

'IN TRANSIT': TAXI DRIVING AS A MINI PARADIGM IN GAITO GAZDANOV'S *NIGHT ROADS* AND HELEN POTREBENKO'S *TAXI!*

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242 "I travel in order to get to know my geography." —Marcel Réja

"I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images." —Georges Duhamel

MINI PARADIGMS AS ROUTES FOR COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

In his 2006 essay "Indiscipline," David Ferris argues for notions of Comparative Literature as an "indiscipline" and a "discipline of exile" (93-4). It seems that Comparative Literature, deterritorialised, as it were, from specific, geographic boundaries, is a discipline that constantly reinvents itself by searching for new ways of comparison. One of the possible 'routes' for Comparative Literature is looking for 'mini-paradigms'. Mini-paradigms are sets of recognisable features that not only make texts from different traditions and periods speak to each other beyond territorial boundaries, but also, potentially at least, offer a more systematic method of enquiry for Comparative Studies. In the definition proposed here, mini-paradigms tackle larger categories—for example, categories of subject, time, space, history—through particular, recognizable situations. Mini-paradigms can be applicable to a wider body of texts; they can be explored again and again; and they offer repeated, multidirectional 'crossings' between texts, rather than a single exchange between individual literary works.

As a case study of one such 'mini-paradigm', this essay will explore the experi-

ence of taxi driving in modernist Russian-French writer Gaito Gazdanov's *Night Roads* and postmodern Ukrainian-Canadian writer Helen Potrebenko's *Taxi!*. Both texts are exilic in nature (and as such, prime objects of comparative study), and both explore the geographic and social boundaries of the city in order to reveal the metaphysical and psychological boundaries of exilic/migrant identity. Across time, these two novels engage in a fascinating intertextual dialogue. *Night Roads* was written after Gazdanov left revolutionary Russia; *Taxi!* was published after Potrebenko migrated from her native Alberta to Vancouver. Both novels use taxi driving as a metaphor to reflect upon the human condition in the urban setting. Yet their fundamentally different aesthetics of the subject link the experience of taxi driving to various levels of the subject's freedom, as well as to contrasting images of the city.

Taxi driving, it seems, has become an enduring cultural paradigm for the relationship between the human subject, technology, and the city—a paradigm that connects the important dimensions of twentieth-century urban life. Quite simply, taxi driving provides us with a way of looking at the city and situating ourselves within it. As a mini-paradigm, taxi driving captures an interesting, quintessentially modern dynamic between the human subject and the city: the human subject inside a technological object navigating through the urban space—a space that the subject cannot own, but must inhabit. Taxi driving explores this dynamic on a more human, more manageable scale, partly because it is a human-oriented profession, in which people's wishes are the very foundation of the socioeconomic contract, and partly because it focuses on *one* subject, *one* technological object, and *one* city. Because the moving taxi literally enforces a continuous change of perspective, the subject emerges more fragmented and, paradoxically, more consolidated in the urban landscape: fragmented because a singularity of vision, both physically and metaphysically speaking, is impossible due to constant movement, and consolidated because this fragmented condition allows the subject to connect to the city as a multidimensional space in a more meaningful way. The dilemma of the taxi driver can thus be captured in the dialogue between the epigraphs to this article: Georges Duhamel's famous complaint—"I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images" (qtd. in Benjamin 41)—and Marcel Réja's "I travel in order to get to know my geography" (qtd. in Benjamin 41). On the one hand, the constant movement of the taxi allows images of the city to invade the subject; on the other, taxi driving enables the subject to understand itself by getting to know the geography of the city.

The paradigm of taxi driving in literary texts also poses a series of critical questions. First, what kind of paradigmatic relations are established between the subject and the city through taxi driving? Second, does driving intensify the experience of the subject in the city or does it induce self-reflection and self-absorption? Finally, and crucially, how does the pre-eminent conception of subjectivity, existent in modernist and postmodern narratives, affect the taxi-driving paradigm? It is on these terms that this article explores the paradigm of taxi driving in Gazdanov's *Night Roads* and Potrebenko's *Taxi!*.

TAXI DRIVING AS A MINI PARADIGM

In order to explore the mini paradigm of taxi driving, we must inevitably turn to the discussion of larger categories—those of the subject, the city, space, and narrative. In her recent but influential discussion of spatiality and mobility in the city, Kirsten Simonsen traces two trends in current popular and academic discourse. One is set by the cultural theorist and urbanist Paul Virilio, who connects the human condition in the twentieth century with our notion of speed. The other is by now the well-trodden path of discussing the modern subject in Giles Deleuze's terms of nomadism and rhizomatic movement. It is Virilio who will serve as a point of departure in my discussion of taxi driving as a mini-paradigm. Virilio emphasizes how mobility and speed have been instrumental in making the modern subject "deterritorialized":

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We have become deterritorialized. Our embedding in our native soil, that elements of *hic et nunc* (here and now), 'in situ', that embedding belongs, now, in a certain way, to the past. It has been overtaken by the acceleration of history—by the acceleration of reality itself. (27)

For Virilio, this sense of "deterritorialization" begins with modern transport, which changes human perception of time and space, and places it within a relativist paradigm. In this changed landscape, human perception of subjectivity also changes. Though it is now possible to move through space in a short time, the subject paradoxically begins to feel more entrapped in space and in its own body.

In the nineteenth century, the subject walks through the city. This movement is individualised, unlimited, and, therefore, inherently artistic—hence, Walter Benjamin's idea of the *flâneur* as an artist with a "highly specialized way of looking at the city" (Jacobs 219). Steven Jacobs argues that, in the modernist era, as cars replace walkers and *chauffeurs* replace *flâneurs*, car driving becomes a way of "both representing and simulating the hyperstimulation of the big city" (219). In other words, the authenticity of the subject's vision of the city and of itself in the city is gone: the modernist subject merely emulates the city. "The perception of the city from a moving car implies a literal distance but not necessarily an aesthetic detachment" (Jacobs 214-15). Thus, the modern, car-driving subject is symbolically merged with the city. As Martin Weinreich states in his analysis of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, the "urban inferno is really a personal inferno": the subject becomes part of the urban landscape and hence also less of itself.

But must car driving always produce a diminished subject? David Laderman discusses the road as a "universal symbol of the course of life, the movement of desire, and the lure of both freedom and destiny", arguing that the "road secures us with direction and purpose" beyond our normal cultural and social framework—as "a mobile refuge from social circumstances felt to be lacking or oppressive in some way" (2). Thus, car driving can be linked with freedom and with the subject's removal of itself from the social. The opposite of car driving as a freedom from the social is taxi

driving: the taxi repeats the same routes and depends precisely on the social contract of the fare. Thus, its movement may become a parody of the “movement of desire”, as well as a parody of the unknown. Yet, taxi driving retains something of the “lure of both freedom and destiny” in literary narratives: it plays on the duality of freedom and entrapment, in social, physical, and metaphysical terms. As we become “deteritorialized”, in Virilio’s terms, through our movement in the city, we also create our own spatialities and our own narratives of the city (Simonsen 52-53). Taxi driving, while exiling the subject within the city through constant mobility and speed, also enables the subject to create alternative narratives of the city—narratives of home and separation, chaos and purpose. As such, taxi driving serves as an ideal paradigm for the comparative analysis of exilic narratives. Its multifoldedness embraces both the alternative spaces created through exile and the ‘indisciplinary’ nature of Comparative Literature.

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GAITO GAZDANOV’S *NIGHT ROADS*: ABSORBING THE CITY

Night Roads presents us with a narrative which is semi-autobiographical in nature and confessional in tone, consisting of multiple episodes from the life of a taxi driver, a Russian émigré, in 1930s Paris. As the narrator works his nightshifts, he encounters a gallery of characters—prostitutes, pimps, drunks, tramps—who become part of his world. In her discussion of urban spatiality, Simonsen signals the city as a “site of stimulation, provocation and meetings with the ‘stranger’, whereby multiple subjects create “multiple rhythms of the city” (46). The “‘non-stop’ city” contains “‘dream spaces’—e.g. hotels, theatres, cafes and cinemas”; such dream spaces are often constructed by the “‘night people’ (whether it is night workers, amusement seekers or ‘underground’ groups) [who] follow particular rhythms; they perform their own spatialities and temporalities and construct their own narratives of the city” (46). Gazdanov’s narrator is clearly one such “night person” who creates his own narrative of Paris in the 1930s. However, despite the “stimulation, provocation and meetings with the ‘stranger’” that his nocturnal lifestyle facilitates, his narrative remains peculiarly self-enclosed. This self-enclosedness is intimately related to his experience of taxi driving, which paradigmatically establishes his relationship with the city.

A quintessentially modernist, introverted text, *Night Roads* is concerned with psychological reality, memory, and a ‘journey inwards’, rather than with external reality, social issues or politics. Often we see the narrator sneer at his fellow taxi drivers, who meekly accept their deplorable lives, at his upper-class passengers, who are described as no better than the ‘low’ society of nocturnal Paris, and at this nocturnal milieu itself, which is described as unworthy of even pity. Yet, his irony does not ultimately challenge social hierarchies: it is in itself a symptom of apathy and self-absorption. The ‘other people’ hardly mark the narrator. What pulsates through the narrative

is the image of his taxi moving around the city in a series of journeys—a movement which charts the inner journey of the character. This journey has no purpose or agenda beyond itself; as it is comprised of myriad routes and impressions, it does not create a coherent picture or trajectory, but embodies a process of getting to know the psychic geography of the city and of oneself.

As such, the experience of taxi driving helps the modernist subject to reflect on its own existential condition, rather than to dwell on/in the city. Gazdanov's narrator juxtaposes physical movement through the city with metaphysical "moving through imagined spaces" (148). He links his aimless movement with a sense of futility and existential exile:

...in my rare and sudden moments of lucidity it would begin to seem to me completely inexplicable *why I should be driving in a car at night through this huge and foreign city, which ought to have rushed by and disappeared like a train but which I was never able to pass through*—as when you are asleep and struggle, but cannot manage, to wake up. (28, my emphasis)

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It is interesting that the narrator considers the city itself in terms of movement and images it as a vanishing "train" that "ought to have rushed by and disappeared", and yet he himself feels "never able to pass through" the city. Crucially, the image of the train appears earlier in the narrative, in connection with the narrator's "urge to perform one truly final action, once and for all"—"to step away for an instant from the firm stone edge of the platform and hurl [him]self under the train" (28). As the narrator imagines his death *under* the train and images the city *as* the train itself, the text establishes the city as the subject's mirror and abyss.

In *Night Roads*, navigating through the city, however fruitless and defeating it appears to the narrator, nevertheless engenders a quasi-Buddhist journey through subjectivity. The Buddhist dimension of Gazdanov's work has already been explored by his Russian critics (Kibalnik 277-305). G.A. Sorokina, for instance, discusses Gazdanov not as a practitioner of Buddhism but as a writer "characterised by a scientific-philosophical perspective on Buddhism" (73, my translation). While Gazdanov was interested in Buddhist teachings, he was not a follower of any particular school of Buddhism. His novels reflect his general interest in Buddhist ideas: the desire 'to wake up' and to achieve a deeper understanding of the world in *Night Roads*, reincarnation in *Buddha's Return*, the non-separation of the self from the Other in *The Spectre of Alexander Wolf*, to name a few examples.

In pursuit of a deeper understanding of the world, Gazdanov's narrator confesses that he had to leave 'safer' occupations, the "total inadequacy of which became clear to him" (34) in order to gain existential knowledge. "I never would have known much of what I do know", the narrator confesses, "if I had not had to become a taxi driver" (34). In the years of taxi driving, he meets a series of socially and psychologically doomed characters: a former courtesan, Raldy, who dies alone and in great poverty; an unintellectual Ukrainian émigré, Fedorchenko, who ventures into an existentialist exploration of life and commits suicide out of confusion; a beautiful asexual

prostitute, Alice; another prostitute, the pragmatic Suzanne, who wants to climb the social ladder by 'working hard' and opening up a shop with her earnings; and the narrator's only friend, "Plato", who drinks his life away in bars while discussing philosophy and lofty ideas. Their influence on the narrator is potent but unenduring: he describes this influence as a "wordless and powerful flow of air that traversed...[his] path through this sinister and fantastical Paris, and which bore away with it other people's ridiculous tragedies" (239). What remains after meeting all these people is always the "sinister and fantastical Paris", as well as the narrator himself.

It is to the city that the narrator owes his final epiphany and his transformation of consciousness:

I understood that *in the future I would see everything with different eyes*, and however I ended up living and whatever fate had in store for me, *behind me, like some burned-up and dead world, like the dark ruins of collapsed buildings, this alien city in a distant and alien world would always stand as an unmoving and silent reminder*. (239, my emphasis)

The apocalyptic vision of the disappearing city—"burned-up", "dead", "collapsed"—is a testament to the disappearance of the old self, and the narrator's final confession ("in the future I would see everything with different eyes") points to a complete transformation of the self that is concurrent with the transformation of the image of the city. Thus, the city symbolically 'exiles' the self, and functions as a metaphor for the fragmentation and dislocation of subjectivity. Of what does the "alien city... always stand as an unmoving and silent reminder", if not, precisely, of the "burned-up", "dead", and "collapsed" self? The introverted nature of modernist aesthetics maps the city as an inner space and denies its objective reality. Hence, the surreality of the city in Gazdanov always precludes objective images. Because the city is mediated and conditioned by subjectivity, it is always 'disappearing' inwards: 'swallowed' or 'exiled' by subjectivity, the city serves as a mere mirror of the self. It is the phantasmagorical city that remains an enduring image in Gazdanov's narrative: it 'survives' in the narrative as a reflection of the narrator's own subjectivity or, in a sense, as the narrator's *Doppelgänger*.

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HELEN POTREBENKO'S *TAXI*: TRANSFORMING THE CITY

Helen Potrebenco's *Taxi*!, identified by Linda Hutcheon as an early example of Canadian postmodernism (198), positions the city as an external space, which the narrator, Shannon, who is also a taxi driver, navigates to assert her identity. "The city is mine, too", she says, "The city belongs to those who know it. There's an arrogance that goes with being a taxi driver" (138). Despite the fact that cab driving positions her at the lower end of the Vancouver society of the 1970s and allows her passengers to question her femininity/normality, Shannon compares herself favourably to "receptionists, sales clerks, waitresses" and other women who "have to look pleasant"

(138). Whereas Gazdanov's mournful narrator experiences taxi driving as physical, spatial, and spiritual entrapment, Potrebenco's protagonist experiences taxi driving as a form of social, spatial, and psychological freedom—the freedom to “choose [your own] kind of madness” (138) and the freedom to claim the city as your own.

This freedom is reinforced by the narrator's attempts to image, articulate, and metaphorise the city—that is to say, by creating what Fredric Jameson, after Kevin Lynch, has famously called a ‘cognitive map’ of the city. Lynch's notion of ‘cognitive map,’ developed in his book *The Image of the City*, helps to “explore how mental images not only affect a spectator's sense of identity, well-being, and belonging to the city but also make the city memorable or imageable” (41). To know the city is to assert mentally its existence, its particular identity, and—because the urban subject is inseparable from the city—to reaffirm the identity of the subject-in-the-city.

Shannon attempts this further by textually mapping the city in her own narrative. She compares the city to a jewel that sparkles in the sun and insists that this image is

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the city sparkles like a jewel beneath cold blue skies. I know that's an overused metaphor, but the city **did**. Like a diamond. It did. Or more like a bunch of diamonds. Sapphires, rubies, opals. That's what's wrong with the metaphor. The city sparkles like jewels. (163)

The simple language of this description, with its bolded insistence on both the ‘realness’ of the city and on its multiplicity, is in sharp contrast to Gazdanov's dense, symbolist prose. While Potrebenco's narrator metaphorises the city in order to better imagine and describe it, Gazdanov's narrator uses the city to metaphorise his own fragmented and disoriented condition.

In *Night Roads*, the city functions as what Svend Erik Larsen describes as a “self-reflective position” or as a “synechdochal” and “metonymical” image that could be transferred onto other realities (the subject itself). In Potrebenco's terse prose, on the other hand, the city embodies an autonomous social and urban reality. According to Larsen, this distinction in the conceptualisation of the city points to the basic difference between modernity and postmodernity:

Our conceptual insecurity is born together with the historical reality of the city. From Antiquity to the dawn of Modernity, the city still represented a self-reflective position vis-à-vis, first, the cosmos and later society as a whole, its clearly marked non-urban features and regions included....But in postmodernity the alleged synechdochal or metonymical role of the city vanishes, simply because what is urban and what is social in general become indistinguishable. (27)

Larsen argues that the postmodern movement towards the blending of the “urban” and the “social” signals the end of the city as a “self-reflective position” and a metaphor for the subject's experience. More socially engaged and less interested in introspection than modernism, postmodernism re-positions the city as a concrete, multidimensional space.

But as the city ceases being an abstraction, it also loses its extravagant charm. The introverted irony of Gazdanov's surrealist narrative can be juxtaposed with the light and practical sense of humour exhibited by Potrebenko's narrator. "An elephant was reported on Granville Street one morning....Is it pink? Does it want a cab?...Elephants ...tend to be rather large tipplers" (41-42). Shannon frequently compares taxi driving to being in a zoo; her sense of humour becomes a survival strategy, which appears to be more sustainable than Gazdanov's collapsible irony of quiet desperation. Like Gazdanov's narrator, Shannon dismantles social hierarchies through her experience of taxi driving, but she does so without his bitter irony of the dispossessed. On one occasion, she gives preferential treatment to a "drunk with only one leg, hobbling along on crutches," leaving behind a "fat and rich and modly clothed and perfumed and manicured" couple; she does this not out of a sense of moral duty, but in order to exercise her freedom over the city and, quite simply, for her own amusement. Her sense of humour is extended beyond the situation onto his persona: "I hope, Shannon said to the cripple, driving away, that you are about to spend your welfare cheque on booze the way you're supposed to" (107). 249

In the multitude of episodes described, the cab moving around Vancouver stands for Shannon's ownership of the city. When an upper-class lady asks her "sympathetically" if she has "ever been anywhere," Potrebenko's narrator affirms her sense of groundedness in this urban space: "Lady, I **am** somewhere." Moreover, she transforms the divisive politics of the gendered and racialised city by openly confronting her passengers and even throwing them out of her cab. Potrebenko's postmodern sense of experience as active, if not transformative, is thus in sharp contrast with Gazdanov's modernist sense of passivity (to experience is to observe, to feel, to trigger inner sensations). Hence, Potrebenko's typographically and metaphorically bolded insistence on basic active verbs: "I **am**," "the city **did**."

On another level, however, this strained *insistence* on the reality of urban experience and identity also suggests their potential unreality. Potrebenko's narrator compares herself to a "stuffed doll with tattered covering and with most of her stuffing hanging out"; this sense of non-existence alleviates her fears of taxi driving, "because you can't hurt a stuffed doll" (50). On this reading, her experience of taxi driving also becomes a non-experience, in the sense that her physical location is dependent on random fares and never reflects where she actually wants to be. As a way of struggling with the unreality of her spatial position, Shannon attempts to control *time* by organising her narrative in a strictly chronological order (thus producing a type of narrative that is characteristically *un*-postmodern) and *place* by claiming that she 'knows the city'. Thus, she symbolically tames the monstrosity of the ever-growing city, imaged in her narrative as a "great sprawling organism which absorbs foreignness into its own body" (26). As the city attempts to absorb the subject, the subject retaliates by controlling the city; the paradigmatic relationship between the subject and the city here is neither passive nor psychological, but active and spatial.

Taxi driving also becomes her way of dealing with politics, when she positions

global events in the background of her narrative. Speaking of the 1971 visit of Soviet officials to Vancouver, for example, Potrebenco's narrator notes that "she was pleased about the visit for the same reasons as everyone else", because the Canadians "had never understood the necessity of hating the Russians" (84). Yet, this visit becomes an annoyance when it affects traffic in the city:

Kosygin rode around in a cavalcade of about a dozen black cars with motorcycle escort, and all traffic was stopped whenever he passed by. It seemed to Shannon that he made an extraordinary number of trips because wherever she was going, she had to stop and wait for the black cars to pass by. The end of the cold war, therefore, just looked to her like a traffic jam and nothing more. (84)

250 The micro-narrative of cab driving thus overshadows the metanarrative of the Cold War. Moreover, from the position of Shannon's experience, the friendly visit of the Russians to Canada ultimately means nothing: "The war went on as before" (85), she says minimalistically. Always grounded in personal experience, Potrebenco's postmodern novel refuses to be politically optimistic, socially constructive or even inspiring on the individual level. Her narrative does not 'teach' us anything, but rather represents a personal attempt to grasp life in a particular city, the Vancouver of the 1970s—the life of economic hardship, social stagnation, and boredom.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE: THE SUBJECT, THE TAXI, AND THE CITY

Taxi! depicts the human condition in a particular city through the paradigm of taxi driving. By way of its linear, literal narrative, the text symbolically controls the complex urban reality, reflected in the random, uncontrolled movement of the taxi through the city. The multiple crossings and recrossings of the taxi—which constantly navigates urban spaces but never reaches an ultimate destination—becomes a metaphor for migration and exile within the city. Like Gazdanov, Potrebenco employs the paradigm of taxi driving to address issues of exile and migration, foreignness and otherness, the politics of urban space, and the sense of dislocation in modernity. However, while in Potrebenco's postmodern text, taxi driving as urban exile works to create a personal narrative which serves to confront the divisive spatial politics of the city, in Gazdanov's introverted modernist narrative, the dislocating movement of the taxi mirrors the dislocation of the exilic self itself.

Gazdanov's *Night Roads* takes the individual story and the image of the city to a level that transcends immediate reality. The surrealist dimension of *Night Roads* subsumes the city, Paris in the 1930s, as a metaphor for human experience. The concrete outline of the city, which is so palpable in Potrebenco's text, is noticeably missing in Gazdanov's story: here, to use Potrebenco's metaphor of the city, the "sprawling organism which absorbs foreignness into its own body" (26) is the human subject

itself, which absorbs the city and other people. Within this paradigm, the text reveals the 'monstrosity' of subjectivity, which symbolically 'sprawls' into the space of the city and into other people's lives. The urban space and the people who inhabit it become mere reflections of the narrator's own inner life. His consciousness filters them and uses them as pale metaphors of his own experience. The confessional first-person narrative keeps the intrusion of other voices at bay, and the narrator's singular vision of the city precludes the emergence of alternative images of Paris.

It must be noted that Gazdanov's apocalyptic cityscape was not born in isolation and follows the surrealist tradition of modernist writing, in which the city as a place disappears and emerges, instead, as a mirror of the character's life or even as another character. According to Richard Daniel Lehan, "the major modernist theme is that of the artist, or the equivalent of the artist, in the city" (77). Lehan suggests that the "city became the place where the sensitive artist experienced acute isolation from ordinary people,...even as he mingled with the crowd" (77). The transformation of the city into a setting for the subject's inner life leads to the development of what Raymond Williams has called the "intense self-consciousness" and the "perceptual subjectivity" of the modern urban subject (245). The 'strangeness' of this 'perceptual subjectivity' is transferred onto the 'strangeness of the city'. This becomes very clear in a particularly emotional episode of the narrator's lost love:

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This was a time of never-ending spiritual torment for me, probably not to be repeated in my life, and the places where I spent time then I see clearly and precisely before me as soon as my thoughts return to that period: the Boulevard Arago and its dense trees which covered up the round street lamps, Fontainebleau and Marly-le-Roi, where I would go on Sundays, nighttime cabarets and the musical waves of those trashy songs and melodies, in which I found *a hopeless and mournful charm which existed, I think, not by itself, but which arose because it was two or three o'clock in the morning and next to me were those unforgettable, distant eyes and that face exhausted by the night and the music.* (170, my emphasis)

The concrete, physical reality of the city is translated, and subsumed, by the 'perceptual subjectivity' into a subjective and impressionistic landscape of emotions. The sense of disorientation of the modernist subject is translated into the experience of driving a taxi through a dark city, and the meaninglessness of this experience propels interest in other people's lives:

In that vast and silent motion, carrying me along as in a whirl of darkness, *in a world that was born and died again each day, in which, naturally, there was no concept of beginning or end, nor any idea of meaning or direction*, and of whose powerful, unceasing, and unpleasant rhythm I was impotently aware, any life that was fitted into some kind of normal and artificial and false schema—beginning, development, and ending—interested me acutely, and any event which had to do with these things was forever imprinted on my memory....And over these things, in the form in which they remained within me, *time had no power*, and they were perhaps all I was able to hold on to out of the *constantly disappearing, shifting world*, which grew even greater with the passage of time and *in whose bottomless expanses had perished whole countries and cities and an*

almost incalculable number of people whom I would not see again.
(198-99, my emphasis)

The reality of the narrator's life is such that the dimensions of time and place become irrelevant ("time had no power" and the place is "constantly disappearing, shifting"); whole "countries", "cities", and people "perish" in the "bottomless expanses" of his inner world. While Potrebenco's narrator never questions her chronological mode or her claim over the city, Gazdanov's narrator recognises the "artificiality" of the linear "schema" and admits that he has no physical or cognitive control over time/space. Time and space are swallowed up by "bottomless", monstrous subjectivity.

252 This absolute privileging of the 'inner' over the 'outer' is imaged in the taxi moving through the city: that which is symbolically and spatially *in* the taxi absorbs that which is *outside*; the 'partitions' provided by the car delineate the inner-outer dichotomy clearly. Moreover, the partition, which at the time was used between the taxi driver and his passengers, delineates the separation of the subject from other subjects, so that they too are assimilated by the 'perceptual subject's' experience. Indeed, Gazdanov's narrator perceives the events in the city and the lives of other people through the prism of his own "violent, sensual existence and profound sadness" (220). In contrast to Potrebenco's postmodern text, in which the city 'absorbs' strangeness, Gazdanov's modernist novel creates images of subjectivity which absorb the city.

Whereas *Taxi!* upholds subjectivity against the city, *Night Roads* exploits the city and its inhabitants as material for the subject's sensual and emotional life. Both novels voice a migrant and exilic consciousness, both locate it in the experience of taxi driving, and both play on the inner/outer aspects of the image of the taxi. However, as a mini-paradigm, taxi driving finds very different expressions in the two texts. In *Night Roads*, it positions the subject *over* the city, which becomes internalised, negated, and aestheticised; in *Taxi!*, it repositions the subject *in* the city, which is thus civically and narratologically reclaimed by the subject.

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