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THE EFFACEMENT OF HISTORY, THEATRICALITY AND POSTMODERN URBAN FANTASIES IN THE PROSE OF PETRUŠEVSKAJA AND PELEVIN

To discuss Russian contemporary fiction in terms of postmodernist poetics might be seen as problematic, even though some scholars have enthusiastically attempted to do just this in the last decade. Marjorie Perloff has warned that comparisons between American and Russian new literatures should be approached with caution, given the enormous political, social and cultural differences between the two countries over the past century and "the long midcentury hiatus of the Stalinist years", which largely suppressed the modernist tradition to which contemporary developments are supposedly 'post' (Perloff 1993, 2). Linda Hutcheon, a leading theorist of postmodernist literature, also believes that postmodernism and the contemporary are not interchangeable and suggests that in being primarily European and American (North and South), postmodernist culture is not an international cultural phenomenon (Hutcheon 1988, 4). By contrast, Richard Rorty views postmodernism as a world-wide cultural phenomenon that threatens to become a new grand narrative in its own right (Rorty 1997).

Despite these uncertainties over the nature of postmodernist culture, it is important to look at the evolution of postmodern condition in the context of Russian contemporary culture. It will be argued below that both Ljudmila Petruševskaja (born 1938) and Viktor Pelevin (born 1962), two of the most prominent contemporary Russian writers, use the same strategies to call into question modernism's faith in the grand narratives of historical meaning. As will be demonstrated below, both Petruševskaja and Pelevin actively engage their audience into the postmodern process of reassessment of the conventions, structures and clichés of narrative itself, highlighting thereby that their goal departs from the realists' aim to clarify the world for their readers. Instead, they immerse their readers into the problem of representation. The present article will focus on the representation of Moscow and the authors' playful engagement with the so-called Moscow text developed in Russian literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see, e.g., Epstein 1999, Dalton-Brown 1997, Belova 1998, Smith 1999), in order to outline some distinct traits of the postmodern thinking of Petruševskaja and Pelevin linked to the perception of Russian contemporary life as the end of history.

Prior to analysis of several playful images of Moscow created by Petruševskaja and Pelevin, it is worth considering briefly a most promising

point of comparison between the US and Russian literary scenes that comes from the American poet Lyn Hejinian, who has translated contemporary Russian poetry into English. Hejinian links contemporary postmodern thinking to the end of history, comparing the Vietnam War (and the morally-related Watergate scandal) that contributed to the collapse of US history to Gorbačev's Perestrojka and the 1991 demise of the Soviet Union that contributed to the collapse of history in Russia (Hejinian 1993). Hejinian redefines the notion of memory affected by the postmodern condition thus: "The notion of 'memory' no longer suggests contemplation so much as sentimentality (or its sister, irony), amorality, and above all novel patterns of logic: 'wandering' rather than hierarchically organised plots. When the cause and effect structuring which determines that an occurrence is an event breaks down, the event becomes an object. This object isn't necessarily isolated – it probably always rests in a matrix of relationships and association. But they are spatial and it is atemporal" (ibid.). As some critics note, postmodern fiction has sought to open itself up to history. In Hutcheon's view, a return today to the idea of a common discursive property is evident most of all in the process of embedding of both literary and historical texts in fiction, but this return might be seen as problematic by overtly metafictional assertions that present both history and literature as human constructs (Hutcheon 1998, 124f.). Hutcheon points to the ability of intertextual parody in historiographic metafiction to offer a sense of the presence of the past, even if our knowledge of this past derives from literary or historical texts, or their traces (Hutcheon 1998, 125).

Given the above background, which suggests the postmodern condition in contemporary Russia could exist having evolved as a result of Gorbačev's reforms and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it is logical to examine how two prominent Russian contemporary writers – Petruševskaja and Pelevin – have responded to the collapse of history in Russia. It will be argued that their responses can be seen as manifestations of postmodern thinking that presents both history and literature as human constructs, exposing today's Moscow as a world of superficiality and depthlessness. They portray Moscow as a source of exciting images dominated by impersonal feelings and a certain sense of euphoria that stems from the liberation from the older *anomie* of the centred subject. Indeed, as will be discussed below, we could detect in Petruševskaja's and Pelevin's post-Soviet writing a vividly expressed notion of the loss of the sense that today's Russian society is moving meaningfully through time. This sense of loss leads to the perception of emotional responses to life as commodities and to the widespread belief in an effacement of history.

It appears that both Petruševskaya and Pelevin share the belief in an effacement of history and in Moscow's special role in Russian cultural and political life. These writers' 'hyper-real' portrayal of Moscow draws not only on Russian modernist narratives (produced by Platonov, Pasternak, Axmatova, Cvetaeva, and Bulgakov) but also on the images of the Russian capital from the media of the 1960s and 1990s. There is thus a sense of continuity, from the modernist literature of the 1920s-40s through to the present period. The novels of Petruševskaja and Pelevin (especially "The Little Sorceress" and "The Clay Machine-Gun") present Moscow of the post-Perestrojka period as a palimpsest that turns everyday existence into a confusing experience. Their narratives also evoke the sense of estrangement from the symbolic universe of codes permeated with automatism. As a result, most of their protagonists feel displaced from their immediate environment and identify themselves with foreigners whose understanding of reality is based on the arbitrary reading of the signs and objects of everyday life. It is not coincidental that Petruševskaja's novel "The Little Sorceress" – which evolves around the notion of estrangement – was included into a book of post-Soviet wonder tales "The Real Fairy Tales" that appeared in Moscow in 1997. Thus, for example, in one of the wonder tales – "The Golden Ordinary Cloth" – Petruševskaja depicts a scholar's unfortunate adventures in finding an ancient magic cloth (which could have been used as a flag at some stage) while climbing a mountain in an exotic East Asian location. He fails in his attempts to sell this cloth to the British Museum, Sotheby's and a television company, and he ends up working in a museum as a warden. Newspapers published numerous stories about his miraculous escape from an earthquake and the effects of the earthquake on a distant South-Asian village's locals (they became dumb), so most of the visitors come to look not at "some pots and rusty axes but at the professor himself" (Petruševskaja 1997, 172). In humorous manner, Petruševskaja suggests that the media-driven modernity turned this scholar into a true celebrity: there are rumours that from time to time the professor flies as a bird to these East Asian mountains to work as a librarian for the local king. Yet the boundary between the real and unreal is laughed away in the narrator's statement about the authenticity of the whole story: "I helped him to get a job in this museum. His old mum asked me. She is my friend. And he needs to earn money somehow" (ibid.).

It appears that, in the works of Petruševskaja and Pelevin, writing as such is designated as secondary in relation to speech and meaning, to the extent that writing loses its intrinsic link with signification and becomes allegorical. The allegorical aspect of writing has profound implications for the notion of space shaped by artificial memory, or 'hypomnesis'. Accord-

ing to John Lechte, artificial memory, which is supposedly supplementary, or secondary, to lived memory, can serve as a kind of personal code constructed for this sole purpose of recalling lived memory. (Lechte in Watson and Gibson 1995, 104). In other words, the loss of living memory gives way to idiosyncratic mnemonics of space. This is achieved by Petruševskaja and Pelevin through the extensive use of the fantastic in their narratives that depict everyday incidents in Moscow as being entwined with the supernatural and with urban fantasy. In their quest for new ways of cognising reality, Petruševskaja and Pelevin abandoned the more universal language of Russian modernists. They make their readers believe that history in the postmodern age is not a means by which we make sense of society and link events to each other. Both Petruševskaja and Pelevin share the same goal: to instil into the minds of their readers a new perspective on the collectivity of idiolects. Their strategy is to use memory and the past as positive catalysts for invention, re-defined in the context of the aesthetics of popular entertainment that presents history as a mere resource of images waiting to be used for recreational or decorative purposes.

The postmodern notion of 'radical eclectism' (Jencks and Kropf 1997, 131) helps identify the new 'grammatology' of Petruševskaja and Pelevin that brings to the fore playful constructions, radical forms of estrangement and double-coding aimed at professionals and populace. Their linguistic games testify to the need in a pluralist culture for an eclectic design inseparable from the notion of simultaneity that intensifies the perception of urban everyday life. It partly echoes some trends in Moscow's post-Soviet architecture labelled as 'Lužkov baroque', bringing together the Moscow mayor's cultural policies and current Muscovite popular taste. Just as contemporary Russian architects, Petruševskaja and Pelevin use double-coding in their works, in order to satisfy the taste both of a wide readership and literary critics. Thus, one of Pelevin's stories "The Ninth Dream of Vera Pavlovna" can be read both as parody on Nikolai Černyševskyj's novel "What Is To Be Done?" and as a trivial story of the everyday life of Vera, an ordinary Moscow lavatory cleaner. In "The Little Sorceress" the preoccupation with double-coding is also strongly pronounced: Petruševskaja's protagonists Barbie Maša and Valka Valkyrie have a double identity and highlight the dynamic relationship between low and high cultural traditions. To this end, Petruševskaja's and Pelevin's aspirations to establish radical eclectism as a popular mode of writing brings together melodramatic and heroic, reflecting thereby on the post-Soviet human subject's loss of the sense of a meaningfully defined place in history. Both Petruševskaja and Pelevin rely on hypomnesis that highlights the sense of disorientation. Their urban writing conveys a message that the process of creating

a new meaning and cognitive mapping of the subject's immediate social position enables us to recover a sense of belonging to the global economic networks that somewhat can compensate for the discredited utopian dreams of the progress of the human spirit.

The presence of artificial memory is well illustrated in Petruševskaja's "The Little Sorceress" which employs the estrangement device aiming at creating a sense of disorientation caused by the collapse of Soviet history and the crisis of the subject. In a striking episode the traditional association of Moscow's Dzeržinskyj Square with the KGB headquarters and the Lubjanka prison is replaced with the description of a magnificent toy store, where one can purchase "a greenish tank", "a pioneer's trumpet", "a banner of young Marxists", "a bucket with a spade", and "a marching doll Katja" (Petruševskaja 1996, 14). In Petruševskaja's tale "Little Groznaja" (1998) the parents and relatives of a girl (who seems to be part of the Soviet elite) are not sure whether they named her Stalinka after Stalin or Berja, who helped them obtain a flat in Moscow, because they "didn't keep this legend in their injured memory" (Petruševskaja 1999, 260). After the death of Stalin this girl was renamed Tat'jana, a name evoking Tat'jana Larina, the protagonist of Puškin's novel in verse "Eugene Onegin", whom Dostoevskyj saw as an embodiment of Russian virtues. In "Little Groznaja" Petruševskaja presents both history and literature as fiction and human constructs, showing thereby the arbitrary nature of both areas that contribute to knowledge, to impart on her readers a strong sense of the unpresentable. The image of injured memory which appears in the story alludes to Bulgakov's image of artificial memory found in the concluding passage of his novel "The Master and Margarita". The passage describes a Moscow asylum and a mad Moscow poet who welcomes the injections that calm down his "injured memory" (Bulgakov 1978, 812). Petruševskaja's "Little Groznaja" (who is not named in the story) stands out as a symbol of Soviet totalitarian discourse and mass hysteria. It is an allegorical post-Soviet image of "a mad woman in the attic", a hysteric who goes adrift in the changing urban environment of pure surfaces where the dream of reconstituting the real remains a mere fantasy indulged by intellectuals and politicians. In a more radical manner, Petruševskaja reinforces this message in her humorous song "My boy" included in the 2003 album "In the Middle of Grand Julius" (Petruševskaja 2003). The song tells the sad story of a rich disabled foreign investor, portrayed as a boy with a beard, the spitting image of Karl Marx. The lyric heroine of Petruševskaja's song appears to identify herself with this displaced foreign eccentric who is seen by contemporary Moscovites as a powerless and disoriented individual.

Baba Ol'ja, the protagonist of Petruševskaja's story "Waterloo Bridge", another eccentric hysteric, also feels lost in Moscow suburbia. She is depicted as a flâneuse in post-Stalin Moscow while pursuing her fantasy to meet famous film star Robert Taylor whose moustache she subconsciously associates with Stalin. By creating a fan club of old ladies who admire the film "Waterloo Bridge", Baba Ol'ja satisfies her need to reinstate the behavioural model based on the cult of personality that makes her responses highly intense. Given the existing link between hysteria and sexual identification that turns language and knowledge into a masquerade around sexual balance, Petruševskaja's story "Waterloo Bridge" seem to demonstrate that subject can be hystericised when pushed beyond the limits of personal control of language and effect. In the vein of Gogol's story "Overcoat", Petruševskaja's story presents Baba Ol'ja's obsession with the film actor Robert Taylor that gets out of hand: Baba Ol'ja perceives her encounter with a ghost on the streets of Moscow in 1954 as a real meeting with the object of her desire. It might be easily mistaken for Stalin, the embodiment of masculinity, suggesting thereby that the image of Stalin became sexualised with his death in 1953. In other words, Petruševskaja's Baba Ol'ja is a hysteric who transforms the experience of history into a sexualised activity of erotic dreaming. Her walk along a Moscow street turns into an imaginary walk, with images to be remembered at various sites along the way. Thus Petruševskaja refers to the suburb Zastava Iliča which becomes familiar to her protagonist and is of personal significance. The suburb becomes a locus of the memorised because of Baba Ol'ja's grotesque and humorous encounter with the doubles of Robert Taylor and Stalin. Such subjectivised experience of space testifies to the fact that the art of memory is a form of inner writing.

For today's readers of Petruševskaja's story the allusion to the Moscow suburb Zastava Il'iča is politically charged, since it also alludes to Marlen Xuciev's film "Zastava Il'iča" released in 1964 which Nikita Xruščev criticised for its subversive content. This film tells of a group of youngsters who grew up in the Zastava Il'iča suburb and represent the liberally minded youth of the 1960s determined to break from the totalitarian past. The film contained documentary footages featuring young radical poets such as Andrej Voznesenskyj, Bella Axmadulina and Evgenyj Evtušenko reciting their poetry to crowds of students in the Institute of Technology in Moscow. In some ways, Petruševskaja's Baba Ol'ja – who writes poetry and uses Robert Taylor as her muse – has striking similarities with the liberal representatives of the Thaw period who denounced Stalin but who nevertheless mirrored the modernism's belief that the political appears in the relationship between a work of art and its context. It can be argued that Petruševskaja's story "Waterloo Bridge" has a postmodernist touch. By

framing the story of an old lady obssessed by the foreign film "Waterloo Bridge" within the political context of the post-Stalin cultural developments, Petruševskaja brings to the fore the fact that politics develops within textuality itself. In postmodernist vein, Petruševskaja argues that our identities are not the result of our imagination since they derive from an existing history of narratives and styles. Petruševskaja demonstrates how delineation of Soviet cohesive society (based on the totalitarian regime created by Stalin's policies) into various groups and subcultures leads to the volatility of contemporary visions of signifiers and texts.

The theme of artificial memory and historical amnesia also plays a significant role in Pelevin's novel "The Clay Machine-Gun" (the original title of the novel is "Čapaev i Pustota", 1996). Thus Pelevin's idea to inscribe Čapaev, a popular children's folk character, into urban modern and postmodern space alongside television and cinema pop-stars (Arnold Schwarzenegger, for example) manifests the writing of the city as a potentially allegorical activity. It is as if Pelevin describes adventures which present writing featuring a reality of multiple meanings, or a palimpsest. As a result, one level of reality contains another, and gradually they develop into a faint image, the void, that Jacques Derrida defines as "chora" (borrowing this concept from Plato's "Timaeus"). Plato's "chora" at its most literal level signifies the notions of place, location and country. Derrida is interested in the term as part of his deconstructive reading of texts. It can be argued that Pelevin's "The Clay Machine-Gun" also deconstructs the multiplicity of meanings in Moscow as cultural construct highlighting the notion of the void.

The interest of many postmodern critics in 'chora' derives from their desire to find some terms that disturb the logic, the *logos* of the text they study. The notion 'chora' is used often in their writings to signify the trace of another text and locate a point of indeterminacy. According to Elizabeth Grosz, the notion of 'chora' serves to produce a form of disembodied femininity that writers use for the creation of their conceptual vision of universe. Grosz explains: "The production of a (male) world – the construction of an 'artificial' or cultural environment, the production of an intelligible universe, religion, philosophy, the creation of true knowledge and valid practices of and in that universe – is implicated in systematic and violent erasure of the contributions of women, femininity and the maternal" (Grosz in Watson and Gibson 1995, 55). The philosophical models of Plato and Derrida depend on definitions of a femininity deprived of its connections with the female and maternal body and made to carry the burden of something that men cannot articulate. Pelevin's images of Moscow and Inner Mongolia are akin to the representation of something unfathomable, voracious, disruptive, and displaced as discussed

in Derrida's works. If we take account of a tendency in Russian cultural tradition to feminise the image of Moscow as maternal, then we can suggest that both Petruševskaja and Pelevin attempt to re-define Moscow as a traditional feminized image, seeking for it some new meanings. Their dislocation of Moscow (into a world of fantasy and the supernatural) resembles an allegorical dislocation of the Greek logos, testifying thereby to the postmodernist project that develops the Enlightenment mode of anti-authoritarianism and treats Nature and Reason as unneeded substitutes for God. The vision of Moscow of Petruševskaja and Pelevin as infinite Other calls upon an ethical relationship and leads to opening the space of liberating metaphysics.

Their portrayal of Moscow in the 1990s stands in sharp contrast to the cultural constructs found in Russian realist and modernist texts. It does not seem coincidental to see the highly scornful responses of some critics to their writing. Some reviewers go so far as to suggest that Pelevin's "The Clay Machine-Gun" is comparable to a computer virus designed to destroy Russian cultural memory. (By the same token neither are the novels of Petruševskaja virus-free.) Sergej Kornev denounces Pelevin's obsession with creating a text that could act as a virus to trigger a type of self-destruction of the cognitive system in the minds of Pelevin's readers (Kornev 1997). Kornev's responses to Pelevin's prose are akin to Plato's profound suspicion of artificial memory and derive from the realisation that postmodernism represents the deepening modern crisis that uncovers the crisis in modernism itself. Mark Lipovetsky's 2001 article on Russian postmodernist literature also points to Pelevin's acid attacks on Russian cultural memory. According to Lipovetsky, Pelevin's fiction contains numerous polemical intersections with the modernist tradition (Lipovetsky 2001). Lipovetsky compares Pelevin's novel "Generation 'P'" with his previous novel "The Clay Machine-Gun". Lipovetsky sees as antipodes the decadent poet Piotr Pustota (Peter the Void) (the protagonist of "The Clay Machine-Gun") and Vavilen Tatarskij (central character of the novel "Generation 'P'", former poet who writes the commercials). Peter has no ability to distinguish between the authentic and fictitious realities that he encounters. He welcomes as more authentic the world where he acts as a decadent poet and as Čapaev's Commissar. Pelevin playfully suggests that the Soviet films featuring war heroes can be seen as influencing Russian views on masculinity and heroic identity. More importantly, Pelevin deplores the use of Soviet films for propaganda purposes. The name "Peter the Void" might be seen as an allegorical allusion to Peter the Great's radical modernisation of Russia that inspired Soviet leaders. On a philosophical level, Pelevin's novel might be read as a critical reassessment of the project of Lenin and Stalin to purify the state on a utopian scale. The under-

lying theme of Pelevin's text is the theme of memory of the Soviet past that reduced life to the single historical purpose of social improvement which caused millions of death and widespread human suffering.

By contrast with Pelevin's Peter inspired by the images of Soviet history of the 1920s, Tatarskij is a product of late Soviet and post-Soviet reality. To escape reality he uses different 'stimulators' like LSD, bad heroin, mushrooms and a Ouija board. Both Peter and Tatarskij challenge basic assumptions of post-Soviet readers with respect to the usable past and historical truth. Pelevin's playful portrayal of Pustota and Čapaev might be seen as an attempt to present modernism as a culture in crisis: Pelevin exposes its utopian character related to the vision of arts as a means of social engineering. Avant-garde values were meant to replace the discredited and anaemic forms of expression and artistic goals. Tatarskij's first name Vavilen evokes Vladimir Il'ič Lenin and the city Babylon, interweaving the narrative with dystopian overtones. His name resembles a brand name of commercials he creates. Tatarskij stands out as a comic character who lost his authentic self: he looks ridiculous with his note-book for recording ideas for commercials. His slogan, suggesting the Christ the Saviour is a lords' Lord, parodies descriptions of computer games and post-Soviet commercials. Pelevin seeks to draw attention to the conventions and clichés embedded in his narratives, highlighting thereby the self-critical nature of his writing.

Some points of distortion of the sacred notion of Moscow as the Third Rome found in the fiction of Pelevin and Petruševskaja relate to the post-modernist desire to subvert the grand narrative that has been shaping Russian imperial imagination. Richard Pipes defines the Muscovite ideology of royal absolutism as comprising four main aspects: the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome; "the imperial idea", connecting the rulers of Moscow to the imperial line of the Roman Emperor Augustus; the representation of Russian monarchs as universal sovereigns; and the ideology that Muscovite sovereigns received their authority from God (Pipes in Baehr 1991, 18). While Constantinople had been regarded as the successor of Rome, Moscow saw itself as the successor of Constantinople and as the final centre of Orthodox Christendom. Boris Uspenskij points out that the notion of 'translatio imperii' took on an eschatological significance which it initially lacked (Uspenskij in Boele 1996, 19). Russians began to see themselves as God's chosen people because they defeated Islam and could bring spiritual light from the East that would lead to the salvation of mankind. Gradually, however, Moscow as sacred place and paradise on earth was replaced with the new europeanised identity, evident with the foundation of St. Petersburg in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Given Lužkov's post-Soviet campaign of monumental reconstruction of the

Russian capital culminated in Moscow's 850th anniversary celebration just as Stalin's did 50 years before celebration of the 800th, it is possible to see that the cliché related to the perception of Moscow as Third Rome has been revived in post-Soviet times as part of the commodification of Russian culture and as an attempt to promote patriotism in the vein of Stalin's cultural policies. Taking into account that Stalin established the tradition of anniversary celebrations and determined Moscow's birth date from the city's first mention in the Russian 1147 chronicles (that state that during Jurij Dolgorukij's reign a large fortress was built in Moscow), we could see that Lužkov's lavish celebrations of Moscow's 850th anniversary in 1997 might have reinforced the understanding of Pelevin and Petruševskaja of contemporary Russian culture as part of the world of consumer consumption that evokes a sense of nostalgia (Boym 2001, 118).

Thus, for example, Gregorij Revzin suggests that in the 1990s the Moscow Kremlin became the main model for architects. Revzin notes the abundance of symbols of statehood in many contemporary buildings in Moscow that feature toy-like towers (Revzin 1997). By contrast, Vladimir Paperny says that Russian contemporary architecture appears too unprofessional because of the disruption of the modernist tradition in Russia. According to Paperny, post-Soviet cities "look like a text written on a typewriter with a few missing characters" (Paperny 1999). Like post-Soviet architects, Petruševskaja and Pelevin use Moscow landscapes extensively in their work to comic effect, rejecting the language of modernist universalist aspirations. To this end, it is not surprising to see Pelevin's protagonist Vera Pavlovna feel liberated and happy to see Moscow vanish for good. In Pelevin's story "The Ninth Dream of Vera Pavlovna", discussed in more detail below, Moscow disappears in Vera's dream, swept away by a flood of dung: "Vera looked around one more time. She was amazed that a huge city standing there for many centuries has disappeared into the abyss with such ease. […] When she woke up, the world appeared to be consisting of two parts: a twilight sky and a limitless even surface, which turned black in the dark" (Pelevin 1991, 154). At her awakening hour Vera Pavlovna also thought of Atlantis. The logic of the story refers to Moscow history as if it was already in the mythical past. Pelevin's gesture of mythologisation of history undoubtedly comes from his desire both to canonise and destroy the Russian modernist tradition, which serves as an important cornerstone for his invention. Pelevin's story does not give any account of Vera Pavlovna's responses to the historical changes she witnesses, suggesting thereby that as a representative of the masses she resists meaningful activity imposed upon her by social élites.

One modernist project that Pelevin explores in his writings is related to the Eurasianist ideology developed in various literary texts penned by

Alexander Blok, Anna Axmatova and Marina Cvetaeva[1]. It was popular with Russian émigré philosophers and historians whose works were republished in Russia in the 1990s. Some of the influential advocates of the Eurasianist historiography in the 1990s Russia include Lev Gumilev and Nikita Mixalkov. Commenting on the inherent Eurasianist hostility towards Western cultural and political concepts, Charles J. Halperin explains: "According to the Eurasianists, Eurasia was a self-contained geographic entity whose boundaries coincided roughly with those of the Russian Empire of 1914. […] The Bolshevik revolution was doomed, since Marxism was but another excrescence of a decadent European civilisation of which Russia should have no part" (Halperin 1982). One of the layers of Pelevin's palimpsest in "The Clay Machine-Gun" can be easily identified as Eurasianist. It is strongly articulated in conversations between Serdjuk and Kawabata, a Japanese businessman. Pelevin's contemporary flâneur Serdjuk stumbles across the semi-veiled Eurasian identity of the city space in his 'real' and imaginary walks through Moscow. Thus, Kawabata introduces Serdjuk to the idea of a sacred marriage between East and West, attacking contemporary Russia for being too pragmatic to appreciate such a metaphysical idea. Serdjuk describes contemporary Muscovites as being unreceptive to this type of universal narrative. He criticises Moscow's fragmented state of affairs: "Life here nowadays is enough to make a man give up on everything too. And as for traditions … well, some go to different kind of churches, but of course most just watch the television and think about money" (Pelevin 1999, 165). It is not surprising to see Serdjuk suffering some amnesia when it comes to visiting the Moscow cultural highlights canonised in Bulgakov's novel "Master and Margarita". Pelevin portrays Serdjuk as a person free of the burden of memory, achieved through heavy drinking: "Serdjuk downed another one and unexpectedly found he had fallen into reminiscing about the previous day – it seemed he'd gone on from Puškin Square to the Clean Ponds, but it was not clear to him why: all that was left in his memory was the monument of Griboedov, viewed in an odd perspective, as though he was looking at it from underneath a bench" (Pelevin 1999, 164f.). In this passage we come across another deconstruction of modern ideas. It appears that Serdjuk's most important recollection of wandering around Moscow has nothing to do with the object (the monument of Griboedov) but with the manner of his gaze.

The odd perspective is in fact a device that Pelevin himself uses to deconstruct the modernist image of the monument which has lost its

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[1] Although Blok is usually seen as a forerunner of the Eurasianist ideology, Cvetaeva's links with the Eurasianist movement should not be overlooked either. The Eurasian aspect of Cvetaeva's work is discussed in Smith, 2001.

reference. Serdjuk's visual image of Griboedov's monument which he re-captured in his memory "from underneath the bench" reminds us of photo-images of Aleksandr Rodčenko, renowned for his innovative avant-garde portrayals of Moscow in the 1920s-30s. Rodčenko and his fellow artists El Lissitzky and Aleksej Gan represented a break with the tradition inherent in the Constructivist principle of film-, photo-, or even 'architecture'-montage that focuses on a chaotic moment and defines new boundaries. Pelevin's narrative evokes some Constructivist slogans – such as "Constructivism is the present world-view" and "Everything is change-able" – that manifested a radical frame of mind and a new way of looking at things. The Constructivist outlook was rooted in a deconstructive idea that divides, analyses, fragments and alienates. For Constructivists there was almost no boundary between art and the everyday life they aestheti-cised. They considered factory or household work more satisfying than preoccupation with the esoteric art of high culture which, in their view, was an escape from the harsh and dull routine of everyday life. Both Petruševskaja and Pelevin appear to revive these principles in their fiction, transforming Constructivist ideas into their own literary strategies that are akin to Dziga Vertov's montage-based experiments.

A recent revival of Vertov's ideas on Constructivist film-making may have contributed to growing interest in montage. A number of Vertov's slogans can be easily applied to the fiction of Petruševskaja and Pelevin, including such statements as "Long live the ordinary mortal, filmed in life at his daily tasks!" and "Long live life as it is!" (Michelson 1984, 71). Both Petruševskaja and Pelevin are preoccupied with the everyday life of or-dinary Muscovites, whom they portray at their daily tasks. Thus, Petru-ševskaja's cycle of stories "Requiems" immortalises people in trivial situa-tions and unremarkable surroundings, notably in crammed apartments or suburban dachas. Pelevin also creates a gallery of engineers, factory wor-kers, drop-outs, drunks and even lavatory cleaners, presented in his stories as philosophers and even poets. For example, in "The Ninth Dream of Vera Pavlovna" we come across two lavatory cleaners (Maša and Vera) who discuss at their work place metaphysics, philosophy and modernist literature, and who recite Fedor Sologub's poetry. Gorbačev's reforms shatter their work environment, and one day their lavatories are privatis-ed. As a result, music speakers playing Verdi, Mozart and Wagner are in-stalled into the lavatories. The conjunction of classical music and lavatory waterfalls is one of Pelevin's most radical gestures. Some critics would find his allegorical equation of Moscow with life in a public/semi-private lavatory repulsive, anti-humanist and explosive. Commenting on similar trends in postmodernist architectual designs to shock, Jenks provides an objective explanation of new aesthetic forms which he defines as 'New

Modern Architecture': "Often the intention is to weave opposites together and deconstruct traditions from the inside, in order to highlight difference, otherness and our alienation from the cosmos. Beginning in the late 1970s as a reaction to both Modernism and Post-Modernism, it has been influenced by the philosophy of Derrida and the formal language of the Constructivists – hence its most visible manifestations, Deconstructivism" (Jencks and Kropf 1997, 10).

In the manner of deconstructivism, Pelevin in "The Ninth Dream of Vera Pavlovna" describes Moscow from the point of view of Vera Pavlovna who is carried away by a torrential flood that erases familiar landscapes. Yet Vera Pavlovna manages to fix her gaze on a few objects representing Soviet and post-Soviet Moscow. These randomly captured images of Moscow are meaningful only from the point of view of insiders who are familiar with Soviet and post-Soviet discourses, since they serve to deconstruct the dominant Soviet discourse. They include a reference to the "huge and ugly Gorky Theatre Company which resembled a granite rock" holding three women in Victorian white dresses and an army officer, "holding his hand on his forehead, trying to look pensively into the open space". Pelevin's Vera Pavlovna perceives this silent acting as a reference to Čexov's play "Three Sisters". Pelevin's allusion to Čexov is double-edged. On the one hand, he laughs away Stanislavskij's acting tradition which had become stiff and boring to contemporary viewers. (A similar gesture is inscribed in Petruševskaja's "The Little Sorceress" in relation to the Bolshoi Theatre's production of Tchaikovsky's ballet "Swan Lake"). On the other hand, Pelevin unravels the hidden message of Čexov's final act: to aspire to the future and to educate desire. Thus Pelevin understands Čexov's text in a deconstructivist manner and challenges Čexov's totalising gesture to neutralise the Other as a being. Pelevin's intention to refer to the new possibilities of meaning as the void, the black space, Inner Mongolia, for example, appear to be more in line with the criticism of the Heideggerean ontology advocated by Derrida. Derrida argues that the affirmation of the propriety of *Being* over the *existent* is closely linked "to a relation with the *Being of the existent*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of the existent (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom" (Derrida 1978, 97). He develops Levinas's vision that stresses that any universality denies the inscription of difference into the text and that the neutral thought of Being neutralises the Other as a Being. The emergence of the new evolving anonymous and inhuman universal discourse is allegorically represented in Pelevin's story by the post-Perestroika disappearance of the difference between men and women in the face of rapid commercialization in Moscow exemplified by the unisex lavatory and making the second lavatory into a second-hand

shop. Pelevin's story implies that pragmatism in today's Moscow is comparable to the desire of the enlightened new ideologists of reforms in Russia to totalise space, thus neutralising the language of difference and of subjectivity.

A strong suspicion of any new project of mass enlightenment in Russia and a gesture of deconstructivism are also articulated in Petruševskaja's novel "The Little Sorceress". It contains an ironic deconstruction both of contemporary economic reforms (driven by a new utopian ideology of transforming Russia into a civilised country) and of Bulgakov's dystopian story "Heart of A Dog". According to Lesley Milne, Bulgakov's resonances in "The Little Sorceress" are intentional (Milne 2000, 282). Petruševskaja's "The Little Sorceress" might be seen as a contemporary fairy tale since it is full of magic transformations: while Barbie Maša can change appearances and transform people morally, Val'ka can turn into a rat, a cockroach, a crow, or a television presenter as the need arises. Barbie Maša also uses her magic to turn a twelve-year-old hooligan and his drunken mother into fox-cub and she-wolf who fall into traps they had set for forest animals, then turns them back into people who have learned their lessons and set about life differently. They are transformed into positive characters, along with two stray dogs, who have been turned into diligent bespectacled children. It evokes the transformation from dog to human described in Bulgakov's "Heart of A Dog". Milne's juxtaposition of Petruševskaja and Bulgakov implies that both authors satirise Moscow with similar strategies: "Like Bulgakov in *The Master and Margarita,* Petruševskaja uses the possibilities of magic for satirical purposes. […] The grotesque social and political deformations in post–Soviet Russia are thus presented as tricks by some mischievously evil magic force, a perspective that challenges passive acceptance of these 'facts' of contemporary life" (Milne 2000, 282f.). Somewhat scornfully Milne points out that "it takes particular genius to think of combining Barbie with Bulgakov" (Milne 2000, 284). In my view, the difference between Bulgakov and Petruševskaja is very substantial. Given the fact that in the 1980s-90s Bulgakov's works were canonised (one can think, for example, of a film based on Bulgakov's story "Heart of A Dog" and Ljubimov's Taganka production of a play based on "The Master and Margarita"), it is possible to detect Petruševskaja's desire to rescue Bulgakov from 'museum' culture. Yet, unlike Bulgakov, Petruševskaja concerns herself not with political satire but with language itself. The need to satirize the emptiness of language and the destruction that it had caused is strongly pronounced not only in Petruševskaja's "The Little Sorceress" but also in many dystopian and apocalyptic-like narratives that she published in the 1990s.

Indeed, both Petruševskaja and Pelevin deal with the fluidity of language and its self-destructive qualities. In Petruševskaja's novel "The Little Sorceress", linguistic transformations play an important role. It can be argued that in this novel Petruševskaja is a reporter walking around Moscow suburbs in search of social dialects. Petruševskaja's range of Moscow languages include obscenities, salesmen's broken Russian, slang and the language of contemporary media. Names, dates, and consecutive narration are kept to a minimum as Petruševskaja highlights the fragility of the stylistic masks of her characters. Thus, for example, in Petruševkaja's 1992 Booker Prize-nominated 'Time: Night' the protagonist Anna loses her verbal control to the effect that the narrative fades into chaos. Anna represents a contemporary Moscow poet, displaced from the literary mainstream but with a life fulfilled by the real poetry of working as editor for a Moscow newspaper and replying to readers' letters. Her gesture is akin to the Russian Constructivists' desire to merge art and everyday life.

Pelevin's Peter the Void can be compared to Anna, too. He is a poet who struggles to win the support of the masses. His association with Čapaev adds mythical overtones to his personality. In fact his surname means 'void' (*пустота*) and suggests the mimicking nature of his poetic skill in adopting various identities and styles. He represents the new pop-poet who no longer needs to be original and who mimics languages and Moscow dialects, including such pop-stars as Muscovite Filipp Kirkorov, a young Bulgarian who was a renowned sex symbol to many young Russian girls in the 1990s. Kirkorov's popularity is reflected, for example, in the following references: "And the world that the Japanese was preparing to quit – if by 'world' we mean everything that a man can feel and experience in his life – was certainly far more attractive than the stinking streets of Moscow that closed in on Serdjuk every morning to the accompaniment of the songs of Filipp Kirkorov. Serdjuk realised why he'd suddenly thought of Kirkorov — the girls behind the wall were listening to one of his songs. Then he heard the sounds of a brief quarrel, stifled weeping and the click of a switch. The invisible television began transmitting a news programme, but it seemed to Serdjuk that the channel hadn't really changed and begun talking in a quiet voice". It is not surprising that Pelevin mixes references to classical literature with allusions to Russian pop-culture to convey contemporary Moscow as both repulsive and glamorous, in an oxymoronic manner. Furthermore, Pelevin's references to Kirkorov are entwined with an allusion to two prostitutes whom Serdjuk and his Japanese friend befriended.

Such a representation of the metropolis is in line with the established tradition of urban writing. Thus in European and American modernist literature the representation of the metropolis is often linked to the ques-

tion of sexual relations within mass culture. Thus, for example, Gillian Swanson argues that in many 19th-century narratives the public woman appears to be used as a sign of urban pathology to the effect that the correspondence of sex and commercial city life was produced through a concept of waste that threatens the autonomy of urban masculinity (Swanson in Watson and Gibson 1995, 85). In Pelevin's narrative, Kirkorov and the two prostitutes symbolise the development of the industry of consumption, retailing industries and popular entertainment, leading to the loss of authoritive self-presence of a male protagonist. In other words, we see in Pelevin's text the correspondence between femininity and disorder as requiring some form of management. In the concluding chapter of Pelevin's novel, Peter remarks: "all women suck" (Pelevin 1999, 323). Yet Peter never abandons his wish to be a poet, and he uses women as his muses. It can be argued that the number of durable identities possessed by Pelevin's male narrator makes him no different to the women whom he perceives as transient and provisional. His new art is part of popular culture, driven by social consumption. Although the carnival anarchy and laughter found in Pelevin's novel bring to mind many of the 1970s pictures and comic books of Warhol and Lichtenstein, Petruševskaja's slogan "Laughter will save the world" (Petruševskaja 1993, 96) seems to be applicable to it, too. In fact, Petruševskaja shares with Pelevin a strong interest in laughter, popular culture and reflexivity. Both use the literary fantastic and fairy-tale plots, presenting thereby post-Soviet Moscow as a comic-book world. Pelevin's novel "Life of Insects" could be also compared to the whole gallery of real-life fairy tales images and plots created by Petruševskaja. It should be borne in mind, however, that Petruševskaja insists in her interviews that her fairy tales should not be taken seriously.

Given the above analysis, it would be appropriate to extend the line of juxtaposition between pop-art and the works of Petruševskaja and Pelevin. If we take into account Brian McHale's assumption, that in comparison with modernism which produced fiction based on epistomological uncertainty, postmodernism is the literature preoccupied with ontological questions (McHale in Dalton-Brown1997, 217), then it becomes clear why Petruševskaja and Pelevin are interested in blurred and fluid boundaries between animals and people, between creator and his creation, between rational and irrational. In fact, they deconstruct the cultural space to which they both belong in the same manner, transforming many plots of the Moscow 'text' into the format of a comic book. For example, in "The Clay Machine-Gun" one of Peter's first observations refers to the revolutionary changes in Moscow in 1918, notably in relation to the famous monument of Puškin (which became a cult object in Russian modernist writing): "The Bronze Puškin seemed a little sadder than usual

– no doubt because his breast was covered with a red apron bearing the inscription: *Long Live the First Anniversary of the Revolution!*" (Pelevin 1998, 1). Although Petruševskaja's portrayal of glamorous scenes of Moscow life of the 1990s in "The Little Sorceress" are mixed up with the depiction of poverty, her images of Moscow are fluid, durable and entertaining. Thus to enter a TV studio Val'ka adopts the identity of a famous pop-star with a very short skirt and a lot of hair. This is a veiled allusion to the Russian super star Alla Pugačeva who continues to be a sex symbol in contemporary Moscow. To a great extent, Moscow is portrayed by Petruševskaja and Pelevin as a centre of entertainment and consumption. In their comic representation of urban life in the 1990s, a walk through Moscow becomes an allegorical ride on a merry-go-round of pop culture.

Another important aspect of the urban space created by Petruševskaja and Pelevin is that disorder and chaos become identified with the creative potential that enables to inscribe subjectivity and avoid becoming part of the totalising discourse. Pelevin's Peter's release from mental hospital becomes his path to freedom to find yet another identity for himself. Vera Pavlovna flees her lavatory environment to take an unusual flight above Moscow which offers her a different perspective of familiar landscapes. Pelevin appears envious of the displaced femininity which he also wishes to control, seeing it as a waste, a residue of unnameable meaning. Yet its strangeness and otherness provides him with a creative impulse. The correspondence between masculinity and a seductive image of postmodern Moscow is also well captured in Petruševskaja's story "The Viewing Platform". The story depicts a man who moved to Moscow from a provincial town and conducted all his love affairs at a Moscow University viewing point. Here Andrej associates all his female conquests with the seduction of Moscow itself: "Here he experienced an exciting sensation, a sensation of victory over this vast city, lying in front of him" (Petruševskaja 1999, 292). As a true postmodernist author, Petruševskaja mocks any aspirations towards victory over space and pragmatism. The story ends with Petruševskaja's pondering the ontological aspects of life: "What is any victory over us? […] any victories are transitional; and life is such a force that always manages to turn out well, it manages to recover, to go on growing and expanding" (Petruševskaja 1999, 319). The words "we" and "life" could be replaced in Petruševskaja's text with a reference to Moscow as the feminised space mentioned in the beginning of her narrative, which becomes a symbol of unpredictability.

The notion of indeterminacy appeals to Petruševskaja and Pelevin as an exciting opportunity for creativity. Both Petruševskaja and Pelevin offer their readers a view of city walking which can be compared to inner writing. In other words, it is a process of writing a dream or rebus, which

contains its own code. It becomes an idiolect, which is indeterminate and might be perceived simultaneously as its own cause and effect. The depiction of walking in a postmodernist city – as manifested in the works of Petruševskaja and Pelevin – gives way to the singular appropriation of space, leading to random redistributions of all kinds. It exemplifies the possibility of a living and 'mythical' practice of the city. Michel de Certeau's essay "Indeterminate" explains the nature of the description of urban experience in postmodern works thus: "Casual time is what is narrated in the actual discourse of the city: an indeterminate fable, better articulated on the metaphorical practices and stratified places than on the empire of the evident functionalist technocracy" (De Certeau in Gibson and Watson 1995, 105). The above mentioned notion of *chora* conveyed in the works of Petruševskaja and Pelevin might be also seen as a manifestation of indeterminacy and a harbinger of pure chance. It corresponds to the postmodernist project of re-definition of a space in the twentieth century linked to the recession of Laplacian search for complete knowledge and the development of thermodynamics which opened way to the establishment of a new value of randomness as opposed to predictability. As Lechte aptly observes, the emphasis on the open system leads to the importance of aleatory effects such as disorder, chance, and random devices, including smoke, the light of the sun, ice, steam, and clouds (Lechte in Gibson and Watson 1995, 101).

The concept of randomness and disequilibrium is of significant importance to Petruševskaja and Pelevin, too. In this respect, it is difficult to agree with Milne's analysis of Petruševskaja's "Little Sorceress" in terms of a fairy tale with a happy ending, leading to blissful equilibrium. It might be argued that Petruševskaja's intention was to create the novel that contains several plots within its narrative. It should be borne in mind, for example, that the subtitle of "Little Sorceress – A Novel for Puppets" – suggests that the novel has some performative qualities and could be perceived as a puppet show, not to be taken seriously. The ending of the puppet show opens the way to an unnamed space full of chance and various possibilities. The important marker of the illusionary nature of this plot is the street organ music which usually accompanied puppet shows in pre-revolutionary Russia. Therefore the TV show which Petruševskaja portrays at the end of the novel has many features of a puppet show in the style of Punch and Judy (Smith 1997). Thus Petruševskaja's portrayal of postmodern urban life as part of glamorous fantasy which is just as disposable as a television set points to the existence of media-driven modernity in post-Soviet Russia. It is not coincidental either that in "The Viewing Point" Petruševskaja describes the Moscow University building as a "protecting wall" offering her protagonist a sense of stability and security,

increasing his masculine power in his relationship with women. This building is one of the most striking examples of Stalinist architecture. It can be argued, therefore, that Petruševskaja's text implies that the pragmatic and rationalised system of space associated with Stalinism collapsed and gave way to the sense of freedom and indeterminacy, since her protagonist's masculinity and rationalism are laughed away.

Given this type of analysis, it is possible to view Petruševskaja's and Pelevin's image of Moscow in the light of the urban theory of a 'soft' city as developed in Jonathan Raban's book "Soft City". He argues that it is not simply that urban life has become more superficial and oriented towards consumption and seduction through images in the context of late capitalism, but that the city in itself is an imaginary space. Raban writes: "Cities, unlike villages and towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they in turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose a personal form on them. In this sense, it seems to me that living in a city is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the particular relation between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living" (Raban 1974, 10). Raban explains that the basic dynamic of urban life derives from the fact that we live in close proximity to strangers. The interactions with strangers and unexpected encounters with them in public places and transport make us see city life as a manifestation of theatricality. The experience of cities becomes a process of acting and perceiving ourselves as actors. Raban's preposition provides us with a useful tool to explain the ironic detachment and estrangement found in the fiction of Petruševskaja and Pelevin, who convey postmodernity as a certain way of experiencing space. Theorists of postmodernity such as Jencks and Rorty understand it not primarily as a style or method of representation but as a certain mood or way of perception of life[2]. Yet both Petruševskaja and Pelevin warn their readers that there is always a danger of dissolving one's identity through the play of representations because the inhabitant of the postmodern city is no longer a subject apart from his or her performances. Their narratives that feature post-Soviet Moscow suggest that the border between self and city has become fluid. As was demonstrated above, Petruševskaja's and Pelevin's vision of urban space as imaginary in a deconstructive sense of the term is closely linked to the representation of a decentred subject which can neither fully identify with nor fully dissociate from the signs which constitute the city. These important signs are entwined in their narratives with numerous Moscow locations with which these authors identify themselves but

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[2] See, for example, Rorty's reference to postmodernism as "the new philosophical world-view" in Rorty 1997 and Jencks's description of postmodern sensibility in Jencks and Kropf 1997, 10f.

also from which they become estranged. A list of such locations would in-
clude Tverskoj Boulevard, Moscow University, Gorkij Theatre, Ostan-
kino, Clean Ponds, Garden Ring, the Puškin and Griboedov monuments,
Puškin Square, Intourist hotels, TV companies, publishing houses, in-
dustrial outskirts, lavatories, crowded flats, mental hospitals, buses, toy
shops, restaurants, and cinema halls. The theatrical and even cinematogra-
phic nature of their imaginary 'soft' city is also evident in many titles they
chose for their novels and stories, including Pelevin's "The Blue Lantern",
"The Tambourine of the Upper World", "Čapaev and Void", "Mid-Game",
and "Crystal World"; and Petruševskaja's "The Ball of a Last Person", "Little
Sorceress: A Novel for Puppets", "Waterloo Bridge", "Happy End", "Me-
dea", and "Cinderella's Path".

In light of the above-mentioned comparisons of the writing of Petru-
ševskaja and Pelevin with pop-art, it can be also added that their image of
Moscow appears to be ephemeral, transient and provisional. Both authors
use historical events and names in a strictly contemporary way, trying to
re-define them, or more precisely – to animate them in an entertaining
manner, reducing Moscow's historical space to the format of an animated
comic book. Such book is similar to other types of pop-culture. If in sculp-
ture, for example, pop sensibility was expressed in brightly coloured plastic
shapes, pop paintings were often used for producing commercial ad-
vertisements and comic books associated with being sexy, glamorous and
young. Yet the image becomes depersonalised through reproduction. As
one critic points out, "What often seems to interest the pop painter is the
fact that the object is depersonalised, typical rather than individual – the
device of the monotonously repeated identical image" (Lucie-Smith in
Stangos 1991, 235). This is why both Petruševskaja and Pelevin inscribe
the most reproduced visual 'snaps' of Moscow, which they revive through
presenting them from an unusual perspective. By referring to the past,
Petruševskaja and Pelevin pay tribute to events and places from the past
and to the past itself, yet their fairy-tale like narratives are firmly placed in
the present.

Furthermore, their fiction has a youthful look and appeal, making, for
example, the Barbie doll, a cult object for young females in Russia, turn
into an enlightening figure in Petruševskaja's narrative. Čapaev, a model
of masculinity for young males in the Soviet period and Perestrojka, is
used by Pelevin to communicate new metaphysical ideas to his readers.
Sof'ja Pavlovna, an appropriated character from Černyševskij's instructive
novel "What Is To Be Done?" (which was studied in Soviet schools as part
of education in utopia) becomes an advocate of new truths. These char-
acters are both parodied and admired by Petruševskaja and Pelevin. They
are used as tools of estrangement taken from one imaginary Moscow to

create another. Just as in fashion where the hallmark of the product is not elaboration, but novelty and impact, authors like Petruševskaja and Pelevin need to rely on new dreams and re-configurations of dreams provided by mass culture. They examine the banal and identify themselves with banal objects. It would not be far-fetched to compare their vision of writing to Warhol's self-representation of himself as a machine that produces everything machine-like and aspires to create all the objects similar to each other. To this end, Petruševskaja and Pelevin identify themselves with machine-like contemporary Moscow which evokes the same desires of consumption in all its citizens. As Petruševskaja admits, "comedy is not a genre, it's a success" (Petruševskaja 1993, 96). In order to achieve this success Petruševskaja and Pelevin need Moscow as much as Moscow needs them.

It is also useful to bear in mind that from the linguistic point of view it is necessary to have space to create satire. As Kristeva explains: "Any spatial representation provided from within a universal language is necessarily subject to teleological reason, contrary to what 'romantic minds' might maintain, attracted as they are to the 'mythico-magical' […] It is henceforth clear that meaning's closure can never be challenged by another *space*, but only by a different way of *speaking*: another enunciation, another literature" (Kristeva 1980, 281). In fact the image of the child-like, infantile laughing Moscow we encounter in the fiction of Petruševskaja and Pelevin could be explained in terms of the mother-child relationship studied by Kristeva in relation to language development: "During the period of indistinction between '*same*' and '*other*', infant and mother, as well as between 'subject' and 'object', while no space has yet been delineated (this will happen with and after the mirror stage-birth of the sign), the semiotic *chora* that arrests and absorbs the motility of the anaclitic facilitations relieves and produces laughter" (Kristeva 1980, 284). Furthermore, Kristeva points to the fact that children lack sense of humour, but they laugh easily "when motor tension is linked to vision (a caricature is a visualization of bodily distortion, of an extreme, exaggerated movement, or of an unmastered movement"; when a child's body is too rapidly set in motion by the adult […]; when a sudden stop follows a movement" (ibid.). Given this semiotic and psychoanalytical explanations of the origin of laughter, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that caricaturised images of Moscow in the works under discussion are the most adequate forms of the representation of a newly born Russian capital learning to speak and create its new symbolic language, and filling the void with laugher in the meantime.

It could be added that the urban tales of Moscow told by Petruševskaja and Pelevin are stories about strangers, strange fantasies or of estrange-

ment. One of the striking features of these contemporary urban narratives is the use of foreigners, immigrants to Moscow, children, or elements of children's literature genres (horror tales, and wonder tales). Furthermore, there is a strong tendency to depict poverty and violence (in such narratives as "The Time: Night", "Little Sorceress", "The Clay Machine-Gun", "The Ninth Dream of Vera Pavlovna", for example). Raban's "Soft City" offers a useful explanation of this predominantly urban phenomenon, pointing to the interconnectedness between poverty and violence inasmuch as both relate to people's attitudes towards strangers: "If a city can estrange you from yourself, how much more powerful can it detach you from the lives of other people, and how deeply immersed you become in the inaccessibly private community of your own head" (Raban 1974, 2). It can be argued that Petruševskaja's story "Little Groznaja" is a prime example of such an act of alienation. It is an allegorical depiction of the disentegration of the urban utopia: if in ancient times and in the middle ages cities were built to protect their citizens from strangers and foreigners, in modern and postmodern times the grammar of modern life has changed dramatically. City architecture exemplifies the absolute strangeness of city life, triggering newcomers to abandon hope of holding on to their old values and their old symbolic language. Petruševskaja's Groznaja represents, therefore, a newcomer from the Caucasus, who would not abandon her hope to preserve her world of family values and moral imperatives. This character may be seen as a veiled allusion to Stalin, too, who withdrew from the city into his own fantasy world.

Given Raban's explanation that the postmodern city is soft, amenable to a dazzling and libidinous variety of lives, dreams, interpretations, it becomes possible to detect a tendency in Petruševskaja's and Pelevin's narratives to explore the very plastic qualities of post-Soviet Moscow. They see it as the city that liberates human identity but at the same time as a space vulnerable to psychosis and totalitarian nightmare, suggesting thereby in the style of Plato that the city's discontinuity favours both instant villains and heroes. It might bring to the fore the displaced subject's violent, sub-realist expression of his panic, his envy and his hatred for strangers. In this respect, Petruševskaja's protagonist in "Little Groznaja" may be seen as a protector of the Platonist/Stalinist ideal of space which represents the human ideal of reasoning and order. Her other protagonist Anna (who appears in her novel "Time: Night") also functions as the protector of her own highly organised Moscow space which she perceives as being threatened by immigrants (whom she sarcastically labels as representatives of the Whole Russia) and chaos from the outside world. In other words, Petruševskaja and Pelevin also represent Moscow as the embodiment of hope which turned into a pursued dream, wanting and destructive.

As Petersburg did in nineteenth-century Russian literature, Moscow acquired a new image and meaning in the works under discussion here. It is a vibrant and dynamic city, not a grandmother admired by Gogol' or Puškin, not an embodiment of eternal Holy Russia (portrayed by Cvetaeva in a cycle "Poems about Moscow"), but a city of intense theatricality and of a vast anonymity, where it is possible to abandon people, be they the poor, the minorities, or the immigrants. Petruševskaja and Pelevin present the city as melodrama, a reminder of lost paradise, spoiled by rapid modernisation and industrialisation. Theatres, TV personalities, prostitutes, poets, singers act in their narratives as signs of modernity. The city space is a totalising space which inspires people to act, to put themselves on show and to imitate. The image of urban everyday life mocks Plato's utopian vision of a socially engineered public space cherished by Stalin. (Plato objected to drama, because it corrupts the actor, seeing imitation as a major vice to be stamped out of the city.) The urban inhabitants portrayed by Petruševskaja and Pelevin have all the qualities of the lowest sort of actor ready to imitate anything, any part he/she offered, of unique goodness and unique evil, as symbolised by Val'ka Valkyrie and Barbie Maša. The narrators present themselves as estranged newcomers who experience both amazement and horror when entering city life. Their narrators cultivate child-like qualities since any newcomer must be stripped of his/her past in order to appear innocent of everything except a humbling consciousness of his/her own innocence and vulnerability. Petruševskaja and Pelevin use such characters to expose the theatricality of the city that they see as a collection of images and a rich source of textuality shaped by the post-Soviet mass media. They deconstruct the various meanings of Moscow in order to underpin unnamed, maternal space ("chora") hidden in between its various layers of meaning.

Taking account of Viktor Šklovskij's examination of estrangement in the context of the literature of the Enlightenment, it is possible to trace a similar ideological impulse in the works of Petruševskaja and Pelevin to relate space to the ontological gesture of expanding knowledge. Their images of the void suggest that their aestheticising becomes the object of their writing, leading to the predominance of the oxymoron. From the semantic point of view, the oxymoron produces an empty reference, because it is based on two meanings which exclude each other. The object of such an oxymoronic discourse exists only as a verbal expression, lacking the object to which it should refer[3]. Such a discourse is lacking an object of reference as something which corresponds to real life. In other words,

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[3] Thus, for example, Pelevin's novel "Čapaev i Pustota" is impicitly oxymoronic: its title can be read as Čapaev and the void, representing history and anti-history (i.e. a denial of history).

the anti-mimetic discourse of Petruševskaja's and Pelevin's fiction leads to an interesting paradox: they inscribe a Moscow into the text which does not exist as a totalising space any more. It is a product of their fantasy and a cultural construct. In their attempts to inscribe Moscow they could be compared to Čexov's three sisters who are estranged from their immediate environment and get caught in the void, never to reach their desired destination. The question of estrangement that possesses aesthetic potential, has been discussed in the writings of Mixail Baxtin, who explains outsideness as the possibility to finalise an event. In Baxtin's view, the writer's work takes place on a boundary between one self and another, which gives a form to inner life from outside, from another consciousness: "To find an essential approach to life from outside – this is the task an artist must accomplish" (Baxtin in Emerson 1997, 211). Caryl Emerson links this presumption to the fact that the Russian sense of tradition is inclusive: "It liberates the artist from the burdensome mandate to create continually new content and form, and thus from the need to destroy tradition in order to find one's own voice" (Emerson 1997, 212). In light of Baxtin's rejection of the aesthetic of escapism and hedonism that views the philosophy of 'art for art's sake' as a dead end which leads to creative crisis, it could be fruitful to use Baxtin's philosophy of the individual conscious act as having implications for the narratives discussed here. Baxtin suggests that only by means of an individual act could the given individual become an author of his/her own life, starting to resemble a work of art. As Emerson notes, "In his view, aesthetic or art-generating activity is distinguished from other activity in our everyday lives (practical tasks, business, dreams, games, and fantasy) by one overwhelming factor: the presence of a spectator, an outsider" (Emerson 1997, 216f.). Baxtin warns, however, of a crisis of authorship which derives from escapism into aesthetics. He offers instead a new model of the author who reconciles himself/herself with dialogue, which Emerson defines as a cautiously interactive model (Emerson 1997, 219). This is precisely what Petruševskaja and Pelevin are trying to achieve, by engaging in continuous interaction with a multi-voiced Moscow. They are not writers in exile in the style of Pasternak or Bulgakov any more, they are liberated reporters of everyday life of the city they belong to, trying to make sense out of reality through images of the 'soft' city they can control and test.

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