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Cognitive Counterparts: The Literature of Eastern Europe's Volatile Political Times, 1917-2017

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Teresa Constance Kuruc

Committee in charge:

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2018

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University of California San Diego

2018

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, my sister and brothers, and Scott for providing for

me in every way during this process.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this dissertation would not have been possible without my committee – Steven Cassedy, Sal Nicolazzo, Patrick Patterson, and William O'Brien – who generously offered their time and insights. My advisor, Amelia Glaser, has pushed me to become a more critical thinker and has helped me to find my scholarly voice. Amelia, I cannot thank you enough for your kind and patient guidance.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cognitive Counterparts: The Literature of Eastern Europe's Volatile Political Times, 1917-2017

by

Teresa Constance Kuruc

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California San Diego, 2018

Professor Amelia Glaser, Chair

Intense moments of political and ideological change in Eastern Europe – namely the Russian Revolution, interwar nation-building movements, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent rise of nationalist populism – presented people with a difficult choice: to cling to historical perspectives or to wholly embrace a new ideology. Writers from these periods of change often are defined by how their aesthetic choices either supported or rejected political and ideological movements. From our vantage point in 2018, we believe that we clearly understand which movements succeeded and failed and, as a result, we categorize associated writers as protagonists or antagonists, progressive thinkers or inhabitants of the wrong side of history. But

these binaries influence the construction of narratives that mask all the critical contingencies of everyday life. Accordingly, this dissertation asks how literature from these volatile times offers ways of resolving the divisions between political and ideological changes, as abstract notions, and the tangible quotidian experience of them. Through an examination of literary case studies from the aforementioned periods in Eastern Europe, I identify an aesthetics of cognitive flexibility, which illuminates the cognitive counterpart, a concept that claims that each term, idea, and individual identity involved in political and ideological change has a necessary other, without which whole and ethical everyday life cannot happen. The four case studies that constitute this dissertation suggest that both within and among individuals is a constant effort to achieve cohesion between one experience and another, one worldview and another, one truth and another, and even between success and failure. The cognitive counterpart supports a nuanced understanding of fossilized perceptions of revolutionaries, nationalists, and dissidents by arguing that, in the context of ordinary life, these categories are rarely so absolute and one-sided as the bureaucratic mechanisms that support or contest them would claim. Reading with an eye for cognitive counterparts uncovers a way literary aesthetics are manifested in quotidian life, not as a symbolic vessel of an abstract idea but as a real-world vehicle for the empathetic and ethical implementation of political change.

Introduction –

Counterparts: Keys to Negotiating Tension

In 1915 Russia had been fighting in World War I for about a year. Talk of socialist

revolution had been simmering since Bloody Sunday and the strikes and protests of 1905 had

destabilized Romanov rule.[1] During that year, art collector, Madame Natalya Dobychina, hosted

0,10 The Last Exhibition of Futurist Paintings in her parlor gallery on the first floor of Adamini

House in St. Petersburg. The setting itself is indicative of the tension between past and future,

tradition and impending political and ideological change. On one hand, Adamini House is solidly

situated in the realm of traditional Russian political symbolism. It stands near the Field of Mars,

a large square in central St. Petersburg, which is the site of official military parades, and is

located not far from critical historic monuments like The Bronze Horseman, the famous statue of

Peter the Great. On the other hand, in 1915, Adamini House was linked to a sense that significant

change was at hand. Dobychina lived in an apartment on the second floor of Adamini House,

which had been the lodging of significant Russian cultural figures like Alexander Pushkin, who

by then was canonized as the father of the Russian literary language. But she hosted avant-garde

artists, such as Vsevolod Meyerhold and Vladimir Mayakovsky, who wanted to overcome

Russia's cultural past with a completely new way of seeing.[2] Her gallery was full of seemingly

conflicting ideas: modern art abutted Russian tradition, and political symbolism crept into

ordinary home life. At the same time, it is representative of what this dissertation calls cognitive

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[1] In 1905, a Russian Orthodox priest named Georgy Gapon led a peaceful procession of workers to present Tsar Nicholas II with a petition that asked for better working conditions. The Tsar's guard fired upon the crowd, killing hundreds. The event, known as Bloody Sunday, was a part of a number of strikes and uprisings in St. Petersburg that led the Tsar to institute the Duma (parliament) and accept a constitutional monarchy. In reality, the Duma did not allow for any greater rule by the people.
[2] Linda Boersma, *0,10: The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting,* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1994), 34.

counterparts – the necessary others to a term, an idea, or an identity, without which a project, a work of art, or a being is incomplete. The negotiation of the tension between cognitive counterparts, such as historical tradition and elements of modernity, was critical to the realization of the *0,10* exhibition.

At *0,10,* two artists who would be key players in the socialist life-building movement that followed the 1917 Russian Revolution, Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin, handled this convergence of opposites in ways that exemplify two understandings of how political and ideological change should work. Both artists displayed their works in the corners of Dobychina's gallery, a meaningful space for most Russian people: the right-hand corner of any Russian Orthodox home, the holy corner (krasnyi ugol), is the designated area for icon veneration and, therefore, is synonymous with Russian tradition and authority. The pamphlet that accompanied Malevich's famous painting, *The Black Square,* explained that the holy corner is the only "path to perfection."[3] Thus, the placement of the painting suggests that Malevich sought equal reverence and veneration for his new Suprematist philosophy of art, which defined a pure art form that could overcome reality and bring the viewer to a new plane of experience. *The Black Square,* as a demonstration of Suprematism, appropriated the significance of the holy corner and then cloaked the tradition behind it with a new idea; Malevich literally used his painting to cover the holy corner. In contrast, Tatlin's corner counter-relief employed the physics of the holy corner instead of obscuring the space. Tatlin's piece was a sculpture made of found materials from modern industrial locations like factories and shipyards. True to his philosophy of faktura, which argued that an artist should strive to discover the potential inherent in the inner makeup of

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[3] Ibid., 69.

artistic materials, Tatlin did not manipulate his materials.[4] Instead, he used their natural strengths

and differences to allow them to support each other: pieces of wood, metal, and glass

interlocked, and wire cables attached to one end of the corner and stretched to the other. Indeed,

as Sergei Isakov observed in his review of the exhibition, "It is obvious to anyone that [Tatlin's

corner counter-reliefs] are the results of some serious, thought consuming effort to resolve an

extraordinarily difficult problem: material and tension…"[5] For Tatlin, the holy corner and the

materials of the modern world were counterparts, each necessary to support the other and to

uphold the physical integrity of the complete work of art. Therefore, while Malevich's work

demonstrated a manipulation of a past tradition in the service of change, Tatlin's was integrative.

He attempted to elicit a new understanding of the world by employing key qualities of the

opposing poles involved in his work of art. Metaphorically, in the corner counter-relief, past and

future, tradition and the changes of modernity, were not dichotomous entities that could obscure

or overcome each other but were essential parts of the same whole.

The material counterparts of Tatlin's corner counter-relief are inspiration for this

dissertation, which claims that the literature of volatile political times in 20th century Eastern

Europe illustrates cognitive counterparts that are necessary to resolve political and ideological

tensions in everyday life. Intense moments of change, such as the Russian Revolution, the

Czechoslovak interwar nation-building movement, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the rise of

nationalist populism in post-Maidan Revolution Ukraine, presented ordinary people as well as

significant cultural figures with a difficult choice: to cling to a historical perspective or to wholly

embrace a new ideology. Writers from these periods of change often are defined by how their

aesthetic choices either supported or rejected political and ideological movements, and so they

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[4] John Milner, *Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 44.
[5] Quoted in Boersma, 66.

are relegated to categories like protagonist or antagonist, progressive thinker or inhabitant of the wrong side of history. These binaries influence how we in 2018 think about the 20th century through what historian Tony Judt calls a "strikingly selective" process of memorialization.[6] Specific groups strategically choose heroes, villains, and incidences of suffering in order to construct narratives about the past that show us either which great ideas triumphed or, perhaps more importantly, which failed ideas to avoid. But these narratives create fractures between people and in our understanding of the ideas themselves because, similar to how Malevich's *Black Square* cloaked the tradition of the holy corner*,* they attempt to mask a past that seems to have failed with a future that ostensibly has moved on from 20th century mistakes. These fractures led Judt to ask how historical narratives might be reassessed for new lessons that go beyond what *not* to do in the future.[7]

The notion of cognitive counterparts is a useful vehicle for these new lessons, as it offers a way to resolve the tension between political and ideological change, as an abstract idea, and the actual lived experience of it. This concept proposes that both within and among individuals is a constant effort to achieve cohesion between one experience and another, one worldview and another, one truth and another, and even between success and failure. This investigation of literary deployments of cognitive counterparts offers nuanced understandings of fossilized perceptions of revolutionaries, nationalists, and dissidents by arguing that, in the lives of ordinary people, these categories are rarely so absolute and one-sided as the bureaucratic mechanisms that support or contest them would claim. Reading with an eye for cognitive counterparts uncovers a way literary aesthetics aimed to affect quotidian life in Eastern Europe,

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[6] Tony Judt, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), 2.
[7] Ibid., 22.

not as a symbolic vessel of an abstract idea but as a real-world vehicle for the empathetic and ethical implementation of political change.

The term *counterpart* allows this dissertation to offer a new perspective on scholarly challenges to the hero/villain, dissident/political loyalist, or successful/failed binary models associated with the abovementioned periods in Eastern Europe. Existing literature has provided nuanced understandings of these binaries in the context of the evolution of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union and of nationalist art in interwar Eastern Europe, both of which can be categorized as life-building aesthetic movements. Katerina Clark's groundbreaking book, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (1981), first suggested that freer folk and avant-garde aesthetic practices and the rigid, official Soviet aesthetic of Socialist Realism are not as disparate as scholars had believed. Clark's argument, which traces aspects of Socialist Realism to Russian folklore and early revolutionary art, complicates the idea that a Soviet artist who abided by Socialist Realism must necessarily have been devoid of the aesthetic talents normally associated with creative modern art. Boris Groys draws a similar connection, arguing in *The Total Art of Stalinism* (1992) that the roots of the authoritarian Stalinist bureaucratic mechanism that governed art production throughout the Soviet period actually lie in what is considered to be the hopeful and relatively democratic early 20th century avant-garde life-building aesthetic mission. Susan Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (2000) recasts the post-Cold War model of a victorious West and a vanquished Soviet Union by asserting that instead of a conflict between very clear capitalist and socialist powers, there was a "constellation of powers" that evolved together, sometimes sharing tactics, goals, and even mistakes. Meanwhile, anthropologist, Alexei Yurchak, investigates the idea of life-building in quotidian rather than aesthetic terms. In *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (2005), Yurchak

complicates the notion of categorically good and bad historical figures – political dissidents versus Communist Party activists in his context – by arguing that a quality of performativity developed in post-Stalinist Soviet bureaucratic life, opening the door for Soviet people to technically follow protocol while being able to maintain normal, apolitical, or at least non-bureaucratic lives.

Other scholars have observed psychological approaches to avoiding the binaries associated with political change. For example, Boris Paloff employs the term "intermediacy" to describe a metaphysical category, created in works by Czech author, Karel Čapek, and Polish author, Bruno Schulz, which could mitigate the traumas of the tumultuous interwar period in Eastern Europe. Likewise, in his dissertation on the life of Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, Radoslav Borislavov discusses a "game of brinksmanship," or a state of moving back-and-forth between ideological categories, to define how Shklovsky survived attacks by Soviet literary critics and – worse – arrest, exile, and execution.[8] While each of these works suggest the avoidance of opposite ideological poles, Masha Gessen's 2017 book, *The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia,* examines the unconscious adoption of two poles, namely a rigidly authoritarian government along with liberal political ideals. Throughout her writing, Gessen returns to the theme of Orwellian doublethink: "To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold

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[8] See: Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000); Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (London, New York: Verso, 2011); Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass., London: The MIT Press, 2000); Benjamin Paloff, *Intermediacy: A Poetics of Unfreedom in Interwar Russian, Polish, and Czech Literatures,* PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2008; Radoslav Borislavov, *Viktor Shklovskii – Between Art and Life*, PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 2011.

simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out…"[9] She uses this idea to explain how former-Soviet citizens could simultaneously be aware of the atrocities the government commits against its people and vehemently believe in the ideology that same government espouses.

A common thread in these works is that ordinary people made difficult choices in order to carry on normal lives on the periphery of monolithic and seemingly immutable bureaucratic systems. This is precisely the point at which this dissertation diverges. Rather than considering depictions of life under these already-existing systems, it focuses on case studies that seek to guide evolving political and ideological change in humane and ethical directions. These works about the Russian Revolution, the Czechoslovak interwar nation-building movement, the fall of the Soviet Union, and rising nationalist populism in Ukraine share an aesthetic of cognitive flexibility that allows for the integration of cognitive counterparts, the necessary others to the ideas that drove each movement. In contrast to "intermediacy," "brinksmanship," and "doublethink," the counterparts these writers model do not avoid or ignore disparities or cancel each other out. Rather, by definition, they are essential to each other in order to bring about ethical political change.

Hallmarks of modern literary theory, especially in Eastern Europe, are the ideas of flexibility and negotiating tension. In the early 20th century, literary theorists grappled with mediating the fissures between form and content, perception and reality, the past and the future, and art and life, and produced useful tools for evaluating the function of literature in the context of political and ideological change. To this end, the Russian Formalists and the Prague Structuralists established that the foundation of modernist poetics is the laying bare of literary devices in order to elicit new ways of understanding the world. Viktor Shklovsky's theory of

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[9] Masha Gessen, *The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 63.

ostranenie, often translated as defamiliarization or estrangement, posits that the purpose of art is to complicate our process of perception, forcing us to "see the seeing" as we behold an object and, as a result, revealing new truths in what we perceive.[10] The encouragement of heightened perception aligns with another critical modernist theory that Russian Formalist, Yuri Tynianov, explains in his essay "On Literary Evolution" ("O Literaturnoi Evoliutsii," 1927) – that the meaning of historical forms is consonant with the literary systems in which a writer applies them.[11] Both of these theories argue that a past form, even one that is usable in a new era, can never mean the same thing twice; the circumstances of our "seeing the seeing," just like changing literary systems, always alter our views of the world. In this sense, these theories also suggest that modern art and literature maintain a quality of contemporaneity and flexibility in that they encourage audiences to continuously strive to understand their changing environments. This process, of course, includes negotiating the tensions between opposing ideas.

On the one hand, new ways of seeing and understanding certainly serve political change because they open one to accepting different ways of thinking. On the other hand, though, the new values tend to separate people from each other, or perhaps new values appropriate and obscure the old ones. In this regard, it is fitting that estrangement, which signifies the distancing effect that art has on its audiences, is one of the most commonly cited terms of modernist literary theory. The possible corollary is that the modernist literature that arose alongside the political changes of the early 20th century increased or reinforced the gaps between the new ideas that were defining the world and the everyday experiences of them. Galin Tikhanov articulates this phenomenon in his essay, "Why did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Eastern Europe (and

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[10] Renate Lachmann, *Memory and Literature: Intertextuality in Russian Modernism,* trans. Roy Sellars and Anthony Wall, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 11.
[11] Yuri Tynianov, "O Literaturnoi Evolutsii," in *Arkhaisti i Novatory* (1927), (Munchen: Wilhelm Fink, 1967), 34.

Why is it Now Dead)?" Tikhanov bases his argument on the ethical chaos resulting from the political changes that arose in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century, pointing out that it is impossible to ignore the effects that revolution and the creation of new nation-states had on the literature of the time. He claims, "Modern literary theory developed at the intersection between national enthusiasms and a cultural cosmopolitanism that transcended local encapsulation and monoglossia."[12] The nascent states and political systems in Eastern Europe attempted to define themselves according to ideas that often were based on pasts that fueled neo-Romantic ethnic pride. Yet because the definitions of these cultures had in historical actuality been very fuzzy – these new states existed somewhere between more dominant German and Russian cultures – writers and intellectuals were unable to rely on their own philosophical systems to understand political and ideological transformations. According to Tikhanov, the only way for these figures to make sense of them was to step outside their perceived identities, defined by "local encapsulation and monoglossia," and to focus on the examination of abstract and universal literary laws. Thus, modern literary theory exists precisely because of estrangement and distancing.[13]

Indeed, scholarship that aims to explain how literature addresses the individual experience of political change often uses modern literary theory to highlight the gaps between these two entities. A relevant example is in Cristina Vatulescu's study, *Police Aesthetics* (2005), which observes that authoritarian state police institutions of Eastern Europe, products – whether intended or not – of the great idea of Marxism-Leninism, appropriated literary estrangement techniques. Vatulescu analyzes seminal works of Soviet literature, comparing them to contemporaneous secret police files, in order to identify how estrangement functioned in an

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[12] Galin Tikhanov, "Why did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why is it Now Dead?)," *Common Knowledge*, 10:1, 2004: 67.
[13] Ibid., 71.

official context. For example, police apparatuses employed language akin to the off-kilter descriptions of foreign characters in Mikhail Bulgakov's novel, *Master and Margarita,* which he wrote during the height of Stalin's purges in the 1930s. This tool of literary estrangement, Vatulescu argues, served to distance supposed enemies of the state from those who embodied the great socialist idea.[14] Yet focusing solely on the distancing effect of modern literary theory is problematic because the theory arose at the same time as the ideas that were supposed to unite people around political change. After all, how could these changes have come to be if everyone distanced themselves or engaged with them only abstractly? Moreover, many of the figures who developed these very literary theories – the Russian Futurists and Formalists, for example – were tightly connected to the political changes of their times. Bearing this connection in mind, this dissertation suggests that modernist literature in Eastern Europe does not simply stop after illustrating the distance between the ideas that foment political change and the way people experience it. Rather, it also demonstrates how to reconnect these entities. The notion of cognitive counterparts is critical to illustrating this process.

To make this point, I focus specifically on novels from periods of political and ideological change. Critics have theorized the novel as the site of modern literary innovation, defying historical literary categories and expected applications of historical literary forms. Moreover, as Milan Kundera argues in *The Art of the Novel,* significant political, ideological, and cultural movements, like Marxism, were being worked out in novels long before they were a part of official bureaucratic discourse.[15] This makes the novel a valuable medium for discussing the possible alternatives to how political and ideological changes develop. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) work is particularly useful to my argument because his theories of the novel highlight the

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[14] Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 76.
[15] Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel,* trans. Linda Asher (New York: Perennial, 2003), 32.

role of the quotidian in literature and the drive to unify the world, as we perceive it, with the essential or true nature of the world.[16] Because of qualities like these, Bakhtin's theories are integrative, ultimately pointing out that counterparts – be they ideas or people – must be linked somehow in order to create cohesive wholes.

Bakhtin defines the novel as a phenomenon of modernity, a literary illustration of how the identity of a modern individual is formed. For him, the conditions of incompleteness and indeterminateness (nesovershimost') distinguish both the novel and its characters from the types of literature and literary heroes of the pre-modern era. These categories maintain what Bakhtin identifies as "the zone of maximal contact with the present," which is to say that they link a novel to its readers' contemporary reality, no matter their temporal or spatial distance from the novel's content.[17] Consequently, the novel and its heroes are not fixed in structure or meaning but are always in a process of becoming. They document not only the progress of time but also the evolution of ideas, a point that appears in Bakhtin's *Discourse in the Novel* (1935). Here, he argues that the study of literature cannot rely strictly on abstract and fixed formal and ideological doctrines because language itself is a vast, multifaceted, and ever changing system. Bakhtin suggests that no living word relates to its object in a singular way because:

> Between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that is often difficult to penetrate. It is precisely in the process of living interaction with this specific environment that the word may be individualized and given stylistic shape.[18]

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[16] See Gary Saul Morson, "Prosaic Bakhtin: Landmarks, Anti-Intelligensialism, and the Russian Countertradition," in *Bakhtin in Contexts Across the Disciplines*, ed. Amy Mandelker, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

[17] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Epic and Novel* (1941), in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 11.

[18] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel* (1935), in *The Dialogic Imagination,* 276.

From Bakhtin's assertion about a word's incompleteness without its alien other, we can extrapolate that any great idea, expressed through political and ideological discourse, has the same requirement – the necessary integration of its counterpart. This notion also applies to bridging the gaps among people. In *The Problems of Dostoyevsky's Creation* (*Problemy Tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*, 1929), Bakhtin defines the polyphonic novel, whose hero fashions his or her own character through constant dialogue with others. In this type of novel, there is no absolute authorial voice; rather, characters are self-aware beings, whose material worlds and inner others ("you" or "you all") continuously build and amend their identities. What interests Dostoyevsky, Bakhtin argues, is not *who* the hero is but *how* he is. This focus defies monologism – even in terms of a national soul or an essential understanding of history – because "how?" is a question of process and of the present, while "who?" supposes a fixed quality or character.[19]

The necessity of counterparts to a whole is most clearly defined in *The Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* (1923), in which Bakhtin explains the concept of the aesthetic event. Bakhtin scholar, Michael Holquist, highlights the significance of the term "event" – "sobytie" in Russian – which in literal translation is a "co-being."[20] That is to say that any entity is not complete on its own. Its ability to become whole is predicated upon its integration with its counterpart, an other that resides on a simultaneous but disconnected plane. In order to make a connection to that other, the entity must leave its own plane and have an experience from the perspective of the other plane. This move, which Bakhtin calls outsideness (vnenakhodimost')*,* illuminates the discrepancies between the two planes, and the entity's return to its original plane and integration of the new knowledge it obtained consummates the aesthetic event, creating new

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[19] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problemy Tvorchestva Dostoevskogo (1929),* (Kiev: Firm "Next", 1994), 67.
[20] Michael Holquist, *Dialogism*: *Bakhtin and his World*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 116.

whole.[21] Thus, Bakhtin's concept of the aesthetic event is a useful theoretical foundation for understanding the role of cognitive counterparts in this dissertation's case studies. The link between opposing poles of political and ideological change is not a one-way relationship, where a single idea, experience, or worldview must overcome or cancel out others. Instead, opposing beliefs, experiences, and worldviews must converge in order for the change to happen humanely. After all, Bakhtin suggests that the aesthetic event, which consummates authors' and heroes' identities, is an ethical event.[22]

Each chapter of this dissertation identifies how writers illuminate the existence of counterparts to ideas that were critical to political and ideological change in their times. In every case study, the writers imply that integrating these necessary others in everyday life will recalibrate the course of volatile political moments. Chapter One analyzes Viktor Shklovsky's novel, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922,* in which he recounts his experiences as a soldier, writer, and political exile during the Russian Revolution. At this moment of intense change, the Bolsheviks upheld the Marxist tenet that "being determines consciousness," while at the same time using propaganda to alter people's consciousness. Through objects imbued with sentimental value – agitprop trains – the Bolsheviks tried to directly transmit effusive revolutionary enthusiasm to Russian people. Their mission suggested that the material experience of the revolution was inherently positive, as it was sure to lead to a bright socialist future. Shklovsky's defamiliarization of train travel, on the other hand, recasts the sentimental object as a means for ordinary people to reclaim their direct and authentic experiences of the revolution and, therefore, to resist the propagandistic manipulation of their emotions.

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[21] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin,* trans. Vadim Liapunov, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).
[22] Holquist, 116.

Furthermore, he suggests that this authentic experience can inspire a reconfiguration of the revolution's trajectory in a more humane direction. Thus, Shklovsky's deployment of a defamiliarizing sentimentality illuminates cognitive counterparts to the revolution: that being determines consciousness, but also consciousness determines being. The novel is a case study in how to neutralize the cognitive effects of propaganda and obtain control of political and ideological change.

Chapter Two examines an aesthetic answer to the "Czech question" (česká otazka), which was a critical factor in the development of a new Czechoslovak culture during the tumultuous interwar period. This question pitted opposing political ideologies against each other in the search for a definition of Czechoslovakia's future as a nation-state: Should a specifically Czech nationalism decide what Czechoslovakia's political and cultural systems look like, or should the state adopt a relativistic system that passively tolerates the diverse ethnicities, languages, religions, and political stances that exist in the Czechoslovak lands? Karel Čapek's 1934 novel, *An Ordinary Life,* addresses the Czech question on the level of an ordinary individual who initially believes himself to be a stereotypically Czech man. Through a process of reevaluating his personal history, the man comes to find that he is in reality a conglomeration of diverse identities that have facilitated important interpersonal connections throughout his life. *An Ordinary Life* demonstrates the integration of two counterparts – the one and the many – which in the larger context of interwar Czechoslovakia are linked to the counterparts of nationalism and relativism. Thus, I argue that in *An Ordinary Life,* Čapek – who is alternately lauded and criticized either for being too fervid a Czech nationalist or for being a feeble and indecisive relativist – defines a vision of an ethical Czechoslovak nationalism through an aesthetic of

nationalist-relativism. His integration of these seeming opposites encourages individuals to constantly reevaluate their identities in order to maintain necessary human connections.

While the first two chapters investigate the institution of two critical political and ideological changes in early 20th century Eastern Europe, the last two address contemporary literature that explores what happens when great ideas that fomented these changes crumble. As the 20th century drew to a close, the Soviet Union fell, and democracies solidified themselves in Eastern European countries. Difficult and sometimes tragic experiences of capitalism and liberalism resulted in a longing for old, familiar ideas like nationalism and socialism. As modernist literary theory argues, though, the meaning of forms and ideas that were used once in the past cannot be the same when they are applied in the present. Accordingly, Chapters Three and Four discuss how the memory of significant political changes and associated ideologies affects the present-day. Will political change cling to its old form, shaping people's lives according to the past, or might it be rewritten according to its new circumstances?

Chapter Three focuses on the end of socialism in Eastern Europe and the beginning of capitalist democracy. Specifically, it addresses the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, which often is considered to have heralded the downfall of the Soviet Union. Historical documents from this period highlight empirical evidence of the political, intellectual, and humanitarian failings of socialism, thereby crowning Western-style capitalism as the victor in the race among the 20th century's great ideologies. But Nobel Prize-winning Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl: A Chronicle of the Future* challenges the nature of the historical document as hard, indisputable fact and redefines it as a living and changing entity. A pastiche of carefully curated interviews with thousands of Chernobyl survivors, *Voices from Chernobyl* reclaims the life-building mission associated with early Russian revolutionary artists: to

democratize art by turning ordinary people into artists, thereby bringing the dream of communism closer to the real world. Therefore, I argue that Alexievich, who currently is considered an enemy by the Russian state, adds nuance to the nature of dissidence in the late and post-Soviet periods by integrating two contemporary cognitive counterparts – anti-totalitarianism and socialism. Her work suggests that, in ordinary life, living contentedly in socialism need not be defined by an official bureaucratic idea.

Finally, Chapter Four tackles the question of whether or not present circumstances warrant the return to old ideologies and examines ethical implications of selectively using the past in an effort to find an answer. This question is especially pertinent in Ukraine. After the 2014 Maidan Revolution that overthrew the Russia-leaning government of Viktor Yanukovich, the nation seems to be divided between two camps: conservative, Soviet-era socialism and Ukrainian nationalism that looks toward Western-style liberal, capitalist democracies. Both of these camps rely on strategically chosen memories of the 20th century's most significant political and ideological changes, and they suffer from the associated good/evil and successful/failed binaries. However, writer, musician, and activist Serhiy Zhadan takes a unique stance in the debate over these memories, asserting that neither is inherently correct but both are necessary to unifying the people of Ukraine. Zhadan's 2010 novel, *Voroshilovgrad,* addresses this issue via the memories of characters who live in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands – namely Luhansk – where the effects of conflicting past ideologies are currently most tangibly felt in everyday life. I argue that in *Voroshilovgrad* Zhadan offers an ethics of memory that is based on understanding friendship, which is to say it prizes people over ideologies. According to Hannah Arendt's definition, a friend is one who is inherently different from you and yet is necessary to your

ability to live as a fully free human.[23] Thus, friendship is perhaps the clearest and most tangible

example of the integration of cognitive counterparts. In Zhadan's work, those who identify as

Ukrainian and those who consider themselves to be Russian/Soviet are necessary others for the

ethical formation of the modern Ukrainian nation.

The writers of each of these case studies are critical intellectual figures of periods of

unrest in Eastern Europe. As historian Timothy Snyder observes, the cultural stature of figures

like these makes assigning them to one of the binary categories with which we judge 20th century

history both easy and necessary. After all, their decisions and opinions are so closely linked to

the great ideas that fueled political and ideological change.[24] Of course, making a choice,

adopting a stance, and then dealing with its ethical implications was unavoidable for anybody

during periods like the Russian Revolution, interwar nation-building movements, the fall of the

Soviet Union, and the return of nationalist populism in Eastern Europe. But this is precisely what

allows this dissertation to contribute to our understanding of how literature functions in the real

world. That these key cultural figures address the cognitive counterparts to political or

ideological movements in terms of how they manifest in everyday experience means that they

put the power to make ethical decisions and, therefore, to direct the trajectory of impending

change into the hands of ordinary individuals. Reading with an eye for cognitive counterparts

reasserts the importance of quotidian life in volatile political times.

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[23] Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing" (1959), trans. Clara and
Richard Winston, in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1968), 9-12.
[24] Quoted in Tony Judt, *Thinking in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), 228.

Chapter One –

An Unsentimental Journey: Ostranenie and Perceiving Political Change

> I am only a falling stone. A stone that falls and can, at the same time, light a
> lantern to observe its own course.
>
> (Ya tol'ko padaiushchii kamen'. Kamen', kotoryi padaet i mozhet v to zhe vremia
> zazhech' fonar', chtoby nabliudat' svoi put'.)
>
> The Bolsheviks believed it's the design that matters, not the building
> material…it's easy to see how the Bolsheviks made the mistake of mapping out a
> plan for the whole world on paper.
>
> (Bol'sheviki verili, chto material ne vazhen, vazhno oformlenie…Proektsiia mira
> na bumage ne sluchainaia oshibka bol'shevikov.)
>
> Viktor Shklovsky[1]

During the early days of the Russian Revolution, the People's Commissar of War, Leon

Trotsky, journeyed across the front and the Russian countryside spreading revolutionary

enlightenment. His primary mode of transportation, which came to be known as "Trotsky's

Train," was part of an official program of agitation and propaganda (agitprop). It was equipped

with all means of propaganda production including printing presses, radios, and newsreels, and it

carried a "mystical significance"[2] that was critical to the people's adoption of a Marxist-Leninist

ideology defined by the notion that "being determines consciousness."[3] Trotsky and his men

looked authoritative and strong, dressing in long black leather coats with large metal badges and

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[1] Viktor Shklovsky, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs 1917-1922,* trans. Richard Sheldon, (Champaign,
Dublin, London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2004), 133, 188; *Sentimental'noe Puteshesvie: vospominaniia
1917-1922,* (Moskva, Berlin: Kinoizdatel'stvo Gelikon, 1923), 187, 266.
[2] Rex Winsbury, "Trotsky's War Train," *History Today,* Vol. 25, 1975: 524.
[3] In *The German Ideology,* Marx argues, "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by
life." This concept was a fundamental tenet of the evolving Russian socialist culture. See Karl Marx, *A
Critique of the German Ideology,*
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf, accessed on
8/22/17.

tall black boots. Titles of articles in the train's newspaper, *On the Way* (*V Puti*), were concise and conclusive – "Soviet Power" and "Revolution in Austria is inevitable" – and the speeches Trotsky made from his train contained similarly definitive slogans. In a 1919 address to the 3rd Army's Revolutionary Military Council, Trotsky exclaims that "communists can have no doubts or hesitations; there can be for them no looking back, no indulgence in criticism, but one slogan only: Forward!" Indeed this notion that the revolution was inexorably pushing forward had proof in Trotsky's Train; while other trains suffered the usual consequences of war – wrecks, explosions, and looting – Trotsky's appeared to have no natural obstacles.[4] The train became a sentimental object, meaning that in its presence people obtained effusive enthusiasm for the revolution.

When Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984) went to the front in 1917, he was assigned to a Provisional Government army propaganda committee and was tasked with increasing the morale of languishing Russian soldiers by giving passionate speeches about the success of the revolution at home. While Shklovsky does not directly name the agitprop program, the settings in his novel, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs 1917-1922* (*Sentimental'noe Puteshesvie: Vospominanie 1917-1922*), indicate that he encountered Trotsky's Train. Historian N.S. Tarkhova observes that the path of Trotsky's Train traces a map of the revolution's front lines. For instance, the train went to Kharkov and visited the army's Nikolaev Division in Ukraine in 1918 and 1919,[5] both places where Shklovsky was serving. Shklovsky's experimentation with the image of trains illustrates a conflict between the outward appearance of the revolution that Trotsky's Train and other agitprop trains assert and the experiences of the ordinary people living through the revolution. In

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[4] N.S. Tarkhova, "Trotsky's Train: an unknown page in the history of the Civil War," in *The Trotsky Reappraisal,* ed. Terry Brotherstone and Paul Dukes, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 33-37.
[5] Ibid., 30.

a scene that depicts the Russian Army's frenzied retreat from German forces in Ukraine, Shklovsky, who was still in critical condition after having been shot in the abdomen, tries to board the last train car out of town. Unlike Trotsky's Train – an image of the revolution that seems be impervious to disaster – this train is packed to the brim with panicked soldiers, is barely able to move, and ultimately breaks down.

This scene highlights a question of perception that was critical both to Shklovsky's developing literary theories and to his understanding of the nature of the revolution. If the notion that being – what we experience – determines consciousness is truly a one-way relationship, then official revolutionary propaganda is dangerous. It manipulates what we see in order to shape our consciousness, and it obscures authentic experience. Shklovsky addresses this issue by challenging the propaganda train's sentimental value through a defamiliarizing version of sentimentality. His deployment of sentimentality is the result of his understanding of his memoir's namesake, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* by Laurence Sterne. Shklovsky uses Sterne in order to work out the relationship between an outer image, which Bolshevik propaganda sought to manipulate, and the experience of its underlying materials and mechanisms. Ultimately, Shklovsky argues that sentimentality inspires a discerning consciousness that understands the true nature of its being and, therefore, has the capacity to reshape its world. Thus, Shklovsky points out the revolution's cognitive counterparts: being determines consciousness, and consciousness also determines being. This reading of *A Sentimental Journey* helps achieve a clearer understanding of the universality of Shklovsky's literary theories, specifically in the context of the developing official Soviet aesthetic, as tools for resisting the bureaucratic manipulation of human emotion in times of political and ideological change.

The key connection between sentimentalism and propaganda – namely the agitprop train that Shklovsky's memoir analyzes – is the potential for direct transmission of emotion. Lynn Festa's study, *Sentimental Figures of Empire,* provides a helpful example of this process. Festa argues that the sentimental mode in literature served to unite the vast British Empire in the 18th century because it enabled citizens to identify others who were part of the same "metropolitan community." To this end, Festa explains how sentimental objects, which had previously only held value in the private sphere, became "sentimental commodities…enclosing in a pretty package a particular emotion we should feel." Thus, the basic purpose of sentimentalism is to allow one person to obtain, though not necessarily to experience, another's feelings.[6] Like Festa, historian Peter Kenez connects the transmission of strong emotion to the solidification of a collective identity. In his analysis of how and why the Soviet Union became a propaganda state, Kenez asserts that the "broadest possible definition of propaganda [is] the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotions, and thereby behavior."[7] Like the sentimental object in Festa's study, propaganda according to Kenez presented a cleanly packaged version of what Soviet citizens should feel. Meanwhile, Miranda Burgess's study of sentimentalism in the context of developing transportation technology is the most clearly linked to the issue of the agitprop train, as it connects physical movement to emotions. Burgess points out that the primary historical definition of transport was "the state of being carried out of oneself…by vehement emotion."[8] The explanations of sentimentality that

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[6] Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2, 69, 81.
[7] Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4.
[8] Miranda Burgess, "Transport: Mobility, Anxiety, and the Romantic Poetics of Feeling," in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 49, No. 2, Nostalgia, Melancholy, Anxiety: Discursive Mobility and the Circulation of Bodies (Summer 2010): 230, 234.

these studies offer suggest that the train, as a vehicle for propaganda in revolutionary Russia, was also an object that could transmit emotion.

The primary difference between the Bolsheviks' use of the sentimental and Shklovsky's is the belief that fully formed feelings can be directly transmitted to people through art versus the assertion that art only facilitates the formation of unique and variable feelings. Here the tension between being determining consciousness and consciousness determining being, which preoccupied Marx in *The German Ideology*, appears again. That art and literature should bestow upon the Russian people appropriate revolutionary feelings that would guide them toward becoming good socialist citizens was a critical idea in the early days of the revolution. Mark Steinberg explains in his study of uniquely Soviet emotions that in Russia's developing socialist society, "The new communist person was expected to do the pubic emotional work required to develop the new communist self." For the Bolsheviks, the application and maintenance of specific revolutionary emotions was a form of social control.[9] The old, negative feelings of Russia's past had to be replaced with new and positive ones, often conveyed in snappy propagandistic slogans like "Great Joy," "Resurrection," and "Justice."[10] Recent studies on the historical significance of Soviet emotions also discuss the superimposition – through bureaucratic discourse – of ideologically correct feelings over authentic feelings that are developed through experience, all with the aim of giving the impression that the peaceful and comfortable socialist future has arrived.[11] The pressure to produce these feelings fell on the

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[9] Mark D. Steinberg, "Emotions History in Eastern Europe," in *Doing Emotions History,* ed. Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 81-82.

[10] Ibid., 86.

[11] Shelia Fitzpatrick points out the ever-present dichotomy between distinct "Soviet" feelings and the feelings based on experiences. Happiness, Fitzpatrick argues, is understood to be transitory and is always coupled with some sense of longing (the almost untranslatable Russian word *toska*). See "Happiness and *Toska*: An Essay in the History of Emotions in Pre-War Soviet Russia," in *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* Vol. 50, No. 3, 2004: 357-371. Alexey Tikhomirov outlines how the Soviet state developed

shoulders of artists during the early days of the revolution because Bolshevik leadership saw art

as the primary medium for the transmission of revolutionary emotion. Accordingly, artistic

works of the period were imbued with proletarian enthusiasm and joy. In her book on the

revolutionary culture of St. Petersburg, Katerina Clark provides a vivid example of this strategy,

noting that in the nascent socialist Russia, actual revolutionary events, such as the 1917 storming

of the Winter Palace, were restaged as works of art with average everyday people as

volunteers.[12] Evidenced by this example, the Bolsheviks used art full of revolutionary zeal to

mask any divergent or dissenting feelings about how this political change was manifesting in

ordinary life.

Bolshevik leadership fleshed out their aesthetic mission in writings about the relationship

between art and the success of the revolution. In 1923, Leon Trotsky (1979-1940) wrote

Literature and Revolution, a detailed assessment of various movements of Russian modernist

literature, in which he argues that poetry must transmit "the new impulses of life" and convey a

specific idea that represents the direction in which society is heading.[13] One year later, Anatolii

Lunacharsky (1875-1933), the first Soviet People's Commissar of Education, maintained a

similar position, explaining that the truly powerful revolutionary artists "give form" to their

experiences, so that they can in turn give those experiences to their audiences.[14] Lunacharsky's

argument implies that a feeling can be packaged and distributed as a work of art. In the same

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a system of forced trust that used emotions as an ethical code that bound the people to the government. Establishing a feeling of regularity and predictability increased the people's confidence in the state's activities. See "The Regime of Forced Trust: Making and Breaking Emotional Bonds Between People and State in Soviet Russia, 1917-1941," in *The Slavonic and East European Review,* Vol. 91, No. 1 Trust and Distrust in the USSR (January 2013): 78-118.

[12] Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 115.

[13] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (1924), https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit_revo/, accessed on June 2, 2015, 167.

[14] Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Formalism in the Science of Art" (1924), in *Futurists, Formalists, and Marxism*, ed. and trans. Christopher Pike and Joe Andrew, (London: Ink Links Ltd, 1979), 73.

year, he also outlines how developing film technology is uniquely suited to this role, arguing,

"Cinema's strength lies in the fact that, like any art, it imbues an idea with feeling…unlike the

other arts, cinema is actually cheap and portable…" Thus, for Lunacharsky, film is even "more

powerful than any kind of narrow propaganda."[15] Both Trotsky's and Lunacharsky's assessments

suggest that art can override individual experiences by impressing upon an audience a singular,

solid, and fully formed emotional idea, propaganda for the Bolshevik cause.

Although Shklovsky wrote both "Art as Device" (Iskusstvo kak priem), the essay that

defines the concept of defamiliarization (ostranenie), and *Sentimental Journey* before the

specifically Bolshevik philosophy of art was official doctrine, it is precisely the Bolshevik idea

that content – the expression of a fully formed feeling or idea – supersedes the variable

constituent materials of works of art that his theory counters. Shklovsky's literary criticism

denies the presence of political or ideological fervor in art[16] and challenges the transmutability of

revolutionary feeling through strictly managed artistic content. On the contrary, he maintains that

art stimulates a continual and variable process of developing feelings. In "Art as Device"

Shklovsky famously points out that both in art and in life, "Automatization eats things up, a

dress, furniture, one's wife, and one's fear of war" (Avtomatizatsiia s'edaet veshchi, plat'e,

mebel', zhenu, i strakh voiny).[17] The juxtaposition of intangible, personal, and potentially very

unique emotions like love for one's wife or fear of war with well defined and easily tradable

objects like dresses and furniture allows Shklovsky to critique linguist Alexander Potebnia,

whose thesis, "Art is thinking in images" (Iskusstvo – eto myshlenie obrazami), is the impetus

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[15] Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Revolutionary Ideology and Cinema – Theses" (1924), in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents,* ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1988, 109.

[16] See "Ullya, Ullya Martiane" and "Samovar po gvozdiam" in *Khod Konia: Sbornik Statei*, (Moskva, Berlin: Knigoizdatel'stvo Gelikon, 1923).

[17] Viktor Shklovsky, "Iskusstvo kak priem," in *O Teorii Prozy* (Moskva, Leningrad: Krug, 1925), 11. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

for Shklovsky's work.[18] Shklovsky explains that thinking in images causes what we see "[to pass] by us as if it were wrapped up. We know by the space that it occupies that it exists, but we see only the outside. Under the influence of such perception, the object dries up, first as perception, and later this affects even the process of its making…" (Veshch' prokhodit mimo nas kak by zapakovannoi, my znaem, chto ona est', po mestu, kotoroe ona zanimaet, no vidim tol'ko ee poverkhnost'. Pod vliianiem takogo vospriiatiia veshch' sokhnet, sperva kak vospriiatiia, a potom eto skazyvaetsia i na ee delanii….).[19] Habitually thinking in images causes us to lose our understanding of the origins of what we see and how it makes us feel, of course making these feelings vulnerable to manipulation. However, Shklovsky defines devices of defamiliarization, such as narrative retardation, experimentation with narrative order, and unorthodox narrative points of view, which inspire an intensified process of perception that combats the potential cloaking or manipulation of images' inner meanings.

Shklovsky often wrote about the canon of British sentimental literature – including Fielding, Richardson, and Sterne – but he was not concerned with sentimentalism in and of itself, as a genre for expressing effusive emotion. Rather, he was interested in Sternianism (sternianstvo) as a repository of materials with which he could elaborate and demonstrate his theory of defamiliarization. According to Emily Finer, who investigates Shklovsky's reception of Sterne, Sternianism denotes the "universal laws of art" that Shklovsky was trying to work out.[20] Indeed, Shklovsky claims in *Sentimental Journey*, "I resurrected Laurence Sterne in Russia by knowing how to read him…I revived Sterne by understanding his system" (Ja voskresil v Rossii

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[18] Ibid., 5.
[19] Ibid., 11.
[20] Emily Finer, *Turning into Sterne: Viktor Shklovskii and literary reception,* (Legenda: London, 2010), 94.

Sterna, sumev ego prochitat'…Ja ozhivil Sterna, poniav ego stroi).[21] Accordingly, it is necessary to examine Shklovsky's memoirs not in terms of genre – *Sentimental Journey* is decidedly unsentimental in its depiction of the war and revolution[22] – but as an example of the universal artistic devices that intensify the process of perception.

Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) suggests that sentimentality involves a process of intense perception that leads to the formation of feelings as opposed to an exchange or conferring of feelings. While Smith acknowledges that the transmission of emotions from one to another has a moral basis in the notion of sympathy, he maintains that it is impossible for one person to feel directly what another feels.[23] The only thing that makes sympathy possible is imagination. Because the sympathizer cannot literally have another's feeling, he or she must imagine what the other's experience is like.[24] The transmission of emotion with a moral basis alone validates the Bolsheviks' propaganda mission; however, imagination as a prerequisite for feeling challenges the claims of propaganda. If, in the process of transfer, emotion must pass through the filter of individual consciousness, the outcome of the transfer cannot entirely be predetermined. Indeed, Smith notes that sympathy is not always the result of the imaginative process of forming emotions, because some people's emotions do not fit into others' cognitive bounds.[25]

This is precisely the juncture of propaganda and sentimentality in which defamiliarization functions. According to Shklovsky, defamiliarization jars an individual's consciousness out of

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[21] *Sentimental Journey,* 232; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 326-327.
[22] Richard Sheldon, *Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky: Literary Theory and Practice, 1914-1930,* (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 1966)*,* 162.
[23] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* ed. Dugald Stewart (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), 10
[24] Ibid., 37.
[25] Ibid., 65-66, 71. In particular, Smith examines why people tend to be more sympathetic to another's joys rather than his or her sorrows, arguing that we often believe that others should reasonably moderate their emotions in times of sorrow.

the habitual processes (thinking in images) on which propaganda might rely and inspires imagination. Both Anastasia Eccles and Adela Pinch observe that sentimentality is equally capable of automatizing emotions and of breaking emotional habits. In *Strange Fits of Passion,* Pinch argues that sentimentality in 18th century and early 19th century literature is indicative of a striving to understand the origins of excessive emotion. In the process, sentimental literature reveals that feelings, while sometimes impersonal and conformist, are also intensely unique and individualized. For Pinch, sentimentality motivates a confrontation between convention and personal experience.[26] Meanwhile, for Eccles, "Sentimentality insists, along with formalist technique, that it can be applied to *any* object. Like defamiliarization, it is an ethics of attention rather than of material desire…."[27] Sentimentality as a literary device is defamiliarizing in and of itself.

Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* effectively demonstrates the connection between sentimentality and Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarization via a famous scene about Father Lorenzo's snuffbox.[28] Yorick, the narrator, pulls out Lorenzo's snuffbox during a digression from his account of his journey from Dover to Calais, and begins to cry. At the time of the digression, Lorenzo is dead, and Yorick is mourning their deep friendship. He remarks that that he will guard the snuffbox just as he does his religious values, thereby linking the image of the snuffbox to a fundamental, fully formed, and automatic idea. Still, the snuffbox is not just a packaged emotional idea[29] – pure friendship – but also a catalyst both for the defamiliarization of

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[26] Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 4-8.
[27] Anastasia Eccles, "Formalism and Sentimentalism: Viktor Shklovsky and Laurence Sterne," in *New Literary History*, Volume 47, Number 4, (Autumn 2016): 539.
[28] Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768)*,* (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 699, 714-716.
[29] In Festa's study, a chapter on Sterne's snuffbox examines the object as a transmitter of the feeling of Yorick's and Lorenzo's close friendship particularly in terms of a capitalist exchange; obtaining the

narrative flow and for a closer examination of Yorick's and Lorenzo's relationship. Snuffbox in hand, Yorick shuffles back and forth from past to present and from inner reflection to outer observation. This movement reveals that he and Lorenzo were, in reality, mere acquaintances and not dear friends. At the beginning of his journey, Yorick rejects Lorenzo's plea for alms; only later, as Yorick is attempting to win the eye of his attractive female travelling companion, does he feel a sense of regret for his earlier behavior and seeks to make amends. The exchange of snuffboxes is a symbol of the peace the two men have made, and as far as the narrative goes, this is the extent of Yorick's and Lorenzo's friendship. Moreover, Yorick's motivations for apologizing to Lorenzo are not purely loving or friendly. He fears that news of his earlier rude behavior will somehow reach his beautiful companion, and he wants to resolve his relationship with Lorenzo before that becomes a problem. The story's convoluted chronology allows us to see the origins of the feelings that the snuffbox evokes in Yorick. The object is not simply a sentimental reminder of bygone years but inspiration for a process of closer examination, a perceptive tool that creates the opportunity to experience feelings anew.

Even aside from the snuffbox, a long and imaginative perceptive process is required to make sense of the sentimental devices in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey.* W.B. Gerard argues that while sentimental ideology like "elevated and refined intellectual feeling" and sympathy is prevalent in *Sentimental Journey*, the exact definition of that feeling, especially its moral aspects, is impossible to determine because of the lack of comprehensive visual details in Sterne's writing.[30] While Gerard's argument focuses on concrete pictorial representations of Sterne's works, his overall assessment of elements that bridge the gap between written depictions of sentimentality and its actual moral significance contains useful parallels for understanding

snuffbox means that one "has" Yorick's and Lorenzo's feeling, as opposed to completing the action or performance of feeling.

[30] W.B. Gerard, *Laurence Sterne and the Visual Imagination,* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 98-99.

sentimentality in Shklovsky's work. According to Gerard, it is precisely the engagement of the reader's imagination that is required to give Sternean sentimentality substance, meaning, and feeling, not the other way around.[31]

Shklovsky's literary criticism calls for perceptive awareness of the differences between outer appearance and inner meaning and is full of analogies that link artistic creation, his own method of scholarship, and even elements of his biography to various processes of weaving, pasting together, or otherwise reconfiguring materials. For example, in his introduction to *Theory of Prose* (*Teoriia Prozy*) Shklovsky explains, "…I am interested neither in the situation of the worldwide cotton market, nor in the politics of trusts, but only in the amount of yarn and methods of weaving it" (…ya interesuius' ne polozheniem mirovogo khlopchato-bumazhnogo rynka, ne politikoi trestov, a tol'ko nomerami priazhki i sposobami ee tkat'").[32] Meanwhile, in "Construction of the Story and the Novel" (Stroenie Rasskaza i Romana), Shklovsky concedes that, while he cannot define specifically what a novel is, he can see the materials that constitute it – threads that pull individual episodes together into a cohesive narrative.[33] According to Peter Steiner's analysis of Russian formalist metapoetics, examples like these are indicative of Shklovsky's mechanistic approach to literary analysis, which is his desire is to understand *how* a work is made rather than *what* is made. For Shklovsky, the technological metaphor of the machine hearkens both to the Russian Futurists' cult of the machine and to the leftist intelligentsia's desire to master technology in order to establish a new Russian society.[34] If man can master a machine so that it produces what he needs, then he can master literature to produce a new kind of society. And yet Shklovsky is hesitant to claim that this mechanical process leads

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[31] Ibid.,177.
[32] Shklovsky, *O Teorii Prozy,* 5.
[33] Ibid., 65.
[34] Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 46.

to any one literary result. Rather, he views materials and the tools that arrange them as elements that can continually be redefined. He explains in "The Link between Devices of Plot Construction and General Devices of Style" (Sviaz' Priemov Siuzhetoslozheniia s Obshchimi Priemami Stilia), that "…art is a means of experiencing the making of a thing, whereas what is made in art isn't important" ("…iskusstvo est' sposob perezhit' delan'e veshchei, a sdelannoe v iskusstve ne vazhno").[35] Shklovsky removes emphasis from the artistic image or object and refocuses it on inner pieces and processes.

In *Sentimental Journey,* Shklovsky applies this process to the image of the propaganda train. The train in Shklovsky's memoirs is like Yorick's snuffbox in that it is a defamiliarized sentimental object. Shklovsky's train does not just bestow a particular feeling but instead sets the narrative upon various investigatory paths, which ask the reader to consider the component parts of the emotion that the revolutionary train means to transmit: Where is the train coming from? What happened between its departure and arrival? Who determines how and to where the physical tracks and proverbial narrative tracks are being laid? What is happening on the ground where the train visits? Most significantly, knowing these details, how can one rework the materials associated with the trains in order to change their course?

The fact that during parts of his career Shklovsky served as a propaganda writer for various Soviet government and economic agencies often is fodder for debate about his life either as a dissident or as a political opportunist.[36] However, in 1917, as the revolution was immediately unfolding, even before official Soviet bureaucracy was established, Shklovsky was dispatched to the Galician front with a Provisional Government army propaganda committee. Later he was assigned to a similar position in Russia's expedition into Persia at the end of World

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[35] Shklovsky, *O Teorii Prozy,* 23.
[36] In the late 1920s through the 1930s, Shklovsky wrote for the Soviet cotton and film industries. See Finer, 30.

War I, just as the Bolsheviks were seizing power in St. Petersburg. His documentation of experiences in these roles is critical to understanding how he simultaneously supports and is baffled by the revolution and, as a result, challenges Bolshevik propaganda. Naturally, the army committees travelled to the front on trains, which carried both utilitarian and ideological significance. Trains of course connected people to their homes and brought much needed supplies and information. Moreover, at the time of the revolution, trains were exciting representations of modern technology, inexorably whisking people toward a bright future. This broad understanding of the role of trains, not just in terms of revolution but also in daily life, made them useful tools for spreading Bolshevik ideology. Kenez notes, "The Soviet regime, consciously or unconsciously used this symbol…[painted] with pictures of heroic soldiers, peasants, and workers with bright slogans. The trains themselves, as moving posters, were instruments of propaganda."[37] Thus, trains were meant to fulfill a role similar to the army propaganda committees – to intoxicate the masses with the spirit and convictions of the revolution.

Kenez addresses the agitprop train program, which from 1918 to 1921 spread socialist enlightenment to the uneducated, illiterate, and rural-dwelling Russian peasants. To this end, the trains needed to be equipped with simple revolutionary images that the majority of Russian people could understand. Accordingly, the pamphlets, artwork, and films the trains carried and even the names of the trains themselves were largely symbolic in nature. Though the people might not understand the inner workings of Leninist ideology or the actual needs and consequences of the revolution, they would accept the excitement and enthusiasm that the name of the train and the bright and appealing images it bore signified to them. The vision of the train was to evoke relief that the revolution had arrived as well as enthusiasm that it would carry the

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[37] Kenez, 60.

people off into the happy socialist future. However, these passionate feelings belied the

underlying problematic elements of the revolution. Sentimentalism evoked by the symbolic train

relates to what Glennys Young terms "emotional hermeneutics," which the new Soviet people

performed during the Bolshevik regime. This practice suggests that the outward projection of

positive emotions blanketed inner misgivings about the revolution.[38] While Young's study charts

the multifaceted emotional performances of those who either participated in or were victims of

Lenin's first show trials in the 1920s, the feelings that the agitprop train transmitted indicate the

beginnings of this type of emotional façade.

During the years Shklovsky was experiencing and disseminating propaganda on the

Galician front, in Persia, and in Ukraine, the train served two functions. First, it carried a

symbolic meaning – it was the revolution itself, bearing the strength and authority of Lenin and

Trotsky, and shining the light of socialist utopia on the Russian people. Second, it demonstrated

that the narrative of the revolution had already been laid out – the train's tracks lead directly to

Russia's bright socialist future. But, in *Sentimental Journey,* Shklovsky reminds us that trains are

simply made of materials that might be taken apart and rearranged, and that riding on a slow,

broken train is an opportunity to examine more closely the world that the revolutionary train

would speed past. His defamiliarization of the trains of the revolution takes apart their

propagandistic façade, both by providing a detailed view of what and who is inside the train and

by moving the action of the revolution off of the train tracks and onto the front, fields, streets,

and homes, the ordinary life that the trains pass by.

For a time during his tenure on the Galician front in 1917, Shklovsky still believes in the

mission of the army propaganda committees, observing that a reason for the army's

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[38] Glennys Young, "Bolsheviks and Emotional Hermeneutics," in *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 129.

disorganization and low morale is the disconnection between the soldiers and what is happening

with the revolution at home. To inspire revolutionary enthusiasm, the committee members

pepper their speeches with phrases like "at all costs" and "war to the final victory." But

Shklovsky soon realizes that these words, which should stimulate sentimentality about the

revolution, have no power. He quips that "atallcosts" eventually sounds like one word, or a town

in Kurdistan, and means absolutely nothing.[39] After all, "at all costs" and "final victory,"

enunciated from a distance in St. Petersburg by those who are mapping the revolution blanket the

actual experience of the soldiers and the people living near the fronts. Shklovsky documents this

conflict between outer appearance and underlying mechanisms in a scene that depicts an army

committee rally. While setting up a speaking platform in front of a train that had just reached

Stanislau, one of the soldiers says to Shklovsky, "I don't want to die" (Ne khochu umirat').

Immediately afterward, Shklovsky has to speak "with desperate energy" (s otchaiannoi energiei)

about "the right of the revolution" (o prave revoliutsii).[40] He admits that his words disgust him,

and he continues to critique the speeches of others on the committee who automatically accept

the ideals of the revolution instead of investigating what they ask of the people. For example,

Shklovsky observes about his fellow officer, Colonel Andarovich: "…he was intoxicated through

and through by the spirit of the Soviet…His convictions made him simple and convincing…The

revolution had engraved its norms on his soul" (…on byl prospirtovan dukhom Soveta

naskvoz…Ego ubezhdeniia delali ego prostym I uveditel'nym …Revoliutsiia v ego dush

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[39] *Sentimental Journey,* 39; *Sentimetal'noe Puteshesvie,* 56. "Slovo "vo chto by to ne stalo" tak vertelis' v moemu mozgu, chto vposledstvii v Persii mne kazalos', chto "Vochtobynestalo" – eto odno slovo, a "Vochtobytonistal'" gorod v Kurdistane."
[40] *Sentimental Journey*, 35; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 51.

obrazovla svoi normy).[41] This intoxication, Shklovsky suggests, dulls the Colonel's perception of the reality of their complicated positions.

In contrast to Trotsky's Train, which became a mythical object full of sentimental value, Shklovsky's trains fail to perform even their basic functions, and as a result, they bring attention to dire situations both on the trains and off the tracks. The trains are not moved by will and enthusiasm for the revolution, and instead sheer panic about the actual consequences of revolutionary activity hampers their progress. Weighed down by masses of fleeing people, trains cannot go far. At one point, Shklovsky hops around on various cars and freight wagons until he ultimately finds himself on a hospital train that crawls along the tracks excruciatingly slowly. It is in the breaks in travel on these cars and wagons – when Shklovsky is off the tracks – that he discovers the grisly details of his army's retreat from Ukraine: "The front had fallen apart; only our armored cars were holding back the Germans, only anti-aircraft guns mounted on the backs of trucks. The armored cars had been hanging on for sixteen hours…None of the soldiers escaped intact; the division was practically wiped out" (Front rasklepan, nemtsev derzhat tol'ko broneviki, zenitnyia pushki na avtomobil'nykh platformakh. Broneviki derzhalis' 16 chasov….u nej ne ostalos' tselykh soldat, ona pochti unichtozhena).[42] The mechanical failures of the supposedly infallible trains of the revolution give Shklovsky the time to learn about the actual mechanics of revolutionary fighting, and he closes this account of the Galician and Carpathian fronts by appealing to readers to consider these mechanics: "When you judge the Russian revolution, don't forget to weigh in the balance of sacrifice – a balance too light – the blood of those who accepted death among the cornfields of Galicia, the blood of my poor comrades" (Kogda budete sudit' russkuiu revoliutsiiu, ne zabud'te brosit' v chashu zhertvy, v chashu

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[41] *Sentimental Journey*, 36; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 52.
[42] *Sentimental Journey*, 58; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 83.

slishkom legkuiu, ves krovi priniavshikh smert' sredi galitsiiskikh kukuruznykh polei, ves krovi bednykh moikh tovarishchei).[43] Here, Shklovsky suggests that being sentimental about the revolution as an abstract idea is the consequence of an inattentive perceptive process.

Defamiliarization of train travel, where the train is a prism through which to perceive the revolution more closely, remains critical in Shklovsky's memory of his deployment to Persia in 1918 and 1919. In these accounts, the trains on which Shklovsky travels become tools for defamiliarization, because they slow down, rewind, and zoom in on important material elements of the revolution. For example, Shklovsky describes how a train struggles up the steep mountains of the Caucasus, writhing, sputtering, and scrambling, always rolling a bit backwards for each time it achieves forward momentum. This train's movement challenges Trotsky's 1919 speech to the Third Army, which preaches the revolution's incessant drive forward with no looking back. Furthermore, its slow speed creates an opportunity to behold the Persian lands that the Russian army was struggling, in the name of the revolution, to claim as part of Russian territory. As the train strains up the side of the mountains, Shklovsky observes abandoned stations, wild fields, and Lake Urmia, a formerly bustling port that is now dead and deserted. The train crawls past hungry children dressed in rags and refugees of war instead of zipping by scenes of lively industry inspired by the revolution.[44] Moreover, Shklovsky's train's arrival at his post does not bring the light of the revolution to the Persian town. On the contrary, he observes that the February revolution and subsequent political moves have not improved the people's lives there at all. The train is insufficient as a harbinger of revolutionary hope but, like Yorick's snuffbox, is useful as a tool for intensifying perception and coming to understand the inner meaning of revolutionary feelings.

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[43] *Sentimental Journey,* 61; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 88.
[44] *Sentimental Journey,* 75-78.

In addition to dismantling the materials and functions of trains themselves, Shklovsky challenges the association of trains with a direct narrative trajectory by taking his narrative off the tracks with poignant digressions that also expose the mechanics of the revolution. These digressions both invert the narrative that Bolshevik propaganda presents and offer a medium for documenting alternative paths that are available to people who are acutely aware of the ground-level details of the revolution. Whereas Trotsky's Train appears to have no obstacles, and whereas the agitprop trains symbolize Russia's inexorable path toward a bright socialist future, Shklovsky's veering away from direct narrative paths suggest not only that there are indeed obstacles that need to be resolved but also that, just as maps can be redrawn and tracks can be re-laid, the narrative of the revolution can be redirected.

One of Shklovsky's most significant narrative digressions is in a story about his role as a liaison between the Provisional Government and the troops in Urmia during the Russian campaign in Persia. In the middle of intense and tragic tales about Russian soldiers and the Urmian Kurds, Aissors, Armenians, Turks, and Jews, whose relations were usually violent, Shklovsky randomly inserts detailed political news from St. Petersburg or official bureaucratic army activities that feel completely inconsequential and out of place. For instance, as Shklovsky describes the prevalence of pogroms and the suffering of the Jews and Persians at the hands of Russian soldiers, he quips, "We were getting ready for the elections. The army committees were re-elected" (Gotovili vybory. Pereizbrali armeiskie komitety). He follows this random observation with a discussion of the "outdated system" of Persian shahs and khans that "has long since outlived its usefulness but still persists" (strashno, davno sebia perezhivshii stroi).[45] The juxtaposition of "outdated" local details with futile official Russian government activities is sadly ironic, as the Russian government's theoretically modern activities are doing no better to

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[45] *Sentimental Journey,* 81; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 114.

help the people in Urmia than the Persian shahs and khans. Later, Shklovsky singlehandedly tries to stop a pogrom perpetrated by Russian soldiers and Cossacks. In a biting digression from the tragic event at hand, Shklovsky describes the Russian officers' attempts to stop the melee. One of them shouts to the soldiers, "Comrades, what are you doing? Is this really the way to fight capitalism? Capitalism has to be fought efficiently!" (Tovarishchi, chto vy delaete! Razve tak boriutsia s kapitalizmom? S kapitalizmom nuzhno borot'sia organizovanno!).[46] This appeal punctuates a scene about humans' chaotic and animalistic tendencies with a useless admonishment from a government representative that consists of propagandistic terms like "efficiency" and "fighting capitalism." As Shklovsky describes the aftermath of the pogrom, detailing the utter destruction of buildings, caravans, storefronts, and kiosks, not to mention the loss of life, he interjects, "I haven't spoken yet about how Petersburg kept us informed. They were always sending some communiqué on the Democratic Conference" (Ja ne govoril eshche o tom, kak informirovali nas iz Peterburga. Posylali nam vse vremia svodku o demokraticheskom soveshchanii).[47] These interjections point out Bolshevik rhetoric that argues that efficiency and government activity keeps the revolution on track. Yet the tragedy of the pogroms emphasizes the absurdity of this official narrative. Bolsheviks require elections, reports, and numbers, but that activity does not mitigate the insanity that is occurring in Persia. It is not the Bolsheviks' plans – the metaphoric tracks for the revolutionary train – that control the revolution's path but the acts of everyday people and events that exist outside of those plans.

Throughout *Sentimental Journey,* Shklovsky interrupts his own autobiographical musings to share reports, letters, or relayed histories that offer alternatives to the seemingly inevitable course of the revolution. These types of interruptions depict interactions with the people who

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[46] *Sentimental Journey*, 94; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 132.
[47] *Sentimental Journey,* 95; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 134.

most directly suffer the consequences of the revolution, and they imply that these people are capable of altering its course. In a hospital in Kherson, Shklovsky meets a devout local communist who describes an encounter with a doctor named Gorbenko, who singlehandedly saved the lives of a number of so-called enemies of the revolution. Gorbenko deflected a Red Army general who wanted to execute wounded Greek soldiers who had fled in the heat of battle, and he even turned away the Cheka (Lenin's secret police), which was after an injured sailor suspected of betraying his comrades to the opposing military.[48] By asserting his will as the director of the hospital, Gorbenko altered the course of these events. He did not take for granted that the Greek soldiers and the sailor had to die in the name of the revolution; instead, he directed his business as his consciousness – and his conscience – dictated.

Later Shklovsky digresses from a treatise on his fellow writers to talk about an Aissor, Lazar Zverandov, whom he befriended while on duty in Persia. Zverandov's story recounts the sad journey of the Aissors over the mountains from Urmia to Iran, where they believed the British Army could protect them from aggressive Turks and Kurds. Along the treacherous mountain route, Turkish and Kurdish mercenaries constantly attacked the Aissors, who quickly ran out of food and faced untenable cold and snow. To continue their exodus, they were forced to abandon the elderly, women, and children; this seemed to them to be an inevitable consequence of their journey. However, as they neared the end of their trek across the mountains, Doctor Shedd, an American missionary who had lived among the Aissors at a mission in Urmia, met them with 3,500 of the children they had felt compelled to leave in the mountains. Shedd not only had managed to cut off the Turkish leader who was assaulting the Aissors, ultimately taking him to the British to be tried, but also had reunited the children with their exhausted and

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[48] *Sentimental Journey,* 223-224.

distraught families.[49] Again, Shklovsky's narrative digression shows that even a path that seems unavoidable due to political struggle can be redrawn.

Scholarship about *Sentimental Journey* tends to push aside Shklovsky's position as an eager, albeit disillusioned revolutionary, often focusing on indications of his attempts to distance himself from the revolution, his veiled justifications for anti-revolutionary activity, or his efforts to acclimate to developing bureaucratic systems.[50] This study, however, accepts Shklovsky as a keen participant in the revolution. After all, as Sidney Monas observes, Shklovsky is quite clear in *Sentimental Journey* about his feelings: he does not like the Bolsheviks, but he supports the revolution and wants his actions to be viewed in that regard.[51] Thus, we must consider the possibility that Shklovsky's memoirs do not simply resist political change but attempt to re-chart its path. *Sentimental Journey* challenges Bolshevik propaganda's story about the revolution. The Bolsheviks mapped out the revolution as though it were a train that ran on tracks they had laid. Then, the train became a symbolic replacement for the revolution itself; the presence of the agitprop train or Trotsky's Train signified that the revolution was somehow mystically complete. Shklovsky's defamiliarizing both the train as a sentimental object and the notion of train tracks as narrative suggests that the revolution – like a train on tracks – is just like his literary work: an arrangement of materials that can be taken apart, swapped, and reconfigured.

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[49] Ibid., 275.

[50] In his dissertation, Richard Sheldon argues that Shklovsky's irony in *Sentimental Journey* indicates his desire to distance himself from revolutionary politics. Meanwhile, Radoslav Borislavov points out that Shklovsky's use of sentimental tropes seeks support for the case he tries to make for himself in defense of charges of anti-Bolshevik, Socialist Revolutionary activities. See ""I Know What Motivation Is": The Politics of Emotion and Viktor Shklovskii's Sentimental Rhetoric," in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Winter 2015): 785-807. Anne Dwyer asserts that Shklovsky's poetics of nomadism, evident in *Sentimental Journey,* are examples of his attempt to accommodate the developing bureaucratic and ideological requirements of Soviet art. See "Standstill as Extinction: Viktor Shklovsky's Poetics and Politics of Movement in the 1920s and 1930s," in *PMLA,* Volume 131, Number 2, (March 2016): 269–288.

[51] Sidney Monas, introduction to *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs 1917-1922*, xxxvi.

In *Revolution and the Front (Revoliutsiia i Front),* the 1921 publication that later would

become the first section of *A Sentimental Journey,* Shklovsky makes an interesting claim about

his reasons for recording his experiences of Russia's revolution: "I don't want to be a critic of

events: I only want to leave material for the critics. I'm telling about events and making of

myself a case study for posterity" (Ya ne khochu byt' kritikom sobytii, ya khochu dat' tol'ko

nemnogo materiala dlia kritika. Ya raskazyvaiu o sobytiakh i prigotovliaiu iz sebia dlia

potomstva prenarat).[52] With these comments, Shklovsky asserts his position as an indifferent

observer, like Yorick, the narrator of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey.*[53] At the same time, he opens

the door for critiquing the function of literature in times of political change. By making war and

revolution into material, Shklovsky gives the impression that the critics both of current events

and of history might read political change as a literary document: a composition of materials and

tools that are employed according to the author's motivations. Thus, Shklovsky complicates the

notion that being determines consciousness because it suggests that its cognitive counterpart –

that consciousness determines being – is necessary and true. How do these cognitive counterparts

function in posterity?

To answer this question, we can look to the later life of Shklovsky's *Sentimental Journey.*

When Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) read a French version of the novel in 1928, he excitedly

advocated for its publication in German translation.[54] Two years earlier, Benjamin had made his

own sentimental journey, guided by romantic love and revolutionary enthusiasm. In 1926, he

followed Asja Lacis, a devout Bolshevik and agitprop theater director, to Moscow, both seeking

her affections and pursuing a place in the revolutionary art and literary scenes to which she

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[52] *A Sentimental Journey*, 24; *Sentimental'noe Puteshesvie,* 34.
[53] Sheldon, 162.
[54] Galin Tihanov, "The Politics of Estrangement: The Case of Early Shklovsky," in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 26. No. 4. Winter, 2005: 668.

belonged. This journey, recounted in *Moscow Diary,* was an emotional disappointment.

Benjamin's love for Lacis was unrequited, and the Marxist ideals he espoused were shaken when

he witnessed the frustrating bureaucratic turn the revolution had taken in Russia. In particular,

Benjamin struggled to accept the "revolutionary education" being enforced on the Russian

people, which he argued "means that they do not come to the revolution through an experience

but only as a discourse."[55] As they did for Shklovsky, whose *Sentimental Journey* addresses the

complicated nature of being a revolutionary, the corollaries of building communism by

forcefully shaping individual Russians' consciousness weighed on Benjamin's mind.

      Shklovsky and Benjamin ran in similar social circles during Shklovsky's exile in Berlin

in 1923 and during Benjamin's two-month stay in Moscow.[56] But their relationship runs deeper

than mere geographic circumstances, and the concept of defamiliarization is an important

connecting thread. Svetlana Boym, for example, notices that Shklovsky's ostranenie can be read

alongside Benjamin's notion of auratic perception, which he outlined in the 1936 essay "The

Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility."[57] Twenty years after Shklovsky,

Benjamin theorizes about the habituation of human perception and suggests that the progressive

automatization of experience makes us all too ready to accept a worldview that the artistic image

bestows upon us. Significantly, Benjamin, like Shklovsky, is working in the context of political

change, where newly developing political and cultural systems employ propaganda that relies on

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[55] Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary* (Cambridge: MIT Press), in *October,* Vol. 35, Moscow Diary (Winter 1985): 53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/778471, accessed on 3/30/18.

[56] Shklovsky and Benjamin certainly ran in similar circles. In 1926, Shklovsky lived in Herzen House, which Benjamin frequented during his stay in Moscow. There, Benjamin met Shklovsky's friend, Vladimir Mayakovsky, as well as Shklovsky's mentees, the writers of the Serapion Brotherhood. See *Moscow Diary*.

[57] Svetlana Boym, "Poetics and the Politics of Estrangement: Victor Shklovsky and Hannah Arendt," in *Poetics Today,* Vol. 26. No. 4, (Winter 2005): 582.

art to disseminate whole, clear-cut worldviews and to ameliorate any resulting crises of conscience.

Benjamin's theory, like Shklovsky's, seeks a way to resist what Victor Erlich calls in his study on modernism and revolution in Russian literature "the inexorable automatization of aesthetic responses."[58] Indeed, Benjamin's definition of the aura is akin to Shklovsky's description of acute perception. Benjamin defines the aura as, "A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be."[59] An observer understands that the aura is, to use Shklovsky's terms on perception, "the time of the creative act, the time of the making and changing of the [artist's] relationship with the world. It's the time of sensation, of the perception of reality."[60] Thus, both the aura and Shklovsky's ideal of acute perception encompass not only our understanding of our feelings about a work of art, but also our understanding of the work's design, material origins, and construction.

In the "Work of Art" essay, Benjamin explains his fear that ubiquitous artistic reproduction has irreparably damaged the aura and the resulting perception of reality because it "detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition." Infinitely reproduced works of art become mere images without any meaningful origins. One of Benjamin's main concerns with this scenario is that the apparatus that reproduces the work of art might appropriate what once was the authentic aura and put it in the service of its own ideology. He writes that through artistic reproduction, "…factual material [is] manipulated in the interests of [the pervading political

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[58] Victor Erlich, *Modernism and Revolution: Russian Literature in Transition*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 233.
[59] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media,* ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 24.
[60] Serena Vitale, *Shklovsky: Witness to an Era*, trans. Jamie Richards, (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2012), 82.

force]," which "is seeking to supplant the class consciousness of the masses."[61] In Benjamin's

context, that force was Hitler's fascist propaganda in 1930s Germany. Benjamin's fear of the fate

of the aura in the age of reproduction echoes Shklovsky's concern with automatized thinking in

images. Instead of understanding the inner meaning of an artistic image by knowing its

component parts, its process of production, and its place in history, people view it only from the

outside, thereby easily accepting its manipulated meaning. However, Benjamin sees hope for a

renewed mode of perception in the defamiliarizing technology of film. He argues that recording

and editing practices bring to light elements of reality that people would not normally have

perceived. Films can speed up, slow down, zoom in or out, and rearrange a narrative, so that one

must consciously construct the film's meaning rather than simply accepting the story it presents

on the surface.[62] It provides an experience in which one cannot help but be aware of the materials

and tools that created it. Thus, film disassembles a work of art's aura, but in doing so, it protects

the work against the manipulation of propaganda.

　　Like Benjamin, who believes in the potential for film technology to overcome

propaganda's manipulation of perception, Shklovsky argues that the developing socialist film

industry will not just require a more attentive way of seeing but also will develop a new language

based on experiences instead of images. In a 1927 article in *New LEF* (*Novyi LEF*), a Proletkult

periodical, Shklovsky examines the film theory of Sergei Eisenstein and observes, "His theory of

attractions which do not remind the audience of their emotions but provokes their emotions…is

extremely important for cinema." Shklovsky links Eisenstein's film language to his own theory

that poetic verse uncovers inner language, which forecloses the possibility thinking in images.

The audience of Eisenstein's films of attraction "perceives emotions because it experiences or

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[61] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 23-24.
[62] Ibid., 33-34.

undergoes them."[63] Thus, inspiring the authentic experience of emotion through defamiliarization, and thereby countering the effects of political propaganda, is the enduring function of Shklovsky's memoirs.

In an interview with Serena Vitale, Shklovsky recalls feelings about the revolution: "There was a train heading for the future, and we were pushing and shoving one another to get on. But we were convinced it would come…."[64] The ellipsis at the end of this sentence is indicative of Shklovsky's feelings about the future of the revolution and is reflected in the hampered movement of his trains in *Sentimental Journey*. For Shklovsky, it is impossible to know the future. Even Benjamin, toward the end of his visit in Moscow, grasped that in Russia's current situation, "Nothing ever happens as planned or expected…."[65] At the same time, though, Shklovsky believes that it is possible to understand what the future holds by examining the present.[66] (Shklovsky dedicates his memoirs to men who maintain an acute awareness of the present and its potential consequences, as well as a sense of pathos for the casualties of revolution – Dr. Gorbenko and Dr. Shedd.) Indeed in a refrain throughout *Sentimental Journey,* Shklovsky contemplates the philosopher, Spinoza, whose meditation on the image of a falling stone questions the human tendency to believe that we have free will without considering the reasons for our actions. Shklovsky, musing about his seemingly futile role in the revolution, echoes Spinoza saying, "I am only a falling stone." But, he clarifies this resignation: "A stone that falls and can, at the same time, light a lantern to observe its own course" (Ya tol'ko podaiushchii kamen'. Kamen', kotoryi padaet i mozhet v to zhe vremia zazhech' fonar', chtoby

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[63] Viktor Shklovsky, "Mistakes and Inventions," in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents,* ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 182.
[64] Vitale,125.
[65] Benjamin, *Moscow Diary,* 30.
[66] Viktor Shklovsky, *Dnevnik,* (Moskva: Sov'etskyi Pisatel', 1939), 80.

nabliudat' svoi put').[67] In *Sentimental Journey*, the defamiliarized sentimental and

propagandistic image – the train – shines the light on the revolution's current course, allowing

for the examination of the present and for the formation of feelings about the future. It inspires

the capacity to engage with political change and to prepare for the future by resisting the

propagandistic manipulation of emotion. As such, it is a step in what Erlich calls Shklovsky's

"quest for…a uniquely human mode of control over chaos,"[68] which transcends the bounds of

nationality, politics, culture, and time.

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[67] *Sentimental Journey,* 133; *Sentimental'noe Puteshestvie,* 187.
[68] Erlich, 234.

Chapter Two –

"My Life Was Our Life": Karel Čapek's Answer to the Czech Question

Jaroslav Hašek, the Czech writer famous for his satire of political and ideological loyalty in the novel *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk* (1922-23), confronts the presumption that there can be an absolute definition of national identity in the short story, "Shake the Dust from your Shoes" (1918).[1] The story's main character, a soldier named Gašek (based on Hašek himself), is travelling home to Prague from the Eastern Front after the end of World War I. At a Red Cross camp along the way, he witnesses the chaos that ensues when volunteers ask refugees to line up for supplies according to their nationalities. No one knows which line to join, and one man, paralyzed with confusion, bursts into tears. Is the tearful refugee better off lining up according to linguistic or religious affinities, to the place his parents came from, or to the borders in which his home and family now exist? Furthermore, given how seemingly easily borders changed after the war, will the nationality of the queue he chooses always be true for him? Though Hašek does not directly pose these questions, he suggests that national identity is not the clear result of an intrinsic quality or historical inheritance but is relative to environment and needs. In this scene, embracing a national identity is like deciding which line looks best, and by Hašek's example, national identity in inter-war Central Europe was paradoxical: was it possible to simultaneously be nationalistic and relativistic? As this chapter will show, the new Czechoslovak identity that was developing in the interwar period needed to be both. The writings of novelist, playwright, and journalist, Karel Čapek (1890-1938), established an aesthetic that

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[1] Jaroslav Hašek, "Shake the Dust from Your Shoes" (1918), in *Behind the Lines: Bugulma and Other Stories,* trans. Mark Corner (Prague: Charles University in Prague, 2012).

integrates these necessary cognitive counterparts – nationalism and relativism – to help Czechoslovak people successfully situate themselves in this evolving geopolitical context.

Nationalism assumes an absolute and exclusive collective identity based on shared characteristics like language, religion, and cultural traditions. In contrast, relativity rejects the absolute and asserts the variability of truth and of interpretations of the world depending on an individual's location and perspective. Relativism is the worldview that accepts the concept of relativity, but just as relativity asserts that truths are variable, applications of relativism are varied, too. For example, Franz Boas's doctrine of cultural relativism says that there are multiple possible moral truths because cultures determine morals, and cultures themselves are diverse. On the other hand, there is a more nihilistic relativism that abandons the attempt to ascertain truth at all and instead resigns itself to the notion that man is the measure of all things. For example, in Luigi Pirandello's 1917 play, *Right you are (if you think you are),* you can believe any character's version of events.[2] Both of these types of relativism fall into a category of passive tolerance of individualism, which would preclude absolute collective nationalist sentiment. Yet the complicated interplay between absolute nationalism and relativism was critical in post-World War I Central Europe, where new nation-states were arising amidst what once were fluid borders within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Often, the basis for the formation of new national identities was historic right, or the notion that there exists a single history of a region and its people, and that specific history defines the nation as a whole and separates it from others. Perceptions of the past, relative because of the differences in individuals' memories, were being employed as absolutes that would define the collective future of Central European nations.

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[2] Franz Boas, *Anthropology and modern life* (New York: Norton, 1928); Luigi Pirandello, *Right you are (if you think you are)* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997).

Exemplary of the cultural discourse surrounding relativism and national identity is Karel

Čapek's writing, which embodies seemingly contradictory qualities. It is equally famous for

being imbued with relativism – which according to Thomas Ort was typical of the Czech literary

scene in the early 1900s, where writers confronted the "dull flag-waving" reiterated in traditional

writings like folklore and song[3] – and for being nationalistic. In a moment when Czechoslovak

artists and thinkers were attempting to establish an aesthetic to define the new Czechoslovak

culture, Čapek's critics accused him of being simultaneously an intolerant Czech nationalist and

a counter-productive relativist.[4] For example, Jíři Wolker, a poet of the Devětsil movement,

which mirrored Russian Constructivism, charged Čapek with being a bourgeois artist who was

unable to sufficiently break from the past. Likewise, in the 1920s, philosopher F.X. Šalda argued

that Čapek was a reactionary figure who clung to traditional folk ideas of Czechness.[5] Indeed,

Čapek has been called a "sentimental nationalist" for his reverence for the Czech language as the

purest representation of the nation.[6] Yet at the same time, his relativistic works, which illustrate

the diversity of individual human experiences, were panned for fostering immorality and for

threatening the sovereignty of the Czechoslovak nation-state.[7] As these examples suggest,

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[3] Thomas Ort, *Art and Life in Modernist Prague* (New York: Springer, 2013), 47.

[4] See, for example, Robert Pynsent's and Bohuslava Bradbrook's contrasting studies on Čapek. Bradbrook reinforces the national myth of Čapek's unceasing open-mindedness and tolerance, while Pynsent breaks it down by pointing out that Čapek's prejudices were like those of other bourgeois Czech nationalists.

[5] Klíma, 95, 155.

[6] Robert Pynsent, "Tolerance and the Karel Čapek Myth," in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Apr., 2000): 350. See Pynsent for a critical discussion of Čapek's less tolerant ideologies, including familial anti-Semitic sentiments.

[7] Czech literary critic, Miroslav Rutte, took issue with Čapek's relativity because it made no attempt to educate readers on moral issues. See Bohuslava Bradbrook, *Karel Čapek: In Pursuit of Truth, Tolerance, and Trust,* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1998), 100. After World War II, relativism became a scapegoat for the failure of the Czechoslovak First Republic overall. In the tumultuous years between the end of the war and the rebirth of Czechoslovakia as a socialist state, Czechoslovak communists criticized thinkers like Čapek, claiming that they would have been willing to support any kind of government during the inter-war period. This lack of ideological fortitude, they argued, led directly to the 1938 Munich Agreement, which relinquished the Bohemian Sudetenland to Germany and effectively ended the

assigning Čapek either to the Czech nationalist or to the relativist camp has continually been

problematic.

In order to explain his socio-political stance, Čapek published a number of writings about

the new Czechoslovak national program, including *Conversations with T.G. Masaryk* (1938)*, a*

collection of thoughts and reminiscences from President of the Czechoslovak First Republic,

Tomaš Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937). In their discussions, Masaryk noted the complicated,

diverse, and interrelated histories that constitute the new Czechoslovak nation-state, and Čapek

shared Masaryk's mission: to develop a nation that was "free in terms other than those claimed

by nineteenth-century nationalist ideology"[8] and to establish a new sense of Czechoslovak

patriotism that embraced all of the ethnicities of the Czech lands, focusing on shared needs rather

than solely on distinctive national pasts. However, unlike Masaryk, who believed that Christian

thought should play a critical role in shaping Czechoslovak culture, Čapek was not a religious

man and acknowledged the variety inherent in religious worldviews. With these nuanced ideas of

Czechoslovak nationhood in mind, this study identifies Čapek as a nationalist-relativist, meaning

that relativism in his writing is the cognitive counterpart to Czech nationalism and is necessary to

achieving an ethical Czechoslovak national idea. His work exemplifies a mode of nationalistic

storytelling that inspires individuals to continually reconsider how they define themselves. This

reading of Čapek helps to understand cultural strategies for reconciling individual uniqueness

with collective sentiment, which in interwar Central Europe was imperative to creating a national

identity that could respond to crises, such as internal socio-political feuding, disparate cultural

programs, and the threat of invasion.

Czechoslovak First Republic. See Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, Inc., 2004), 121.
[8] Rene Wellek introduction to Tomáš Masaryk, *The Meaning of Czech History,* ed. Rene Wellek, trans. Peter Kussi (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), vii.

Between 1932 and 1934, when Czechoslovakia was feeling the pressure of Hitler's ascent to power in Germany (which was employing specifically manipulated versions of history to define German identity), Čapek composed what is known now as "the most successful attempt at a philosophical novel in any language,"[9] a trilogy of books – *Hordubal* (1932), *Meteor* (*Povětron.* 1932), and *An Ordinary Life* (*Obyčejní Život,* 1934). Each work illustrates relativism through unconventional narrative techniques that tell the stories of an individual's past from multiple perspectives. This chapter focuses on *An Ordinary Life,* a memoir whose subject suspects that a simple and clearly defined life story – his personal history – does not truly represent his identity. Like the other novels in the trilogy, *An Ordinary Life* has a shifting narrative perspective; in contrast to the other novels, its varying narrative points of view exist within one subject. The memoir's narrator enters into a process of listening to a chorus of third-person voices which are simultaneously his own and which appear in connection with particular life events. This narrative movement suggests that people are not simply the absolute sum of past events that place them into a particular collective mold – like being a Czech or German nationalist or a Marxist, for example – but are conglomerations of possible identities that are relative to the needs of specific moments in everyday life.

I examine *An Ordinary Life* through the lens of two schools of thought with which both Masaryk and Čapek interacted and which are critical to this consideration of the relationship between past and present and between the individual and the collective – the theories of Henri Bergson and William James's American pragmatist philosophy. Elements of Bergson's and James's ideas define Čapek's nationalist-relativism in that they demonstrate an accessible way for individuals to come to understand and enact a Czechoslovak national program that fosters an inclusive and adaptive identity. In particular, both philosophies maintain that the past is a living

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[9] William Harkins, *Karel Čapek*, (New York, London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 19.

entity, our understanding of which evolves based on our present circumstances, and which continually alters the way we see ourselves. *An Ordinary Life* is an aesthetic answer to President Masaryk's national call to action because it claims that reconsiderations of the past highlight moments of choice that defy absolute historical inheritance and illuminate previously unconsidered connections to diverse peoples. Thus, Čapek's nationalist-relativism allows for imagining a national identity that is fluid and connective, not just imposed from without by absolute bureaucratic conceptions of the past, but redefined continually from within and among individuals.

Čapek acknowledged that his relativism was criticized for being, like the outcome of Pirandello's play, a "soft-soupy tolerance" or a blind acceptance that all beliefs and practices can be equally good in their own ways. Accordingly, in the article "On Relativism" ("O Relativismu"), published in 1926, he distinguishes his stance from the aforementioned concept by arguing that relativism is not unquestioning tolerance but "an anxious attentiveness to everything that exists" (úzkostná pozornost vůči všemu, co jest). This attentiveness is necessary for people to become well-rounded wholes, which is preferable to being one-dimensional automatons or ideologues – a characteristic, Čapek insinuates, that belongs to religious zealots or perhaps to Marxists, who believe an absolute historical causality defines the world from the past to the present and into future. He states:

> As for Einstein's relativity, I admit frankly that I don't understand it, just as I don't understand some religious mysteries, the logic of history, infinite space and suchlike. I tried to study it; I got to the point where it states that if I moved with the velocity of light, I'd, for some numerical reasons, get flattened like a biscuit; and then I gave up on the rest, very much reconciled that I don't move with the velocity of light. Because I move slowly and thoughtfully, I become round rather than anything else, and I wouldn't like to be flat. Some people who hurl themselves forward with enormous speed and who are ahead, as they say, of their time, really are remarkably flat.

Pokud se týče relativismu Einsteinova, pravím upřímně, že mu nerozumím, tak jako nerozumím některým náboženským tajmstvím, logice dějin, nekonečnému prostoru, státnické moudrosti a jiným věcem. Pokoušel jsem se to studovat, došel jsem až k místu, kde se praví, že kdybych se pohyboval rychlostí světla, zploštil bych se z jakýchsi ciferních důvodů jako oplatka, tu jsem opustil další důkazy, velmi usmířen s tím, že nepohybuji rychlostí světla. Protože se pohybuji pomalu a rozvážně, stávám se spíše kulatým, a nechtěl bych být plochý. Někteří lidé, kteří se řítí vpřed ohromnou rychlostí a předhánějí, jak se říká, svou dobu, jsou skutečně úžasně ploší.[10]

According to this exposition, Čapek's relativism relies on an unceasing consideration of all aspects of his world and the relationships among them, and not either on a stubborn adherence to an historical ideology or a quick and relentless push toward the future.

Čapek's understanding of general relativity – specifically its implications on time – is quite the opposite of his contemporaries, the Russian Futurists, whose art intently worked to collapse time, cleanly breaking with the past, so that the future could exist in the here and now. The poet, Vladimir Mayakovsky, was fascinated with Einstein's theory of relativity because of its potential to resolve what Mayakovsky believed to be the Russian revolution's main problem – the amount of time it would take to finally achieve communist utopia.[11] In Mayakovsky's famous science fiction play, *The Bedbug* (*Klop,* 1929)*,* a Communist Party member, who was frozen during the late 1920s New Economic Plan era in Russia, thaws out decades later, after communist utopia has been obtained. However, he cannot assimilate to the new culture and is made into a sideshow at the zoo, a vestige of the past that socialism has overcome.[12] In contrast, Čapek's best known relativistic works, like *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots,* 1920), which is

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[10] Karel Čapek, "About Relativism," in *Believe in People: The Essential Karel Čapek,* trans. Šárka Tobermanová Kůhnová (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 288; "O Relativismu," in *Přítomnost,* Ročník III, 18 února, 1926, Číslo 6: 81, http://www.pritomnost.cz/archiv/cz/1926/1926_18_2.pdf, accessed on March 14, 2018.

[11] For more on Mayakovsky and Einstein's theory of relativity, see Roman Jakobson "On a Generation that Squandered its Poets," in *Language in Literature,* ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (London, Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1983), 284-285.

[12] Vladimir Mayakovsky, *The Bedbug: [a play] and selected poetry,* trans. Max Hayward and George Reavey, ed. Patricia Blake (New York: Meridian Books, 1960).

a provocative futuristic story about how robots take over the world, challenge the singularity of truth and moral rightness, as well as presumably inherent human qualities such as the capacity for reason, sympathy, and love. Unlike the main character in Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug,* Čapek's characters grow and change their worldviews. Illustrations of varied perceptions of truth allowed Čapek to acknowledge the value of diverse political and social movements of his era. He noted in response to criticism of *R.U.R.* that his purpose was to exemplify the necessity of "[reflecting] a struggle in which "Conservatives or Socialists, Yellows or Reds" each sought in their own way to improve the human condition."[13]

Relativism as a vehicle for establishing national identity is significant in interwar Czechoslovakia because it counters two critical issues of the era: the notion of historic right and the Czech question (česká otázka), which each tried to employ a singular historic truth in the nation-building process. Czech historian, Jan Rychlík, points out that after World War I, Czechoslovakia essentially was a copy of the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire, having "inherited all the problems of the old Empire – plus some more."[14] Like Austria-Hungary, the nascent Czechoslovak state needed to manage diverse ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures, but it lacked an absolute answer, like the strictly geopolitical Austro-Hungarian identity, to resolve conflicts stemming from this diversity. Historic right claimed that Czech culture had existed long before outside powers – namely German – dominated the region and, therefore, that Czechs were owed their status as a nation-state.[15] Meanwhile, the Czech question asked whether Czech culture could stand on its own or would be better off aligning with an ostensibly more successful German cultural tradition. For Czech national defense groups, whose

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[13] Peter Benet, "Playwrights, Presidents, and Prague," *VQR,* Volume 79, No. 1 (Winter 2003), http://www.vqronline.org/essay/playwrights-presidents-and-prague, accessed on September 11, 2017.
[14] Jan Rychlík, "Czech-Slovak Relations, 1918-1939," in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe 1918-1948,* ed. Mark Cornwell and R.J.W. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14.
[15] Ibid., 15.

program asserted that the new nation should develop according to exclusively Czech linguistic and folk traditions,[16] the answers to these issues lie in specific versions of history that verified the existence of an original, independent, and thriving Czech language, political society, and culture.

The argument for specifically Czech national identity was based on the belief, which arose with the Czech National Revival in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, that Czechs are a historically democratic people. Accordingly, movements that sought a Czech-centric national program argued that other cultural influences that existed within the borders of the new state – including Slovaks, Germans, Jews, Magyars, and Ruthenes – were a threat to Czechs' democratic historical inheritance.[17] The prevailing thought was that some Germans would be sympathetic to vestiges of Austro-Hungarian power, while Slovaks would be more accustomed to authoritarian forms of government, having been under Magyar control for so long. As a result of beliefs like these, formerly inclusive social groups adopted a specifically Czech nationalist slant. For example, historian Mark Dimond notes that after World War I, the Sokol, which since 1862 had been an inclusive youth organization dedicated to social works, "reassert[ed] Czech ethnic ascendancy in the new multi-ethnic Czechoslovak state, by creating a new 'Czechoslovak person' that encapsulated certain Czech values…The Sokol wished to impose some kind of Czechness on the new state, when Germanness had been predominant in the area before."[18] This definition of "Czechness" adopted a mythical tone, similar to that of the fascist assertion of

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[16] Catherine Albrecht, "Economic Nationalism in the Sudetenland, 1918-1938," in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe 1918-1948,* ed. Mark Cornwell and R.J.W. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91.

[17] See Robert Pynsent, "Literary Representations of the Czech "Legions" in Russia," 79 and Albrecht, 108, both in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe 1918-1948,* ed. Mark Cornwell and R.J.W. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[18] Mark Dimond, "The Sokol and Czech Nationalism, 1918-1948," in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe 1918-1948,* ed. Mark Cornwell and R.J.W. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 189.

German historical identity. Robert Pynsent points out examples of this tendency in literature about the famous Czech Legions, soldiers who defected from the Austro-Hungarian Army during World War I to fight on the side of the Entente Powers in the hope of attaining Czech independence. While Pynsent's study focuses on how this literature embodied anti-Semitic attitudes, it highlights the overarching belief that Czech identity had been passed down through the centuries and was pure and everlasting. For instance, Legion soldier, Rudolf Medek's (1890-1940), poem, "Theater" (Divadlo), reveres "all the loyal/tough/incorruptible children of the Czechs."[19] In literary conceptions like Medek's, Czech blood was "mystical," and those who possessed it – the "children of the Czechs" – were warriors who continually fought for the truth.[20]

Along the lines of Medek's Czech warriors, President Masaryk was known as a "ceaseless destroyer of illusions in the quest for truth."[21] However, the truth he sought was in direct conflict with far-right Czech nationalist agendas because it acknowledged the relativity of the notion of historic right; if this were the only category necessary to establish political sovereignty, any ethnic, linguistic, or religious group within the Czech lands could argue for its own primacy. Masaryk was liberal and democratic, an advocate of scientific research, and a decided realist. At the same time, he was a devout Christian who argued that religious thought was a key component in the development of the new nation.[22] Additionally, he believed that knowledge and truth seeking in general is an ongoing process, a view that complicated purely ethnic-nationalistic answers to the Czech question. He argued, "We cannot believe that we already possess enough knowledge, and nothing but the truth; but we can be sure – and this is an

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[19] Quoted in Pynsent, "Literary Representations," 74.
[20] Ibid., 77.
[21] Abrams, 128.
[22] Rene Wellek, "Masaryk's Philosophy," 62.

epistemological certainty, that through the progress of the ages we shall approach ever nearer

and nearer to the truth."[23] For Masaryk, truth is not an object passed down through history but a

never-ending evaluation of all the contingencies that connect the past to present everyday life – a

worldview akin to Čapek's "anxious attentiveness."

In one of Masaryk's famous quests for truth, the Hanka Manuscript controversy of 1886,

he challenged the notion of historic right by participating in a study that debunked the authority

of documents that had been critical to establishing Czech nationalism. The Czech National

Revival, which from the late 18th through the early 19th centuries sought to reenergize a uniquely

Czech culture, was a part of what historian Lonnie Johnson calls the first phase of nationalism in

Central Europe.[24] Many milestones of the Czech National Revival – such as Josef Jungman's

1830 Czech-German dictionary and Karel Erben's (1811-1870) and Božena Němcová's (1820-

1862) publications of traditional Czech folktales – relied to a large degree on supposedly

authentic medieval Czech manuscripts discovered by philologist, Václav Hanka (1791-1861), in

1817. The manuscripts served as evidence of an original Czech national literature, independent

of outside influence. During the second phase of nationalism, which saw the politically

motivated revolutions of the Springtime of Nations in 1848,[25] Hanka's manuscripts became, for

all intents and purposes, national fact. For example, historian and politician, František Palacký

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[23] Karel Čapek, *Masaryk on Thought and Life, Conversations with Karel Čapek,* trans. M. and R. Weatherall (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1938), 17. Contemplating his life, Masaryk makes a case for a worldview like Čapek's – an "anxious attentiveness to everything that exists." Indeed, his understanding of the multiple national groups that existed in the Czech lands is a credit to his varied background, education, and often-controversial forays into the field of Czechoslovak history. Masaryk was half Slovak and grew up in poverty on an Austro-Hungarian estate; he spoke Czech, Slovak, and a little Hungarian, received his university education in Vienna, travelled across Europe, America, and Russia, and served in the Austro-Hungarian Parliament. Masaryk's contact with such diversity is indicative of what historian Timothy Snyder suggests was typical of Austro-Hungarian Europe – the absence of a single native tongue or homeland that could define one's nationality, political aims, or how he perceived himself. See Timothy Snyder, *The Red Prince* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
[24] Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends,* Third Edition (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 129.
[25] Ibid.

(1798-1876), known as the father of the Czech nation, used the manuscripts to argue the need for

Czech autonomy within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus, Hanka's accomplishment was a

historical foundation for a movement that came to define Czech nationalism. Masaryk, however,

believed that this accomplishment should not be accepted with too narrow a view, and he

ultimately played a pivotal role in proving that Hanka had forged the famous manuscripts.

Because the Hanka manuscripts had been a cornerstone of Czech national identity in the 19th

century, Masaryk was criticized for being anti-historicist, as if his assertion that Hanka's

documents were fake damaged the credibility of the Czech national movement overall.

On the contrary, Masaryk believed that history "always is something which changes and

develops; it is not a movement in itself, it is based on something which moves."[26] Thus, he

reasoned that history could be a tool for action that would come to change people as opposed to

being regarded as its own political entity.[27] In this context, Masaryk reframed the Czech question

by arguing that it is a matter of critical self-reflection that will allow people to address the issues

of real, everyday life as opposed to historical inheritance. In *The Czech Question* (*Česká Otázka,*

1895*)*, Masaryk's treatise on the topic of national identity, he explains that the "thoughtful

Czech" must consider:

> Not with violence but with reconciliation, not with the sword but with the plough,
> not with blood but with work, not with death but by life and for life – that is the
> answer of our Czech genius, the meaning of our history and the legacy of our
> great ancestors…That question of national tactics has enormous significance, is
> incredibly difficult, and is full of riddles and further questions...
>
> Ne násilím, ale smírně, ne mečem, ale pluhem, ne krví, ale prací, ne smrtí, ale
> životem k životu – tot odpoved českého geni, tot smysl našich dějin a odkaz

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[26] Čapek, *President Masaryk Tells his Story* (1934)*,* trans. D.R. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.,
1936), 216.
[27] Wellek, "Masaryk's Philosophy," 25, 62.

velikých předků…Tato otázka po národní taktice má ovšem ohromnou důležitos a
je velmi složitá, plna záhad a otázek.[28]

This assertion of the need for constant work to understand the questions that surround the

meaning of history and the present in order to sustain the sanctity of life summarizes Masaryk's

mission, which he called humanitat. National progress could not be achieved simply by

mirroring historical facts; rather, progress would require examining these facts in order to create

history anew. Frederick Barnard points out that Masaryk's conception of how the newly formed

Czechoslovak nation should treat history – specifically its elements of choice and action – is an

accurate reflection of the original intent of Herderian nationalism. Barnard argues that Herder's

idea of the nation was never meant to induce exclusionary political moves but accepted the

"manifold diversity of human aspiration." Ultimately, Herder's rejection of an unchanging

historical ideal reflects the choice necessary to nationalism; it involves reevaluating particular

histories in order to negotiate their relationships with more universal human needs.[29] In the

context of interwar Czechoslovakia, that choice was to consciously connect multi-ethnic, multi-

lingual, and economically diverse individuals and groups to a broader idea of nationhood that

could continually transcend difference.

Čapek suggested that Masaryk's humanitat could be attained via "anxious attentiveness"

to the wide world to which people gained access through new communication methods like film

and the radio. Still, for Čapek, literature best develops the high level of attentiveness that allows

one to "penetrate the circumstances:" to observe individualities both in the past and the present,

examine them in relation to one another, and as a result, to attain a fuller understanding of their

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[28]Tomáš Masaryk, *Česká Otázka: snahy a tužby narodního obrození,* (Praha: Melantrich/Praha, 1969),
155. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
[29] Frederick M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity, and History,* (Montreal & Kingston, London,
Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 86-93.

function in the world.[30] While Čapek did not believe that literature could mirror the world, he did claim that it could "beget people in its image."[31] It follows then that Čapek sought a form of literature in relativism that could foster the critical process of coming to know the Czechoslovak identity in its relation to its ever-changing circumstances. William Harkins maintains that out of all the influences on Čapek's writing, cubism was able to most clearly convey relativism in his works because it presents a single object from multiple perspectives.[32] Indeed, Čapek's trilogy of philosophical novels is often called the cubist trilogy because each of the works addresses a single event through the eyes of multiple characters. However, as Charlotte Sleigh argues, Čapek is distinct from French or German cubists who blur the lines between man and object because he views man as both object and creative subject.[33] In line with this argument, Ivan Klíma points out Čapek's position that "…reality, at least in art, is always what is made of it; every art finds its own solution and will go on solving. Its model isn't external, in the nature of things, but what is in man himself, a spiritual and poetic creature who gives things his own form and measure."[34] For Čapek, an art form that illustrates how individual identities shift based on changing perspectives of the world could beget a new national idea that would be capable of doing the same.

The notion that man fashions his own reality and gives form to the matter that surrounds him certainly sounds relativistic, hearkening back to the idea that man is the measure of all things. But it also points to Čapek's attention to the work of Henri Bergson. In *Creative*

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[30] Karel Čapek, "The Age of the Eyes" (*Adventium Discussions,* 1925), in *Believe in People,* 20. Čapek places the act of reading in contrast to the act of watching a film, which, he argues had resulted in people's desire to understand everything at once, or in absolutes.
[31] Karel Čapek, "Instead of Criticism" (*The National Newspaper,* 1920), in *Believe in People,* 6.
[32] Ibid., 28.
[33] Charlotte Sleigh, "Plastic body, permanent body: Czech representations of corporeality in the early 20th century," in *Studies in History of Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences,* 40 (2009): 243.
[34] Ivan Klíma, *Karel Čapek Life and Work,* trans. Norma Comrada (North Haven: Catbird Press), 32.

Evolution (1907), Bergson asserts, "As thinking beings, we may apply the laws of our physics to our own world, and extend them to each of the worlds taken separately; but nothing tells us that they apply to the entire universe, nor even that such an affirmation has any meaning; *for the universe is not made, but is being made continually*" (emphasis mine).[35] Čapek's interest in Bergson is well established; he attended Bergson's lectures as a student in Paris in the early 1900s, and Bergson remained popular in Czechoslovakia even after he lost his appeal in Western Europe after World War I. His idea that evolution can transcend even death was ameliorating for Czechs who, like other nascent states in Central Europe, were facing the tremendous challenge of being independent after having suffered such huge losses during the war.[36] While Čapek continued to be interested in Bergson's theories of evolution and renewal, he became skeptical of Bergsonian vitalism's reliance on intuition as the main impetus for change. For this reason, Čapek's continued affinity for Bergson was tempered by his interest in American pragmatist philosophy, which presented a reconciliation of intuition and an intellectual approach to effecting change in the world. This combination of the intellectual and the intuitive is critical to Čapek's aesthetic reconciliation of nationalism and relativism, specifically with respect to its treatment of history.[37]

Both the Bergsonian and the Jamesian pragmatist philosophies dispute the possibility that the past is an absolute gauge of the future. Instead, they suggest that how we understand information from the past only helps us to make choices that allow us to adapt to our present circumstances. Additionally, both philosophies maintain that the essence of life is action; each action is performed in continually new ways because the settings in which it occurs are different. Bergson and pragmatists agree that the purpose of action is to overcome obstacles, be they

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[35] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: MacMillan, 1922), 241.
[36] Sleigh, 245.
[37] Bradbrook, 94.

evolutionary (for Bergson) or ideological divides (for pragmatists). The notion that we continually evaluate the past in order to make choices that resolve present obstacles is critical to a Czechoslovak national program that asks individuals to redefine themselves based on new needs rather than historic right.

Bertrand Russell explains Bergson's philosophy of memory: "It is above all in memory that…the past survives into the present."[38] In *Matter and Memory* (1896), Bergson argues that memory is a part of becoming, a process of recomposing the material world.[39] He shows memory's relationship to our perceptions of the material world in a famous illustration of an inverted cone, the widest part of which is the realm of memory; the plane at the inverted cone's tip, where our bodies are located, represents our perceived reality. As we move around, memories filter from the widest part of the cone to the tip according to our location on the plane.[40] Bergson suggests that these memories, combined with our perceptions of the material world, constitute the "useful actions or attitudes" the body will adopt.[41] That is to say that the past influences our choices in continually new ways at different points in our lives. Like Bergson, William James theorizes that the past is part of a larger mechanism of change, and the goal of the pragmatic method is to understand how that mechanism works. In *Pragmatism* (1907), James explains, "Men and nations start with a vague notion of being rich, or great, or good. Each step they make brings unforeseen chances into sight, and shuts out older vistas, and the specifications of the general purpose have to be daily changed. What is reached in the end

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[38] Russell, 7.
[39] Ibid.*,* 50.
[40] Monika Greenleaf's explanation of Bergson's memory theories, which she applies to her analysis of Marina Tsvetaeva's performative autobiography, is very helpful for visualizing this process. See "Laughter, Music, and Memory at the Moment of Danger: Tsvetaeva's "Mother and Music" in Light of Modernist Memory Practices." in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Winter, 2009): 825-847.
[41] Bergson, *Matter and Memory,*131.

may be better or worse than what was proposed, but is always more complex and different."[42]

The purpose of James's pragmatic method is to reconcile the variable (unforeseen chances) with what was assumed to be absolute (older vistas). Čapek's essay, *Pragmatism or the Philosophy of a Pragmatic Life* (*Pragmatismus čili Filosofie Praktického Života,* 1918), explains the cognitive flexibility necessary to this specific aspect of James's philosophy: "There are thoughts that are not just "pleasant to think" but rather are valuable help to us in the struggle of the practical life. If there were some thought that we could adopt in order to help us live this life, then it would be better for us to believe in it, indeed even if it does not coincide with what be believe about other more interesting life concerns." (Neboť existuje myšlenky, které nejsou jenom ¨příjemné
k myšlení¨ nýbrž jsou nám cennou pomocí v bojích praktického života. Je-li nějaká myšlenka, která, přijmeme-li ji, by nám pomohla žíti tímto životem, pak bylo by vskutku lépe pro nás věřiti v tuto myšlenku, ovšem nesráží-li se víra v ni s jinými životními zajímy vyššího interesu).[43]
Bergson's and James's analyses of how we interpret the past are critical both to understanding Čapek's "anxious attentiveness" and to comprehending the imperative of choice in Czechoslovakia's developing national identity. While a notion of historic right might be, as Čapek says, pleasant to think, considering the relationship between history and new contingencies is necessary to determine the most appropriate behaviors and worldviews. In *An Ordinary Life,* the past, assessed through memory, is a fluctuating process of reconciling differences, and so there cannot be a single, absolute historical origin for any one person let alone a collective nation. However, actively being aware of this process of reconciliation opens the door for establishing broader interpersonal and even national relationships.

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[42] William James, *Pragmatism* (1907) (Cleveland, New York: The World Publishing Company, 1944), 97.

[43] Karel Čapek, *Pragmatismus čili Filosofie Praktického Života* (1918) (Olomouc: Votobia, 2000), 18.

Čapek's works about regular, everyday people who have tangible beliefs and goals, make mistakes, learn, and change their minds clearly illustrate the flexible choice-making process that is reflective of the Bergsonian and pragmatist philosophies with which he engaged. For example, Čapek speaks to the dangers of using historical moments to define oneself in "The Stamp Collection" (Sbírka Známek, 1932), a short story from his famous collection, *Tales from Two Pockets* (*Povídky z Druhé Kapsy*). The story begins by suggesting the relativity of personal identity: "There's no getting away from it," says the narrator, Mr. Karas. "If a man were to rummage through his past, he'd find material in it for a whole different set of lives" (To teda je svatá pravda...Kdyby se člověk hrabal ve své minulosti, našel by, že v ní je dost látky na docela jiné životy).[44] Mr. Karas realizes through the course of his tale that he had misinterpreted a momentous event from his childhood, which he had used to define his entire being. When he was young, Mr. Karas had a beautiful stamp collection that he shared with his friend, Lojzik. Mr. Karas's father never approved of the collection, thinking that it distracted the boys from their schoolwork. Once, after young Mr. Karas recovered from a long illness, he discovered that his stamp collection was gone. He accused Lojzik of the theft and from thereon hardened his heart against friends and family and became, he believed, a strictly professional and purposeful person. As an old man, Mr. Karas unearths his stamp collection in a box of his father's things and realizes that he, not Lojzik, had confiscated it during his illness. Upon this revelation, Karas exclaims, "I saw my whole life afresh; suddenly it seemed a different life..." (Já viděl znovu celý svůj život…Vždyť' já mohl žít docela jínak, napadlo mě).[45] For old Mr. Karas at the end of "The Stamp Collection," it is too late to start his life anew based on his refined understanding of his

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[44] Karel Čapek, "The Stamp Collection," in *Toward the Radical Center,* ed. Peter Kussi (New Jersey: Catbird Press, 1990), 253; "Sbírka Známek" (1929), in *Povídky z druhé kapsy* (Praha: Československý Spisovatel, 1967), 137.
[45] "The Stamp Collection," 257; "Sbírka Známek," 142.

past, and so he is left being disconnected from his friends and family. In contrast, the fictional memoir in Čapek's *An Ordinary Life* illustrates how a man re-learns his personal history, recognizing the fluidity of his identity and the connections to other people that it fostered in his life. This process is significant in terms of personal and national identity: *An Ordinary Life* offers that anyone can reject an identity imposed by historical patterns and recognize that, despite uniqueness, there is always a possibility for connectedness among individuals.

An Ordinary Life is a memoir within the frame of a novel. The memoir begins when the narrator realizes he is likely to die soon and decides to get his affairs into order. Since, in a bureaucratic sense, he has already done this – every document, letter, and scrap of paper related to his career, family, and finances is neatly categorized – there is nothing left for him to do but to organize his memories, and so he begins to write his life story. The narrator's explanation of where and how he was born, his relationships with his parents, his childhood friends and school years, his first job, and his life with his wife could belong to any ordinary Czech person. He grew up in a small town in Bohemia, on the edge of a primarily German-speaking community, among hardworking "little people," such as joiners, glassworkers, painters, and carpenters. He was immersed in local culture and tradition, attended his hometown school, and ended up working with trains, eventually moving up the professional ladder to oversee his own station. He fell in love with a girl of German descent, married her, and lived a quiet life. At the moment he finishes his story, the narrator believes that he is the sum of his life events. Remembering them only reasserts that his personal history has defined his identity.

However, the structure of the initial version of the narrator's memoir suggests that the narrator's identity is unclear. In fact, *An Ordinary Life* does not begin at the moment of the narrator's realization of his impending death but instead introduces two different men, Pan Popel

and his physician. The two are discussing the death of the man who turns out to be the subject of the memoir. Even in this scene, which is told from an omniscient point of view, the reader never learns the name of the man who has narrated his life, and this frame for the subsequent memoir closes on a vague note. After the doctor offers the memoir to Popel, Popel hesitates to accept it, and the doctor simply shrugs his shoulders. Thus, from the beginning of the novel, important questions of identity arise: Whose life story are Popel and the doctor discussing? Since they establish that it is a regular and good Czech man, does his specific identity even matter? This situation complicates the idea that the life history that the memoir conveys constitutes an absolutely defined identity. *An Ordinary Life's* introductory section and the continued fluid shift between first- and third-person voices further indicates that the identity of the memoir's narrator might at once be his own and anybody else's.

Harkins observes that the life of *An Ordinary Life's* narrator is governed by habit and chance as opposed to choice, and that even when chance disrupts the narrator's life, habit reasserts itself with more force.[46] When the narrator first decides to write his life story, he asserts this idea of habit, claiming that his life has proceeded down a seemingly predetermined path, which he describes as "the almost mechanical continuance of days and years up to the end point that is before me and that, I hope, will be the same in its lack of the dramatic as all the others" (...skoro mechanický průběh dnů a let až po konečný bod, který je přede mnou a který bude, doufám, stejně málo dramatický jako ostatní).[47] According to this mechanism, the narrator recounts his childhood memories with the phrase "I remember" (vzpomínám si), and from this first-person perspective, the narrator's first attempt to tell his life story is mechanistic; he

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[46] Harkins, 141.
[47] Karel Čapek, *Obyčejní Život,* (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1971), 263.

remembers what one is supposed to – that he loved his parents, was diligent in school, worked hard, was good to his wife, and was loyal to the people around him.

Amidst these first-person descriptions, though, the narrative perspective shifts almost unnoticeably, suggesting that there is something more to the mechanistic first-person version of the memoir. Specifically, some accounts of the narrator's own actions (as opposed to his reflections on the nature of other people) are told by third-person voice. For example, just after the narrator remembers watching his father work in his woodshop, the point of view shifts to observe the narrator. We see: "The little guy sits high on a pile of wood planks…here, he no longer belongs to the joiner's yard, he has his own world for himself, which is connected to other worlds only by a single stem" (Vysoko na hromadě fošen sedí klouček...teď už klouček nenáleží ani k tomu truhlářskému dvorku, má svůj svět pro sebe, který s tím druhým světem souvisí jenom tím jedním pněm).[48] This position, Zdenka Kalnicka observes, conveys the pragmatic tendency – which is to say seeking rapprochement between disparate things – of Čapek's relativism through metaphors of height. Kalnicka explains that for Čapek, "from the tops of mountains looking down enables a person to see the world below as a place where different people can live peacefully together..."[49] Like sitting at the top of a literal mountain, the little guy who sits on a mountain of wood planks might see how the individual worlds of people he observes in the yard below are be connected. Still higher is the voice that narrates this scene and points out the stem that unites the boy's individual world to everything else. This voice, to use Bergson's terms, is at the widest part of the boy's cone of consciousness, where it might filter down to affect his choices as he moves among different circumstances on his plane of existence.

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[48] Ibid., 265.
[49] Zdenka Kalnicka, "Metaphors in Pragmatist Texts: What Can They Reveal about Their Values?" in *Pragmatism and Values: The Central European Pragmatist Forum, Volume I,* ed. John Ryder and Emil Visnovsky (New York, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 78.

These early shifts in narrative viewpoint foreshadow the ultimate revelation that the narrator of *An Ordinary Life* has. As his attempt at writing his life story comes to a close, he believes that what he has written is a complete and unified account of all of his experiences. He notes, "And there is everything that I have lived, that's piled up in my experience; I could use it all again, and that would be like living out my life once more in its entirety…It was ordinary, but it was a complete life, and when I reflect on it, I see that everything that happened realized a kind of order…." (Ted' je tu všechno, co jsem žil, pohromadě v mé zkušenosti; mohu jí znovu a plně využít, a to je, jako bych znovu prožíval svůj život v jeho součtu…Byl to obyčejný, ale celý a svým způsobem dovršený život a když se nyní dívám nazpátek, vidím, jak se ve všem, co bylo, uskotečnoval jakýsi pořádek…).[50] When the following chapter begins, the narrator is recovering from a heart attack and wondering whether or not his life story is true and complete. At this point, the narrative, which has previously been punctuated by other narrative voices only sporadically, is taken over by the myriad voices that the narrator discovers are actually part of him.

When the narrator questions the completeness of his story, he notices, "Two voices are arguing, I distinguish them quite clearly; one voice is talking now as if it is defending something" (To se hádají dva hlasy, rozeznávám je docela zřetelně; ten hlas, který mluví teď, jako by něco hájil).[51] These voices talk with each other about the discrepancies in the narrator's first attempt at writing his memoir, and it is clear that at least one of them is the observer that appeared in the first part of the memoir and watched the narrator (the little guy) sitting on the pile of planks in his father's workshop. The voice argues that the narrator's oversimplified account of his life is evidence of his desire to have his own world that is cut off from all the

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[50] Čapek, *Obyčejní Život,* 315.
[51] Ibid., 316.

others. Of course, the voice says, this is impossible to accomplish in a life, a rationale that reflects Masaryk's and Čapek's assertions that Czechoslovak national identity must be integrative rather than closed off. The rest of *An Ordinary Life* consists of accounts of numerous other voices, which assert the variability of truths about the narrator's life experience and demonstrate how his behavior continually changed in order to allow him to connect his own world to others'.

For example, the narrator's original story points out a time when he benevolently tutored an outcast in school, noting that this boy was his good friend and that he was pleased that he could help and could stand out among his classmates. One of the arguing voices rebuts, claiming that the real reason for the narrator's action was his desire to connect to the outcast's world – he also had always felt like an outcast. Later, a new arguing voice emerges to clarify the context of the narrator's love for his wife. She was the daughter of a German stationmaster, for whom the narrator worked, and while the narrator loved her, this new voice argues, the primary reason for his courting his future wife was to be a part of the mature and prestigious adult world. Indeed, the narrator obtained a promotion after his wedding and became the master of his own station. Yet another voice suggests that what the narrator described as patience for his wife's overbearing nature was, in reality, a behavior he adopted because it suited his hypochondriac state of mind; the narrator had contracted tuberculosis at a young age, and his needs fit precisely with his wife's tendency to obsess over his health.

By the time the memoir ends, about eight different voices – though the narrator acknowledges that there are many more than that – emerge to explain how the narrator's outlook on the world and behaviors changed with each of his life circumstances. The identities that these voices uncover include a poet, a lover, and a freedom fighter; the list can go on ad infinitum, and

all of the identities directly relate to the people with whom the narrator was interacting at particular points in time. Most importantly, the narrator comes to realize that none of these identities has ever disappeared. Rather, they moved from the background to the foreground according to changes in the narrator's existence and, for him, they represent possibility. He realizes, "…my life was our life, of us, who long ago lived and died, and of us, who perhaps were not born but only *might have* been" (...svůj život byl náš život, nás, kteří jsme dávno žili a umřeli, i nás, kteří jsme se ani nenarodila jenom jsme *mohli* byt).[52]

The reinterpretation of a personal history that results in *An Ordinary Life's* narrator's new conception of his identity reflects Bergsonian and pragmatist theories on the relationships among the past and present action by pointing out that the narrator's life was not simply a mechanistic and organized series of events that resulted in the formation of a single and unified identity. Rather, *An Ordinary Life* asserts the inevitability of change and the need for active choice, which is a key to both theories. In *Creative Evolution,* Bergson argues that in every stage of our progress, we are presented with choices. He writes,

> Each of us, glancing back over his history, will find that his child-personality, though indivisible, united in itself divers person, which could remain blended just because they were in their nascent state: this indecision, so charged with promise, is one of the charms of childhood. But these interwoven personalities become incompatible in course of growth, and, as each of us can live but one life, a choice must perforce be made. We choose in reality without ceasing; without ceasing, also, we abandon many things. The route we pursue in time is strewn with the remains of all that we began to be, of all that we might have become.[53]

He adds, however, that nature never abandons any of these choices; rather, they reveal themselves to us through memories and inspire us to act anew. The dialogue between Pan Popel and his doctor, which sets up the memoir in *An Ordinary Life,* addresses the same scenario. The two men are conversing in the doctor's garden, when the doctor pauses to tend to his roses. He

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[52] Ibid., 364.
[53] Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 99.

bends over to break a wild stem away from a plant and comments, "Let's take a peek at how this stem would like to be a rosehip. To keep it in order, we must keep that other rose down, the wild one" (Koukejme, jak by ten kmínek chtěl být šípkem. Pořád se v něm musí potlačovat ta druhá růže, ta planá).[54] The doctor's reflection on what he does to the wild rose foreshadows what the memoir's narrator's attempts to do with his life story – to use the past to push down all of the other potential identities that exist within him and to close himself off from the rest of the world. Only when he hears the chorus of voices within him does he come to realize, "A person simply has his own particular vision of himself and of his life, and according to that, he chooses a fact or edits it a little, so that it affirms his vision" (Člověk má určitou představu sám o sobě a o svém životě, a podle toho vybírá nebo i trochu upravuje fakta, aby mu tu představu potvrdila).[55] The narrator's newly realized identities allow him to see that the choices he made in his life continually changed his identity and allowed him to build bridges to other people in his world.

Connecting diverse people was a critical element of social and political questions when Čapek was writing his philosophical trilogy, and by the late 1930s historical absolutes were making this type of connection seem impossible. It was the eve of the 1938 Munich Agreement, and Čapek feared that Germany was relying too much on historical inheritance to define its current course of action. In "History Lesson," a 1938 article in the journal, *The Present* (*Přítomnost*), Čapek argues that Germans' worldview had solidified around their history, and consequently Germany was closing itself off from the rest of Europe.[56] His remarks on Germany recall the narrator of *An Ordinary Life,* whose first attempt at a memoir presents history as means of reasserting a static identity and organizing his world into a little bubble that is separate from others. This danger of isolation, which a rigid understanding of national history posed, is what

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[54] Čapek, *Obyčejní Život,* 258.
[55] Ibid., 358.
[56] Quoted in Klíma, 228.

prompted Čapek's friend, Tomáš Masaryk, to ask the Czechoslovak people to reconsider historical questions everyday anew. Masaryk's call was a means of negotiating a political idea with everyday life in what historian, Robert Evans, calls the "laboratory" that was the Czechoslovak First Republic and the "testing ground for some of the most important ideological contests of the 20th century."[57] Where ideologies like fascism and ethnic nationalism relied on conflicting historical absolutes to define how individuals understood both themselves and their roles in the collective nation, Masaryk's call to action and Čapek's aesthetic answer argue that historic truths are actually variable, and that our understanding of them is always evolving. How they view human identity is akin to how Tatlin examined his artistic materials: striving to understand the inner make up of a thing uncovers its flexibility and potential to connect even to a seemingly incongruent thing in order to make a whole work of art, a whole human being, or a whole nation.

Capek's nationalist-relativism shows how an individual could realize the flexibility of his or her personal identity by being "anxiously attentive" to new information about both the past and the present. If people could redefine themselves according to new information and experiences, then the national idea could, as well. Čapek concretely demonstrated this notion when he suggested that Czechoslovak people engage in a letter-writing campaign with Germans in order to see the world from each other's perspectives and to uncover shared experiences – a real-world version of Bakhtin's aesthetic event. In 1938, he wrote in *The People's News* (*Lídové Noviny*),

> I turn to you today namely with something in my heart. It sometimes seems as if
> the distance from Prague to Žatec or from Česká Lípa to Prague has gotten
> greater…that it's somehow difficult to understand each other. But this isn't a
> question of language. For example, a person who travels the world can understand

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[57] R. J. W. Evans introduction to Mark Cornwell and R.J.W. Evans ed. *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe 1918-1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11.

a Dutchman, a Spaniard, or an Englishman even though he doesn't know even one word of that person's speech…Nations cannot talk directly with each other, but people can.

(Na oplátku se dnes obracím já na vás. Mám totiž něco na srdci. Někdy se zdá, jako by byla větší vzdálenost z Prahy do Žatce nebo z České Lípy do Prahy…Nějak těžko si navzájem rozumíme. Není to otazka jazyka. Například člověk, který cestuje po světě, se dorozumí s Holandanem, Španělem, nebo dokonce s Angličanem, i když neumí ani jedno slovo z jeho řeči…Národy spolu nemohou primo mluvit, ale lidé ano.)[58]

Čapek's aesthetics of nationalist-relativism asserts that individuals' tangible worldviews and actions, not abstract collective ideas alone, are the keys to a peaceful and ethical nationalism.

This type of flexible thinking persisted even through Czechoslovakia's socialist years in the form of dissidence that did not simply trade one absolute – communism – for another like Western-style capitalism. In particular, the work of playwright, essayist, and the first president of post-communist Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, defines dissidence as a decision-making process that foregoes ideology. In his influential essay, "The Power of the Powerless" (1978), Havel lays out the fundamental human drive to "live in truth," which he argues is the ongoing process of creating social structures that serve the needs of human life. Havel believes that social structures must have no a priori requirements like historic right; rather, they should be based on present, variable, and perhaps fleeting needs. Politics, though it might revamp corrupt social systems, will never change or destroy them because the politically minded only understand how to work according to these systems' historical definitions. Thus, Havel explains, people must "open [themselves] up fully to the world of human existence and then…draw political conclusions only after having analyzed it…"[59] Non-political acts that are driven by the needs of life are the simple

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[58] Karel Čapek, "Milí němečtí posluchači…" (*Lídové Noviny,* 22.6.1938) in *Tichý Hlas. Neznámé i Známé Texty z Roku 1938* (Praha: Nakladatelství ARSCI, 2005), 39.
[59] Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in *Open Letters Selected Prose 1965-1990*, ed. Paul Wilson (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1991), 161.

acts of every individual and are important demonstrations of the power to direct ethical political

and ideological change.[60]

Other contemporary theorists in the context of broader social challenges like LGBT

rights, race, and religious issues have taken up arguments like Havel's. For example, in *Gender*

Trouble Judith Butler proposes a fluidity of gender identity that, in turn, opens society to

coalitional activism, which is a flexible affiliation based on immediate need rather than

membership to organizations fossilized in historical tradition or ideology.[61] And as the

reassertion of populist tendencies in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe again brings

conflicting historical absolutes to the fore, the nationalist-relativism Čapek illustrates in *An*

Ordinary Life – openness to reevaluating historical ideologies and to changing our minds about

how we see ourselves in the world – continues to serve as a useful example of the necessity of

cognitive counterparts, which have the capacity to forge connections instead of reinforcing the

divisions that history has written in stone.

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[60] Ibid., 133-134.
[61] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Chapter Three –

"Here We Have Communism": Svetlana Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl* as Heterotopic

Documentary

A common Eastern European folktale recounts the story of a beautiful princess who is betrothed to a hedgehog. Miraculously, and to the princess's relief, the hedgehog sheds his coat on the wedding night, revealing a dashing young prince underneath. Complete physical transformation resolves all questions of the man-qua-hedgehog's true identity of husband and benevolent ruler. Regular figures in folklore, hedgehogs often uncover the truth of an obscure or complicated situation or guide those who seek wisdom.[1] Since antiquity, the hedgehog has been associated with the notion of absolute truth, istina in Russian. As Archilochus claimed, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing."[2] Historian and philosopher, Isaiah Berlin, employs this axiom in his famous analysis of Tolstoy's conception of Russian history, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, where he describes thinkers who perceive the flow of history in the manner of a hedgehog, meaning that they understand all events and their causes to boil down to the inevitable fulfillment of a single overarching Russian Idea. In the Soviet Union, this absolute idea, which defined Soviet citizens' identity of Homo Sovieticus, was Marxism-Leninism. But in Svetlana Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl: A Chronicle of the Future* (*Chernobyl'skaia Molitva: Khronika Budushego*, 1997), the sage and magical hedgehog loses his folkloric glory and becomes a symbol of the fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, a tragedy that complicated rather than affirmed the Soviet Idea and the identity of the Soviet people. References to hedgehogs range from sightings of bald hedgehogs, sick from radiation, to

[1] Hugh Warwick, *Hedgehog,* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2014), 101.
[2] Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and The Fox: An essay on Tolstoy's view of history,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1953), 1.

"Chernobyl hedgehog" (chernobyl'skim ezhikom), a nickname for survivors and workers, to survivor-mothers' fears of giving birth to some sort of human-beast hybrid.[3] According to one witness, the Chernobyl accident – like the folkloric hedgehog's shedding his hair – ultimately showed people's true colors.[4] Thus, the Chernobyl hedgehog is a concrete manifestation of growing questions about the nature of istina in the late- and post-Soviet periods, and *Voices from Chernobyl* suggests that istina is continually defined through conversations among multiple, often conflicting elements of the everyday and not by bureaucratically enforced ideology.

Alexievich, who is a journalist by training, often is credited with illuminating the true nature of the Soviet Union. Some scholars place her among notable Soviet dissident documentary writers like Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), whose works like *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) depict in hard factual detail the lives of ordinary citizens who were sent to the Gulag for supposed ideological crimes.[5] Indeed, *Voices from Chernobyl* illustrates a moment when the Soviet bureaucratic mechanism that forsook people's safety and the veracity of documentary work for the sake of maintaining the Communist Party's power structure was beginning to fail. At the same time, critics have accused Alexievich of being a novelist rather than a nonfiction writer. Alexievich composes her works by curating thousands of interviews with everyday people. Yet, as Sophie Pinkham argues, Alexievich's writing process is tantamount to "witness tampering" because of critical discrepancies in the content of interviews

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[3] Svetlana Aleksievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: A Chronicle of the Future* <u>(1997)</u>, trans. Keith Gessen (Normal, London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), 111, 139; *Chernobyl'skaya Molitva: Khronika Budushchego* (Moskva: Vremia, 2016). One of Alexievich's interviewees describes her nightmare of giving birth to a baby with the body of a puppy and the head of a hedgehog ("shchenka s golovoi ezhika"), 185. Later, a man describes classmates who called him "Chernobyl'skim ezhikom," 199.
[4] *Voices from Chernobyl*, 113.
[5] Angela Brintlinger, "Mothers, father(s), daughter: Svetlana Aleksievich and The Unwomanly Face of War," in *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes,* 2017, https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2017.1379114, accessed on December 15, 2017.

among older and newer editions of her works.[6] Additionally, a group of initially willing

interviewees now alleges that she incorrectly manipulated their accounts, and they have gone so

far as to sue her for defamation.[7] Alexievich's genre, the authenticity of her writings, and the

potentially political function of her authorial voice are continually debated.

While Alexievich is a liberal thinker who openly opposes Russian President Vladimir

Putin's neo-Soviet totalitarian regime,[8] she does not express in her writing a decidedly anti-

socialist stance and does not deny the literary tendency of her creative process. In fact, she

claims that she works under a definition of documentary that seeks to "create a new reality" as

opposed to simply recounting the already-perceived facts of life.[9] Alexievich's formal writing

process – creating a "chorus of voices"[10] – is reminiscent of the composition of folklore, which

Roman Jakobson defines as a communal artistic product that changes according to the

circumstances surrounding its genesis.[11] The folkloric timbre of Alexievich's works not only

renders the question of authenticity almost moot – the definition of authenticity is difficult to

obtain from a work that is inherently changeable – but also lends a uniquely heterotopic quality

to her documentary genre in that it suggests that the collective ideals that drove the Russian

revolution in the first place indeed have existed and might continue to exist in spite of the Soviet

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[6] Sophie Pinkham, "Witness Tampering," in *The New Republic,* August 29, 2016,
https://newrepublic.com/article/135719/witness-tampering, accessed on November 6, 2017.
[7] See Masha Gessen, "The Memory Keeper," in *The New Yorker,* October 26, 2015,
https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/26/the-memory-keeper, accessed on March 5, 2018.
[8] In 2017, Alexievich, along with a number of other writers, withdrew from Russia's national PEN club in
protest to the official expulsion of Sergey Parkhomenko, who was accused of "provocative activity," code
for his support for a Ukrainian writer who had been labeled a "terrorist" in Russia. See Paula Erizanu,
"Nobel Prize Winner Svetlana Alexievich Quits "Shameful" Russian PEN," in *The Guardian,* January 14,
2017, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/14/nobel-prize-winner-svetlana-alexievich-quits-
shameful-russian-pen, accessed on January 31, 2018.
[9] John C. Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Amherst: University of
Massachusetts Press, 2016), 84.
[10] Alexandra von Nahmen, "Writing for Peace: How Mighty is the Pen?" DW News, October 13, 2013,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DsJUsgu_U8, accessed on August 2, 2016.
[11] Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrov, "On the Boundary between Studies of Folklore and Literature,"
(1931), in *Selected Writings*, Vol. II (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1971), 91-93.

Union's bureaucratic limitations. As *Voices from Chernobyl* exemplifies, Alexievich's works reflect a fundamental mission of the Proletkult period of the early 1920s, during which artists attempted to create a completely new socialist culture by engaging regular people as artists and by bringing the realm of art, which held the dream of communism, closer to the real world. Therefore, as a political figure, Alexievich redefines dissidence in the late- and post-Soviet context by suggesting that integrating the cognitive counterparts of anti-totalitarianism and socialism is necessary for a fulfilling and ethical life in the post-communist world.

Heterotopia is useful for understanding the nuances of late- and post-Soviet culture and, therefore, of Alexievich's writings, because it addresses the myriad differences or "other topoi"[12] that existed in Soviet life, both artistic and quotidian. Soviet bureaucracy's conception of time and its mandates on who would create Marxist-Leninist culture and how are keys to understanding how it obscured alternate artistic and everyday spaces in Soviet life, especially that of Proletkult, the avant-garde artist organization that sought to create a new socialist culture immediately after the revolution in Russia. In *Dreamworld and Catastrophe,* which tracks the numerous potential alternatives to the cultural and political binaries that evolved during the Soviet era, Susan Buck-Morss defines the significant difference in how Proletkult and the evolving Marxist-Leninist bureaucracy understood time:

> The "time" of the cultural avant-garde is not the same as that of the vanguard party. These artists' practices interrupted the continuity of perceptions and estranged the familiar, severing historical tradition through force of their fantasy…The effect was to rupture the continuity of time, opening it up to new cognitive and sensory experiences. In contrast, the party submitted to a historical cosmology that provided no such freedom of movement. Bolshevism's claim to know the course of history in its totality presumed a "science" of the future that

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[12] Vitaly Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Kingston, Canada: McGilll-Queen's University Press, 2009), 89**.**

encouraged revolutionary politics to dictate art. Culture was to be operationalized.[13]

The Russian avant-garde artists who would build the Proletkult movement perceived revolutionary time as flowing, open, and immune to the limits of human consciousness. That is to say that past, present, and future might exist simultaneously, and that change could easily happen, be reversed, and be reconstituted in a different form. This sense freed artists to experiment with art in everyday life and to encourage regular people to do the same. For example, in the years immediately following the revolution, traditional art forms like theater became mass spectacles; ordinary people (perhaps grabbed from the streets), who in the past would have been passive audience members, directly participated as actors, set builders, and musicians.[14] In contrast, the Bolsheviks, under Lenin's ideological purview, saw time as strictly linear and believed that the goal of the revolution was simply to speed time up. Striving to bring the future to the here and now resulted in the manipulation of formerly free-flowing artistic practices and, ultimately, the establishment of the official Soviet aesthetic of Socialist Realism in 1932.

The essence of the Proletkult movement and its implications on the Soviet documentary tradition with which I associate Alexievich was defined in the works of Sergei Tret'iakov (1892-1937), one of the founders of the revolutionary journals, *LEF (The Left Front of Art, Levyi Front Iskusstvo,* 1923-1925) and *Novyi LEF* (*New LEF,* 1927-1929). Tret'iakov is known for his devotion to the idea that traditional, bourgeois Russian art was no longer relevant; *LEF* was supposed to be an artistic medium for the new Russian socialist culture. In a 1922 essay, "Art in

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[13] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass., London: The MIT Press, 2000), 49.

[14] Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 115. Clark writes specifically about the "staging" of the storming of the Winter Palace on the first anniversary of the revolution.

Revolution and Revolution in Art" ("Iskusstvo v Revoliutsii i Revolutsiia v Iskusstve"),

Tret'iakov lays out his vision of the function of art in socialist life and makes two significant

claims: that art should be constructive rather than reflective, and that it should be democratic.

Echoing the theories of Russian Formalists like Viktor Shklovsky and Yuri Tynianov, Tret'iakov

maintains that art is the collection and organization of aesthetic tools, and that these tools have

varying functions depending on the circumstances in which they are employed. If art is simply

given to the people, then they become passive viewers who do not understand the works' inner

meanings. Accordingly, democratic and constructive revolutionary art will teach all people how

to use aesthetic tools to build socialist life. Per Tre'tiakov's analysis, everyone should be tasked

with becoming an "artist-builder of this life" (khudozhnikom-stroitelem etoi zhizni).[15]

Documentary became a primary vehicle for this Proletkult art-to-life mission because it

required the application of aesthetic tools to organize and give new meaning to elements of the

day-to-day, a process that Tret'iakov called factography. Factographic documentary methods

were used to demonstrate how Russian revolutionary ideology was being enacted in the real

world. For example, the early 1920s works of director Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) captured

various images of daily life, such as births, deaths, work, and family, and juxtaposed them on

film to create a seamless vision of the socialist world.[16] Likewise, Maxim Gor'ky (1868-1936)

recognized the potential for documentary to create a society of people who did not simply

appreciate art but who were artists themselves. His encyclopedia projects, most notably the

resurrection of the series, *The Lives of Great People* (*Zhizni Zamechatel'nych Liudei*), made

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[15] Sergei Tret'iakov, "Iskusstvo v Revoliutsii i Revoliutsiia v Iskusstve," in *Gorn*, Kniga 8 (Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiiskogo I Moskovskogo Proletkultov, 1922), 117.
[16] Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 79-85. Vatulescu argues that Vertov's shots of daily life factored into evolving Soviet policing practices. Nonetheless, his work, including the use of hidden cameras, depicted the new socialist day-to-day.

documentary work a key part of the new socialist culture.[17] Early Soviet documentary encouraged people to contribute to the construction of socialist life by showing how everyone – the average Russians in Vertov's films or the "great people" in Gor'ky's encyclopedia – was working toward that common goal.

The notion that art can organize reality or create a new understanding of it was also a topic of anthropological discourse, as Vladimir Propp's (1895-1970) studies of the history and structure of Russian folklore suggest. The genesis of folklore is akin to documentary and factography according to Propp's assertion that folkore is "a fact of the people's life."[18] In an essay on how folklore scholars should study the relationship between folktales and reality, Propp argues that, although it might contain elements of magic or fantasy, folklore is rooted in the real life of the time in which it was produced. It is reality explained "through the prism of thought,"[19] which has a heterotopic quality because it brings together the normally disparate entities of performer and audience. Propp observes, "What is not in harmony with the people dies out; what remains is subjected to profound qualitative changes..."[20] Folklore is the property of the people, not just of a single author. Its form, content, and social function always change according to what the performer of the folktale wishes to add or remove and to what the audience approves or rejects. Because of its blurring the lines between performer/artist and audience, folklore was a useful model for achieving the Proletkult mission of democratizing art and uniting art and life, but it also became critical to the Soviet bureaucratic mission.

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[17] Elizabeth Papazian, *Manufacturing Truth: The Documentary Moment in Early Soviet Culture,* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009)**,** 22.
[18] Felix Oinas, "The Problems of the Notion of Soviet Folklore," in *Essays on Russian Folklore and Mythology,* (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1984), 160.
[19] Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore,* ed. Anatoly Lieberman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 10, 38.
[20] Ibid., 6.

Historian Dana Howell describes how the study of myth and folklore, once an anthropological field, became critical in the Soviet Union as a bearer of ideology. As the majority of the Russian population was peasantry, folklore was a universal and easily accessible vehicle for a socialist education. At first, the gathering of local myths by the State Institute for the History of Art (Gosudarstvennyi Institut Istorii Iskusstv, GII), an entity that consisted of many formalist artists and scholars, was indicative of the modern condition. It served a function of connecting the urban to the rural and preserving customs that were disappearing due to rapid urbanization and industrialization.[21] Eventually, these myths were mined for forms that could demonstrate the proletarian mission. According to Howell, in the 1920s, Proletkult published proletarian lore in forms that had been collected from the Russian countryside with the hope of showing – via forms that ordinary Russian people could understand and apply – how the revolution was happening in Russian cities.[22]

In *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual,* Katerina Clark, explains how these folk aesthetics were applied to depictions of everyday socialist life. For example, novels of the 1920s present their heroes via hagiographic descriptions, essentially painting pictures that are akin to Russian Orthodox icons. The "folk lesson" that the heroes of these novels ultimately learn is that spontaneous and experimental behaviors, not rooted in the Soviet idea, are unproductive and harmful to the socialist cause. Clark discusses characters like *Cement's* (*Tsement, 1925*) Gleb Chumalov, who returns to his hometown after the revolution to find that the factory at the heart of the town has been closed down. Only after benefitting from the wisdom of a party official does Chumalov achieve success by uniting the townspeople and restarting the factory. In the end of novels like *Cement,* the heroes – images of Homo Sovieticus – who act with consciousness of

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[21] Dana Prescott Howell, *The Development of Soviet Folkloristics*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 51.
[22] Ibid, 77.

the Soviet idea are able to overcome both manmade and natural obstacles to preserve the socialist mission.[23] As Clark's examples show, the use of folklore in the early 1920s – like the mission of documentary – was meant to encourage the vast population of Russia's peasants and workers to contribute to the creation of the new socialist culture by employing aesthetic tools that were accessible to them.

However, toward the end of that decade and especially after Lenin's death in 1924, folklore changed from a fluid, creative act that could be defined by the people into a national literature that was the property of the Soviet government. For example, Slavic folklorist, Felix Oinas, explains how a particular communist authority, whom Oinas does not name, ultimately determined the singular social function of folklore. He writes that this authority built communist society by "[describing] in glowing colors the Soviet reality – the advantages of the Soviet socialist order, the new Soviet man, and the need for unmasking the bourgeois ideology – all of which "constitutes the inspiration for contemporary folk art….""[24] In her essay praising the role of folklore in the Soviet Union, historian Margaret Schlauch acknowledges that Soviet authorities regurgitated the people's lore to them but with specifically socialist contexts. She observes, "Conscious choice dictated the use of a weapon which the people themselves has provided. Their original groping satire was clarified when they re-encountered their own formulations of it in the context of other tales."[25] Thus, the folklore that the people created was forced into the mold of the great Soviet Idea. Indeed, by 1931, the study of folklore fell under the purview of a Soviet bureaucratic institution, the State Academy of the Study of Art (Gosudarstvennaia Akademia Iskusstvoznaniia), and became a Marxist "weapon of class

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[23] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000), 8-15, 44-45.
[24] Oinas, 166.
[25] Margaret Schlauch, "Folklore in the Soviet Union," in *Science & Society*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer, 1944): 215.

struggle."[26] Likewise, factographic documentary, which had connected elements of art to the varied and fluid details of everyday life, became a vehicle for a singular, official Soviet aesthetic. In *Manufacturing Truth: The Documentary Moment in Early Soviet Culture,* Elizabeth Papazian argues that the early revolutionary focus on documentary naturally led to the establishment of Socialist Realism, as it began to present the imagined future triumph of communism as an already-existing fact.[27] Ultimately, both folklore and documentary work were required to reflect what Katerina Clark calls the master narrative of Socialist Realism, the official Soviet aesthetic, which depicts Homo Sovieticus, the Soviet man with a resolute communist consciousness.

     Voices from Chernobyl questions the absoluteness of the Soviet Idea – and the nature of istina – by presenting Soviet reality through hundreds of prisms of thought. The Soviet Idea had been instilled in Homo Sovieticus's psyche largely through a manipulated folklore, but as John C. Hartsock argues, the structure of Alexievich's works breaks down Soviet lore by exposing individual experiences that directly counter it.[28] In *Voices from Chernobyl,* many of Aleksievich's interviewees begin their testimony by presenting big Soviet ideas that they had believed before the nuclear disaster and end it by debating whether or not they still uphold them. Often, these ideas – that Homo Sovieticus can master nature, and that the government honors its hero workers – are expressed as symbols of Soviet folklore: the atom and the shovel, for example. One Chernobyl survivor recalls that, "…everyone was raised to believe that the peaceful Soviet atom was as safe as peat or coal" (…vse vospitany na tom, chto mirnyi sovetskii atom tak zhe ne opasen, kak torf i ugol').[29] In this case, Soviet lore argued that in the service of the socialist mission, the potentially dangerous atom was good. Even after the accident, people

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[26] Howell, 257
[27] Papazian, 22.
[28] Hartsock, 87-88.
[29] *Voices from Chernobyl*, 211; *Chernobyl'skaia Molitva,* 262.

believed that man could overcome nature. An interviewee explains that she was relieved when the army arrived at the accident site, thinking that if the Soviet military were there, then everything would be okay.[30] Likewise, servicemen and volunteers believed not only that it was their duty to participate in the firefighting, evacuation, and excavation efforts but also that, since they were Soviet workers, their sacrifices would ultimately result in success. In another folkloristic aphorism, an interviewee explains that liquidators – the name for the workers at Chernobyl – could "fight the atom with a shovel" ("na atom – lopatoi").[31] Finally, the Soviet idea of brotherhood among nations initially was still strong at the time of the Chernobyl accident. Some evacuees remember thinking that, while of course leaving their homes was traumatic, they would be welcomed and would find help and comfort wherever they went. After all, Soviet brotherhood meant that no matter one's ethnic, linguistic, or geographic origins, he or she was first and foremost a Soviet person.[32]

The initial calm and hope that these ideas offered was shaken when people began to realize that their lived experience did not correspond to Soviet lore. In particular, they saw man's futility in the face of a powerful natural force. Sergei Gurin, a cameraman who was sent to document the liquidation efforts, remembers that he went to Chernobyl thinking that he could capture the heroic work that would reinforce belief in the great Soviet national character. Instead, he found fear, suffering, and a pervasive sense of confusion over how the accident had happened, what the actual value of the liquidation efforts was, and whether or not the workers were as safe as they were being told they were.[33] Soviet national character became fuzzy at Chernobyl because the people who were doing their best to embody it were being exploited, ignored, and

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[30] *Voices from Chernobyl*, 156.
[31] *Voices from Chernobyl*, 160; *Chernobyl'skaia Molitva,* 202.
[32] *Voices from Chernobyl*, 57, 63.
[33] *Voices from Chernobyl*, 105-114.

abandoned by Soviet authorities. Liquidators, who had been told they would be working at

Chernobyl for a few days, ended up at the accident site for months on end, without any

indication of when they would be able to go home or how they should mitigate the spread of

radiation to their families when they got there. One liquidator remembers a Colonel Yaroshuk,

who should not have had to spend so much time measuring radiation levels in the Zone – the area

that had been evacuated – and, as a result, turned into a Chernobyl robot.[34] In this example,

Alexievich defamiliarizes the heroic Soviet folkloric figure of the worker by turning it into a

machine that nature can break down.

Even outside of the Zone and years after the accident, people found that their status as

Soviet citizens was not enough to ensure that they had the information, assistance, and care that

they needed to deal with the economic hardship and disease that Chernobyl caused. For example,

family members of deceased liquidators might not know where their loved ones were buried, or

even that they had died. Moreover, those who remained alive but suffered illness from radiation

exposure were denied the ability to treat their ailments or receive medical benefits. For instance,

Nikolai Kalugin, the father of a cancer victim, recalls that hospital officials refused to disclose

the results of his daughter's medical tests.[35] These Soviet heroes and the reasons for their deaths

were being concealed from the public, as if to say that all they had experienced was not true.

As Aleksievich's voices show, the individuals who experienced Chernobyl could not

continue to accept critical elements of Soviet folklore – that the worker could triumph over

nature, and that being a Soviet citizen warranted a certain level of care and protection. But the

crumbling of the Soviet myth opened the door for the creation of a new worldview that is

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[34] Liquidators note the broken-down robots, which authorities had hoped would contain and clean up the site of the accident instead of people. Humans were the only "robots" who could work through the heat of the radiation. See *Chernobyl'skaia Molitva,* 82 and 97 and *Voices from Chernobyl,* 135, for example.
[35] *Voices from Chernobyl*, 36.

impervious to Soviet bureaucratic norms and instead operates according to natural folkways that

scholars like Propp defined and that avant-garde Proletkult artists embraced. Significant

anthropological and historical studies of Soviet life have analyzed similar relationships between

ordinary citizens and official bureaucracy, but their mission is to interpret reactions to these

authorities rather than to document attempts to guide or change them. For example, historian

Gabor Rittersporn argues that the folkways of Soviet people tangibly countered official state

policies. The bureaucratic attempt to engineer Homo Sovieticus based on the demands of an elite

political few was not entirely effective because Soviet people preserved their original beliefs and

behaviors while maintaining a façade of loyalty to official Soviet ideology.[36] Likewise, in

Everything was Forever, Until it was No More, anthropologist Alexei Yurchak documents how

practices in the smaller levels of large Communist Party institutions, namely local Komsomol

chapters, prioritized regular family and social relationships by upholding bureaucratic demands,

such as exams on ideology and employee reviews, only superficially.[37] In contrast to these

investigations of how people reacted to official ideology, Alexievich's chorus of voices presents

how people struggle to translate the Soviet Idea into a productive way of collectively building a

working socialist society. Thus, *Voices from Chernobyl* is heterotopic in two ways: its form

creates a literary space that allows Alexievich as a writer to experiment with aesthetics of

contingency and flexibility that the Soviet bureaucratic mechanism had blocked, and its content

illustrates how Chernobyl as an actual geographic location has created a space – both concretely

and symbolically – in which Soviet citizens are determining their own socialistic societies. That

is to say that Alexievich's arrangement of voices recaptures the collective nature of the early

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[36] Gabor Rittersporn, *Anguish, Anger, and Folkways in Soviet Russia*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2014).
[37] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

revolutionary cultural mission and suggests the potential for the Soviet people to continually

build their socialist life rather than having it imposed upon them from a state entity.

Heterotopia defines spaces that maintain a working relationship between ordinary people

and political and ideological authorities, like the ones that manipulated folklore and factographic

documentary in order to enforce the great Soviet Idea. In "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault

defines heterotopias as spaces that exist outside of the ones civilization has "emplaced" by

coding them according to binaries like sacred/profane, public/private, or playful/useful.

Heterotopias question, subvert, and neutralize these binaries because they inherently consist of

all the categories that civilization has separated. Unlike utopias, which fulfill a similar function

by defying existing definitions of place but are nonetheless imagined "nowheres," heterotopias

actually exist. Foucault argues that they are "probably in every culture, in every civilization, real

places…something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites,

all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented,

contested, and inverted."[38] Where ideological constructs and the authorities that enforce them

define categories of emplacement, such as personal, political, or biological identity, profession,

and even artistic genre, heterotopias offer a space in which it is possible not just to imagine but

to experiment in reality with defying, redefining, or integrating these categories. Paul Clements

argues in his study of the practices of underground artistic movements that modern heterotopias

are not concerned with "philosophical questions about 'why' inequalities exist" and instead

tackle "pragmatic questions that concern 'how' to deliver a life." That is to say that heterotopias

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[38] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (1967), trans. Jay Miskowiec, in *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, October, 1984: 3-4, http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf, accessed on January 8, 2018.

aim to facilitate a fulfilling and just existence amidst or in spite of the limiting categories of politically or ideologically imposed emplacement.[39]

Foucault outlines six conditions that a space must meet in order to be a heterotopia. First, a heterotopia must accommodate people in crisis, or those who in some way do not fit the categories of emplacement of the society in which they exist. Second, the function of a heterotopia must be able to evolve along with the nature of the civilization in which it exists, a quality that leads to another necessary condition of heterotopia – connection to a particular point in time, or heterochrony. A heterotopia juxtaposes several spaces that normally would be incompatible with each other, and yet access to a heterotopia is not free and unbounded, as people often undergo particular cultural rites in order to enter it. Finally, a heterotopia cannot exist in a vacuum and must interact with all other spaces that it touches.[40]

Several iterations of the notion of heterotopia have appeared in analyses of Russian and Soviet culture. For example, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, the literary representation of space-time, is echoed in Foucault's claim that heterotopia is connected to specific places in time. In the early 20th century, Bakhtin suggested that the carnival is a space-time where people can freely defy social abstractions such as sacred traditions, dictates from authorities, and taboos, and perform normally limited rites and behaviors that are more closely connected to tangible, earthly, and sometimes crudely human needs.[41] Toward the end of 20th century, Soviet semiotician, Yuri Lotman, proposed the concept of the semiosphere, which, like Foucault's heterotopia, is a space where new meaning is made, and the world is understood and lived in a way that negotiates disparities and defies norms. Lotman defines the semiosphere as an

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[39] Paul Clements, *The Creative Underground: art, politics, and everyday life* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 124.
[40] Foucault, 5-8.
[41] M.M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1937-38), in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

abstract location of communication that translates the tangible world of space and time into a language that people can understand – namely those who are neighbors to a particular space-time but are not necessarily part of it. Lotman specifies that in a semiosphere, contradictory or normally unaligned objects and ideas must exist together, and that communication between these entities must be reciprocal.[42]

While these qualities of semiospheres mirror two of Foucault's conditions of heterotopia, they do not function as universally as Foucault contends that heterotopias do. For instance, Lotman argues that in Russia, there is insufficient space for certain semiospheres to exist because Russian culture operates on a very clearly defined binary of old and new – there is no permeable middle ground in which two-way communication can happen. Instead, the old and the new in Russian culture continually swap places, the old leaving traces of itself each time the new rises to the top. For example, when ancient Rus' was Christianized in 988, old Slavic pagan ways still factored in the new Orthodox Christian culture, a phenomenon known in Russian as dvoeverie or dual-belief. Still, Orthodox and pagan practices remained separate in principle. Until Orthodoxy became old in cultural terms with the early 18th century reforms of Tsar Peter I, following Orthodoxy was progressive, and retaining pagan behaviors was reactionary.[43] This cultural understanding continues in the context of dissidence in the late- and post-Soviet periods. Being a dissident in the Soviet Union generally equated to being progressive, which in turn meant supporting a Western-style democratic and capitalistic culture. Meanwhile, other stances were considered either to be reactionary – striving toward a past that either cannot or should not exist

[42] Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, "On the semiosphere" (1984), trans. Wilma Clark, in *Sign Systems Studies* 33.1, 2005: 207, 219.
http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.693.9961&rep=rep1&type=pdf, accessed on February 2, 2018.
[43] Iurii M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspenski, "Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (to the End of the Eighteenth Century)" (1977), in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History,* ed. Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 33.

anymore – or simply towing the party line. There was no shared membrane,[44] in Lotman's terms,

through which a conversation about the relationship between the poles of this binary could occur.

George Faraday's study of the Soviet film industry is helpful for understanding the faults

in perceiving Soviet cultural production and dissidence according to this binary. In *Revolt of the*

Filmmakers, Faraday explains the cultural significance of Russian and Soviet artists, who as

members of the intelligentsia took on the responsibility of educating and improving society.

Whereas in pre-revolutionary Russia, artists were relatively free to fulfill this mission as they

saw fit, in the Soviet era, the nomenklatura – Communist Party leaders who often were chosen

more as political favors than for their cultural capital – dictated the form and content of artistic

works in order to ensure their ideological loyalty. As a result, an understanding arose among

observers of Soviet art that those who abided by the bureaucratic artistic code were opportunists

who sought only material and professional benefits, while those who defied Soviet ideology were

true artists who understood and conveyed istina to the people.[45] Faraday's primary argument

complicates this notion by highlighting the variety of internal mechanisms in the Soviet film

world that created an artistic middle ground that addressed, among other factors, the needs of

everyday life such as having a job, getting an education, and feeding one's family. Faraday

suggests new aesthetic categories that are neither clearly Communist Party-oriented nor dissident

and that often can bleed into each other. For example, he defines groups of messianic elitists,

who aimed to convey some sort of message – not necessarily on Soviet ideology – through their

work, while amoral artists were primarily concerned with experimenting with artistic forms;

Faraday provides evidence that both groups would produce state-sanctioned films in spite of

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[44] Lotman, "On the Semiosphere," 211**.**
[45] George Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers: The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 22.

their personal imperatives.[46] The mechanism Faraday describes is heterotopic because it allows artists to operate outside of the categories of progressive dissident and reactionary opportunist. Furthermore, it is a space in which a writer like Alexievich, whose works tend not to have a dominant ideological voice, can exist. Thus, heterotopia – perhaps more than Bakhtin's chronotope and Lotman's semiosphere – helps clarify the nuances of dissidence in late- and post-Soviet culture.

Journalist Irena Kiseleva's interview implies the heterotopic nature of Chernobyl, both as a place and an idea: "…it's as if there are two people inside of me, the pre-Chernobyl me and the post-Chernobyl one" (Vo mne slovno by dva cheloveka – dochernobyl'skii i chernobyl'skii).[47] Another voice contends that the world is now divided into two groups, Chernobyl people and other people, and even nuances of accent – Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian – do not matter. Chernobyl itself has become a "new nation" (My razdelilis': est' my – chernobyl'tsy i est' vy, vse drugie liudi…U nas ne aktsentiruiuto: ya – belorus, ya – ukrainets, ya – russkii…Kak budto my otdel'nyi kakoi-to narod…Novaia natsiia).[48] Based on testimony in *Voices from Chernobyl,* a Chernobyl person has no need for official bureaucratic definitions. A woman who decided to defy evacuation orders and stay in her home near the plant exclaims, "We don't need anything from the government. Just leave us alone is all we want. We don't need a store, we don't need a bus. We walk to get our bread. Twenty kilometers. Just leave us alone. We're all right by ourselves" (Nichego ot gosudarstva nam ne nado. Vse sami proizvodim. Ne trogaite tol'ko nas! Ni magazina ne nado, ni avtobusa. Za khlebom i sol'iu xodim peshkom za dvadtsat' kilometrov. My – sami sebe).[49] Another Chernobylite voice echoes her, claiming, "Here we have

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[46] Ibid., 27, 91, 174, 196**.**
[47] *Voices from Chernobyl*, 207; *Chernobyl'skaia Molitva,* 257.
[48] *Voices from Chernobyl,* 126; *Chernobyl'skaia Molitva,* 140.
[49] *Voices from Chernobyl,* 42; *Chernobyl'skaia Molitva,* 59.

communism – we live like brothers and sisters" (U nas tut kommunizm. Zhivem – brat'ia i sestry).[50] They argue that the most necessary elements of life and of survival are not to be found in political ideology but in basic provisions and, essentially, in the work of fellow humans. Thus, they dispatch with the idea that some sort of official Soviet Idea is a prerequisite to living contentedly in socialism.

Furthermore, Chernobylites exist outside of the notion of Soviet brotherhood, which, as it became clear after the accident, did not guarantee sympathy, assistance, or support. In fact, Chernobyl becomes a nation of Soviets who have found that they are not welcome or do not belong in their homelands. A refugee from Central Asia says that she came to Chernobyl because she no longer has a home. In the past, living in Central Asia had not been a problem for an ethnic Russian like her because everyone was a Soviet citizen. However, being Soviet no longer has the same meaning, the refugee explains, and so she cannot stay in Central Asia, where Russians are now unwanted. She describes the circumstances that have brought her to Chernobyl:

> What am I? My mother's Ukrainian, my father's Russian. I was born and raised in Kyrgyzstan, and I married a Tatar. So what are my kids? What is their nationality? We're all mixed up. Our blood is all mixed together. On our passports, my kids and mine, it says "Russian," but we're not Russian. We're Soviet! But that country – where I was born – no longer exists. The place we called our motherland doesn't exist, and neither does that time, which was also our motherland…Our country doesn't exist, but we do.

> Kto ya? Mama – ukrainka; papa – russkii. Rodilas' i vyrosla v Kirgizii, vyshla zamuzh za tatarina. Kto moi deti? Kakaia u nikh natsional'nost'? My vse peremeshalis', nasha krov' peremeshalas'. V pastporte u menia i u detei zapisano – russkie, a my – ne russkie. My – sovetskie! No toi strany, gde ya rodilas', net. Net ni togo mesta, chto my nazvali rodinoi, ni togo vremeni, kotoroe tozhe bylo nashei rodinoi…Nashei strany net, a my – est. [51]

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[50] Translated by TK; *Chernobyl'skaia Molitva,* 62.
[51] *Voices from Chernobyl,* 63; *Chernobyl'skaia Molitva,* 77.

Chernobylites are not Russian, Central Asian, or Soviet, but a transnational people who live according to everyday needs and individual relationships, and Chernobyl is a space that accommodates them in their time of crisis.

This Chernobylite phenomenon, which Aleksievich's writing describes, has been documented in the work of anthropologist, Adriana Petryna, who argues that Chernobyl has been a critical factor in Ukraine's mission to establish itself as a political entity. She writes, "The legacy of Chernobyl has been used as a means of signaling Ukraine's domestic and international legitimacy…and as a venue of governance and state building, social welfare, and corruption…"[52] While Petryna focuses on Ukraine's official political activities, she observes a general phenomenon of "biological citizenship," which arose to address the consequences of Chernobyl radiation. Biological citizenship is a concrete and measureable example of the heterotopia Aleksievich's voices describe, as it posits that factors related to the human body, which stem from exposure to Chernobyl radiation, are more significant grounds for citizenship than ideology or ethnicity because they determine people's access to social welfare services. Significantly, Petryna's study indicates that biological citizenship itself has a fluid definition and is not regulated by a particular political authority. Of course, there are standards for the types of biological factors that warrant healthcare assistance or compensation from the government; however, people find ways to grant or obtain biological citizenship according to need, even if the factors do not immediately meet these standards. For example, Petryna recounts the story of a couple's quest for medical care for their nine-year-old boy who suffers from a limp. Medical professionals did their best to trace the boy's condition to in-utero exposure to radiation – even though tests demonstrated that he had not ever been exposed to enough radiation to cause such a

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[52] Adriana Petryna, "Biological Citizenship: The Science and Politics of Chernobyl-Exposed Populations, 2004," in *The Anthropology of Citizenship*, ed. Sian Lazar (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), 140.

problem – because connecting the disability to Chernobyl would ensure that the boy's family would receive aid.[53] In light of examples like this one, Petryna determines that people have "accidentally" developed a "socialist-like" society that provides for the sufferers of Chernobyl radiation.[54]

The Chernobylite society that Aleksievich's voices describe, like the society of biological citizens illustrated in Petryna's studies, exists outside of and in spite of bureaucratic determinations of truth, victimhood, and what warrants exclusion or inclusion in social processes. Hints of this heterotopic existence appear in Alexievich's other books, which also address the breakdown of Soviet ideas and the resulting transformation of Soviet identity. *Zinky Boys (Tsinkovye Mal'chiki,* 1989*)* contains the stories of the servicemen and women in the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, as well as of the surviving loved ones of those who did not come back home. Meanwhile, *Secondhand Time (Vremia Sekond-Khend,* 2014*)* tells the story of the days surrounding the August Putsch and the ultimate dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Both of these works document challenges to the official Soviet Idea and suggest the potential inherent in the outsider or crisis position in which people found themselves at these times.

In *Zinky Boys,* interviewees struggle with the desire to fight for a great cause and the knowledge that the purpose of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was murky. Some soldiers remember that they volunteered and were proud when they were called up to the army because they believed that they were playing roles in their generation's version of the Great Patriotic War (World War II). While these soldiers left for Afghanistan with parades and cheers, they often returned home to abandonment and jeers. In a letter to Aleksievich, G. Khaliulina, a civilian employee in Afghanistan argues, "…we were still idealists. We had our faith. The worst came

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[53] Ibid., 143.
[54] Ibid., 145.

later. We were sent to Afghanistan by a nation which sanctioned the war and returned to find that the same nation had rejected it…What was only recently described as one's 'international duty' is now considered stupidity" (Nesmotria ni na chto, my ostavalis' romantikami. Verili! Samo strashnoe proizoshlo potom: uezzhali my iz gosudarstva, kotoromu eta voina byla nuzhna, vernulis' v gosudarstvo, kotoromu eta voina ne nuzhna…Eshche neravno eto nazyvalos' "internatsional'nym dolgom", seichas – glupost'iu).[55] Here, Khaliulina articulates the crisis of returning soldiers' identities, which categorizes them as outsiders. They lament the crumbling Soviet Idea that should have justified the war in Afghanistan and wonder what sort of idea can sustain them now that they are home. But some voices in *Zinky Boys* describe a completely new way of life that is not based on ideology. A veteran maintains that serving in Afghanistan has made it impossible for him to exist in Russia, and so he has retreated into a different livable space that consists mostly of the arts, books, and music. He says, "I've created a world of my own for myself, thank God…which has cut me off from all that and has been my salvation" (Slava Bogu, u menia drugoi mir, on zakryl tot. Mir knig, muzyki. On menia spas).[56] These people live day to day in a space that allows them to create a fulfilling life outside the ideological and bureaucratic world that is failing them.

In *Secondhand Time*, interviewees recall specific instances that solidified the sense that the Soviet Idea no longer bears the same weight it had in the past. For example, Aleksievich notes the role of newspapers in people's ideological confusion after the fall of the Soviet Union. In the past, one would simply by a copy of *Pravda*, the official government vehicle for the socialist message (as well as the Russian word for factual truth). Now, an interviewee explains,

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[55]Svetlana Alexievich, *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from a Forgotten War* (1989), trans. Julia and Robin Whitby, (London: Chatoo & Windus, 1992), 185; *Tsinkovye Mal'chiki* (Moskva: Vremia, 2014), https://goo.gl/RZEDXS, accessed on March 3, 2018.
[56] *Zinky Boys,* 121; *Tsinkovye Mal'chiki*, https://goo.gl/NAjYXr*,* accessed on March 3, 2018.

you can find a different message in each newspaper you read: "I buy three newspapers and each one of them has its own version of the truth. Where's the real truth? You used to be able to get up in the morning, read *Pravda*, and know all you needed to know, understand everything you needed to understand" (Ja kupil tri gazety i v kazhdoi svoia pravda. Gde zhe nastoiashchaia pravda? Ran'she prochitaesh' utrom gazetu "Pravda" – i vse znaesh'. Vse ponimaesh').[57] Before the fall of the Soviet Union, the fact (pravda) that the bureaucratic apparatus conveyed was also the absolute truth (istina) of the Soviet Idea. The proliferation of new truths in newspapers was also evident in the streets, where, an interviewee suggests, one might witness two separate Russias, the "red" one and the capitalist one.[58] Avowed communists march through the streets of Moscow toward Lenin's tomb with red flags and portraits of Stalin, yet Moscow's streets are beacons of capitalism and consumerism. Walking those streets is like walking outside of two different states of being.

   Immediately in *Secondhand Time*, Alexievich brings into question the impermeable binary that, just as it had in Lotman's analysis, again is defining Russian culture. She writes in her introduction to the book, "Today, people just want to live their lives, they don't need some great Idea. This is entirely new for Russia; it's unprecedented in Russian literature. At heart, we're built for war. We were always either fighting or preparing to fight. We've never known anything else…" (Chelovek khochet prosto zhit', bez velikoi idei. Takogo nikogda ne bylo v russkoi zhizni, etogo ne znaet i russkaia literatura. V obshchem to, my voennye liudi. Ili voevali, ili gotovilis' k voine. Nikogda ne zhili inache…).[59] While Aleksievich claims here that big ideas were always an unspoken but pervasive part of Soviet life, many of her interviewees

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[57] Svetlana Aleksievich, *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets,* trans. Bela Shayevich (New York: Random House, 2016), 6; *Vremia Sekond-Khend,* (Moskva: Vremia, 2014), 10
[58] *Vremia Sekond-Khend,* 36.
[59] *Secondhand Time,* 4; *Vremia Sekond-Khend,* 8.

suggest that real life happens in a space that, like heterotopia, is outside of ideology. *Secondhand Time* points to this heterotopic space in Soviet existence in an interview with a former Communist Party member, Elena Yur'evna C., and her longtime friend, Anna Il'inichna M. Il'inichna is not a Communist but instead read samizdat literature, discussed dissident activities with her friends and family, and attended the demonstrations that occurred in the days before the Soviet Union officially fell apart. Meanwhile, Yur'evna is still a Communist and misses the days when she could proudly write the name of her country, the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the two still have managed to maintain their friendship. When Aleksievich asks how this has been possible all these years, Il'inichna replies,

> We agreed never to talk about these things. We have no interest in hurting each other's feelings. We used to get into fights, stop talking. Sometimes, we wouldn't speak to each other for years on end. But all that has passed. Now we only ever talk about our children and grandchildren. What we're growing in our dachas. When our friends get together…Not a word about politics. Everyone came to this by their own path. We all live together: the gentlemen and the comrades. Reds and Whites. But no one wants any more shooting. There's been enough blood.

> U nas ugovor – ne zatragivat' eti temy. Ne delat' drug drugu bol'no. A kogda-to my sporili, rvali otnoshenia. Godami ne razgovarivali drug s drugom. No eto proshlo. Teper' govorim tol'ko o detiakh i vnukakh. Chto u kogo na dache rastet. Soberutsia nashi druz'ia…Tozhe ni slova o politike. Kazhdyi svoim putem prishel k etomu. Zhivem vmeste: gospoda i tovarishchi. "Belye" i "krasnye." No nikto ne khochet streliat'. Khvatit krovi.[60]

Like the soldier in *Zinky Boys*, these women have created a world, a way of life, and an identity that are not beholden to big ideas. On the contrary, they depend on the multifaceted nature of everyday life – children, family, the garden in the country. They mirror the Chernobylite culture, in which people live outside of official society defined by political or bureaucratic demands.

The people in Aleksievich's works are in crisis because the Soviet Idea that had defined their lives and identities is failing them and disappearing. Alexievich explains that one of the

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[60] *Secondhand Time,* 77; *Vremia Sekond-Khend,* 79.

primary goals of her writing is to acknowledge both the concrete and the existential suffering

that this crisis causes. Scenarios of economic, physical, and personal loss and the question, "who

am I now?" dominate *Voices from Chernobyl, Zinky Boys,* and *Secondhand Time*. However,

unlike other Soviet and post-Soviet documentary writers and journalists – such as Anna

Politkovskaya and even Alexievich's mentor, Ales Adamovich, who was both a writer and a

politician – Alexievich does not probe this suffering in order to establish a singular truth about

the Soviet Idea or to explain the causes and effects of related historical moments. Rather, she

writes of suffering as a continual process of negotiating change: it is, she says, "our path of

wisdom" ("Stradanie – eto nash put' pozanania").[61] According to sociologist, Elena Gapova,

Aleksievich's works strive to identify a new moral foundation for life in the rapidly changing

post-Soviet era. Aleksievich does not claim to have defined this foundation, and so her striving

makes the genre of folklore and the early revolutionary, collective life-building artistic

movement so pertinent to her work. Just as Jakobson and Propp explain that folklore continually

changes according to the relationship among performers, audience, and the experience of reality,

the function of Alexievich's writing continues to change along with political circumstances.[62]

Historian Mark Elliot argues that the bureaucratic failings that accompanied the

Chernobyl disaster stimulated the progress of President Mikhail Gorbachev's programs of

glasnost' and perestroika, which ultimately destabilized the Soviet government and economy.

Chernobyl heralded the transformation of Eastern Europe from an oppressed region behind the

Iron Curtain to a group of independent, transparent, and democratic societies with identities of

their own.[63] Alexievich's writings reflect both elements of this argument – repression and

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[61] *Secondhand Time,* 37; *Vremia Sekond-Khend*, 40.
[62] Cited in Brintlinger, 3.
[63] Mark Elliot, "From Chernobyl to Ceausescu." in *Transformation*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (APRIL/JUNE 1991): 73.

transformation. Some of her earlier works, such as *The Unwomanly Face of War* (*U Voiny Ne Zhenskoe Litso,* 1985) and *Zinky Boys,* could not be published until the glasnost' and perestroika period because of their critique of Soviet bureaucracy. But the institution of glasnost' and the associated open criticism of the Soviet Idea is precisely what created the environment in which the cognitive counterparts that Alexievich's works address could exist. Currently, Aleksievich is officially considered to be an enemy of the totalitarian Russian state, and she laments the rising phenomenon that she calls Russia's "collective Putin" or "the deep sense of wounded national pride and contempt for liberal values."[64] And yet her writing process still holds a kernel of hope in collectivity, specifically if it is directed toward continuing conversations that document and foster the creation of spaces in which people can have a fulfilling existence. The creative element of collectivity is perhaps the most significantly heterotopic element of Alexievich's works. After all, Foucault closes his explanation of heterotopia by claiming that it is the "greatest reserve of imagination" and warning that without it, "dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates."[65]

The subtitle to *Voices from Chernobyl* is *Chronicle of the Future*, and as this chapter has shown, the beginnings of the socialist past and Eastern Europe's potential future, in aesthetic terms, are not as dissonant as the terms "past" and "future" would suggest. Thirty years after the Chernobyl disaster, and more than twenty years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the image of the bald hedgehog still appears as a reminder of the continued collective work necessary to build a humane and fulfilling life. For example, a multi-national activist group calling itself the Chernobyl Way (Chernobyl'skii Put' in Russian) often uses the image of a bald hedgehog during

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[64] Guy Chazan, "Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich on her fears for Russia's 'collective Putin'," in *Financial Times,* June 16, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/3bd17f26-4f5b-11e7-bfb8-997009366969, accessed on February 16, 2018.
[65] Foucault, 7.

its yearly rallies in Minsk to remember the victims of the nuclear disaster. On top of their

memorial purpose, they demand assistance for those who still suffer debilitating medical

problems, as well as action to resolve environmental issues related to the accident. In recent

years, the group has endured oppression by Belorussian president Sergei Lukashenka's regime,

which has dispersed rallies and arrested group members.[66] Yet the bald hedgehog perseveres.

The early socialist life-building aesthetic project still has a useful role to play in the post-Soviet

era.

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[66] Paula Borowska, "The Chernobyl Way, 2013," in *Belarus Digest,* April 29, 2013,
http://belarusdigest.com/story/chernobyl-way-2013-13844, accessed August 5, 2016.

Chapter Four –

"We're One but We're not the Same": Memory, Friendship, and Imagining the "Off-Modern"

Nation in Serhiy Zhadan's *Voroshilovgrad*

In Ukraine, where the struggle to move beyond subjugation to Russian colonial power

has become a matter of both ideological and physical war, is the past holding people back? More

specifically, what from Ukraine's Soviet period is worth remembering as the nation strives to

define its independent future? In a 2012 interview, Ukrainian poet, novelist, rock musician, and

activist, Serhiy Zhadan, explains the current lack of empathy in memorial practices and cultural

debates in Ukraine:

> There will be no mutual understanding while the East erects monuments to Stalin
> and the West to Shukhevych.[1] Our discussions will always assume a destructive
> stance. Promotion of the Ukrainian language gets reduced to a battle against the
> Russian language, and vice versa. Instead of addressing these problems
> constructively, we play along with the authorities, political populism and
> manipulation…it's best to find a common language. I think we need to accept the
> simple idea that we're all different….We're one, but we're not the same….We
> must constantly look for things that unite us.[2]

Prefiguring the Maidan Revolution of 2014, the subsequent Russian intervention, and the

resulting war in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine, Zhadan acknowledges that memory is

critical to defining a national idea but suggests the need for a new ethics of memory that actively

and critically seeks common ground instead of upholding divisive ideals that take advantage of

conveniently remembered or forgotten historical details – like Stalin's destructive policies in

Ukraine, including the devastating famine in the 1930s, or Shukhevych's violent nationalistic

acts against Ukrainian Poles during World War II. Zhadan's 2010 novel, *Voroshilovgrad,* defines

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[1] Roman Shukhevych was a leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a nationalist group that carried out
violent activities to stop the Polonization of Western Ukraine during World War II.
[2] Tanya Zaharchenko, "Ukraine: An Interview," July 10, 2012,
https://memoryidentity.wordpress.com/2012/07/10/ukraine-interview/, accessed on April 10, 2016.

friendship as the key to this ethics of memory because it is the only value from the past that resists becoming a troublesome binary. That is to say that friendship in *Voroshilovgrad* integrates the cognitive counterparts that are necessary to build an ethical modern Ukrainian national idea: Ukrainian culture and Russian/Soviet culture.

The politics of memory became particularly volatile in Ukraine after 2014, when the state forewent negotiations to join the European Union in favor of participating in a Russia-led economic coalition. Fed up with government corruption and still reeling from the 2008 worldwide economic downturn, Ukrainians of all backgrounds and political affiliations protested, upending the old government and instituting a new one. However, the empathetic unity that existed among Ukrainians during the Maidan demonstrations dissolved with the start of military conflict in the Donbas region, during which time Luhansk, Zhadan's home and the setting of *Voroshilovgrad,* seceded from Ukraine. Now, a key aspect of the conflict is the drive to create an exclusive definition of the Ukrainian nation that is devoid of Russian influence. This mission is indicative of a nostalgic politics that, as Svetlana Boym explains in her work on memory in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, "[claims] a pure and clean homeland" and effectively removes any sense of empathy that is usually present when people remember where they are from.[3] Thus is the problem with memory and politics: Remembering, as Tanya Zaharchenko observes in her study of the literature of Ukraine's borderlands, facilitates the formation of critical principles or, in other words, values to fight for.[4] However, the unfortunate corollary of having something to fight for is having something to fight over, such as language, religion, economic policy, or supposed national historical tradition.

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[3] Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia and its Discontents," in *The Hedgehog Review,* Summer 07: 10.
[4] Tanya Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet: Frontiers of Memory in Post-Soviet Fiction of Kharkiv, Ukraine,* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2016), 104

Conflicting memorial practices have created dark political and social times in Ukraine, but, as Hannah Arendt argues, friendship is a beacon in these times because it requires the constant negotiation of differences in worldview in order to preserve human connections.[5] Invoking Arendt, Svetlana Boym counts the capacity for friendship as one of the keys to the "off-modern," a back-and-forth cognitive movement that accepts that history contains a series of "what ifs" that comprise alternate models of politics, culture, and everyday life.[6] Therefore, by linking memory to friendship, Zhadan suggests that if actual human connections – which integrate the cognitive counterparts of Ukrainian and Russian/Soviet culture – are the defining factors of memory, the Ukrainian national idea will be flexible and adaptable enough to bridge problematic ideological divisions. As a native of the Donbas region and, Marci Shore notes, the "unofficial bard of eastern Ukraine," Serhiy Zhadan is "conscious of the moral responsibility he bears for his words."[7] Contrary to the nostalgic politics that Boym describes, and in contrast to a romantic, mythical sense of Ukrainian nationality, Zhadan's poetics argue the concrete socio-political potential for memory to facilitate the construction of a Ukrainian national identity that seeks unity through continually working with both sides of perceived cultural binaries.

Voroshilovgrad is a useful vehicle for understanding Zhadan's ethics of memory because of its narrative structure and its geographic and temporal settings. Pavlo Shopin suggests that *Voroshilovgrad's* postmodern slant – its narrative open-endedness – offers varying interpretations of Ukrainian cultural memory that create the "possibility of integrating" Ukrainian society. Shopin acknowledges that Zhadan's writing brings to light the struggles of

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[5] See Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing" (1959), trans. Clara and Richard Winston (1960), in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1968), 3-32.
[6] See Svetlana Boym, *The Off-Modern* (London, Oxford: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).
[7] Marci Shore, "The Bard of Eastern Ukraine, Where Things are Falling Apart," in *The New Yorker,* November 28, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-bard-of-eastern-ukraine-where-things-are-falling-apart, accessed on April 17, 2017.

individuals, specifically outsiders in Ukrainian society, in an effort to make readers sympathetic to the plight of the other.[8] Additionally, the Donbas in the late 2000s provides critical examples of Ukraine's economic, political, and social plights. These Ukrainian-Russian borderlands welcomed the newfound sense of Ukrainian independence that accompanied the 2004 Orange Revolution but then bore the brunt of the 2008 economic crisis, which contributed to the 2014 Maidan revolution and subsequent war. *Voroshilovgrad's* main character, Herman Korolyov, must come to terms with all of these issues of political and economic change through the prism of relationships with people from his past. Thus, in Zhadan's ethics of memory, the integration of Ukraine is dependent precisely on individuals. Specifically, it relies on acknowledging, rekindling, or maintaining friendships that have existed before, alongside, or in spite of perceived cultural divisions.

In a poignant scene toward the end of the *Voroshilovgrad*, the protagonist, Herman, and the antagonist, Marlen Vladlenovich Pastushok, link the issue of memory to politics, economics and identity. Herman, a native of the now depressed but formerly booming industrial area of Luhansk, reluctantly goes home to deal with his missing brother, Yura's, gas station. At first glance, it seems that Herman favors forgetting for the sake of personal progress. He moved away from the Luhansk area to the larger city of Kharkiv and started working as a speechwriter for an organization that supports youth political groups, a seemingly exemplary career for a young, progressive, democratic Ukrainian. Vladlenovich,[9] the boss of the thugs who aim to take over Yura's gas station, is a communist member of the Ukranian parliament. His status suggests a

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[8] Pavlo Shopin, "Voroshylovhrad Lost: Memory and Identity in a Novel by Serhiy Zhadan," in *The Slavic and East European Journal,* Vol. 57, No. 3 (Fall 2013): 372.
[9] Marlen Vladlenovich's name is a mixture of the names Marx and Vladimir Il'ich Lenin. See Tanya Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet,* 93.

conservative adherence to a past in which political officials had economic advantages. Ironically,

Vladlenovich lectures Herman on the cost of remembering, explaining,

> Let me tell you, Herman, I think the whole reason you guys have to deal with so much shit is because you're too attached to this place. You've got this crazy idea in your heads that the most important thing is to stay here, not to give an inch – you're clinging to your emptiness. There's no fuckin' thing here! Not a single fuckin' thing. There's nothing to cling on to – how come you can't see that? You'd be better off looking for a better place to live.

> Mozhe, - pohodyvsia vin. – Shcho ia tobi, Hermane, skazhu – meni zdaietsia, vashi problem vid toho, shcho vy zanadto chipliaietes' za tsi mistsia. Vbyly sbi v holovy, shcho holovne – tse zalyshytys' tut, holovne – ni kroku nazad, i trymaietes' za tsiu svoiu porozhnechu. A tut nikhuia nemaie! Prosto – nikhuia. Tut nemaie za shcho trymatys', iak vy ts'oho ne bachyte?! Ïkhaly b sobi, shukaly, de krashche zhyvetsia.[10]

This monologue insinuates that the biggest problem for Herman and the people of the Luhansk

suburbs is nostalgia. Their romanticization of their past and refusal to let it go forecloses them

from achieving success, which for Vladlenovich means political and economic power. Per

Vladlenovich's argument, Ukraine's communist past did not work out and is finished, and

anything less than actively forgetting it is a failure. Yet he still uses the notion of communism,

devoid of ideology, as a vehicle for supporting his extreme, manipulative, and destructive

capitalistic activities.

Quoting Zhadan's 2010 introduction to the novel, Zaharchenko writes, "This is a novel

about resistance, about confrontation, and protecting one's principles from external pressure,"[11]

like the kind that Vladlenovich and his cronies apply to Herman. She rightly observes that

through the course of the novel, Herman changes from an indifferent observer into a principled

actor in the conflict over his brother's gas station. This growth is possible because Herman

remembers not just his personal past in the Luhansk area but also huge swaths of Ukraine's

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[10] Serhiy Zhadan, *Voroshilovgrad* (2010)*, trans. Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler and Reilly Costigan-Humes (Dallas: Deep Vellum Publishing, 2016), 301; *Voroshilovhrad* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2011), 300.
[11] Tanya Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet*, 104

complicated history. Memory is the opposite of emptiness, the dangerous "black hole," caused

by forgetting, that swallows one's humanity.[12] Still, the danger inherent to memory, which

Zhadan's writing illuminates, is "the assumption that accepting a narrative means discarding

(burying) its alternatives."[13] Indeed, the apparent victory of liberal democracy that accompanied

Ukraine's 1991 declaration of independence from the USSR, has led to broad social divisions

and conflicting Western- versus Russian-facing narratives, each of which employs specific

collective memories to bury the other in defining the nation's contemporary cultural identity.

The "two Ukraines" principle, a line of thought proposed by journalist and political

analyst, Mykola Riabchuk, posits that the people of Ukraine constitute not a single unified nation

but two distinct and opposing cultural currents.[14] Nostalgia defines these divisions to a large

degree. On one hand, some in the Ukrainian-speaking area of Galicia look to the nation's

illustrious Cossack past and historical affiliation with Western thought and believe that

reclaiming this past is the key to Ukraine's bright and independent future. On the other hand, the

largely Russophone East (the Donbas, where Luhansk is located) historically was under the

control of the Russian Empire and became a socialist republic in 1919, twenty years before

Galicia. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the economic crisis of the late 2000s, thousands of

people in the Donbas lost their jobs, and the area was "characterized by little commercial

activity, high unemployment, few opportunities."[15] Consequently, people there long for the

relative economic stability they enjoyed under socialism. This desire is perceived as a stubborn

loyalty to Russia and an indication of conservatism and backwardness. Thus, the "two Ukraines"

theory supposes no alternative definitions of the Ukrainian nation: either it must forget the Soviet

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[12] Ibid., 85.
[13] Ibid., 89.
[14] Mykola Riabchuk, "Two Ukraines?" *East European Reporter,* vol. 5, no. 4 (1992).
[15] Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History,* Fourth Edition*,* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 668.

past and wholeheartedly embrace the West or it must go back down the same Russophilic road it walked before.

Similar to the "two Ukraines" position, histories of Ukraine sometimes proceed down divergent paths. One attempts to understand the contingencies of Ukraine's people and complicated geopolitical borders, while the other deems Ukraine to always have been the product of an outside political and cultural influence. Historian Paul Magocsi calls Ukraine a "land without a history," pointing out that Ukraine's past often is measured according to the values of the inhabiting force.[16] Russian writer, philosopher, and historian, Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826), for example, contended that Ukraine simply was a Russian diaspora, as all Slavs ultimately trace their roots back to Russia. Meanwhile, from the perspective of Polish intellectuals, Ukraine was "an uncivilized frontier, into which [the Poles] brought culture and state formations."[17] Historian Orest Subtelny broadens Ukraine's historical context to Western Europe, arguing, "The course of modern Ukrainian history has largely been the tale of two parallel paths, one tread by the West Ukrainians in the Austrian Empire and the other by East Ukrainians in the Russian Empire."[18] These perspectives assume that how people who live in the lands of Ukraine understand themselves is primarily the result of the culture that was imposed on them by a more prominent political power. However, as Timothy Snyder cautions in his critical evaluation of how the Polish, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian nation-states were formed over the past 500 years, "The more effective national ideas involve getting the past wrong."[19] Seemingly absolute but one-sided versions of the past influence the formation of the Ukrainian national idea to this day.

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[16] Paul R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: the Land and its Peoples,* Second Edition (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 11.
[17] Ibid., 16-17.
[18] Subtelny, 220
[19] Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 17.

Getting the past wrong in the service of a Ukrainian national idea means either

manipulating historical details or enacting a guided and deliberate forgetting; the specter of the

Soviet past impacts both of these processes in a complicated way. Svetlana Boym discusses the

Soviet Union's attempt to create in each of its satellite republics people who do not remember

their national pasts, a practice that she calls "mankuritization," referencing a Kazakh literary

figure that has no memory.[20] Yet, as historian Ronald Suny argues, the Soviet Union was in

reality an "incubator of new nations" because it upheld, at least on the levels of language and

folk tradition, individual national memories.[21] Suny points out that the practice of nativization

(korenizatsiia) in the 1920s meant that Ukrainians were not forced to be Russianized at school, at

work, or in social and legal proceedings. This benefit regressed, however, when Stalin's Five-

Year Plan increased industrialization, especially in eastern Ukraine; more Russians moved to the

area to fill new jobs, and they were not required to Ukrainianize.[22] As a result, during the Soviet

regime, cities like Luhansk were full of Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians who self-

identified neither as Russian nor Ukrainian but as Soviets. Moreover, due to Soviet media

censorship, the historical perspectives of people in this area contained "blank spots" that

obscured the past crimes – such as economic exploitation and the tragic famine of the 1930s –

inflicted against Ukraine by both Russian and Soviet imperial forces. These blank spots relegated

Ukrainian suffering to the "ancient past" and shed light only on the perceived benefits of the

Soviet system: economic development, social services, access to education, and the promise of

upward career mobility. While the period of glasnost' made strides toward reversing Soviet

"mankuritization" through the open discussion of traumas of the Soviet past and newfound

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[20] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 58.
[21] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 87.
[22] Ibid., 102, 154.

accessibility to archives, secret police files, and previously banned literature, the post-Soviet

period is defined by the drive to recover the memory of an ahistorical Soviet past that avoids the

acknowledgement of crimes or traumas and instead focuses on what was happy and stable.[23]

Indeed, since the fall of the Soviet Union, many people of eastern Ukraine have retained parts of

their Soviet identity.[24]

Yet retention of Soviet identity in the eastern part of Ukraine conflicts with the nation's

broader socio-political movements. After Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004, which arose

through protests against electoral corruption and fraud associated with Russia, Ukraine strove to

distinguish itself more definitively from Russia and, by extension, from its Soviet period. Again,

this process centered on the issue of what from Ukraine's past should be remembered and how.

Georgiy Kasianov observes that by the early 2000s, the Ukrainian government "had to devote

more attention to gaining ideological legitimacy by exploiting the ideological construct generally

known as the "national idea."" He argues that recognition of the Holodomor, the famine of 1932-

1933 that claimed the lives of millions of Ukrainians, fit that ideological need perfectly.[25] Under

the Soviet system, the Holodomor was deemed a tragic natural disaster, but according to

Kasianov, politicians and intellectuals in early 2000s Ukraine defined the catastrophe as

genocide of the Ukrainian people perpetrated specifically by Russian agents of the Soviet Union.

In laws passed during 2006, "public denial of the Man-Made Famine of 1932-1933 was

proclaimed as a contamination of the memory of the millions of victims and 'humiliation of the

dignity of the Ukrainian people.'" While not debating the tragedy of the Holodomor or its place

both in Ukrainian and Soviet histories, Kasianov illuminates how politically guided memory or

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[23] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 58.
[24] Subtelny, 532, 608.
[25] Georgiy Kasianov, "Revisiting the Great Famine of 1932-1933: Politics of Memory and Public Consciousness (Ukraine after 1991)," in *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989,* ed. Michal Kopeček, (Budapest, New York: Central European Press, 2008): 209.

forgetting creates new versions of national identity. He concludes his study by noting that "the subject of the famine remains a matter of political speculation and pragmatic exploitation…references to "national traumas" generally serve to promote immediate political goals and mobilize the populace in the short term."[26] The political dealings with memory of the Holodomor serve as a concrete example of a broader issue, whereby memory offers no opportunity for national integration but instead pits different memorial foci against each other: fondly remembering parts of the Soviet past means denying Ukraine's independence, and yet denying the Soviet past entirely means disrespecting Ukrainian national dignity. If successful integration will take place, what should the focus of memory be?

Serhiy Zhadan confronts the tendency to treat memory as an objective inheritance from the past on which justice must be issued in the present. His works argue that Ukrainian identity need not be consumed with righting past Soviet wrongs but, on the contrary, the Soviet past and the Ukrainian present must coexist and interact with each other. In this sense, he takes a Derridean approach to the "specter of Marx" – Ukraine's Soviet period – that haunts the nation today. In *Specters of Marx,* Derrida argues, "Inheritance is never a *given,* it is always a task."[27] This task is to engage and collaborate with elements from the past instead of evaluating them from afar. The dynamics of Derrida's concept of hauntology make this task possible in the first place. Hauntology assumes that the spirit of something that existed in the past is "inhabited" or "becomes a being" when it is engaged in real conversation in the present, just as the spirit of Hamlet's father passes in and out of the play's initial scenes until Horatio speaks to it, and it responds.[28] This engagement with the past – the injunction of the ghost – requires a reevaluation

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[26] Ibid., 214.
[27] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New Interntional,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), 54.
[28] Ibid., 6

of the notions of justice and vengeance. Inheritance is not an absolute right that has experienced

a past wrong and now must be avenged. Rather, there is a "radical and necessary *heterogeneity*

of an inheritance…*one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities

that inhabit the same injunction."[29] In order to understand all possible versions of an inheritance,

the injunction of the ghost must continually occur. Derrida concludes his argument by explaining

that we not only can converse with the past but also learn from it:

> If he loves justice at least, the "scholar" of the future, the "intellectual" of
> tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning
> not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her,
> how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in
> the other, in the other in oneself: they are always *there*, specters, even if they do
> not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.[30]

The concept of hauntology suggests that in order to establish a just Ukrainian national idea,

various Ukraines must be engaged.

Indeed, Zaharchenko calls the "two Ukraines" thesis, which claims that Ukrainian culture

is clearly divided into a Ukrainian-speaking and democratic-leaning West and a Russophone and

pro-Russian East, "shortsighted" and maintains that cultural identities in the Ukrainian-Russian

borderlands, the site of ongoing military action that aims to uphold one or the other end of this

binary, are in reality "open, blurred, and situational." Citing political scientist, Lowell

Barrington, Zaharchenko argues that Ukrainian identity depends more on location and economics

than on elements of a perceived historical inheritance.[31] The notion of situational identity is

significant in that it assumes that elements of the everyday – homes, jobs, finances, and

interpersonal relationships – take primacy over ideological categories of identity like political

affiliation or historical perspectives. Situational identity means that how people perceive

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[29] Ibid., 16.
[30] Ibid., 176.
[31] Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet,* 45-48.

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themselves is a factor of engaging with others to establish relationships that, simply put, make life work more smoothly.

Zhadan acknowledges the blurring of identity in post-Soviet Ukraine in the very title of his novel, *Voroshilovgrad.* The city of Luhansk, the novel's setting, was renamed to Voroshilovgrad in 1935 to honor Soviet military commander and politician, Kliment Voroshilov. It reverted back to being called Luhansk after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Of course, adjusting to life in the post-Soviet world is not as simple as changing a name, and Luhansk faces the same challenges as other former Soviet industrial centers: economic depression, poverty, and the bullying of oligarchs who usurp private property for their own business ventures. Consequently, the people who are from or who still live in this region not only have a thorny relationship with the past but also a fraught understanding of Ukrainianness. When Herman, *Voroshilovgrad's* main character, goes back home to the Luhansk suburbs after years of living in Kharkiv, he demonstrates Derrida's injunction of the ghost – tangible engagement with the past and the incorporation of lessons learned into his present problem-solving and future understanding of the world. Through Herman, who must interact with ghosts of past friends and acquaintances, Zhadan illustrates how to engage with literal specters of Marx, the people who lived through and still live with Ukraine's Soviet past. In the context of the larger cultural conflict in Ukraine, this theme suggests that the part of the past that Ukraine continues to get wrong is that it has ignored concrete and everyday human relationships. In a recent interview about the role of the poet in wartime, when asked whether or not the current conflict in Ukraine is a war on culture, Zhadan responds, "Of course this is a war of cultures, information, and historical contexts. However, in my opinion we should speak about the war in which die and

disappear not just someone's cultural and historical assumptions–but real people."[32] In order to achieve justice for Ukraine as a nation, past friendships among real people must be engaged more critically.

As Vladlenovich's monologue in *Voroshilovgrad* – about the benefits of forgetting a town that no longer is economically serviceable – exemplifies, Serhiy Zhadan's writing often is concerned with the power of places and symbols compared to the power of people. In memory, places easily can be manipulated in to symbols that support a particular way of abstract or ideological thinking about the world. Svetlana Boym defines this process as part of "restorative nostalgia," which seeks to reestablish a place in time that was perceived to have existed, regardless of whether or not it actually did. Restorative nostalgia, Boym explains, "evokes a national past and future," uniting people around symbols like pictures, emblems, rituals, and narratives that serve as proof of this longed for place in time.[33] Expanding on Boym's argument, we can understand how restorative-nostalgic thinking also contributes to the formation of symbols to rally against, which is an issue that Zhadan addresses in his writing about the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands and the outsiders who live there. For example, because Luhansk is in eastern Ukraine, used to be called Voroshilovgrad, and now is referred to as the Luhansk People's Republic, which is a Russia-backed effort to distance the area from Ukraine, the city and the people who live there are eternally connected to an idea of Russian- or Soviet-centeredness. Yet Zhadan's poetics argue that conflict over a place's perceived symbolic value ignores the more significant value of the place's inhabitants.

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[32] Polina Barskova, Ilya Kaminsky, and Ostap Kin, "Forum: Poetry in a Time of Crisis," in *Poetry International,* https://pionline.wordpress.com/2017/01/11/poetry-in-a-time-of-crisis-forum/, accessed on January 11, 2017.
[33] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia,* 48.

In a cycle of poems, "Stones" (Kameni), Zhadan limns the distance between place and people. The piece discusses the memory of cities that have crumbled, figuratively, by being taken over by someone new (or by some new idea). In the beginning and ending stanzas, cities are anthropomorphized in memory:

> We speak of the cities we lived in –
> that went
> into night like ships into the winter sea,
>
> we speak of the cities that suddenly lost their ability to resist –
>
> My hovorimo pro mista, u iakikh my zhyly
> i iaki vidkhodyly v nich, mov korabli v zymove more,
> pro mista, iaki raptom utratyly
> zdatnist' opyratys'.

However, in the middle of the poem inanimate objects in and around the cities are blurred with the experience of the cities' living inhabitants:

> Now we remember: janitors and the night-sellers of bread,
> gray, like wrapping paper,
> burglars,
> taxi drivers with klaxons instead of hearts,
> children who grew up
> among the old furniture
> (furniture that smelled of poplar trees and sea).
>
> Our city of workers and ugly middle-men,
> tear-jerking market beggars
> they cleared
> the autumn fog
> with their shouts.
>
> We got to soak in the rain
> with strangers
> on tram stops,
> old proletarian quirks, subway cars,
> we got to soak in the rain
> on cars
> loaded with the unemployed
> like shops with cartridges.

Dvirnyky ĭ nichni prodavtsi khliba,
siri, mov obhortkoviĭ papir, kvartiyrni zlodiï,
taksysty z klaksonamy zamist' serdets',
dity, iaki vyrostaly pomizh staryx mebliv,
shcho pakhly lisom ta morem.
Tsile misto robitnykiv i dribnikh perekupnykiv,
shchemkoï bazarnoï bydnoty, iaka rozhaniala svoïmy
krykami osinniĭ tuman.

Perekhozhi, z iakymy razom dovodylos' potrapliaty
pid doshch na tramvaĭnykh zupynkakh,
stari proletars'ki zamashky, vahony pidzemky,
nabyti bezrobitnymy, mov mahazyny patronamy.[34]

The poem's imagery – anthropomorphized places in which living beings are fused together with mechanical parts and goods to be bought and sold – demonstrates the blurring of symbolic places in time with real life. It is tempting to remember a place for its historical significance or its symbolic ideological meaning and to mourn its loss, seek its return, or even wish to forget it. Nonetheless, within the bounds of a place are real people; their relationships should define it and give it life. Perhaps because of this important detail the powers that have taken over the cities in "Stones," "don't know where to begin" (prosto ne znaiut', z choho ïm pochynaty).[35]

The restorative-nostalgic tendency to hang on to the symbolic significance of place and its resultant problems in post-Soviet Ukraine is a thread that runs through a number of Zhadan's works. For example, set in the city of Kharkiv in 1993, soon after the fall of the Soviet Union and Ukraine's subsequent declaration of independence, Zhadan's *Depeche Mode* (*Depesh Mod,* 2004) is a novel about mourning the past and the possibilities that can arise only after moving on. The novel's plot centers on the journey the narrator (who happens to be Zhadan) takes in and

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[34] Serhiy Zhadan, "Stones," in *Poetry International,* trans. Valzhyna Mort, December 17, 2016, https://pionline.wordpress.com/2016/12/17/two-poems-by-serhiy-zhadan-translated-by-valzhyna-mort/, accessed on March 15, 2017; "Kameni," in *Hospod Simpatizyue Autsaĭderam* (Kharkiv: Klub Simeĭnoho Dozvillia, 2015), 107-109.
[35] Ibid, 110.

around Kharkiv in search of a friend, Sasha Carburetor, whose stepfather recently passed away. The narrator wants to inform Carburetor of the death in time for him to attend the funeral. Thus, the novel's main motivation is allowing someone the proper mourning process. But in early 1990s Kharkiv, mourning goes beyond death; it also means coming to terms with a particular national past – namely Ukraine's Soviet period – that has come to define individuals' identities. But the nature and evolution of the narrator's friendships in *Depeche Mode* suggest that a worldview that is not restrained by a rigid relationship with an abstract past is the only way to move forward. As the narrator explains in the novel's introduction, "Friends have changed, meaning that some have disappeared forever, and others have appeared to take their place" (Zmilylis' druzi, sebto odni nazavzhdy znykly, a inshi natomist' z'iavylys'),[36] which is to say that while interpersonal and ideological associations change, the fundamental drive toward human connection remains. This is what creates possibilities for continually moving on.

In *Depeche Mode,* shadows of the recently dissolved Soviet Union still actively factor into the narrator's and his friends' lives. For example, some friends work at an advertising agency located in a building that used to house Kharkiv's Komsomol chapter. Many of them have nicknames, like Vasia the Communist, that link them solidly to the past. They also employ the defining moment of Soviet history – victory in World War II – in their schemes. One friend, Dogg Pavlov, attempts to use his fictitious granny's World War II veteran's identification card in order to get a free ride on the tram. This primacy of identification with the past appears again when the narrator thinks to himself, as he looks at old photos of soldiers from the 1940s and 1950s, that this was the "right" time to be alive, before the USSR "squeezed everything out" of

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[36] Zhadan, Serhiy, *Depeche Mode,* trans. Myroslav Shkandrij (London: Glagoslav Publications, 2013), 6; *Depesh Mod* (2004)*,* in *Kapital* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2006), 8.

the Soviet people.[37] The squeezing that the narrator feels, a force that implies movement, is countered by a sense fruitless motion, an idea that recurs at various points throughout his journey and is suggestive of symptoms of melancholia. Indeed, in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud presents the condition as a somatic rather than psychic malady,[38] which is to say that melancholics cannot move on to something new but instead "establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object."[39] Thus, melancholia is like a circular mourning process, in which the mourner and the object of loss continually return to each other.

Circular movement also defines the narrator's and his friends' search for Carburetor, as they continually run around Kharkiv to no avail. Once they look outside of Kharkiv, the process of moving on begins, and it consists of partings with various friends. According to the narrator, the group's friendship was always loose, "A nice, eternally hungry crew, held together by no one knows what, because in principle everyone has issues with everyone else, but this is still no reason to avoid healthy interaction" (Harna, vichno holodna kompaniia, kotru nezrozumilo shcho trimaie razom, bo v printsypi vsi odne odnoho nedoliubliuiut', nu, ale tse shche ne prychyna, aby ihnoruvaty zdorove spilkuvannia).[40] This is not to say that interpersonal relationships are without value. On the contrary, Zhadan presents a specific type of friendship that is not restrained by any sort of absolute ideology but is flexible, based on a necessary "healthy interaction" despite differences. This type of friendship is critical to coming to terms with the past and moving on. The narrator's personal moving on process at the end of *Depeche Mode* is rather nihilistic - alone on the train to Carburetor's camp, he rattles off to himself all of the things that he has realized he

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[37] Ibid., 59.
[38] Freud, Sigmund, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917)*,* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XIV,* trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 243, http://www.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_MourningAndMelancholia.pdf, accessed on October 4, 2017.
[39] Ibid., 249.
[40] Zhadan, *Depeche Mode*, 44; *Depesh Mod*, 45.

will never believe in. Still, the novel introduces the concept of friendship that *Voroshilovgrad* refines. The friendships in Zhadan's novels overcome melancholic and nostalgic relationships with the past by offering a shared cause – friendship itself – that inspires purposeful movement in the present.

In *Voroshilovgrad,* Herman has a problematic relationship with the past. When his parents moved to the Kharkiv area from Luhansk, he had absolutely no trouble following them. Now, he has minimal contact with them or his hometown, where his brother, Yura, lived and owned a gas station before his mysterious disappearance. In Herman's first few days of being back in the Luhansk suburbs, his memories are strongly associated with places – the park where he celebrated soccer victories, the street corner where he used to take girlfriends – and they are troublesome to him. These memories, Herman observes, stack up and "clog [his] lungs."[41] Yet, while Herman seems to be satisfied with the way his life in Kharkiv turned out, he is aware of the problems lurking beneath the city's progressive exterior. After earning a degree in history, he got a job working for a non-profit that supports youth government organizations and also happens to serve as the front for a money laundering operation. Herman has no illusions of an ideal past in his hometown, nor does he take for granted that his life in the city is somehow better than it was there.

However, when Herman finally makes it to his brother's gas station and encounters his old friends, he comes to understand that the value of his past precisely is in people: Kocha, a longstanding but seemingly hapless petty criminal with a good heart; Injured, a talented mechanic who is equally famous for his soccer skills and for his frequent womanizing; and Olha, the accountant for the gas station who is simultaneously pragmatic and sentimental both about the business and about her hometown. All of these characters encourage Herman to deny the gas

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[41] *Voroshilovgrad*, 86.

gangsters, and in these days, Herman observes that he is "surrounded by old friends and complete strangers who all want me to take action."[42] This need for action incites for Herman a Derridean injunction of ghosts of the past. He realizes that abstract principles contribute to his problem, and the best solution can only be formed through interpersonal engagement:

> Who could say what might happen, whether things could be resolved without any bloodshed; it seemed to me that everyone in this part of the country was all too willing to fight for their principles…far too determined and stubborn to find a solution that didn't involve body bags to what were, after all, just some administrative problems. It seemed as thought it was all coming back to me – my school days and the real, adult world that was right there beside me…I needed some sort of solution, and told myself that I shouldn't be the only one responsible for finding it. A solution would only be found when your brothers in arms were standing alongside you. But where are my brothers, I wondered, and who are they anyway?

> Nikhto ni mih haranturovaty, shcho vse zavershyt'sia spokiĭno ĭ bezkrovno, vony vsi hotovi ĭty na pryntsyp…u vsikh u nykh nadto bahato ambitsiĭ, aby vyrishuvaty pitannia orhanizatsiĭnoho kharakteru bez trupiv. Tak, niby vse povernulos' nazad – shkil'ni roky, dorosliĭ svit, iakiĭ znakhodit'sia zovsim poruch, nache khtos' vidchynyv dveri do susidn'oi kimnaty…Z takymy dumkay pohano chekaty, vony vymahaiut' vyrishnnia. I virishennia zalezhyt' ne lyshe vid tebe. Vse vyrishyt'sia todi, koly pruch iz toboiu stoiatymut' vraty po zbroĭ. Prote de vony, tsi braty, i khto vony?[43]

With this revelation, Herman's memories begin to show him where and who his brothers are and how friendships with them can help him reach a solution to his gas station problem. Specifically, soccer-related incidents shift the focus of Herman's memories from static places to engagement with people. For example, watching Injured juggle a soccer ball, Herman flashes back to 1990 to a soccer victory party that included "our players as well as local gangsters, women wearing fancy dresses and men wearing white dress shirts or track suits, waiters – budding capitalists, all of us, sitting together with all kinds of crooks…." (i nashi gravtsi, iakis' zhinky v sviatkovykh sukniakh, choloviky v bilykh sorochkakh i sportyvnykhh kostiumakh,

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[42] Ibid., 96.
[43] *Voroshilovgrad*, 108; *Voroshilovhrad,* 108.

ofitsiantky, kooperatory, my molodi, sydymo za odnym stolom iz bandytamy…).[44] When a fan of the opposing Voroshilovgrad team hurls a brick through the restaurant window, all of the patrons pour out into the night to defend their honor. This particular memory hints to Herman the significance of shared experience, which overshadows differences in background, lifestyle, or economic worldviews.

Later, when Herman has the opportunity to relive a past soccer match, the necessity of friendship to conflict resolution is reinforced. Herman and his old friends – who have descriptive monikers like one-eyed Sasha Python, Andryukha Michael Jackson, Kolya One-and-a-Half Legs, and the Balalaeshnikov brothers – have a rematch with their old rivals. In the course of the game, Herman and his team nearly come to blows with the other team but end up winning the game. Herman elatedly admits that, despite the many years that have passed since he had seen or thought about his teammates, "everything seemed to be returning to how it was…it was this kind of joy, precisely the joy of recognition and the joy of returning that I'd been missing all these years" (iaka zavershylas' tak dobre…a vse znovu povertalos' na svoï mistsia…radist' piznavannia i radist' povernennia, te, choho brakuvalo meni ostanni roky).[45] In this specific moment, Herman has reconstructed a fulfilling past that he had not even realized he longed for. While at face value this soccer match is a repetition of a glorious memory, Herman learns in the days after the game that each of his old soccer friends, in reality, is long dead. The Balalaeshnikovs, for example, died in a fire, and the others fell victim to alcohol, drugs, or crime. Thus, the past alone, as an object, cannot solve Herman's problem. He needs to understand what useful information this memory – his injunction of these ghosts – gives him and how he can apply it toward his actions. Herman has another critical revelation about what these types of

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[44] *Voroshilovgrad,* 81; *Voroshilovhrad,* 82.
[45] *Voroshilovgrad,* 130; *Voroshilovhrad,* 131.

memories can teach him as he is hiding in a train car after escaping smugglers who were chasing

him after a deal gone wrong. While Herman rides, he attempts to define what he will remember

from this experience. As opposed to previous memories that centered on places from his past,

this memory, Herman determines, is about the people who helped him escape. He thinks,

> …why should I have cared about their struggles, about their attempts to stand
> their ground? And why should they have cared about my problems, helping me to
> escape, to hide? Whoever we are, we're always moving along our own routes,
> finding ourselves in foreign lands, reaching beyond the curtains of our own
> experience, everyone we meet along the way remains in our memory, their every
> word and every touch.
>
> …a shcho meni bulo do ïkhn'oï borot'by, do ïkhnikh sprob protystoiannia ĭ
> perekhovuvannia. Ale tak chy inakshe – my rukaiemos' svoïmi marshrutami,
> potrampliaiuchy v nevidomi mistsia, pronykaiuchy za lashtunky vlasnoho
> dosvidu, i vsi, koho nam dovelosia zustrity, lyshaiut'sia v nashiĭ pam'iati svoïmi
> holosamy ĭ svoïmi dotykamy. [46]

Thus, Herman decides that this connection with people is the most critical element of memory. It

is the primary aspect of the past that determines how we act in the present – to care about others,

sympathize, or to help. Herman learns by thinking attentively about his memories that he indeed

must trust people and believe in his friends.

The issue of friendship comes full circle at *Voroshilovgrad's* climax in a final showdown

with Vladlenovich's gangsters. Here, the soccer game memory reappears as Herman again

engages the ghosts from his past in a new context. While working at the gas station, Herman is

accepted into a group of local gypsies, and they, Injured, Kocha, and Herman's friend Ernst are

the brothers in arms that stand shoulder to shoulder with him at the final encounter with

Vladlenovich's crew. Significantly, the structure of this showdown closely mirrors the soccer

match in which Herman and the ghosts of his friends managed to defuse conflict with their

soccer rivals. Vladlenovich's lawyer and his main thug, Nikolaich, along with some hired locals,

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[46] *Voroshilovgrad,* 292; *Voroshilovhrad,* 291.

meet Herman and his friends to finally force them to hand over Yura's gas station. Just like the Balalaeshnikov brothers at the soccer match, two of the gypsies standing with Herman fabricate a reason to start fighting with each other. In the confusion of the scuffle, some of the hired locals supporting Nikolaich realize that they have personal connections with Herman and his friends. They climb down from their trucks and tractors and join the group, effectively ending the skirmish. In the end, Herman's memories provide him with important information about necessity of friendship in hard times. It is impossible to literally recreate the friendships from his past. After all, those friends with whom Herman endured the battle of the soccer game are dead. Nevertheless, Herman can internalize the knowledge those memories give him of what friendship feels like and what it can accomplish, and use this knowledge as he navigates his present and moves into the future.

A sad counterpoint that reinforces the necessity of friendship to conflict resolution is in Nikolaich's actions during the final showdown. Once it becomes clear that Nikolaich's efforts on Vladlenovich's behalf have failed, he believes that he has no other recourse but violence, and he aims a gun at Herman's group. In a beautiful example of narrative retardation, we observe Nikolaich's inner consciousness, which replays his lifetime of feeling humiliated, outcast, and rejected and his inability to feel the personal connections that Herman has learned are integral to life. His disconnection from people, tragically, leads Nikolaich to shoot and kill Injured.[47]

Zhadan's poetics suggest that the ethical corollaries of memory are more critical to Ukrainian national identity than memories themselves. That is to say that his works fight the urge toward restorative nostalgia that wants to avenge past wrongs and instead beg the questions: What does the past make us do? How does it make us think? And, most importantly, how does it affect the way we interact with each other? The ethics of memory that Zhadan presents requires a

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[47] *Voroshilovgrad,* 397-410.

sense of friendship, an awareness of the human connections that we have forged in our pasts, rather than abstract places or ideas that we believe we have inherited. The internalization of this sense of friendship is realized in a few of *Voroshilovgrad's* final scenes. After the ultimate showdown with Vladlenovich's men, the accountant, Olha, recounts a memory of her high-school pen pal from Dresden. Wanting the boy to think that Voroshilovgrad was a fun city, Olha filtered out all of the Voroshilovgrad postcards depicting dull, gray factories and people walking to work and sent him only those full of bright flowers and colorful monuments. Thinking back, Olha realizes the error in her representation of the city. She understands now that she could have lived in any place, and so leaving out select Voroshilovgrad postcards that depict people in their normal everyday environments was like leaving out the "best parts" (krashcha chastyna) of her.[48] The people of Voroshilovgrad shaped Olha, not the idea of the city, which the colorful, flowery postcards symbolically depicted.

Olha's realization echoes a meaningful moment earlier in the novel when Herman witnesses the baptism of a baby just born to a group of nomads travelling from Mongolia. The priestess leading the ceremony sings, "Everyone who came to welcome you into this world, everyone who will follow you up and down the mountain trails, now sings for you alone…for all we have to persevere together, forging through the snow together…" (Vsi, khto priĭshov tebe vitaty, vsi, khto pide za toboiu hirs'kymy stezhkamy, spivaiut' teper lyshe dlia tebe…Oskil'ky nam razom zymuvaty, razom vybyratysia kriz' snihy…).[49] Being a nomad is tantamount to the human condition. We move through physical environments and abstract ideas that are fleeting, but the elements of life that we internalize and that guide us along the way are people – our friends – with whom we suffer, learn, change, and persevere. Nomadism, according to Irene

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[48] *Voroshilovgrad,* 435; *Voroshilovhrad,* 433
[49] *Voroshilovgrad,* 319; *Voroshilovhrad,* 319

Sywenky's study of post-modern Polish and Ukrainian literature, is a common theme for

contemporary Ukrainian writers, like Yuri Andrukhovych, whose aesthetics of mobility

encourage the formation of a collective identity that is specifically directed towards Europe.[50]

But the freedom of movement illustrated by the nomads in *Voroshilovgrad* is broader, focused

on human connections rather than places, and it calls to mind Hannah Arendt's claims about

freedom.

Arendt argues that friendship is the only ideal that facilitates the freedom to move and

change one's mind and, therefore, perseveres despite the complexity of the world. She writes in

"On Humanity in Dark Times" that "humanity is exemplified not in fraternity but in friendship;

that friendship is not intimately personal but makes political demands and preserves reference to

the world."[51] Likewise, Svetlana Boym defines a way of remembering that fosters an "anarchic

responsibility for the other individual in the present moment," with no necessary historical

justification.[52] Indeed, Zhadan has commented that a new type of contemporary hero, whose acts

are based solely on the necessity of helping people in need, is arising in Ukraine.[53] His current

poetry projects stem from his personal correspondence with people living in the war-torn Donbas

region. The poem, "Needle," for example, tracks the life and death of Anton, a local tattoo artist,

whose work was well known throughout the town, even as more and more people fled the

growing conflict. Anton was shot and killed at a roadblock, and no one knows exactly what

happened or how it might have been connected to his political leanings. But, Zhadan writes,

> There will come a time when some bastard
> will surely write heroic poems about this.

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[50] Irene Sywenky: "Nomadic Homes, Postmodern Travel, and the Geopolitical Imaginary in the Post-Totalitarian Cultures of Poland and Ukraine," in *Postcommunism, Postmodernism, and the Global Imagination,* ed. Christian Moraru (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2009), 285.
[51] Arendt, 25.
[52] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia,* 337.
[53] Serhiy Zhadan, in discussion with the author, April 24, 2017.

> There will come a time when some other bastard
> will say this isn't worth writing about.
>
> Priĭde chas – i iaka- nebud' navoloch
> obov'iazkovo bude pysaty pro tse heroïchni virshi.
> Priĭde chas – i iaka-nebud' navoloch
> skazhe, shcho pro tse vzahali ne treba pysaty.[54]

On the ground in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands beset by conflict, avenging past wrongs or defending a historical national idea is no longer relevant. Through his poetry about these individuals, Zhadan extends his connections, and the inherently refined perspective on the Ukrainian national conflict they offer, to a wide audience. The people whose lives are being affected by the war are what must be written about, so that we can continually connect with and understand them.

This value echoes Boym's arguments in *The Off-Modern*, which define the so-called "third way" of thinking that many modernist writers and artists alluded to during tense cultural and political periods of the early 20th century. In particular, Boym focuses on the sideways cognitive route that Russian writer and formalist critic, Viktor Shklovsky, uses in *The Knight's Move* (1923) as an analogy for his creative (and often political) thought processes. Shklovsky's discussion of the zigzagging path the knight takes during a game of chess serves as the basis for Boym's definition of the off-modern: it is the only mode of thought that is capable of touching both of two parallel lines – any absolutes that physically, ideologically, or spiritually cannot touch – thereby bringing rapprochement between them by teasing out their previously unexplored details. While Boym explains the off-modern in terms of art and architecture, its possibilities extend into the realm of everyday life, where flexible thinking can lead to more

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[54] Serhiy Zhadan, "Needle," from *Why I am Not on Social Media,* trans. Amelia Glaser and Yulia Ilchuk, in *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine,* ed. Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2017), 166-67; "Holka," https://www.e-reading.club/chapter.php/1050498/49/Zhadan_-_Zhittya_Marii.html, accessed on February 28, 2018.

adaptable and inclusive cultural, political, and economic systems. Zhadan's ethics of memory is an off-modern way of considering Ukraine's national identity because it offers a vehicle – friendship – for accessing seemingly irreconcilable entities, such as East versus West or Russian versus Ukrainian language, that are perceived in Ukrainian culture.

Conclusion

Intense moments of political and ideological change understandably affect people's worldviews, either reinforcing ideas they already have or uncovering new ones. These effects do not necessarily have to be negative, but they often have unfortunate corollaries in the context of everyday life. As this dissertation's case studies suggest, abstract notions of political and ideological change in 20th century Eastern Europe used the quotidian to legitimize themselves and then masked the actual significance of these details of everyday life with ideological generalizations. This process is reminiscent of Malevich's *Black Square,* which, as the introduction explained, appropriated the meaning of the holy corner to support its own artistic philosophy and then obscured the space entirely. Using one idea to obscure another in the service of political change results in unexpected and incomprehensible tensions among ordinary people who are striving to have normal and fulfilling lives.

Svetlana Alexievich's *Secondhand Time,* which documents the consequences of the great Soviet Idea that had concealed the contingencies of ordinary Soviet life, clearly demonstrates this sort of tension. In an episode about the attempted coup of the nascent Russian government in 1993, we see how a formerly congenial relationship turns sour in the context of a changing ideology. After the 1991 August Putsch that dismantled the Soviet Union, hard economic times and military conflicts led to another wave of protests. In 1993, there was a clash between Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, and the Russian Parliament, who accused Yeltsin of overstepping his authority. This time, tanks actually fired on the White House and on protesters, and other violent conflicts erupted all over Moscow. One of Alexievich's interviewees remembers this moment of impending change:

Everything started out so well in '91!...But now…now I see it all in a different light…We too are to blame for everything that happened afterward…Of course, Yeltsin is also responsible but so are we…Half of Russia was pulling forward, while the other half was pulling back. Back toward dreary socialism…My wife and I had helped the cleaning woman in our building…with money on more than one occasion, and we gave her all our furniture after renovating our apartment. But on the morning when it all started, she noticed my Yeltsin pin, and instead of saying "Good morning!" she told me, her voice full of malice, "Your time is running out, you bourgeois pig," and turned away. I didn't see that coming. Where had this hatred come from? What did she hate me for?

I ved' kak vse khorosho nachinalos' v devianosto pervom!...No seichas…seichas ya inache ob etom dumaiu…Vo vsem, chto sluchilos' i my vinovaty…El'stin, konechno, neset otvetstvennost', no my tozhe…Pol-Rossii rvalos' vpered, a pol-Rossii tianulo nazad. V seryi sotsializm…Nasha dvornichikha…kotoroi my s zhenoi ne raz pomogali den'gami, otdali vsiu mebel', kogda delali v kvartire remont – v to utro, kogda vse nachinalos', uvidela u menia znachok s El'tsinym i vmesto "Dobroe utro!" zloradno skazala: "Skoro vam, burzhuiam, konets budet", - i otvernulas'. Ya ne ozhidal Otkuda u nee ko mne takaia nenavist'? Za chto?[1]

The largely political confrontation happening in and around the White House manifested itself in Russians' ordinary lives in disturbing ways. In this example, people who had coexisted empathetically and peacefully are divided by a moment of political change that put the spotlight on conflicting understandings of Russia's past and present. The temptation to use either idea to blot the other out and to use ideology to erase once meaningful everyday relationships makes imagining a humane and ethical future difficult.

Similar dark times are enveloping Eastern Europe and are a mirror for cultural conflicts in the United States. In countries like Russia, Poland, and Hungary, programs of intense nationalist populism claim to unify the nation in the name of addressing quotidian concerns, such as unemployment or social services. For example, as András Bozóki argues in his study on the evolution of Hungary's current populist movement, populism can arise in almost any context of political change because it is a concrete vehicle for establishing a sense of belonging. However,

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[1] Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time,* trans. Bela Shayevich (New York: Random House, 2016), 287-288; *Vremia Sekond-Khend* (Moskva: Vremia, 2014), 299-300.

in the process of defining who should be the beneficiaries of political change, these programs ultimately create new divisions among people. Bozóki explains: "Good and evil, workers and oligarchs, producers and parasites are presented as polar opposites in this political discourse, in which elites, migrants, and other minorities do not "truly belong" to the people."[2]

The cultural climate in the United States is like that in some Eastern European countries because it is full of tension between perceptions of the good and evil inherent in people who value tradition versus change. For example, Voroshilovgrad/Luhansk is like the once vital but now depressed industrial towns in the Mideast and Appalachian rust belts, which currently are at the center of a debate that is an American version of the "two Ukraines" model. Here, it seems there are no alternatives either to a direct return to the ways of the past (like revitalizing the steel and coal industries) or to a wholesale forgetting and moving on – figuratively, through the abandonment of certain economic activities, and literally, with the mass human exodus from these areas. The desire for the economic stability linked to past industrial greatness in "America's forgotten towns" is associated, on a cultural level, with backwardness, conservatism, and narrow-mindedness. Yet, as economist Joseph Stiglitz argues, there is one critical element from the past which towns like these retain, and which the rest of the nation should not forget – "social capital," or a vast and active network of friendships and communal trust that is decaying elsewhere. Like Luhansk, "America's forgotten towns" have become symbols that are employed in abstract political and ideological clashes. As a consequence, the everyday relationships that historically have existed both within these communities and between them and the rest of the United States are marginalized. But, for Stiglitz, the social capital these towns possess could be

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[2] András Bozóki, "The Illusion of Inclusion: Configurations of Populism in Hungary," in *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe after 1989,* ed. Michael Kopeček and Piotr Wcislik (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 277.

the saving grace for the United States in the 21st century.[3] Thus, even here, Zhadan's ethics of memory is useful. Internalizing a sense of friendship, which prizes responsibility to people over place or bureaucratic assertions of ideology, means integrating cognitive counterparts – necessary others – in order to form a complete and ethical individual or community.

As the introduction to this dissertation notes, friendship is perhaps the most tangible manifestation of cognitive counterparts in ordinary life. The model of friendship that Hanna Arendt analyzes in "On Humanity in Dark Times" maintains that a friend is an other who is necessary to living in true freedom. That is to say that recognizing friendship means acknowledging that integrating your counterpart is imperative to a whole and fulfilling life. Indeed, the cognitive counterparts that all of this dissertation's case studies address are connected to a sense of friendship: Dr. Shedd, one of the heroes of Shklovsky's novel, who is aware that being determines consciousness *and* consciousness must also determine being, acts in the name of friendship with the Aissors; the narrator of the memoir in Čapek's *An Ordinary Life* realizes that once he integrates the notion of "the many" – the counterpart to "the one" – into his conception of his personal history, he can understand the friendships he formed throughout his life; the interviewees in Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl* demonstrate that living contentedly in anti-totalitarian socialism means living as friends; and, of course, Zhadan's ethics of memory, which I argue is meant to integrate Russian and Ukrainian counterparts, is predicated upon a sense of friendship.

This literature of Eastern Europe's volatile political times inspires a discerning eye toward big, bureaucratic declarations of change that can marginalize or obscure critical

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[3] Quoted in Heather Long, "America's Forgotten Towns: Should they be saved, or should people just leave?" in *The Washington Post,* January 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/01/02/americas-forgotten-towns-can-they-be-saved-or-should-people-just-leave/?utm_term=.ec102b43135f, accessed on January 10, 2018.

experiences of everyday life instead of making them whole. Additionally, it fosters a renewed

confidence in the ability for ordinary individuals to affect impending change in empathetic and

ethical ways. These aesthetic lessons on the value of recognizing and working with cognitive

counterparts in ordinary life span languages, cultures, and generations.

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