Vestnik kinematografii*.¹⁹ Similarly to Bauer, Kuleshov broke through in cinema coming from an artistic background (he had worked for Bauer as a young designer himself). Based on his practical experience in the field, Kuleshov writes that within the new art of cinema, a designer ('художник') should become a figure of major importance, or even more — the director should be a 'художник' himself, the perfect combination that Kuleshov recognised in Bauer:

Если режиссер сам не художник, то он не может создать картины — истинного произведения искусства кинематографа. [...] Почему так прекрасен Бауэр? Почему режиссеры не художники, даже в совместной работе с творцами внешности и облика, не создают истинно красивых картин?²⁰

This question of *Why is Bauer so fine?* is answered by Kuleshov in a discussion of Bauer's method in set design ('метод Бауэра'), which, he contends, unlike the simple flat sets of the majority of contemporary film-productions, created the illusion of depth: 'Громоздкие архитектурные постройки с возможно большим числом планов и изломов стен, для более эффектного освещения и достижения благодаря этому большой глубины и стереоскопичности (метод Бауэра)'.²¹

In 1918, the whole first issue of *Kinogazeta* was dedicated to Bauer's cinematography.

¹⁹ Lev Kuleshov, 'O zadachakh khudozhnika v kinematografe', *Vestnik kinematografii*, 126 (1917), 16–17; and idem, 'Zadachi khudozhnika v kinematografe', *Vestnik kinematografii*, 127 (1917), 37–38.

²⁰ Kuleshov, 'Zadachi', p. 38, (emphasis original).

²¹ Kuleshov, 'O zadachakh', p. 16.

This creation of depth of field was one of the main elements in the development of set design in pre-revolutionary films. Cloth backdrops were replaced by the ‘deep’ system of props: a series of flat screens that created multiple levels within the set, offering different positions for the camera, and Bauer was the pioneer of this development.²² However, the creation of depth on its own was not Bauer’s only aim.

Another important element of Bauer’s set, according to Kuleshov, was his work with ‘предметы’:

Художник кино пишет *предметами*, щитками (стенами) и *светом* (содружество с оператором), его полотно — тридцатипятиградусный угол восприятия кинематографического аппарата, треугольник на плоскости. На экране почти неважно, *что* стоит в кадре, а важно, как размещены предметы, как они скомпонованы на плоскости.²³

Later, the art of ‘writing with the objects’ will be characterised by Kuleshov as the art of using ‘диговинка’ — an exotic feature that is alive and creative on the set; an active object that creates an extra meaning:

Декорация должна иметь свой характер, свой смысл, дело не в громоздкости и сложности постройки, а в нахождении первого плана — ‘диговинки’, которая определяла бы стиль декорации, ее назначение, ее сценарный характер и смысл.²⁴

²² In this, the cinematic medium was slowly moving away from conventional theatricalisation of the set, see Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and specifically on the relationship between theatre and cinema in the early Russian film production, see Cavendish, ‘The Hand that Turns the Handle’, pp. 211–224.

²³ Kuleshov, ‘O zadachakh’, p. 16, (emphasis original).

²⁴ Lev Kuleshov, ‘Evgenii Frantsevich Bauer’, in *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, 3 vols (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1987), ii, pp. 403–409 (p. 405).

Bauer's sets, as I shall demonstrate, always include this kind of 'диговинка'; objects that are remembered by the spectators not less than the characters themselves.²⁵ This chapter argues that Bauer's unusual attention to set design constructions is rooted in his new use of the melodrama genre, as well as his interest in the emerging modernity and shifting meaning of urban and domestic spaces.

Melodrama and Domestic Interior

In his study of melodrama and modernity in the early cinema, Ben Singer distinguishes two types of topological dominants for this genre, corresponding to the two different types of melodrama: (1) 'the blood-and-thunder sensational melodrama of spectacular diegetic realism' and (2) 'the Hollywood family and maternal melodrama'.²⁶ According to this study, the family melodrama can be described as 'a form in which everything happens "inside"' — or even within 'a zone that is doubly "inside", concentrating on the interior spaces of the home and the heart'.²⁷ The other type of space appears in what Ben Singer calls 'sensational melodrama', which was 'distinct in its externalization, its insistence that everything happen on the outside'.²⁸ This type of melodrama:

²⁵ For a discussion on the use of *dikovinka* in Bauer's productions, see Alyssa DeBlasio, 'Choreographing Space, Time, and *Dikovinki* in the Films of Evgenii Bauer', *The Russian Review*, 1 (2007), 671–692.

²⁶ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 55. For more on this genre, see Peter Brooks, 'Melodrama, Body, Revolution', in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, ed. by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1994), pp. 11–25; and idem, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

²⁷ Singer, p. 55. Cf. the 'doubleness' of interior as seen by Rice. See Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, p. 2.

²⁸ Singer, p. 55.

Virtually eradicated any [...] emotional entanglement, or sentiment in favour of a focus on physical action and violence. At the same time, it externalized its focus of diegetic interest, avoiding the private sphere in favour of an adamantly nondomestic *mise-en-scène* of criminal dens, submarines, lumber mills, diamond mines, munitions factories, racetracks, abandoned warehouses, gothic mansions, rooftops, airfields, highways, and railways.²⁹

In my analysis, I shall argue that Bauer's use of interior space can belong to both types. Just like the Hollywood family melodramas, Bauer's films are set mostly inside. But unlike in the popular US melodramas, Bauer's films do not lead to a triumphal 'happy end', nor is there a radiant 'happy home'. Some critics are even convinced that in his treatment of the domestic topic, Bauer makes a clear statement that 'home is not the happiest place on earth'.³⁰

Indeed, Bauer's homes and interiors are treated just like 'nondomestic' transitional spaces, or even like exteriors, 'inhabiting' the physical action and violence of the outside — the qualities that are characteristic of 'sensational melodramas', which has led critics to suggest that, by using set design and interior decoration so efficiently, Bauer had already created a new melodramatic style in his first film, *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*:

This quintessential 'Bauer film' [...] transcends the clichés of melodrama. In stylistic terms it is a remarkable combination of Bauer's aestheticism [...] and realism — in its vivid picture of urban poverty and decay. The beautifully decorated interiors not only reflected elite style of the day, but formed it as well.³¹

²⁹ Singer, pp. 54–55.

³⁰ Jane Gaines, 'Domestic Melodrama', in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, pp. 602–606 (p. 605).

³¹ Youngblood, *Magic Mirror*, p. 81.

This chapter will try to investigate what enables Bauer's domestic sets to generate such a sense of anxiety and vulnerability inside the cosy interior.³² It is this aspect of Bauer's cinematography on which I shall focus. By analysing two of his films set in the modern interior, I shall trace how, entrapped in difficult moral and social situations, Bauer's heroines are at the same time entrapped in their own domestic interiors, and how their crossing of different moral and social lines is supported (and even explained) by their crossing of the graphic lines within the constructed set.

Sumerki zhenskoi dushi

Sumerki zhenskoi dushi was Bauer's first film as director for Khanzhonkov's production company, and the first of his tales to reveal the opposition between urban and domestic life, and its influence on a woman's fate. From the opening scene, this film focuses on interior imagery that shows Vera Dubovskaia, the female protagonist, being trapped in a liminal zone, a transitional space 'between' two opposites — the inside and the outside, the luxurious and the poor. The stylistic and spatial choices of the film therefore are dictated by Vera's choices between these two oppositions.

Vera Dubovskaia, Bauer's heroine, is a young, beautiful and wealthy woman, a Countess's daughter, afflicted by loneliness and boredom in her luxurious residence. Out of this boredom and a failure to find meaning in her luxurious life, Vera decides to devote her life to poor and unfortunate people, and starts helping her mother, who runs a charity. However, her first visit to the slum dwelling of the labourer Maksim

³² The same opposition of cosiness and anxiety is defining for another popular genre — the detective story. As Charles Rice suggests in his reading of Benjamin and Bloch, the detective story becomes a 'critique of the *intérieur*', as bourgeois interiors appear to become 'too cosy', so that they 'invite' a murder to happen in their walls, almost predisposing the murder. See Charles Rice, 'Evidence, Experience and Conjecture: Reading the Interior through Benjamin and Bloch', *Home Cultures*, 3 (2005), 285–298 (p. 286).

ends with a traumatic experience. Maksim rapes Vera, and in the act of defending herself she stabs Maksim to death.

After this incident, Vera goes back to her usual life of boredom and luxury. Soon she meets Prince Dol'skii; he proposes to her, and she accepts his proposal. Being still tortured by the visions of the past, Vera reveals her traumatic experience to her husband who, unable to accept it, rejects Vera. Vera decides to pursue a new career as a stage performer. Soon Dol'skii sees her on the screen, regrets his rejection and begs for forgiveness, but Vera tells him he is too late. The Prince dies of a broken heart.

The Characters and Their 'Background'

The film opens with a series of establishing shots, which reveals the characters' qualities through the interior decoration, and changes our perception of space and figures as they are continuously placed differently against different settings.

Of the three actors, only Nina Chernova, who plays the main role of Vera Dubovskaia, is shown moving through the space of a corridor. Chernova is also the only one to walk towards the spectator (though generally a long corridor would invite movement of this kind), thus creating the sense of the depth of the screen, and this liminal space gradually becomes a metaphor of Vera's soul. Additionally, Chernova hides her face under her muff — a gesture that echoes the sense of claustrophobia and enclosure.

Aleksandr Ugriumov, starring as Prince Dol'skii, is shown in front of a flat background of oriental rugs and armour hanging on the wall — this is the space where he first meets Vera. These tapestries create tension between the flat surfaces of

Dol'skii's space and the infinitely deep background of Vera's.³³

The last of the three actors, Viktor Demert in the role of Maksim Petrov, appears on a completely black background, which represents the darkness of his own social and spatial position in film narrative.

Trapped in the Gauze

In the opening sequence of the film, Bauer shows Vera being physically entrapped by the surroundings of her bedroom. 'Одиноко чувствует себя Вера, среди окружающей ее роскоши', the intertitle says as we enter a complex construction of the set of Vera's bedroom draped with a gauze veil. In this film, Bauer 'pioneered the use of tulle sheets in place of painted flats to create lightness on the screen',³⁴ and it is this gauze that helps us to explain Vera's mood. Bauer locates the gauze between Vera and the viewer, which makes Vera's figure look mysterious and distant. This image allows the viewer to enter Vera's dreams, and allows us to enter her soul following the invitation of the film's title. At the same time, the gauze divides different spaces of the set that represent different worlds of Vera's imagination.

³³ First using this technique in *Sumerki*, Bauer would revisit this style constantly right up to his last film, *Korol' Parizha*.

³⁴ Christie, p. 587.



Figure 1. *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*. Vera in her bedroom.

In this film still (figure 1), the darkness of the curtain, flowers, and chair creates the immovable foreground of the shot that contrasts with the light interior of the bedroom where Vera is sitting. We see Vera only through the limited space created by the two sides of the curtain, almost as though she were a character of a separate episode. Graphically, the silhouette of the chair with the standing plant in the foreground reflects Vera's posture, as if to deliberately leave her with no space to move, representing her as an immovable figure. As will emerge later in the film, Vera is trapped not only by the objects in her room, but also by her mood and social status.

By using the liminal spaces so efficiently, Bauer is very close to the understanding of spaces in pictorial tradition, such as a distant view of mountains, or a view through windows, open doors or open curtains. In her study on space, composition and meaning in seventeenth-century Dutch art, Martha Hollander examines the use of such spaces by several Dutch painters, and concludes that these spaces often bear more meaning than primary ones; they are used as rhetorical devices to make the composition more complex, to expand the narrative and to suggest

ambiguous connotations.³⁵ Hollander bases her study on two particular terms from Karel van Mander's painter's book — *doorsien* (view through) and *insein* (view into) — that the artist uses 'for an opening in the picture space'.³⁶ Both terms, as Hollander comments, 'emphasise penetration':

The dynamic word [Mander] uses to describe the 'plunging' movement of the eyes [...] literally means 'to plow', evoking the aggressive and even erotic nature of looking. Painting demonstrates its seductive power by offering a pathway into the historical narrative.³⁷

This description, although referring to painting, is very close to Bauer's use of interior scenes in *Sumerki*. The narrow space between the gauze curtains through which we first see Vera is very similar to the interior imagery of Dutch artists, and could also serve as an illustration of the *doorsien*, a view through. However, if in Dutch paintings this view signifies the penetration of the pictorial narrative, the cinematic medium takes the scene further.³⁸

Later in the film, we enter the same room once again. This time, the scene starts from the outside. Maksim gets into Vera's room through the window; the light space of Vera's room is penetrated by Maksim's dark silhouette exactly at the point of *doorsein*, in the very centre of the room. His dark silhouette seen in the foreground

³⁵ Marta Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ The same effect of penetration with an eye is reached by a different medium — the use of gauze or lace. Andrew Webber, analysing the use of gauze drapery in Buñuel's film *Un chien andalou* (1929), suggests that the gauze is used by the director specifically to evoke the idea of looking through, the idea of penetration of the cinematic space by looking through it. Lace, according to Webber, 'draws attention to what is uncovered: it is flat but indicates with its porosity the attraction of hidden depths. Lace is a lure, presenting a device amenable to both exhibitionist and voyeur, especially with conjunction with the right form of lightning'. See Andrew Webber, 'Cut and Laced: Traumatism in Luis Bunuel's *Un chien andalou*', in *Projected Shadows: Psychoanalytic Reflections on the Representation of Loss in European Cinema*, ed. by Andrea Sabbadini (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 92–101 (p. 93).

looks enormous compared to the sleeping Vera, which symbolically prepares the viewer for their next encounter. Finally, Maksim's gesture of opening the curtain also alludes to the same event (figure 2).³⁹



Figure 2. *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*. Maksim visits Vera's bedroom.

The Short Freedom of (Camera-) Movement

Another example of how Bauer uses interior space to make the viewer understand Vera's mind is in the sequence that represents a social evening. Once again, Vera is bored with the luxury and vanity of her mother's salon, and wants to be alone. She leaves the crowd and sits down. The sense of Vera feeling lonely and detached is suggested by the organisation of space in this shot. Vera is graphically separated from the rest of the crowd by the lamp and the white wall of her background that creates two parallel screens: one of the crowd moving to the right of the screen, and one of Vera — as a contrast — immovable, white, and slightly smaller than the 'crowd' part of the screen (figures 3 and 4).

³⁹ Philip Cavendish also suggests that in this scene the veil symbolically denotes Vera's virginity. See Cavendish, 'The Hand that Turns the Handle', p. 215.



Figures 3 and 5. *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*. Vera alone at the ball.

Bauer uses parts of the interior to separate Vera from the rest. A gentleman invites her to dance, but she refuses. She then stands up and with her back towards the viewer moves into the depth of the screen. The camera follows her movement, as if, while refusing to dance with others, Vera has invited the viewer (and the camera) to follow her movement. This camera movement suggests to the viewers a sharing of Vera's mood, a mood so different to that of the glamorous ballroom crowd, which is, in contrast, shown in one static frame.

As soon as this movement ends, Vera is trapped again. Sitting this time on the right side of the frame, Vera is almost lost in the lush floral arrangements (figure 4). The interior violates her. The frame is literally full of people and objects, and when her mother asks her to be polite and join the guests, Vera agrees. There is no space for her in this frame.

Descending to the Basement

In search of the places that she belongs to, Vera decides to visit the slums with her mother. The next series of shots comes from inside a basement.⁴⁰ Here, the basement

⁴⁰ In Russia, as elsewhere, the basement apartment was typically a place where the lower class would live. At the beginning of the twentieth century, 10 per cent of all Moscow flats were situated in the

is dark, and totally different from the light kingdom of lace and gauze Vera is used to. In this series of shots in the basement, we see poor people sitting around the table, drinking, and playing cards. As they notice the charity ladies in the window, they immediately transform the room from a ‘casino’ into a reasonably ‘tidy’, but nonetheless poor, home in which the rich imagine the poor might dwell. This, at first glance, innocent transformation doubles the effect of liminality regarding the space Vera is about to enter.

Another cinematic detail that reveals this tension is Bauer’s use of an unusual low-angle shot when showing the basement from the point of view of its only window. It is the same window that allows the poor to notice the charity ladies — we only see their feet passing by (figure 5).⁴¹



Figure 5. *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*. Vera passing by. A view from the basement.

This point of view establishes the connection between the basement and the world outside, which appears to be of a paradoxical kind. Although the basement is lower down in a literal sense, and represents the ‘lower class’, the charity ladies of the

basement. See G.V. Andreevskii, *Zhizn' Moskvy na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2009), p. 219.

⁴¹ The same device will later be used by Abram Room in the basement of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, see Chapter V of this thesis.

‘upper class’ are seen trapped in a tiny window that looks like a prison cell, once again hinting at Vera’s oppression by society and the city through an illusion of a closed, claustrophobic space. Additionally, this scene reveals the privileged position of men, despite their ‘low’ social and spatial position. The men have a good view of the arrival of Vera and her mother, while the women can only imagine what is going on in the basement, and the men control the situation by rearranging the room, and mocking the women before they enter.⁴²

The two women continue their travel to the world of the poor, ending up at an attic occupied by Maksim — another ‘lower-class’ space. The intertitle calls Maksim’s living space ‘каморка’ — a closet or a very small room. The room is a tiny rooftop that serves all Maksim’s needs, including sleeping and eating. This type of apartment was called ‘коечно-каморочные квартиры’ and indeed was usually referred to as ‘несчастье и позор Москвы’.⁴³ It is not surprising that it is this very space, where all notions and boundaries are confused (unlike the certain borders between light and dark in Vera’s room), that ‘invites’ the rape and the murder to happen.

Vera enters Maksim’s space with her face veiled — a necessary attribute of a lady of her social position as well as a symbol of her illusions regarding Maksim’s intentions. She brings lunch to Maksim. It is the first time we see Vera outside (and not through the tiny window of the basement), and the first time we see her from a very unusual angle — from above — the viewpoint of Maksim who is looking down

⁴² In another sequence, when the worlds swap places and Maksim is visiting Vera, he is the one who controls the situation. Vera is asleep and does not notice him.

⁴³ Andreevskii, p. 220. In his book on Moscow, Andreevskii also collected some notes of the accounts left by people who had to examine these flats. These notes speak for themselves: ‘духота невыносимая, квартира сырая и невероятно грязная’; ‘в комнатах полный мрак, грязь, вонь, теснота, не поддающаяся описанию’; ‘квартира имеет ужасный вид: штукатурка обвалилась, в стенах дыры, заткнутые тряпками’; ‘отхожее место настолько развалилось, что взрослые не ходят и детей не пускают’; ‘жутко сделалось, когда пришлось осматривать квартиру — в полном смысле пещеру: воздуха нет, комнаты тесные, грязные конуры’; ‘под квартирой сточная труба, от нее удушливый запах, страшная грязь’, see *ibid.*

at Vera from his window. This unusual angle makes the viewer realise that Vera is an object of Maksim's gaze; she looks small and fragile from above. Maksim is looking at her; he is now the master of the situation (figure 6).



Figures 6 and 7. *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*, Maksim watching Vera from the roof.

The rape and the murder itself are both contained in Maksim's tiny attic; this time Vera literally has no way to escape. After the murder, she is seen going down the outer staircase, shaking from side to side, helplessly touching the wall and the railings as if for support, but these walls seem to be transparent and vulnerable — nothing stable is left in this city.⁴⁴ The scene, also shot at an angle, follows Vera down the steps, symbolising her downfall.

This visual motif is repeated towards the end of the film when Vera leaves another man, her husband, to begin a new life on her own in the city. In the scene leaving Maksim's attic, Vera is depicted descending, trying to find her way home — to that very interior that caused her feelings of loneliness and decay. In the last sequence, when Vera is moving away from her husband, her path is different. She walks independently through the interior towards the camera. The corridor is narrow, but she does not need any support. Instead, she walks deliberately slowly,

⁴⁴ Movements and details that echo the heroine's behaviour on the staircase in Akhmatova's poems described in Chapter I. This staircase is depicted straight after the scene of rape and murder, and symbolically alludes to both.

independent of all. The shot, filmed at a high angle, is also deliberately long, lasting 26 seconds. The length of the shot and the slowness and confidence of Vera's pace indicate her transition from the inside towards the outside; from a lonely fragile girl, motionless, trapped in her room, to an independent woman who moves confidently in the modern city.

The three main interiors of the film (Vera's room, Maksim's attic and Dol'skii's house) helps to define the identity of the female protagonist through her passing through different interior spaces. Philip Cavendish even calls *Sumerki* 'a rites of passage film':

It [the film] charts the liberation of the female protagonist from virginal fantasy-figure and cherished ideal [...] towards her own discovery of freedom, independence, and self-definition beyond the confines of marriage and the male gaze.⁴⁵

The interiors shown in the film play the main role in creating this liminal sense; they mediate and explain both Vera's choices.

Ditia bol'shogo goroda

In his second extant film, *Ditia bol'shogo goroda* (1914), Bauer introduces another female figure whose character and fate are influenced, guided and even explained by the interiors she lives in. Mania (Elena Smirnova), a young seamstress born in a basement flat, dreams of a better life. One day, while window shopping, she meets Viktor (Mikhail Salarov), a wealthy man from high society. As the intertitle tells us, bored by high society, Viktor is desperately looking for a perfectly innocent and

⁴⁵ Cavendish, 'The Hand that Turns the Handle', pp. 215–216.

uncultured woman, and Mania appears to be the embodiment of his dream. However, having become Viktor's mistress, 'элегантная Мэри' (as she is now called) gradually bankrupts her lover. On the brink of poverty, Viktor begs Mary to stop her life of luxury and to move with him to a cheap flat, where they would be able to live a modest and happy life together. Mary rejects this, and finds herself another lover. In despair, Viktor kills himself on the steps of her apartment. The film famously ends with a close-up of Mary's foot theatrically stepping over Viktor's dead body.

Having started in a small basement with the death of Mania's mother and ending on the steps of a luxurious flat with the death of her lover, the film is literally 'closed' into interior spaces that capture death, unhappiness and coldness. The big city of the title is represented not by cityscapes, but mostly through its apartments and what is happening behind closed doors.

Mania's Rooms

The opening intertitle introduces both the first interior space — a basement — and the main character of the film — Mania — while all the dwellers of the small basement are gathered by the bed of Mania's dying mother.⁴⁶

The opening frame Bauer presents us with is extremely claustrophobic; almost compressed by the low camera angle and hardly succeeding in accommodating all the characters. The only piece of furniture, the deathbed itself, barely fits into the frame. Here, the bed is situated so close to both the viewer and the characters within the frame that it leaves no space even for someone to die in privacy, and certainly no space for Mania to dream about a different life. Being associated with this basement

⁴⁶ This depiction illustrates quite precisely the real social conditions of the time. In early twentieth century Russia, basement apartments would usually have over ten working-class people living there side by side, see Blair A. Ruble, *Second Metropolis: Pragmatic Pluralism in Gilded Age Chicago, Silver Age Moscow, and Meiji Osaka* (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 267.

location from the beginning of the film, Mania has every chance of ending her life just like her mother who worked and then died in the same tiny space.⁴⁷

As proof of this, the film cuts to a grown-up Mania in her new working place. She has become a seamstress. Her profession is associated with textiles and texture, notions to which Bauer pays particular attention in his films, draping his female characters in beautiful white dresses, and hiding them under the gauzes of their dreams. However, unlike laced and gauzy Vera from *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*, Mania is dressed in black. The dresses she makes are white and covered with lace, but she can only afford to dream about them. The next shot takes us to the space of Mania's dreams.



Figure 8. *Ditia bol'shogo goroda*. Mania daydreaming.

An intertitle reads: 'Часто Маня уносилась мечтами к несбыточной жизни, полной богатства и роскоши'. The shot itself lasts for eighteen seconds, much longer than any of the previous shots and an unusually long time for a cinematic

⁴⁷ At that time, many workers like Mania and her mother would sleep and work in the same room; peasant and proletariat children usually started working in the age of six or seven, Mania's age as first depicted in the film, see Robert Eugene Johnson, *Peasant and Proletarian: The Working Class of Moscow in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979), p. 52.

narrative of this time. However, it does not seem to bear any specific narrative value. Instead, it celebrates Mania's connection to the city and the street that is seen behind her.⁴⁸ Technically a close-up of Mania, this shot also opens up the world of her dreams in the window behind her, showing it as vibrant and moving, inviting the viewer to enter both Mania's dreams and the city's vibrant life (figure 8). The transparency of the windowpane is akin to one of the gauzes used by Bauer in his previous film to metaphorically illustrate the 'twilight of a woman's soul'. But if Vera's room is the representation of her soul, thus creating the aforementioned 'double' interior, Mania's soul is situated in-between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. And Bauer holds this shot for eighteen seconds specifically to construct this metaphor. The shot shows Mania as a liminal character, as a figure always ready to cross the borders.⁴⁹

Her position and her movements multiply this sense. She sits on a windowsill (once again a place not designed for sitting, just like all the spaces in her childhood, which were used for other purposes than those they were designed for). A window frame behind her divides the space of the cinematic frame into two, and Mania cannot find a stable position between these two halves of the frame. After holding still for a moment, she turns to one half of the frame, then to the other, then turns around and sighs three times. In all, she behaves just like Vera from Bauer's previous film, who also could not find a place of her own. However, this time the space to capture her movements is not a room (she cannot afford it), but simply a small space on a windowsill; the windowpane then turns into the screen that shows her dreams. Once again, female anxiety is revealed through interior details.

The next time we see Mania, she is also by a window. This time, however, she

⁴⁸ The alternative title of the film was *Devushka s ulitsy*.

⁴⁹ Cf. many of Akhmatova's heroines by the window in Chapter I; as well as the traditional romantic idea of a character sitting by the window and dreaming of a distant future, see Rewald, pp. 3–20.

is outside, window shopping.⁵⁰ There are two sequences when we see Mania looking at things in shop windows. The first is in front of a flower shop window, and other is in front of a jewellery shop window. Bauer deliberately multiplies this experience to establish an even stronger connection between Mania and the city's windows, her liminal position just 'on the edge', and her desire to destroy the social border between her poor life and the glamorous life of the city. Moreover, by crosscutting between the scene shown from the 'inside' of the window and the 'arcade' window of the outside, Bauer shows the permeability of the border between the two.

It is precisely this image of the arcade's windows, 'houses or passages having no outside — like the dream',⁵¹ 'the furnished and familiar interior of the masses'⁵² that becomes a central notion in Benjamin's discussion of the city and its 'porosity'. By this term, Benjamin seeks to describe what he sees as the characteristic form of social, spatial and temporal organisation in the city. Porosity refers to 'the notions of dislocation and disorientation within the urban environment',⁵³ and hence provokes the merging of opposites, such as public and private, male and female, inside and outside. Bauer's cross-cutting between the two shots of Mania in front of the two windows (inside and outside) also shows Mania as a liminal figure of a liminal space; a child of a city of porosity.

No wonder then that it is precisely here, by the arcade windows, that Mania meets Viktor — a man from her dream world who invites her to cross the border.

⁵⁰ Window shopping became a popular cinematic motif associated with female figures, see Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, 'First Sketches', in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 827–870 (p. 839).

⁵² Walter Benjamin, 'M: The Flâneur', in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 416–455 (p. 423).

⁵³ Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 25.

Tango of the Doors

Viktor is another major character who is introduced through his interior. The first time we see him, he is in his study. Unlike Mania, surrounded by people in her first appearances, he is instead surrounded by flowers, statues and pictures — all the things that Mania would like to possess. His rooms are spacious and high, as opposed to the basement Mania was born in. Moreover, Viktor's room demonstrates how important set design was for Bauer. As mentioned earlier, most directors in early cinema put little effort into the construction of the set design; they often used second-hand materials left from earlier films. Bauer's interiors are always tailored for a specific film. For example, in Viktor's room, the shape of the wooden panels on the walls matches that of the windows, the ornament of the floor is similar to the shape of the table, and it echoes the rectangular geometry of the rest of the interior space.

This set also reveals Bauer's passion for the chequerboard-type ornamentation that would later appear in most of his other films.⁵⁴ Firstly, this type of ornament pays homage to the use of the same imagery in many Dutch interior paintings. Secondly, it captures Bauer's love of modern design — this is a type of design used frequently by the Viennese Secessionists in the early 1910s. At the same time, this pattern on the floor might evoke a literal reading of the space, thus becoming a chequerboard set out for a game. The white immovable female statues in the room and the black figures of the men who move through the frame become like pieces used in draughts or chess.

The next move of this game takes us to another interior. This time it is a dining room, where the seduction scene takes place. However, if in the previous interior the characters, like chess figures, were only planning the game of seduction (with the active male figures lined up in opposition to 'innocent' and immovable

⁵⁴ It was also used in European and American productions of the time; a similar pattern appears in Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) and Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916).

female statues), this scene introduces dynamic movement through a reference to yet another popular phenomenon of the time — the tango.

In 1913, as Roman Timenchik has observed, St Petersburg was captured by what the scholar calls ‘tangophilia’.⁵⁵ Only a year later, when Bauer was making his film, ‘tangophilia’ had already turned into ‘tangomania’. Yuri Tsivian was the first to comment that Bauer based this *mise-en-scène* on a model of movements from the tango, and *Ditia bol'shogo goroda* was the first of these films. According to Tsivian, the tango was ‘boosted as an icon of the new age, [...] a “dance of tragic sexuality”’.⁵⁶ Timenchik echoes this description: ‘моральные качества [танго] бурно обсуждались обществом’; ‘[танец] был окружен ореолом сексуальной смутительности’.⁵⁷

However, while noting the tango’s sexual connotations, scholars rarely mention the role of interiors in constructing and explaining tango scenes, which is of major importance for my discussion. Originally a dance of the Argentinian streets, in Russia the tango moved inside, inviting all the connotations of sexuality and freedom behind the closed doors of private apartments.

Influenced by this ‘tangomania’, Bauer’s characters imitate tango movements in their everyday life. In the scene of seduction, Mania and Viktor literally dance towards the moment of their first kiss, which is also performed as a dancing tableau (figure 9).

⁵⁵ Roman Timenchik, ‘Priglasenie na tango: Potselui ognia’, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 45 (2000), 181–186 (p. 184). In this dangerous connotation, the tango follows the traditions of the nineteenth-century dancing culture, as described in Stephanie Sandler, ‘Pleasure, Danger and the Dance: Nineteenth-Century Russian Variations’, in *Russia–Women–Culture*, ed. by H. Gosciolo and B. Holmgren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 247–272.

⁵⁶ Yuri Tsivian, ‘Russia, 1913: Cinema in the Cultural Landscape’, in *Silent Film*, ed. by Richard Abel (London: Athlone, 1996), pp. 194–216 (p. 207). See also idem, ‘The Tango in Russia’, *Experiment: A Journal of Russian Culture*, 2 (1996), 307–334.

⁵⁷ Timenchik, ‘Priglasenie na tango’, p. 184.



Figure 10. *Ditia bol'shogo goroda*. The kiss.

Importantly, in the last shot of this sequence, Bauer makes the interior echo the position of the characters. In the shot of the kiss, Bauer constructs his *mise-en-scène* in such a way that the background of the room — the white door framed by black velvet curtains — almost exactly echoes the ‘ornament’ of the two kissing figures. The two white faces and white collars of the characters unite together in a kiss just like the two leaves of the white door in the background, while the black clothes of the characters echo the black velvet framing of the curtains.

Being literally the child of a big city, Mania is not seduced by its mobility, power and scale — notions that are characteristic for urban modernity. She is seduced by consumption and luxury — attributes she finds in Viktor’s rooms, as the dangerous effects of the city have moved from the streets into the rooms.

That might explain why Bauer pays such great attention to the liminal spaces of transition between the inside and the outside; namely, the doors.



Figures 10 and Figure 11. *Ditia bol'shogo goroda*. The glazed doors.

Before entering the dining room in the seduction scene, Bauer shows the characters passing through two sets of glazed doors — another image of *doorsein* (figure 10). The position of the characters between the two parts of the door signifies their transition to a new state. Additionally, the glazed ornamentation of the doors themselves shows the city as vague and unclear, another hint of the instability of Mania's path. Once again, in a later sequence, when Mary and Viktor are entering the theatre, the image of the door is shown for several seconds, without there being any particular narrative reason for it (figure 11). Bauer's focus on the glazed, transparent doors takes us back to the discussion of the porosity of the modern city, and the disappearing border between the inside and the outside — the border that Mania is about to pass.

Vibration of the Soul

The interior background continues to play a crucial role in the following rooms we enter. The next time we see Mania, who is from now on called 'элегантная Мэри', she is in her new role as Viktor's mistress. This time, the background is divided into two parts. However, this is not to unite the characters (as in the kiss scene), but to separate them. Mary is shown against the grilles while Viktor, instead, is shown on

the background of floral wallpaper (figure 12).

From now on, the motif of the grilles becomes a constant companion for Mary. Moreover, Bauer uses it again and again in the most narratively sharp scenes: when Mary is writing letters of denial to Viktor (figure 13); when Viktor finds her kissing the butler; and finally, just before Viktor kills himself at the steps to Mary's room (figure 14).



Figures 12 and 13. *Ditja bol'shogo goroda*. Mary and the grilles.



Figure 14. *Ditja bol'shogo goroda*. Viktor goes to Mary.

According to the German cultural historian Christoph Asendorf, around 1910 ornamental structures such as grilles were believed to generate certain ‘vibrations’ in space that produced similar responses for the nerves of people who looked at them.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Christoph Asendorf, *Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity*, trans. by Don Renau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 205–208.

As Asendorf observes, this idea was highly popular at this time and originated in the recent scientific discoveries of the nature of energy, electricity and the behaviour of the nervous system and ‘neurosis’. A similar thought was later theorised by the German sociologist Georg Simmel, who in his essay ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ suggests that ‘the psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists of the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli’.⁵⁹

This contemporary obsession with instability, insecurity and irrationality helps explain why Bauer shows grilles, thus making his sets themselves anxious — in tune with his characters’ states of mind. In fact, by using these details, Bauer makes his interiors ‘behave’ nearly hysterically, just like the typical melodramatic characters described in Peter Brooks’s famous study.⁶⁰ According to Brooks, the hystericised body of melodrama ‘offers a key emblem of the convergence [in the concerns of melodrama and psychoanalysis], because it is a body pre-eminently invested with meaning — a body that has become the place for the inscription that cannot be written elsewhere’.⁶¹ I argue that Bauer finds this ‘elsewhere’ on which to write the message of melodrama in the walls and windows of modern domestic apartments and cinematic sets.

Importantly, the idea of ‘vibration’ and neurosis was closely connected to the cinematic medium. As Asendorf observes:

The construction of the vibration of the soul is reminiscent of the effect achieved by the cinema: movements whose succession and relations do not proceed according to the laws of

⁵⁹ Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. by R. Sennett, pp. 47–60, p. 48.

⁶⁰ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 24–56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

logical and mechanical causality take on a fantastic quality, which is produced by the technique of editing.⁶²

In *Dit'ia bol'shogo goroda*, Bauer demonstrates how the 'vibration of the soul' affects both his characters.

Being the constant attribute of Mania, the grilles gradually capture Viktor's soul. Each time he tries to come back to her, he is shown through or next to a grating, with one frame even picturing him literally inside the ornamental construction of the bridge — as if imprisoned by it (figure 16). Finally, Viktor dies on the steps leading to Mary's house, and Mary steps over his dead body, showing her elegant foot in a shoe, the lace pattern of which copies the pattern of the bridge (figure 16).

While the separate interior details (doors, windows and gratings) construct the general sense of anxiety and proximity, the rooms themselves seem to provide their own twist to the plot. Through the careful sequence of editing we can see a complete reversal in the social positions of Mary and Viktor. By the end of the film, Mary has not only crossed the boundaries of class, now she is also the one who has power, money and rooms. In the opening scenes we saw Mary in a dark claustrophobic room, and then in an empty room dreaming by the window; now Viktor moves to a similar dark, small, claustrophobic room with only one window — hoping for one final encounter with Mary. In sharp contrast, Mary's new accommodation is spacious, full of objects and possessions — similar to the one Viktor had at the beginning of the film. The film ends at the steps of this apartment that once belonged to Viktor and now belongs to Mary.

⁶² Asendorf, p. 205.



Figure 15 and 16. *Ditia bol'shogo goroda*. Viktor on his way to Mary shown through the construction of the bridge. Mary steps over Viktor's body.

The 'double' inside of melodrama, which was so perfectly demonstrated in the introductory shot of *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi* discussed earlier, becomes the 'outside' in *Ditia bol'shogo goroda*. In this last frame, Mary is depicted as absolutely soulless, and even bodiless — we can see only her foot as we read the intertitle of her ordering a taxi to a restaurant.

Interiors in Bauer's Other Works

This chapter has primarily addressed the use of interior imagery in two early films by Evgeny Bauer. However, the director's interest in different techniques of representing interiors and their functions was equally evident in some of his later films.

For example, in *Nemye svideteli* (1914), just as in *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*, Bauer shows the contrast between the low and the high levels of society. Whereas in the earlier film he cross-cuts a basement and a boudoir, in *Nemye svideteli* he juxtaposes the low and the high sections of the house — the servants' rooms downstairs and the private rooms upstairs — and builds the plot of his film around this juxtaposition.

His 1915 *Deti veka* is yet another film built on the juxtaposition of the interior and exterior, with particular attention to the border between the two. Just as Mania from *Ditia bol'shogo goroda* is lured by the big city and wants to cross this border

between her poor interiors and the luxury of the exterior world of Moscow she sees through her windows, Maria from *Deti veka* is seduced by the openness and luxury of the outside. Although Maria is not as poor as Mania, and has a loving husband and a son, the sewing machine in Maria's room indicates that much of the sewing has to be done at home, which links Maria to Mania's profession and Mania's fate. And, just as in *Ditia bol'shola goroda*, in *Deti veka* Bauer selects a threshold location by the windows of the shops to indicate the new turn in the character's life. It is precisely by the shop windows, where Mania met Victor, that Maria meets her old friend Lidia, a lady from a higher social level, who invites Maria into her world of entertainment: strolls in the parks, boat trips and gypsy music. Influential banker Lebedev then attempts to seduce Maria. The whole affair between Maria and Lebedev is constructed on the juxtaposition between inside and outside, interior and exterior. Different exteriors, open spaces — parks, rivers, a glass conservatory, the garden, a car driving through the streets of the city — become places of private encounters between Lebedev and Maria, places that seduce Maria into Lebedev's world. On the contrary, the interiors of Maria's home and her husband's office are oppressive and dark, small and claustrophobic, and eventually Maria leaves them for a different life, crossing that border. Constant cross-cutting between the poorly decorated interior of Maria's home and the visually beautiful exterior locations that Lebedev invites her into helps spectators understand Maria's choice. This choice, however, ends with a tragedy — Lebedev offers money to Maria's husband if he will let Maria and the child go, Maria's husband refuses and kills himself. Once more in Bauer's films, the class conflict is played out by juxtaposing interior and exterior locations, and the crossing of this border leads to disaster.

If *Nemye svideteli* and *Deti veka* preserve the same schema as *Ditia bol'shogo*

goroda, in another film, *Posle smerti* (1915), Bauer starts to modulate his use of interior imagery. As with Akhmatova's *Belaia staia*, the supernatural begins to assert itself. Here, the director depicts the room of a young scientist Andrei Bagrov as the entrance to the world of death. It is in this room where the ghost of Zoia, a young girl who killed herself after Bagrov had refused her, visits the young scientist. Bauer chooses specific locations in the room to show the points of connection to the other world, playing with different objects and special effects to separate the real from the unreal. Zoia's ghost appears in three locations: the chair, by the bed, and in the threshold between the two curtains. As viewers become accustomed to these locations and expect the ghost to appear there, Bauer tricks them by showing Bagrov's servant dressed in the same white clothes as the ghost. Each time Zoia's ghost appears, the image is cut to an imaginary field where Zoia and Bagrov are together, once again intercutting interior and exterior. Finally, Zoia lures Bagrov to her world from his room, and his bed turns into his deathbed. The interior here, again, becomes a place of threshold and leads to a tragedy — but this time of an emotional, rather than a sociological, kind.

Bauer's best-known film, *Zhizn' za zhizn'* (1916), shows probably the most luxurious and elaborated interior images, which however bear less significant plot-constructing meanings than in his earlier films, as well as less dynamism and instability. Here the luxurious and spacious interiors of the Russian upper-class milieu are compared not with the lower-class lifestyle or values, or the dynamism of the outside world, but with the characters themselves. Spacious interiors, columns, tulle, fur, brocades, lace, flowers become elements of Bauer's composition which, in this film, seem to be there for their own sake. Characters interact with decoration in different ways; they move through the lace draperies, appear from behind the flowers,

slide between the colonnades, sit on the glittering brocade sofas. These interiors become a symbol of the beautiful glittering life, which here — in contrast to the world of Bauer's early films — is stable, and cold in its stability. All the betrayals that are performed within these interiors are performed with a cold heart, and actors look just like the marble columns in the decoration. After showing such dynamism in depicting interior scenes in his previous films, in *Zhizn' za zhizn'* Bauer decides to show interior decorations free from the influences of any other world (whether the world of a different class or even the world of death). But the very beauty of these fantastic decorations becomes poisonous, as the final murder is shown within this luxurious setting — the millionaire's widow Khromova, having failed to arrange happy marriages for her two daughters, kills the husband of one of them.

Here we see that the use of interior spaces in many of Bauer's films echoes what became emblematic for Russian urban modernity. As Walter Benjamin notes, the modern city was a place characterised by the porosity of its borders. In the modern city, old and new, death and life, rich and poor, inside and outside were not only situated side by side, but merged together. It was cinema, and its ability to highlight the detail through a close-up and movement, that created the sense of the modern city's anxiety on the screen, demonstrated through both interior and exterior:

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-

world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject.⁶³

According to Benjamin, the new art of cinema is the best medium to represent urban porosity between the inside and the outside. As a perfect illustration, Bauer moves his camera through sets that have no boundaries, taking us from the claustrophobic dirty basements of the Russian poor to the boudoirs of Moscow's high society women, from bachelor salons to the attics of hooligans, from the worker's basement to the most luxurious restaurants of the modern metropolis. And if some of these places are literally separated just by glazed transparent doors, Bauer's camera makes these boundaries even more uncertain by constricting, dividing, and decorating the interior spaces of his films with such details as laces, gauzes and grilles. These compositional elements of Bauer's sets allude to Benjamin's notions of porosity between urban and domestic spaces. Setting his films in constantly changing and vibrating interiors, Bauer creates new types of characters who prefer to stay on the boundary between the city and the interior.

⁶³ Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 29.

CHAPTER V

Abram Room. A Travelling Room

In contrast to my approach taken in other chapters, here I investigate just one room as a whole — the set of the film *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* (1927) directed by Abram Room (1884–1976). The film's artistic properties turn out to be so strong and influential that they could be compared with entire galleries of rooms in other films. *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* is the name of the street in Moscow where the film is set and the title by which the film is known in Russia.¹ There are, however, two alternative titles: *Liubov' vtroem*, the Russian term for *ménage à trois*, a title which was considered too provocative; and *Bed and Sofa*, the title chosen for the English and German premières of the film. *Bed and Sofa* is also probably the most accurate title in the context of my research: it shows that it is interior objects themselves and not their users and owners that become the true protagonists of the film. This highlights an important shift in the interior's function and connotation from purely decorative to that of ideology, morality, violence, and revolution, and, more importantly, the ability of a set decoration to construct and develop narratives.²

The film tells the story of a Soviet woman, Liuda (Liudmila Semenova), who spends her entire life symbolically trapped in a small room in a basement on Third Meshchanskaia Street in Moscow. She is cooking, washing and doing all the house —

¹ The three in the title could be referring to the multiplied quality of *meshchanstvo*. For further discussion on the significance of the film's titles, see Paul E. Burns, 'An NEP Moscow Address: Abram Room's *Third Meshchanskaia* (*Bed and Sofa*) in Historical Context', *Film and History*, 13:4 (1982), 73–81; and Julian Graffy, *Bed and Sofa: The Film Companion* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001), pp. 16–23.

² Julian Graffy makes the point that, although appropriate in regards to the different functions of the two pieces of furniture in the film, this title has the 'significant disadvantage of drawing the viewer's attention to the contrast in the roles and fates of the two men', fates that actually will end quite alike in the film, see Graffy, p. 23.

or rather room — work while her husband, Kolia (Nikolai Batalov), works on the construction site of the Bolshoi Theatre. One day, Kolia meets an old friend, Volodia (Vladimir Fogel), who has just arrived in Moscow in search of work. Having discovered that Volodia has nowhere to stay in the capital, Kolia invites him to live in their room on the sofa, while the couple occupies the bed (hence the title of the film in English). Soon, Kolia has to leave the city to work on another construction project. During his absence, Volodia and Liuda become lovers. When Kolia comes back, he discovers that the bed is now occupied by his old friend and Liuda; he leaves, however later Liuda lets him sleep on the sofa. In this situation, very soon Liuda becomes the wife (and housemaid) for both men regardless of where either sleeps. The three continue to live together in this peculiar Soviet version of the *ménage à trois* until Liuda discovers that she is pregnant, and both men (not knowing who the real father is) insist that she goes to an abortion clinic. Liuda reluctantly obeys, but changes her mind at the very last moment and decides to leave both husbands for a life as an independent woman.³ In the last shot of the film we see her leaving Moscow on a train.

Critical Reception: ‘как надо “любить втроем”’

It is not a surprise that, presenting as it did the most controversial questions of the new Soviet reality — such as the new housing, abortion, and sexual relationships — the film provoked one of the most intense critical discussions in the history of the early Soviet cinema; as Grashchenkova puts it, the film was seen as ‘горячая точка кинематографа 20-х годов’.⁴

³ A similar decision to the one that Vera takes in the end of the film in *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*.

⁴ Irina Grashchenkova, *Abram Room* (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1977), p. 85.

The critical assessment of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* ranged from the total acceptance of the film as ‘первая бытовая советская фильма, удачно разрешенная от начала до конца’⁵ to its total rejection,⁶ with the latter being prevalent. During this discussion, the different definitions given to the film by critics ranged from ‘заурядная семейная драмочка’⁷ to a complete ‘love manual’ (‘наглядный рецепт как надо “любить вдвоем”’),⁸ or a cinematic portrait of the characters, who are far too petit-bourgeois (‘их обмещанила Москва’).⁹

These extracts are representative of the overall direction the critical reception of the film had taken. Regardless of how aggressive, provocative, or, on the other hand, nuanced this critical reaction was (and regardless of its positive or negative evaluation), it still tended to be preoccupied with two major points of interpretation that were both consistent with the Soviet ideology of the time.

The first of these is connected to the social and sexual relationship of the three characters, and the (anti-)pedagogical role of the film in its representation.¹⁰ The other refers to the representation of the new Soviet *byt* on the screen, with its relationships to new housing questions. Although both topics are closely connected to the representation of the room itself and its domestic objects, their interpretation in the critical reviews of the time is largely given to us from the perspective of ideology and morality.

Focusing on this social-political interpretation and trying to figure out whether Liuda is a prostitute or a petit-bourgeois woman (‘непонятно, мещанка ли Людмила

⁵ K. Ganzhenko, ‘Sovetskii byt na sovetskom ekrane’, *Kinofront*, 1 (1927), 9–12 (p. 12).

⁶ L. Vul'fov, ‘Liubov' vtroem’, *Kino*, 29 March 1927, p. 4.

⁷ Aleksei Zuev, ‘Liubov' vtroem’, *Pravda*, 22 March 1927, p. 6.

⁸ Konstantin Denisov, ‘Meshchanstvo v kino’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 5 (1927), 3.

⁹ ‘Tret'ia Meshchanskaia. (Na prosmotre ODSK)’, *Kino*, 22 March 1927, pp. 4–5, (p. 4).

¹⁰ The most vivid discussions of this include Zuev and Denisov.

или проститутка’),¹¹ the first film reviews seem to shed far less light on the film’s purely *artistic*, cinematic qualities: its construction, composition, the use of cinematic techniques, and, in particular, the use of space and set design (those qualities that are the main point of my discussion in this film). The few critical reviews that did pay attention to my point of interest still tend to describe the room or domestic details of the film in relation to sexuality. One critic equates ‘горшки, примусы, корыта’ that every good proletarian housewife has to have in her possession and ‘подчеркнуто соблазнительные круглые бедра’ that the housewife depicted by Room has instead.¹² Another critic uses the issue of proletarian true character to question the entire sense of the plot:

Где это видано, чтобы рабочий класс пил чай из подстаканника? Возможно ли, чтоб муж пролетарий, узнав об измене своей жены, так-таки без боя оставил жену и жилплощадь? [...] Режиссер бытовой фильмы должен суметь вскрыть диалектику нового быта, а не вычерчивать в диаграмме химически чистый ‘новый быт’.¹³

However, if this commentator found the film too utopian and abstract, it is exactly the *byt* in its ‘chemically pure’ incarnation in just one room that interests me in this analysis. There were very few authors that considered the room in the film in its artistic form free of ideological connotations. Mostly, it is possible to find references to the artistic employment of the domestic objects within some broader discussions of the reaction to the film.

Vul’fov, for example, in his very negative review, makes a very important statement about the bed and the sofa actually being the main protagonists of the film:

¹¹ ‘Tret’ia Meshchanskaia. (Na prosmotre ODSK)’, p. 4.

¹² Denisov, p. 3.

¹³ Viktor Pertsov, ‘Zametki o sovetskoi bytovoi kartine’, *Sovetskoe kino*, 2 (1927), 4.

‘Собственно в этой фильме в главных ролях засняты не столько люди, сколько [...] кровать и стоящий в комнате диван. Вот кто главные герои картины’.¹⁴

However, this fact is used to highlight the poor directing of the picture, not to comment on the artistic deployment of the objects. ‘Ибо, не будь их, то, пожалуй, и смотреть бы не на что было’, Vul’fov sums up.¹⁵

Other critics even present in antithesis the representation of objects and the representation of *byt* on the screen, saying that while Room has brilliantly shown the ‘play of objects’ on the screen, *byt* is still shown wrongly: ‘У Роома прекрасна игра вещей, но быт выведен неправдиво’.¹⁶

This specific ‘play’ with *byt* was also noticed by the critic Bliakhin, who rated *Tret’ia Meshchanskaia*, despite its ‘мещанское название’, very highly:

[‘Третья Мещанская’ стала] первой удачной картиной из области советского быта, первой картиной, которая очень тонко и художественно ставит одну из жгучих современных проблем (проблему пола), ставит вопрос о взаимоотношении мужчины и женщины в наших советских условиях.¹⁷

While praising Room as a pioneering example of the playful representation of *byt* on the screen, this critic, however, mentions that most of these playful references are peripheral to the development of the story (‘только загромождают основную линию, отягчают сюжет’).¹⁸

Another important article directly approached this contraposition of real *byt* and its ‘playful’, ‘artistic’ representation on the screen through domestic objects.

¹⁴ Vul’fov, p. 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ ‘Tret’ia Meshchanskaia. (Na prosmotre ODSK)’, p. 4.

¹⁷ P. Bliakhin, ‘Tret’ia Meshchanskaia’, *Kino*, 22 January 1927, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Ganzenko's 'Sovetskii byt na sovetskom ekrane' gives a detailed analysis of the up-to-date experience of showing domestic reality on the Soviet screen, and for the first time highlights the role of the set designer in the development of the subject, and the challenges a set designer would face while leading the viewer: 'Трудно художнику найти пути, по которым он мог бы подойти к зрителю, увлечь его, повести за собой'.¹⁹

However, according to Ganzenko, the team of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* successfully accomplished this task. He praises the film's specific 'playfulness' in the relationship to every single object represented on the screen:

Первый основной павильон *обыгран*, начиная от стенного календаря, занавески, диванной подушки и кончая плачущей гипсовой кошкой. До мельчайших деталей *обыграна* обстановка (окно, с которого прыгает кошка, влазит через окно муж, врывается через него же ветер, свет автомобиля и т.д.), шашки, с невозможностью хода назад, с развёрнутой вокруг них игрою Баталова и Фогеля, стол, кровать, комод с зеркалом, в котором видит себя и через которое отражает благополучие семьи и старается узнать себя семья.²⁰

This specific 'игра' with the objects continues, according to Ganzenko, until the very end of the film, showing the director as the main figure of this game: '*Игра с ситом, в котором привез муж кизил, а затем игра с вилкой и вареньем, сваренным из привезенного кизила. Все сюжетно спаяно, режиссерски обыграно*'.²¹

¹⁹ K. Ganzenko, 'Sovetskii byt na sovetskom ekrane', *Kinofront*, 1 (1927), 9–12 (p. 10).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 11, (emphasis added).

²¹ Ganzenko, p. 11, (emphasis added).

Ganzenko's discussion of the game with the objects in the film is probably the first interpretation that attempted to divide the artistic, playful treatment of the material from its ideological interpretation. However, while firmly establishing this position by repeating the word 'игра' and its variations (see my italics), the critic does not explain exactly what the game signifies, leaving his readers to decide that on their own.

Another reaction to the film that brings forward some specifically artistic qualities is a group resolution of the members of the Association of Revolutionary Cinematographers (ARK), published in *Kinofront* in 1927.²²

The resolution is one of the main pieces of criticism praising the film, stating that 'режиссер А. Роом вполне справился со стоящей перед ним сложной задачей экранизации советского быта'.²³ The authors specifically highlight the film's realism, its tactfulness in the treatment of the major episodes of the film, and fine artistic representation of everyday life. Importantly, unlike many other critics, the members of ARK draw their conclusions based not only on ideologically motivated arguments, but also on the purely artistic qualities of the film. These include its set design,²⁴ and its 'cinematicness': 'Картина "Третья Мещанская" с успехом

²² "'Трет'я Мещанская". Rezoliutsiia ARK', *Kinofront*, 4 (1927), 21. This resolution provoked a separate trend of criticism with many critics attacking not only the film, but also the ARK itself, with which the film was associated. These include Kh. Khersonskii, 'Rasskaz o meshchanstve. (Diskussionno)', *Kino*, 29 January 1927, p. 4; N. Iakovlev, 'Pervosortnaia Meshchanskaia. (Diskussionno)', *Kino*, 29 January 1927, p. 3; and a review by someone with a peculiar pen-name Sha; see Sha, 'ARK o "Tret'ei Meshchanskoi"', *Novyi zritel'*, 11 (1927), 13. However, the line of defence presented by ARK was later supported by such directors as Sergei Eisenstein, Sergei Vasil'ev, and Georgii Vasil'ev in a letter to the editor 'O linii ARK. Pis'mo v redaktsiiu', *Kino*, 29 March 1927, p. 2. For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between the ARK-critics and the representatives of other Soviet film institutions, see Denise Youngblood, 'The Fiction Film as a Source for Soviet Social History: The *Third Meshchanskaia Street Affair*', *Film and History*, 19:3 (1989), 50–60 (p. 55).

²³ "'Трет'я Мещанская". Rezoliutsiia ARK', p. 21.

²⁴ However, the authors actually criticised it for being far too complicated, describing 'некоторую перегруженность декоративного оформления во вред работе актеров (неспокойный фон)', see "'Трет'я Мещанская". Rezoliutsiia ARK', p. 21.

опровергает существующее мнение о “некинематографичности” советского быта’.²⁵

Apart from the listed pieces of criticism, most of the early reviews of the film were ideologically driven, and it was only members of the film’s crew who widely commented on the structural and artistic aspects of the film, its composition and the importance of the set and location shooting.²⁶

The situation with film criticism was different in Europe, where the film was successfully premiered. Foreign reviews of the film at the time provided more freedom and opportunity for discussion of the film without reference to ideology, compared to their Soviet colleagues. Many foreign reviewers commented on the unusual artistic qualities of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* that, in their eyes, had made the film surprisingly apolitical. Winifred Bryher, for example, after the German premiere of *Bett und Sofa*, confessed: ‘It was not until I saw *Bed and Sofa* that I discovered Russia. It was the first film to attack life itself, as opposed to politics’.²⁷ An anonymous reviewer from the magazine *Close Up* commented almost solely on the film’s new cinematographic techniques, praising them despite only having seen a censored copy of the film that was shown in England:

The usual technique is almost ignored, and havoc is made of time sequences by reckless cuts, by unrelated continuity [...]. And yet there was a film that gripped and had genius. Its very unevenness gave it an odd power; almost created a new technique.²⁸

²⁵ “‘Tret'ia Meshchanskaia’”. Rezoliutsiia ARK’, p. 21.

²⁶ G. Giber, ‘Kak snimalas’ “Tret'ia Meshchanskaia”’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 5 (1927), 4; “‘Tret'ia Meshchanskaia’” (Beseda s rezhisserom A.M.Room’), *Kino*, 14 September 1926, p. 1; Abram Room, ‘Moi kinoubezhdeniia’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 8 (1926), 5; Sergei Iutkevich, ‘Kak ia stal rezhisserom’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3 vols (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1990), i, pp. 273–333 (pp. 320–324).

²⁷ Winifred Bryher, *Film Problems of the Soviet Russia* (Territet: Riant Chateau, 1929), p. 27.

²⁸ ‘Bed and Sofa’, *Close Up*, December 1927, pp. 69–74 (p. 69).

Like Bryher, the anonymous *Close Up* reviewer finds that the film discovered the truth of life, ‘presented life as it (let us admit it) so often is, and not as most of us try to pretend it should be’.²⁹ But neither of the critics went on to explain how that ‘truth’ was reached ‘cinematically’. In my analysis, I shall argue that the key to reaching this truth is located in the room where the film was shot. Basing my analysis on the director’s and production designer’s own statements about the film as well as on close reading of its particular scenes, I shall follow the line of criticism outlined above, and focus on the artistic representation of the interior imagery.

In doing so, I will also be following later criticism of the film, which appeared from the late 1970s.³⁰ One of the most detailed critical responses to the film was included in Irina Grashchenkova’s monograph *Abram Room*, which to this date remains the only full-length book on the director’s life and work. In her treatment of *Tret’ia Meshchanskaia*, Grashchenkova was the first to give highly detailed and poetical analyses of the particular scenes of the film, especially those that included interior imagery. In fact, the critic argues that in the structure of this imagery lies the clue to understanding the film’s idea, which many of the earlier critics failed to recognise:

Первые же его [фильма] кадры задавали определенный тон всей картине, давали как бы ключ к ней. Жаль, но этим ключом воспользовались далеко не все зрители и даже не

²⁹ ‘Bed and Sofa’, p. 73.

³⁰ It is true to say that after vigorous discussion of the film, followed by its ban in several European countries in the 1920s, the film did not receive much mention in film criticism until its ‘rediscovery’ in the 1970s. However, most of these later articles remained preoccupied with the sexual or social sides of the film, only now seeing them in the light of the new theories, such as, for example, feminism. *Tret’ia Meshchanskaia* was named ‘the most extraordinary feminist film’ in M. Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 320–321; similar topics were discussed in B. Sullivan, ‘Bed and Sofa/Master of the House’, *Woman and Film*, 1 (1972), 21–25.

все кинокритики, не сумевшие отомкнуть сложную по сути и обманчиво простую на вид структуру фильма.³¹

This structure, according to Grashchenkova, is based on the juxtaposition of the two layers of imagery: ‘разомкнутость, свет, воздух, движение’ of the outside and ‘замкнутость, полутьма, духота, неподвижность’ of the inside. The constant modulation between these two sets of images creates tension and conflict between the exterior and the interior:

И снова поезд, и снова комната. Эти чередующиеся кадры — пластический запев двух контрастирующих, борющихся тем фильма — темы большого, продуваемого всеми ветрами, полного динамики макромира действительности и тесного, изолированного, застоявшегося микромира нетронутого индивидуального житья.³²

If Grashchenkova focuses more on the room as a whole, another leading female Russian critic of the time, Maïa Turovskaiia, gives a detailed analysis of the use of ‘objects’ in film, where ‘реалии современности [...] причудливо вклинивались в дорежимный уют рамок с лебедями’.³³

The revolutionary ‘behaviour’ of the objects in this ‘communal romance built around furniture’³⁴ is also a topic of discussion in more recent contributions to the film’s exegesis — Svetlana Boym’s *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* and Olga Matich’s ‘Remaking the Bed: Utopia in Daily Life’.³⁵

³¹ Grashchenkova, p. 89.

³² Ibid.

³³ Maïa Turovskaiia, “‘Zhenskii fil’m’ — chto eto takoe?’, in *Pamiatì tekushchego mgnoveniia: Ocherki, portrety, zametki* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1987), pp. 246–263 (p. 251).

³⁴ Boym, *Common Places*, p. 133.

³⁵ Olga Matich, ‘Remaking the Bed: Utopia in Daily Life’, in *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, ed. by John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 59–78 (pp. 74–76).

However, having presented highly valuable observations of the functions of the interior imagery in the film, all the critics use them as a part of their own broader discussions: Turovskaja, in order to compare *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* to Lana Gogoberidze's film and explore the notion of a 'female film' in general; Boym, to discuss the socio-cultural peculiarities of communal living in the Soviet Union; Grashchenkova, to explore predictable topics of *byt* versus *bytie*; and Matich, to trace the development of everyday life mythologies in Russia.

The same (in terms of relevance to the main idea of my thesis) could be said about several other articles, book-chapters and monographs written on *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. While all of them give acute and highly elaborate close readings of the film, they usually use them to prove their own arguments: Paul Burns and Denise J. Youngblood use the film to reconstruct the social reality of the time;³⁶ Judith Mayne focuses on the film's representation of the woman question and the topic of Soviet domesticity;³⁷ and Julian Graffy provides an excellent X-ray reading of the film and its connections to the broader cultural and political situation of the 1920s, and also looks at the fate of the film's major motifs.³⁸

While being aware that my discussion runs parallel to some of these close readings of the film, in my analysis I would like to leave the social and sexual questions as secondary, and to trace the justification of Liuda's choice to the use of the interior space and set design as a structural base for the film. I shall particularly focus on its relation to patterned surfaces, and the wider area of the city and the street.

This does not mean that I deny that the film has any meaning beyond its formal structure. As Room himself suggested, his picture 'ни в коем случае не

³⁶ Burns, 'An NEP Moscow Address'; Youngblood, 'The Fiction Film'.

³⁷ Judith Mayne, 'Bed and Sofa and the Edge of Domesticity', in *Kino and the Woman Question. Feminism and Soviet Silent Film* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), pp. 110–129.

³⁸ Graffy.

может и не должна быть только формально-новаторским достижением [...] Идея, мысль — обязательны'.³⁹ However, I will explore the way in which these ideas and thoughts are delivered by means of domestic imagery, looking at how a simple room and things located in it are used as the main device to suggest this meaning — and also to make it ambiguous. Additionally, I will explore how the image of a room structures the composition of the film as a whole.

The Truth of Being on the Screen

That very 'правда жизни' in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, which became the object attacked by many Soviet critics and the object of surprise for their English colleagues, had an important cultural pedigree in the Soviet cinematic tradition to which the director of the film belonged.

During the 1920s, Soviet film criticism was preoccupied with the discussion of the new 'truth' or 'reality' of life ('подлинность жизни') that had emerged as a result of the Revolution. The members of the film crew of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* took an active part in this discussion. In 1925, in an article for *Sovetskii ekran*, Abram Room introduced his artistic credo, drawing a bold line between *to seem* and *to be* as represented by the two media: 'Театр — это "казаться", а кино — это "быть"'.⁴⁰ Set design played one of the major roles in this ontological dichotomy between 'seeming' and 'being'.

The question of an artistic division between the reality of theatre and the reality of cinema in its specific relation to set design had originally been raised in

³⁹ Room, 'Moi kinoubezhdeniia', p. 5.

⁴⁰ Abram Room, 'Kino i teatr (diskussionno)', *Sovetskii ekran*, 8 (1925), 56–57.

Soviet cinematic discourse several years earlier.⁴¹ One of the catalysts of this discussion was the 1922 release of the German expressionist film *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* (1919).⁴² Praising the film as ‘выдающееся событие экрана’, commenting on its artistic qualities such as ‘конструктивность сюжета’ and especially innovative ‘декорум’,⁴³ critics, however, denigrated the film for the fact that this very ‘декорум’ became the source for the excessive ‘theatricalisation’ of the cinema, and therefore looked very poor on the screen:

Жидкая, однообразная фактура кадра (фанера и краска, без использования возможностей пространственно-кубического построения и естественной светотени), — трактовка павильона, низводящая его до роли сценической коробки, с макетом или декорацией, неподвижной для зрителя и в отдаленном плане, — особенно случайная и слабая (напоминающая плохой театр) ‘мизансцена’, [...] неопытный, слабо подражающий кинематографическому — монтаж действия.⁴⁴

Such ‘poor’ decorative practice (lacking in substance and monotonous) was unacceptable for the new Soviet cinema, which was supposed to create a new type of artistic reality that should correspond to the new revolutionary world and was to be believed in by the new Soviet citizens. Hence, as critics proclaimed, the first

⁴¹ For a discussion on the relationship between cinema and theatre in relation to the earlier era of film production, see Brewster and Jacobs.

⁴² Expressionism was not the only Western design movement criticised by Soviet filmmakers. The French impressionist cinematic movement represented by Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein with its theory of ‘photogenic truth’ was also known and discussed in Soviet Union. These two groups represented two opposite approaches to set design, and both undoubtedly influenced the Soviet practice; however, as Emma Widdis points out, Soviet film design of the time ‘sought its own direction’ between the two, see Widdis, ‘*Faktura*’, p. 11.

⁴³ K. Fel’dman, ‘Kabinet doktora Kaligari’, *Kino: Dvukhnedel'nik ob-va kinodeiatelei*, 2 (1922), 10–12 (p. 11).

⁴⁴ V. K. Turkin, ‘О “Kabinete doktora Kaligari”’, *Kino: Dvukhnedel'nik obshchestva kinodeiatelei*, 1 (1923), 15–19 (p. 18).

‘theatrical’ stage of cinematic development needed to end, opening the doors for the new ‘historical’, ‘real’ one.

In accordance with this tendency, Soviet film-makers would try to distinguish sets from their ‘staged’ equivalents by all possible means: ‘Реальный человек, реальная жизнь, в каких угодно фантастических формах, но непременно реальная’, as the leading director Lev Kuleshov put it shortly after the release of *Dr Caligari*.⁴⁵ Spurning the highly elaborative, but seemingly too ‘theatrical’ sets of *Dr Caligari*, Soviet directors and set designers neglected interior locations. Instead, they went filming outside, on every street and corner. As noticed by the director Leo Mur in his programmatic discussion of outdoor and interior shooting: ‘Весь мир доступен кино-аппарату, но он спотыкается о порог каждого дома. Он может бродить по всем улицам и дорогам, но ему нет доступа внутрь помещений’.⁴⁶

In fact, the space of a room provoked an almost sacred awe for film directors at that time. The interior location, hence, is not only a forbidden territory for the camera, but also becomes a kind of sacred space, in which the camera loses its power to depict reality: ‘Жизнь комнат очертана для кино-аппарата заповедным кругом. Его подслеповатый глаз ничего не видит ни внутри дворцов, ни внутри хижин’.⁴⁷

However, having described this awe of the camera, Leo Mur confesses that it is impossible to totally reject studio location when depicting Soviet reality, as much of Soviet everyday life was happening literally ‘inside’: ‘Но жизнь не ограничивается только улицей. Большая часть жизни человека проходит не под небом, а под

⁴⁵ Lev Kuleshov, ‘Priamoi put’’, *Kino-gazeta*, 25 November 1924, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Leo Mur, ‘S’emki na nature i v atel’e’, *Kinofront*, 5–6 (1926), 2–7 (p. 2).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

потолком’.⁴⁸ Therefore, the critic concluded, cinema needed to develop its own ways of depicting interior spaces on the screen.

For Leo Mur, as well as for Soviet set designers, this paved the way for the creation of a specific type of studio location — *kinoatel'e*. Importantly, Leo Mur first refers to the studio as a ‘house’ for a filming camera: ‘И вот кино-аппарату пришлось обзавестись своим “домом”-ателье’.⁴⁹ Later in the article, he develops this metaphor, and transforms this house into a moving one that constantly changes its identity and imaginary location — a special ‘hotel room’ for different types of houses:

Кино-ателье — это своеобразная ‘гостиница для проезжающих’, где ‘посуточно’ останавливаются не квартиранты, а квартиры, не жильцы, а комнаты. Сегодня в ателье заехал и прописался дворец американского миллионера, на завтра плотники уже ‘выписали’ его и вселили на его место тюремную камеру и трактир. Кино-ателье это дом для всех домов и изо дня в день живет жизнью комнат всего мира.⁵⁰

Here, Leo Mur captures an important shift between the inside and the outside. The outside — with all its qualities of disruption, proximity and fluctuation — moves inside, *into* the imaginary house. If previously the cinematic house was a dark, forbidden territory for the moving camera, it has now been discovered and unveiled; it turns into a territory of constant motion and change of identity — not into a house, but a hotel room for all the houses. The notion of the house loses its important quality of cover and protection from the violence outside and instead it welcomes the outside in; it opens the borders, and intermingles the inside and the outside: ‘Если раньше для

⁴⁸ Mur, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

киноаппарата весь мир был ателье, то теперь — весь мир очутился в ателье.

Кино-аппарат перестал ходить на улицы, а стал их приглашать “к себе””.⁵¹

Tret'ia Meshchanskaia, as one of the first Soviet films to portray Soviet everyday life behind the closed doors of an ordinary apartment, became the true incarnation of this metaphor of a moving, changing interior, and of the vanishing border between the interior and the exterior.

In his theoretical article ‘Moi kinoubezhdeniia’, Room explains that the reality of cinematic ‘being’ should be realised through ‘присутствие в кадре живого ощущения, полнокровного чувства и настоящей жизни’.⁵² This, in turn, could be reached through a certain type of what Room calls ‘простота’. Such simplicity, however, should not be provided by a formal approach to the film, but it should work as a specific container, a basic framework for the main idea of the film:

Простота, включающая, по преимуществу, такой прием, который в наиболее заостренном виде, иногда оголенном до кости, подает материал и идею так, что прямо, непосредственно выражает существо и основную мысль любого явления.⁵³

Moreover, it should define not only the content of the film, but also its form and its structure:

Простота, определяющая монтаж как способ обработки материала (до и после съемки) не с точки зрения приема, а как факт органический, строящийся на основе самого монтируемого материала.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Mur, p. 2.

⁵² Room, ‘Moi kinoubezhdeniia’, p. 5.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

These statements were developed as Room was already working on the script of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, and these, naturally, found their practical incarnation in the film. In a 1926 interview for *Kino* regarding the making of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, Room comments that it was exactly the urge for such simplicity that made him and his team start the film: ‘Возникла настоящая потребность в работе над фильмой, в которой весь материал был бы не распылен и раздроблен, а сгущен, сконденсирован и уплотнен’.⁵⁵

In order to introduce his major technique of compressing, condensing and concentrating the material of the film, Room coined the term ‘aesthetic economy’: ‘Лозунг такой картины — эстетическая экономия. На фронт борьбы за режим экономии должна выступить не только итальянская бухгалтерия, но и бухгалтерия творческая, решительно проводящая художественное сокращение штатов’.⁵⁶

These ‘artistic staff reductions’ are understood by Room, first of all, as the reduction of space for filming to just the set of *one room*, into which the director literally ‘packs’ almost all of his filming material: ‘Материал сконденсирован и запакован в [...] одну комнату’.⁵⁷

This opens an extended metaphor that presents the room as a travelling unit of space. Being the major structural (or ‘packing’) element of the film, this room is not seen by the director as something immovable, stable and constant, but becomes the ‘luggage’ with which the characters embark on their journey through the film: ‘Три действующих лица картины легко отправляются с этим багажом [of the material packed in one room — M.P.] в свое путешествие на пленке’.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ “‘Tret'ia Meshchanskaia” (Beseda s rezhisserom)’, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

These structural metaphors of ‘a travelling room’ and ‘travelling luggage’⁵⁹ coined by Room and seemingly overlooked in the existing criticism will serve as the guiding metaphor for my analysis. I shall demonstrate that when the Soviet camera actually entered the ‘forbidden territory’ of the interior space, it depicted it not as something stable and fixed, but as a moving and developing element, an object of transformation itself.

Unpacking the Luggage of Space

Tret'ia Meshchanskaia starts and ends with mirror images of the train going in and out of Moscow, as if directly illustrating the metaphor of the journey on the camera reels with the luggage of the packed cinematic space of one room. In turn, the introductory sequence of the film gradually, shot by shot, ‘unpacks’ this luggage, using a variety of artistic techniques.

In this first sequence, the domestic interior is depicted in parallel with cityscape imagery by the technique of intercutting. These first sequences of the film demonstrate that many techniques of the portrayal of a room are borrowed from the depiction of the territory of the urban cityscape, which was more familiar for the Soviet camera.

Recalling his experience of writing the film, the scriptwriter Viktor Shklovskii comments on the artistic potential that he sees in this closed space of just one ‘decoration’ (the combination of the city *and* the room), and its ability to immediately

⁵⁹ The previous metaphor of the hotel room coined by Leo Mur suggests mobility too.

contain the many characters: 'Мне казалось, что на экране всего интереснее человек и что можно снять картину в одной декорации'.⁶⁰

The set designer of the film also comments on the close relationship between Moscow and the room, calling Moscow itself 'фантастическая декорация',⁶¹ and deliberately shifting the meanings of the two sets. Thus, if the real Moscow turns into a 'decoration', the decoration of the set turns into 'reality'. The reality of the city, its recognisable landmarks (the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the Bolshoi Theatre, etc.) that were shot as a 'decoration' helps the filmmakers to highlight the 'reality' of the set (an important task to fulfil for the first Soviet film that fully depicted the interior in a set).⁶²

These artists' intentions are fully realised already in the first shots of the film. Here, both the city and the room are introduced through a set of five frames of different scales, depicted from different points of view. According to Shklovskii, the exact camera positions (points of view) were already incorporated into the film at the stage of scriptwriting at Room's insistence: 'Писали сценарий мы очень подробно, с разметкой точек съемок'.⁶³ In the close reading of the film, one can see how these points of view work in order to realise the idea of the city's connection to the room.

⁶⁰ Viktor Shklovskii, 'Tret'ia Meshchanskaia', in *Za sorok let* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 104–107 (p. 105).

⁶¹ Iutkevich, p. 323.

⁶² In their later recollections, the members of the film crew commented that the set was so 'realistic' (with all the facilities and even a water supply), that it was actually possible to cook, eat and even stay overnight there: '[Декорация] была построена под жилую комнату так удачно, что нам оставалось только переехать в нее для жилья. Все удобства были налицо вплоть до настоящего водопровода и уборной. Приходя на съемку в декорациях, мы чувствовали себя как дома, [...] раздевались, вешали свои пальто в гардероб, разводили примус и пили чай (настоящий). Таков был подход режиссера. В час [...] мы разогревали обед в том же примусе (который, кстати сказать, играет у нас одну из главных ролей)', see Giber, p. 4. Importantly, both the director and the cameraman were deliberately preoccupied with the size of the room. It had to be extended on their request so that the cameraman could use all the possible angles of shooting, so the decoration was not the closed space, but an open one: 'Я построил декорацию, в которой были четыре стены. Они запирались на всякий замок, как комната. Любая из стен отъезжала в сторону. Можно было снимать с любой точки', see Iutkevich, p. 322.

⁶³ Shklovskii, 'Tret'ia Meshchanskaia', p. 104.

The first shots of both the city and the room (figures 17 and 18) are of a general plan of the two loci. They are both shot from a specific angle that is situated slightly above the horizon, better to introduce both Moscow and the room on Third Meshchanskaia Street. Interestingly, there is also one graphical accent in both frames in the low left corner, which is highlighted in colour — the white church in the city and the white bed in the room. Another analogy can be regarded in the foreground of the low left corner: in the city frame, there are leaves of a tree, and in the interior, there is the construction of a bed. Both objects give us a sense of perspective and of the depth of the screen.



Figures 17 and 18. *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. The view of the city. The bed in the room.

The second pair of shots (figures 19 and 20) represents the city and the room from a new angle. In both shots, the viewer goes deeper inside the city and the room and is now able to distinguish the details. For the city it is the roofs of the buildings that dominate the middle ground of the frame, whilst for the apartment it is the windowsill with a cat sleeping on it. Once again, the shots are compositionally equal, and repeat an identical colour scheme: white corners of the frame, grey middle ground and white background.



Figures 19 and 20. The city. The windowsill.

The third set of shots (figures 21 and 22) takes the viewer to another side of the room and the city, to the sights that will become familiar later on. Once again, the composition of the two frames is equal. The sofa is shown in a diagonal position, as is the building. To the left, another building mimics the table. Additionally, the viewers are getting closer to the centre of the room that is shown fully in the next set of shots.



Figures 21 and 22. The city's buildings. The sofa.

Here (figures 23 and 24), we are in the very heart of both the room and the city. In the room shot, we see a dining table situated exactly in the middle of the room. Its 'reflection' in the city is the Christ the Saviour Cathedral (and in fact to increase the echo, the cathedral's reflection in the river is shown, not its actual self).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The same motif is repeated in the film *Dom na Trubnoi*.

Here, the authors might be playing with the similarity of the symbolical meanings of ‘стол’ that serves to unite the family, and indeed with regard to the point of uniting different characters of the film, and the symbolism of the cathedral that has a symbolical ‘престол’ in its centre, and is also associated with the notion of unity (the Russian noun for ‘cathedral’ — ‘собор’ symbolises a specific kind of unity — ‘соборность’).



Figures 23 and 24. The Christ the Saviour Cathedral. The table.

Finally, figures 25 and 26 take us to the ‘backs’ of both the city and the room. Here we see the construction site of the city that symbolically corresponds to the husband (as Kolia is a worker). In a parallel image we see a kitchen — the ‘working space’ of the wife, Liuda. Once more, the shots are filmed from the same angle (this time from the left), and even the vertical line of the construction site in the left half of the picture replicates the vertical line in the kitchen, ‘constructed’ out of a towel and a wooden stick of a broom.



Figures 25 and 26. *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. The construction site and the kitchen.

In the existing criticism of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, there is a common point of view that juxtaposes these two shooting locations: the set and the *natura* (location) of Moscow. For example, in her analysis of the first scenes of the film, Irina Grashchenkova suggests that these two sets of topological imagery play the role of two very strong oppositions. She evokes this contrast in a rather poetic way as the structural key to understanding the meaning of the film:

Под огромным небом, по сверкающим рельсам, в распахнувшуюся светлеющую
 рассветную даль мчится поезд. [...] И вдруг, точно с разбега, уперся паровоз в
 невидимую стену. Резкий монтажный слом. Под низкими сводами полуподвала —
 комната, еще в полутьме и полусне; в затаенные углы забились многочисленные
 вещи.⁶⁵

Several other critics make the same point, highlighting the contrast between the dynamic exterior and the stable, immovable, packed interior as ‘the opposition between motion and stasis’.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Grashchenkova, p. 89.

⁶⁶ Mayne, p. 113.

However, as my analyses have shown, the relationship between the set and the location in film is not so ‘black and white’, but is capable of showing much more complicity and interdependence. If the set interior for a long time was a forbidden territory for the camera because filmmakers were concentrating on creating ‘historical’ images on a bigger scale, it was exactly Room’s application of the techniques filmmakers used to picture cities and landscapes to his depiction of the interior that legitimised this new subject.

The room and the city are not, in fact, distinct. They are seen as part of the same structure and the same dynamism. They both embark on their ‘journey’ through the film and neither of them is ‘stable’; both are transitional spaces of travelling. As the film proceeds, we see more and more details that reflect this transitional metaphor of ‘travelling’ through the script. It is realised through the literal ‘travelling’ of characters in the film. And on the level of the narrative, it alludes to the ‘travelling’ of ‘passengers-characters’ through the narrative of the film with the luggage of the room, into which they are ‘packed’ themselves, as the director suggests.

This complicated relationship between the inside and the outside, as expressed by Room in his artistic statement regarding the film, is depicted through the cinematic use of an interior detail — a window.

‘Полуподвальное окно’

The window of the *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* flat features in Room’s very first introduction to the film as one of the defining elements of the room:

Место действия знакомо всем и каждому — московская комната, вернее ‘Жилплощадь, размером в 33 кв. аршина’,⁶⁷ принадлежащая обыкновенному совслужащему и расположенная в полуподвале, из единственного окна которого видна отраженная жизнь города. Но и она видна только наполовину, полуподвальное окно, как приспущенный занавес над улицей, позволяет видеть лишь торопливые ноги прохожих, шины авто и копыта извозчичьих кляч.⁶⁸

As many critics (especially those preoccupied with the gender question in the film) have pointed out, the liminal (‘полуподвальное’) position of the window plays the important role of drawing the contrast between the male and female points of view in the film.⁶⁹ Volodia and Kolia, the male protagonists, see Moscow from above (construction site, bridge, plain, etc.), while Liuda stays sitting by the windowsill of the basement, hence having only a restricted view. This positioning of the characters creates ‘две точки зрения на Москву: высокая, как ее видят мужчины, [...] и низкая, как ее видит женщина, запертая в быт Третьей Мещанской’.⁷⁰

However, I would argue that, in this interior image, Room creates a more complex set of metaphors that reveals the relationship between the inside and the outside. Firstly, the life of the city that can be observed through this window is ‘reflected’ — ‘отраженная жизнь города’. Hence, the window of the room metaphorically loses its transparency and turns into a mirror — the room mirrors the city. The device of reflection is seen several times: as Volodia is reflected in the window of the train that brings him to Moscow, and once again in the window of the hotel where he fails to find a room for himself. Yet again, we see the city as ‘a

⁶⁷ Cf. ‘10 кв. арш.’ of Krzhizhanovskii’s room described in Chapter III of this thesis.

⁶⁸ “‘Третья Мещанская’ (Beseda s rezhisserom)”, p. 1.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of a similar frame in Bauer’s films, see Chapter IV of this thesis.

⁷⁰ Grashchenkova, p. 100.

reflection' of the room, whilst the protagonists try to find their identity in the reflections.

Secondly, the position of the window is compared to the theatrical drop curtain that reveals what is going on in the street ('окно, как приспущенный занавес над улицей'). So the street and the city are perceived as theatrical decoration (exactly following what Iutkevich had argued).⁷¹ The room, instead, is represented in this understanding as the stalls from which the 'performance' is viewed, or rather (taking into account the position of the room in the basement) as an orchestra pit, from which the direction of the 'theatre play' is performed. The room acts as the 'first violin' in the construction of the film's narrative.

Embodied into the cinematic medium, this image of the street through the window of the basement suggests even more meanings than it does in a verbal description. As the city and the room take their turns in the 'waking up' sequence, we see one frame that represents both loci — the window as seen from the basement (figure 27).



Figures 27 and 28. *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. The window. The divided screen.

⁷¹ Importantly, describing his experience of shooting the exterior of Moscow, Iutkevich deliberately uses interior metaphors, including walls and lamps: 'Раннее солнце, как дежурная лампочка на полу-желтой стене, дает странные тени и ракурсы', see Iutkevich, p. 323.

The window frame occupies almost the entire screen, creating a 'frame in a frame' effect. However, as quoted earlier from Room's cinematic convictions, every 'frame for the frame' ('кадр для кадра', which here transforms into 'кадр в кадре') should bear its own meaning. As can be seen from close analysis of this single frame, there is in fact be more than one meaning here.

First of all, the window acts as a *constructive* element of the film. The frame of the window (and by extension the room) is 'capturing', and 'compressing' the city, and thus acts as a mediating element in the relationship between interior and exterior space.

As has been pointed out earlier, this window view is traditionally associated with Liuda, the female protagonist, who, captured in the room, is only able to perceive the city from this limited point of view. The two men, conversely, see the whole range of the cityscape (from the roof of the Bolshoi Theatre, for example). However different in their points of view (from above and from below), these images are closely connected graphically. The net of the horizontal and vertical lines in this image of the window is copied in the division lines of the screen in the frame of the city view later in the film. Showing the panoramic view of Moscow from the roof of the Bolshoi Theatre where Kolia works, Room uses a specific cinematic effect of the dividing the screen into several fragments, each representing different points of view and different sites of the city (figure 28). This image shows that even the male 'free' gaze is still framed and captured by that very look from the 'female' windowsill, and that the female and male gazes in the film have much in common.

Additionally, if the divided image of the city is seen as flat (we just see figures on the pavement without any sense of the horizon), this image of the window is instead shown as deep. Not only can one see different grounds in the depth of the

screen (the foreground of the table, the next 'layer' of depth in the line of the windowsill, the window itself, and finally, the city behind the window), the spectator can also experience the depth of the frame in the direction from the ceiling to the floor. This can be seen in the position of a lampshade in the left corner of the frame that demonstrates the height of the actual room in relation to the window and to the city. This double 'depth' of the room in relation to the flatness of the city may act, on the one hand, as a metaphorical 'depth' to which the inhabitants of the room have sunk in their everyday existence; but on the other hand, the doubling could represent the nature of Liuda's character, which, in contrast with the male characters, is 'deep' and capable of development.

Secondly, this image of the window functions as a graphical link between the characters and the events in the film. The horizontal lines of the window frame echoed in the windowsill and in the horizontal patterns of the curtains create specific structures of lines that graphically remind the viewers of the first sequence of the moving train on which Volodia is travelling to Moscow. Hence, the window acts as a functional device. Its graphic parallels unite the seemingly stable and immovable room with the images of the moving, vibrant city, and inform viewers that these as-yet-dislocated shots are shortly to be connected. This frame also references the final scenes of the film, where not Volodia, but Liuda will be the traveller. Another point of connection of the city and the room is the beam of light coming through the window inside the room.

The director uses this beam as a rhetorical device to connect not only the city and the room, but also Liuda and Volodia. As the characters first meet each other, we see the play of light and shade through the shadow of a wicker chair on Liuda's face. A similar pattern of light and shade also appears on Volodia's face when he is shown

working in a factory.⁷² Hence, the window acts as a mobile device of the film's narrative, and establishes a strong connection not only between the interior and the exterior, but also between the dislocated events in the film, as well as between the characters.

This sense of a 'travelling' room is once more highlighted in a new set of parallels between the city and the room. The first shot of movement in the room is a sequence where the cat jumps from the windowsill. It is partly seen from the point of view of the cat as it performs a jump from the windowsill on to the floor.⁷³ The carpet (seen from the cat's perspective) on the floor has two parallel lines depicted on it (figure 29) in exactly the same way as the reels in the beginning of the film (figure 30). Additionally, the two parallel patterns on the floor make a very sharp turn to the left (and, importantly, away from the sofa and outside of the frame). The same abrupt turn will be shown in the train sequence as Liuda leaves Moscow.



Figures 29 and 30. *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. The carpet in the room. The railway.

⁷² Judith Mayne in her analysis of the film suggests that these patterns on both characters' faces symbolise the strong link between Liudmila and Volodia. According to Mayne, Volodia not only appears to be 'crucial in his function as a mediator between Liudmila and the world outside the apartment', but also acts as Liudmila's double, see Mayne, p. 116.

⁷³ The cameraman Giber remembers that he had shot several scenes from the cat's point of view, but they were, unfortunately, removed from the final version of the film: 'В комнате Баталовых прижилась кошка — у нее было свое постоянное место, где она и жила со своим потомством. К сожалению, кадры с точки зрения кошки не вошли в фильм. Чтобы добыть их, мне пришлось на животе ездить по комнате с заводной кинемой в руках', see Giber, 'Kak snimalas' "Tret'ia Meshchanskaia"', p. 4.

Reminding the viewer of the arrival of one character, Volodia, who in the first shots of the film is also seen reflected in the train window, and preparing us for the departure of the other, Liudmila, whose reflection in the train window we also see in the very last shots of the film, the window of the basement acts itself as the allegorical window of the train that the cinematic narrative is ‘travelling’ on, as if to develop Room’s travelling metaphor.⁷⁴

With its general association with thresholds and boundaries, this window frame symbolises a potential transition, development or shift within the sequence, and allegorically acknowledges an important connection between the interior and the exterior, or depth and surface, on the screen.

This metaphor of a film narrative as a train, and a room as just one stop of its journey, was also recognised by Maia Turovskaia in her analysis of the film:

Фильм как бы окольцован движением поездов — поезда в Москву и из Москвы. Комната на Третьей Мещанской [...] была как бы промежуточной станцией, островком мнимой неподвижности в текучем подвижном быту, тронутым с места войной и революцией.⁷⁵

However, if Turovskaia sees the room as an imaginary stop in the film’s journey, hence something stable, I see it as rather a moving object in itself, whether a piece of luggage (as suggested by Room) or the carriage of a train from which the passengers are looking out (as suggested by the visual line of the film).

⁷⁴ For a general discussion of the poetics of the railway and its influence on the culture of the time, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Anselm Hollo (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980). For early cinema’s preoccupation with motion and the image of the train, see Kirby.

⁷⁵ Turovskaia, p. 251.

The Cinematic Travel of Objects

If the room itself and its borderlines play a structural role in the development of the visual narrative, the objects on the screen have strong potential to define the character of the image. According to *Room*, this ‘cinematic travel of a room’ lasts for eight different narrative sections, which are designed to totally transform the spectators’ relationship with the objects:

Путешествие длится 8 частей — на их протяжении все движения, жесты, ракурсы, вещи, отпущенные скупой, должны быть использованы, переставлены и обыграны так, чтобы они смогли жить в сознании зрителя не только до, но и после конца фильма.⁷⁶

This statement reflects the common belief of the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s that the power of cinema was able to transform the material lives of the audience.⁷⁷ The specific quality of film that was ‘responsible’ for this was called ‘кинематографичность’ (‘cinematicness’).

This notion of a specific ‘cinematicness’ regarding the material of films was the main subject of Louis Delluc’s book *Photogénie* (1920), translated into Russian in 1924. Delluc, the head of the French avant-garde movement coined the term *Photogénie*, which would later become one of the most essential concepts for the development of cinematic imagery over the course of the 1920s. In his book under the same title, he pointed out that a detail, or a person, could gain a very specific quality when being depicted on the screen. This quality, the cinematic ‘essence’, depended on

⁷⁶ “‘Третья Мещинская’ (Beseda s rezhisserom)”, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ For a broader discussion of this topic, see Widdis, *Visions*, p. 23–56.

several basic characteristics of the object — its *faktura*⁷⁸ and light. Providing a list of the most ‘photogenic’ objects, Delluc named, among others (such as the sky and clouds), some elements of set design, especially patterned textile and background.⁷⁹

At first accepted with much enthusiasm and even having become ‘необходимым прожиточным минимумом [...] в теоретическом багаже кинематографиста’,⁸⁰ *photogénie* was soon criticised in Soviet theory for its ‘пассивность’,⁸¹ and inability to actively transform reality on the screen, because ‘истинно-кинематографическое заключено в преодолении материала режиссерской волей, а не скрыто в самом материале, как его неотъемлемое свойство, как его фотогения’.⁸²

Soviet filmmakers had to *remake* the physical world with the enormous power they are given; they had to create ‘objects’ out of ‘nothing’: ‘Советская кинематография зовет режиссера к величайшей активности, к тому чтобы из “ничего”, в стесненных условиях, делать “вещи”’.⁸³

Only after this cinematic ‘battle’ for the material objects on the screen, would one be able to reach the new, active and real ‘cinematicness’. As one critic stated: ‘Теоретические поиски нужно направить в другую сторону. Нужно раскрыть законы той победы над динамичным материалом, которая в своем результате дает нам впечатление “кинематографического”’.⁸⁴

Following these theoretical discussions, Viktor Shklovskii proclaimed his own declaration of ‘cinematicness’. According to the scholar, the cinema was entering its

⁷⁸ See Widdis, ‘Faktura’, pp. 12–14.

⁷⁹ Lui Deliuk [Louis Delluc], *Fotogeniia*, trans. by T.I. Sorokin (Moscow: Novye vekhi, 1924).

⁸⁰ Viktor Pertsov, ‘Mif o fotogenii’, *Kinofront*, 5:2 (1926), 4–7, (p. 4).

⁸¹ Mur, pp. 4–8.

⁸² Pertsov, ‘Mif’, p. 6.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

‘second period’, in which it would become ‘фабрикой отношения к вещам’.⁸⁵

Shklovskii therefore called directors not to establish a special relationship to the shooting process: ‘В кино вообще нельзя снимать вещи, а нужно выяснить отношение к ним’.⁸⁶ Talking about the new theoretical role of objects in Eisenstein’s *Staroe i novoe* (1927–1929), Shklovskii developed a new formula of an active cinematicness based on the representation of objects: ‘Вещи не просто сняты, они не фотографии и не символы, они знаки, вызывающие у зрителя свои смысловые ряды’.⁸⁷

His colleague, the critic Adrian Piotrovskii, also ‘updated’ the function of the objects in films and equated it to that of the people. Although Piotrovskii used Delluc’s term, he still explained it in a more Shklovskian manner, stating that this very ‘фотогения’ of objects completely transformed the nature of dramatic art:

Фотогения ставит ‘человека’ в одинаковый ряд восприятия с ‘вещью’. [...] А ‘драма вещей’, или ‘человеко-вещей’, невозможна без того, чтобы внести существенные поправки в самое понятие драматического.⁸⁸

In his early-1926 article ‘Moi kinoubezhdeniia’, Abram Room talked about the enormous role of objects on screen. Here, he first formulated what Grashchenkova would later call one of the most important principles of cinematic realism — ‘вещной психологизм, вещизм’:⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Pogranichnaia liniia’, in *Za shest’desiat let* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), pp. 110–113 (p. 111).

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Adrian Piotrovskii, ‘K teorii kinozhanrov’, in *Poetika kino*, ed. by Boris Eikhenbaum (Moscow: Kinopechat’, 1927), pp. 143–170 (p. 150).

⁸⁹ Grashchenkova, p. 102.

В обыденной жизни вещи н е м ы, незначительны. Они ни о чем не говорят и никакой активности не проявляют. В кино, на экране вещь вырастает до исполинских размеров и действует с такой же силой (если не с большей), что и сам человек.⁹⁰

This new attitude towards objects on the screen was fully realised in filming *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, the room in which is already inhabited by these very special, active objects. As Room said in an interview in 1926:

Эта комната на настоящей третьей Мещанской, что у Сухаревской башни, заселена вещами. Каждая из них имеет свою судьбу, свое прошлое, настоящее и будущее. Все вместе они живут, дышат, вмешиваются в жизнь человека и держат его в цепком плену.⁹¹

Indeed, Abram Room and Viktor Shklovskii place their characters in an interior environment that is object-filled and, even more importantly, over-patterned: wallpapers, tablecloths, paintings, photographs, calendars and objects unite into concatenations of competing design.⁹² Already the first scene of the interior gives this impression as the camera scans the scene with wallpaper, rags, several portraits and calendar hanging on the walls, patterned table cloths, and discarded clothing strewn over the floor and furniture, in which, amidst the paraphernalia of habitation, there

⁹⁰ Abram Room, 'Moi kinoubezhdeniia', *Sovetskii ekran*, 8 (1926), 5.

⁹¹ "'Tret'ia Meshchanskaia" (Beseda s rezhisserom)', p. 1. This description could be compared to the description of an almost aggressive interior object in Olesha's novel *Zavist'* of 1927, which illustrates the point that the idea of active objects was universal in the creative discussion of the time: '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. Если какая-нибудь дрянь — монета или запонка падает со стола, то обычно закатывается она под трудно отодвигаемую мебель. Я ползаю по полу и, поднимая голову, вижу, как буфет смеется', see Iurii Olesha, *Zavist'* (Moscow: Zemlia i fabrika, 1930), pp. 8–9.

⁹² This was a contradiction to the NEP policy over the new *byt* and the Party's strong advice of the time to whitewash walls and paint all the furniture white, leaving the room clean and clear. For more on the new *byt* campaign, see Buchli, pp. 41–62.

appears scarcely space for anything human. This over-patterned, box-like space visually captures the film's protagonists and symbolically becomes their master.

As the film develops, more and more objects 'express' their relationship towards the characters, and therefore form the spectators' attitude towards the events in the film. The special object-metaphors, object-symbols act as an aid to the narrative in cases when the simple 'showing' of things fails to reveal the director's methods:

‘[...] Повествовательный и описательный вещизм не в силах был выявить всей глубины и сложности состояния, и тогда режиссер прибегал к вещной метафоре, внезапной, как взрыв, емкой, яркой’.⁹³

This is seen, for example, in a samovar that transforms its function and suddenly becomes a shower for Kolia. We see a close-up display of Kolia's body taking this 'samovar' shower, and this close-up immediately becomes iconic. For the spectator, this detail turns into a visual representation of Kolia's playful character, and also shows his dominance over Liudmila, who is humbly washing at the sink.

Another important detail in the room alongside the window is the table. It is exactly here where the symbolical act of Liudmila's choice between the two men is displayed during her card reading. Laying the cards on the table in a specific order, she decides which man to choose.⁹⁴

In fact, most of the objects on the table become so-called 'object-metaphors'. Below I mark just a few of them. The boiling kettle left by Volodia on the table is used to trick Kolia. It acts as a diversion for Kolia, when he thinks that the friends are going to have some tea. Having gone to buy some cakes for the tea, Kolia discovers that his wife and Volodia are already in bed. Another example is the cup of milk that

⁹³ Grashchenkova, p. 103.

⁹⁴ This image of the cards that symbolise the three in love was depicted on the film's posters.

Liudmila offers to Kolia in the beginning of the film. Kolia first rejects and then accepts it, which echoes the development of their sexual relationship.

Finally, another table becomes an object of transformation. When Kolia is rejected by Liuda and finds out that he has no bed in his own room, he spends a night in the office using a desk as a temporary bed.

However if the bed, the sofa and the table symbolically ‘capture’ and ‘trick’ two male characters of the film and indicate their shifting roles in relationship with Liuda (with ‘an official husband’ belonging to the bed’s space, a ‘rejected’ one being placed on the sofa, and a ‘double-rejected’ sleeping on the table), Liuda herself is visually connected to the overall patterned surroundings of the room: the wallpaper, clothes and wicker furniture.

This visual and symbolical interdependence is carefully built up through a set of interrelated frames and the designer’s tricks. Liuda’s photographic portrait is hanging on the wallpaper; her favourite place in the room is by the window where she is usually seen through the patterns of the curtain (this image was even chosen for the poster of the film); and the patterns of her dress recall those of the room’s wallpaper.

Another Soviet film by the director Iurii Zheliabuzhskii, *Papirosnitsa ot Mossel'roma* (1924), provides some interesting contrast to the comparative use of wallpaper and dress patterns in the film design. This film shows a female character in a dress made from constructivist fabric by Varvara Stepanova. A protagonist appears in this dress against the background of old bourgeois wallpaper. This contrast between Stepanova’s fabric and its visual surroundings was recognised at that time. As the specialist in constructivist design Christina Kiaer puts it, ‘the film gets exactly right the way that the fabric’s bright optics rebel against the faded florals of the out-dated wallpaper and that Stepanova’s fabric is meant to signify dynamism, rationality, and

mechanization'.⁹⁵ In contrast, Liuda's over-patterned dress visually merges with the pattern of the room's wallpaper, which makes the viewer realise that she truly belongs to this world of Third Meshchanskaia Street.

Moreover, the 'violence' of patterns increases every time the narrative comes close to Liuda's emerging liaison with Volodia, and thus visually maps the sensual geography of their affair. Notably, in the scene in which Kolia introduces Liuda to Volodia, her future lover, we see the patterned shadow of a wicker chair on her face which, as I have described earlier, graphically connects her to Volodia. The very scene of Liuda's seduction by Volodia opens and closes with a close-up frame of patterned wallpaper. From this time on, Volodia does not allow Liuda out of the room, and she is sentenced to live surrounded by these four patterned walls, just like her photograph hanging on one of them.

Finally, Liuda's visual and symbolical release is shown through that photograph. Having refused to have an abortion and not knowing which of the two men is the father of her child, Liuda decides to leave the Third Meshchanskaia. She takes her photograph out of the frame, leaving an empty space on the wall. The space of this empty frame appears to be the only white gap in the room, free from pattern, thus symbolically representing Liuda's freedom and linked by the montage to the 'white frame' of the train window, out of which Liuda sees the beginning of her new life.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Object of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), p. 118.

⁹⁶ This graphical play of the over-patterned background with the white one echoes the use of white and patterned background was discussed in the previous chapter. Both Bauer's and Room's heroines belong to the over-patterned world, but where Liudmila and Vera find their way out of it, Mary gets trapped in the luxury of her new interiors.

‘Live’, ‘Educated’ and ‘Rebellious’ Objects

In this skilful interplay with objects in domestic surroundings, *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* developed a new type of relationship towards objects on the screen that immediately entered a broader philosophical discussion on the pages of Soviet newspapers. In his theoretical manifesto about the use of objects on the screen, released on 11 October 1927, Kaufman suggested that cinema was the only type of art where all material objects become ‘alive’. According to Kaufman the cinematic medium is able to transform ‘dead’ material objects and release their inner beauty: “взять [...] мертвую вещь [...] и сделать из нее поэму”.⁹⁷ In real life, all objects are passive, as Kaufman suggests, and we seldom even notice the objects that surround us; both movable ones such as an opening door or a moving curtain, and static objects such as chairs on the floor, a mirror on the wall, or clocks on the table — they intermingle together with thousands of other objects. However, the cinematic medium can release what is otherwise hidden in real life — ‘скрытую, самостоятельную сущность, внутреннюю красоту [вещи]’.⁹⁸ And this is exactly what Room did in his film.

This manifesto was even illustrated by stills from *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, to prove the point that the filmmakers of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* skilfully use interior imagery in their film in a way suggested by Kaufman — a way that brings objects to life. The domestic environment of the film is active — it directs the characters’ actions, attitudes and habits, and reveals a new type of artistic reality that is able to transform life.

In *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, several of the things that we see receive this new being; they go out of the static world and become movable, shifting and interchangeable. For example, a samovar acts as a shower, a sofa is transformed into a

⁹⁷ N. Kaufman, ‘Veshch’ na ekrane’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 41 (1927), 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

bed and a table is transformed into a bed. Not only do they transform their essence, they also influence the characters. Indeed, as some contemporary critics pointed out, the things become the protagonists of the film, sometimes even edging out the actors themselves: 'В кино играют не только люди, но и вещи, причем часто вещи талантливее людей'.⁹⁹

This perfection of the objects' 'performance' on the screen, in turn, gave birth to a new theory according to which cinematic objects would not only define the artistic world of the film itself, but would also bridge the gap between art and reality and go beyond the limits of the film itself.

The Revolution's call to create a great 'New Man' through transforming social norms and traditions saw a radical change in the domestic codes of society.¹⁰⁰ Soviet films, such as *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, shaped and documented the new 'language' of the apartment. By trying to depict this 'language' in the most realistic way, cinema also created the first 'moving' document of how to use this language, as Oksana Bulgakova puts it in her pioneering study of gesture in Soviet cinema: 'Благодаря кино двадцатый век стал первым столетием, законсервировавшим телесное поведение не только в словесном описании или остановленном моменте статуи, картины и фотографии, но и в движении'.¹⁰¹

Tret'ia Meshchanskaia without doubt was part of this 'moving document', but it documented not only 'body gestures', but also the transformations of objects.

The scriptwriter for the film, Viktor Shklovskii, shortly after its release, wrote about the importance of the cinematic medium in the process of 'selecting' the

⁹⁹ A. Toporkov, 'Igraiushchie veshchi', *Kino*, 28 August 1928, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ See Lynne Atwood and Catriona Kelly 'Programmes for Identity: The "New Man" and the "New Woman"', in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution 1881-1940*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 256-290.

¹⁰¹ Oksana Bulgakova, *Fabrika zhestov* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005), p. 5.

movements of bodies in the domestic environment and educating the spectator in how to use domestic objects:

Кино должно помочь селекционировать человеческий быт и человеческое движение. Нигде нет таких отсталых навыков, как в быту. Вероятно, мы даже пальто надеваем неправильно. Навыки переходят друг от друга, от поколения к поколению непроверенными, потому что быт не инструктируется и не может инструктироваться обычным способом. Мы снимаем заводы и снимаем их, обычно, пейзажно, но завод не нуждается в том, чтобы проверить себя в кино. Но у нас не снято, как нужно дышать, как подметать комнату, как мыть посуду, как топить печку, хотя в одной топке печей у нас такая бесхозяйственность и варварство, перед которым меркнет даже кинематография. Нужно создать ленту, [...] которая не передразнивала бы жизнь, [...] а натаскивала ее как молодого щенка.¹⁰²

In a further theoretical discussion of the role of things on the screen, published a year after the film was released, one critic directly suggested that objects could help in ‘educating’ actors and spectators. In this 1928 article, ‘Igraiushchie veshchi’, Toporkov describes an example of a scene with a table, in which the shape of the furniture would actually *direct* the acting techniques of the actors:

Предположим — задумана какая-нибудь сцена из современной жизни. Нужен стол. Форма этого стола должна быть только такой, какой она значится в каталогах Мосдрева. Подходит ли актер к этому столу, умеет ли он за ним сидеть? Может быть да, а может быть нет. Может быть актер не в состоянии провести сцену за этим столом, — стиль его игры не согласуем со стилем стола. Но, тогда в чем же расхождение?

¹⁰² Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Standartnye kartiny i leninskaia propotsiia’, in *Za shest’desiat let*, pp. 56–59, (p. 58).

Какая новая жестикуляция нам нужна? Какая походка? Наконец, какое лицо? Вот беда! Оказывается нет современного лица!¹⁰³

The author famously ends this imaginary scene with sincere gratitude to the table for its ability to educate actors and spectators in how to behave on screen and in real life: ‘Так [...] будем благодарны столу за его ценные указания’.¹⁰⁴

Earlier in this chapter I have discussed *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*'s educational impact, which was considered rather provocative, so that this film was not in fact praised for its ideological message. The table in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* is not yet the table from *Mosdrevo*, as Toporkov suggests would be the ideology of the future. It represents a transitional stage between the table of the previous tradition of representation, and the one that is suggested by Toporkov. In these cases the tables predicate the actions of the protagonists. A nineteenth-century table in fiction would be the one that gathers the family, the one where everyone is united over a meal and appropriate conversation. Toporkov's table from *Mosdrevo* has a specific style that dictates the behavior of those who approach it. In contrast, *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*'s tables are rebels. One table is even misused as a bed (by Kolia at work); at another table Liuda makes her choice between the two men; it becomes a symbolic place of an adultery; it is also used to divide the couple, or as a tool of trickery. When Liuda is trying to use it in a conventional way by being a good wife, Kolia does not approve, and mistreats her. The table becomes a source of constant change, of difficult decisions, of inappropriate use — all happening around just one object which used to have a solid meaning as the centre of the room and the centre of the family universe.

¹⁰³ Toporkov, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

As I have illustrated, not only this table, but the whole of the interior plays a major role in the film; it unites and divides the characters, it is used as a tool to describe them, but is also used as a space that helps the spectator understand the ideology and aesthetic choices of the director. The room is connected to the bigger city, and therefore becomes a space that is not safe anymore. It is not protecting its inhabitants from the big city; in contrast it makes them escape from the room to the big city to feel the freedom and the ability to choose, even if this choice cannot bring further protection — this is how Liuda escapes from the room into the unknown. Alone with a child, she does not know what the future will bring her. However, she prefers this uncertainty to the life she has on Third Meshchanskaia. Her two men are left in the flat playing games — an episode that first alludes to the cosiness and wellbeing of one's own home, of enjoying the evening over a chess game. However soon we understand that this is just an imitation of these feelings. Both men soon realise that they have mistreated the woman they loved, that they are actually now left lonely and unprotected themselves in this room. This episode clearly shows the break with the previous tradition of family interior spaces.

At the same time, the room in the film is never the same, as manifested in the use of objects in it — a husband goes to the sofa, while the lover occupies the bed, and visa versa; domestic objects such as kettles, chairs, tables are constantly used in unusual positions. All this shows us a room that is active, not only in a direct way (the way the props were designed with the flexible walls), but also in an artistic way – it is full of changing meanings and connotations, and it introduces a truly new way of depicting an interior on the screen. Indeed, it is one of the most complex examples of the use of an interior set even up to the present day.

CHAPTER VI

Boris Barnet. Comic Interiors

This chapter examines the representation of interior spaces in the genre of lyrical comedies. It demonstrates the way in which, in the two major films of Boris Barnet (1902–1965). The room and domestic objects are employed to produce a comic effect, as well as to suggest a new way of connecting the city and the interior.

Recognised today by many historians and critics ‘as the founder of Soviet comedy’,¹ Boris Barnet himself confessed at the end of his career that he ‘liked comedy best of all’, however, he found it one of the most difficult genres to create.² By examining his directing debut *Miss Mend* (1926, codirected with Fedor Otsep) and his two most successful — and at the same time most controversial — comedies of the 1920s, *Devushka s korobkoi* (1927) and *Dom na Trubnoi* (1928), I will analyse the artistic means by which interior setting and interior decoration are used to shape the genre of new Soviet lyrical comedy, and the importance of this domestic locus in creating a proper satirical film about new Soviet everyday life.

Interiors of *Miss Mend*: Function and Speed

Boris Barnet entered Soviet cinema through Lev Kuleshov’s film workshop, which celebrated the physical rather than the philological expression in actors, and much

¹ Bernard Eisenschitz, ‘A Fickle Man, or Portrait of Boris Barnet as a Soviet Director’, in *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, ed. by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 151–164 (p. 151).

² From an interview with Georges Sadoul, 12 September 1959, published six years later in G. Sadoul, ‘Rencontre avec Boris Barnet’, *Cahiers du Cinema*, 169 (1965); here I quote from its English translation in Eisenschitz, pp. 151–152.

influenced Barnet's own style as a director. First a sports teacher and a professional boxer, Barnet was then perfectly cast as the famous Cowboy Jeddy in Kuleshov's *Neobychainye priklucheniia mistera Vesta v strane Bol'shevikov* (1924), a slapstick satire based on American silent comedies, full of dynamic chases and special effects. The great success of Barnet's performance as Jeddy encouraged him to begin a professional film career. His first directional co-production, the comic thriller *Miss Mend*, co-directed with Fedor Otsep, also exhibited car chases and special effects similar to Kuleshov's directing style.³ *Miss Mend* was based on a popular novel by Marietta Shaginian titled *Mess-Mend: Iankees in Petrograd* (1925). The film tells the story of a reporter (Boris Barnet), a news photographer — 'фотограф-моменталист' — (Vladimir Fogel'), a clerk (Igor' Il'inskii), and a secretary, Miss Vivian Mend (Nataliia Glan), who are trying to stop a bacteriological strike by powerful Western business leaders against the USSR. The exotic locations, adventurous plot, fantastic action and a lot of visual effects made the film a resounding success with the public.⁴ Denise Youngblood refers to three major components of the film's success:

First, the very 'Westernness' of *Miss Mend*'s fantastic plot would have been a selling-point with audiences, since it was reminiscent of the American films they liked so much. Second, the fact that the action mainly took place abroad was another important attraction; the foreign settings made it possible for Barnet to show a life both exotic and glamorous. Third, the acting style [...] was naturalistic.⁵

³ Kuleshov derives the basic principles of his film theory from the dynamism of American silent comedies, calling it 'американский монтаж'. For more on Kuleshov's theory, see Lev Kuleshov, 'Amerikanshchina', *Kino-fot*, 1 (1922), pp. 14–15; and idem, 'Nash byt i amerikanizm (Po povodu stat'i Toporkova)', *Kino-gazeta*, 23 April 1924, p. 1.

⁴ The film drew an audience of 1,7 million in the first six months of its release. See S. Krylov, *Kino vmesto vodki. K vsesoiuznomu partsoveshchaniu po voprosam kino* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1928), p. 30.

⁵ Youngblood, Denise, 'Boris Barnet: Soviet Actor/Soviet Director', in *Movies for the Masses. Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 126–138 (p. 130).

To this description, I would add another important detail, already evident in Shaginian's novel – the notion of speed and dynamism.⁶ At the first glance, it seems that interior location has little to do with the success of the film; however, a close analysis of the film will show that, even in his debut, Barnet uses interior location in a way that reflects the major characteristics of the film — dynamism, exotic settings, contrast, and the use of special visual effects.

Windows and Stairs as Action Sets

The very first scene of the strike is shown through its relation to two interior objects that separate inside of the interior from the outside — doors and windows. In fact, they become central to the scenes. There are two doors to the factory — a front door and a back door, which sets the location and at the same time sets the intrigue; the back door implies a hidden plan that is soon revealed. After establishing the scene with the two doors, the camera moves to an anonymous man looking out from a window, and then a hand with a gun shooting out from the window. The window frame becomes the frame of the shot itself, highlighting the action (figure 33).



Figure 31. *Miss Mend*. A gun in a window.

⁶ According to Tim Harte, both Shaginian's novel and its adaptation exemplified 'how notions of speed permeated popular Russian culture in the 1920s', see Harte, p. 277.

In the next sequence we see the office, where Miss Mend and the clerk work. The protagonists hear the shot and rush to the window to see what has happened. To indicate the surprise and confusion of the situation, Barnet and Otsep show several different positions of the protagonists relating to the window: first Miss Mend and the clerk are looking out from the opposite sides of the window; then Miss Mend is seen alone while the clerk is moving to her side of the window (figure 32); then we see them together looking from one side of the window (figure 33); then they are shown at the different sides of the window again; then we see Miss Mend standing up on the window sill (figure 34); and finally she is jumping down into the crowd.

Here, the window is used not only to show an unusual situation, but also to introduce the character, Miss Mend, who is ready to act straightforwardly. In a sequence of several other frames we see the clerk also standing on the window sill, in the same position that Miss Mend stood. This shot interchanges with the scenes of the ground where the police are chasing Miss Mend (so we see that from his point of view). Finally we see the clerk after some thought reluctantly jumping down to follow Miss Mend – which indicates his sympathy towards her. This short sequence of multiple shots with just one window already indicates Barnet's interest in such objects and their dynamic possibilities, and his wish to give them additional meaning, which will develop further in his next films.



Figure 32. *Miss Mend*. Miss Mend looking out from the window.



Figure 33. *Miss Mend*. Miss Mend and the clerk looking out from the window.



Figure 34. *Miss Mend*. Miss Mend and the clerk looking out from the window.

As the plot progresses, we see the images of interiors several times – as we enter Miss Mend’s apartment, and as we see the journalists preparing themselves for the day. On both occasions these are very ordinary apartments, and not interesting from the visual or narrative point of view at all. However, later we can recognise that they create a big contrast to the luxury and glamour of the residence of Artur Storn (Ivan Koval’ Samborskii); the son of a millionaire, he is the main villain of the film. Artur’s apartment is huge, almost grotesque — the exotic setting that the spectators of *Miss Mend* like so much. In a spectacular general shot of the apartment, we see two staircases framing the big auditorium with an oval table in front — which indicates the depth and scale of this space. Artur himself is always shown in relation to huge interior objects in his flat. In the introductory shot he is sitting on a wooden bench that looks far too big for him — a technique of grotesquery in representing a negative attitude towards the character (figure 35).



Figure 35. *Miss Mend*. Artur Storn in his apartment.

This might initially seem a rather static use of interior, but later in the film we see some plot-intensive interior scenes taking place in this very apartment and focusing

exactly on its scale and division of space. For example, the protagonist is trying to climb up a huge lamp in order to jump out of the attic window. In fact, jumping out of the window becomes an iconic scene in this film, following the American chase tradition: it conveys the general message of American silent comedy, particularly slapstick, ‘to beware the calamitous potential of prosaic objects’.⁷

Additionally, there are many shots of the staircase throughout the film (see figures 38 – 40) which do not play a significant narrative role, but are perfect for effective chase scenes in order to show the dynamics of the diagonal and horizontal movements on the screen, or the scene of falling off the stairs (see figures 36 and 37), or to play with the graphic appearance of the stairs (figure 38).



Figure 36. *Miss Mend*. A chase on the staircase.

⁷ Paul Vincent Murphy, *The New Era: American Thought and Culture in the 1920s* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), p. 47.



Figure 37. *Miss Mend*. A chase scene by the staircase



Figure 38. *Miss Mend*. A scene on the staircase.

In general, although in this film most of the plot-intensive chase scenes still happen outside, there are several interior scenes that feature very compelling dynamic sequences when the objects of interior decoration become the obstacles to the protagonists, such as for example the traditional use of the closed door as a shelter during the chase or the creative use of a table as a trap — in one of the final scenes we see characters trapped inside the table frame with the tabletop missing.

Already in his first film, Barnet is very much interested in the dynamic use of interior objects; however, if here Barnet employs interior details following the tradition of slapstick comedies, or just uses them as a kind of visual peculiarities, in his next films he experiments with the interior objects at a much bigger scale.

***Devushka s korobkoi*: ‘на подступах к советской комедии’**

Devushka s korobkoi was Barnet’s debut as a solo director, in which he tried to depart from the style of his cinematic ‘Godfather’ Lev Kuleshov and to develop his own artistic method. Although the film is now recognised as Barnet’s ‘first successful comedy’,⁸ its critical reception at the time was rather negative.⁹ Denise Youngblood mentions that ‘the vitriolic energy with which the film was attacked was disproportionate to its relative weight’.¹⁰ She compares the film’s critical reception in the spring of 1927 to the later cultural reaction regarding Abram Room’s *Tret’ia Meshchanskaia*: ‘The former [*The Girl with the Hatbox*] was the stick with which to beat Mezhrabpomfil’m, the latter [*Bed and Sofa*] — Sovkino’.¹¹

Beskin in his article for *Sovetskoe kino* also attacked the film for its deliberate fakery and ‘foreignness’, claiming that it came ‘прямо из Парижа’, and its

⁸ Jay Leyda, *A History of the Russian and Soviet Film: A Study of the Development of Russian Cinema from 1886 to the Present* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p. 223.

⁹ It is important to mention that for a long time Barnet’s works were among those that slide ‘into reference books either in footnotes or as material to fill the cracks between discussion of the universally “accepted” innovations’, as pointed out by John Gillett in his review of a major Barnet retrospective at the British National Film Theatre in 1980, see John Gillett, ‘A Barnet Postscript’, *Sight and Sound*, 49:4 (1980), 244. Until that date, there had been only a few articles and one monograph dedicated to Barnet’s career, and I shall base my analysis on two of them: A.M. Kushnirov, *Zhizn’ i fil’m my Borisa Barneta* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977) and Denise Youngblood, ‘Boris Barnet: Soviet Actor/Soviet Director’, in *Movies for the Masses. Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 126–138. A lot of valuable critical and contextual material in French is presented in *Boris Barnet: écrits, documents, études, filmographie*, as well as in newspaper articles of the period, which will be referenced separately.

¹⁰ Youngblood, ‘Boris Barnet’, p. 133.

¹¹ Ibid. The comparison between the two films had already been made by contemporary critics as well: ‘На пути создания советской кино-картины [...] намного нужнее и полезнее [...] такие ошибочные [...] роумовские картины, чем межабпомовская “Девушка с коробкой”’, see Iakov Lev [Nikolai Iakovlev], ‘Devushka s korobkoi’, *Kino*, 3 May 1927, p. 2.

protagonist was a perfect Mary Pickford ('ну прямо, — Мэри Пикфорд'). He summed up: "«Девушка с коробкой» — талантливый фокус: французско-английская картина с русскими надписями. И не сразу узнаешь, что французская'.¹²

One of the few reasonably positive reviews of the film which took into account more than its political and artistic betrayal of the new motto of 'советский экран для советской картины, а не для псевдо-советской подделочной под границу экспериментации',¹³ appeared in *Pravda*.¹⁴ Praising the film for qualities such as 'мягкая безобидная веселость, столь редкая в наших фильмах', 'много душевной лирики и внешнего обаяния (в сочетании с хорошими кинематографическими качествами)',¹⁵ the critic of *Pravda* drew on the main problem the film managed to solve — the challenge of the comical and satirical representation of Soviet reality.

By the time *Devushka s korobkoi* was created, the art of Soviet comedy was being proclaimed to be in serious crisis. The same critic in *Pravda* confessed the weakness of the overall situation in Soviet comedy production: 'Комедия — едва ли не самое уязвимое место нашей художественной кинематографии'.¹⁶ According to the critic, one of the main problems was directors' habit of using material borrowed from American reality and American life,¹⁷ and hence neglecting Soviet material:

Неудачи в этом направлении понятны. Нет умения схватывать резче и глубже черты советской действительности. Не хватает еще зоркости и политического чутья нашим

¹² O. Beskin, 'Neigrovaia fil'ma', *Sovetskoe kino*, 7 (1927), 8–11 (p. 10).

¹³ Beskin, p. 11.

¹⁴ S. Ermilovskii, 'Devushka s korobkoi', *Pravda*, 11 May 1927, p. 6.

¹⁵ S. Ermilovskii, p. 6..

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Beskin also commented on the totality of foreign films on the Soviet screen. Cf. 'Закабаление наших экранов заграничными фильмами'; 'ассимиляция нас плохими заграничными фильмами изнутри', see Beskin, p. 11.

сценаристам и режиссерам, смелости порвать с формами и масками заграничного кино.¹⁸

In the context of these debates, *Devushka s korobkoi* was seen by the critic as the first step away from these influences towards the development of a pure Soviet comedy modelled on Soviet material: ‘Девушка с коробкой — шаг вперед, несмотря на то, что многое у авторов в слишком осторожной зависимости от сюжетных схем, положений и кинообразов’.¹⁹

Just like his contemporary critics, Boris Barnet himself realised the need to create a proper Soviet comedy in the situation of the total decline of the genre, which he characterised as ‘полный художественный провал всех, а если не всех, то огромного большинства комедий’.²⁰ In his article entitled ‘Na podstupakh k sovetskoi komedii’, he tries, as the title suggests, to find his own ways to make a Soviet comedy, highlighting one of the main challenges of its creation: ‘Самым сложным вопросом является выбор темы’.²¹

Devushka, therefore, was Barnet’s response to these difficulties regarding a proper topic for a proper Soviet comedy. The answer offered was brave and creative, and I argue that a substantial part of its artistic method is based on the innovative and dynamic use of interior imagery.

The Plot and the Apartment Question

The plot of *Devushka s korobkoi* is built around the apartment question. A young girl, Natasha Korosteleva (Anna Sten), lives on the outskirts of Moscow with her

¹⁸ Beskin, p. 11.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Boris Barnet, ‘Na podstupakh k sovetskoi komedii’, *Kino*, 19 April 1927, p. 3.

²¹ Ibid.

grandfather and works in Moscow selling her handmade hats in the shop of ‘Madame Irène’ (Serafima Birman). But Madame Irène finds another way to use Natasha’s skills; in order to get an extra room for her lazy husband Trager (Pavel Pol’), Madame provides Natasha with an official residence permit in one room of her Moscow flat. This room in Moscow becomes the main focus of developing and unfolding of the comical situations of the plot.

One day, Natasha meets Il’ia Snegirev (Ivan Koval’-Samborskii), a poor peasant who has arrived in Moscow from his village to study, cannot find a place to rent, and has to sleep on a bench in a park. Natasha decides to help the poor student and suggests that he marry her ‘fictitiously’, so that Il’ia, as her husband, may occupy her room at Madame Irène’s house.

As soon as Madame learns about these new arrangements, she becomes furious and orders their room emptied — another source of comic situations. Thereafter, Madame fires Natasha, and to add more to this misery, Trager holds back Natasha’s salary, paying her only with a lottery ticket instead of money. However, to Trager’s great disappointment, this ticket turns out to be a lucky one and wins 25, 000 roubles.²² Having discovered what he has done, Trager tries to get the ticket back. After a series of chases and pratfalls Natasha is saved by a man called Fogelev (Vladimir Fogel’), who is in love with her and decides to propose. However, by this time Il’ia and Natasha realise that they are truly in love, and decide to turn their fake marriage into a real one. The room in Moscow and the 25, 000 roubles become a perfect ‘wedding gift’.

Having selected the apartment question as the central element of the development of the film’s narrative, Barnet still faced the major problem of how to

²² The film was commissioned by the Soviet Ministry of Finance, and aimed to advertise the state lottery, hence the business with the lottery ticket.

‘approach’ (‘подступиться к’) the material, how to make this contemporary material of the Soviet everyday ‘funny’, as there appeared to be no established methods to do so: ‘Придется вступить на путь эксперимента, так как методы выявления смешного на материале нашей действительности, на которой, главным образом, и построен сценарий, еще не найдены’.²³ In the close reading to follow I shall prove that the deployment of interior imagery becomes a substantial part of Barnet’s ‘experiment’ with the comedy style.

Introducing Characters Through Interior Details

The first scene of the film is set in the interior of Natasha’s house in the country. We see a close-up of Natasha’s Grandfather, who is sitting in a chair. The chair is situated in between the rooms and divides the flat into several narrative-spaces: to the left we see Natasha’s room with a mirror, in which she tries the hats on; like any young woman, she looks beautiful in a new hat and enjoys her appearance. To the left of the chair, we see her hat workshop. Having shown the entire house in an earlier shot, Barnet then, however, narrows in to two close-ups of people and the interior objects that are associated with them. The first close-up is of Natasha’s Grandad, sitting in an old chair. Natasha puts a hat on his head and hugs him, he smiles in response. This small scene establishes the relationship between Natasha and her Grandad and shows the protagonist as a caring and joyful person; the cosy chair that is in the background of this scene creates the sense of a warm atmosphere. The other close-up shows Natasha posing in the mirror as she tries the hat on, once more showing her as an engaging person full of imagination. The interior objects in these scenes help to introduce the characters.

²³ Boris Barnet, ‘Devushka s korobkoi’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 12 (1927), 10.

The next character is also introduced with the help of interior locations. Fogelev is a railway ticket seller who is hopelessly in love with Natasha: 'Ежедневно железнодорожный кассир Фогелев стремился к предмету своей безнадежной любви', the intertitles say. However, once more, the relationships between the characters are explained not only by the intertitles, but also, and more effectively, through interior imagery. In this scene, Fogelev approaches Natasha's house and knocks on the window. It is winter, so the window is frozen, and for several seconds we are left with a close-up of Fogelev's face almost completely obscured by the frozen window. This effect is doubled by Natasha's actions: she approaches the window, but instead of opening it and greeting Fogelev, she draws the curtains. This gesture confirms the intertitles — there is no hope left for Fogelev's love.²⁴

Finally, the relationship between two protagonists, Natasha and Il'ia, are also mediated and directed with the help of different interior details. Natasha meets Il'ia for the first time in the interior of a train she takes to Moscow. It is not even a proper interior, but a very small, almost box-sized space, packed with people, yet Barnet uses this space creatively: he puts Il'ia on the upper bunk, just above the place where Natasha is sitting. Next comes a scene that is only too familiar to those who are used to travel in Russian trains: Il'ia puts his legs down the side of the bunk just in front of Natasha's head, and when a poor girl tries to protest, he starts dangling his legs, and finally puts his head down to look at Natasha. At this moment, the camera follows Natasha's gaze, and the spectators also see Il'ia's face upside down. This is the first close-up of Il'ia, and as it is shown in a peculiar position (upside down), we understand that he will be the main source of comic effects in the film. Once again,

²⁴ Later in the film Fogelev will appear in his own room looking in the mirror for a long time, an interior detail associated with Natasha, which demonstrates that he is still thinking of her.

the effect that Barnet wanted was possible only in a specific interior location – with Il'ia sitting on the upper bunk of the train coach and looking at Natasha on the lower.

Not only the introduction, but also the subsequent meetings of Natasha and Il'ia are mediated through interior details. Next time we see them at the station where Natasha is waiting for her train back home. Before Natasha arrives, Il'ia loses the only coin he possesses and clambers under the chairs in order to find it. On arrival, Natasha sits on the chair and is scared by Il'ia's sudden appearance from beneath it. Apart from creating a comic effect, this image of Il'ia always occupying the wrong place in the layout of the interior becomes the character's leitmotiv in the film, and highlights his situation, that of a homeless student. Il'ia is also shown using a bench in a snowy park as his temporary bed, or employing his pack of books as a chair. And it is exactly now, seeing Il'ia sitting on his books, that Natasha feels pity for him and proposes to solve this 'housing problem' by entering into a fake marriage with him.

As the film proceeds, we are introduced to Madame Irène and her shop, where the interior is used with even more creativity. Delightfully comic, to begin with, is the situation where a cleaner is balancing on tiptoe standing on a chair to clean the windows. The same cleaner then approaches Madame and her husband when they are standing on a staircase and, as the space is too narrow, she can't help thrusting her feather duster in their faces. However the most effective scene employing interior details to comic effect begins when members of the House Committee (the official management body of the apartment block) approach Madame's house. One of the rooms of Madame's flat has been registered in Natasha's name; it is, however, actually being used by her husband, Trager. In order to free up the room, Madame, her servant and Trager rush into it and start throwing all Trager's clothes and personal possessions around, creating a dynamic scene almost equal in its

energy and comic effect to the dynamic chase scenes in Kuleshov's comedies. This situation is repeated in the film later as well, this time when Natasha arrives with her new 'husband' and asks for the room that officially belongs to her to be cleared. Furious, Madame and her guests, who are having dinner in that very room at the time, take everything away, freeing up the space not just for Natasha, but also for the new cinematic effects developed by Barnet.

The Empty Room

When embarking on this film, Barnet had talked about experimenting: innovation was a self-conscious objective for him. One of his most creative experiments is the one of an empty room. Barnet decided to employ a completely empty set, free of most objects, in order to maximise the comic effect of the situations that emerged; to highlight the relationship between 'the human being' and 'the thing': 'Всякое положение и действие разворачивалось нами для максимального обыгрывания человека и вещи. Действие происходит в совершенно пустой комнате. Вся мебель, все вещи вынесены'.²⁵

This empty set allows Barnet to highlight the acting of both actors and interior objects on the screen: 'Играют два актера, подоконник, плевательница, шляпная коробка и еще 2-3 мелкие вещи'.²⁶ However, unlike for example in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, the sense of the *activeness* of the objects on the screen was established not by their constant interaction with one another, but by a diametrically opposite effect — the use of a completely empty room.²⁷ The objects in the empty

²⁵ Boris Barnet, 'Devushka s korobkoi', *Sovetskii ekran*, 12 (1927), 10, (emphasis added).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ 'Все происходило в одной декорации — в одной комнате, среди снегов', as the scriptwriter of the film Viktor Shklovskii remembered later, see Viktor Shklovskii, *Druz'ia i vstrechi* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1966), p. 26. Interestingly, *Devushka* was also set during the winter, 'среди снегов', and the combination of a completely flat white frame shot outdoors with the geometry of the empty

room appear only when they are needed, and are immediately highlighted — as there are no other objects around.

Another aspect of Bauer's genuine capacity for innovation in this film is that this emptiness of the room acts as a microscope that highlights the fundamental cinematic effects of the film, and allows Barnet to experiment with the raw material of cinema — montage and *mise-en-scène*. To the astonishment of the film crew, the use of such an empty set resulted in the fact that the most vivid cinematic effect was produced not at the stage of postproduction (as is usually done through montage and cutting), but instead at the stage of shooting: 'Работая, мы пришли к удивительно приятному для нас факту: можно было строить сцены, впечатляя ими не только монтажно, но и самой мизансценой'.²⁸

Working towards this effect, Barnet decided not to use close-ups of objects (which, conversely, was the major technique used in Room's film), and to film all the interior scenes using only a long shot: 'Мы имели возможность снимать, не прибегая к первым планам, чтобы выделить ту или иную нужную деталь. Съемки общим планом было достаточно — не мешали лишние вещи, не отвлекали внимания от нужного'

Although Barnet claimed that to build the plot around just one room was a part of his new experiment, he might have borrowed the idea for this technique from his teacher Lev Kuleshov. Kuleshov's film *Po zakonu* (1926) was also set

room is one of the many interesting stylistic devices of the film, and could also be traced back to Kuleshov's idea for *Po zakonu*. In the final version of Kuleshov's film, the snow was replaced by the flood of the river; as Shklovskii comments, 'пока разговаривали, обсуждали сценарии, снег растаял. Заменили снег разливом Москвы-реки', see Shklovskii, *Druz'ia i vstrechi*, p. 26. However, in developing his first independent comedy, Barnet departs from Kuleshov's style in several ways. In Kuleshov's film the focus was on the representation of nature and the landscape as the basic spatial elements of the film; elements that, according to Shklovskii, could 'eat space': 'В ней [картине] появились кадры, пожирающие пространство, а не показан "актер на фоне природы". Человек, противопоставленный этой природе, [...] делал пейзаж близким зрителю', *ibid.*

²⁸ Barnet, 'Devushka s korobkoi', p. 10.

predominantly in just one room.²⁹ But the approach adopted by Barnet was different in important ways from that used in *Po zakonu*, where the director had employed many close-ups and combinations of different shots. In Barnet's film, the constraints of a limited set design and a limited number of traditional cinematic techniques placed in the spotlight the details of the interior decoration — floor, walls, ceiling — and the concentration inherent in the *mise-en-scène* itself replaced the types of highlighting more usually conveyed by close-ups and montage cuts. The effect of this, in turn, was to create various 'frame within a frame' effects, and to direct the relationship between the characters in unusual ways, from which the rich range of comic situations was directly derived.

The most effective sequence illustrating these effects is the one of which I have mentioned briefly already, when furious Madame reluctantly gives the order to empty the room so the newlyweds can use it. Here Barnet contributes to the gallery of 'moving interiors' so characteristic of the modernist movement; for several minutes all we see are moving objects travelling from one room to another. The director explores a whole range of possibilities of 'moving the immovable' and of shifting the borders between stasis and dynamics.

For example, Il'ia carries out a sleeping guest (just to make her point, Madame Irène has decided to empty the room while her guests are still having dinner); other guests get up and take out their chairs themselves. When the room is already empty, we suddenly see Natasha being dragged away by 'an invisible force'. It turns out that the last bit of the interior decoration left in the room, the carpet, is moving, apparently on its own. Actually, of course, the guests are dragging it out themselves, working from a neighbouring room, but since Natasha is standing on this

²⁹ Barnet, 'Devushka s korobkoi', p. 10.

carpet, she appears to be sliding away without wanting to, a comic effect that becomes all the funnier when Il'ia comes to 'save' her, allowing her to remain in the already empty room. Barnet uses the boundaries between the two rooms to enhance the impact of the scene: at first, the spectators cannot see what is causing the strange movements of Natasha in the room next door.

As the narrative progresses, Il'ia is left sleeping on the floor in the empty room — another example of using an object outside the scope of its ordinary purpose. In fact, the only possessions he has, his books, keep serving him in all possible ways; as a pillow during sleep, or as weights for his morning exercises.



Figures 39 and 40. *Devushka s korobkoi*, Il'ia performing exercises in the empty room.

Not only is the room practically empty, but Il'ia himself is almost naked in the 'exercises' scene, wearing only his (admittedly capacious) underpants. The room of Madame and her husband next door, on the contrary, is full of details and is depicted through a series of close-ups focusing on these details — a duvet, domestic shoes, a patterned carpet. The contrast continues as the scene progresses. In his empty room, Il'ia starts going through all possible actions: boxing, jogging, and exercising;

the enclosure paradoxically invites freedom of action (see figures 39 and 40).³⁰ On the contrary, Trager cannot perform anything in his room, and even when he tries to copy Il'ia's actions, watching him through the keyhole as he works, Madame Irène stops him.³¹

The next time we return to the empty room is when Natasha needs to spend a night in the room with Il'ia. Both characters sleep on the floor using their only belongings — books for Il'ia, and hatboxes for Natasha — as pillows. The empty room here helps to establish a relationship between the characters, as they occupy opposite corners of the room, but still try to look at each other. The wonderful acting of Ivan Koval'-Samborskii demonstrates the tender feeling Il'ia has towards Natasha as his character wishes Natasha good morning. The round hat-boxes that Natasha uses to barricade herself in an empty room both add a comic touch and look really striking in a graphic sense, resembling a piece of abstract art such as a constructivist or cubist sculpture.

To demonstrate that this room is really important to the plot, Barnet sets the final scene there. This tour-de-force scene shows all the potential of Barnet's experimentation with empty settings and with directing different scenes using just one shot of a room, rather than different montage cuts. Natasha, ready to confess her real feelings towards Il'ia, enters the room. She notices some change in the layout — a big armchair is situated in the middle of it (Trager had put it back in order to bribe Il'ia

³⁰ These actions may also allude to the concept of the 'actor-mannequin' coined by Kuleshov during his workshops on acting, which, as Rolando Levaco puts it, 'would appear to embody all potential, possible human actions', see *Lev Kuleshov on Film. Writings of Lev Kuleshov*, ed. and trans. by Rolando Levaco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 209.

³¹ This so-called 'keyhole realism' was used by Russian filmmakers much earlier than 1927 as well. For example, Vladislav Starevich uses it in his 1912 animation film *Mest' kinematograficheskogo operatora*. Bauer had already eagerly employed this technique in *Posle smerti* (1915). In a few cases, the keyhole seems to serve Barnet's pictorial and expressive ends, rather than merely supplying the point of view shot. For instance, in the analysed scene of Barnet's film, the keyhole point of view serves for comic effect as it gives another opportunity for Madame Irène to attack her husband. For more on the comic usage of the keyhole gaze in cinema, see Norman K. Denzin, 'The Comic Voyeur's Gaze', in *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze* (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 64–87.

and to get his lottery ticket back). As Natasha enters the room, the spectator cannot see whether the chair is empty or someone is sitting on it, but Natasha can. She takes a note from the chair and reads it. However, the spectator is still unaware what she can see on the chair itself. She turns around to leave, but then changes her mind, and ‘enters’ the room again, knocking, but not on the door but on her hatbox. It is only now that we discover that Il’ia has been sleeping in the armchair all the while. Here, Barnet uses the chair to create a type of ‘frame in a frame’ effect – but of a very particular kind: a ‘secret in a frame effect’, as one might say. In a comparable vein, when we see Il’ia rising from the chair, another ‘secret’ emerges. This time, Il’ia himself is unaware of what the spectator already knows: Natasha has read his note, which appears to be an application for divorce.

Thus, without changing the point of view of the camera and without using creative editing, relying entirely on the help of just one empty room and one chair, Barnet manages to show all the possible points of view (of the spectator, of Natasha, and of Il’ia) in one single shot. This is not yet the limit of the chair’s functions in the scene. Natasha puts her signature on the divorce application while sitting on that very armchair, which is already an object of transition within the room. From this, the viewer understands that there is the potential for the legitimacy of the signature to soon change. And this is exactly what happens.

As Il’ia comes back to the empty room after showing the divorce certificate to the Tragers, Natasha occupies the space behind the chair, using it now as a defensive tool against Il’ia. A beautiful trajectory of movements that is similar to an imaginary bullfight,³² the combination of attack and defence in a game around the

³² If in Bauer’s films, the *mise-en-scène* of the loving couple was modelled on the trajectories of tango, popular in the 1910s, Barnet prefers to use more aggressive examples for his construction of the *mise-en-scènes*. For example, in an earlier sequence we already saw Il’ia using the empty room as an

armchair leads to the final union of the couple in the corner of the room. ‘Defeated’ Natasha demonstrates her ‘wound’ — a prick on her lip. Il’ia heals the ‘wound’ in a final kiss.

Dom na Trubnoi: The Zigzag of the Staircase

Inspired by the popularity of his first comedy with the ordinary Soviet public,³³ Barnet went on to make his most elaborate silent comedy, *Dom na Trubnoi*, another attempt to recreate a Soviet comic interior on screen. In *Devushka*, Barnet was still experimenting with cinematic techniques; in *Dom na Trubnoi*, however, the director definitively established his cinematic style, and ‘reworked motifs [...] that he had learned from Kuleshov [...] in such a way that they became truly his own’.³⁴

The film’s narrative centres on Parasha Pitunova (Vera Maretskaia), a young villager who arrives in Moscow and is hired as a domestic servant by the Golikov family precisely because she does not belong to a trade union. Golikov the barber (Vladimir Fogel’) and his idle wife (Elena Tiapkina) continuously mistreat their new servant Parasha by forcing her to work both at home and in their barber’s shop. Another domestic helper offers Parasha the opportunity to join the trade union, but Golikov steals his employee’s application form, fires the young girl and drives her out of the apartment. After receiving information that Parasha has been elected to the Moscow City Soviet (Mossovet), the Golikovs change their relationship to the poor girl, and, much to her surprise, organise a big banquet in her honour. As soon as it is revealed that the new delegate to Mossovet is not Parasha, but her namesake, the

imaginary boxing ring as a part of his morning exercises (a possible reference to Barnet’s own boxing career).

³³ On the film’s public success, see Youngblood, ‘Boris Barnet’, p. 132; and Kushnirov, p. 67.

³⁴ Youngblood, ‘Boris Barnet’, p. 135.

Golikovs change their attitude once again and get the domestic servant out of their apartment for the second time. Parasha loses her job at the Golikovs', but this lets her start a better life with a handsome driver (Vladimir Batalov) and her new friends from the Union. The film's final sequence depicts Golikov in court, being sentenced for all his crimes.

Although undoubtedly popular with the public, and praised by later film historians as demonstrating 'an even richer feeling for film form in its extravagant visual invention [than Barnet's first comedy]',³⁵ *Dom na Trubnoi* received a high degree of criticism from contemporary critics. Considered a definite failure ('картина получилась неудачной'),³⁶ the film was attacked not so much for its visual qualities, but for its particular infidelity to the script.

Indeed, there was something extraordinary about the script, which in the course of its creation turned into a collaboration of as many as five leading authors of the time: the formalist Viktor Shklovskii, the writers and poets Bella Zorich, Anatolii Mariengof and Vadim Shershenevich, and the satirical dramatist Nikolai Erdman. Shklovskii's words during the discussion of the film in ARRK were quoted on the pages of *Kino* under an ironical title 'История болезни':

Тов. Шкловский (сценарист) рассказывает, как 'видоизменился' сценарий картины. 'Сначала сценарий переделывал Шершеневич, затем Мариенгоф, Эрдман и еще человек 5-6. К этой работе впоследствии привлечен был и я. И что же получилось? По принципу привлечения меньшей или большей "знаменитости", первоначальный сценарий попал в бесконечные переделки, гораздо худшие, нежели работа тов. Зорич. Сценарист Эрдман ввел лишь двух кошек: белую, которая делалась черной и черную,

³⁵ Gillett, p. 244.

³⁶ 'Dom na Trubnoi', *Kino*, 18 September 1928, p. 6.

которая делалась белой. За это ему заплатили 400 рублей. Но этих кошек в картине не удалось показать.³⁷

The so-called ‘leading’ scriptwriter Zorich also criticised the film for the fact that its making had dragged on past all tolerable limits, describing it as a picture made ‘без всякого кинематографического темпа’. Meanwhile Zorich’s colleagues added to this criticism a range of details that showed the picture as a failure from an ideological point of view, taking the wrong attitude to Soviet life: ‘самым безобразным образом [высмеивает] советскую действительность’. One ‘Comrade Iudin’, for example, asked ‘до какого предела допустимо у нас калечить сценарий, и вообще пользоваться советским комедийным материалом?’. This view was echoed by his colleague Anoshchenko: ‘Установка сценария в первоначальной редакции тов. Зорич была иная, чем содержание картины. [...] Картина идет по линии внешней эксцентриады’.³⁸

Against the background of obsessive interest in the scriptwriting ‘кухня’ of the film, one of the few contemporary critics who did pay attention to the film’s visual and cinematic qualities rather than its fidelity to the literary source was Konstantin Fel’dman. In his review for *Kino*, where he attempted to place Barnet’s films in the tradition of Soviet comedies, Fel’dman highlighted some specific artistic techniques in both Barnet’s comedies, summarising, however, that ‘обе картины отнюдь не являются законченными произведениями; это только опытные лабораторные работы’.³⁹

³⁷ ‘Dom na Trubnoi’, p. 6.

³⁸ All the quotations in this paragraph are taken from the discussion of the film on the pages of *Kino*, see ‘Dom na Trubnoi’, *Kino*, 18 September 1928, p. 6.

³⁹ Konstantin Fel’dman, ‘Na putiakh k sovetskoi komedii. “Dom na Trubnoi”’, *Kino*, 2 October 1928, p. 3.

In fact, the sense of ‘лабораторная работа’ was for some reason immanent to the discussion of the film. On this wave of experimenting, the attack on the film’s infidelity to the script continued in a rather surprising ‘laboratorial’ form. Two weeks after the film’s official release, *Sovetskii ekran* published extracts of the script of *Dom na Trubnoi* and invited its readers to find any points of similarity with the film:

Зачастую первоначальный сценарий бывает совершенно переработан и изменен. Он служит только зеркалом, проектом или черновиком для режиссера, оператора и актеров.

Как пишутся сценарии? И что из них получается потом в фильме? Для сравнения предлагаем зрителям отыскать печатаемые нами отрывки сценария Белы Зорич ‘Параша’ — на экране в фильме Б.Барнета ‘Дом на Трубной’.⁴⁰

Importantly for my analysis, most of the scenes, which the magazine highlighted as ‘unfaithful’, took place in the domestic interiors of the house on Trubnaia, and hence a major part of the director’s ‘infidelity’ to the script was connected to his treatment of the visual representation of the house and its parts.

The critics’ own ‘experiment’ itself demonstrated a very significant detail. For Barnet, the written word had never been more than a springboard for the accumulation of more cinematically specific elements; hence the reason why so many contradictions could be established between the script and the film itself at the post-production stage.⁴¹ His handling of *Dom na Trubnoi* allowed him to go beyond the construction of an ideologically-driven narrative of a typical female fate in 1920s

⁴⁰ ‘V stsenarnoi kukhne “Doma na Trubnoi”’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 35 (1928), 15.

⁴¹ Barnet’s biographer Kushnirov even suggests that the failure of the scriptwriters to produce a sufficient piece of scriptwriting actually led to the film’s success, as it gave Barnet more possibilities to experiment: see Kushnirov, p. 80.

Moscow. As the film follows Parasha's arrival at ideological consciousness, with her finally becoming a member of the Workers' Union, the visual level of the film offers a more complex picture that is based, as I argue, on a number of interior metaphors. Such an interpretation, I believe, is made possible by the director's highly creative and dynamic treatment of the material of the script.

The Staircase

As the opening sequence of the city waking up develops into a montage of the interior of the house on Trubnaia, we see the landmark shot of the whole film — the womb of the house — the famous stairway with a zigzag set of stairs (figure 41).



Figure 41. *Dom na Trubnoi*. The staircase.

It is important to note the transition from the interior and exterior and back throughout the film that, just as in Room's film, establishes the strong connection between the microcosm of a flat and the macrocosm of the city. For example, one of the intertitles establishes an important metaphor, stating that the city wakes up and, looking in the mirror, starts to wash. Here the city is metaphorically placed in interior space, as it literally *looks in the mirror*. The whole range of consecutive frames showing the city's awakening develops this interior metaphor. In the montage that follows this intertitle, the city is shown almost as an interior, closed space; almost as a decoration, to borrow Iutkevich's description.⁴²

Another point of connection is in the name of the house itself. A house on Trubnaia, to a contemporary viewer, was something different from a house on Tverskaia or a house on Arbat. Trubnaia Square was one of the proletarian districts of Moscow, famous for its big market and cheap evening restaurants. Kushnirov provides an excellent account of the resonance of Trubnaia Square at the time:

Трубная площадь испокон веку была злополучной проблемой для московских архитекторов. В те незапамятные годы [...] она была похожа на грязный шербатый поднос. С утра до вечера она кипела, кишела, давилась буйным перемещением человеческих тел. В гомоне огромной толпы витали пiski, чирикание, лай, непонятный гогот — тут был знаменитый и единственный в столице 'птичий базар'. Пернатые, мелкое зверье, рыба живность, гады (а заодно и цветы), стиснутые частоколом рук, ног, спин и животов, подавленные неволей, познавали здесь полную меру человеческой к ним любви и человеческой жестокости.⁴³

⁴² A similar technique to the one used in Room's *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*.

⁴³ Kushnirov, p. 87.

With the teeming ‘bird market’ as a kind of spoiled paradise (with reptiles as well as flowers), Trubnaia was a contradictory space. This element of chaos, programmed into the title of the film, will soon reveal itself in the interior scenes, and though the market itself was not shown in the film, the atmosphere *inside* the house seems very similar to that described by Kushnirov, which we understand as soon as we enter the staircase of the house.

This scene was to become one of the most popular sequences of the Soviet silent era. For all the traditional lack of detailed criticism regarding Barnet’s films, at least a short description of this ‘wonderful tenement set with the camera craning up and down on scenes of frenzied activity’⁴⁴ features in almost any mention of the film.⁴⁵

Shot structure and the organisation of space in the frame become major characteristics of Barnet’s new style of directing. Symmetry and attention to the subdivision of space, both within and between the frames are the main features of his emerging style. The main structural component of Barnet’s shot structure is the zigzag of six diagonal flights of stairs. Diagonal is the most dynamic type of movement within the cinematic frame; it represents power, rapidity, irreversibility and the dramatic tension of the frame. Moreover, the subdivision of the stairs into six separate parts, each going in opposite directions, creates an atmosphere of chaos and instability, absence of centre, lack of dominant. Here, people, as well as the camera, move simultaneously up and down the stairs and even chop wood there. This staircase becomes at one and the same time both dusty and stinking ‘black staircase’⁴⁶ and

⁴⁴ Gillett, p. 244.

⁴⁵ This scene played an important role in Noel Burch’s 1985 television documentary on Soviet silent film, *Born Yesterday: USSR, 1924-1928*, which confirms its exceptional visual qualities.

⁴⁶ ‘Black staircase’ or *chernaya lestnitsa* in Russian – mainly in Saint Petersburg – a staircase that is opposite to the front staircase (*paradnaya lestnitsa*), used primarily by servants for various domestic needs.

welcoming front stairs. This sequence illustrates that interiors changed themselves at this time, inner space has now become a public space.

The sequence opens with the 'boiling activities' of the inhabitants of the house. Each room in the staircase represents one particular character in the film. Many times we see the doors of the house opening and closing, showing peculiar details of the flats' inhabitants: someone is cleaning dust from his stuffed leopard, other neighbours are chopping firewood on an already structurally weak staircase, others are cooking, cleaning, washing. All this happens with the background of different signs that prohibit the inhabitants from doing various domestic activities, for example telling them not to chop the wood on the staircase. Undoubtedly an accurate representation of the domestic labour of Soviet people of the time,⁴⁷ this sequence interests me not so much in its properties of social representation, but as an example of an explicitly formalist and constructivist use of interior imagery.

Traditionally seen as a stable and concrete construction, the house here is on the move. The camera goes up and down the staircase, zooms in and out, and zigzags from one corner to another, representing the staircase as an anthill. *Barnet* seems to show the whole range of camera movement techniques in a single sequence. Here we have close-ups of the legs of characters going up and down the stairs (figures 42 and 43),⁴⁸ panorama shots both horizontal and vertical, a view from the top and a view from the bottom, which also shows the depth of the screen in several dimensions

⁴⁷ Emma Widdis even prioritises this function over the others. She writes that 'domestic necessity is given a starring role in *The House on Trubnaia Square*', and calls the film 'a deliberate parody of *meshchanstvo*', see Widdis, *Visions*, p. 90.

⁴⁸ A year earlier, similar close-up shots of feet on the stairs and on the floor were displayed during the fourth exhibition entitled *Iskusstvo dvizheniia*, the fourth and the last in the series of shows dedicated to the representation of movement in different media, see *Iskusstvo dvizheniia. Katalog chetvertoi vystavki* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia akademiia khudozhestvennykh nauk, 1928). Cf. also a similar close-up image of soldiers' legs on the Odessa steps in *Bronenosets Potemkin*. However, if in *Bronenosets* the legs were multiple and represented order and rhythm, in *Dom na Trubnoi* we see how the same image of close-up legs represents chaos, with characters moving towards different directions one by one.

(figures 44 and 45), sliding from left to right and back, and finally, diagonal ‘tracking shots’. The variety of movements in this sequence is also multiplied by the variety of those who move: cats run up and down the stairs, people go out and in, jump and rush, even a girl with crutches appears to ironically close off this gallery of all possible movements. The staircase emerges, in this representation, as a perfect set for this brilliant cinematic show. Moreover, this zigzag image dominates the visual part of the movie and develops the whole dynamics of the film, introducing a palpably new way of representing both the house and the city.



Figures 42 and 43. *Dom na Trubnoi*. Feet on the staircase.



Figures 44 and 45. *Dom na Trubnoi*. The view of the staircase from the top. Golikov looking up the staircase from the bottom.

The staircase almost explodes with movement and action, with its geometry and architectonics; ‘лестница беснуется’, as Kushnirov puts it.⁴⁹ Importantly, the zigzag movement of the camera framed by the form of the staircase is echoed in one of the most dynamic cinematic sequences of the film — the scene when Parasha arrives in Moscow with a duck under her arm, which escapes from the girl’s hands and nearly gets under a tram. While Parasha is trying to catch her escaped duck, the camera follows the girl in overcrowded Moscow, moving alongside one diagonal to another (with some shots following the diagonal lines of the tram rails), until the duck and Parasha are nearly under the tramcar.⁵⁰ Here, we see the famous freeze frame joke. The viewers are not allowed to see the end of a possible tramcar accident, but instead are literally taken back by the rewinding of the film to find out what had happened before the accident. This sequence reveals the potential of a zigzag construction to act also on a meta-level for the narrative, representing not only the structure of particular shots in zigzag shapes, but also the structure of the film narrative itself that could stop and make a zigzag turn back at the film’s most exciting moments.⁵¹

Another zigzag sequence is Parasha’s efforts to find her uncle’s home where she was supposed to stay during her time in Moscow. Having only the address of Uncle Fedia in her hands, Parasha enters the disorienting, chaotic space of the city, where she does not know anyone or anything. The girl keeps asking strangers how to

⁴⁹ Kushnirov, p. 86.

⁵⁰ Kushnirov mentions that such tramcar accidents on Trubnaia Square (‘трамвай постоянно врезался в толпу’) caused the closure of the famous market on the square by the time *The House* was filmed, see Kushnirov, p. 87.

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, one of the most accurate observers of this new Moscow, spent two winter months (from December 1926 to the end of January 1927) in the city, and found it extremely different to walk ‘on the sheet ice of the streets’, as there were no ‘clear demarcations between sidewalks and pavements: the snow and ice even out the various levels of the street’; he also noticed the strange walking habits (although produced more by carelessness than the situation on the pavement) of Moscow’s pedestrians, who ‘have gotten in the habit of walking zigzags’ the movement so meticulously captured by Barnet, see Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, ed. by Gary Smith; trans. by Richard Sieburth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 17–18; p. 47.

find the address, and they keep sending her in different directions, from one corner to another, manifesting the zigzag motif on the screen, and thus echoing the earlier sequence on the staircase where people are also moving in different directions.⁵²

The Room

The sense of a chaotic zigzag movement of frames and functions continues in a series of interior shots. As we pass the transitional space of the staircase, we enter the rooms themselves. The main room we enter is the one belonging to the Golikovs. It is situated on the top floor, and its inhabitants have to wake up earlier than others because they do not have a servant (although when they do acquire a servant, nothing much changes). The over-patterned design of the Golikovs' apartment captures Parasha the same way it captured Liuda in Room's film a year earlier. For example, the walls of the Golikovs' apartment are decorated with ornamental round paper fans — a kind of zigzag used in interior decoration.⁵³ This is not only an allusion to the pre-revolutionary culture to which the masters of the fans belong, but also to the 'structure' of other spaces in the film, and the fans also allow Barnet to explore more cinematic techniques. When Parasha takes the fan and starts to fan herself with it, Barnet shows us several different angles and shots of it, including a graphically very interesting close-up of Parasha's face with a gigantic fan moving forwards and backwards in front of it. This frame not only highlights Parasha's amusements, but also adds to the film's dynamic montage techniques developed in the interior scenes — the close-up of a paper fan looks just like the close-up of stairs we saw earlier,

⁵² This sequence of Parasha's search for home, as Emma Widdis suggests, becomes a metaphor for the general feeling of dislocation in 1920s Moscow, see Widdis, *Visions*, p. 46.

⁵³ A fan became a popular attribute for many cinematic productions of the time. A similar paper fan decorates the wall in the room in Ivan Pravov's and Ol'ga Preobrazhenskaia's *Poslednii attraktsion* (1929). A heroine from Konstantin's Eggert's *Ledianoi dom* (1928) also often uses a fan in her room. A folded curtain that copies the shape and design of a fan is seen in a room in Room's film *Predatel'* (1926); for a discussion of the décor in *Predatel'*, see also Widdis, 'Faktura', pp. 14–24.

Parasha's struggle with this over-decorated apartment in its trajectories also echoes the same 'zigzag' structure. In a sequence intended to depict Parasha's usual way of spending the day at the Golikovs', the heroine tries to stack a mattress on a trunk that is balanced on the top of a chest of drawers. However, the mattress slides down to the floor each time Parasha tries to put it up, and makes it almost impossible for the poor girl to complete her task.

This use of 'moving' objects is somehow different to the tradition described in the previous chapter, where the objects symbolically recreated the actions that took place between the characters. The use of objects in Barnet's *Dom na Trubnoi* is closer to the comic trick identified by the film theoretician Adrian Piotrovskii as 'эксцентрическое использование вещи'.⁵⁴ Defining the genre of the comedy, Piotrovskii names 'эксцентрическое использование вещи' among the most important of the comedic elements, the one that will move the genre forwards:

Вещь, использованная не по прямому своему назначению, неожиданно и невпопад, — зубные щетки как орудие к вскрыванию консервных банок, папироса в качестве трамвайного вагона, контрастное чередование намеренно больших и нарочито маленьких вещей [...], — весь этот сумасшедший мир несообразностей открыт кино.⁵⁵

In *Devushka s korobkoi*, such an eccentric object is the pack of books that Il'ia carries around and uses as a chair, as weights, and pillows. In *Dom na Trubnoi*, it is a mattress that Parasha fails to put on its place, or a goose that she takes with her to the

⁵⁴ Piotrovskii, p. 157.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 158.

city. As Piotrovskii puts it regarding Chaplin's films, in some films

‘эксцентрическая игра вещей вырастает до размеров философических’.⁵⁶

Talking about two of Barnet's comedies, one can say that it is his play not only with objects, but with interior imagery as a whole that develops to philosophical dimensions. In both of his films, Barnet uses interior imagery as the centre of his narrative and a dominant part of his visual style. In *Devushka s korobkoi*, interiors are used creatively to outline the relationships between the characters, as well as to develop new types of scene construction. This experiment, highly constructivist in its essence, successfully establishes Barnet as a pioneer of the genre of comedy, as it allowed him to develop different comic effects without referring to elaborate props or complicated montage techniques.

In *Dom na Trubnoi*, the image of the interior staircase is used ambivalently and to dynamic effect. The interior here becomes both a social microcosm (showing different layers of society) and a space for Barnet's artistic intelligence and formally interesting experiments, and the latter — not sufficiently valued in secondary discussions so far — is significantly manifested in his own, highly individual, treatment of the staircase. This transcends its symbolic role as a metaphor of progress and social gradation to introduce the zigzag dynamics that dominates the entire representation in the film.

The dynamism that is present in all the interior scenes in both films is a feature that divides Barnet's interiors from the previous tradition of interior representation in Russian cinema. Borrowing some techniques of dynamic scenes that he learned from Kuleshov, Barnet also shows that scenes located indoors can be as dynamic and fast as those located on the streets. Moreover, both films break with the

⁵⁶ Piotrovskii, p. 158.

established 'bourgeois' understanding of domestic space, given that their interiors do not give any sense of comfort, security and joy. Even the 'luxurious' (by the standards of that time) rooms of Madame Irène and the Golikovs are constantly disturbed by the Housing Committee or the other authorities imposed over the private sphere. The revolution had brought momentous changes to the security of private living as well as the abolition of private property and a drive to reform the public culture. Barnet's comedies were among the first to reflect on the results of this process artistically, and to create a specific cinematic tradition of representation of the new housing phenomenon, a tradition that was both realistic and entertaining, both innovative and popular with large sections of the Soviet population who had no interest in cinematic experimentation for its own sake.

Interestingly, later in his career, Barnet returned to many of the spatial motifs he used in these films. For example, the representation of the staircase and the motif of a girl lost in a city appear in *Odnazhdy noch'iu* (1944), albeit with a totally different accent. The film tells a story of a young girl, Varia, who is trying to help soldiers in an occupied city. Here Barnet comes back to the idea of showing an empty space in order to highlight characters or objects that appear in this space.

Odnazhdy noch'iu shows Varia in a completely ruined, empty and scary city, which contrasts with the young innocent girl moving through them. At one point, while moving through the city, Varia has to go up the staircase. This scene is filmed from the top of the stairs, and this point of view suddenly gives a symbolical significance to the whole film. Russian film critic Evgenii Margolit suggests that this image becomes a symbol of an apocalyptic space:

Чтобы попасть на чердак полуразрушенного дома, где прячутся раненые, она идет босиком по осколкам камней, а затем поднимается по лестнице, как бы повисшей в воздухе. Апокалиптический характер пространства вызывает ассоциации с крестным путем, проявляет мистериальный тип сюжета.⁵⁷

Here we see that Barnet developed his use of details, bringing to them a significance that goes beyond the plot. However the whole tradition of using a staircase as a particularly interesting and ambiguous set comes from his earlier films, especially from *Dom na Trubnoi*. Of course *Dom na Trubnoi* does not suggest any kind of apocalyptic meaning, however, it is an important intermediate stage in establishing the tradition of shifting meaning of the interior details, of showing the interior as a primary location of catastrophe and chaos. Therefore with Barnet's case we are able to trace the development of the representation of interior details – from visually interesting sets in *Miss Mend* to the highly symbolical set in *Odnazhdy noch'iu*.

⁵⁷ Evgenii Margolit, 'Prizrak svobody: strana detei', *Iskusstvo kino*, 8 (2002), 76–85 (83).

CONCLUSION

I began this study with a hypothesis that suggested the room was one of the central creative locations of Russian modernism, alongside cities and public spaces. I contended that the representation of interior spaces in the early twentieth century abandoned its former connotation of safe and stable places, such as was set out in previous literature, and instead became dynamic, uneasy and unstable. However, if this pattern was well established in European secondary literature on the subject, my study attempted to trace similar patterns in Russian responses to the question of how a modernist room was to be represented in the 1910s and the 1920s. The six case studies of different writers and directors who depicted the image of a room that I have analysed here have allowed me to demonstrate the validity of this contention for the Russian cultural sphere on three different levels.

A New Tradition of Representation

At this level, my analysis responds to Henri Lefebvre's argument that, during the 1910s and 1920s, the previously 'sacred, quasi-religious and in fact almost absolute space' of secure private living associated with the interior came to represent fluidity and anxiety, produced by 'the terrible urban reality, which the twentieth century has instituted'.¹ I showed how Anna Akhmatova, for example, depicted rooms that were no longer connected to the idea of peace and family values, depicting, rather, rooms where her heroines felt alienated, abandoned, and scared. Even in those relatively rare examples where the inhabitants of Akhmatova's imaginary room were portrayed as feeling joy and happiness, the author always stressed how temporary and fragile this

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 121.

joyfulness was, and how it was disappearing as we were in the very act of reading the poem.

Andrei Belyi's case, by contrast, shows a writer more preoccupied with the fact that the whole culture of a big and joyful family flat (what he calls 'профессорская квартира') has disappeared. He traces its destruction in his character's consciousness, where all the elements of his room are being deconstructed: walls fall apart, the floor disappears... Belyi's two autobiographical novels are based on remembering the culture of the professor's apartment as a part of the author's own heritage, and at the same time on realising that he is an individual that is detached from that culture, that he has his own perception. The spatial arrangement of the flat helps Belyi's protagonist to understand the past and the future, to become aware of his own consciousness, and to realise that he constitutes a new unity of being, different from his parents and their culture. All these ideas come to mind while Belyi is describing his character's room, hence the room can be called a symbol of self-exploration. In his prose, Belyi clearly shows the emergence of a new, modernist tradition of representing spaces.

Like Belyi, Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii relates to the old tradition of representation of the rooms as something cosy and domestic, a family home. However, this very cosiness destroys his protagonists, who are looking for space and freedom rather than a trap in one's room. Most of the rooms in Krzhizhanovskii's stories are small and intimidating; they do not connect people in a social conversation, as was common for the traditional pre-modernist private space. Rather, Krzhizhanovskii's rooms are inhabited by lonely people who are influenced by and even suffering from the architectural qualities and emptiness of their rooms.

Bauer as well as Belyi starts with depicting rooms apparently belonging to the earlier tradition of the secure home: beautiful ball rooms, drawing rooms with rugs and exotic goods, studies with antique statues, boudoirs... However, those who inhabit these rooms never feel comfortable in them — they all desire something new, something completely opposite to their actual experience. The heroine of *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi* leaves her beautiful boudoir and goes out to the slums, and then brings the insecurity and cruelty of the world of the poor and homeless to her private bedroom. Importantly, from the very beginning the composition which Bauer chooses for the frame of the bedroom hints towards what is going to happen, so the interiors Bauer chooses to show are filled with uncertainty and desire for change. Likewise, the male protagonist from *Ditia bol'shogo goroda* goes out to the city to find an orphan girl from the street who will turn his life upside down, resulting in him inhabiting a poor attic and finally committing suicide. The tradition is broken, high changes into low, security into insecurity — and all this is represented through interior details.

Abram Room's treatment of the topic also directly plays with the traditional representations of the room. The director represents a battle between the old petty bourgeois tradition and new Soviet reality, which, in his treatment, destroys the life of the protagonists. The female character Liuda has to escape her home, showing that one's own room can become a nightmare for their inhabitants. She is divided between the old tradition of a woman being a constant of any household and the emerging image of an independent woman who is free to choose not only who to love, but also where to go — so she leaves her room.

Finally, Barnet's film *Devushka s korobkoi* shows the old tradition neighbouring the new one — the old-fashioned Madame Irène lives next door to the empty room of her servant, who represents the new generation; the bourgeois

Golikovs live on the same staircase with people less well-off than themselves. The proximity of these two worlds results in chaos, symbolically visualised in the image of a huge staircase. In both cases, Barnet points out that there is a new tradition of representation that particularly interests him —the images of both the empty room and the staircase play the dominant role in the films.

Therefore, all six chapters clearly show that the old tradition of representation is fading away, every author and director notes that the old tradition existed, and sees it as a starting point to establish new modes of showing the interior to their readers and spectators.

Movement and Transformation

In these new modes of representation, all six writers and artists show clear signs of the influence of modernism's preoccupation with dynamism — so that static objects like interiors are represented as unstable and dynamic. However, in the work of each, this tradition functions with strikingly different results, as I have demonstrated. In the case of Anna Akhmatova, I was able to demonstrate that the writer prefers to show her rooms not through the descriptions of static objects, but through descriptions of actions, conditions that are in the process of development. For example, if there is a staircase in her lyrics, the protagonist rushes up or down the staircase, or miscounts the stairs — actions that suggest uncertainty and a feeling of discomfort. She also feels the floor becoming a raft under her feet; all the objects of her room indicate the result of having been moved away, they slowly disappear, fade away. These rooms usually capture the heroine out of place, in transition, between different states of being. If previously the room stood for a resting place, the home, for Akhmatova the room is a place of uncertainty.

Belyi gives perhaps the most impressive literary evocation of all sorts of movements and transformations in the room. The room in his novel *Kotik Letaev* becomes a place where past, present and future meet, the centuries collide; it is the location of constant changes of ideas, characters; it changes itself. Seen through the child's eyes, rooms become the point of departure of his imagination: everything interchanges, moves, people come and go, ideas appear and develop. The room becomes the locus of fantasy and imagination and constant movement of imaginary objects.

If in Belyi's works movements through the room are chaotic and spontaneous, Krzhizhanovskii specifically points out two very particular kinds of movements associated with the room: expanding or becoming smaller; and following the angles of a square. Importantly, these movements influence the lives of those who inhabit the rooms, making the inhabitants square, small or big, or dividing them into parts. The rooms in the beginning of short stories are never the same as in the end, and these transformations influence the transformation of the characters.

Cinematic tradition brings different techniques for showing the transformations of interior spaces. Bauer, for example, prefers to allude to particular patterns that indicate the unstable situation of the inhabitants of the room. Additionally, he is one of the first directors to use panoramic camera shots in his films, and it is important that these panoramas are used inside the interiors — to show how interior, character and camera coexist in one shot, and what new meaning they bring. In Bauer's case, I have traced several occasions in which scenes set within a particular interior bring discomfort for the protagonists, or indicate a change of state. We cannot see the direct movement of the interior spaces, but their inner dynamism is highlighted by very precise choices of pattern in interior design, indicating unstable

situations in which the protagonists find themselves — such as gratings, for example, or overpatterned wallpaper.

Abram Room made the rhetoric of travelling the very essence of his film *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. In the film, he makes clear that this is a cinematic *journey* and compares the room to a train, and there are many visual parallels that to some extent equate the room to the city or to the train. Many interior objects in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaya* shift their meaning: a table becomes a bed, a samovar becomes a shower. In all these transformations, the room is the crucial location.

Rooms in Barnet's film also constantly change function to indicate dynamism. One of the most important scenes in this respect is the scene of taking the belongings from the room in Madame Irène's house — the objects are literally taken away, the room is emptied out. Finally, the staircase in *Dom na Trubnoi* becomes one of the most iconic cinematic representations of chaotic movement, mess, and the hustle of everyday life to be produced during the 1920s.

Overall, in each case, the techniques to indicate dynamism are different, but what unites them is the constant choice of a static object (room) to represent the idea of flow and change.

Creative Use

The new tradition of representation of the interior spaces has to be based on specific representational techniques, and I have suggested in my hypothesis that writers and directors use interiors in their work in a consciously complicated, artistically challenging manner, and not just as background images. Indeed, in the examples I have provided, interiors are not only used artistically, but also become central to the author's artistic intention, and to some extent become a part of the technique to

indicate new modes of representing a person's life. There are several features, which can be used to prove this point.

Akhmatova uses different kinds of everyday interior objects to suggest the high emotional state of her heroine, to introduce the themes of love, loss and betrayal. This manipulation of objects shifts the meaning of both material world and emotions: exceptional love or the agony of loss is linked to something close and familiar, and an item that is seemingly not important at all, such as a glove on a table, or a lamp in a room next door, acquires philosophical resonance: the scene lets the reader feel that exceptional love can be as simple as a glove. At the same time, everyday objects in the context of the heroine's room can carry an exceptional meaning and generate an emotional explosion — as in the famous case of the glove placed on the wrong hand.

Bely indicates that the room becomes 'a language' for the exploration of the world. He links space to consciousness, putting the room in the very centre of this journey of exploration. Equally, Krzhizhanovskii links the room to the language with which he explores the world, suggesting that urban space has influenced his way of writing, and, as I have pointed out, a square room becomes central to urban space, becoming the place where all the journeys begin and end.

All the cinematic examples I have discussed show that the room is used as a medium to create meaning, and not just as a passive background. For Bauer, interiors were of major importance in most of his films, and I have shown multiple occasions in which the interior and the way it is represented helps the spectator to better understand the plot. Room himself emphasised that he employed special techniques to build a cinematic interior space that would move apart and allow him to use different angles and camera techniques while shooting in the room — so in every frame we see the space differently. Barnet experiments with new montage techniques using the

image of an empty room, and then shows a huge variety of camera movements within a set based just on one staircase.

The examples of dynamism and mobility in the work of all the writers and artists acquire cumulative significance, creating a temporally specific discursive world. Private interiors, doors, windows, chairs, staircases — all become elements of an alternative symbology of modernity, the new, unstable Russia born into the age of dynamism and flow, trailing no past. The existing criticism that looks at the representation of domestic interiors in Russia has paid little attention to this process; on the other hand, work on modernist art has scarcely addressed the role of interior space. My work puts material culture and history in conversation with literature and cinema, but its distinctive contribution I see in the placement of Russian modernist writers and directors in dialogue with European theories of modern domestic spaces. My introduction addressed the values and hierarchies implicit in the design of living spaces and their representation, offering a concise overview of the role that domestic architecture has played in the formation of both modernist literary aesthetics and middle-class private life. Taking that as a starting point, this study has proposed that the spaces of private life are a generative and influential site for our understanding of literary and cinematic modernism in Russia. The examples that I discuss show that preoccupation with domestic interiors is central to many Russian modernist texts and films. Moreover I argue that the confluence between domestic space and modernist practice has gone largely unremarked by critics, and demonstrate how the modernist writers and directors drew a conceptual vocabulary from the lexicons of domestic architecture and interior design, elaborating a notion of interiority that has a spatial as well as a cognitive dimension. I have shown the productive juxtaposition of engaging close readings and an informed understanding of the influence that the history of

interior representation and the structure and functioning of domestic spaces have had upon the development of literary and cinematic modernism.

Bachelard's work on the poetics of space indicated the importance of interiors for the European modernist culture. My work has argued for the validity of thinking modernism in terms of interior spaces in early twentieth-century Russia. In this thesis I have proved that the representation of interiors by Russian writers and directors has a similar meaning for modernity as do the European representations of domestic spaces. And although there are some features of Russian interiors that are specific to the Soviet reality of the time and do not correspond to the Western varieties that I mentioned at the outset, such as the size of a room in Krzhizhanovskii's stories, or the traditional representation of some particularly Soviet domestic realities (such as *uplotnenie* that we saw in Barnet's and Room's films), the artistic treatment of these features demonstrates the same modes of dynamism and motion that are common for any discussion of European modernist space.

In my introduction, I quoted Mikhail Bakhtin, who claims that Dostoevskii in his novels had already stopped being a writer of calm and cosy private rooms, but rather used interior setting to exclusively show ambiguity and catastrophe. All the case studies I have examined amount to evidence that this idea has become an overall pattern of development of the imaginary interiors in Russian modernism. And this was only possible to establish when studying different figures together as has been done in my work.

Overall, one of the most important outcomes of my research lies in the fact that, having looked at a group of very different authors and directors who were not linked directly within one movement or even one genre, I have been able to establish

so many similarities in their treatment of interior imagery. Moreover, is important to mention that through this gallery of imaginary rooms I was able to demonstrate the evolution of the way in which interiors were being presented in 1910s and 1920s Russia within different genres and media – poetry, prose, autobiographical prose, comedy, and drama. This has allowed me to establish not just similar patterns of representing interiors during this period, but to mount the interior as a specifically ‘modern’ locus in Russian film and literature. Modernism has changed the way we perceive space in general: fragmented, dynamic, and uncertain. The interior is just one part of this modernist space, but a crucial one. The interiors studied in this work highlight Modernism’s engagement with such concepts as tradition and innovation, space and place, shape and form, private and public, enclosure and openness, movement and fixity, centre and periphery, style and genre, and tense and temporality. In recognising plurality and multiplicity as definitive qualities of the interior space for cultural production and examining it through the case studies from different media, this study indicates the richness of material this unit of space provides for interdisciplinary studies.

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