Alien Places in Late Soviet Science Fiction

The “Unexpected Encounters” of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky as Novels and Films

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Having finally finished this manuscript, I asked myself when this whole venture actually began. Was it that warm September evening back in 1992 when my eyes fell on a book by the Strugatsky brothers on a table on a Moscow street? I bought the book even though I had never heard of it. Many years later I began to entertain the idea that it might contain material on which to base a dissertation.

Perhaps it does not matter when or where or how it began, but rather that I finally seem to have reached the end. The road there has not been completely smooth. Nevertheless, travelling it has, on the whole, been a pleasant experience during which I have received invaluable help from a number of people and institutions.

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Note on transliteration

Where an established conventional English spelling of Russian names exists (e.g., Strugatsky, Tarkovsky, Vysotsky), this has been given preference in the main body of the text. The sole exception is the name of the hero of the first novel: although he is “Glebsky” in the title of the novel, he is “Glebski” in the main text. In the case of the director Grigori Kromanov, I have used the established Estonian spelling. In the footnotes and bibliography, Russian names and sources have been transliterated according to the Scandinavian version of the international scholarly transliteration system ISO/R 9.

All translations are mine unless stated otherwise. Where an established English title for a work exists, this has been used, with the original title in parentheses. In other cases the translation of the titles are mine, with the original titles in square brackets.
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All photos courtesy of Estonian Film Archives, Tallinn.
From Utopia to Heterotopia: The End of the Soviet 1960s and the Beginning of the 1970s

Expectations and Disillusionments

In June 1968, the renowned scientist Andrei Sakharov completed an essay entitled “Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom” (“Razmyšlenija o progresse, mirnom sosuščestvovanii i intellektual’noj svobode”). In the essay he discussed the threat of nuclear war and addressed the subject of the lack of intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet 1960s began as a time of unusual optimism about the future: at the 1961 Party Congress it had been proudly declared that the ideals of communism would finally be realized. The conquest of outer space also appeared to be within reach. However, in the essay, completed in June 1968, Sakharov expressed doubts concerning both the possibility of a future as well as the means which had been relied upon to reach such goals up until then. Particularly the invention of nuclear weapons, a development in which Sakharov took part, gave him reason to worry. The bomb made it apparent that science could hardly be considered to be something indisputably beneficial to mankind. Yet in the essay the belief in a more open society still remained – another hope that would be crushed only a couple of months later with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

As the 1970s followed the 1960s there came about a shift in attitudes in Soviet culture. Birgit Menzel describes this as a change in “Zeitgeist”

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1 Andrej Sacharov, “Razmyšlenija o progresse, mirnom sosuščestvovanii i intellektual’noj svobode” (Frankfurt am Main, 1969).
3 This allegedly put an end to the hope of building “communism with a human face” not only in Czechoslovakia but also in the Soviet Union itself. See Vajl’ & Genis, p. 310.
affecting “both official and unofficial Russian cultural spheres. […] From politics and natural science the intelligentsia turned to philosophy and religion.” While the Soviet 1960s have been studied by Peter Vajl’ and Alexander Genis and the 1980s by Alexei Yurchak, the 1970s as yet have not been given quite the same amount of attention. The Soviet 1970s have largely been dismissed as essentially a time of stagnation. However, this opinion cannot entirely be justified since so much of importance was happening in the cultural sphere, not the least in the less official areas. Others have discussed aspects of the 1970s unofficial culture including Vladislav Kulakov in his account of underground poetry, Ekaterina Bobrinskaja in her study of the period’s unofficial art, as well as the artist Ilya Kabakov who in his memoirs recounts his experiences as a participant in the underground art scene of the 1960s and 1970s.

It must be noted that this kind of a shift in mood and interests occurred not only in the Soviet Union during the 1960s and on into the 1970s. In a series of interviews from the early 1970s the British writer J. G. Ballard repeatedly returned to how the technological enthusiasm of the earlier decade then appeared to have been replaced by an interest in a totally different set of phenomena such as Eastern mysticism. Ballard described this development as a shift from outer space to “inner space.” This phrase could also be used to illustrate the development of the work of the Strugatsky brothers, the pair of science fiction writers, Arkady (1925–1991) and Boris (1933–2012).

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5 Vladislav Kulakov, Poezija kak fakt (Moskva, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999).
7 Il’ja Kabakov, 60-e – 70-e: zapiski o neoficial’noj žizni v Moskve (Wien, Wiener slavistischer Almanach Sonderband 47, 1999).
8 See “1970: Lynn Barber. Sci-fi Seer” in Extreme Metaphors: Interviews With J. G. Ballard 1967-2008, ed. Dan O’Hara and Simon Sellars (London, Fourth Estate, 2012), p. 24-25. It should, however, be noted here that there were important differences between the developments in the East and the West. In the Soviet Union access to certain texts was limited which, for example, prevented interest in eastern religions from becoming part of the mass culture in the way it had in the West.
The Strugatskys

Natural science, on the one hand, and “philosophy and religion,” on the other were the concerns of the two opposing sides in an important ongoing cultural debate: the physicists [fiziki], who placed their hopes for a better world in a rational, scientific worldview, and the lyricists [liriki] who still had faith in “softer” cultural expressions such as literature.

Although the Strugatskys are usually characterized as fiziki, it appears more correct to see them as bridging a gap between the two groups; Arkady was a linguist, Boris an astronomer. The work they produced together can largely be said to mirror the currents and developments of the science fiction genre in the Soviet Union from the late 1950s to the late 1980s. Like much of the science fiction of the Thaw, their early works could be said to constitute “a rejection of the wrong road taken on the way to Communism and a revival of fundamental socialist ideals.”9 However, from the mid-1960s and onwards, a shift became noticeable in their works. They ceased to reflect “the general optimistic ethos of the ‘thaw’ generation” and instead began to “paint an increasingly pessimistic picture of ethical and moral stagnation.”10 This tendency was first expressed in the novel Hard to be a God (Trudno byt’ bogom, 1964) where they voiced certain doubts about the possibility of successfully interfering in the development of society.

In the years 1970-1972 they published three novels: Inspector Glebsky’s Puzzle (Otel’ U pogibšego al’pinista, 1970), The Kid (Malyš, 1971), and Roadside Picnic (Piknik na obočine, 1972).11 Although these are three rather disparate works, the Strugatskys nevertheless considered them connected by a common theme: contact between humanity and extraterrestrial intelligence. The intention was to publish all three novels together in one volume with the

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11 The English titles are taken from existing translations of the novels. Inspector Glebsky’s Puzzle (New York, Richardson, Steinman & Black, 1988). The Kid was included in a volume with other Noon universe stories: Escape Attempt (Best of Soviet Science Fiction), trans. Roger DeGaris (New York, Macmillan, 1982). Roadside Picnic was first published in Roadside Picnic/Tale of the Troika (Best of Soviet Science Fiction), trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, Macmillan, 1977). In the following, the English titles of the novels will be used. The titles will be referred to in shortened form, as Puzzle, Kid and Picnic, respectively.
title *Unexpected Encounters* [Nenaznačennye vstreči].\(^{12}\) Istvan Csiseray-Ronay has described *Picnic* as “a fable of the despair of the 60s’ intelligentsia.”\(^{13}\) One of the questions that will be addressed in the following study is whether this, in fact, could be said about all three novels.

**Previous Research and the Aim of this Study**

The relatively few studies of the Strugatskys’ works which have been published up until now in the West have largely been aimed at a readership without extensive previous knowledge about them or their works. This means that the aim of these studies has been partly to introduce the Strugatskys and to place them within a broader context. Stephen Potts’ *The Second Marxian Invasion* gives a brief account of their entire career read from a political perspective.\(^{14}\) Yvonne Howell’s *Apocalyptic Realism*, undertaken with the ambition of “[redressing] the imbalance between the significance of the Strugatskys’ works in contemporary Russian culture and the lack of scholarly attention it has heretofore received,”\(^{15}\) concentrates on their works from the 1970s and onwards. Howell places the Strugatskys within a particular Russian tradition of different “realisms” as well as avant-garde literature with an eschatological bent.

The present study differs from previous ones in terms of its concentration on a smaller body of works produced within a fairly short time span. The aim here is to contribute to the corpus of works intended to elucidate the culture of the Soviet 1970s after the departure from the values of the 1960s. This will be done through an analysis of connected works produced at the initial stage of the paradigm shift as well as those created when these ideas had become more established.

Apart from the three novels, the study also includes two films based on *Puzzle* and *Picnic* made towards the end of the 1970s – *Dead Mountaineer’s*
Hotel (Hukkunud alpinisti hotell/ Otel’ U pogibšego al’pinista, Grigori Kromanov, 1979) and Stalker (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1980) – where the Strugatskys actively took part in their making. The selection of material for this study has been made for several reasons. For one thing, the novels and films have never been studied together or explicitly examined in connection with the Soviet 1970s. With the exception of Picnic and Stalker, this is also material which largely has not been subjected to a more extensive study. Since the novels and films not only form a tentative artistic unity but also cover the beginning and the end of the decade, they appear to be a suitable basis for a study of the Soviet 1970s. For another, the study attempts to explore the relationship of the Strugatskys’ work to the Gothic literary tradition, a connection which, to my knowledge, has never before been given any in-depth attention.

Here it is also especially worth mentioning another of the Strugatskys’ works – the novel The Ugly Swans (Gadkie lebedi). Swans was written between Hard to Be a God and Picnic – in the years 1966 and 1967 – but because of difficulties with censorship it was denied publication for two decades. Officially the novel was not published in the Soviet Union until 1987, and then only in a Latvian literary magazine (copies of the text did however circulate as samizdat in Russia). Before being published in Latvia, it also figured in the Strugatskys’ novel A Lame Fate (Chromaja sud’ba, 1986) in the form of a manuscript the protagonist is working on. Swans is relevant to the discussion, partly because it can be said to thematically prefigure the later “unexpected encounters” in many ways, but also because the Strugatskys themselves actualized it when they wrote their screen adaptation of Picnic.

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16 While Stalker undoubtedly has generated quite an extensive body of work, this has largely taken place within the context of studies of Tarkovsky rather than of the Strugatskys.
17 In the following text only referred to as Swans.
18 An “unauthorized Russian edition and translation” was, however, published in the West already in 1972. See Howell, p. 10.
A Literature of Difference

Soviet Science Fiction

The history of science fiction, or naučnaja fantastika, in the Soviet Union has its own particularities compared to those of science fiction in the West, primarily in the way it was closely connected to the history of Soviet ideology.

Soviet science fiction emerged as a clearly defined genre at about the same time as its Western counterpart. According to Rosalind Marsh, science fiction was considered to be a Western import, and it was also associated with an open attitude towards Western influences in general. Here it appears relevant to pause and add a few words about the terms for the genre. The Russian term naučnaja fantastika first came into use already in the 1890s. According to Patrick McGuire it is not a direct equivalent of “science fiction” but rather a borrowed translation of “scientific romance” (used for example in reference to the novels of H. G. Wells), which was in use around the same time. Although it is often stressed in definitions of the term science fiction, the word “science” nevertheless does not come across as being charged with the same kind of ideological meaning as nauka, and all of the words derived from it, did in the Soviet context. The Soviet Union was supposed to refashion itself into a science state through the scientific-technological revolution.

19 However, Leonid Geller argues that the genre also partly has its roots in particular Russian folk utopias. See Geller, Vseleennaja za predelom dogmy: Sovetskaja naučnaja fantastika (London, Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd., 1985), p. 18. At the same time, however, certain native sources are usually also mentioned, as a way of pointing out how the genre has an undeniable national specificity. For example Darko Suvin describes Soviet science fiction as “blending the rationalist Western European strain of utopianism and satire with the native folk longings for abundance and justice.” See Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics of a Literary Genre (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1979), p. 243.

20 In the West, the term “science fiction” for this particular kind of literature was coined in 1929, when legendary pulp magazine editor Hugo Gernsback finally found a name for the kind of literature he promoted after failed attempts such as “scientifiction.” See Brian W. Aldiss, Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction (London, Victor Gollancz, 1986) p. 27.


Marxism enjoyed the status of a science with the ability of correctly predicting the development of history. There was also the phenomenon of “scientific atheism,” intended to counter religion.

In the 1920s post-revolutionary context the genre provided a suitable vehicle for the representation of seriously intended utopian imaginings. However, after the 1920s it lost official support; instead socialist realism was proclaimed “to represent the tomorrow in the today.” As a consequence of this, output remained low throughout the 1930s and 1940s (the years when the genre’s American counterpart experienced its “Golden Age”). The late 1950s, however, saw the emergence of a “new wave of Utopian science fiction” when the “Wellsian tradition of the 1920s” was resurrected as a part of the officially promoted cult of science.

The second flourishing of Soviet science fiction is usually considered to have started in 1957. The year when the successful launching of Sputnik inaugurated the space age also saw the return of the cosmist utopian imaginings with the publication of Ivan Efremov’s novel *Andromeda: A Space-Age Tale* (*Tumannost’ Andromedy*). In *Andromeda* Efremov presents his vision of an incredibly advanced Marxist utopia, the “Great Circle of Civilizations.”

The following year, 1958, the Strugatskys made their literary debut with the short story “From Beyond” (“Izvne”). In the next years they began to elaborate on their version of a technically advanced Marxist utopia, the Noon Universe, in a cycle of interrelated longer and shorter works. Efremov evidently served as an inspiration, even though his visions are considerably more utopian than the Strugatskys ever were. Efremov’s vision, however, demonstrates a development similar to that of the Strugatskys’ as the 1970s drew near. In the sequel to *Andromeda*, *The Hour of the Bull* (*Čas byka*, 1968), set in the same fictional universe 200 years later, utopia is seriously flawed.

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24 First published in January 1958 in the journal *Technika – molodeži*, later re-worked into a longer story with the same title.
25 Efremov, for example, places his utopia 3000 years into the future instead of the mere 200 years of the Strugatskys’ *Noon 22 Century* (*Polden’, XXII vek*, 1962); he also populates it with heroic characters who sharply contrast with the Strugatskys’ more laid-back individuals.
As early as the mid-1960s, the second flourishing of Soviet science fiction reached its peak. In the years after, the official status of the genre once again diminished and the number of published titles declined markedly. Authoriti es began to become more aware of the genre’s subversive potentials while the absolute faith that had inspired authors to “[project] the desirable into universal time and infinite space” had begun to give way to serious doubts.

The change in the cultural climate from the 1960s to the 1970s has been attributed to a radically diminished belief in the possibility of changing society. Disappointment and doubt turned the Soviet 1970s into a time when people no longer dreamt of the future. Since everything of interest appeared to be happening elsewhere, wishes were instead projected onto other spaces, real or imaginary. Certain escapist tendencies were evident already in the 1960s. What was different in the 1970s was that this longing then manifested itself particularly as a movement away from the rational towards the irrational. The philosopher Alexander Piatigorsky identified the common denominator for the various areas to which energy was relocated in the 1970s as “everything that was not Marxism.” In Andrei Tarkovsky’s Stalker, considered by many to sum up the Soviet 1970s, it appears as though the only thing still remaining of that which recently had been a radiant future was the technological debris that had been left behind.

The Place of Science Fiction Within Late Soviet Culture

In the early 1970s the critic Anatolij Britikov stated that on a map of literary studies, science fiction would be “an unexplored country.” However, during

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26 McGuire, p. 20.
27 Peterson, p. 36.
28 A contributing fact here was that the two major literary figures of the time, Joseph Brodsky and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, both were forced to emigrate to the West.
30 In his memoirs Kabakov discusses how artists and other members of the Soviet 1960s and 1970s non-official culture shared an interest in these kinds of things.
this time science fiction ("a special genre different from all others") occupied a position within Soviet culture that gave the genre a particular relationship to both official and unofficial culture.

Here it appears relevant to address the matter of Soviet culture in the 1970s. It has often been presented as a binary structure, neatly divided into the sphere of the official and that of the unofficial, although in later years this model has been questioned. According to the sociologist Alexei Yurchak, Soviet society was considerably more complicated, especially in its last decades. One of the unique features of this period, Yurchak argues, was how different "elements of Socialist culture" at the same time could belong to the sphere of the censored and the uncensored as "parts of the same indivisible cultural process, existing in an unavoidable symbiosis." Soviet science fiction was one example of this: with its "combination of official and dissident

32 "It was the only adult literature officially exempted from the demands of realism. It dealt with alternative, often utopian models of society, be they technological, social or moral, and for this reason alone it had the potential to compete with the party ideology. Yet at the same time it maintained close ties to the mainstream literature of socialist realism, officially approved as an instrument to popularise [sic!] the achievements of Soviet scientific and technological progress. Therefore NF [naučnaja fantastika] was always located on a problematic border between official and unofficial culture, presenting a controversial and speculative discourse. At the same time it was the only kind of literature that bridged science and the humanities and connected readers from different cultural spheres and social strata, from different generations and educational backgrounds." Menzel, p. 118.

33 According to Yurchak, sociologists Rogov and Uvarova argue that this model is problematic, both because it is in itself highly ideological, and because this fact has not been properly discussed. This understanding of late Soviet culture has been adapted, uncritically, from the discourse of Soviet 1970s dissidents. According to this premise, nothing true could be published through official channels, while anything published through unofficial channels acquired credibility simply by that fact alone. They instead propose that the 1970s culture should be divided into that which was subjected to censorship and that which was not. However, as Yurchak has pointed out, this model still suggests a binary division of society into two diametrically opposed spheres, and as such it is just as simplistic and laden with ideology as that which it is supposed to modify. See Yurchak, p. 6.

34 This was true for cultural products such as literature or cinema as well as for different aspects of everyday life. Rather than simply choosing sides for or against the system, Soviet citizens were engaged in a constantly ongoing process of negotiation whereby they embraced certain aspects of the system while opposing others. Yurchak has also pointed out how the system in fact provided the material basis for those who opposed it, as in the case of the technological intelligentsia. Consequently, the world of late socialism was not divided in two opposing spheres as the binary model suggests but into spheres that constantly overlapped. Ibid., p. 4-10.
potentials” and location somewhere between the serious and the popular, the genre occupied a highly liminal position within culture.

Soviet science fiction could perhaps be likened to a bridge between high and low culture. However, an even more apt image of this would be a “zone”: it constituted a space where different and sometimes opposing cultural spheres – serious and popular, official and unofficial – could meet and be affected by each other.

Since Soviet science fiction simultaneously belonged to the sphere of the censored and the uncensored, it was engaged in a constant dialogue with censorship. The Strugatskys, with their “precarious and somewhat anomalous position as writers neither wholly approved of, nor yet officially blacklisted,” constituted a good example of this.

Science fiction was not quite the same kind of marginal literature that its Western counterpart was. It was popular but still not exactly “mass culture,” since it was mainly linked to a limited group, the technical intelligentsia. This kind of literature was perceived as a possible tool with which to “form the moral character of Soviet youth,” or at least in connection with the cult of science, to foster an interest in the conquest of space in the minds of prospective future cosmonauts. At the same time it was not taken quite

36 According to Stephen Lovell this was a feature of much of Soviet culture which according to him “sought to eliminate the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’, ‘popular’ and ‘elite’: from now on, writing was to be both popular and serious. Intellectuals and other opinion formers declared that culture could – indeed must – be both ‘popular’ (i.e., accessible, authentic, of the people) and ‘serious’ (morally improving, intellectually challenging, and of high literary quality). They did not allow for the dialectic of ‘high’ and ‘low’, ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ that proved so culturally productive elsewhere in the twentieth century.” Stephen Lovell, “Reading the Russian Popular” in Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia, p. 34.
37 Howell, p. viii.
38 According to Stephen Lovell this was a feature of much of Soviet culture which according to him “sought to eliminate the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’, ‘popular’ and ‘elite’: from now on, writing was to be both popular and serious. Intellectuals and other opinion formers declared that culture could – indeed must – be both ‘popular’ (i.e., accessible, authentic, of the people) and ‘serious’ (morally improving, intellectually challenging, and of high literary quality). They did not allow for the dialectic of ‘high’ and ‘low’, ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ that proved so culturally productive elsewhere in the twentieth century.” Stephen Lovell, “Reading the Russian Popular” in Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia, p. 34.
39 In 1975, over 60% of Soviet science fiction writers had a background in science and engineering. Ibid., p. 93.
40 Ibid., p. 101.
seriously, precisely because it was primarily considered to be directed to-
wards a younger audience.

On the other hand, the genre offered readers and writers quite different
and unforeseen possibilities: thanks to its non-realistic content it could ad-
dress politically sensitive topics in a way that was hardly possible in a more
straightforward fashion. It also fulfilled a role which its Western counterpart
did not by filling the void left by the cultural heritage of modernism, some-
thing which was largely unavailable to the reading public before the peres-
stroika.

The Relationship Between Science Fiction and Reality

The choice of basing a study on a particular moment in the history of non-
realistic fiction inevitably raises the question of the relationship between this
type of fiction and reality.

The underlying assumption is of course that there is a valid relation be-
tween them in the first place. Donna Haraway assumes that there is; she dis-
misses outright the boundary between science fiction and reality as nothing
more than “an optical illusion.” 41 Peter Stockwell interprets the aim of sci-
ence fiction as being to “represent the world without reproducing it.” 42

The question of science fiction’s relation to reality is complicated, howev-
er, by the fact that the term apparently can be used both for fictionalized
extrapolations of scientific results and fantastic tales completely uncon-
cerned with questions of plausibility. While the former can be accepted quite
easily as a reflection of the real world, the latter undoubtedly appears as more
distanced from it. Darko Suvin posits an element of understanding as abso-
lutely essential in his definition of the genre as a “literature of cognitive es-
trangement” 43 while Tzvetan Todorov argues that it must be understood as a
subgenre of the fantastic, the “scientific marvelous.” 44

43 Darko Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics of a Literary Genre (New
44 Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, translated by
In an attempt to systematize this diversity, the genre is often divided into two principal tendencies, one more concerned with “science,” the other with pure “fiction.” Various terms have been used for the two: “speculation – narration,”45 a “cerebral, educated tradition” versus a “populist, sensational” one,46 or a “thinking pole” and a “dreaming pole.”47

Science Fiction and the Gothic

An explanation of the contradictory nature of science fiction can perhaps be found in the origins of the genre. Brian Aldiss traces it back to the Gothic novel.48 The Gothic genre first appeared on the literary scene in the late 18th century. Its appearance has been interpreted as a reaction to the Enlightenment (the horrors of the French Revolution shattered the previous epoch’s faith in the powers of human reason). There was, however, another revolution under way that was just as important – the Industrial Revolution. One feature that unites science fiction (intimately associated with discourses on reason and progress) and the Gothic (predominantly preoccupied with “unreason and decay”) is how both appear to be reactions to change. A comparison between developments in European late 18th century and the Soviet 1960s–1970s demonstrates enough similarities for it to appear meaningful to draw certain parallels.

In the Soviet Union of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Thaw and the Scientific-Technological Revolution had proved unable to live up to the high hopes originally invested in them. One way of describing the shift in interests that took place between the 1960s and the 1970s would be as a turning away from an Enlightenment worldview towards a more romantic one.

While the Strugatskys, with their emphasis on thinking, generally are attributed to the more cerebral strain of science fiction, an overview of their work clearly demonstrates how too great an emphasis on thinking does not take into consideration certain aspects of it, such as the elements of the

46 Stockwell, p. 9.
47 Aldiss, p. 25.
48 Aldiss argues quite convincingly that the first science fiction novel was Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818). See Aldiss, p. 18. Aldiss further argues that science fiction also “characteristically [is] cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode.” Ibid., p. 25.
grotesque that begin to emerge around the mid-1960s. Geoffre... 49 Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that the grotesque often appears in connection with shifts in cultural paradigms: “The paradigm crisis is the interval of the grotesque writ large.”50 According to Lejderman and Lipoveckij the romantic grotesque expresses “the tragic impossibility to reconcile the ideal with reality.”51 Later we will see how the imagery the Strugatskys employ in their narratives about “unexpected encounters” directly recalls Lejderman’s and Lipoveckij’s “semantics of the romantic grotesque” – the double, masks, shadows, dolls that come to life.52

In the novels discussed here, however, the grotesque has become the Gothic. Even though this tendency may not be strong enough to place the Strugatskys firmly within the prominent Gothic tradition that certainly exists within Russian literature – Mark S. Simpson has explored its beginnings53 while Muireann Maguire has demonstrated how it survived in Soviet literature, for example “within popular genres such as science fiction”54 – the degree to which it is discernible shows exactly why it deserves to be given proper attention.

Replacements of Time, Space and Body

The Chronotope

In the essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (“Formy vremen i chronotopa v romane,” 1937) Mikhail Bakhtin elaborates on “the

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49 An example is found in the novel Monday Begins on Saturday (Ponedel’nik načinaetsja v subbotu, 1965).
52 Ibid.
inseparability of space and time” in a literary work. He does so by proposing the existence of a special form of literary space-time, the chronotope.

According to Bakhtin, the chronotope defines “[a] literary work’s artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality.” He further argues that the chronotope generally has “an intrinsic generic significance”; it may even be that which “defines genre and generic distinctions.” For Bakhtin, time is the more important category in this unity of time and space. Here a question presents itself: what could be said about the chronotope in a genre where the temporal element evidently is ambiguous and where there is no specific, genre-defining setting?

Science fiction is routinely assumed to be about the future. At the same time, however, there also appears to be a general agreement that it is “not about predicting the future but examining the present” (i.e., not futurology) and “in dialogue with the present.” The question of space is similarly complex. It is repeatedly stated to be of fundamental importance to the genre (it has even been suggested to be its “primary hero”), which at the same time is characterized by its lack of a typical, generic setting (this is one of the reasons why it has proved difficult to find an all-encompassing definition). To complicate the matter even further: what happens to the genre’s chronotope if the defining temporal element (the future) is removed altogether (and along with it the notion of scientific progress)? This question is particularly pertinent to the discussion that will follow in this study.

56 Ibid., p. 243.
57 Ibid., p. 84-85. (Italics in the original).
58 Ibid., p. 85.
59 The *Oxford English Dictionary* for example defines science fiction as “imaginative fiction […] frequently set in the future.”
Heterotopia

The vaguely defined chronotope of science fiction is perhaps the reason why one of the few things theorists (regardless of which position they take concerning the genre’s relationship to reality) have been able to agree upon is that it is characterized by difference.63

Allegedly science fiction is “predicated on some substantial difference or differences between the world described and the world in which readers actually live”64 (as its “various plots […] once divested of their alien, otherworldly, or futuristic appurtenances, tend to coincide with the plots of realistic fiction”).65 It appears as though the only thing that can be stated about its chronotope is that it cannot be the “same.” In his study of the iconography of the genre, Gary K. Wolfe proposes that this essential difference is manifested primarily in two areas: the landscape (“images of environment”) and the body (“images of humanity”).66

In his essay “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias” (“Des espaces autres. Hétérotopies,” 1984) Michel Foucault discussed a concept concerned with difference, primarily related to certain particular categories of space, but also to the body. He borrowed his term for it from medicine: heterotopia.67

Images of Environment

As a spatial category, heterotopia is connected to utopia. For example both are linked to other spaces in a particular way. However, while utopias are “sites with no real place,” heterotopias are

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63 Peter Stockwell’s term for the first manifestations of this genre-marking element is “points of differentiation.” See Stockwell p. 154.
66 Gary K. Wolfe gives the spaceship, the city and the wasteland as examples of “images of environment,” and the robot and the monster as examples of “images of humanity.” See Wolfe, The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction (Kent, Kent State University Press, 1979).
67 As a medical term heterotopia stands for the displacement of an organ from its normal position.
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 sim-
ultaneously represented, contested and inverted.68

Unlike utopia, “the good place,” and dystopia “the bad place,” a Foucauldian
heterotopia is simply the “other place.” It can be an illusory space – the room
you see in the mirror, or the place where a telephone conversation takes
place. In its more concrete forms it can be a place apart from ordinary life,
somewhere people go as part of a process of change, like a boarding school or
a hotel. Its disparate incarnations are united by how they are explicitly “not
here.”

The concept of heterotopia undoubtedly appears particularly relevant to a
discussion of Soviet society in the 1970s, where the pervasive longing for an
“elsewhere” found an expression in the creation of alternative “worlds” –
half-mental and half-physical spaces.69 The relative indeterminacy of the
concept also makes it appear suitable in a definition of the settings that begin
to replace utopia in the Strugatskys’ fiction after a while. Howell’s descrip-
tion of the development of their fictional worlds from 1976 is that they
“move away from abstract and intergalactic settings in order to concentrate
on the here and now.”70 It could, however, be argued that something begins
to happen already during the mid-1960s.

One way to describe this is to say that the chronotope in the Strugatskys’
works changes: instead of satellites and space stations we find a new type of
landscapes: forests, mountains, and foreign countries. These new landscapes
(which undoubtedly are somewhat romantic) lack the temporal aspect im-

dicent in the earlier ones, which were squarely placed in the future. This also
means that they are not laden with the kind of intrinsic value judgments
found in the previous landscapes. Instead the spatial aspect appears invested
with special importance.71

68 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias”
www.foucault.info/doc/documents/heterotopia/foucault_heterotopia_en.html (accessed July 7,
2013).
69 For a discussion of this kind of “deterritorialized milieus”, see Yurchak p. 126-157.
70 Howell, p. 22.
71 This recalls Frederic Jameson’s observation on how perceptions of reality have developed in
the direction of being “dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time.”
See Jameson, Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London, Verso, 1991),
p. 16.
However, in the early 1970s – as *Kid* makes perfectly evident – the Strugatskys had not wholly abandoned the “intergalactic settings,” and what they presented (in *Puzzle* and *Picnic*) cannot be described as a “here and now”, but rather as Foucauldian heterotopias with features (more or less accurate representations) of the West.

Positing the West as the “other place,” the Strugatskys definitely placed themselves within a tradition; for according to Stephen Hutchings “Russia habitually defines its identity against that of a homogenized West.”72 From the Soviet point of view the West was not something against which all other alternatives were measured but an unknown surface onto which fears and fantasies could be projected, or as Bobrinskaja formulates it, a “constructed ideal outside position.”73 Yurchak describes the collective Soviet fantasy, which he gives the name the “Imaginary West,” as an unknown land where dreams could come true and life was always interesting. However, the West was never viewed in an unambiguously positive light. Despite the general longing for an “elsewhere” in the Soviet Union of the 1970s, leaving the country permanently appeared in many ways to be a symbolic death, which according to Carol Avins was just as it had been in the 1920s’ context of enforced emigration.74

Another feature of the setting in the three novels that will be given special attention in the analysis is a certain divided structure. In connection with the Strugatskys it has been suggested that narrative space in fantastic literature generally is divided into two parts: the space of life and the space of death.75 There is a link between heterotopia and death (evident in Foucault’s inclusion of the cemetery among his examples). In some ways, the “other” place must be the land of the dead, since death is the absolute “other” of life.

In all three novels a division of space is indeed clearly visible; however, the two parts can just as well be interpreted as the space of the rational and the


73 Bobrinskaja, p. 70.


space of the irrational. While these two halves are complementary, it is evident that they are not of equal importance. This recalls how the “rational” and “irrational” in the Russian philosophical tradition are valued differently than they are in the West. For example, the rational is not necessarily the same as the good, because it lacks a moral dimension attributed to the irrational.76

In the novels the space of the rational serves mostly as a backdrop against which the space of the irrational can stand out. It may be the land of death, but it is also the zone of possibility. The difference between the two spaces is also reflected in how they are distributed in the text, which means that the divided structure sometimes is less discernible to the reader. However, the pattern basically remains the same.

One thing both spaces have in common is that they are thoroughly fictional constructions. While this perhaps is rather evident in the case of the space of the irrational, it seems relevant to point out that the space of the rational does not in any way constitute a mimetic reproduction of the world which the Strugatskys met in their everyday life. Howell argues that the Strugatskys’ “use of the setting […] is the single most important device which enables them to mediate between the realistic and fantastic layers of narration.”77 It could be argued, however, that what we see in the three novels discussed here is not a juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic, since both contrasting spaces are simply variations on the theme of a place that is “not here.”

It is, however, of interest to consider that the space of the irrational here has been invested with the greater importance. Even though a commitment to reason never was a truly indispensable factor of the science fiction genre, one could wonder what this apparent emphasis on the opposite of reason discloses about the times in which the novels were conceived.

76 For a discussion of this see Elena Namli, Kamp med förnuftet: rysk kritik av västerländsk rationalism (Skellefteå, Artos & Norma, 2009).
77 Howell, p. 22.
Images of Humanity

Yet it is not only in the settings that signs of a shift in the Strugatsky’s early 1970s fiction are to be found. Something also happens to humans and extraterrestrials. Elana Gomel makes the following observation about how *Picnic* apparently “inverts the structure of *Hard to Be a God*” when it comes to the relationship between these two categories: “If the crucial issue in *God* is the biological and historical parallelism between the aliens and the Earthmen, the plot in *Picnic* pivots on their absolute difference.”

A complete reversal of the founding assumption concerning the “images of humanity” appears to have taken place in only a few years, between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s. As this change coincides with the one in “Zeitgeist” it is hard not to see the two as somehow connected. According to Gomel, the Strugatskys emphasized that the unknown could always be known, and they strove to completely minimize the initial tension between the two so that in the end “all otherness is ultimately reduced to the familiar and the known.” This, however, is apparently only true for their earlier works where the world still is a fundamentally comprehensible (as well as predictable) utopia ruled by universal laws. When that no longer appears to be the case, the other suddenly becomes impossible to imagine. In the Strugatskys’ fiction, utopia and heterotopia imply very different versions of the other.

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79 Ibid.

80 The body appears to occupy diametrically opposed positions in relation to utopia and heterotopia. According to Foucault, utopia means the absence of the body, as it is where one has an ideal body “without a body.” He argues that the first utopia was the idea of “the incorporeal body.” All utopias are ultimately attempts to escape the body. In heterotopia, however, the presence of the body must be considered as central, as this is where bodies are kept out of circulation, or undergo processes of change. Since Foucault includes sites like the cemetery, the prison, and the hospital among his examples, it is evident that the body here cannot be the idealized one of utopia. The utopian body can also never be one’s own body: by necessity one’s own body is always “here” and can never be “there”; it must always be “the opposite of utopia” (le contraire d’une utopie). See Michel Foucault, “Le corps utopique” in Die Heterotopien, Der utopische Körper/Les hétérotopies. *Le corps utopique* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 55-56.
This underlying assumption about the same and the other is also reflected in the nature of the contact between them. In *Hard to Be a God* it is intentional and guided by a purpose,\(^{81}\) while in *Picnic* (as in all three novels) it only comes about because the two accidentally happen to cross paths, and there the only result is a lasting trauma.

It is tempting to interpret the difference as yet another indication of a shift in cultural paradigm. If the 1960s organized expeditions to other planets were an expression of a belief in a particular rational logos, the awkward encounters between inhabitants of different worlds in the science fiction of the early 1970s arose as a result of its disappearance.\(^{82}\)

That the purposeful action of the kind that was characteristic of utopia apparently is no longer possible in heterotopia also means that the novels are not invasion narratives (not even *Picnic*, where H. G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds* figures as an intertextual reference). If anything, they could be characterized as just the opposite, since the extraterrestrials are elusive rather than aggressive. Conflicts follow as a result of these accidental meetings; however, without exception these are always caused by the humans – the unavoidable consequence of their limited capacity to grasp the unknown.

A comparison between *Picnic* and *Swans*, two novels constructed around a similar premise – a fateful encounter between humans and a highly developed “other” of possible extraterrestrial origin, presented in a deeply ambiguous way as both a hope and a threat – appear to further confirm Gomel’s observation of how difference is now stressed instead of similarity.

Just as in *Hard to Be a God*, this “other” is fully present in the narrative; in *Swans*, however, the other (the “slimies [*mokrecy*]”) is represented as physically different. In *Picnic* the Strugatskys have taken the matter of difference one step further and made a radical departure from their earlier strategy. Here the other is neither represented as the same nor as different, it is simply

\(^{81}\) It is initiated by members of an organization with the aim of influencing the development of other worlds (“progressors [*progressory*]”). Later a race of elusive extraterrestrials only known as the “Wanderers [*stranniki*]” makes similar attempts directed towards our world. While the ultimate purpose of the “progressors” is explicit, that of the “Wanderers” remains unknown. It is implicit, however, that there is one.

\(^{82}\) It must be pointed out here that the extraterrestrials of the trilogy – who apparently strive to avoid all contact with humans – were not intended to be understood as Wanderers. Boris Strugatsky has explicitly stated this. See Strugatsky, “*Kommentarii k projdennomu.*” [www.rusf.ru/abs/books/bns-06.html](http://www.rusf.ru/abs/books/bns-06.html) (accessed October 1, 2013).
not represented at all. However, this is by no means only characteristic of Picnic; on the contrary a reluctance to offer any explicit image of the other is a prominent feature of all three novels. A complete lack of representation of that which constitutes “difference” has come to constitute a fundamental compositional principle.

It has been argued that the “deep structure” of science fiction demands a “confrontation with the unknown,” for example “between the human and the nonhuman,” since “nonhuman life” is “one of the key images of the unknown in science fiction.” Wolfe, however, advises writers “interested more in concepts than in images” to avoid explicit “monster imagery” in order to allow the reader “to focus on the issue of ‘alienness’ rather than the image of deformity.”

This, however, does not mean that they should forego representation altogether. Here the choice to do so does not appear typical of science fiction but rather recalls Rosemary Jackson’s observation of how the fantastic (“constructed on the affirmation of emptiness,” according to her) generally demonstrates a pronounced tendency towards “non-signification.” The genre abounds with “nameless things” and “thingless names.” Jackson explains this with the genre’s relationship to the “real,” and how it “introduces areas which can be conceptualized only in negative terms.”

**The Posthuman**

Perhaps the only body that ever really can be included in utopia is that of the one who is something one is not. Shunned by the town’s adult population, the “slimies” in Swans find allies in the children. It is suggested that they are not ordinary children and that they may be a harbinger of things to come. They certainly are precursors of the child characters in the Strugatskys’ later work, who “are part of another, alien reality.” Howell interprets these

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83 According to Malmgren this confrontation “contributes in large part to that ‘sense of wonder’ the genre inspires.” See Malmgren, Worlds Apart, p. 173.

84 Wolfe, p. 185.

85 Ibid., p. 203.


87 Jackson gives as examples “the im-possible, the un-real, the nameless, the formless, shape-less, un-known, in-visible.” Ibid., p. 26.
characters as representing a state “more perfect, more logical, and more intelligent” than humanity’s recent one, but also definitely not “a human future.”

However, in Swans the children are set apart from the rest of humanity only by their highly developed intellectual faculties and concomitant unnatural precocity. They are not physically different, which they are in the three novels discussed later. Here young people have evidently become the “other” in the eyes of the older generation – something fundamentally incomprehensible and ultimately nonhuman rather than the future of humanity. While the difference of the young is undoubtedly intimately connected to the sub-themes of vision, perception and communication that run through the novels, it is nevertheless presented as a sign rather than as an illusion.

**The Dislocated Protagonist**

Yet it is not only to the “other” that something apparently happens. Howell perceives a “shift in emphasis from the human to the alien” in the Strugatskys’ later fiction. Allegedly “the tangibility of the alien protagonist […] grows in direct proportion to the weakening position of the humanist hero.”

Like the setting and the extraterrestrial, the male subject also changes between the 1960s and the 1970s: the early “men of action” are replaced by characters more resembling Joanna Russ’ “Dislocated Protagonist.” According to Kaja Silverman there is a direct connection between masculinity and “reality.” “Reality” – or, as Silverman prefers to call it, “the dominant fiction” – is actually a belief system to which “the affirmation of classic

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88 Howell, p. 141.
89 Ibid., p. 116.
90 Peterson, p. 36.
91 Russ, however, defines this as “the protagonist who finds himself in a strange place or a strange world […] with no knowledge of how he got there,” which is not quite the case in the Strugatskys’ stories. Russ’ protagonist “also stays there,” while theirs do not. Nevertheless the term sums up the impression that the Strugatskys’ new type of protagonist makes on the reader. See Joanna Russ, “Speculations: The Subjunctivity of Science Fiction” in *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 20.
92 The “dominant fiction” is defined as “the privileged mode of representation by which the image of the social consensus is offered to the members of a social formation and within which they are asked to identify themselves.” Rancière quoted by Kaja Silverman. See Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, Routledge, 1992), p. 30.
masculinity” is central. Consequently any significant change in male identification would “render null and void virtually everything else that commands general belief.”

The three novels present examples of traditional masculine hero figures – mountain climbers, cosmonauts, or rugged pathfinders in the wilderness. Yet the overall impression is that they represent an ideal that now belongs to the past. In opposition to the earlier, more relaxed scientist-heroes, the new “Dislocated Protagonists” undoubtedly appear far less certain about the worlds in which they find themselves.

Further Developments: The Screen Adaptations

Towards the end of the 1970s the first and last novels of the intended trilogy, Puzzle and Picnic were adapted for the screen: Puzzle was released as Dead Mountaineer’s Hotel (dir. Grigori Kromanov, 1979) and Picnic as Stalker (dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, 1980).

It is necessary to include these films in the discussion in order to reach a conclusion about what happened in Soviet society during the decade following the 1960s. The film adaptations are examples of how the Strugatskys’ found other creative outlets during a period when they repeatedly experienced difficulties in getting their fiction published; more important here, however, is the way in which the films demonstrate how the 1970s new cultural paradigm had become more established by the end of the decade. Evidence of this can be found, for example, in certain features of the films that are not present in their source texts, such as a more or less overtly religious subtext. Since religion never was of interest to either of the Strugatskys, this is a feature of the films that can be attributed directly to the directors.

On the whole, both films demonstrate influences from other sources, brought in by either the Strugatskys or the directors. This is most evident in Stalker, where the whole process of making the film has often been described

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93 Ibid., p. 16.
94 Ibid., p. 3.
95 In the following text the film will simply be referred to as Hotel.
96 Kid has also actually been adapted several times, for example as an episode of the television series This Fantastic World [Etot fantastičeskij mir], (Pavljučenko, 1980), and as a film made for Czech television with the title Nesmluvená setkání (Pavlásková, 1994). However, these adaptations fall outside of the scope of this study.
as an endless tug-of-war between director and scriptwriter(s), but also in *Hotel*, which visually is heavily influenced by the film noir tradition.

To study the film adaptations along with the novels is to connect the beginning with the end: *Puzzle* was completed in 1969 (even though it was not published until 1970), the films were completed in 1979 (although *Stalker* was not officially released until 1980). The films also demonstrate what happened to the Strugatskys’ writing when it was subjected to outside influences. Film is, as Thomas Leitch points out, “a collaborative medium.”

The films are, to say the least, two distinctly different works with few things in common besides being adaptations of related works by the same authors, and the time and location of their production. In both cases the final results quite distinctly bear the mark of the directors.

The Strugatskys took part in the adaptation process in the capacity of screenwriters. For them, writing a screenplay was obviously not the same thing as writing a novel. While their fiction was entirely a collaborative effort involving both brothers, one brother appears always to have been more involved than the other in the making of a particular film. For example Boris was mainly responsible for the script of *Hotel* while Arkady was more involved with that of *Stalker* (particularly in the numerous exchanges with Tarkovsky).

The texts they produced were what in Russian is known as an *avtorskij scenarij* [literary script]: an intermediary text that was standard in Soviet cinema (and which is distinct from the *režisserskij scenarij*, the director’s script or shooting script). Stephen Hutchings and Anat Vernitski describe

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98 Here we see an example of how “the literariness of Soviet film […] facilitated the blurring of the boundaries between serious and frivolous cultural artifacts.” See Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchhy, “Imperially, my dear Watson: Sherlock Holmes and the decline of the Soviet empire” in *Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature, 1900-2001: Screening the Word*, ed. Stephen Hutchings & Anat Vernitski (London, Routledge, 2005), p. 168. Another thing both films had in common was a relationship to Soviet commercial filmmaking (one expression of a tentatively developing consumer society that would begin to flourish a few decades later). In the case of *Hotel* this connection is quite obvious. Tarkovsky, on the other hand, initially intended to make *Stalker* as a fairly simple action film, the financial success of which would guarantee him funding for the films he really wanted to make. (Conversation with Jurij Arabov, April 2010.)
the different stages in the process of adapting a literary original for the screen in the following way:

Adaptations in which the original author was involved (of which there are many in Soviet cinema) worked with three texts: 1) the literary original; 2) an intermediate text (the literary scenario) written by the author in literary style, but with the cinematic version in mind; and 3) the director’s translation of the latter into “film language.”

Adaptations always involve making certain changes since the “technical constraints of different media will inevitably highlight different aspects of [a] story.” The two works can be said to represent almost opposite relationships to their respective source texts: while the adaptation of Puzzle does not stray far from the source text, that of Picnic has been subjected to an almost complete transformation.

**Presentation of the Study**

The choice of the title for the intended volume in which the three novels were to be published together, *Unexpected Encounters*, can serve as a starting point for the formulation of the questions that will be addressed later.

This was by no means the first time the Strugatskys wrote about contacts between humans and aliens; on the contrary, that was a regularly recurring theme. Humanity’s first encounter with extraterrestrials – more often referred to as “guests from outer space” – generally was a popular motif in the science fiction of the Thaw. Here, however, focus seems to be on the meeting rather than on the extraterrestrials.

The title suggests that the guests were not expected, which implies a conflict or a trauma. As the following analysis will demonstrate, a recurring theme in the contact narratives of all three novels is the impossibility of dealing with the unexpected and the unknown. The three novels cover the

101 Another way to describe the two films is as good examples of two of the strategies of adaptation Hutcheon lists: *Hotel* of an “acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work” and *Stalker* of an “extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work.” See Hutcheon, p. 8.
mediate break between the 1960s and the 1970s, a time when an earlier certainty suddenly no longer existed. The aim of the study is to see what the novels and the film adaptations have to say about the Soviet 1970s – a time of political but not cultural stagnation. Here focus will be on the following categories: the construction of the artistic space of the texts, the representation of the hero, and the child character that embodies the unknown (alien/future). Special attention will also be paid to the question of the affinities of the texts with the Gothic genre. The analysis is undertaken chronologically, and is divided into two chapters, the first one dealing with the three novels, the second one with the two films.

The first chapter of analysis begins with a discussion of *Puzzle* as a genre hybrid and an example of literary Gothic. The discussion of the novel’s artistic space focuses on how heterotopia is envisioned here as a fairly typical Soviet fantasy version of the West. The analysis of the hero explores the influence of a recently defunct ideal about the character and suggests that the child character can be seen both as one of the features that connects the text to the Gothic literary tradition and as a trope for an incomprehensible future.

The discussion of the Strugatskys’ relationship to the Gothic literary tradition continues in the analysis of *Kid*. However, other intertextual connections are also explored: the novel is suggested as a colonial narrative with links to Kipling. Here attention is paid to the subthemes of visual and aural perception and to the connection the text makes between communication and colonization. In the analysis of the hero, the theme of conflict between generations is explored. Special attention is also given to the eponymous “kid” as a further elaboration on the theme of the future as an embodiment of the posthuman condition in a young person.

In the analysis of *Picnic*, the question of narrative space is given more attention, because here the two-fold structure discernible in all three novels has a considerably greater direct importance for the narrative. The concept of heterotopia is even more complicated, since the text presents two versions of the “other” place, which have an intricate interrelationship. Once again, further consideration is also given to the Gothic features of the text, which
are clearly discernible in the representation of space, as well as in the construction of its hero.

The second and final chapter of analysis is concerned with the films, *Hotel* and *Stalker*. Here both visual (the films) and textual material (screenplays, correspondence, and commentaries) have been used. Some of the textual material, such as the correspondence between the Strugatskys and the studio/director prior to the making of *Hotel*, has not been published earlier. The influence of the directors on the final productions will be given special attention. The analysis partly aims to find a common denominator for the two films and locate this within the construction of heterotopia as a separate space.

The conclusion brings together the analyses of the novels and the films in order to elucidate both the Strugatskys’ work at this time and the paradigm shift that took place in Soviet culture during the period from the end of the 1960s and on through the 1970s.
Over the Threshold: The Three Narratives of Unexpected Encounters

**Inspector Glebsky’s Puzzle: A Requiem for the Detective Genre?**

The title (*Otel’ U pogibšego al’pinista*) came at the request of the editor of the magazine *Junost’*, where the novel was first published in serial installments.¹ The Strugatskys originally wanted to call it *A Murder Case: Yet Another Requiem for the Detective Genre* [*Delo ob ubijstve: ešče odna otchodnaja detektivnomu žanru*].² Since this title proclaims that the story is a “requiem,” the obvious questions which arise are what the Strugatskys meant by this and why they wanted to write a requiem.

The simplest explanation is to understand it as an intertextual reference to Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s novella *The Pledge*, allegedly a “requiem for the detective novel” (*Das Versprechen: Requiem auf den Kriminalroman*, 1958), one of the Strugatskys’ sources of inspiration for the novel. It can also be seen as an expression of the Strugatskys’ seemingly ambiguous attitude towards the detective genre. The text itself could certainly be said to support this explanation. Boris Strugatsky explains its origin as necessitated by practical circumstances. The Strugatskys had come to the conclusion that they would not get any of their serious work published and reacted by writing something they explicitly did not consider serious.

These explanations all view the novel as a reaction to an outside influence. It could be seen as a reaction – intentional or not – to tendencies developing in society at the time. “Reluctance to comment on contemporary affairs is in

¹ The novel was published in no. 9-12, 1970.
itself […] an ideologically loaded decision,” as Lee Horsley points out in her discussion of the detective genre.³

The silence with which it ends then becomes a sign of sadness or melancholia over something now irrevocably lost. Loss undoubtedly recalls death; it is of interest to notice how the title the Strugatskys originally wanted, and the one the editor insisted on, both stress the theme of death. In the novel, however, death occupies a contradictory position, connected not only to loss but also to unlimited possibility. Yet the latter is never fully realized, and loss is manifested as the ultimate failure to reach out to the new and the unknown.

Liminality

It seems appropriate to begin the analysis of the narrative with a discussion of one of its most prominent characteristics. In order to do this, I would like to first briefly turn to a text derived from the novel. The text in question is a parody in the form of a short story titled “The Tipsy Detective Hotel [Otel’ U podvypivšego kriminalista].”

Дверь открылась, и на пороге появилось странное существо неопределенного пола.
– Салют, Хлебски, – начало хамить оно. – Все пьешь, полицейская крыса?
«Ну, уж теперь ты от меня не уйдешь!» – подумал я и сорвал с существа черные очки. Это оказалась девушка.
– Ага, ты все-таки женского рода! – злорадно воскликнул я.
Но разоблаченная внезапно рванула свою «молнию», человечья оболочка упала, как некий скафандр, и передо мной оказался обычный сенбернар, который устало зевнул и улегся на пол.⁴

What we see here is not so much the deception and disguise of the detective story as Jean Baudrillard’s “ceaseless transformation of one sex into another […] of the human into the inhuman, and on through the total cycle of appearances.”⁵

The novel itself begins with a transgression of a similar kind. Snevar orders someone called “Kajsa” to fetch Glebski’s suitcase, whereupon a St. Bernard appears on the steps (Puzzle, 266). Glebski assumes that the dog is supposed to carry his luggage (even though he appears somewhat surprised). “Kajsa,” however, turns out to be the name of the hotel maid, not the dog. Here an uncertainty is created concerning both the categories human/animal and male/female. (The word used for the dog, kobel’ and the emphasis on its size and perceived strength code the animal as male. The name, however, is a woman’s name, and the other word used for the dog, sobaka, is also of feminine gender.)

In his discussion of bodily liminality, Edmund Leach states that “[t]he individual is either a man or a beast; [...] either alive or dead” and “to move from one such clear cut state to its opposite entails passing through an ambiguous ‘threshold,’ a state of uncertainty.” Liminality is one of the “three characteristically Gothic themes” isolated by Maguire. It refers to the genre’s “fascination with transgressing boundaries which are traditionally taboo” and is expressed as a “blurring [of] the distinctions between humans and animals; humans and machines; living and dead; or even between genders.”

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6 All page references to the novel are taken from Sobranie sočinenij, t. 5, Ulitka na sklone; Vtoroe našestvie marsej; Otel’ U pogibšego al’pinista (Moscow, Tekst, 1992). The abbreviation of the English title is, however, retained.

7 This initial confusion about the identity of “Kajsa” later affects both characters permanently as it establishes them in ambiguous positions between human and animal in which they will remain. The hotel maid is represented as somewhat less than human (through references to her alleged carnality and stupidity), while the dog is made to appear as more than a mere animal. Repeated references are made to its great intelligence; it is said to understand everything people say in three European languages and shows up in places where things are happening during the story. In the epilogue, Glebski recalls Snevar’s statement that the dog in its last years learned to read.

8 “The text performs androgyny, or invites the reader to perform it,” as Brian Attebery says about le Guin’s The Left Hand of Darkness in Decoding Gender in Science Fiction (New York, Routledge, 2002), p. 134.


10 The other two are “regression and revelation.” See Maguire, p. 11.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.
Throughout the text the border between living and dead is transgressed in several ways: by the continued presence at the hotel of a dead mountain climber, by the characters discussing a motorcycle as though it was a living creature, by the notion of robots (where science fiction re-imagines the Gothic motive of the living doll). The latter transgresses not only the categories dead/alive but also human/nonhuman. Subtle signs are planted in the text, suggesting that there may be something artificial about Mrs. Mozes and Olaf: Snevar tells Glebski that Mr. Mozes travels with a life-size doll of his wife (Puzzle, 366), and Olaf is said to play billiards “like a machine” (Puzzle, 299). Their transgressive nature is made even more paradoxical by how they outwardly appear as the ideal man and woman in many respects. She is described as “the kind of woman one only sees in magazines and movies” (Puzzle, 278), while he is called a “god” and “descendant of kings” (Puzzle, 325). The constant transgressions also recall Jackson’s definition of the fantastic as a “zone of hesitation” where “[g]ender differences of male and female are subverted and generic distinctions between animal, vegetable and mineral are blurred.”

Since the limen “stands at the boundary between This World and The Other” and places of this kind “are therefore appropriate […] for a meeting between the natural and the supernatural,” the concept appears particularly applicable in a discussion of this novel. While the limen or “the place betwixt-and-between” traditionally takes the form of a wilderness where a prophet goes to receive messages from God, Puzzle alerts the reader to the possibility that it also can be a ski resort in a remote valley where a police officer goes for two weeks of vacation. The hotel becomes the obvious choice of a site where a common man like Glebski can have his “unexpected encounter” with the unknown. To be positioned “betwixt-and-between” is by no means limited to the characters or narrative space however, rather it is highly characteristic of the narrative itself.

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13 Jackson, p. 49.
14 Bethea, p. 37.
15 Edmund Leach, “Introduction” in Leach and Aycock, p. 5.
Between Genres

The Strugatskys undoubtedly appear to have harbored somewhat ambiguous feelings towards the detective genre. Although they (especially Arkady) greatly enjoyed reading detective fiction, they nevertheless found the genre marred by what they perceived to be two “fundamental flaws”: the “dreariness of the motive” and the cliché-ridden explanation that inevitably disappoints the reader and does away with all credibility.16

They wanted to make their own contribution to the genre in order to “correct” these flaws. Their ambition was to write a complicated, many-layered work without what they considered to be the usual “trivial” ending. Dürrenmatt’s novella17 gave them the idea to change the conditions of the “death-detection-explanation model of classic detective fiction.”18 They would do this by adding elements of science fiction.

Although they meant to create something new – a genre hybrid – what the Strugatskys actually achieved was the re-connection of two related genres with each other and with their common origin.19 The text includes a number of elements that can be understood as markers of the Gothic:20 the alpine setting, the haunted house, the sense of impending doom; buried secrets; gender ambiguity; images of caverns underground and skeletons; even, it could be argued, the employment of specific words.21 This, rather than science fiction, is what adds a fantastic component to the detective plot.22

16 «Нам был совершенно ясен фундаментальный, можно сказать – первородный, имманентный порок любого, даже самого наизабойнейшего детектива... Вернее, два таких порока: убогость криминального мотива, во-первых, и неизбежность скучной, разочаровывающей унылой, убивающей всякую достоверность изложения, суконной объяснительной части». Strugatsky, "Kommentarii k projdennomu” (accessed September 24, 2013).
17 Ibid.
18 Horsley, p. 287.
19 Aldiss, p. 28. Here it is perhaps also of interest to note the paradoxical in how two genres with a considerable investment in the rational, detective fiction and science fiction, apparently both spring from one which has just as much of an investment in the irrational.
20 However, even more important here than the Gothic genre is what some critics refer to as the Gothic mode: a particular ambience, which can seem independent of any particular plot, setting or motives. The Gothic mode appears to be the one constant that remains as the story subsequently metamorphoses from genre to genre towards its open end.
21 Particularly the words razbojnik and podzemel’e. The word razbojnik is used in the text in an endearing and jocular manner. However, even bearing that in mind, it does fit in well with the other, more unambiguously gothic elements. Orest Somov’s satiric poem “Plan romana à la Radklij” begins with the line “Razbojniki i podzemel’ja.” See Alessandra Tosi, “Gnedich’s Don
Tzvetan Todorov claims that the affinities between the supernatural and detective narratives are so great that it is no accident “that Poe originated the detective story.” However, Stefano Tani suggests that “Poe’s detective story” is to be seen rather as “an intellectual reaction to Gothicism,” and according to Horsley “traditional detective fiction ultimately acts as a repudiation of the gothic.” All this points to the presence of an unresolved inherent contradiction concerning the development of the genre.

The Strugatskys were not quite satisfied with the outcome of their literary experiment. Boris Strugatsky claims that it “failed because it could not, ever, succeed”; the “rules of the genre simply could not be broken” in the way which they had tried. The assessment largely appears justified; the reason why the experiment did not turn out as they might have hoped is not so easy to find however. The elements they attempted to link together ought to have been quite compatible.

In The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, Todorov discusses the relationship between the detective story and the fantastic. According to him, the affinity between these two kinds of narrative is limited to “a certain type of detective story (the ‘sealed room’) and a certain type of uncanny narrative (the ‘supernatural explained’).” The plot the Strugatskys constructed follows this pattern to a fault. Nevertheless, the end result appears to defy the assessment regarding genre compatibility.


2 Tzvetan Todorov considers science fiction to be a subgenre of the fantastic. He identifies four types of the marvelous: the scientific, the hyperbolic, the exotic and the instrumental. In the scientific marvelous, “the supernatural is explained in a rational manner,” however, “according to laws which contemporary science does not acknowledge” (Todorov, p. 149).

23 Ibid, p. 49.


26 «Дело, видимо, было в том, что нельзя нарушать вековые каноны таким образом, как это позволили себе АБС. Эксперимент не удался, потому что он и не мог удасться. Никогда. Ни при каких стараниях-ухищрениях.» Strugatsky, “Комментарии к проектному” (accessed September 24, 2013).

27 Todorov, p. 49-50.

28 The “murder” of Olaf takes place in a classic “sealed room,” and the particular subgenre of the Gothic is easily identified as Todorov’s “supernatural explained” when the haunting of the
The answer is perhaps to be found in a comparison between Todorov’s account of “what brings the detective story close to the fantastic tale,” and the relationship of the resolution to the plot. The Strugatskys’ aim was directed above all towards the point where the two genres are the least easy to reconcile, according to Todorov. Both involve “two solutions, one probable and supernatural, the other improbable and rational.” The problem is that in a text more concerned with “the reactions [the] mystery provokes,” the “supernatural explanation” ought to be the favored one, but this goes against the rules of the detective story, which “leaves no doubt as to the absence of the supernatural.”

Not only do the Strugatskys continue to present a text “linked to the uncanny,” even after the shift to a detective plot. They also disregard the demands of the genre when it comes to providing any kind of certainty. While the detective genre demands that the “entirely improbable solution disclosed only at the end” must turn out to be “the only right one,” the Strugatskys consciously strove to create doubt that would remain even when the story had ended. It does not end with a solution to the murder, but rather with the unresolved conflict between Glebski’s “probable and rational” solution and Snevar’s and Simone’s “improbable and supernatural” one.

In a detective story this must be seen as highly problematic, if the solution is what “gives sense to the genre and justifies its existence.” Here is where the influence from Dürrenmatt’s novella – another experiment with the detective genre – manifests itself. Like the Strugatskys’ novel, his story ends without ever coming to a resolution. Order is not restored even if the murder mystery eventually is solved.

However, from the outset Dürrenmatt openly addresses the detective genre in a manner that makes it clear to the reader not to expect adherence to the rules of the ordinary murder mystery, whereas the Strugatskys largely pretend to operate within the rules of the detective genre until the end where they disclose their own real intentions instead of the those of the murderer.

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29 Todorov, p. 49.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Tani, p. 41.
Although The Pledge can also be described as realistic fiction, the Strugatskys’ literary experiment is more accurately characterized as an attempt to write a story about the supernatural in the manner of a traditional murder mystery.33

Although Boris Strugatsky lists Dürrenmatt and a number of Western mystery writers as inspiration for the novel, someone he does not mention, but who seems highly relevant, is Agatha Christie.34 The detective plot follows a pattern similar to that in many of her novels,35 and there is also a direct reference to her hero Hercule Poirot (Puzzle, 304).

The choice of model causes an uneasy balance between the rational and the irrational in the text. This type of murder mystery – “structured like a puzzle and solved like one” – could be defined as the ultimate rational narrative. It takes place in a “laboratory universe”36 – a microcosm where everything happens for a reason, someone is always responsible when the initial equilibrium is disturbed, and someone is always capable of restoring order.

Puzzle, however, “frustrates the expectations of the reader” as the text “substitutes for the detective as central and ordering character the decentering and chaotic admission of mystery, of nonsolution.”37 The “laboratory universe” as presented by the Strugatskys is not fundamentally comprehensible and ruled by logic. If anything, the murder brings it closer to a state of relative normality, as it means the end of the alleged manifestations of the supernatural. True identities are not disclosed as a rule, but further obscured. The detective possesses no superior knowledge that could enable him to solve the mystery. On the contrary, of all the characters involved in investigating the murder, he appears to be the one least capable of understanding what is going on. The investigation he embarks on following the murder does not come to a conclusion; it is neither finished nor even abandoned but

33 The basic pattern of the murder plot is easy to detect: the enclosed space with its limited set of characters, the mystery of the sealed room, how one of the company takes it upon himself to solve the murder.
35 Agatha Christie’s novels were immensely popular in the Soviet Union in the 1960s; they were among the things Soviet citizens bought during travels to the West. See Yurchak, p. 140.
36 According to Genis, it is in itself a version of the “sealed room,” since it lacks connections to anything outside itself. See Genis, “Perestroika”, p. 99-100.
37 Tani, p. 40.
simply dissolves into nothing as events take yet another turn.\textsuperscript{38} The murder, it turns out, is not even a murder: the “victim” is not dead because he was never alive. No one is responsible except the detective, since he plays a crucial role in the final tragic outcome of events. On the whole it appears more accurate to define this as an anti-detective story. The novel ends, its plot unresolved, in a state between genres.

\textbf{Between Worlds}

Narrative space in \textit{Puzzle} is divided, in accordance with both the common structure of all three novels discussed here and the conventions of the Gothic genre and classic detective fiction (both genres which, to a great extent, rely on spaces that are closed off in some way). Here, however, the “zone” consists of the space where the events narrated in the text take place – the hotel and its surroundings – while the “normal world” is exclusively represented by a few images in Glebski’s mind. This means that the structure is not immediately visible.

The world Glebski has left behind appears fairly close to Soviet everyday life, while the hotel gives the impression of being located in the “Imaginary West.” In a similar way Glebski himself is placed between worlds. He drives a Moskvič (\textit{Puzzle}, 388), and his name – Peter Glebski – sounds Slavic yet it is clearly not Russian, which makes him both Russian and non-Russian at the same time.

\textit{Allusions to the West}

According to Alexander Genis, “the detective genre does not mirror an existing reality but invents new realities.”\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Puzzle’s} “reality” is certainly invented, but it is not entirely new. Since it is a hotel, it can be described quite straightforwardly as a Foucauldian heterotopia. However, this hotel is also located

\textsuperscript{38} Since alleged mysteries as a rule are easily solved in the world of the hotel, it is obvious that it is not the detective who abandons his investigation but rather the Strugatskys, who abandon their contrived murder mystery plot in favor of an equally contrived science fiction ending.

\textsuperscript{39} Genis, “Perestroika,” p. 99.
“beyond the border” in what appears to be a typical “Soviet imaginary elsewhere” in the “archetypal form of a locally produced” image of the West where the currency is kronas and grošen and people speak foreign languages. Already the word otel’ in the title signals that this is not a Soviet-Russian gostinica, a signifier further clarified by its name, “U pogibšego al’pinista.”

This “foreign” setting, constructed with the help of French, German or simply strange sounding names and allusions to Western popular fiction, does not appear, however, to be intended as an actual representation of any particular country (even though the brothers allegedly had “Switzerland, Austria or Andorra” in mind when writing), not even an imagined one, but merely as another Soviet “elsewhere.”

40 Yurchak defines the concept of zagranica as “disconnected from any ‘real’ abroad and located in some unspecified place – over there (tam), with them (u nikh) as opposed to with us (u nas).” Yurchak, p. 159.
41 Stray French words mark the text’s linguistic space as foreign: for example Simone says pardon (Puzzle, 279), and dju Barnstokr que diable (Puzzle, 293). The mountain climber’s last words to Snevar were “Pourquoi pas?” (Puzzle, 268.) It does, however, appear as if the characters are not to be understood as actually speaking to French as the language, as Snevar obviously did not understand the mountain climber’s last words.
42 Yurchak describes how names were used in the construction of the subcultural “Imaginary West.” Participants in the fantasy sometimes adopted foreign sounding nicknames (Elena for example became Madeleine). More often, however, they preferred to use various visual means: pictures, but also various artifacts of western manufacture, such as plastic bags and empty beer cans. These items served no practical purpose; nevertheless they were immensely important as signs, invested with something akin to an almost magical ability to evoke an imagined “elsewhere.” See Yurchak p. 193-195.

Life at the hotel could be said to very much resemble a Soviet subculture characterized by “[t]he centrality of open-ended and temporally unconstrained interaction, and the unpredictable and changing milieu of participants that it involved.” The hotel is certainly located in an unnamed and timeless space. The common meals, around which much of the social life of the hotel apparently revolves, and the recurring conversations of Glebski and Snevar greatly resemble the Soviet institution of obščenie – a form of endless socializing, very much centered round discussions where the process is an end in itself. See Yurchak, p. 148-151.
43 Allusions are made throughout the text to Agatha Christie, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and even Astrid Lindgren among others.
Inside this heterotopia there is in fact yet another one: the mirror. Foucault defines it as a third “unreal space” beside utopia and heterotopia. According to him the mirror is “a sort of mixed, joint experience,” since it belongs to both categories at the same time. As “a placeless place” and “an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface,” it is a utopia, but as it also exists in reality it is a heterotopia at the same time.45

In the novel it is central in a short but important scene. When he comes to the hotel, Glebski is defined by what he has left behind – his professional identity as a police inspector, as well as his private identity as a husband and father.46 Alone at last in his room he voices “anxieties about being together and being alone,”47 sharing confidences with the reader about how he considers the lack of privacy in modern society to be a far greater problem than loneliness, and how relieved he feels to finally be able to do as he pleases.

He also begins almost immediately to distance himself from all these restricting social roles. Soon, however, he is obliged to temporarily abandon his newfound splendid isolation in order to join the other guests for lunch. In preparation for this ordeal he tests a series of different facial expressions in front of the mirror:

Я причесался перед зеркалом, опробовал несколько выражений лица, как-то: рассеянное любезное внимание; мужественная замкнутость профессионала; простодушная готовность к любым знакомствам и ухмылка типа «ты». Ни одно выражение не показалось мне подходящим […]. (Puzzle, 276.)

This scene demonstrates how the mirror – according to Foucault a place where one is not and at the same time is, in the form of “a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself”48 – can function as “a metaphor for the

45 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces.”
46 Since he has come to the hotel without his family and at the suggestion of a colleague, his presence there is more closely connected to his professional identity than to his private one.
47 In Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999) Eric Naiman argues that similar anxieties were expressed through Gothic narratives in the early Soviet period (Naiman, p. 130).
48 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces.”
production of other selves.” According to Jackson it “establishes a different space, where our notions of self undergo radical change.”

Heterotopia as the zone of possibility is presented here as somewhere where Glebski can experiment with different socially constructed images, different strategies to (literally) face other people. His reflection in the mirror does not show any “true self,” but only suggestions of different possible “selves.” “By presenting images of the self in another space [...] the mirror provides versions of the self transformed into another, become something or someone else.” This can also be seen as yet another of the text’s ubiquitous transgressions. Not only do many aspects of narrative space in the novel come together in the mirror. It is also connected to questions of vision and visibility.

Here the inclusion of these themes would have been easy to interpret as expressing the detective genre’s central quest for the truth; however, as the narrative ultimately has little to do with the usual concerns of the detective genre it seems reasonable to look further for another explanation. It can also be seen as more evidence of elements of the purely fantastic in the narrative. Any quest for the truth would be severely hampered by the fantastic’s “zone of hesitation,” where identities are uncertain.

Between Identities

The Mountain Climber

A fallen hero appears to dominate the place where Glebski comes. Through him the hotel has acquired a distinct identity that it did not have before. Originally it was simply called “The Hut [Šalaš]” (Puzzle, 285) but now instead it is named after the dead mountain climber in a manner slightly

49 Jackson, p. 87.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 The death of the climber appears to have started a peculiar tradition of naming the hotel after a guest who died there. Early in the story, Glebski fantasizes about renaming it after the “dead biker.” After the “murder” of Olaf, the host remarks to himself in an allegedly self-explanatory manner that he may have to change the name of the hotel again. In the epilogue, it actually has been renamed. This undoubtedly rather morose naming tradition is, however, never discussed.
reminiscent of the Soviet custom of naming various institutions after prominent people, and his old room has been turned into a shrine in the spirit of a Soviet “museum apartment.”53 He is also bestowed with a rather dramatic introduction into the narrative already on the first page,54 which creates an expectation in the reader that he must be important for the story.

The mountain climber in fact turns out to be relegated to a rather liminal existence in the text. He remains unnamed55 and disappears quietly from the narrative, never to return, as soon as the detective plot begins to unfold. However, this does not mean that he is unimportant. To begin with he is intimately connected to the Gothic subtext: as a tragic hero he stresses the romantic in the setting, and as an “uncanny revenant, lacking the fixture of a burial place, present in absence”56 he provides it with an element of the mysterious.57

Mountain climbing as a sport also has connotations outside of this specific context that are relevant for the understanding of this figure. Bourdieu stresses its sublime qualities in his description of mountain climbing as a sport characterized by “aristocratic asceticism” which “offers for minimum economic costs the maximum distinction, distance, height, spiritual elevation, through the sense of simultaneously mastering one’s own body and a nature inaccessible to the many.”58 This description largely reflects how mountain climbing was perceived by the Soviet scientific intelligentsia where

53 The reader cannot help but wonder whether his body had not been lost in the avalanche, whether it might very well have been preserved and exhibited at the hotel, like Lenin in his mausoleum.
54 When Glebski arrives at the hotel, Snevar appears on the steps to tell him the story of how the climber died in an avalanche in the mountains. He does this before he has even introduced himself (Puzzle, 265). He also takes Glebski to see the mountain climber’s “room-museum,” thus creating a moment of confusion, as Glebski plainly can see that the room which he must have assumed was intended for him apparently is already occupied (Puzzle, 267-268).
55 When Glebski finds an anonymous letter signed “F,” dju Barnstokr immediately attributes it to the climber, but adds that he must ask Snevar what the climber’s name was (Puzzle, 305-306).
57 When an avalanche later shakes the valley – heralding the even larger mysteries to come – Glebski feels compelled to ask Snevar whether it is the climber who has returned (Puzzle, p. 317).
it enjoyed widespread popularity – as a healthy outdoor activity, but also as a way of obtaining a distance from ordinary life.

Another side of this was an evident longing for danger. In the late 1960s, roughly around the same time that the Strugatskys wrote their novel, the artist Vladimir Vysotsky composed several songs featuring mountain climbers, in which a recurring theme was the risk of falling or coming in the way of an avalanche. Apparently both Vysotsky and the Strugatskys not only found this image particularly compelling around the same time, they also chose to highlight similar features.

The mountain climber can be seen as a less socially integrated counterpart to another symbolic figure in Soviet culture: the cosmonaut. They have much in common, since both symbolize the drive to reach ever higher. They are, however, also different, in that the cosmonaut is wholly embraced by society and appears to have little of the longing for distance which is characteristic of the mountain climber.

It could be argued that within this narrative, with its Gothic affinities, elements of suffering and ultimate failure also associated with the figure of the mountain climber are even more important than those of freedom or heroism. These certainly appear central to the story’s other fallen hero: the physicist Simone. He is first introduced practicing mountain climbing inside the hotel, a scene which establishes the link between him and the hotel’s fallen hero, and at the same time demonstrates how much there is that sets them apart. Here Glebski jokingly asks Simone if he is a “lost” climber (Puzzle, 277); the question prefigures Simone’s ultimate fate and stresses the doubling of the characters. It also contributes to the impression that Simone, while demonstrating many traits of a stereotypical Soviet 1960s fizik, is in fact a reversed, Gothicized version of it. He may be a “cheerful scientist”

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59 For example the songs Skalolazka, Veršina, and Proščanie s gorami (1966) or K veršine, and Gornaja liričeskaja (1969).
60 As Arkady Strugatsky and Vysotsky were acquainted (personally as well as professionally) this could, of course, simply have been a case of mutual inspiration. See Ant Skalandis, Brat’ja Strugackie (Moskva, Ast, 2008), p. 359.
61 A number of prominent scientist-mountain climbers figure in Soviet and Russian history, for example Vitalij Abalakov, who was arrested in 1938 on suspicion of espionage, and the physicist, mathematician and mountain climber Aleksandr Aleksandrov.
62 Another interpretation is that Glebski asks whether he is the lost climber, since Russian does not make a difference between definite and indefinite nouns.
(references are repeatedly made to his sense of humor), but his eerie laughter evokes images of “damp underground passages, inexplicable bloodstains and the sound of rusty chains on skeletons” (*Puzzle*, 277).

While allegedly “a hero of national science” he undoubtedly is very different from the scientist-heroes of only a few years earlier. Unlike them he appears ultimately incapable of achieving anything: he is removed from the world of science after some kind of major breakdown forced him to take an extended leave of absence. He has come to the hotel to climb mountains but apparently only climbs the walls. When after much hesitation he makes a single attempt to act on his attraction to Mrs. Mozes, he finds the object of his affection dead.

On the whole Simone appears to be a failure: as a scientist, a mountain climber and a lover – in short, as a hero. He could in fact be seen as an inversion of the mountain climber: if the mountain climber appears alive while dead, Simone appears to be dead already, even when he is still alive. His silence towards Glebski at the end of the novel – in itself the result of yet another failure (despite his efforts he could not convince Glebski of the truth and save the extraterrestrials) – puts even further emphasis on this impression.

Simone’s manner of death changes him from an inversion to a double of the earlier character – he becomes the new “lost climber.” His death, however, is nothing more than a pale repetition of the earlier event and consequently not commemorated in any way. The hotel is renamed, but after another dead guest.

*The Detective*

Unlike Simone, Glebski has no apparent resemblance to the mountain climber. Nevertheless, it is evident that he initially does harbor a wish to

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63 According to Vajl’ and Genis, “physicists did not simply tell jokes, they were obliged to do so in order to remain physicists.” See Vajl’ & Genis, p. 102. Simone also appears to be intended, at least partially, to be read as a portrait of an imagined ideal Strugatsky reader. A large portion of the Strugatskys’ readers consisted of members of the scientific intelligentsia – people who considered themselves to be foreigners in their own country and who read “Agatha Christie novels bought during trips to the west” (Yurchak, p. 140).
become this kind of character. This is manifested in the scene where he goes skiing shortly after arriving at the hotel:

Я попрыгал на месте, пробуя крепления, гикнул и побежал навстречу солнцу, все наращивая темп, зажмурившись от солнца и наслаждения, с каждым выдохом выбрасывая из себя скуку прокуренных кабинетов, затхлых бумаг, слезливых подследственных и брюзжащего начальства, тоску заунывных политических споров и бородатых анекдотов, мелочных хлопот жены и насекоков подрастающего поколения... (Puzzle, 272.)

For a brief moment he experiences how the dust of his office and the burdens of family life are lifted from him. This is so intense that it appears to be precisely that “moment of triumphant ecstasy, stupendous beauty and purity” which Edith Clowes claims to be “the real experience sought by the apocalyptic utopian mind.” When it ends he ponders how short such moments are. He now knows how it feels to be a hero: striving upwards towards the sun, or even getting too close to it, like Icarus.

The danger inherent in the extraordinary experience is also obvious however. (The encounter with the “dead biker” on the road further stresses this.) The narrative in which Glebski figures is framed by two even more extraordinary events similarly staged out in the open: the death of the climber and that of the extraterrestrials. Even though both events earn the hotel a new name, they are essentially instances of loss – of an ideal or a possibility. The promise of transformation, of change, inherent in the “apocalyptic moment” is apparently often realized as death.

At dinner Glebski first makes another brief attempt to act in a different, seemingly more traditional masculine way than what his earlier life apparently allowed in order to impress the glamorous Mrs. Mozes. Yet when he plays around with alternative identities, the one he settles for is even less

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64 In her discussion of *Swans* in *Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology After Utopia* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993), Edith W. Clowes argues that this is what the Strugatskys show instead of “a new order” (Clowes, p. 169).

65 Even if both occur outside the narrative they nevertheless fulfill the function of structuring time within it. According to Mark Rose the apocalyptic moment occupies a central position in the science fiction genre: “Because it lies beyond consciousness, beyond language, the apocalyptic moment is unrealizable in narrative. And yet, because it represents the logical limit of the dialectic between the human and the nonhuman, science fiction inevitably moves towards apocalypse.” See Rose, *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 195.
heroic than that of a police inspector – a “vendor of used washbasins and toilet bowls” (Puzzle, 310). Already at this stage it is evident that in the end he will permanently distance himself from the heroic/Gothic and return to the dull “normal” world from which he came.

During his “moment of triumphant ecstasy,” Glebski appears endlessly open to new possibilities, and later, when the “ghost story” unfolds, he demonstrates an unexpected predilection for fantastic imagery. However, as the narrative proceeds, his imaginative capacities undoubtedly begin to seem somewhat limited. The imagery he conjures up mostly involves skeletons.66

As events unfold further, his inability to imagine different possibilities perhaps appears to be his most important characteristic. His immediate reaction to the crisis that the murder represents is to resume the form from which he initially tried to escape and to become an outspoken champion of a worldview that “leaves no doubts as to the absence of supernatural events.” Accordingly Mr. Mozes cannot be anything other than a criminal, and as such a matter for the law.

From this fixed position Glebski cannot understand what is happening and consequently cannot master the situation. In “order to restore order”67 he would have had to remain open to the possibility that things might not be what they seem. When he is finally presented with a chance to be a hero (though of a different kind than the mountain climber), Glebski is not any more up to the challenge than Simone was.

**Between the Old and the New**

Among the more prominent of the characteristic Gothic transgressions discussed earlier is undoubtedly that of male and female. This transgression is at the core of one of the characters: the “strange child of the 20th century.” This is how s/he appears to Glebski at their first meeting:

Волосы у него были богатые, женские, а впрочем, может быть, и не женские, а, так сказать, юношеские. Ноги, затянутые в эластик, были тощие, мальчишеские, а впрочем, может быть, совсем наоборот – стройные девичьи. (Puzzle, 275.)

66 He envisions a skeleton in the locked shower, another skeleton smoking a pipe at his own desk, and chained skeletons in caverns underground.
67 Horsley, p. 28.
Similar characters have earlier made brief appearances in the Strugatskys’ works, for example the “crowd of young people of indeterminate sex” which Viktor Banov sees outside the entrance of a movie theater (Swans, 16). However, nothing more ever came of it there since the story already had its physically different “other.” In Puzzle, where the existence of the “guests from outer space” remains a mystery up to the end, it is the incomprehensible young person who takes on this role. As the “other,” the character not only acquires a more central position in the narrative but also a connection to death (first expressed as an associative link to the dead mountain climber: Glebski imagines him/her as a successor of sorts – “the dead biker”\(^\text{69}\)). As a figure of death the “strange child” – Brjun – also has a connection to the supernatural. Not only does s/he have the magician dju Barnstokr for an uncle,\(^\text{70}\) but the question of his/her gender is repeatedly juxtaposed with questions about the mysteries of the universe.\(^\text{71}\)

Gender ambiguity is to some extent constructed in what Brian Attebery calls “the traditional way”: through “unisex clothing” (oversized jacket and motorcycle gloves, tightly fitting trousers, a voluminous red scarf), and to some extent “the adoption, by one sex, of behaviors associated with the other.”\(^\text{72}\) However, it is even more often represented as a constant oscillation

\(^{68}\)“[I]n SF, androgyny and other sexual alternatives need not be illusions to be dispelled or exceptions to be avoided but can instead represent plausible features of an extrapolated future or an alien world” (Attebery, p. 9).

\(^{69}\) Glebski’s first encounter with this character occurs outside the hotel, and this inspires Glebski to envision the hotel renamed “At the Dead Biker [U pogibšego motociklista].” The renaming is preceded by “the biker’s” demise; “he” is buried under a heap of bricks in the hotel’s kitchen instead of under an avalanche in the mountains. The associative link between climber and biker that is established here could be interpreted as suggesting a similarity between death and an undefined gender position as different states of non-being.

\(^{70}\) Since he “loves the mysterious,” he introduces him/her to Glebski as “my dear late brother’s only child” instead of simply as “my nephew” or “my niece” (which Glebski evidently would have preferred), thereby contributing to the gender mystery (Puzzle, 275).

\(^{71}\) For example, when Glebski and Snevar discuss the question along with such topics as the ultimate fate of the universe, and whether some things are unattainable by the human mind, or when Glebski’s ponderings over lunch about whether this is a boy or a girl are interrupted by dju Barnstokr’s discussion about the mysteries of the cosmos (Puzzle, 280). Here dju Barnstokr mentions the 16th century mystic and scholar Giordano Bruno, who not only believed in the possibility of other inhabited worlds and was one of the great heroes of the Soviet scientific intelligentsia of the 1960s, but who also wrote about the androgyny, the all-in-one. See Mircea Eliade, *Mephistophiles et l’Androgyne* (Paris, Gallimard, 1962), p. 97.

\(^{72}\) Attebery, p. 133.
between two opposite positions\textsuperscript{73} which creates a set of Gothic twins, one of whom smells of sweat and gasoline, speaks in a “hoarse boyish bass,” drives a motorcycle and generally behaves rudely while the other has a “gentle girlish alto” and appears delicate, lonely and vulnerable.

From the beginning it is evident how inextricably connected this mystery of alleged cosmic proportions is to questions of vision and visibility. One minute Glebski sees a spoiled young person on the wrong track in life, towards whom he has a responsibility as a police officer, and in the next he sees a lovely young girl who inspires romantic feelings. His perception undoubtedly appears heavily colored by previous assumptions, and it rests on very traditional conceptions of male and female as well.\textsuperscript{74}

His interpretation is also somewhat paradoxical. Despite the fact that Brjun predominantly appears to be coded as male in the text, from the beginning Glebski demonstrates an expressed tendency to see him/her as female.\textsuperscript{75} This is evident in the first longer conversation between them. Glebski first addresses Brjun as “mademoiselle,” then as “boy.” The latter, however, earns him the answer, “I’m not a boy,” together with a reminder that they “just got engaged” (\textit{Puzzle}, 312).\textsuperscript{76} This perhaps also explains why he continues to flirt with someone who later is addressed as “boy” again, this time by Mrs. Mozes when Brjun asks her to dance (“Битте, мой мальчик.” \textit{Puzzle}, 314).

\textsuperscript{73} These themes are particularly predominant in the sequence where Snevar arranges an impromptu after-dinner entertainment. In this way, all the characters are gathered together in a sequence which in the Agatha Christie murder mystery fulfills the double function of allowing the author(s) to build up suspense which erupts in the (first) murder and plant clues that eventually lead to its resolution. However, the scene only superficially fulfills the role, in the same manner that the “murder” does. The only “suspicious” behavior the reader gets to witness here has to do with breaking traditional gender roles rather than the law. Olaf and Simone both ask Mrs. Mozes to dance, and she dances with the two of them—simultaneously. Mrs. Mozes asks Glebski to dance with her. Brjun refuses to dance with Glebski, and instead dances first with Mrs. Mozes and then with Olaf.

\textsuperscript{74} For example, once he has decided that this is a girl, he interprets “her” way of smoking as “girlish”: “Конечно, это была девушка. Она и курила, как девушка […]” (\textit{Puzzle}, 288).

\textsuperscript{75} Here it can be of interest to note that apart from the robots, Mrs. Mozes and Olaf, Glebski is the only one who makes advances towards the “strange child.”

\textsuperscript{76} They talk about marriage and wedding rings; Glebski does offer to teach “her” to shoot, but specifies that the gun in question is a дамский браунинг (\textit{Puzzle}, 312).
The “Eye” and the “I”

In accordance with the fantastic genre’s “affirmation of emptiness,” the single most important feature of Brjun’s face is also that which for the longest time remains invisible: the eyes, hidden behind large black sunglasses. According to Nina Lykke the eyes “disclose the human essence of the individual” and “make it fail or pass as truly human.”\(^77\) Apart from functioning as another sign of the “West,” sunglasses here appear to be invested with an additional, more context specific significance. Eyes “represent the primary sense of the enlightened human being, the vision.”\(^78\)

The theme of vision is introduced with the removal of another pair of sunglasses. On the first page, a newly arrived Glebski steps out of his car in front of the hotel and takes off his dark glasses (a gesture that apparently does not increase his ability to interpret his new surroundings). In the case of the “strange child,” the sunglasses, however, appear to be more connected to intelligibility than to vision. They are obviously a very effective means of protecting the secret of Brjun’s identity: with his/her eyes covered s/he becomes completely unreadable in gender terms. The dark glasses alone apparently have the ability to create that “sexlessness and anonymity” which Victor Turner claims are “highly characteristic of liminality.”\(^79\)

From the outset Glebski intuits the link between the “eye” and the “I” – that the eyes are the key to the secret. As the “strange child” is the last person to see the murder victim alive, his interest might have been interpreted as justified according to the rules of the ordinary murder mystery. It does, however, give the impression of being a separate mystery that must be solved even before that of the murder.

Marjorie Garber discusses the function of another kind of ambiguously gendered character in detective fiction, the cross-dresser. In a murder mystery, Garber argues, “[w]hen he or she is ‘found,’ or discovered, the mystery is solved.” In *Puzzle*, however, this is merely the point where the narrative


\(^78\) Ibid.

undergoes another metamorphosis and the murder mystery gives way to science fiction. Furthermore, while this character usually “plays a crucial narrative role as that which is mistaken, misread, overlooked – or looked through,” the “strange child” certainly is “mistaken” and “misread,” but looked at rather than “through,” to an extent where other, more important things tend to go unnoticed instead.\(^{80}\)

Glebski is convinced that of the two opposite positions, only one can ultimately be the correct one, and makes it something of a quest to discover the truth. One way to understand his interest in ending the ambiguities concerning the “strange child” is to see it as another expression of the narrative’s general tendency to exchange an initial open “zone of possibility” for a closed state of “normality.” Establishing the identity of the killer then becomes subordinate to a larger process of establishing stable identities.

Having reaffirmed the unified subjectivity he had at the outset – his original identity as a police officer – Glebski proceeds to put an end to the seemingly constant oscillation between opposite positions. When that is accomplished, and there now is only a single fixed position of “girl” instead of a boy-girl continuum, order appears to be restored to a certain extent. What follows, however, confirms Garber’s observation of how “in detective stories the woman, instead of materializing, often disappears.”\(^{81}\) Brjun, who “after all the cultivated androgyny of her presentation, turns out to be a girl in the end”\(^{82}\) is effectively removed from the narrative along with the sunglasses.

As a “girl” Brjun loses the status of a cosmic mystery. On the other hand this enables her to forge a link to the cosmos in a more traditional way – she marries a cosmonaut. This choice of husband might have carried an associative connection to Brjun’s newly discarded identity as a “dead biker” had he

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\(^{81}\) Ibid. It is interesting to notice how she eventually ends up in the half of the double identity that throughout the text has appeared to be the less dominant one. In many ways it would have seemed more logical if she had turned out to be the “dead biker” since this character came across as considerably more vital than the “girl,” whose prime characteristic appears to be an excessive emotional vulnerability (it is only to be expected that she is crying when Glebski makes her take off her dark glasses), and who has been given considerably less attention throughout the text.

not completely lacked the Gothic/romantic connotations of the novel’s dead mountain climber.

As a symbolic figure the cosmonaut is in some ways a logical continuation of the mountain climber as he goes even further in order to reach places where no one has been before. As an embodiment of the “science state” and its techno-futurist hopes, he is, however, also the opposite of the mountain climber in other ways.

The new role as “wife” not only fixes Brjun even more firmly in an intelligible position, but also connects her to life instead of death. Although that does not mean that it is a position which actually points forward since it appears to permanently place her in utopia rather than in heterotopia. The cosmonaut recalls the technological optimism of the 1960s, rather than the uncertainties of the approaching 1970s. In the epilogue, the figure of the climber appears irrevocably lost (another mountain climber is dead but not remembered): however, since the cosmonaut appears so late in the narrative, he seems to be nothing more than a fairy tale solution that promises an impossible happy ending – the return to an earlier epoch.

The new name the hotel has acquired in the epilogue, “The Interstellar Zombie [U mežvezdnogo zombi]” refers to Olaf, and can as such be interpreted as a confirmation of Howell’s observation of a “shift in emphasis from the human to the alien.” However, it would be easy to interpret it as also referring to Brjun, because the word has explicitly been used about her earlier in the text. Snevar at one point suggests to Glebski that s/he is “a zombie, that is, a sexless corpse brought back to life through magic” (Puzzle, 319). In that case the death of the “zombie” would have occurred at the moment when the boy-girl continuum collapsed into a single unambiguous position. For Brjun this indeed was a kind of death, however, only in the form of a reintegration into the human community in a stable and considerably more traditional and conventional role.

One way to interpret the word “zombie” is as a reference to the link between the text’s visible embodied “other” – the “strange child” – and its ever elusive and invisible real “other.” It appears as though the greatest

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83 As a robot, however, Olaf undoubtedly could also be defined as a dead, sexless thing brought to a semblance of life through a technology so advanced that it borders on the supernatural.
transgressions here also are the subtlest. Just as in the parody cited earlier, what appear to be the bodies of the alleged extraterrestrials are actually nothing but space suits. The truth about what they really are or look like, or whether they really are what they claim to be, is never revealed. They are never “saved” from their liminal position and fixed in a stable identity but simply disappear into silence.

At the point where the reader expects an explanation, none is given. The story ends not with a solution to the mystery, but with silence. This “reluctance to comment” was perhaps at that point the only answer the Strugatskys were able to give to the question of what was to come when the hopes of the Soviet 1960s were no more.

**The Kid: Utopia Revisited?**

The central question in *Kid* appears to be what is “same” and what is “other.” Early on in the text the reader is cautioned against making hasty judgments based on superficial resemblances. The members of the expedition who have come to explore the planet are reminded that it is not Earth, even though the landscape looks familiar (*Kid*, 5).

Yet the opposite appears to be true for the narrative itself: even though it initially can be hard to see any apparent affinities between technically orient-ed science fiction and an Agatha Christie murder mystery, *Kid* does in fact have much in common with *Puzzle*. Again the Strugatskys present a ghost story set in a haunted landscape, recounted by a character that does not fully comprehend what he sees. The fact that it evidently is set in the Noon universe is also easy to interpret as an expression of the same underlying wish to return to an earlier period. However, the narrative is somewhat more complicated, which means that the resemblance in this case may not be as great as it first seems.

The novel’s chapters have been provided with headings from which, even though they are short, much can be ascertained about its structure and thematics. The chapter headings read as follows: “Emptiness and Silence”

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84 There is even a brief allusion to the detective genre, connecting *Kid* to the earlier novel: Vanderchuze makes a cryptic statement about an “alibi” and “corpses”: “Было бы алиби, а трупы найдутся” (*Kid*, 42).
The presence of a Gothic subtext is easily discerned from these couplings. The inclusion of “ghosts” for example gives reason to suspect that this could be something other than what the outer trappings appear to suggest, since the supernatural would have no place in the rational discourse of technically oriented science fiction. Certain combinations of words directly recall Lejderman’s and Lipoveckij’s observations about the romantic and the grotesque.86 The pattern of the chapter headings can also be read as an indication of a development where once again an initial state of total openness gradually is exchanged for a more narrowly defined one. This time, however, the movement is halted in the middle; the level of certainty represented by “people” is gradually dismantled until all that is left are “doubts” demanding “decisions.” “Same” eventually turns out to be “other.”

A Colonial Narrative

Literary Ancestors

Again the Strugatskys rely on an existing literary model. This time it is not only a genre but also a specific work – Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book (1894). The working title of the first rough draft was actually Operation MOWGLI [Operacija MAUGLI]. One way to understand this is simply that

85 According to Svetlana Bondarenko, the chapter headings were a relatively late addition to the manuscript. The chapter headings have also varied in different versions of the text, primarily due to uncorrected mistakes. Consequently, the title of chapter two has the variation “Emptiness and Voices” [“Pustota i golosa”], and chapter five has the variation “People Not People” [“Ljudi ne ljudi”]. See Neizvestnye Strugackie: Černoviki, rukopisi, varianty: Ot “Otelja” do “Za milliard let…” ed. Svetlana Bondarenko (Doneck, Stalker, 2006), p. 214.

86 One of the examples they give is actually “people and ghosts.” See Russkaja literatura, p. 450-451.
this time they turned to the traditional adventure novel in search of an antidote for the “lack of action” Genis would comment upon much later.  

The story of Mowgli is, however, also a story about exploitation. Alexander Etkind has written about Russian history as an ongoing project of “internal colonization” carried out with blatant disregard for its consequences for people and for nature.\(^8\) Etkind’s discussion does not include the Soviet period with its relocations of whole populations and grandiose schemes for the remodeling of the landscape – both carried out with tragic results – but certainly places it within a broader historical context.

In Kid the characters implicitly posit that which is useful for humans as an unquestionable value which apparently excludes all other concerns.\(^9\) By colonizing the planet, the narrator Popov argues, humans are saving it from emptiness, dead silence and lack of meaning (Kid, 15). Later he repeats to himself how human beings, unlike nature, cannot abide emptiness and always strive to fill it with something (Kid, 17). Here “same” cannot see beyond itself.

Another aspect of exploitation in The Jungle Book which is relevant to the discussion of Kid is that it does not only concern new territories. The story of Mowgli, the “noble savage,” ends with his enlistment in the imperial project. This is presented as the only possible outcome; that Mowgli may not have an interest in serving is never even considered. In a similar spirit the scientists from Earth include the Kid in their plans after having discovered his existence. However, this is not the first time he is made a part of someone else’s scheme. He had been subjected to certain alterations already before the arrival of the expedition. These have enabled him to live on the planet, but they have been implemented without his consent (Kid, 193). Mowgli is not the Kid’s only literary ancestor: the Kid can also be said to have a place within a minor tradition in Soviet science fiction of stories about children who have had their bodies modified in different ways. While these interventions are mainly presented as motivated by good intentions, the narratives

\(^{87}\) Genis, “Perestroika” p. 96.

\(^{88}\) Alexander Etkind, Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011).

\(^{89}\) Had Kid been told from the other side, it would have been an invasion narrative – the mirror image of Picnic. Both stories evolve around unwanted contact with potentially far-reaching consequences.
nevertheless evolve around the tragic consequences for the recipients, who thereby are forever excluded from the human community.  

Communication and Sensory Perception

Also discernible from the chapter headings is the theme of communication (“voices”; “questions”). In the novel this theme is intimately connected to colonization, since this is the form the meeting between “same” and “other” takes on here. The inhabitants of the planet resist colonization by refusing to communicate. Their silence makes them invisible, which therefore only makes them possible to ignore. When communication finally occurs, the plans to colonize the planet are eventually abandoned.

Colonization apparently also has an intimate connection to vision. The importance of the eye is reasserted here. To see again is to be able to contain and control that which is different, ultimately aiming to “reduce all otherness to the familiar and the known.” The connection between colonization and vision is evident in the novel’s narrative climax. It is here that what had, until then, been hidden suddenly is brought to light:

И тут что-то произошло. На какую-то долю мгновения изображение сделалось совершенно ясным. Слишком ненадолго, впрочем, чтобы можно было рассмотреть что-либо. Затем раздался отчаянный крик, изображение перевернулось и пропало вовсе. (Kid, 225.)

Further on in the text, what exactly happened is explained:

Майка включила аварийную лампу-вспышку, вмонтированную в обруч. И можно было представить себе, каково пришлось обитателям пещеры, когда в вечном мраке на мгновение вспыхнуло маленькое солнце. (Kid, 228.)

Earlier in the text the Kid tells the group from Earth that the truth about the planet is buried deep down where “one cannot see with one’s eyes” (Kid, 187). Instead of accepting this boundary – established by the unseen “other” – they react by furtively making the Kid part of a scheme intended to allow

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90 The perhaps best-known examples are Aleksandr Beljaev’s fish-boy Ichtiandr from The Amphibian Man (Čelovek-amfibija, 1928) and the eponymous flying boy Ariel (Ariel, 1941). In Beljaev’s stories scientists implement profound changes to the bodies of young boys, similar to what the inhabitants of the planet have done to the Kid.
them to see that which cannot (or rather is not meant to) be seen. Again we see the recurring pattern of confrontations in all three novels: when the “oth-
er” tries to keep a distance, the “same” reacts by initiating violence. The re-
result, however, becomes the opposite of what was intended: instead of gaining access to the planet’s hidden secrets, they are abruptly shut out. The trans-
mission stops instantly and they see nothing instead of everything. They are virtually struck “blind.”

Blindness – the opposite of sight – is almost immediately established as being connected with death. One of the first things Popov notices in the landscape is a “blinding white” iceberg resting in an “unnaturally dead” ocean (Kid, 3). Later the Kid’s dying mother cries out that she “cannot see anything” (Kid, 185-186), stressing the blindness-death link, as well as the previously discussed one between vision and control. This makes the description of the Kid’s eyes as “blind” particularly odd, and the choice of word is made even more puzzling by the fact that he evidently is looking around, and he states that he “loves to see with his eyes” (Kid, 187-188).

Apparently the word “blind” cannot be taken literally in reference to the Kid, and it takes on a slightly different meaning as well. The Kid’s “blind” eyes are partly another expression of the now familiar connection between eyes and identity. In accordance with Lykke’s earlier quoted assessment these eyes – “blind, like a statue’s” and “completely unmoving” (Kid, 81) – are of vital importance to the positioning of him as nonhuman – allegedly as a creature between life and death, a “ghost” or a “phantom,” in actuality a crea-
ture between human and alien, “same” and “other.”

Another aspect, as we saw in the case of the inhabitants of the planet, is that humanness is intimately connected to communication, and through that to vision and visibility – to see, and to be seen. When used in reference to the Kid, “blind” apparently signifies the inability to emote something rather than to take something in, or in other words, an evident lack of the ability to communicate. This is by no means limited to the eyes alone but extends to his entire face, which is completely motionless, “like a mask” or “as if made of stone” (Kid, 134).

Earlier it was established that if the eyes are crucial for identity in general, the face is crucial as well for the communication of a chosen identity in a social context. The Kid’s face finally does come alive, although it is like the
performance of a strange “dance of the muscles” (Kid, 136-137),91 which does not make him appear more human. Like Glebski, the Kid finds himself in a situation where he must deal with other people when he would prefer to be alone, but since he knows absolutely nothing about communication between human beings his face just contorts into a series of completely random movements.

The “voices” which finally break the “silence” put new emphasis on the importance of hearing. From the chapter headings it can be ascertained that a shift – from the eye to the ear – appears to have occurred as to which sense now is the privileged one. This is confirmed by how the “ghosts” appear as spectral voices and not as apparitions.

One of the more extreme expressions of this is when the Kid himself at one point is reduced to an aural imprint; it is suggested that his crying and the voices of his parents are all that actually remain of him (Kid, 124). Even if this is in complete accordance with the perception of him as a “ghost” and a “phantom,” the ease with which he evidently can be transformed into a completely disembodied entity nevertheless is paradoxical in quite an astonishing way, since his body is otherwise positioned as crucial to the question of his humanness. The suggestion cannot be easily dismissed precisely because of the greater truth-value attributed to aural versus visual impressions.92

The “voices” also stress another aspect of communication. The Kid’s lack of communicative ability is reflected in how he understands language. Words are for him the same as a closed circuit between his mouth and ears (or at least it is so “for people,” Kid, 188) into which the idea of communication never really figures. The notion of something that cannot take place with just one participant is to him something profoundly alien. Because of this he also literally lacks a voice of his own and initially cannot actually speak, only mimic speech: the voice of his mother, or that of Maja Glumova.

91 The image of a child whose face goes through a series of rapid movements could indicate the influence of Stanislaw Lem’s Solaris (1961) on the Strugatskys.
92 The aural imprint of the voices of the dead apparently makes Popov the recipient of more immediate knowledge about the death of the Kid’s parents than his colleagues, despite the fact that they, unlike him, have seen the crashed spaceship with their own eyes. (Kid, 90-95.)
Heterotopia

The Land of Death and Opportunity

Even though it undoubtedly is an “intergalactic” setting, the landscape in Kid nevertheless appears to have a far greater affinity with the Gothic of Puzzle than the Noon universe. The presence of death in it is evident already from the “unnaturally dead” ocean (Kid, 4) in the beginning of the first chapter. Its only inhabitant, the Kid, is a “phantom” and a “ghost” who does not leave any footprints in the snow.⁹³

Early in the text Popov describes the planet as safe, precisely because it is dead and has neither “bloodthirsty monsters” nor natural disasters. To him this means that safety regulations – necessary on other planets – become completely irrelevant, both to adhere to and to break. More than anything else, the planet appears “pitiful.” His colleague Maja Glumova perceives it differently however: as a “castrated world” that is by no means “biologically passive,” but on the contrary “actively necrotic” (Kid, 56-57). The planet does not simply exist in a state of deficiency but exerts a harmful influence on everything that comes into contact with it. It was no coincidence to her that the spaceship with the Kid and his parents crashed there.

Like the planet that Earth plans to evacuate, this one will also soon be “immersed in old deaths” and “the smell of death,” or the (apparently even worse) “smell of former life” (Kid, 57). The name of the planet, “Ark [Kovčeg],” nevertheless evokes something diametrically opposite – lives saved. These rather contradictory assessments of the planet can be seen as an example of that ambiguous conception of heterotopia as offering both death and unlimited possibility which will be developed further and made explicit in Picnic.

⁹³ With the appearance of “ghosts,” followed by “people,” attention appears to be transferred from the “images of environment” to the “images of humanity.” The chain of chapter headings can also be interpreted as describing a movement towards incarnation. Through an intermediary, still disembodied state of “ghostly” voices the bodiless state temporarily becomes embodied but does not remain so because the nature of this body is immediately questioned. Uncertainty (questions and doubts) both creates and is created by a retreat back into a bodiless state, which possibly is only the movement towards another embodied state at the very end. The “questions” give rise to (or are caused by) “doubts” which make certain “decisions” necessary.
In *Kid* the structure of narrative space is not that of a “Gothic enclosure” in an otherwise normal world; rather in the novel’s intergalactic setting “the fantastic” instead “has become the norm.” The space of the irrational here (the landscape/“outside”/nature) surrounds that of the rational (the spaceship/“inside”/culture).

The relation between these two spheres is fundamentally unequal, which means that the fragile order of the “inside” (maintained by the crew members’ rational actions) exists under a constant threat of being contaminated by the haunted “outside.” This makes every indication of a breach in the barrier between the two parts immensely threatening to the “inside”: the voice of the dead woman almost causes Popov to suffer a nervous breakdown and the robots begin to behave erratically after being approached by the Kid.

Fred Botting suggests that within the Gothic, “uncanny disruptions of the boundaries between inside and outside” characterize a shift towards “horrors that are much closer to home,” by which he means the Freudian uncanny (defined as something familiar and at the same time concealed). There are undoubtedly certain domestic as well as Gothic overtones in the description of the planet as a “haunted castle” rather than a “new house” (*Kid*, 57). This points to just how much of that which is initially presented as concerns on a planetary scale, upon closer scrutiny appear to be about considerably more private matters. Far from being kept firmly separate inside and outside, they are on the contrary deeply interconnected.

**Mirrorings**

The mirror as heterotopia reappears, although in a less literal form this time. The name of the planet – evidently reflecting intention rather than observation – is by no means the only instance where largely subjective views are projected outwards.

Gradually it becomes evident how the landscape functions, to a considerable degree, as a mirror of Popov’s mental and emotional landscape. The decrease in appetite he experiences which makes it difficult for him to fulfill his kitchen duties (*Kid*, 18), largely appears as an internalization of the

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94 Jackson, p. 47.
“silence and emptiness” of the surroundings. Alone in the spaceship and highly aware of the “dead silence” within himself (Kid, 7), he declares the silence around him to be that of a vast and completely empty world (Kid, 8), even though he can only have experienced a tiny fraction of the planet. When he hears the baby, he perceives the sound as coming from somewhere inside the spaceship (Kid, 24) and suddenly notices how the rooms in the corridor are all empty (Kid, 5).

This kind of correspondence between inner states and landscape is something he shares with the Kid, who apparently experiences a complete lack of difference between inner and outer worlds. The profound isolation within which he exists is also mirrored, on a much greater scale, by the position of his planet in relation to the greater intergalactic community. This relationship also highlights the degree to which mirroring is an aspect of communication here, explicitly stated in the description of the Kid as offering “a unique mirror” of the alien psyche (Kid, 122-123). As will be discussed in more detail later, mirroring can also be said to constitute a central aspect of the relation between the Kid and Popov.

The Dual Hero: “Fathers and Sons”

Father Figures

“Hero” can be said to have several referents. As in Puzzle, a dead “hero” is present in the background. Here it is a cosmonaut, the figure that earlier appeared as a logical continuation of the mountain climber, while simultaneously being very different in many aspects. Unlike then, the hero now has a name – Šura (Aleksandr) Semenov. He is remembered as someone who

...любил дружить со многими и чтобы многие дружили с ним. И чтобы работать вместе – большой шумной компанией. И чтобы устраивать мозговые атаки, и все время быть в веселом напряжении, и чтобы все время соревноваться, все равно в чем – в прыжках ли с крыльями, в количестве острот на единицу времени, в знании наизусть каких-нибудь таблиц... во всем. А в промежутках во все горло распевать под нэкофон куплеты собственного сочинения... (Kid, 130.)

Despite his many talents, Semenov could be considered something of a failure when seen as an inhabitant of utopia. He came to the planet on his own
initiative, not as part of a collective, officially sanctioned effort. In the Noon world such independent missions are only undertaken by people who are not fit to be scientists, but who nevertheless are not inclined to take up less qualified occupations. He also obviously chose the wrong world for his colonization attempt. One of the other characters (who dismisses his “free search” as an “archaism”) describes him as a “浪漫” (Kid, 129-130) and it is true that among romantic heroes – “wanderers, outcasts and rebels” – he would undoubtedly acquire a rather different stature.

This time the hero has a son who could be said to have completed his mission. The Kid, however, does not appear able to recall his father (unlike his mother, whose voice he somehow has committed to memory). Semenov remains a shadow in the life of his son. It is an entirely different matter with two other “father figures” who, in spite of their recent arrival on the planet, are already busy deciding the future of it and its inhabitants. The “father figures” in question are two of the Strugatskys’ scientist-heroes, Komov and Gorbovskij, familiar from earlier stories set in the Noon universe. Unlike the dead Semenov, these two are successful, well-adjusted citizens of utopia. However, they do appear to have undergone a subtle change, almost a transition from a classic to a romantic/Gothic mode of representation. Popov remarks that in portraits Gorbovskij looks like “a philosopher from antiquity,” but when seen over the transmitter he appears gloomy and distraught (Kid, 242).

With the introduction of Komov and Gorbovskij, the motive of generational conflict reappears in a scenario which is familiar by now, where fluid identities must be exchanged for fixed: the human in the Kid must be restored “with all possible means and completely without mercy” so that he can become a useful “instrument for Earth” (Kid, 244). However, there are serious doubts among the “fathers” as to whether the “same” and the “other” will be able to meet:

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96 Towards the end of the novel it is discovered that a satellite was placed in orbit around the planet to prevent contact with the rest of the universe. Due to the fundamentally solipsistic nature of its civilization, it was decided that contact with the outside world would only seriously disrupt it. “[К]онтакт грозит серьезными потрясениями для этой цивилизации.” (Kid, 249).
97 Botting, p. 98.
The Dislocated Protagonist

Popov has nothing of the unquestioned authority of Komov and Gorbovskij. While they decide the future of the Kid and his planet, he sits “quietly like a mouse” without seeing or understanding anything (Kid, 252).

Like Glebski before him he can be defined as a “Dislocated Protagonist” since he does not understand the strange and haunted place to which he has come. Unlike Glebski however, he does not make any attempts to reinvent himself in the image of a now defunct hero. Instead he implicitly positions himself as the hero’s very opposite by repeatedly contrasting the earlier quoted positive opinions about Semenov with depreciative descriptions of himself (Kid, 12). This has the effect that lack comes to appear as his defining characteristic.

In sharp contrast to Semenov, who died seeking freedom and power over his own destiny, Popov comes across as an illustration of what Silverman means by “perverse” masculinities (“with respect not so much to a moral as to a phallic standard”) that say “‘no’ to power” and instead “embrace castration, alterity and specularity.”98 In psychoanalysis lack is associated with the female rather than with the male. Even though Popov evidently is a man, his position within the group can readily be characterized as “female” (considerably more than that of Maja Glumova).99 While the others go out to explore the planet, he remains in the spaceship where he is in charge of the kitchen (one of his responsibilities is to plan meals) and supervises the work robots. In other words his place is to stay at home to cook and look after the children, symbolically speaking.

Popov also demonstrates personality traits that could be said to place him within a traditionally feminine sphere, such as an obvious preference for indoor activities over outdoor ones. He also compares the silence of the spaceship to that of “a home-like and cozy apartment” (Kid, 11), while

98 Silverman, p 1-3.
99 In early drafts of the novel Maja Glumova was a male character called Dik. See Neizvestnye Strugackie, p. 213.
qualitatively distancing it both from that of the outside (it is very different from the “wonderful silence of a winter night in the countryside,” Kid, 7) and from spaces explicitly associated with the public domain represented by science and technology (the “padded silence of an acoustic laboratory,” Kid, 7).

Silverman discusses a type of masculinity which, according to her, “calls sexual difference into question, and beyond that, ‘reality’ itself.” If Popov is interpreted as a representative of this, it becomes evident why he is the one to hear the baby and the woman’s voice, an incident where reality undoubtedly is called into question. He makes a feeble attempt to disarm it by dismissing any connection between the voices he heard and the dead bodies in the crashed spaceship, thereby turning the whole incident into nothing more than a “frightening coincidence” instead of another manifestation of the uncanny (Kid, 42).

However, Popov can also be understood as the “child” of the group. Since he is only 20 years old, he clearly must be one of its junior members. When asked whether he is afraid to be left alone while the others prepare to go out on another expedition, his answer is that he is “not a child” (Kid, 53). Yet this only confirms exactly what his actual position within the group is.

The relationship between Popov and the Kid generally appears to be one of mutual identification. Before he meets Popov, the Kid first attempts to establish contact with the robots – also positioned as “children.” Popov, on the other hand, perceives the first traces of the Kid when he is left behind – just as the Kid was when his parents perished. Although he denies it, Popov does seem distressed by the others leaving him; he explicitly states that he does not like being reminded of his being alone after they left (Kid, 7), or the possibility of their being delayed (Kid, 6). Later, when faced with a conflict, he feels as though he will split in two “just like the Kid” (Kid, 226). This could explain why it is that the Kid forms a connection with him; the two could in fact be seen as the dual hero of the novel.

In certain aspects they are, however, the opposites of one another. While Popov (according to his own descriptions of himself) is perfectly ordinary, the Kid is extraordinary in every way. Popov is part of a community, while the Kid is completely alone, a “civilization of one.”

\[100\] Silverman, p. 1.
Popov could be said to represent the younger generation as essentially a continuation of the present – in the eyes of the “fathers” he undoubtedly must represent a more comprehensible version of this, while the Kid embodies the possibility of a completely different future. Popov and the Kid could be said to be the “same” and the “other” simultaneously.

Ultimately, however, there appears to be more that unites them than divides them, which is why they can finally establish a lasting contact. Evidently the same can eventually meet the same, but the true other must forever remain out of reach.

**The Posthuman**

Earlier we noted how the chapter headings point out the divergence of “same” and “other” within the narrative. Contrary to science fiction’s general emphasis on setting, here otherness is primarily not a feature of the landscape (which “looks like earth”) but rather of the body. In the two centrally placed chapters the “same,” represented by “people,” is juxtaposed with the “other,” represented either by “ghosts” or “non-people.” While “ghosts” appear to signify something that is not (either someone who has passed away or is a figment of one’s imagination), the term “non-people” is less specific since it does not signify what it is, only what it is not.

Again, the principal “other” here is not the extraterrestrial but rather a young person. This time, the character – the eponymous Kid – is given an even more central position in the narrative. The novel’s working title, *Operation MOWGLI*, alludes to the motif of a child raised in the wilderness by animals – not simply the image of the feral child as an “other,” but also the importance of upbringing, which even with the change of title remains one of the novel’s major subthemes. In the novel it is suggested that a human child is some kind of unmarked raw material that takes its form according to whatever it happens to come into close sustained contact with:

Человек – нечеловек. Наверное, на самом деле его нельзя называть человеком. Человеческий детеныш, воспитанный волками, вырастает волком. Медведями – медведем. А если бы человеческого детеныша взялся воспитывать спрут? Не съел бы, а стал воспитывать... Дело даже не в этом. И волк, и медведь, и спрут – все они лишены разума. Во всяком случае, того, что ксенологи называют разумом. А вот если нашего мауг-
In the Strugatskys’ utopia, the Noon world, their “higher theory of upbringing” played an important role. Boris Strugatsky sums up this theory in two points: children must be brought up by professionals, and not by amateurs (by which he means their parents) with the aim of identifying and cultivating their particular talents in order to form them into thinking and creative individuals. Upbringing (which Boris Strugatsky points out must not be confused with education) should take place away from home in boarding schools and begin at a very young age (when the child is about one year old). The theory puts great emphasis on the personality of the teacher, who should be a professional in science or the arts.\footnote{Interview with Boris Strugatsky, www.rusf.ru/abs (accessed February 2, 2014).} In a way it could be argued that the Kid has enjoyed a version of an ideal upbringing as suggested by the Strugatskys: he has not been raised by his parents; his “teachers” have had a decisive influence on his development and have indeed managed to foster some quite remarkable “talents” in him. However, this has not made the Kid into that “human” personality Boris Strugatsky discusses. Of all of the trilogy’s young characters none deserves to be characterized as an “alien of our time” more than he. Yet the potential his difference represents is apparently under acute threat of interference by the group from Earth:

To meet the “other” yet again comes to imply the forced imposition of a concept of normality that excludes the new. The unique potential the Kid represents is neither properly understood nor appreciated:

In the end, his whole future is merely perceived as an obstacle to “the vertical progress of humanity” (Kid, 255). Like Brjun before him, he is a “threshold
creature.” However, his liminal status is no illusion that can easily be dispelled. The Kid really is a go-between, uneasily positioned between the human and the nonhuman. To represent the younger generation as fundamentally alien was by no means unique to the Strugatskys. According to Il’ja Kukulin, this was the rule rather than the exception in popular culture after the 1960s. Student revolts and other manifestations of a growing youth subculture made the older generation – in the West as well as in the East – view young people as “the other.”

As an example of this Kukulin gives the American science fiction writer Robert A. Heinlein’s cult novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961). Boris Strugatsky does not mention Heinlein’s novel in his commentaries; there are, however, several striking similarities between it and *Kid*, which is why it nevertheless appears relevant to mention the novel here. Both works center on a young man, the orphan son of space travelers killed during an expedition to another planet, who is brought up by an extraterrestrial intelligence largely unfathomable to the human mind, and who acquires something akin to superhuman powers because of this.

In the Strugatskys’ works from the early 1960s such as *Far Rainbow* (*Dal’ekaja raduga*, 1962) the child characters are less developed as individuals. Nevertheless it is clear that they provide the motivation for the actions of the adult characters since they embody the future. A decade later this has not changed: now, however, both the children and the future have become considerably less comprehensible. When Popov meets the Kid for the first time he does not know what he sees.

Это был человек, во всяком случае – гуманоид, маленький, тощий, совершенно голый. Кожа у него была темная, почти черная, и блестела, словно покрытая маслом. Лица его я не разглядел или не запомнил, но мне сразу бросилось в глаза, как и в ночном моем кошмаре, что человечек этот был весь какой-то скособоченный и словно бы размытый. И еще – глаза: большие, темные, совершенно неподвижные, слепые, как у статуи. (*Kid*, 80-81).

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103 These are partly explained by how both works were inspired by Kipling.

104 In the Strugatskys’ first outline of the novel, the Kid is brought back to earth, just like Heinlein’s hero is. See Strugatsky, “*Kommentarii k projdennomu*” (*Kid*, 266).
The Kid is first assumed to be one of the inhabitants of the planet (Kid, 86). It is only when he has already been identified as Semenov’s son that Popov suddenly can see that the creature is a “skinny boy of about twelve years old.” His “resemblance to a normal boy”, however, ends there; the overall impression he gives is somehow of not being entirely human (Kid, 134-135).

Because he evidently cannot project a unified and comprehensible impression of himself to those who see him, they in their turn cannot decide whether he is “same” or “other.” Since he can appear to them as small, white and matte, like the walls (Kid, 81) one minute, and the next suddenly bright purple or green (Kid, 82), to them he seems to be “at the same time human and nonhuman, humanoid and non-humanoid” (Kid, 122). Even when he finally offers himself up for a good close look, it does not diminish the initial impression of essential alienness and uncanniness. His face is “of an inhuman blue-green color” which makes it appear “unpleasant” to the spectators.

While young people in earlier works (even the decidedly odd, slightly inhuman children in Swans) belong to some kind of community as a rule, the early 1970s representatives of the younger generation appear to pursue a lonely existence. The word “lonely [odinokij]” is repeatedly used in connection with them. Paradoxically enough in the case of the Kid, it is only after the unexpected expedition from Earth arrives that there are others like him on the planet for the first time, and this makes him “lonely.” Before he lived in an undifferentiated state as essentially one with his environment, without any concept of personal identity. As a “civilization of one” he did not consider himself alone, because he could effortlessly surround himself with copies of his own image – “statues in different colors.”

Since the Kid only has himself as a point of reference and company to him only means himself multiplied, that which ought to have been the “same” becomes the “other” instead. Then his isolated individual consciousness must come to the realization of the existence of a whole world outside (and also independent) of it. When the Kid asks Komov about why people have

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105 It is these copies that initially give the impression that he freely changes shape and location.

106 According to Malmgren the founding plot of the entire science fiction genre can be formulated as a meeting between the “self” and the “other.” See Malmgren, “Self and Other in SF: Alien Encounters” in Science Fiction Studies Vol. 20, No. 1 (Mar. 1993), p. 15-33. The only thing that would make this meeting unusual is that the self here is the alien and the other is represented by the group from Earth.
ten fingers “when we only need one to count” (*Kid*, 191), he is actually asking why there must be other people besides himself. In the presence of others just like him, the Kid experiences both a wish to “split in two” (*Kid*, 212), and a fear of what that would do to him (*Kid*, 215). He also clearly perceives how the “same” and the “other” lack a common language here (*Kid*, 191). In his undifferentiated state he has been (or at least believed himself to be) perfectly omnipotent. Now he has to face the fact that there are things which evidently fall outside of his power (*Kid*, 190).

The Kid’s position as “torn between two civilizations” (*Kid*, 255) is also explained in psychological terms. Allegedly his “consciousness” belongs to the world of humans and his “subconscious” to that of the extraterrestrials (*Kid*, 244). This, a rather interesting suggestion in itself of the ultimate cause behind the deep division within the Kid, is, however, just thrown into the text with no prior discussion and no further development.

In a similar manner, concepts taken from psychoanalysis occasionally surface in the text; earlier the planet was described as “castrated” because of an alleged impact vaguely reminiscent of the Freudian death drive. Even then, the idea was not actually elaborated upon (it only appeared as a variation on the concept of entropy, another popular topic around the same time). The overall impression is that the authors here, rather than introducing any actual discussion of psychoanalytic ideas, want to demonstrate their openness to different facets of the current tendency to embrace anything that runs counter to the official discourse.

According to Boris Strugatsky, the brothers did not spend too much effort on *Kid*, which they considered to be a comparatively unimportant work (*Kid*, 270). An attentive reading of the novel, however, discloses a work far more complicated than the simple hard science fiction/adventure story it superficially appears to be. It is another narrative about the conflict between “same” and “other,” evidently written in a “threshold time” when things appeared to be the same on the surface, while underneath the culture in actual fact was undergoing a period of profound change.
If the Strugatskys already seemed to be looking back on an earlier phase in *Kid*, it could be said that they did so even more in *Picnic*. The plot recalls one of their earliest works – the short story “From Beyond” (“Izvne,” 1958), which was their literary debut. *Picnic* is different from *Puzzle* and *Kid* in that it deals with the aftermath of an “unexpected encounter” which has already taken place. The narrative covers a decade instead of just a few days, and concerns the development of the world and humanity condensed into the microcosm of a small town and the life of one man. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay interprets the novel as “a fable of the despair of the 60s’ intelligentsia,” which to him demonstrates the Strugatskys’ complete disillusionment with the technocratic utopianism of the *Rainbow* period, and with it the hopes the Soviet scientific intelligentsia entertained about the power of the STR [Scientific-Technological Revolution – H.C.] to transform Soviet society.

“The story of transformation” is, however, “the correlative of the story of alien confrontation.” Even though *Puzzle* undoubtedly expresses a certain amount of disillusionment, it ultimately appears to be about uncertainty in the face of change rather than despair. Here heterotopia is both more prominently positioned and more invested with meaning than before, and its ambiguous nature is stressed even more.

The Strugatskys continued to use a model taken from Western popular literature as their point of departure. This time it was the classic story of adventure and exploration, of men venturing into the wilderness looking for treasures. Just as they did in *Kid*, they found inspiration in a work by Kipling. Searching for an original term for the central character, the pathfinder in the Zone, the Strugatskys tried different English words. Since they found their first choice “trapper” to be less than satisfactory, they replaced it, after

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107 This is another story of how humans encounter “alien technology” rather than “aliens.” There, a scientist encounters something he believes to be an extraterrestrial, which merely turns out to be a probe sent to collect samples.
109 Ibid., p. 29.
111 There are, however, also allusions to James Fennimore Cooper.
some consideration, with “stalker” in its original sense (from the verb “to stalk,” i.e., to approach furtively). According to Boris Strugatsky, the brothers took the word “not from a dictionary but from a novel by Kipling” that had a character named “Stalky.” He did not recall the title but it is evident that he was referring to *Stanky & Co* (1899). In his commentary, Boris Strugatsky only mentions Kipling in connection with the origin of the word “stalker.” There are, however, certain similarities between the two works – the motif of furtive resistance to authorities and the structure of the narrative (interrelated but essentially finished episodes) – which could suggest that Stalky inspired the Strugatskys in more ways than just the choice of a particular word while writing *Picnic*.

Apart from Kipling, there is something else which *Picnic* shares with *Kid*: an uncertainty regarding genre. In its opening chapter the novel appears to be science fiction. Under closer scrutiny it, however, begins to seem like the Strugatskys are attempting to pass off *fantastika* as *naučnaja fantastika* here: under a thin, superficial layer of technically oriented science fiction they are hiding the purely fantastic. The text includes numerous assertions of the importance of the scientific discourse over the fantastic; however, these are thoroughly belied by the centrality of that fundamentally irrational space where “ghosts and Frankenstein’s monsters” seem considerably more important than “cause and effect” (*Picnic*, 166). In the novel the irrational reappears in the guise of the rational, and the literature of unreason – the Gothic – is once again actualized.

*Complementary Heterotopias*

In *Picnic* the division of narrative space takes the form of two parallel heterotopias having a complicated relationship to each other: the space of the purely fantastic and a more mundane “elsewhere.” With the concept of anamorphosis as a starting point, Matthew Beaumont argues that the elements which mark a work as science fiction can be seen as a kind of literary

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112 Strugatsky, “Kommentarii k projdennomu.”

113 The chapter heading also appears to stress the importance of science because it includes the information that Dr. Valentin Pil’man received the Nobel Prize in the year “19…” Further, in chapter 3, Kirill’s death date is “April 19…” This further confirms that the novel is set in the 20th century.
"anamorphic estrangement." Using *Picnic* as an example, he further argues that the Zone there fulfills the function of establishing an “anamorphic perspective” from which “the empirical reality portrayed by the Strugatskys is estranged.” However, this raises the question of how this “anamorphic estrangement” works, because what it is applied to could more correctly be described as a highly fictive construct. The world which the Zone is an aberration of is not a reconstruction of the Soviet reality in which the Strugatskys lived, but rather the same kind of fantasy version of the “West,” as we saw earlier.

As a technique for the manipulation of visual impressions, anamorphosis can be seen as part of the recurrent subtheme of vision/perception which, as we have already firmly established, is intimately connected to the construction of otherness. Unlike before, this is now the property of a landscape instead of a character; however, the accuracy of perception apparently remains central. From the outset, the Zone is posited as the site of the greatest possible difference, where not even the laws of nature apply. Yet it is not easy to grasp exactly how this difference actually manifests itself. Redrik (the stalker) cannot perceive anything that would obviously set this particular area apart from the rest of the world. To him it looks exactly like an ordinary industrial town, the only exception being that there are no people and no smoke rises from the chimneys (*Picnic*, 20). The reader is not helped by the apparent lack of consistency in the text. Descriptions of the Zone differ so considerably, in fact, from the first to the last chapter, that the reader has reason to wonder whether it really is the same place. In chapter one it is an industrial landscape, located quite near the center of town and possible to enter in broad daylight. While allegedly being closed off from the rest of the world, the

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114 In art history anamorphosis is a special form of distorted perspective, which demands that the spectator must either have access to special viewing devices or stand in a particular position in relation to the work in order to see the image correctly. Beaumont gives Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* as an example. In the case of science fiction, the reader must change observation points to be able to make anything out of the science fiction elements, and in turn, this change of positions makes the ordinary world suddenly appear strange. This technique has been used in order to conceal images intended only for a select audience within other images, much like how covert social and political criticism was hidden in Soviet science fiction. See Matthew Beaumont, "The Anamorphic Estrangements of Science Fiction" in *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, ed. Mark Bould and China Miéville (London, Pluto Press, 2009).
border between them appears almost imperceptible. After only a few steps, the party is suddenly inside (Picnic, 28). Halfway through the text it has become a place where it is possible to go fishing, and in the last chapter it has morphed into a landscape of meadows and swamps, covered in thick fog, and Redrik and Artur must spend several hours waiting before they can cross the border. (It also takes the entire chapter for the two to reach its center, while the first expedition was over in just a few pages.)

Here Artur recalls a rumor “that there’s life in the Zone”:

– Я знаю, рассказывают, что в Зоне будто бы кто-то живет. Какие-то люди. Не пришельцы, а именно люди. Будто Посещение застигло их тут, и они мутировали... приспособились к новым условиям. Вы слыхали об этом, мистер Шухарт?
– Да, – сказал Рэдрик. – Только это не здесь. Это в горах. На северо-западе. Пастухи какие-то. (Picnic, 190.)

This is the only instance in the novel where someone is said to be living in the Zone, and nothing further is made of it. Undoubtedly it contributes to the impression that the Zone covers a much larger area than what seems to be the case in the first chapter.

Apparently the most mysterious thing about this area (at least in the eyes of the reader) is its fluctuating size. That which truly separates it from the rest of the world evidently is neither visible to the eye of the narrator, nor possible to relate to the reader. It is tempting to suggest here that the Zone, apparently “un-representable” in some aspects, demonstrates the narrative’s allegiance to the fantastic and the irrational. Beaumont argues that the construction of the Zone in the text mirrors the construction of the text itself as science fiction. He has a point, in that there is a special relationship between the Zone and the text. However, another suggestion of what constitutes this relationship could be that the text itself is a Zone – a space where certain phenomena connected with the Zone, by their nature, appear difficult to fit into any strictly “scientific” literary paradigm: the returning “living dead” (the explanation provided does not appear particularly convincing), the statistically improbable rate of accidents occurring around those who witnessed the Visitation and, not least, the effects on the stalkers’ children.

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115 In chapter one the expedition into the Zone takes only a few pages, while the final one in chapter four takes up the entire chapter.
116 Most of the phenomena connected with the Zone, by their nature, appear difficult to fit into any strictly “scientific” literary paradigm: the returning “living dead” (the explanation provided does not appear particularly convincing), the statistically improbable rate of accidents occurring around those who witnessed the Visitation and, not least, the effects on the stalkers’ children.
“normal” laws no longer apply. This would be in accordance with the Zone seeming to be not so much a “quantum leap into the future,” but rather the kind of “Gothic enclosure” Jackson describes as “a space of maximum transformation and terror.”¹¹⁷ This comes across with particular clarity in the “living dead” produced by it, perhaps the most explicit illustration of the already firmly established link between heterotopia and death in the novels discussed here. This link is further articulated in a scene where Redrik, returning home from an expedition, does not want to touch his daughter because he perceives himself to be “permeated with death and the Zone” (Picnic, 85). However, his fear does not come across as completely logical since one of the Zone’s “living dead,” his father, is already present in his home alongside his daughter. Since both his father and his daughter represent conditions directly related to the Zone, their presence makes his home a heterotopia in itself, a miniature version of the Zone in a way, dominated by strange phenomena that defy rational explanations.

The characters have been given names that immediately establish the “mundane” version of heterotopia as an “elsewhere,” while at the same time making it hard to pinpoint exactly where they are.¹¹⁸ The text does however contain several clues as to the location of the town of Harmont. English apparently enjoys the same kind of shadow existence within the narrative as French did in Puzzle: the characters refer to each other as “Mister,” and the name “Red” is interpreted as a reference to the color of his hair, which indicates that people understand it in the same way that an English speaker would.¹¹⁹ The clues are subtle but consistent: the language suggests it must be “the West,” but it cannot be “Europe,” as this is where Red emphatically

¹¹⁷ Jackson, p. 47.
¹¹⁸ In science fiction, “strange” names suggesting that the world of the text must be different from that of the readers are common as this is a fairly simple and efficient way of achieving the desired effect of estrangement.
¹¹⁹ The use of English words could also be interpreted not only as a way to mark or represent the strangeness or foreignness of the novel’s diegetic world, but also to allude to the world outside the novel. It was common practice among the core group of Strugatsky readers, the technical intelligentsia, to use English – a type of performance that was part of the construction of their self-image as foreigners in their own country. (See Yurchak p. 139-141 and 193-195.)
refuses to go when asked to emigrate (Picnic, 50). In a similar way clues are also provided concerning the location of the Zone. These appear to defy all logic however: the Zone is at the same time located close to the center of town and in a completely different world. Regardless of the repeated assertions that the Visitation occurred in the West, of all countries it is Russia that is singled out as the country with a special relationship to the Zone. A telling sign is the name Redrik uses when referring to it, *zona-matuška* (Picnic, 17). One way of marking this distinction is by emphasizing elements that are Russian. Kirill is clearly a Russian scientist; the vodka Guta offers Nunan is Russian vodka (however, as a non-Russian, he drinks it mixed with tomato juice in a Bloody Mary instead of straight, like a Russian would). More often this connection is established through negative assertions. For example, Red explicitly claims that he cannot imagine that there could be a Zone in Russia, and that Russia is no place for a Zone. Russia is thereby seemingly posited as the “other” of the “other.” Yet the reassurances of how there is absolutely no relationship between Russia and the Zone, or in other words that the Zone is absolutely not Russia, on the contrary do more to point out to the reader that the Zone perhaps really is Russia.

If the Zone is indeed Russia, one way to see it is as an illustration of Boris Groys’ thesis of “Russia as the subconscious of the West.” In the essay with this title, Groys argues that there are striking similarities between how the subconscious is described in psychoanalytic theory versus classical Russian self-understanding. According to Groys, there can be no subconscious in Russia because “Russia itself is the subconscious.” Of interest here is also how the Russian 19th-century philosopher Petr Čaadaev, “the first to posit

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120 According to Boris Strugatsky, it is located somewhere in the less densely populated areas of the British Commonwealth, probably in “Canada,” but it could be “Australia” as well. Strugatsky: “Kommentarii k projdennomu.”

121 The word *matuška* can signify respect, or point out something as the source. Red apparently sees the Zone as a mother or source of everything. The name *zona-matuška* also recalls *zemlja-matuška* from Russian folklore.

122 Especially since no explanation is offered, this creates a feeling that the authors want to hint that there is some kind of special relation either between Russia and the Zone or perhaps between Russia and the rest of the world outside the Zone. The “other” space, which in the novel stands for the “same,” i.e., the normal world or the world outside the Zone, is not established simply as “western,” but specifically as “non-Russian” or “not-Russia.”

Russia as a philosophical problem” according to Groys, described Russia in a deeply ambiguous way as simultaneously being a country like others, located in time and space, and an entity outside of all normal categories such as time, space, memory, or rational analysis. Here Russia seems to be both “Harmon” and “the Zone” at the same time. Groys quotes Čaadaev’s words, that Russia “only seems to exist to teach the world some valuable lesson.” It is doubtful whether the same can be said about the Zone in the Strugatskys’ novel. The danger it poses for everyone who comes into contact with it – even from a distance – is repeatedly stressed throughout the text. Also unlike Russia, the Zone is not unique; it is only one of a total of six similar places scattered around the world.124

Material Objects

Jackson’s definition of the fantastic is “a literature of absences.”125 According to her, it is “constructed on the affirmation of emptiness.”126 In Picnic emptiness is given concrete form as “nameless things” and “thingless names.” Also in the text there is undeniably a great deal of attention given to material objects that could be characterized in this way. These can roughly be divided into the categories “gadgets” and “garbage.” The relationship between these two categories could be said to be just as intricate as that between the two complementary heterotopias.

Gadgets

The category undoubtedly given most attention in the text is the “gadgets,” the artifacts allegedly left behind in the Zone by extraterrestrials. The novel

124 The combined influence of all these Zones is a question that the text interestingly enough never addresses. Another connection between the Zone and Russia is of course found in the connotations of the word zona. To a Soviet-Russian reader this particular word for an enclosed area would only help to immediately evoke associations to prison camps. It is, however, interesting to note the subtle strategies the Strugatskys employ in order to distance themselves from the inevitable association: by spelling the word with a capital letter, thus turning it into a name, and by using the grammatical construction в зону instead of the usual на зону. In this way they create a sense of uncertainty that allows them to use this word.

125 Jackson, p. 70.
126 Bessière, quoted by Jackson. Ibid., p. 37.
has been cited as an example of “gadget SF,” and taken at face value the artifacts can undoubtedly appear important. The narrative opens with a long, detailed description of one of these objects, an “empty”:

Всего-то в ней два медных диска с чайное блюдце, миллиметров пять толщиной, и расстояние между дисками миллиметров четыреста, и, кроме этого расстояния, ничего между ними нет. (Picnic, 10.)

However, this turns out to be the exception that proves the rule: usually when the artifacts are mentioned in the text they are not described at all. The name by which this particular object is referred to is also rather revealing since it suggests how completely devoid of actual content it eventually turns out to be. Its only function in the story is to be the motivation for the first expedition into the Zone; once it has done this it vanishes without a trace. Its name, however, recalls the genre allegedly constructed from “emptiness” (much more than “gadget SF”), and soon it also becomes apparent how similar objects which fill the text actually are “thingless names” around which there definitely is an air of the fantastic: “devil’s cabbage,” “death lamp,” “merry ghosts,” “witches’ jelly,” to name just a few. The last undoubtedly sounds as though it was taken directly from a fairy tale, as does the “golden ball” (however this object’s fairy tale quality is apparently not limited to its

127 Malmgren, Worlds Apart, p. 111. In “About the Strugatskys’ Roadside Picnic” in Science Fiction Studies, vol. 10 (1983), Stanislaw sums it up as being about “a miracle introduced into a consumer society” (Lem, p. 323) and Csicsery-Ronay considers it “obviously bound to the fairy tale’s universe of discourse” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 22).

128 The strange names of the artifacts could of course be evidence of a humorous – or even slightly disrespectful – attitude towards the science fiction genre. The suggestion the title makes, that perhaps the aliens had only stopped there on their way to somewhere else and left garbage behind, undoubtedly is reminiscent of Douglas Adams’ Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy series. If that is the case, Picnic is not so much “gadget SF” as a parody of it.

129 The perceived connection of the “golden ball” to the fairy tale is, however, not limited to the name because it allegedly has the ability – completely devoid of any discussion about natural laws – to fulfill wishes. According to Fredric Jameson, it “flings our text generically over into the fairy tale” (Jameson, p. 74). Tarkovsky was certain that “in the Strugatsky story, the desires were truly fulfilled.” However, he also saw the wish-fulfilling ability as possibly “the Stalker’s fantasy.” Aldo Tassone, “Interview with Andrei Tarkovsky (on Stalker)” in Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews, ed. John Gianvito (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p. 55. Lem simply dismisses the golden ball as “a naïve belief, one of those popular legends which rose up in the wake of the visit” (Lem, p. 329) so as not to have to reconsider his assessment of the novel as technologically oriented science fiction.
As a rule the alien artifacts only figure in the text as a list of colorful names. The “empty” is, however, next referred to as a “magnetic trap.” The fairly detailed description of the object would make it easy to interpret this switch to a parallel terminology as a confirmation of the text’s allegiance to a genuine scientific discourse. It is, however, hard to interpret the novel as technically oriented science fiction, despite the number of objects. The alien technology and its effects on science are never actually described in any detail and there is no extrapolation of a single technical artifact. The transformation of the “empty” into a “magnetic trap” has no more of an impact than the scientific explanation of the Zone’s “living dead” had (Picnic, 166). Also the very existence of an alternative discourse with its own terminology is not brought to the reader’s attention again until much later in the text, when what up until then seemed to have been officially accepted terms are revealed as the argot of the stalker subculture (Picnic, 157). While superficially more scientific, it actually has no greater significance than the better established “fairy tale terminology.” Despite being posited as immensely important for science and technology, the “gadgets” (as well as the Visitation itself) actually remain the “thingless names” of the fantastic.

The scientific (or pseudoscientific) discourse – expressed in this alternative terminology together with the suggested explanations of the “living dead” and the mutations in the children of the stalkers – do not have any real impact on the text’s allegiance to a genuine scientific discourse. The scientific (or pseudoscientific) discourse – expressed in this alternative terminology together with the suggested explanations of the “living dead” and the mutations in the children of the stalkers – do not have any real

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130 This terminology gives an impression of explaining why Todorov defined science fiction as the “scientific marvelous” (Todorov, p. 56).
131 Nunan has access to this jargon because he is closer than Pil’man to the people who actually deal with the Zone. The Nobel laureate Pil’man understands the Visitation as a geometrical shape, not as actual effects on actual people.
132 The Visitation is explained through two parables, both provided by Dr. Pil’man. The novel opens with his explanation of the so called “Pil’man Radiant” to the reporter from Harmont radio. The “Pil’man Radiant” is the only real image of the Visitation that is offered in the novel. It is, however, only a pattern, said to look “as though someone had taken six shots at Earth with a pistol located somewhere along the Earth-Deneb line,” but nothing is said about who might have pulled the trigger. The images Pil’man evokes of the events surrounding the Visitation, of “monsters that selectively devoured only old men and children,” and “bloody battles” with the “invulnerable invaders,” have nothing to do with the Visitation, since they are taken directly from the canon of science fiction, H. G. Wells’ The War of the Worlds. He also uses these images in a way that further obscures, rather than clarifies things, since he affirms that this is not what he believes happened. Pil’man also says he “believed” in the Visitation – a word, which appears to indicate doubts concerning what actually happened. It is almost as though he says that it is possible to believe in the Visitation itself without necessarily believing in any visitors (Picnic, 5-9).
impact on the reader simply because they do not add anything really meaningful to the narrative. The rational is not in a position to actually compete with the irrational here. For example, this is why statements about the importance of the Visitation for technological progress fall flat. On the whole the scientific terminology has little effect on the novel’s “fairy tale quality” and does not convince the reader that this is “gadget SF.” However, even though the objects are not important, the names actually are – not for any scientific-technological discourse, but as part of a strategy to represent the un-representable. Just as the strange names of the characters construct them as “foreigners,” the names of the artifacts construct those behind the technology that produced them as fundamentally different. One argument against the interpretation of the text as “gadget SF” could be that repeated allusions to the fantastic obviously are needed in order to evoke the desired effect of “otherness.” Faced with the mutations in the stalkers’ children, even the representatives of the scientific discourse evidently find themselves compelled to turn to fantastic concepts like sorcery or the “evil eye” (*Picnic*, 165). In a situation that puts the human capacity to create meaning to the test, the discourse of the rational apparently cannot overthrow that of the irrational.

*Garbage*

The other category of material objects is garbage. “Garbage” figures considerably less prominently in the text than the “gadgets,” and it does not appear nearly as important. Garbage did however serve as inspiration for the novel. The idea first came to the Strugatskys when they saw the remains of a picnic during a walk in the woods.134 About halfway through the text comes an

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133 Here it must be noted that science fiction and fairy tale are not, as Csicsery-Ronay points out, the “antithetical genres” they would be if “the genre terms were precisely descriptive.” “Most of what is classified as SF owes more to the structure of the fairy tale than to any scientific ideas it purports to explore.” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 1.) Besides, as the British science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke famously claimed: “All sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” See *Science Fiction Quotations: From the Inner Mind to the Outer Limits*, ed. Gary Westfahl (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005), p. 214.

134 This allegedly happened in February 1970. The first preliminary notes for the new novel where they tried to capture the idea which this image offered them mention “a monkey and a tin jar” [*obez’jana i konservnaja banka*]. At this point in the writing process, the Strugatskys concentrated on suggesting broader themes, such as increasing superstition and a
elaborate image explaining the title. Here it seems as though the authors recall what they saw in detail:

– Пикник. Представьте себе: лес, проселок, лужайка. С проселка на лужайку съезжает машина, из машины выгружаются молодые люди, бутылки, корзины с провизией, девушки, транзисторы, фотоаппараты... Разжигается костер, ставятся палатки, включается музыка. А утром они уезжают. Звери, птицы и насекомые, которые всю ночь с ужасом наблюдали происходящее, выполняют из своих убежищ. И что же они видят? На траву понатекло автола, пролит бензин, разбросаны негодные свечи и масляные фильтры. Валяется ветошь, перегоревшие лампочки, кто-то обронил разводной ключ. От протекторов осталась грязь, налипшая на каком-то неведомом болоте... ну и, сами понимаете, следы костра, огрызки яблок, конфетные обертки, консервные банки, пусть бутылки, чей-то носовой платок, чей-то перочинный нож, старые, драные газеты, монетки, увядшие цветы с других полян...

(Picnic, 154.)

This passage not only demonstrates the relationship between the two categories of material objects but also the Strugatskys’ artistic method. By using their imaginative skills, various ordinary discarded objects are transformed here into alien artifacts equipped with almost magical abilities. The relationship between gadgets and garbage is, however, more complicated than the fact that the latter is simply transformed into the former. Even once valuable objects are transformed into garbage when taken out of context, either by being removed from a place where they had a given function and then being put into one where they do not, or because they are no longer able to fulfill their original function. Consequently, the alien artifacts – despite the economic and scientific value they are ascribed – are also essentially garbage. Garbage, in the literal sense in the novel, is only mentioned to a lesser extent in the descriptions from the Zone (a pile of refuse, or broken glass and rags). As we will see later when the novel is adapted for the screen, the circle will be completed when garbage soon replaces “gadgets” there.

concomitant decrease in the prestige of science, rather than outlining the actual plot. See Strugatsky, “Kommentarii k projdennomu.”
The Hero

The novel allows for alternative interpretations concerning its hero. One is that it is the Visitation itself, in which case the novel would be an example of “the idea as hero”.135

Another possible interpretation is that Dr. Pil’man is the hero.136 The most obvious, however, appears to be the assumption that the hero is the stalker Redrik Šuchart.137 After all, the plot traces his “ambiguous Pilgrim’s Progress.”138 He also embodies an aspect of time and change that is entirely missing in a character like Dr. Pil’man139 (who “avoids the Zone’s danger altogether,” and who understands the Visitation predominantly as a distinct geometrical pattern140), which makes him a more suitable prime representative of humanity. Redrik also appears to be singled out since he constitutes

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135 In *New Maps of Hell* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1961) Kingsley Amis argues that this is usually the case in science fiction (Amis, p. 137). Here, this interpretation is supported by the assessment of the Visitation Dr. Pil’man provides early in the text. Just as the Visitation (in the world created by the text) is more important than any visitors, it is more important (in the text itself) than any singular character. In Lem’s opinion, the alien Visitation is not intended to be something strange for the sake of its strangeness; instead it establishes the starting conditions for a thought-experiment in the domain of the “experimental philosophy of history” (Lem, p. 323).

136 The novel opens with an interview where Pil’man gives his opinion about the Visitation.

137 For example, a 1995 theatrical adaptation of the novel was titled “The Love and Damnation of Redrik Šuchart [Ljubov’ i prokljatie Redrika Šucharta].” See Michail Vorob’ev, “Zona i čelovek,” *Teatral’naja žizn’,* 1995, No 11/12, p. 36.

138 Csicsery-Ronay, p. 21.

139 In the novel, time is measured not in relation to the alien Visitation, but by references to Red’s age. When it begins he is 23, when it ends he is 31.

140 Pil’man also tries to distance himself even further from the Visitation by claiming that his discovery, the “Pil’man Radiant,” “wasn’t the first, nor was it serious, nor was it really a discovery.” It was not even his since it was “discovered by a schoolboy” (*Picnic*, 5). Despite the fact that he is a native of Harmont, Dr. Pil’man did not actually witness the Visitation. He has no story of his own to tell about it and does not believe in those of others. Asked his opinion of the Visitation, Dr. Pil’man surprisingly claims that he “never permitted himself to think about it seriously” (*Picnic*, 150). The only way he finds to talk about it is the parable of the picnic. Like the “Radiant,” the picnic is essentially just another mental image, perhaps more vivid, but really just as remote.
an exception to the general rule of representation. He is unlike the other stalkers – who (like the “gadgets” they chase) exist within the text only as names without actual representation. Redrik is even provided with a visual sign of individuality in the form of red hair.  

He is also markedly different from the protagonists of the two novels previously discussed here in that he demonstrates more of the qualities of a traditional “hero,” such as self-reliance. Like Glebski and Popov, he is a traveler on a Fantastic Voyage, but it does not appear accurate to define him as a “Dislocated Protagonist” since he is the one who knows how to navigate in heterotopia, but he quickly loses his bearings outside of it. Equally true is that while Glebski and Popov are represented as well adjusted with solid occupations, Red appears to gravitate closer and closer towards the margins with each passing chapter. His liminal position, however, just contributes more to his status as exceptional: like a Romantic-Gothic hero, he “stands at the edges of society,” seemingly unable to find “a path back into the social fold.”

This ambiguous position is by no means a characteristic of Redrik alone. The stalker is a hero who – like the mountain climber earlier – is tormented rather than victorious. He is, in Botting’s words, an “outcast, part victim, part villain.” The only other stalker given any actual representation within the text, Redrik’s mentor and childhood hero Barbridž, could be said to demonstrate the fate of even the successful representative of the profession. Barbridž has profited economically from his expeditions into the Zone, but has in the process also been crippled, physically as well as morally. Towards the end of the novel it turns out that stalkers are not only victims of the Zone or their own greed, they are also victims of technological progress. “Cybernetics” is about to make the profession completely obsolete:

Старый сталкер был грязным, угрюмым человеком, который со звериным упорством, миллиметр за миллиметром, полз на брюхе по Зоне, зарабатывая себе куш. Новый сталкер – это франт при галстуке, инженер, сидит где-нибудь в километре от Зоны, в зубах сигаретка, возле локтя – стакан с бодрящей смесью, сидит себе и смотрит за экранами. Джентльмен на жалованье. (Picníc, 147-148.)

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141 His nickname, Red, is not only an abbreviation of Redrik; he is alternately called “Ryžij.”
142 Botting, p. 92.
143 Ibid.
144 Red heard of him for the first time when he was ten years old.
Redrik himself acts out the part of a villain when he brings Barbridž’s son Artur with him into the Zone as a “human minesweeper.” Yet at the climactic moment when he finally stands before the “golden ball,” another side of him apparently emerges. The wish he utters concerns all of mankind and not just his own daughter, which was his original intention.  

Just as in *Kid*, an intimate connection is established between the hero and his surroundings. According to Beaumont, at one point in the novel Redrik even “seems suddenly to internalize [the Zone’s] sheer otherness,” so that all of a sudden “it is not the stalker that is in the Zone, but the Zone that is in the stalker.” Two passages which outwardly chart the development of the Zone could also be read as charting Redrik’s inward development. The first is a passionate speech Redrik gives in chapter one about the future, when he is approached with the proposal to emigrate:

Городишко наш – дыра. Всегда дырой был и сейчас дыра. Только сейчас, – говорю, – это дыра в будущее. Через эту дыру мы такое в ваш паршивый мир накачаем, что все переменится. Жизнь будет другая, правильная, у каждого будет все, что надо. Вот вам и дыра. Через эту дыру знания идут. А когда знание будет, мы и богатыми всех сделаем, и к звездам полетим, и куда хочешь доберемся. Вот такая у нас здесь дыра... (*Picnic*, 51.)

The second is taken from chapter two where five years have passed and Redrik is on his way to meet his employers at an expensive hotel:

Здесь пахло дорогим табаком, парижскими духами, сверкающей натуральной кожей туго набитых бумажников, дорогими дамочками по пятьсот монет за ночь, массивными золотыми портсигарами – всей этой дешевкой, всей этой гнусной плесенью, которая наросла на Зоне, пила от Зоны, жрала, хапала, жирела от Зоны, и на все ей было наплевать, и в особенности ей было наплевать на то, что будет после, когда она нажрется, нахапает влась, а все, что было в Зоне, окажется снаружи и осядет в мире. (*Picnic*, 99.)

145 Stephen Potts interprets Red’s wish for the good of all humankind, which abruptly ends the novel, as “the desperate cry of a basically good human being who has been ruined by the destructive and dehumanizing values of his society” (Potts, p. 80). Csicsery-Ronay, on the other hand, has another interpretation. According to him, Red is here “forced to think for the first time in his life about his place in the world and the way the world should be” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 21).

146 Beaumont, p. 41-42.

147 They can, however, also be interpreted as veiled references to Soviet-Russian history, or as mirrorings of the Marxist idealism of the early Strugatskys and their disillusionment when the bright future turned into a budding “soft” consumerism.
Here the hero’s inner development is suggested through his relationship to the Zone. Bela Kljueva, the editor of *Molodaja gvardija*, interpreted the novel as the story of the gradual progress of a “foreign hero” towards communist ideals. For Redrik, the money he can make because of the Zone never becomes a primary motivating force; such concerns are apparently always balanced by his taking care of others. Even the first, fatal expedition into the Zone was primarily his way of helping a friend. He also immediately assumes responsibility for his child, and is careful to make arrangements to provide for his family when he is sent to prison. Redrik’s speech also stresses positive connotations of even the most extreme version of heterotopia, which is the Zone.

**The “Other”**

If it is true, as Patrick Parrinder argues, that every attempt to imagine the unimaginable in itself always must be a problem, a plausible conclusion is that every attempt to actually represent it must be an even greater one. Writing about *Picnic*, Stanislaw Lem posits that the Strugatskys’ solution to this problem simply can be described as “preserving the mystery.” In the text, the extraterrestrial not only remains out of sight; it is implicitly constructed as incomprehensible to a degree that excludes all forms of representation. It might, however, be argued that this definition could in fact be extended to encompass the construction of difference in general. Time, space and characters appear as pairs of binary oppositions – before/after, Harmont/the Zone, humans/aliens – conspicuously lacking the other half. Time, for example, has apparently been divided into “before” and “after” by the fact of the Visitation, but “after” is only represented by “well-nigh microscopic bearings on

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148 See letter to Arkady Strugatsky in *Neizvestnye Strugackie*, p. 335.

149 “[T]he utterly alien would also be meaningless. To give meaning to something is also, inescapably, to ‘humanize’ it or bring it within the bounds of our anthropomorphic world view.” Patrick Parrinder, “The Alien Encounter: Or, Ms. Brown and Mrs. Le Guin,” *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 17 (Mar.1979), [www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues](http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues) (accessed June 8, 2014).

150 Lem, p. 317.
what is going on,”151 and “before” is not represented at all. Non-signification cannot be said to be typical of science fiction, in which the elaborate construction of different worlds is, on the contrary, a recurring feature. The fantastic on the other hand is, according to Jackson, centered on a void consisting of its unrepresented (in some cases even un-representable) object.

Csicsery-Ronay argues that the interpretations of the ending of the novel and that of the Visitors are wholly dependent upon each other.152 According to Lem, to characterize the Visitors meant to “describe a being which is definitely gifted with reason, but which, with equally categorical certainty, is not human.”153 The extent to which this is a problem is made evident by how they are alternately posited at extreme poles, either as virtually the “same” (young people on a picnic) or the completely “other” (Wells’ “invulnerable invaders”). One expression of this is how their artifacts are “commensurable in size with the human body,”154 but at the same time are not subjected to the same laws of physics.155 Even though these two images are apparently diametrically opposed, both could be characterized as easy solutions to a difficult problem.

The lengthiest description offered of the Visitors – the image of the picnic quoted earlier – could undoubtedly be said to confirm the view that “alien encounters merely reflect our desire to see our familiar selves mirrored in the cosmic mystery.”156 It could also perhaps be referred to as an expression of “the pseudoscience of xenology”, which is defined as “science fiction mixed with formal logic,” (Picnic, 151), and at one point dismissed by one of the characters as being unable to imagine anything beyond the human

151 Lem, p. 322.
152 Csicsery-Ronay, p. 27
153 Lem, p. 317.
154 Ibid. p. 325.
155 Lem also draws attention to the fact that the Visitation took place in a city and not in the wilderness, and he argues that the visitors must either have been indifferent or malevolent to the people on earth, contrary to Fredric Jameson’s view of the Visitation as nothing more than a “grim extraterrestrial accident.” (“Aliens,” Jameson argues, “are neither benevolent nor malevolent” rather “we are invisible to them, or at best indifferent.”) See Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions (London, Verso, 2005), p. 73.
The other extreme is recalled when Nunan, faced with the physical alterity of Monkey, Red’s daughter, comes to the conclusion that the Visita-tion actually must have been “an invasion.” His reaction practically confirms Mark Rose’s suggestion that “an alien encounter may lead to a metamorphosis of humanity.” Here it appears relevant to recall the way in which “[t]he transformed human is equivalent to the alien,” as well as Howell’s observation that young people in the Strugatskys’ later novels are represented as “part of another, alien reality.” Otherwise the novel could hardly be defined as an invasion narrative. Indeed, the idea is not elaborated upon further, which would mean that the only purpose of this comment seems precisely to recall the Wellsian “other” once again.

The interpretation of Monkey as an image of the Visitors could also be said to further complicate the reader’s understanding of them. While the “gadgets” imply a more advanced state compared to the human, she – with her thick fur and silence – clearly appears to imply a less advanced one. However, one way to reconcile this apparent paradox could be to place Monkey and the alien artifacts side by side. Positioned in this way, they would form a tableau of humanity faced with incredibly advanced technology, like “a monkey and a tin jar” – the novel’s other key image together with the picnic. This would also make the Visitors into exactly the “doubles of humanity” Csicsery-Ronay argues that they are. Yet an argument against this would be that it puts too much stress on only one side of the paradoxical description. There is just as much reason to see the Visitors as “the reverse of humanity.” One solution could perhaps be to see them as a “mirror image of humanity,” since this unites these two otherwise opposing views. (This would also make it yet another expression of the recurring mirror theme.)

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157 Csicsery-Ronay, apparently convinced by Lem’s argumentation about the scale of the alien artifacts, imagines the visitors as similar to human beings and comes to the conclusion that “[a]nthropocentric projection is […] the basis for making sense of the fiction” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 28).
158 Rose, p. 33.
159 Ibid., p. 188.
160 Howell, p. 141.
161 See Strugatsky, “Kommentarii k projektam.” Here it must be pointed out, however, that Boris Strugatsky uses the word obez’jana for the parable, while Red’s daughter is called Martyška.
162 According to him this explains their virtual invisibility.
Monkey’s silent, animal-like state would then be a reflection of the Visitors’ refusal to communicate. According to Csicsery-Ronay, the Visitors (like the extraterrestrials in Kid) “have actually refused contact,” and the Strugatskys suggest (through Nunan) that perception and understanding fail for all mankind.

The subtheme of relations between generations continues in Picnic. Monkey is an example of how daughters here are invested with a special significance sons apparently lack. The privileged relationship generally appears to be that between fathers and daughters (the only example of father-son interaction is Red and his dead father). This manifests itself as vulnerability on the side of the daughters and responsibility on that of the fathers: Redrik, Barbridž and Tender all have daughters who suffer from different physical conditions ultimately traceable back to their fathers’ contacts with the Zone. Here a discussion about formative influences also constitutes one of the novel’s subtexts; but while the focus was on upbringing in Kid, here apparently it is on heredity. The mutations in the stalkers’ children undoubtedly recalls the Gothic theme of how the sins of the fathers come back to haunt their descendants. However, fate is not represented as an absolute: the old generation does not necessarily repeat itself in the new. The chain can be broken; individuals are not condemned to repeat their personal history. Although he is an orphan himself, Redrik nevertheless immediately accepts responsibility for his own child. In his childhood memories his father figures as a menacing presence at home, but when they are reunited after the latter

163 She provides the only actual example in the novel of the physical effects on the stalkers’ children of their fathers’ contacts with the Zone.

164 Csicsery-Ronay’s conclusion is that the meeting here between “same” and “other” never took place because “[n]either side is interested in the other” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 28).

165 In his opinion, not even a sight such as that of Red’s daughter together with his dead father is enough to make it apparent what a singular event in history the Visitation was. (Picnic, 125.)


167 Red’s colleague Tender goes into the Zone in order to help his sick daughter, just as Red himself does in the last chapter (Picnic, 22).

168 This is evident in the chapter headings that not only state Red’s age, but also his marital status.
has returned from the Zone as one of its “living dead,” Redrik – despite the unnaturalness of the situation – projects feelings of warmth and love towards his father.

Along with children, Howell also includes women among the Strugatskys’ “aliens of our time.” According to Elisabeth Bronfen, femininity has traditionally been accorded “a position of Otherness” in relation to a self defined as masculine. In this position, “Woman” can “stand for a complete negation of the ruling norm.”

In Picnic the category of the female figures more prominently than it does in the other two novels – including not only daughters, but also mothers and wives. All three categories are united in Barbridž’s daughter Dina (with whom Red has had a sporadic relationship). The notion of the beautiful woman as something artificial again resurfaces here: Red refers to Dina as “a doll.” One interesting detail is that he also refers to her by using the word pustyška – the same word he uses about the alien artifact he examines in the beginning of the novel (Picnic, 184). The choice to use the same word for both the artifact and the alleged doll-woman (woman as artifact) may be a coincidence, but since both serve as objects of the hero’s desire in different ways, it is tempting to read more into it than that. The word definitely stresses her previously established connection to the Zone.

Dina has no children, a fact which apparently contributes to Red’s opinion of her as “empty” and artificial. Paradoxically, it appears to be precisely this quality which makes her – the childless woman – remind him of his own mother. In his childhood memories the mother served as a figure of falsehood and disappointment: his only memory of her is how she wore a cardigan with buttons that looked like candy. Whenever he put one of these buttons in his mouth he was always terribly disappointed since it was never sweet and rewarding as he had expected. The figure of the mother appears to have been chosen as a signifier of a lack of authenticity. The Zone is not only deceitful and amorphous (qualities traditionally attributed to the feminine), it is also a mother, a zona-matuška who both gives life (in the form of riches) and takes it away.

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169 Bronfen, p. 181.
170 The fact that the word zona is a feminine noun can perhaps also be considered in this context.
As an answer to a question about why only men went into the Zone, Boris Strugatsky stated that it “is no place for women.” While this could be taken simply to mean that it is too dangerous for women, it also sounds suspiciously like the assertions about the relationship between the Zone and Russia discussed earlier. The Zone may not be a place for women, but there definitely appears to be a connection between “Woman” and the Zone. After all, both are the “other” of something positioned as the “same.” However, the novel also offers an example of a positive mother figure in the form of Guta, Red’s wife. The only longer scene where she appears demonstrates not only how she is capable of giving him the sustenance he needs, but also how she stands for authenticity to the extent that she is able to redeem the falsehoods of his life.171

Conclusion: Closing the Door to Utopia

The fundamental question which this analysis of the three novels sets out to answer is how the “change in Zeitgeist” that occurred in Soviet society between the 1960s and the 1970s is expressed. Alleged stories of contact with extraterrestrials, the core theme of the three novels, seem to be more about the inability to profit from a chance meeting with the unknown. In Puzzle, the new and unknown are systematically rejected in an attempt to restore a previous state of normality. Nevertheless, when the story ends in silence and sadness everything is forever changed. Kid appears to offer a more upbeat ending. However, even though contact with the unknown does not end in disaster this time, it is by no means an unambiguously happy ending. The “civilization of one” which the Kid represents will exist only as long as he does. Nothing is said about the future. In Picnic, everything is definitely changed forever and there is no way back. Here what appears to be another hopeful ending – a wish for the “happiness of all” – is also highly ambiguous. Despite repeated promises of gigantic progress, the general direction appears to go backwards rather than forwards.

The “unexpected encounters” unavoidably express a certain pessimism, because they are ultimately all stories of failure: a derailed murder

171 By frying the fish he bought earlier as a prop for the expedition into the Zone, she transforms what initially was a lie (the fishing trip) into something true (a meal for him).
investigation, an aborted attempt at colonization, an averted meeting with a superior civilization. Failure here is without exception caused by human lack of insight and maturity needed to deal with the new and unexpected. The meeting with the unknown only results in a trauma. One way of characterizing the novels could be as “anti-narratives,” since they are mainly about what did not happen, which in itself perhaps could be interpreted as an expression of an impulse towards the irrational. What is obvious here is that the irrational is positioned so as to be where truth and hope are found. The probable solution to the murder is not the correct one; the child has access to things that adults are excluded from; and “happiness for all” is only to be found outside of the boundaries of the normal world.
As noted in the introduction, an analysis of the screen adaptations of two of the novels is needed for the discussion to be complete. The Strugatskys’ work in film has not yet received as much academic attention as their fiction, which in itself could be enough to motivate such a study. However, the main reason why the films are important to include here is that if the novels can be said to have appeared at a threshold, the screen adaptations take us even farther into the new “landscape” that opened up at the beginning of the 1970s. The purpose of reading the film texts together with the literary texts in this way is to demonstrate how certain facets of the shift in cultural paradigms become clearly discernible, for example how other concerns later came to take precedence over the hopes of the 1960s, which still are present in the source texts.

The Script and the Directors

The Strugatskys began experimenting with writing for film on their own initiative. This offered an opportunity for them to expand creatively while making money at the same time. Yet none of their scripts based on their own work came into production until around the latter half of the 1970s, when Grigori Kromanov started working on Dead Mountaineer’s Hotel, and Andrei Tarkovsky began Stalker. Even though the Strugatskys themselves obviously were not averse to experimenting quite radically with their own works, what followed meant that they experienced for the first time how a director’s adaptation of a work could certainly “be a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another’s story, and filtering it […] through [his] own sensibility, interests, and talents.”

1 Hutcheon, p. 18.
The process that resulted in a film based on one of their scripts frequently ended up including several rewritings. The texts which the Strugatskys produced as part of the production process often constituted quite considerable departures from their literary originals – differences which many times were not caused by the demands of the new medium as much as by the direct demands of the clients. The attitude adopted by the director, both towards his own practice and the source text, constituted perhaps the most important single outside influence on the screenwriting process.

Thomas Leitch suggests that there are two kinds of directors with diametrically opposed approaches to the source text: the metteurs-en-scène who “merely furnish and photograph […] the literary worlds of their screenplays,” and the auteurs “who create their own cinematic worlds.” He also introduces the following categories for different relationships between source text and adaptation: transposition (“in which a novel is given directly on the screen, with a minimum of apparent interference”), commentary (“in which an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect”), and analogy (“a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art”).

Kromanov approached the source text like a metteur-en-scène and explicitly demanded a script that followed the novel as closely as possible, in other words he wanted a transposition. Tarkovsky, on the other hand, took the approach of an auteur. His firm belief was that “[a] valid film can be realised [sic!] even when the original conception has been broken and destroyed […] and a new idea, a new organism, has emerged from the ruins.” Unlike Kromanov, he wanted something distinctly different from the literary original – not even a commentary, but rather an analogy. The film’s title, Stalker, can be read as an expression of this, as well as an indicator of the director’s focus of attention. However, he could not communicate to the screenwriters exactly what it was he wanted, just what he did not want.

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2 Leitch has borrowed the terminology of François Truffaut. See Thomas Leitch, Film Adaptations and Its Discontents: From Gone With the Wind to the Passion of the Christ (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 236.
3 Ibid. p. 93. Leitch’s three categories originally come from Geoffrey Wagner’s The Novel and the Cinema (Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975).
Constructing Space

The division of narrative space in the source texts is translated into various divisions of cinematic space in the films. One interesting thing to notice here is how this division appears to be more pronounced at the beginning and the end of the adaptation process than it is in the intermediary texts, the screenplays.

While both films have a relationship to Soviet Estonia, it is only in Stalker that any use is made of the Estonian landscape. In Hotel, all exteriors were shot in Kazakhstan (at the ski resort Shymbulak in the Trans-Ili Alatau Mountains near Almaty), which contributes to establishing cinematic space as “elsewhere,” somewhere other than Estonia. Coincidentally, Central Asia was also originally the intended location for Stalker. However, an earthquake resulted in the otherworldly desert of Tadzhikistan being exchanged for the kind of wetlands the director had already used to great effect in Ivan’s Childhood (Ivanovo detstvo, 1962). According to Geoff Dyer, the landscape in the film is used with very great care in order to create an “other place” through subtle means. It is not Estonia Tarkovsky reveals however, but rather “the unchanging, eternal, natural world” unmarked by historical time and geographical location.

The landscapes presented in these two films are undoubtedly very different. Yet both could be said to be very much characterized by liminality, as well as by being imbued with religious connotations. Where the sky and the earth meet is one of the traditional locations for encounters with the divine. Another such traditional landscape for receiving divine messages is the wilderness (even though allusions to communication between heaven and earth seem to be more easily suggested by mountains, rather than by a flat landscape where all movement by necessity must take place on a horizontal axis instead of a vertical one).

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5 Hotel is generally considered an Estonian film. It was produced by an Estonian film studio and directed by an Estonian (albeit of Russian origin), with a partly Estonian cast and crew. In later years, Estonian film critics have included it among the ten best Estonian films of all times.

6 The Zone is “another world that is no more than this world perceived with unprecedented attentiveness.” Dyer goes so far as to argue that Tarkovsky “brought this landscape – this way of seeing – into existence.” See Geoff Dyer, Zona (New York, Pantheon Books, 2012), p. 58.
Adapting Characters

The transfer of characters in the adaptation of a literary text into a visual medium always involves special challenges. Some things are lost. For example the spectator cannot directly take part in the characters’ inner life in the same way that the reader can. New dimensions can, on the other hand, also be added through means that are uniquely available to the new medium, such as acting and the casting of actors. Either the Strugatskys or the director(s) added new layers of meaning to the representation of the characters in both films by including certain intertextual references, or “shadow texts,” in the written text of the scripts and the visual text of the films. In some cases the degree of change some characters underwent during the adaptation process motivate the question “if the ideas of a character are changed in the process of adaptation, are we still dealing with the same character?”

Dead Mountaineer’s Hotel

Transposition or Commentary? The Screenwriting Process

A script based on Puzzle appears to have existed long before any director had shown any interest in adapting a work by the Strugatskys. Allegedly Boris Strugatsky wrote it in 1969 with the help of the director Alexei German shortly after work on the novel was completed, and he sold it to Lenfilm.8 (Archival documents mention a contract concerning the reworking of a script based on Puzzle.)9 The screenplay was offered to Kromanov, who

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8 According to Skalandis, the novel was completed in April 1969, and the screenplay in September the same year. German’s part largely consisted in giving encouragement and some advice on film writing. One reason for writing the script was as a response to unexpected difficulties in getting the novel published. Another was to experiment with a film adaptation of a newly written work (Skalandis, p. 453). In his commentaries, Boris Strugatsky corroborates that this were motivating factors behind the decision to write an adaptation.
9 This was signed on February 16, 1976, between Tallinnfilm and Issmas Fribergas and Jakovas Kapovicius (Estonian State Archive, ERA.R-1707.1.1767.) It is not clear from the records whether the script mentioned in the contract is the same as the already existing script. Since Tallinnfilm was a subsidiary of Lenfilm at this time, it could be possible that someone had noticed that the studio owned this piece of property. It does however seem that the existent Strugatsky-German script was not considered as the index card only lists two versions of the script. This would mean that the Strugatskys wrote three screenplays in all. It must also be
rejected it, however, and requested instead that Arkady Strugatsky write a new one. In 1976 the Strugatskys signed a contract with Tallinnfilm for a screen adaptation of Puzzle, for which they subsequently submitted two screenplays. In all, the process of writing the script for Hotel took a little over seven months.\footnote{On October 8, 1976 the contract between Tallinnfilm and the Strugatsky brothers was signed and on May 31, 1977 the studio received the final version of the script (Estonian State Archives, ERA.R-1707.1.1767).}

The first script the Strugatskys wrote while under contract with Tallinnfilm (submitted January 17, 1977), entitled “The Murder at the Alek Snever Hotel” [“\textit{Ubijstvo v otele U Aleka Snevara}”]\footnote{In December 1976, the Strugatskys wrote to Tallinnfilm requesting an extension of the writing period until February 1, 1977 (the time stipulated in the contract was January 5, 1977). In the letter, they claimed to no longer be satisfied with the first draft they has completed and therefore needed more time in order to produce a better version. The request was granted. On January 17, 1977 a manuscript was delivered to the studio. Nothing in the correspondence between the Strugatskys and the studio explains whether this was the version the brothers had already completed in December 1976, or the version they demanded the extension for in order to re-write. The fact that the script is dated January 5, 1977, the deadline stipulated in the contract, does little to lessen the confusion.} must be considered something which Leitch would call a commentary. The script did not correspond to the demands made by the director, which resulted in his writing a letter to them emphasizing the importance of having events follow in the same sequence as in the source text, and that contractions in the plot must not affect the number of characters. Representatives of the studio were also not satisfied with the dialogue, which was considered inconsistent with the desired aesthetic effect of Western refinement.\footnote{The board of Tallinnfilm expressed dissatisfation with the dialogue in their assessment of the manuscript, as did those directly responsible for the project such as Enn Rekkor. Here it must be noted that the Strugatskys regularly received similar complaints about the dialogue from their publishers too.} Arkady Strugatsky reacted by declining to have anything further to do with the project. Boris Strugatsky took over and another script, entitled “A Murder Case: Hotel The Dead Mountaineer” [“\textit{Delo ob ubijstve: Otel’ U pogibšego al’pinista}”] (submitted May 31, 1977) which was precisely the kind of transposition of the source text that the clients demanded, was subsequently accepted by the studio.\footnote{The exact contributions of each brother are not clearly discernible from archival material. All correspondence from the Strugatskys is signed by both brothers, and correspondence from noted that the version of the script published in anthologies of the Strugatskys’ screenplays is not one of the two preserved at the Estonian State Archive.}
In one respect Kromanov may have realized his explicit ambition to transfer the novel to film as faithfully as possible even better than he realized. Hotel could certainly be said to be one of the films where “the film-maker has picked up visual suggestions from the novel in his representations of key verbal signs.”

According to Boris Strugatsky, one of the sources of inspiration for Puzzle was the author Dashiell Hammett, who provided source material for classical film noir pictures such as The Maltese Falcon (Huston, 1941). In spite of this alleged influence, the Strugatskys wrote a Gothic murder mystery rather than a hard-boiled detective story. However, Kromanov produced a work that is quite possible to read as an example of film noir. While often assumed to be “an indigenous American form… a wholly American film style,” film noir has in fact “from its beginning […] been an international phenomenon.”

Here it is of particular interest to note that this allegedly seminal influence is not very obvious in the source text or the screenplays, even though the bleak conclusion of the plot could be said to correspond well with the genre conventions of film noir.

In the translation into a visual medium, the Gothic features of the source text suddenly appear considerably more reconcilable with the detective genre. For example, while the use of voice-over as a narrative device also undoubtedly corresponds to the genre conventions of the noir, it is predominantly in the visual language, especially in the cinematography, that the film comes closest to traditional noir esthetics. The cinematographer Jüri Sillart has consistently employed a low-key lighting scheme that creates stark contrasts between light and darkness and allows for an elaborate use of shadows, especially in the frequent close-ups of wholly or partially obscured faces.

the studio, such as the reply to the letter where the Strugatskys demand an extension, went out in two copies, addressed to each brother.

Characteristic noir techniques have been used to make the inside of the hotel appear confined to the point of becoming downright claustrophobic. In the establishing shots this space appears as a flat, black surface broken only by geometrical shapes in bright chemical colors.\textsuperscript{17} The relatively few outdoor scenes take place in such close proximity to the hotel building and the menacing mountains that they reinforce the claustrophobic feeling. Shadows are also used with great effect: long shadows of trees on the snow in outdoor scenes and of venetian blinds (a salient feature of classic noir) in interior scenes.

**The Construction of Space**

**The Natural Landscape**

Most of the action in *Hotel* takes place indoors, nevertheless the landscape appears invested with particular importance. The source text and the script begin with descriptions of exteriors. However, while the focus in the source text is on the hotel, in the script it is predominantly on the surrounding landscape:

**Puzzle:**

Отель был двухэтажный, желтый с зеленым, над крыльцом красовалась траурная вывеска: «У ПОГИБШЕГО АЛЬПИНИСТА». Высокие ноздреватые сугробы по сторонам крыльца были утыканы разноцветными лыжами – я насчитал семь штук, одна была с ботинком. (*Puzzle*, 265.)

**“A Murder Case: Hotel The Dead Mountaineer”:**

По обеим сторонам дороги тянулась нетронутая снежная долина, стиснутая отвесными скалами,- сизые, жуткого вида иззубренные гребни казались нарисованными на сочно-синей поверхности неба. Впереди уже был виден отель – приземистое двухэтажное здание с плоской крышей. Уютный дымок белой свечкой упирался в небо. (*Screenplays*, 203.18)

\textsuperscript{17} It is possible that the low-key lighting scheme should be understood as a visual translation of the novel’s “enigmatic atmosphere,” a quality Kromanov perceived in the text and considered important to preserve in the screen adaptation. (Letter from Kromanov and Ilmar Taska to the Strugatskys, dated April 16, 1977. Estonian National Archive, ERA.R-1707.1.1763) On several occasions, Kromanov’s explicitly stated ambition to remain faithful to the source text resulted in quite crude literalizations, for example when the concept of “zombies” is illustrated with a close-up of African masks, and “robots” with Glebski winding up a little toy robot.
Here the only evidence of a human presence in the landscape is the hotel. None of the descriptions reveal where this landscape is supposed to be located. In the source text, the name of the hotel at least gives a suggestion of a general direction. Initially, the corresponding landscape of the visual text is completely devoid of any signs of human life. In the film’s opening sequence diegetic sound is completely absent, there is only the composer Sven Grünberg’s slightly jarring musical score which contributes to the timeless and otherworldly ambience in a scenery that could be described as belonging wholly to the Gothic sublime. 19 The camera pans over snow-covered mountains “filmed in such a way that they assume the status of dramatis personae.” 20 The director’s script specifies that the mountains should be filmed to “look like faces.” 21 While this idea does not seem to have been followed up, the mountains are repeatedly filmed in ways intended to make them look even more impressive. For example, the low-angle of the establishing shots of the hotel make the mountains tower menacingly over the small buildings at their base. In Russian films, images of foreboding mountains can be intended to evoke associations to the “prisoner of the Caucasus” theme of the Russian classics. Yet even though the hero becomes a prisoner of sorts here, the majestic mountains merely signal a different kind of “other place.”

**The West**

It is of interest to note how the focus on the natural landscape in the script makes the description appear less precise in terms of possible location than in the source text. In the film, “visual, aural and verbal signifiers” 22 are

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18 All page references to the film scripts are taken from *Miry brat’ev Strugackich: Kinoscenarii* (Doneck, Stalker, 2005). In the text the book will, however, be referred to as Screenplays.

19 Throughout the film, the music – with the exception of a few mostly non-diegetic scenes – is used to enhance dramatic moments, especially towards the latter half of the film. The score, written especially for the film, was specifically mentioned when the film was awarded the Silver Asteroid at the Trieste Science Fiction Film Festival in 1980.


21 Director’s script, scene 3 (Estonian National Archive, ERA.R-1707.1.1766).

subsequently added in order to create a decidedly “international” setting, while the natural landscape is unmarked. One of the first such details is the news, in what is not immediately discernible French, on the radio in the car driving up the road through the mountains.

However, since the sound is definitely relegated to the background it is easy to overlook, and as a rule these location markers tend to be visual and verbal rather than aural. For example selected verbal clues are placed around the hotel in order to transform it from a Soviet ski resort into something more closely resembling the source text’s “Austria, Switzerland or Andorra.” Its name is given in French (Hôtel L’alpiniste mort), as are the directions to the rooms, and the anonymous letter someone slips Glebski at the dance. Either a mistake or a deliberate misspelling has been made in the sign on the roof that spells out the hotel’s name, betraying the reality behind the illusion. In the word “mort” a “P” (or a Cyrillic R?) has been used instead of an “R.” The Russian pronunciation of the word is thus the same but the letter nevertheless changes the impression of the word completely. Foreign words are seldom used in the script as a way to evoke the West. (Later we will see how the opposite is true in *Stalker.*)

Yet these kinds of visual/verbal clues play a minor role in the construction of the “West.” Considerably more important are special objects, clothing, and interior design. One such detail is Glebski’s car; in the film he drives a Toyota Corona.\(^{23}\) The significance of seemingly minor details is especially evident in a scene where a bottle of Cinzano and a packet of Marlboro cigarettes briefly figure (Fig. 1). In a Hollywood production this undoubtedly would have indicated product placement; here these examples of consumer goods are quite unimportant in themselves and only serve the purpose of evoking a vision of a generalized West.\(^{24}\) Items of genuine Western origin are, however, scarce in the film; as a rule suitable objects of domestic origin have been used instead. Contemporary furniture and decorations of Soviet

\(^{24}\) In a short scene Brjun is seen drinking and smoking after the death of Olaf. The image resembles contemporary Soviet cartoon representations of young people. See for example the image from *Krokodil* reproduced in Yurchak, p. 201.
design
design are employed to create a look where “Western” apparently is closely identified with “modern.” Costumes, especially evening wear, further enhance this “foreign” (i.e., non-Soviet) look (Fig. 2). Yet the clothes are the work of Soviet designers: the Estonian Ell-Maaja Randküla, and the Russian Vjačeslav “Slava” Zajcev, also known as the “Red Dior.”

Fig 1. Consumer goods evoking a vision of a generalized “West.”

Fig 2. Western glamour: Simone (Lembit Peterson) in the billiard room

25 Tõnu Virve, the art director of the film, intentionally included references to a number of contemporary Estonian artists in his set designs. See Jaan Ruus, “Tsirkus alati järb” in Eesti Ekspress: Areen, June 18, 2009.
Spatial Binary Oppositions:

Above/Below

While narrative space in the screenplays is not noticeably divided, cinematic space has clearly been separated into several pairs of binary oppositions. These are subsequently demonstrated as absolutely essential for the maintenance of order in the universe of the film. Here it will gradually become obvious that displacements between opposite spatial categories are inevitably followed by the intrusion of death.

The first of these important pairs is above/below. The film begins with a steady movement upwards as the camera follows Glebski’s car as he drives towards the hotel. For the rest of the film decisive moments tend to be connected to movements along a vertical axis, although in the opposite direction as a rule, from heaven to earth. The theme of falling down remains as a subtext even though the mountain climber has been reduced to a portrait in the hotel lobby. Glebski watches bodies fall from a high building on TV, and dreams afterwards about falling from a mountain.26

The spectator’s gaze is repeatedly directed upwards. Already in the opening sequence – before the narrative proper has even begun – the camera captures circular light reflexes floating in the air above the mountains. Since their shapes are later multiplied in the rows of lamps around the hotel, they are obviously loaded with meaning. When Glebski arrives at the hotel, two figures (Olaf and Brjun) are shown flying above the building. Later the women’s eveningwear, adorned with feathers, functions as another subtle reminder of the theme of flying by the association to birds.

The sky alludes to the direction from which the visitors came. In connection with the visitors, flying must primarily be understood as flight in space. In Soviet culture of the 1920s this was seen as the ultimate “fantasy of liberation,” although as part of a “discourse of fantasy, speculation and often mysticism,” rather than of “science and technology.” In the changing cultural climate that followed after the 1920s, interest was mainly relocated from

26 In the director’s script, the man who appears in Glebski’s dream, laughing as he goes over the cliff, is explicitly identified as the lost mountain climber (director’s script, scene 287). The scene is included in the film, but the laughing figure is not immediately recognizable as the man from the portrait.
space flight to aviation with its “mixture of modernity and liberation.” While space flight was perceived as connected to religion through the occult tendencies inherent in technological utopianism, aviation was appropriated by the anti-religious campaigns in early Soviet culture under the slogan “assault on heaven.” The conquest of the sky would once and for all prove that there is no god.

In the film’s climactic scene, aviation is incorporated into the already established theme of death from above with the appearance of a mysterious helicopter. Is what we see here a definite negation of the possibility of “liberation from earth” (space flight defeated by aviation), or the horror inherent in the sublime (the “terror” of the Gothic)? As the helicopter vanishes, Snevar cries out that he “hopes God will forgive them,” while the dog begins to howl. Together this gives the scene a disturbing religious-mythic ambience, which makes what immediately follows appear to be something akin to divine retribution.

Originally both authors and director imagined a dramatic ending to the film. The reason for this could be a perceived need for a spectacular and emotionally engaging ending, or perhaps the alleged tendency of film noir to “respond to modernity in its catastrophic or irrational registers.” The Strugatskys suggested that the hotel ought to be completely destroyed, while Kromanov was satisfied with having the bodies of the visitors explode after death. Even this was far beyond what both the budget and the available special effects know-how could provide. This is clearly demonstrated at the end of the film, where the supposed extraterrestrials glide away over the

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30 Fay and Nieland, p. xiii.
31 In “The Murder at the Alek Snevar Hotel” the final scene has become almost grotesque in its apocalyptic excess. The hotel is completely destroyed and everyone except Glebski is killed. “Громадная яма на том месте, где стоял отель, а вокруг – на гектары раскинулись неопрятные языки копоти.” (Neizvestnye Strugackie, p. 196). “Тут происходит нечто невероятное. Тела пришельцев начинают взрываться. Вместе со взрывом то одного, то другого отлетает рука, нога, разрывается живот.” (Director’s script, scene 470.)
snow in a scene which “exemplifies the way in which sf films are often as much about their own real-world technological resources as they are about the fictional technologies that exist within the world of the film’s narrative.”

The ending, as it finally turned out, still constitutes an important departure from the source text, since the film does not end with an image of bodies scattered in the snow or a quiet return to boredom, but rather with a vision of the ultimate death from above: total annihilation in the form of an avalanche. All borders and visual oppositions in the mise-en-scène are finally obliterated here and exchanged for a uniform white.

*Inside/Outside or Light/Darkness*

Another important spatial binary opposition is that of outside/inside or light/darkness. It is at least equally, if not more important than the previous one since the film could be said to constitute a reversal of Lotman’s “elementary sequence of events in myth” which he describes as “entry into closed space – emergence from it.”

It constitutes a journey beginning in the bright daylight of an open space – the mountains – and ending in a confined dark space where Glebski makes his final plea addressed directly to the viewer. The primary narrative is framed by these two visually opposing sequences which both fall outside of its space-time.

This partition of screen space, at times visible within the same frame, is largely achieved through the use of light – natural light in outdoor scenes and sparse lighting in indoor scenes. The division between the two spheres initially appears solid: while it is bright daylight outside when Glebski arrives, it seems nevertheless to be midnight inside the hotel. When he enters the building, the contrast between the stark white exterior and the dark interiors is especially striking. Here the hero evidently finds himself before a Bachtinian “chronotope of crisis and break in life.” He leaves the world of light and reason behind in order to enter the underworld. The hotel becomes a mythological enclosed space. Doors, however, do not appear to be

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generally invested with any kind of symbolical meaning the way we will see later in *Stalker*.

It soon becomes evident how unstable the border separating light and darkness really is. The inside is full of reminders of the outside. Not only are the mountains visible everywhere through all of the windows, but the table in the dining room is set as a replica of the landscape outside: the snow-white tablecloth, napkins folded into miniature mountains, and light reflexes on the crystal resembling the ones seen earlier in the air above the mountains in the opening sequence. Glebski’s very presence at the hotel is in itself an example of a transgression of a border between separate spheres (the hotel and the world outside it), even though these are not visually juxtaposed.

When night falls outside, the border between darkness and light finally collapses by itself, heralding the beginning of truly mysterious events. In his pocket Glebski discovers a note warning him that Chinkus, one of the guests, is a “dangerous criminal and member of a terrorist organization.” When Glebski goes up to the roof to confront him, he discovers that what he thought was the man himself is in fact only a fur coat stuffed with snow. This certainly does not contradict the idea that visual impressions here can indeed be highly deceptive (though not in the way indicated by the note). Chinkus himself, when he is finally found, offers further confirmation of a possibly dangerous instability concerning personal identities by repeating an incomprehensible statement about having seen “himself.”

Soon two deaths follow, Olaf and Mrs. Mozes, further proving the danger of weakened borders between opposite spheres. Both are subsequently resurrected – another breach of borders or indication of the deceptiveness of impressions – though only to die again when the mysterious helicopter opens fire. The arrival of the helicopter is anticipated by another blurring of the border between inside and outside. The doors and windows of the hotel are suddenly thrown wide open, allowing snow and wind to freely blow in.
Adapting the Characters

A Less Ambiguous Hero

Even if Kromanov’s attitude towards the source material was diametrically opposed to what we find in Tarkovsky, one thing the two directors shared was a certain focus on the hero. Kromanov explicitly demanded the perspective of the source text to be preserved in the adaptation: “As in the novel, the narrative should be in the first person, through subjective assessments and observations, in some cases, through the use of so called inner monologue.” Consequently, Glebski is placed at the center of the film. Not only is he present in virtually every scene, the narrative is also framed and directed by his sporadically recurring voice-over, whereby the entire primary narrative is established as an extended flashback. The only exception is the scene which ends the film, where he looks straight into the camera and addresses the viewer directly. The only scenes where he is not actually present are illustrations of events that other characters recount for him during the investigation of the “murder,” which means that they are also part of his mental universe.

Kromanov saw the Glebski character as a “completely honest and reliable,” as well as a “thoroughly experienced and in his way decent” official who, simply because he thinks “in the way common to most law-abiding and conformist people,” accidentally becomes a criminal in a moral sense. The representatives of the studio voiced a similar interpretation in more ideologically charged language. They attributed Glebski’s “misfortune” to the fact that he lived in a “capitalist society:” “true to the logic and laws of capitalist society, with its stereotypical values and ways of thinking, Inspector Glebski is unable to find a way out of the unprecedented situation and actually

34 Letter from Kromanov and Taska to the Strugatskys. In “Murder at Alek Snevar Hotel” the Strugatskys refer to Glebski as “the hero of the film.” (See Neizvestnye Strugackie, p. 128.)
35 Letter from Kromanov and Taska to the Strugatskys.
37 Letter from Kromanov and Taska to the Strugatskys.
commits a serious, moral crime.” This is posited as a critical view of the “serious social and ethical problems of bourgeois society.”

Kromanov also interpreted Glebski as harboring an “unacknowledged wish” to free himself from his surroundings in order to become “brave and independent” once again. Since he cannot act upon this wish, he suffers a defeat when faced with a situation where precisely these qualities would have been needed. As was demonstrated earlier, the source text does indeed allow for this interpretation of the character; nevertheless the theme is not particularly well developed in the film.

Changes in Glebski’s inner states of mind appear to be projected outwardly by his clothes: upon arriving at the hotel he takes off his leather coat that signals komissar, takes a shower and reappears wearing a black shirt and trousers. At the outset of the murder investigation, he exchanges this outfit for a considerably more conservative looking jacket and tie, which he keeps on until the end of the film.

In the director’s script, the scene from the novel, where Glebski experiments with different facial expressions in front of the mirror, is still included. In the film it has been reduced to a short sequence where his image simply is reflected in a wall of mirrors — only one of several such instances in the film where characters are similarly reflected (the mise-en-scène’s ubiquitous mirrors are another feature linking Hotel to film noir). Here a seemingly small shift in focus changes the perspective and direction in subtle but significant ways. The viewer now studies the image of Glebski in the mirror, while Glebski himself does not seem to consider his own reflection important. This fits the film’s depiction of Glebski, who does not aspire to be anything other than a police officer.

A “shadow text” unique to the film is introduced through Glebski. The actor, the Latvian Uldis Pūcītis, appears to have modeled his interpretation of Glebski on a particular Soviet stereotype: the investigator who wants to disclose a spy (well known to the audience from a particular subgenre of thrillers). This is evident in the way Glebski talks, acts and generally interacts with

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39 This opinion is expressed both in a letter from Rekkor and Taska, dated February 16, 1978, and in the studio’s assessment of the director’s script, also dated February 16, 1978 (Estonian National Archive, ERA.R-1707.1.1763).
40 Director’s script, scenes 38 and 39.
the other characters. This allusion to more specific Soviet motives is interesting, not the least because of how it counteracts the film’s otherwise carefully constructed “West.” It also counteracts the ambition to attribute the hero’s ultimate failure to the fact that he is a “product of the capitalist world.” Glebski’s inability to correctly assess what kind of “aliens” he is confronted with – to him visitors from outer space [prišel’cy] are indistinguishable from foreigners [inostrancy] – and his conclusion that they must be spies are easy to associate with certain aspects of Soviet mentality.

Other Characters

The association between foreigners and extraterrestrials is also somewhat complicated by the film’s pan-Baltic cast, comprised of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian actors. Pūcītis for example was habitually cast as a foreigner (often German). Perhaps it is also partly in order to lead the spectator away from the inevitable realization of the hero’s own foreignness that he is provided with a dark mirror image in the form of Luarvik. While Glebski arrives in plain daylight and can account for who he is and why he has come, Luarvik comes at night and is unable to explain anything satisfactorily. They are also contrasted in their appearance: while Glebski is forceful, Luarvik is fey. Overall, the primary function of the other characters appears to be to enhance Glebski’s position as “the hero of the film” through favorable contrast by making him appear stronger and considerably more decisive than he is in the source text. Here Mr. Mozes (Karlis Sebris) and Snevar (Jüri Järvet) are old men (the role of Snevar has also been severely reduced), Olaf (Tiit Härm) and Luarvik (Sulev Luik) are both slightly effeminate, and Simone (Lembit Peterson) appears somewhat ridiculous most of the time. Only towards the end is he allowed to appear with some dignity. Even the possible heroic connotations of the dead mountain climber have been removed. The image that

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41 Pūcītis had also played a police investigator in two films made at the Riga Film Studio: The Light at the End of the Tunnel (Gaisma tunela gala, 1974) and The Keys to Paradise (Paradīzes atslēgas, 1975). Both films were directed by Aloīzs Brenčs.
represents him resembles a Russian intellectual as he is portrayed in the films of Leonid Gajdaj rather than a traditional hero (Fig. 3).  

The studio’s dissatisfaction with “The Murder at the Alek Snevar Hotel” evidently had much to do with representation of the characters in the script. They did not approve of how the rolls had been shuffled around and recombined. In the adaptation the Strugatskys apparently experimented to see which characters were absolutely necessary and which were not. Glebski, Chinkus, Simone, Brjun, Olaf and Mr. Mozes reappeared in all versions of the screenplay, while Alek Snevar, Kajsa, Mrs. Mozes, Luarvik, dju Barnstokr, the dog, and the dead mountaineer did not. The decisive factor here evidently was not whether a character was marginal or not: Alek Snevar serves a major function in the novel, and yet was still not considered absolutely necessary. However, these expendable characters were not always omitted altogether – they could, for example, be fused together with those who were left in the script.  

The studio representatives also had objections to the psychological characterizations of the characters, which they found inferior to those of the source text. Yet strangely enough, the correspondence never once touches upon what undoubtedly must have been considered the most radical reinvention of a character: the hotel proprietor is now a woman. A new, female character, Kajsa Snevar, has replaced Alek Snevar. Since the director explicitly demanded a script that followed the novel as closely as possible in regard to the representation of the characters, it is hard to believe that he would have approved of such a major alteration. Among other things, the sex change deeply affects the interaction between the characters Glebski and Snevar: where there is camaraderie and mutual respect in the source text, in

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42 The portrait has a certain resemblance to a character played by the actor Aleksandr Dem’janenko in the films Operation Y and Shurik’s Other Adventures (Operacija “Y” i drugie priključenija Šurika, 1965) and Kidnapping, Caucasian Style (Kavkazskaja plennica, 1967).
43 For example, Mr. Mozes is enhanced with the traits of Luarvik in “The Murder at the Alek Snevar Hotel” and those of dju Barnstokr in “A Murder Case: Hotel the Dead Mountaineer.”
44 Assessment by the board of Tallinnfilm, dated February 15, 1977. (Estonian National Archives ERA.R-1707.1.1763.)
45 This character appears to be a combination of several omitted characters from the source text: Alek Snevar and the maid Kajsa, with some of the allure of Mrs. Mozes.
46 In a letter he stresses how the characters, just like the events, must be represented just as they are in the novel.
the script there is a mixture of distance and attraction. Moreover, Snevar’s widow has not inherited her husband’s position as an authority along with the hotel. While Alek Snevar had access to information about the supernatural which he could pass on directly to the uninitiated Glebski, Kajsa Snevar is only able to do so via contact with her late husband. Alek Snevar has here acquired the quality of a dead hero, similar to the omitted dead mountaineer.47 Unlike Alek Snevar, Kajsa Snevar dies at the end of the story in the attack in which the hotel also is completely destroyed.48

Fig. 3. The hero: inspector Glebski (Uldis Pūcītis)
before the portrait of the dead mountaineer

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47 This is particularly evident, since the hotel is named after him.
48 Neizvestnye Strugackie, p. 196.
Although Kromanov lectured the Strugatskys on the importance of preserving the characters “as they are in the novel,” he was not above making quite consequential changes himself. He thoroughly reimagined Brjun as a “female relative [rodstvennica]” of Alek Snevar (one of the few ideas retained from “The Murder at the Alek Snevar Hotel,” in which the character is a distant relative of Kajsa Snevar). From the outset it is evident that she has lost her function as the narrative’s embodied “other” in the film. No mystery now surrounds Brjun. Despite trousers and a short haircut, the actress Nijolė Oželytė cannot be described as projecting a particularly androgynous appearance.

The relationship between Brjun and Olaf is also recreated as a part of this transformation. In order to motivate the continued inclusion of a character that now must be considered expendable, an entire new context is invented where Brjun is now Olaf’s girlfriend. What is merely a passing flirt in the source text is expanded into a relationship in the film. This shift to a position where romance is central also affects the interaction between Brjun and Glebski in a somewhat unexpected way. The underright of attraction and flirtation that exists in the source text apparently disappeared together with the missing male component (what Glebski in the novel refers to as the “brother”). Some of the ambiguity Brjun embodied in the source text has instead been transposed into Olaf in the film, particularly by casting the dancer Tiit Härm in the role, instead of an actor more resembling the description in the source text and the scripts. This shift in position could be seen as contributing to a normalization of both Olaf and Brjun. However, Kromanov interpreted the relationship between them as very much characterized by a particular artificial quality, which he dubbed “doll-like” [kul’kol’nost’], in comparison to how the characters are represented in the source text (Fig. 4). He perceived this to be a recurrent feature of modern people in

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49 Kromanov and Taska demanded that it be presented as a relationship instead of the novel’s passing flirt. (Letter from Kromanov and Taska to the Strugatskys.) In the film the two go skiing and hang-gliding together, and even eat from the same plate at the dinner table.

50 This is particularly explicit in the episode with the party in chapter six. Glebski here explains his views on marriage to the “girl” while trying to stop the “boy” from participating in the discussion. He, however, then proceeds to drink with “both of them” (Puzzle 311-312).
general, whom he saw as “standardized in appearance, soul, and feelings,” and therefore easily reduced to dolls. In Kromanov’s opinion this quality transforms Olaf’s “death” from a tragic event into something grotesque, because it reduces the grieving Brjun into a stupid girl “crying over a broken doll.”

Fig. 4. “Doll-like”: Brjun (Nijolė Oželytė) and Olaf (Tiit Härm).

The Femme Fatale

It is interesting to note that Kromanov says nothing about being “doll-like” in connection with Mrs. Mozes, where it otherwise would have been in complete accordance with how the character is presented in the source text.51 The correspondence does not mention her at all, despite the fact that she is another example of a character who undoubtedly has been heavily reimagined

51 Kromanov explicitly instructs the Strugatskys to make it a central theme only in the interactions between Olaf and Brjun. (Letter from Kromanov and Taska to the Strugatskys.)
in the adaptation. While she must be characterized as rather peripheral in the source text, in the film she is allotted a considerable amount of space.

There could be several reasons behind the decision to expand the character in this way. One could be found in the new medium: a film primarily intended to be entertaining needs an elaborate visual spectacle in order to ensure the attention of the audience. An easy way to provide this here was to capitalize on the “to-be-looked-at-ness”\(^\text{52}\) inherent in a female character represented in the source text as glamorous.

Generally it appears to be the character’s inherent possibilities for various types of visual spectacles that have been elaborated upon in the film. The most obvious is the conventional one of the alluring woman: she has been recast as what “connotes woman as an enigma, threatening active sexuality and androgyny”\(^\text{53}\) in the world of film noir – the \textit{femme fatale}. More surprising perhaps is the fact that Mrs. Mozes also has taken on the role of the embodied “other,” since she has the ability to assume different shapes. While in the source text this is only mentioned in passing, in the film it is demonstrated in a climactic scene where she transforms herself into Glebski right before his eyes. The transformation is not very convincing and mainly seems to be an illustration of how phenomena only hinted at in the novel become overtly crude when translated into a visual medium by using special effects.

Rather than being doll-like in the film, transgressiveness could perhaps be said to be Mrs. Mozes’ most fundamental feature. One aspect of this is discernible in the scene where she dances around Glebski. The wide white dress she wears recalls images of dancing cranes, while the stiff metal collar around her neck subtly hints that she may not entirely be who she seems (Fig. 5).\(^\text{54}\)

This is further elaborated upon in the scene where she falls down “dead” in front of Simone and is unexpectedly exposed as a figure of the uncanny. That she is resurrected almost immediately merely contributes further to the air of strangeness that surrounds her. Here a significant detail has been

\(^{54}\) Outright science fiction elements are otherwise sparse and appear late, almost as an afterthought. The only explicit visual reminder of the genre is the little toy robot, which only makes a very brief appearance.
added: her hair comes off. Apart from being yet another example of how Kromanov illustrates a concept (in this case, artificiality) by rather crudely literalizing it, the disclosure that her hair actually is a wig calls into question her earlier impressive performance of femininity. Without her hair, the desirable woman becomes a dead, unnatural and genderless creature – a “zombie” in the terminology of the novel. In the source text, the suspicion that Mrs. Mozes might be a “doll” vaguely recalls Coppelia from E.T.A. Hoffmann’s short story, “The Sandman” (“Der Sandmann,” 1816). Yet in the film it is easier to read her as one of science fiction’s allegedly fundamental visual icons, the Bald Woman,55 rather than an image from Gothic literature. This could be described as the director having picked up on and elaborated upon the suspicion that she might not be who she seems to be, as articulated in the source text. Otherwise the character has been changed to better fit the model of the film noir, as has the entire film.

Fig 5. The Femme Fatale: Mrs. Mozes (Irena Kriauzaitė) dancing at the party.

55 According to Thomas M. Disch, this image is as iconic to the science fiction genre as that of the robot or the spaceship. Interestingly enough, Disch dates its appearance to 1979, the same year as Hotel. The figure can, however, be traced back at least to the female robot in Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1929). See Disch, p. 135.
Stalker
Re-imagining the Source Text: The Making of an Analogy

The story behind the film adaptation of Picnic exists in different versions. According to one, the idea originally came from Tarkovksy (or from his assistant Valerij Charčenko).\textsuperscript{56} It was on his request that Arkady Strugatsky wrote the first scenario. Initially however, the idea was not that he would write it for Tarkovsky but rather for another director, Georgij (Tito) Kalatozišvili, who had asked Tarkovsky to write a scenario for him, together with the Strugatskys. Yet when Tarkovsky approached them with this proposal, Arkady Strugatsky made it clear that the brothers preferred to have Tarkovsky direct the film himself.\textsuperscript{57}

In his diary Tarkovsky noted that Picnic “could make a tremendous screenplay for somebody as well.”\textsuperscript{58} Yet this remark is made in a context where he discusses the option of writing screenplays for other directors in order to make money. So it is not entirely clear whether he considered it a future project for himself at this stage.\textsuperscript{59} Tarkovsky claimed that three versions of a screenplay based on Picnic existed already at the time of his first meeting with Arkady Strugatsky.\textsuperscript{60}

Regardless of whose idea it was to write an adaptation of the novel, work on the script for Stalker proved to be something of an ordeal.\textsuperscript{61} At one point Tarkovsky himself observed how “[c]ollaboration between director and screen-writer […] tends to be beset by difficulty and argument.”\textsuperscript{62} A suggestion of the difference between his vision and the text which the Strugatskys

\textsuperscript{56} The story first appeared in print as serial installments in the journal Aurora, no. 7-10, 1972.
\textsuperscript{57} Skalandis, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{59} It is, however, also possible that the Strugatskys could have written screen adaptations on their own initiative since they had done so before in order to make money.
\textsuperscript{60} “There are three screenplays, all equally viable.” Tarkovsky, TWT, p. 108.
\textsuperscript{61} In the adaptation process from novel to film, a series of screenplays were produced. The exact number varies; Greg Polin for example claims that there were as many as thirteen. See Polin, “Stalker’s Meaning in Terms of Temporality and Spatial Relations” (people.ucalgary.ca). The later versions were written in direct response to Tarkovsky’s demands. According to Jurij Arabov, towards the end of their cooperation, the only thing that Tarkovsky wanted to keep of the Strugatskys’ contribution was the dialogues. (Conversation with Arabov, April 2010.)
\textsuperscript{62} Tarkovsky, Sculpting in Time, p. 76.
actually wrote is discernible in a diary entry where he envisions “a film version of something by the Strugatsky brothers” as “totally harmonious in form: unbroken, detailed action, but balanced by a religious action, entirely on the plane of ideas, almost transcendental, absurd, absolute.”

*Intertextual References*

The basis for the adaptation was primarily the last chapter (chapter four) of *Picnic*. To some extent the Strugatskys also used material from other chapters. From the beginning it was evident however, that they did not intend to write a simple transposition of the novel here. The screenplays are enriched with their own particular “shadow texts” and gradually distanced from the source text. Kipling’s *Stalky* is exchanged for the Strugatskys’ own (then still unpublished) *Swans*. The plot of *Swans* could be described as a variation on the same theme as *Picnic*. Both narratives evolve around the presence of extraterrestrials on earth, which has resulted in the creation of an enclosed area – a Zone. *Swans* could perhaps be described as the story about what would have happened in Harmont if the Visitors had taken up residence there in instead of only stopping for a “roadside picnic.” Recollections of *Swans* appear already in the first version of the script, where an image of the Zone (“a tentacle of an incredibly far away future,” *Screenplays*, 89), recalls Viktor Banev’s description early in the novel of how the future works in the present (*Swans*, 31). In both the word “tentacle” [ščupal’ce] is used in connection to the future.

In other words, the Strugatskys mainly used their own material here. When they occasionally made intertextual references to sources outside of their own artistic universe, such as adventure stories directed towards a younger audience, they belonged to the same cultural level as a rule. One of Tarkovsky’s tangible contributions to *Stalker* is the allusion to high culture: art, poetry and classical music. Another, connected to these, is the film’s religious sensibility, a feature quite foreign to the Strugatskys. A comparison between early versions of the script and the film demonstrates quite clearly Tarkovsky’s contributions, changing that which would otherwise simply

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have been an adventure story (although obviously imbued with pretensions of being something more).

Tarkovsky stated that he preferred to think of Stalker as “realistic, and not fantasy or science-fiction [sic!]”⁶⁴ Even though he made two films during his career which were based on works of science fiction, the genre held no particular fascination for him. This was obvious already in Solaris (1972). Tarkovsky thought Stanislaw Lem’s novel dealt with a moral problem, but he was completely uninterested in “the material details of the future.”⁶⁵ When making Stalker, his ambition was to transform the Strugatskys’ story of technological miracles into an existential and spiritual drama. The gradual progress of the screenplays also shows how the Strugatskys worked to accommodate this view.

In its earliest stages, the script contains numerous markers of the science fiction genre. It opens with a scene where the stalker is putting on “something resembling a long white vest of shimmering material” – evidently some kind of protective gear – which makes a “strange clinking sound” when it accidentally falls to the floor (Screenplays, 86). In the scene that follows, a character only referred to as diktor introduces the alien visitation, when our world, for the first time in history, “became the object of attention of a powerful superior civilization” (Screenplays, 88). This scene recalls the introductory interview in the novel, refuting the often repeated statement that the film adaptation was based solely on the last chapter. The visitation by extraterrestrials is presented as an undisputed fact, even though the identity of the visitors is unknown (“Who were they? Why did they visit us? Where did they go after they left – just as unexpectedly as they came?” Screenplays, 88) and the Zone is one of its lasting effects.

⁶⁴ Tassone, p. 59.
The Establishment of Different Spaces

Outside the Zone

In *Stalker*, space and time are marked by uncertainty to such a degree that Tarkovsky received complaints from the authorities because it was not sufficiently clear where the film was set.\(^66\) In the screenplays the space outside of the Zone initially appears to be an “Imaginary West” like that of the source text. To a certain extent, details signaling the “West” are even presented somewhat more straightforwardly than in the novel, perhaps an expression of the Strugatskys’ (or at least Boris’) view of cinema as “a simple and not very subtle art.”\(^67\) For example, Writer’s house is described as built in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright [*v stile Rajta*] (*Screenplays*, 94) and surrounded by abstract sculptures.

In the screenplays the name of the institute concerned with the study of the Zone is given in Russian and English, as *institut vnezemnych kultur* and “Institute of Extraterritorial [sic!] Cultures” [*Instit’jut ov Ekstraterritorial Kalčerz*] (*Screenplays*, 96-97). The warnings on the signposts are also given in English and Russian, even though they are said to be in several languages. All English is transcribed with Cyrillic letters. In a later version, however, the name of the institute is said to be given in three languages but is actually only given in Russian. It is possible that Russian here is simply meant to suggest a linguistically undetermined space, and that it is used as yet another way of placing the story outside of time and space due to a lack of defining markers. However, the tendency to only use Russian complicates the understanding of the Zone to some extent, as well as the world surrounding it. If the outside world is not unmistakably understood as the “West,” then what is the Zone? It must implicitly be that which is not the rest of the world. In the source text there is a definite impression of the existence of a special relationship between the Zone and Russia.\(^68\) In the text explaining the origin of the Zone at

\(^{66}\) Tarkovsky, *TWT*, p. 172.


\(^{68}\) It is perhaps of interest to note that it is Russia which is mentioned, never the Soviet Union. In this case knowledge of the role played by various kinds of enclosed areas in Soviet society contributes to this, of course.
the beginning of the film, the country is only referred to as “our little coun-
try.” To explicitly define the country as small, as opposed to the “Canada or
Australia” that the Strugatskys had envisioned when they wrote the novel,
appears to be a ruse intended to remove the possibility of reading it as Russia
or the Soviet Union. However, it also has the effect of making the Zone ap-
pear larger than the country itself, an impression enhanced by the time allot-
ted to scenes from the Zone in the film.

The Zone

As was the case with the establishment of the outside world as the “Imagi-
nary West,” the construction of the Zone as different and dangerous is also
considerably less subtle in the screenplays as compared to the novel. Espe-
cially in the early stages of the script, the Zone is referred to in suggestive
ways intended to build up expectations: as “a scar on mother earth,” a place
for “cruel wonders,” and “the mighty feeler of an incredibly far away future”
(Screenplays, 89). Later, when the three main characters are already in the
Zone, it is confirmed to be a place where “it can be dangerous even to throw
a rock” (Screenplays, 104). All three characters stress the connection between
the Zone and death in different ways: Writer with his revolver, Professor
with his bomb and poison capsule, and the stalker with his firm assertion
that no one can live there (Screenplays, 102 and 166). 69 However, this meticu-
ously created impression is never actually confirmed by the unfolding events
or by actual descriptions of the landscape in the Zone. They are very few; the
exception being a quite lengthy one of scenery, including a standard science
fiction effect in the form of a “green twilight” intended to create an impres-
sion of a space that is different from the rest of the world (Screenplays, 105).

The title used for the screen adaptations, “The Wish Machine” [“Mašina
želanij”], is taken from the novel’s third chapter. There is an unspecified
device mentioned in passing there, in a conversation about mythical alien
artifacts. It is not singled out for any special attention, and certainly is never
identified in any way with the “golden ball” (even though the name clearly

69 In the earlier version Anton interferes here with a seemingly meaningless play on words that
distracts the reader’s attention away from the question of what the stalker actually means. (“-
Я, конечно, понимаю, - говорит он, - что Зона - это именно Зона, а не лоно, не два
gазона и не три, скажем... э... бизона.” Screenplays, 103.)
suggests that it might have been endowed with similar miraculous properties). In the screenplays, the concern to provide the Zone with explicit signs of its status as a differentiated space diminishes progressively. The first version still includes several artifacts of extraterrestrial origin and various strange phenomena: the “mosquito mange spots” of the novel along with “permanent batteries” and “blue clay” invented especially for the script.70 Yet the artifacts are soon replaced by “normal” technical objects that have acquired mysterious qualities simply by operating in anomalous ways: a telephone that suddenly begins to ring in the middle of nowhere, or a lorry with the motor still running after twenty years. It is perhaps of interest to note that what makes them into wonders seems to be that they evidently function even when it is least expected.

Not only does an evident shift of genre occur between source text and adaptation with the omission of these “gadgets,” which arguably signaled a particular subcategory of science fiction. Something also happens to the understanding of the Zone. In the source text its origin is attributed entirely to contact with extraterrestrials. In the screenplays, on the contrary, Writer claims at the outset that it “has nothing to do with any superior civilization” (Screenplays, 152). The very existence of the Zone is suddenly questioned when that which constituted the core of the original story is denied. Writer implicitly compares it to the Bermuda Triangle, which he dismisses as impossible in a “boring” world ruled by “iron laws” that only allow for “the triangle a-b-c” (Screenplays, 151). This inquiry of an element, which in the source text seemed to be beyond any doubt, is not merely a clear indication of how radically the story has been reimagined. It also opens for the possibility of questioning the existence of an objective reality in the Zone and ultimately the existence of the Zone itself.71

70 In later versions of the script only the “meat grinder” [mjasorubka] remains.
71 The Strugatskys appear to hint at something similar in the screen adaptations. In the first version of the script Anton (the writer) states: - По-моему, фактов не бывает. Особенно здесь, в Зоне. Здесь все кем-то выдумано. Чья-то бесовская выдумка... Нам всем морочат голову. Кто - непонятно. Зачем - непонятно... (Screenplays, 118.)
Tarkovsky wanted to induce doubts as to whether it had any autonomous existence outside of people’s minds. This interpretation provides some basis for the view of the Zone as a state of mind rather than a geographic or spatial entity, contrary to the source text, where it seems very clear that it was absolutely not a figment of someone’s imagination. Nevertheless, since the Zone – somewhat paradoxically – definitely remains central to the narrative, it is perhaps more correct to argue that the nature or perception of it changes.

The cinematic space in *Stalker* is also divided. It is of interest to note that while the division of space is much more evident than it was in *Hotel*, the border between the two parts is by no means vested with the same vital importance. This is most apparent in the way the border crossings are given a very different meaning. Where it earlier meant certain death, there are instead three important doors here, like in a fairy tale, that must be passed through before the heroes can reach their goal: the door to the (stalker’s) home, the door into the Zone, and the door to the Room in the center of the Zone. Once the three men have passed through the third and final door, they are magically transported back to the place where they met up before their expedition into the Zone.

The narrative space is divided according to what appears to be a fairly well established tradition, where black and white signifies the real world and color the world of the imagination. This has the effect of simultaneously making the difference between the real world and the Zone both more subtle and more striking in the film as compared to the source text and the scripts. The use of sepia/color creates an immediate effect of separate spaces that quite efficiently mask the true lack of any fundamental difference in the actual setting. When the real world suddenly appears in color towards the end of the film, it gives the impression of heralding a new beginning rather than any

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72 “The spectator may doubt its existence or see it merely as a myth or a joke... or even as the fantasy of our hero. For the viewer this remains a mystery.” See Tonino Guerra, “Stalker, Smuggler of Happiness”, trans. Deborah Theodore, in *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews*, p. 50.

73 For example, this is how the difference between the real world and the world of fantasy is constructed in *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939), a work that otherwise has very little in common with *Stalker*. Here it can be of interest to note how the description of the stalker’s home in the first version of the script, with its vocabulary recalling the gothic subtheme of the source text, comes closest to the images of the actual film. The stalker’s room is dark, lit only by the “dead blue light” of a neon sign outside (*Screenplays*, 85).
catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions. That which is inside the room at the center of the Zone can evidently reach out and transform the world outside.

_The Changing Chronotope_

The choice of title for the screenplays also seems more significant than simply indicating an adaptation based on themes from the source text rather than on the text as a whole. The “wish machine” apparently alludes to H. G. Wells’s “time machine” (_The Time Machine_, 1895).\(^74\) In the source text the importance of the category of time is demonstrated for example by how the present is invaded by both the past and the future in the form of returning dead parents and deformed children. The change of title could indicate a shift in terms of the category of time. The “picnic” belonged to the past, the “machine” belongs to the present, and the wishes it purportedly grants point even farther ahead in time. This would not only be a shift in focus from past to future, but also from alien to human – a shift from a concern for what might have happened to what can be interpreted from the situation at hand, from what an inexplicable and absent “other” might have wanted at one time to what people might need or want now. However, the change of title gradually seems to fade as evidence of a shift in emphasis between different temporal units in a process where the element of time is completely removed from the narrative. Without the “picnic” there is no “before” or “after,” no past and no future.

This development – the gradual abolishment of the category of time – reaches its logical culmination in _Stalker_, where Tarkovsky’s ambition was to make the film “as if it were one long take.”\(^75\) The tempo in the scenes from the Zone is almost painfully slow. Nothing appears intended to create any sense of movement. As Thomas Redwood notices, “literally no progress is made in the journey whatsoever.”\(^76\) The fairly monotonous scenery lacks anything that could mark the passing of time – the sun neither sets nor rises.

\(^74\) Yet Wells’ “time machine” was essential to the plot, while the Strugatskys’ “wish machine” only functions as an alibi for the characters in the story to enter the Zone.


\(^76\) Thomas Redwood, _Andrei Tarkovsky’s Poetics of Cinema_ (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars, 2010), p. 142.
which makes it unclear exactly how long the three characters have been walking through it. The Zone is situated in a timeless “now,” a static present where the idea of a future appears to have vanished altogether, while the past is omnipresent in the form of debris, suggesting what might once have been. However, this quality of timelessness is not restricted to the Zone alone. The world outside appears equally haunted by the past and devoid of a future.\textsuperscript{77} As we noted earlier, the landscape inside and outside the Zone is essentially the same; the difference is not in the scenery, but rather in the use of color.

\textit{Abolishing the Future}

Gradually it becomes obvious how radically the story has changed in the adaptation. When the initial idea of the alien encounter disappeared, so did the “literary alchemy” that transformed garbage into gadgets. Since Tarkovsky preferred not to see \textit{Stalker} as science fiction, there is reason to believe that the “gadgets” perhaps were some other ideas on the part of the Strugatskys which simply “did not interest” the director. They can also be seen as a last reminder of the 1960s technological optimism which, by the time the film was made, had been rendered completely obsolete in many ways. Whereas the source text presented technology as mystery, Tarkovsky returns to mystery in its original religious form.

In the film, it is garbage which is heavily endowed with meaning. Garbage here is not limited to the Zone (the three drive through piles of unidentified detritus on their way to the entrance point), but there certainly is a marked difference in symbolic connotations between what is located inside the Zone and what is outside. Garbage found inside the Zone is further positioned as important or unimportant depending upon its relationship (under/above) to water. Several shots linger on objects submerged in water: a syringe (recalling the medical paraphernalia in the stalker’s home), a machine gun, Estonian coins from the interwar period, a page from a calendar (both striking exceptions from the general rule of the absence of markers of time), and religious images, the most prominent being a reproduction of the van Eyck brothers’ rendition of St John the Baptist from the Ghent altarpiece.

\textsuperscript{77} Incidentally the only signs of relative affluence in the entire film – the Writer’s car and his girlfriend’s clothes – are also among the few recognizable markers of time.
On their way to the Room in the center of the Zone, the three men must get into the water. Through this baptism of sorts they, too, temporarily become exhibits in the “underwater museum.” Professor and Writer also make more permanent contributions to it: Writer “donates” his revolver, Professor his bomb (donating it instead of detonating it). Images of reflecting surfaces such as glass and mirrors are connected to the images of water. These provide a different perspective, recalling the reversed perspective characteristic of icons. The movement of the water, continuing in the sand and the grass, also recalls something of the amorphous quality of the Zone as it is described in the source text. The influence of Tarkovsky is clearly discernible in the importance of water in the composition of the frames, especially in relation to religious imagery. Tarkovsky transforms the Strugatskys’ landscape, marked by technological debris, into one vested with spiritual meaning.

*A Religious Action*

Tarkovsky added the markedly pronounced religious theme to *Stalker*, which is so central to the narrative. He imagined the film’s “unbroken, detailed action” as “balanced by a religious action” (my italics) already at the earliest stage of the project. The only instance where the Strugatskys actively include an allusion to spirituality (rather than religion) in the script is in an early version. Towards the end of their journey, the three main characters come to a ghost town in the Zone where they collectively experience a vision, which they recognize as taken from a painting by the Russian artist Nikolai Roerich (*Screenplays*, 126-127). Here it is interesting to note an important difference. Even though the Strugatskys connect a spiritual/religious theme to the Zone, they do not appear to want to convey any hidden deeper meaning with their allusion to Roerich. The scene gives the impression of being included with the sole purpose of adding yet another element of mystery to the narrative. It must also be pointed out that Roerich was not primarily linked to the kind of Orthodox Christianity which constitutes such a powerful undercurrent in the film, but rather to the kind of mysticism inspired by Eastern religions, a major preoccupation of Soviet underground culture during the 1970s.

In *Stalker*, among the first things the viewer sees when the three main characters have entered the Zone are a number of blackened telephone poles
shaped like crosses. These are subsequently used with great effect in the composition of the frames, particularly in one scene where the three are grouped in a way intended to recall a traditional icon motif depicting three of the disciples kneeling before the cross.\textsuperscript{78} The mere number of “crosses” scattered around the Zone also offer associations to a cemetery, one of Foucault’s examples of heterotopia. Something is certainly buried in the Zone; however, it is not dead people but remnants of cultural history – music, scraps of poetry, religious texts and images. Even cultural expressions that are not explicitly religious are invested with quasi-religious meaning. In the void created by official “scientific” atheism, high culture is elevated to a position where it can function as a substitute for religion.

When comparing the two films Hotel and Stalker, it is the latter, with its clearly articulated religious theme, which ends on what appears to be a note of hopefulness. It even seems that some quality, which before was only inherent to the Zone, has found its way out into the real world, because color images suddenly begin to appear. However, the “iron laws” which Writer talked about at the beginning of the film appear to have been broken. Early in the film the camera pauses on an image of a glass of water on a table. The glass moves; at first it seems to do so by itself, soon, however, the sound of passing trains provides a natural explanation for its movements. At the end of the film another glass of water is placed on a table next to the stalker’s daughter (Nataša Abramova). Again the glass moves; this time there is no sound of passing trains, so the viewer is inclined to draw the conclusion that it must be the girl who makes the glass move. The miracle that would have made it possible for her to walk again did not happen (even though the spectator is made to believe that it did during a short sequence where the girl appears to be slowly walking forward). Yet another miracle apparently did – even more in conflict with the dictates of reason and the “iron laws” that allow “only for the triangle a-b-c.” The irrational manifests itself in a rational world.

\textsuperscript{78} Tarkovsky was known for his meticulous attention to the composition of individual frames. See Redwood, p. 129.
The Transformations of the Characters

In *Stalker* there is definitively a link between the characters and their surroundings. While Tarkovsky explicitly declared that he did not think of the story as science fiction, his understanding of the “room where dreams come true”\(^79\) at the center of the Zone nevertheless recalls Rose’s view of how “the crucial relationship in a science fiction narrative” predominantly is that “between the human figures and the landscape.”\(^80\) Tarkovsky saw the room merely as a “pretext to revealing the personalities of the three protagonists.”

Throughout the different versions of the screenplay, it becomes increasingly evident to what extent the three characters are defined by how they interact with the Zone. The stalker has a relationship to it that resembles the one he has with his wife – tumultuous and dependent at the same time. When asked about people allegedly living in the Zone, he appears jealous more than anything else, even as he denies that very possibility. He alone can have a relationship to the Zone. Writer demonstrates an ambiguous attitude: while claiming to be looking for inspiration, he nevertheless enters the Zone carrying a revolver. Professor, on the other hand, is unapologetically hostile and destructive. His attitude is manifested as a poison capsule and a bomb – death to himself and destruction to the Zone. When the stalker finds out what the others have brought with them, he asks them if they have come to the Zone to die (*Screenplays*, 104).

The Struggle to Find a Hero

Tarkovsky, even more than Kromanov, had his own interpretation of the hero. Because he did not feel constricted by the source material in any way, he could be considerably more radical. From the outset his undivided focus

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\(^79\) In the screenplays the wish-fulfilling entity is gradually transformed. The “golden ball” of the novel is described as a solid, existing object. In the screenplays, it is only in the first version that there is an actual “wish machine.” There the “golden ball” \(\text{zolotoj šar}\) has become the “golden circle” \(\text{zolotoj krug}\) the “machine that grants wishes.” Unlike the “golden ball” it is described as quite large, \(\text{ogromnyj zolotoj disk}\), as something the wisher must step on (*Screenplays*, 91-92). This can be seen as the first step in the transformation of an object into a place.

\(^80\) Rose, p. 37.
was on the stalker, who to him was the story’s undisputed central character. However, the stalker, as he was portrayed in the novel, “did not interest” him. The Strugatskys had already begun experimenting with the character by reversing the purpose of his expeditions into the Zone (in the screenplays he brings people into it, while in the source text he takes artifacts out of it). Tarkovsky went much farther and envisioned a character with almost no basis at all in the source text.

The stalker he imagined was “a very honest man, clean, and intellectually innocent.” Initially he did not have a clear vision of his hero (for a time he even considered the idea of a female stalker). However, it had to be a character that would allow him to incorporate the motif of a sacrifice, since this was central to his work in general. Gradually Tarkovsky came to view the film as the story of “the crisis of one of the world’s last remaining idealists.” In his diary he noted how the Strugatskys then had to rewrite the script yet another time in order to accommodate a new conception of the stalker. Now “instead of being some kind of drug dealer or poacher” the character “had to be a slave, a believer, a pagan of the Zone.”

The Strugatskys had problems with the transformation of the earthy and sometimes ruthless hero of the source text into the “priest of the Zone” and the “prophet who believes humanity will perish for lack of a spiritual life” Tarkovsky envisioned. The process was by no means facilitated by

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81 Asked about the title of the film, he explained: “Stalker is the name of the person telling the story, quite simply. It’s his story that’s important” (Tassone, p. 59).
82 In the earliest version of the script, however, the stalker takes the other two into the Zone as part of a quest for an artifact (the “golden circle”).
83 Guerra, p. 50.
84 In his diary, on January 4, 1975, Tarkovsky writes: “A thought – what if I were to have a female instead of a male protagonist in Roadside Picnic?” (Tarkovsky, TWT, p. 105).
85 As he was working on several other projects at the same time, among them a film about Dostoevsky and a film adaptation of The Idiot, the idea came to him that the character should resemble Dostoevsky’s prince Myshkin. However, the wish to incorporate this theme could also have been behind the earlier idea of a female stalker.
86 Tassone, p. 59.
87 Entry from August 26, 1977 (Tarkovsky, TWT, p. 147).
88 Guerra, p. 50.
89 Tassone, p. 59. A later version of the script begins with a scene where the stalker prays before embarking on the expedition into the Zone. Here his motives are, however, questioned. Writer accuses him of bringing people into the Zone in order to exercise power over them while pretending to want to help them, as the stalker in the Zone is “a tsar and a god” who “decides who is to live and who is to die” (Screenplays, 197).
Tarkovsky’s inability to communicate exactly what it was he wanted. Their difficulties are evident in the way the character changes throughout the different versions of the script.

Initially the Strugatskys experimented with making the stalker appear considerably more antisocial than he does in the novel. When he is getting ready to leave for the Zone, his wife calls him a “thief” and chides him for his inability to earn a living. His emphatic refusal to work as a taxi driver appears to confirm her accusations. It is suggested that his main motivation for bringing people into the Zone is money (in early versions of the script he has evidently been paid by the other two to take them there). Yet they could not take this too far, since this type of marginal character could be implicitly understood as positive in Soviet culture in the 1970s. This is probably the reason why what in the source text is Red’s plan to sacrifice Barbridž’s son for his own gain, is transformed in the screenplays into a story about how one of the stalker’s colleagues sacrificed his brother in the Zone in order to become rich. The stalker’s callous behavior is transferred to another character here.

When he is inside the Zone the stalker also partly becomes a noble savage taken directly from classical adventure novels: “esteemed Hawkeye,” “my dear Chingachgook,” or simply “pathfinder.” Even though this is done with an unmistakable amount of irony, it nevertheless stresses once again how he has one position in the world outside of the Zone and a radically different one inside of it.

In Tarkovsky’s vision of the story, the figure of the stalker was intimately connected to the “religious action” he imagined. It took some time before the Strugatskys finally came up with the idea of a character suited for this: the stalker as a “holy fool” [jurodivyj]. This last transformation of the character

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90 When Writer asks him how he can kill comrades just for money (after the stalker has stated that his only reason for bringing the other two with him is to be able to pass the “meat grinder”) he answers that nobody brings comrades into the Zone (he does not count these two as friends), and adds that “stalkers have no comrades, he is his own comrade.”

91 Here, the Strugatskys’ original model for the story comes to the surface. It becomes apparently visible how they envisioned the story as a treasure hunt – men venturing into the wilderness – and modeled the stalker character after Kipling’s and Fennimore Cooper’s heroes.

92 These references to classic adventure novels are retained in the film; otherwise not much remains of the minor shadow text that the Strugatskys introduce here.

reveals the presence of another shadow text that will be more fully developed in the film itself, Dostoevsky’s novel *The Idiot*. While working on *Stalker*, Tarkovsky’s major preoccupation was an adaptation of Dostoevsky’s novel. As with *Picnic*, his primary focus in *The Idiot* was on one character in particular: Prince Myshkin. In his commentaries, Boris Strugatsky attributes the idea of the stalker as a “holy fool” to himself and his brother. However, considering Tarkovsky’s preoccupation with Dostoevsky’s novel at the time, there appears to be reason for not accepting this version without question. Nevertheless, this seems to have been one instance in the ongoing tug-of-war between the writers and director where they finally were able to agree upon an idea. Yet this shadow text, an example of the kind of cultural allusions Tarkovsky added, is not immediately discernible in the script. It was introduced into the film primarily by other means. The instruction which the actor Aleksandr Kajdanovskij received regarding his rendition of the newly recreated stalker role was simply to read the gospels in order to understand what motivated the character.94

*Other Characters – Other Aspects*

As noted before, Tarkovsky certainly did not share Kromanov’s ambition to follow the source text as closely as possible. This is evident both in the representation of the hero and also in those of the other characters. As with the hero, it was certainly not essential to him that it be in accordance with the source text. For example, Tarkovsky and the Strugatskys appear to have had rather disparate views as to the importance of the individual characters to the story.95 For Tarkovsky, Professor was simply a character that “could make a bomb.” He claimed that Writer was “a very important character,” but also that he “could have been someone else” (and not necessarily a writer).96 The Strugatskys, on the contrary, apparently had an idea of having the stalker go into the Zone accompanied by a writer and a scientist. These two characters

94 Conversation with Jurij Arabov, April 2010.
95 While the stalker from the outset undoubtedly appears to be more central than the other two, it is also evident that the Strugatskys had an idea in mind about the composition of the party. In the final chapter of the novel only two men go into the Zone, which indicates that the Strugatskys may have felt that the structure of the plot demanded the addition of a third character.
96 See Tassone, p. 60-61.
can be understood as representatives of the *fiziki* and the *liriki*. (Professor actually specifies his profession as *fizik*.) They also enable a discussion about “science” and “fiction” as different ways of seeking the truth.

The process of transformation which the story undergoes on its way from being a novel to becoming a film is also evident in the names of the three characters. In none of the scripts do the Strugatskys use names taken from the novel. This stresses that, from the outset, the film script was intended to be an interpretation of themes in the source text rather than a retelling of the story. At an early stage, when the text can still be defined as science fiction, the characters have individual names. However, the authors refrain from pushing the matter of genre markers too far and, instead of “strange” names, they use ones which are of Western origin but nevertheless fairly common in Russia. The stalker is called Viktor, the writer Anton, and the professor Filippp. The individual names quickly disappear, however, – together with the unambiguous genre markers – and the characters are transformed from individuals into representatives of larger groups or even symbols: pathfinder, Writer and Professor. In *Stalker* this further contributes to the impression of a filmic space located outside of any particular time or space. In one version of the script, the word *stalker* is used in the title of the chapter for the first scene, *dom stalkera*, and later as a term for the character’s profession, but the character himself is mostly referred to as *provodnik*, a word not used in the novel. The variations *stalker* and *učenyj* are initially used for *provodnik* and Professor, although with the addition of *pisatel’*, the characters are given monikers beginning with the letter “p.”

The progressive removal of the names is evident in the following versions of the same exchange:

– Меня зовут... - начинает человек из виллы.
– Его зовут Антон, - не оборачиваясь, громко говорит Виктор.
Человек из виллы потрясен этим сообщением, но молчит.
– Гм... – говорит Профессор. – А меня как?
– А тебя зовут Профессор, – отзывается Виктор.
– Меня зовут Профессор, – сообщает человек в очках. – И я профессор.

In the novel the characters have names that either suggest the Imaginary West or simply the “other space” of science fiction.

According to Natasha Synessios, the committee allegedly demanded that the names be changed since they “sounded too Russian.” See Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, p. 377.
– Польщен, – говорит Антон, пытаясь шаркнуть ножкой. – А я – писатель, но все зовут меня почему-то Антон. Представляете, как неудобно? (Screenplays, 100.)

ПИСАТЕЛЬ. В таком случае разрешите представиться. Меня зовут...
СТАЛКЕР. Вас зовут Писатель.
ПРОФЕССОР. А как зовут меня?
СТАЛКЕР. Вас? Вас зовут Профессор.
ПИСАТЕЛЬ. Ага. Понятно. Я – писатель, и меня все почему-то зовут Писатель. (Screenplays, 154.)

The Professor

In the first version of the script, the professor is only referred to as “driver” in the beginning, and it appears as though his only function is to drive the stalker Viktor. However, when “driver” asks why they brought along “the man from the villa,” Viktor’s answer is that “his money is just as good [as yours].” Suddenly the driver is identified as someone who has paid Viktor, instead of someone who is working for him. It is only when all three are together and they are about to enter the Zone that the “driver” suddenly is referred to as “professor.” His new identity is later confirmed in the conversation between him and the writer quoted above.

Yet Professor does not appear to be invested with the same significance as Writer, who is intimately linked to intertextual references (shadow texts) introduced into the film script, in much the same way that the stalker is connected to references added by the director. This may be one of the reasons why he seems to vanish at times when he is with the stalker and Writer. Between these two characters there also exists a subtle but nevertheless clearly discernible symmetry. For example, the initial scene where the stalker and his wife quarrel is mirrored in the considerably more amiable conversation between the writer and his girlfriend. (The stalker’s wife tries to stop him from going into the Zone, while Writer’s girlfriend, on the contrary, wants to come with him). As we will see, Writer was a character brought into the text by the Strugatskys as part of their own agenda. However, Tarkovsky apparently also came to perceive him as important. This is evident from an interview where he claims to have “had this idea to make another film whose
main characters would be the wife, the little girl, the Writer and the Stalker.”

**Writer**

Unlike the stalker and Professor, Writer does not have a model in *Picnic*. The character is taken from *Swans*. The Strugatskys simply transplanted the protagonist, the writer Viktor Banev, into the landscape of the Zone, virtually unchanged and complete with entire lines of dialogue. In *Swans*, Banev’s wife describes him as a *modnyj pisatel’* (*Swans*, 9), an assessment later given by Anton/Writer about himself. Several passages in the scripts are lifted almost word for word from the text of the novel. Compare for example the following passages:

**Viktor Banev:**

- Мы не будем напиваться, – сказал Виктор, разливая всем коньяк. – Мы просто выпьем. Как это делает сейчас половина нации. Другая половина напивается, ну и Бог с ней, а мы просто выпьем. (*Swans*, 150.)

**Anton:**

- Напился? Ни в коем случае. Я выпил. Я выпил, как это делает половина народонаселения. Другая половина – напивается, женщины и дети включительно. Ну и бог с ними. А я выпил. (*Screenplays*, 95.)

**Writer:**

Я просто выпил, как это делает половина народонаселения. Другая половина – да! напивается. Женщины и дети включительно. А я просто выпил… (*Screenplays*, 153.)

A comparison of passages that express disgust and despair concerning writing and the role of the writer further confirms that the character is based on Viktor Banev.

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99 Tassone, p. 60.
Viktor Banev:

[П]исать – это мучение, стыдное, неприятное занятие, что-то вроде болезненного физиологического отправления, вроде поноса, вроде выдавливания гноя из чирья… (Swans, 166.)

Anton:

[П]исать – это мерзко. […] Это постыдное, гнусное занятие, все равно что чирьи выдавливать перед зеркалом! (Screenplays, 131.)

Writer:

Это для меня мука, болезненное, постыдное занятие, что-то вроде выдавливания фурункула … (Screenplays, 171.)

In this manner, the Strugatskys found a way to enrich one of their works with material borrowed from another,100 and to present at least parts of their unpublished novel to the public as well. Here the suffering connected to the writing process also brings Writer closer to the stalker in his incarnation as a “holy fool.”

The Wife

The first version of the script includes a more prominent female presence than later versions do. There is the woman in the Roerich version who captures the writer, as well as a certain “Lola”101 whom the professor speaks to on the telephone from the Zone. However, in later versions these two disappear, and the only woman left is the stalker’s wife. The reason for her inclusion seems primarily to provide an additional perspective on him. While the stalker’s wife is just a silent, supportive presence in the home in the earliest version of the script, the character is soon expanded and allowed to play a considerably more active role.102 Later versions of the script end with a brief monologue which she gives about her life with the stalker. This monologue concludes the film. The wife (Alisa Frejndlich) delivers it in a manner

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100 This was later applied in the screen adaptation of Swans (Lopušanskij, 2006) where Dr. Pil’man makes a guest appearance early in the film.
101 The name could be taken as further evidence of the influence of Swans, as “Lola” there is the name of Viktor Banev’s wife.
102 She provokes a quarrel with him. The scene with the quarrel between him and his wife is subsequently retained in the script, even when the stalker character is transformed into a “holy fool.”
reminiscent of the epilogue in *Hotel*: looking straight into the camera she tells her story directly to the audience. 103 That it is not the hero himself who delivers the final speech is another thing which could indicate that the wife is an aspect of the stalker, and as such she is as much of a symbolic figure as the others are.

The changes which this monologue undergoes throughout the different versions of the script chart the transformations of the stalker character. 104 In the early versions, he seems to be the kind of “drug dealer or poacher” which Tarkovsky stated in his diary that he did not want, “a complete bandit,” “doomed,” and “an eternal prisoner.” When shooting began, the stalker (called Alan at that stage) was still the kind of character Kajdanovskij was instructed to play “with the leather jacket on.” 105 Later, when the character begins to take on distinctly religious overtones, he remains an “eternal prisoner,” but he is now also “blessed.” If he was someone “everyone was afraid of” earlier, he then was “pitiful,” a “good for nothing” – someone “everyone laughed at.”

*The Daughter*

Another female presence in the film is the stalker’s daughter. Despite the fact that she does not have a speaking role, she is still an important character, which is evident from Tarkovsky’s inclusion of her in his proposed sequel to *Stalker*. Although she is not actually included in the scripts, she can be characterized as another of the director’s contributions to the film. The daughter stresses the religious aspect of the stalker even more. With a shawl wrapped around her head and shoulders she resembles a figure from an icon, an impression further underlined in the scene towards the end of the film where the stalker carries her like a holy image. Her apparent psychic gifts position her firmly on the side of the “irrational” – the kinds of miracles she can

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103 The original intention was to have the monologue early on in the film. It was, however, moved to the end.

104 This speech is a version of the one given by Guta at the end of chapter one in the novel, where she tells Red that she is expecting his child. In the novel Red reiterates what Guta said, while in the screenplays the stalker’s wife speaks directly.

105 Conversation with Jurij Arabov, April 2010.
perform belong to the religious sphere, where hope for new life is evidently to be found in the film.

Moving Into “The Other Space”

While they are undoubtedly two distinctly different works, Hotel and Stalker could nevertheless be said to have a common denominator, since the focus of both films is on the construction of a peripheral space. Incidentally both films happened to be produced far from the center of the Soviet Union. However, what is important here is the diegetic space of difference, which is a construct in both films. Instead of contemporary Soviet reality, they present alternative worlds, characterized either by a higher or a lower material level – consumerism or decay. Despite a clearly discernible difference in imagery, both nevertheless refer to the collective Soviet fantasy where the West was positioned as the ultimate “other.” In Hotel it is envisioned as a place where glamorous people speak French and have access to certain kinds of consumer goods. In Stalker it is a post-apocalyptic world where scraps of a lost civilization – Western European culture or European universalism – are evidence of what once was, and where hope can only be found in a place which might not even exist. It is tempting to connect this to the important role that different kinds of borders play in both films. Here border crossings have huge consequences: the annihilation or the redemption of the world. The films deal with questions of who is the “same” and who is the “other” – of Soviet reality versus the fantastic and seemingly unreachable space of the West.

In the adaptations, the narratives have been re-structured around a central character in a way that differs from that of the source texts. To some degree, this is also perceptible in Hotel, where the narrator of the source text has been recast as the prime motor of the events. However, this is only a slight change, compared to the one in Stalker where the protagonist seems to have undergone a complete transformation in order to become a character that corresponds to Tarkovsky’s vision rather than to that of the Strugatskys.
On To New Territories:  
Concluding Remarks

The analyses of the novels and films here attempt to address this question: What do these “unexpected encounters” say about the paradigm shift in Soviet culture as it approached the threshold of the 1970s? More specifically, the analyses deal with what has been described as the predominant tendency of the more vital parts of Soviet culture throughout the decade – the movement away from the rational towards the irrational.

The Soviet 1970s saw the creation of a multitude of alternative “worlds” – the result of a process whereby the collective imagination created substitutes on a large scale for that which was unobtainable in real life. Science fiction played a significant role as a source of inspiration in this reimagining of reality.

*Puzzle, Kid* and *Picnic* all present narratives greatly characterized by liminality or a state of being in-between. They appear to be suspended between genres as well as between the past and the future, in other words the 1960s and the 1970s. This amounts to an “affirmation of emptiness” that recalls science fiction’s alleged roots in the Gothic. The novels’ affiliation with the Gothic-fantastic is clearly discernible, even when the authors try to break new literary ground with a detective novel or revisit their old interstellar utopia. The choice here to look backward in history rather than forward into the future could also be understood as a reflection of a general change in the attitude towards progress. It could be that we have to understand this particular aspect of the texts in this context.

One way to read the three novels as parts of an artistic whole is to view them as a gradually evolving narrative of change. From denial, resistance – even nostalgia – there finally begins to evolve a reluctant acceptance of what already is an undeniable fact. It becomes evident that the future, as it was
imagined up until recently, will never come to be. However, it is not yet possible for anyone to say what can be expected instead. The protagonists learn that what seems to make sense is not necessarily always right, nor will it lead to the truth. In fact, it is only by accepting the opposite of “sensible” that one can arrive at an understanding of what is happening. An earlier utopia that celebrated thinking – rational reasoning – has now been replaced by a heterotopia that can be characterized as fundamentally irrational since it constitutes a zone where death and unlimited possibility do not cancel each other out. On the contrary, they appear to be prerequisites of one another. However, the novels could also be described as narratives of an irretrievably lost opportunity. In all of them the chance to make a real breakthrough is there, right in front of the whole of humanity, but it cannot be seized upon because there is an inability to deal with the new. These “unexpected encounters” are not presented as peaceful exchanges with “guests from outer space” or as invasion narratives, but rather as conflicts which cannot easily be resolved between a “same” – which is unable or unwilling to understand – and an elusive “other” whose true nature is never disclosed, not even to the reader. These meetings come about by accident, despite the apparent wish of the “other” to avoid contact of any kind.

A deep anxiety concerning the future seems to run through all three novels, and this is expressed artistically by using the images of young people. When it is no longer certain what the world of tomorrow will be like, those who will inhabit it also essentially become incomprehensible to the older generation. Young people also embody questions of vision and communication in the form of various conditions – such as blindness or muteness – thereby demonstrating to what extent the confrontation between past and future, “same” and “other,” is actually about the ability to see and to speak – or the lack thereof.

The screen adaptations of two of the “unexpected encounters” made in the latter half of the decade further illuminate the cultural paradigm shift of the Soviet 1970s. The films could be said to reflect the transfer of interest from the rational to the irrational. Yet they also present different, in certain aspects even diametrically opposed, versions of heterotopia – one being an escapist vision of soft consumerism in an imaginary West, and the other an
illustration of a denial of the idea of progress in favor of a particular sensibility that elevates culture to the position of being a substitute for religion.

The films are not concerned with the future in the way that the novels are, which means that the theme of an encounter with the new is treated differently. Hotel could be said to deal with the theme of a confrontation with the “other” since this is in accordance with the structure of the detective genre’s central narrative of death and detection. In Stalker this theme has largely been transformed into a confrontation with the “self” as the characters go into the Zone to confront their own deepest inner wishes.

In Hotel the clearly discernible Gothic undercurrent of the source text has found a visual equivalent in an esthetics heavily influenced by classic film noir. The same cannot be said of Stalker, a film considerably more difficult to attribute to any existing genre, even though its opening sequence with low-key lighting and images of decay does have certain affinities with visual Gothic.

The border theme is a more or less overt feature in both films. The crossing of borders is presented as something that unavoidably has great consequences. Conversely it can be said that the theme has also received the opposite treatment. In Hotel transgressions inevitably lead to death, while in Stalker, on the contrary, borders must be crossed because this is the only way to revive a dying world. It is interesting to note how it is the film which projects an image of the West that also demonstrates an apparent anxiety in terms of crossing borders.

The uncertainty about the future that is evident in the novels does not appear to be resolved in the films by any means. Hotel ends with a disaster. Stalker is more ambiguous in this regard. While not promising anything, the film appears to hint that the road taken in the 1970s – towards “softer” cultural values rather than “hard” science – might lead somewhere. In their own ways, each of the films comes across as an attempt to reach something new, in other words to achieve that which in the source texts is represented as sadly beyond reach. While Kromanov expands the borders of science fiction by attaching it to the film noir, Tarkovsky wants to leave science fiction completely behind and move farther along in order to concentrate on a religious theme. Thus he can be said to have radicalized the process of the
relocation of interests which was characteristic of Soviet 1970s culture as a whole.

For quite some time the image of the Soviet 1970s remained that of a time when nothing happened, characterized by repression and stagnation. However, another, more contradictory image has begun to appear with new research where it is seen as a time of creative cultural explorations. The Strugatskys, always sensitive to the tendencies of the times in which they lived, were part of this. Despite a professed commitment to reason they came to follow the same path away from the rational towards the irrational as so many others had done.
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Visual


Secondary sources


Appendix I.
The Novels

Inspector Glebsky’s Puzzle

The narrator, police inspector Peter Glebski, arrives for a two week vacation at the hotel called At the Lost Climber’s [U pogibšego al’pinista], located somewhere in the Alps. Right on the front steps he is greeted by the hotel owner, Alek Snevar, who recounts the story of the death of the lost climber who gave the hotel its name. Subsequently Glebski meets the other guests: the physicist Simone, the magician dju Barnstokr with his nephew/niece Brjun, Mr. and Mrs. Mozes, Olaf Andvarafors, and the alleged gangster Chinkus. Initially life at the hotel appears peaceful, even though a string of mysterious events (things go missing and showers are inexplicably occupied) appear to suggest that the lost climber may haunt the place. After some initial skiing and socializing, during which Glebski mainly is preoccupied with trying to ascertain whether Brjun is boy or girl, events take a more serious turn. At the end of an evening of entertainment including dancing and drinking, a mysterious man, half-dead, arrives at the hotel. He claims that his name is Luarvik Luarvik, and he demands to see Olaf Andvarafors. This leads to the discovery of Olaf’s dead body lying in his room with the door locked from the inside. Glebski takes it upon himself to investigate the murder and interrogates the other guests. Simone makes a statement suggesting that Mrs. Mozes is dead as well; however, Glebski finds her alive and well in her room. As a result of the investigation Glebski is finally faced with the idea that Mr. Mozes and Luarvik are “visitors from outer space” and Olaf and Mrs. Mozes are their robots. The extraterrestrials are now under direct threat from criminal elements they encountered earlier, and they need Glebski’s cooperation in order to escape. He must give them a suitcase he found in Olaf’s room and locked away as evidence since it contains a piece of equipment that is crucial to them. Glebski, however refuses, and his
uncompromising attitude eventually leads to disaster when a helicopter arrives on the scene. The extraterrestrials are killed as they try to make their way to a waiting spaceship.

*The Kid*

The novel is set in the Noon universe, where meetings between humans and inhabitants of other planets are a long-established phenomenon.¹ The narrator Stas Popov is a member of a small expedition to a planet Earth intends to colonize. The mission of the group is to prepare the way for a number of colonists from the planet Pant that is to be relocated to the seemingly uninhabited Ark [*Kovčeg*] in order to avoid a threatening ecological disaster. Shortly after landing, Popov’s colleagues go out to explore the surroundings while he stays behind to monitor the work robots. Alone in the spaceship he hears a baby crying and the voice of a woman calling out to someone for help. Later his colleagues return with the news of having found the wreck of a spaceship containing the bodies of a man and a woman. Popov, believing his experience to be the sign of a coming psychic breakdown, is hesitant to tell anyone about it. The expedition’s spaceship is, however, soon haunted by a strange small figure, human in shape but with an uncanny ability to change appearance and location. This finally turns out to be the “Kid,” the son of the two deceased colonists from the wreck. Not only is his survival a miracle in itself, he also displays strange mental abilities. His appearance changes everything for the group and for Earth as well. The Kid with his strange abilities represents both a unique glimpse at unknown possibilities and a threat to the future of mankind. The Kid claims to be the only inhabitant of the planet, but the members of the expedition assume that there must be others and that he must have been saved by them. Gigantic antennae emerge on the horizon every time the Kid approaches the expedition. The group from Earth plans to use the Kid to contact these creatures; when he proves unwilling he is unwittingly provided with a video transmitter through which they witness some extraordinary feats, such as the Kid levitating. However, at a crucial moment the Kid is made aware of the device and the

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¹ *The Kid* is to a greater extent integrated in a larger body of the Strugatskys’ work than the other two novels since it also is part of the cycle of stories about the Noon universe.
transmissions abruptly stop. The colonization project is subsequently abort- ed but Popov stays in contact with the Kid.

Roadside Picnic
Here the Strugatskys tell the story of the aftermath of an event referred to as “the Visitation,” an event when alleged extraterrestrials briefly visited earth. This occurred on several locations on earth, one of which was Harmont, a small North American town. The area in the town that was primarily affect- ed by this event was permanently sealed off by the authorities and became known as the Zone. This is an area where the laws of nature work differently than anywhere else and where a number of artifacts of extraterrestrial origin had been left behind. Like the place in which they are to be found, these arti- facts demonstrate strange and inexplicable powers. The protagonist, Redrik (Red) Suchart, initially works at a scientific institute dedicated to the study of the Zone, where he uses his position as a lab assistant to sell such alien arti- facts on a thriving black market. The narrative consists of four essentially separate chapters, which form a chronicle of the hero’s life journey from a member of the scientific community to ex-convict. In the first chapter Red initiates an expedition into the Zone to look for an artifact about which his friend, the Russian scientist Kirill, plans to write a paper. The chapter ends with Red receiving news first of Kirill’s unexpected death and then that his girlfriend Guta is pregnant. In the following chapter several years have passed and Red is returning home from yet another expedition into the Zone. He is now living not only with his wife and daughter but also with his father, who has returned from the dead. The chapter ends with Red being captured by the police. In the fourth and final chapter Red is back in the Zone on yet another expedition. This time he has brought along Artur, the son of a stalker colleague, in search of the “golden ball,” an alien artifact which allegedly has the capability of granting wishes. The purpose of the expedition is to find a cure for Red’s daughter; however, his hidden agenda is to use Artur as a “human minesweeper.” The chapter ends with Red’s am- biguous encounter – half way between death and a religious epiphany – with the “golden ball.”
Appendix II.
The Films

**Dead Mountaineer’s Hotel (Hukkunud alpinisti hotel/Otel’ U pogibšego al’pinista)**
Director – Grigori Kromanov
Script – Arkady and Boris Strugatsky
Cinematography – Jüri Sillart
Music – Sven Grünberg
Art director – Tõnu Virve
Costume design – Ell-Maaja Randküla and Vjačeslav Zajcev

**Stalker**
Director - Andrei Tarkovsky
Script – Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, Andrei Tarkovsky
Cinematography – Aleksandr Knjažinski
Music – Eduard Artem’ev
Art director – Rašid Safiullin
Costume design – Nina Fomina
Svensk sammanfattning


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1 På samma sätt som jag i avhandlingen valt att använda en etablerad engelsk stavning av vissa ryska namn där sådan finns använder jag i det följande en etablerad svensk stavning.
3 Jag har här valt att använda den engelska titeln på filmen. I analysen av filmerna har inte enbart visuellt utan även textuellt (filmmanus, korrespondens mm.) material använts.
Avhandlingen inleds med en introduktion som syftar till att ge den allmänna historiska och kulturella kontexten och av sovjetisk science fiction eller naučnaja fantastika. Här ingår en kort historik över genren och en diskussion av vilken plats denna hade i sovjetisk kultur, samt vilken relation science fiction-genren i stort kan sägas ha till den omgivande verkligheten. I ett separat avsnitt behandlas även förhållandet mellan science fiction och den gotiska litteraturen. Här ges även en redogörelse för bröderna Strugatskijs tidiga litterära produktion då de verk de publicerade under första hälften av 1960-talet kontrasterar skarpt mot de romaner som kommer att analyseras i det följande.

Det kulturella paradigmskiftet har beskrivits som en rörelse bort från det rationella mot det irrationella. Här ges en kort redogörelse för den specifika ryska filosofiska diskursen kring dessa begrepp. Begreppen ”rationell” och ”irrationell” har i rysk filosofi investerats med en annan moralisk betydelse än i väst och även delvis getts motsatt värdering.

Den teoretiska del som inleds med en mer allmänt hållna diskussion av science fiction fortsätter och blir mer avhandlingsspecifik i och med introduktionen av två begrepp som kommer att vara grundläggande i synnerhet för analysen av det konstnärliga rummet: Bachtins kronotop och Foucaults heterotopi. Här vidareutvecklas iakttagelsen att en betydanförändring förefaller ha ägt rum i bröderna Strugatskijs science fiction under de tio år som skiljer det tidiga 1960-talet från det tidiga 1970-talet då romanerna publicerades. Denna förändring gestaltas delvis genom skildringen av rummet.

romanernas konstnärliga rum genomgår som det tydligt kan spåras att en utveckling nu sker bort från den typ av science fiction bröderna Strugatskij inledde sin litterära karriär med. Två av de romaner som studeras här utspelar sig i det slags heterotopia som beskrivs ovan. I den tredje görs en tillfällig återgång till den tidigare typen av miljö då den utspelar sig på en främmande planet. Romanens värld är dock så pass problematisk att det inte förefaller vara frågan om någon återgång till utopia.

Ett annat drag som är mer typiskt för rummet i de tre romaner avhandlingen behandlar är att det har delats in i en ”rationell” och en ”irrationell” sfär där den senare är den mer betydelseladdade och utgör centrum för handlingen.


I analysen av de två filmatiseringarna behandlas filmmanusen som en del av bröderna Strugatskij:s litterära verk. Analysen tar bland annat upp hur materialet förändras då författarna måste anpassa sig till de krav som ställs såväl det av det nya mediet som uppdragsgivarna. I fokus för analysen av så väl romaner som filmer står samma kategorier: konstruktionen av rummet och framställningen av hjälten.

Över tröskeln

Analysen består av två delar. Första delen behandlar de tre romanerna. Dessa behandlas var och en för sig, i kronologisk ordning.

detektivgenren kommer analysen fram till att dess mest framträdande drag är att befina sig mellan kategorier. Detta går igen såväl i genren som i skildringen av det konstnärliga rummet och romanpersonerna. Romanens skildring av ett mordmysterium på ett hotell beläget i en avlägsen dal i alperna utgör det första exemplet på ett ”icke avtalat möte”.


Den tredje romanen, *Picknick vid vägkanten*, skiljer sig från de två övriga vad kompositionen beträffar. Medan de föregående romanerna utspelar sig under en koncentrerad tidsperiod av några få dagar löper handlingen här över en period på cirka tio år. I fyra löst sammanhängande kapitel skildras ett helt samhälles utveckling speglad i en mans livsöde efter en händelse som allmänt tros vara ett besök av utomjordingar (titelns ”picknick vid vägkanten”). Detta har fått till följd att en mängd märkliga föremål lämnats kvar i det område som närmast berördes av händelsen. Dessa föremål har gett upphov till en blomstrande svart marknad där romanens huvudperson är aktiv i sin egenskap av en av de få som kan röra sig i det avspärrade området.


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Ett drag de tre romanerna har gemensamt är hur de är utformade efter modeller hämtade ur västlig populärlitteratur – detektivromanen, det koloniala narrativet och äventyrsromanen. Ett annat är en stark gotisk ådra. Denna yttrar sig i ett dödstema som uttrycks tematsiskt så väl som på rent lexikal nivå, inte minst i gestaltningen av romanernas konstnärliga rum.

Den inledande romanen - ett ”experiment med detektivgenren” utgör uppenbarligen ett försök till litterär förnyelse; den nästföljande som tvärtom lätt kan framstå som ett steg tillbaka då den utspelar sig i Zenit-universum problematiserar delvis bröderna Strugatskys tidigare utopiska fantasier; medan den avslutande romanen som tar ett bredare grepp än de två föregående behandlar hur ett samhälle österkalleligt förvandlas.


In i zonen

Andra delen av analysen behandlar de två filmerna. Den inleds med en argumentation för varför det är nödvändigt att även inkludera de två filmatiseringarna. Filmerna är relevanta dels därför att bröderna Strugatskij i båda fallen var direkt involverade in produktionsprocessen i egenskap av manusförfattare (vilket i fallet med Stalker innebar ett tämligen omfattande engagemang), dels för att båda filmerna producerades under samma period i slutet av 1970-talet. Filmerna kan alltså ses dels som en ytterligare
vidareutveckling av bröderna Strugatskij:s prosa i vilken de tendenser i tiden som kommer till uttryck i romanerna under de år som gått kommit att bli än mer tydliga.


De två filmerna kan sägas vara tämligen olika sinsemellan. De förenas av att vara baserade på verk av samma författare, tillkomna under ungefär samma tidsperiod och i samma geografiska område. De två regissörerna närmade sig emellertid sitt material från mycket olika utgångspunkter. Grigori Kromanov hade ambitionen att göra en film som i största möjliga mån följde sin litterära förlaga medan Andrej Tarkovskij såg denna enbart som en språngbräda för sin egen idiosynkratiska konstnärliga vision. Den film han gjorde har också betydligt mer gemensamt med hans övriga verk än med bröderna Strugatskij:s roman.


Tarkovskij:s film är väsentligt svårare att genrebestämma. Analysen tar avstamp i det långdragna och mödosamma arbetet med att stöpa om en science
fiction-äventyrsberättelse till ett existentiellt drama med religiösa undertoner.


Trots sina stora olikheter kan filmerna sägas ha det gemensamt att båda konstruerar ett rum ”vid sidan av”. I stället för att reproduera det sena 1970-talets sovjetiska verklighet presenterar filmerna alternativa världar präglade av antigen en högre eller lägre materiell nivå – av konsumism eller förfall. Trots att de på detta sätt kan förefalla att visualisera diametralt motsatta världar hänför sig båda till den kollektiva sovjetiska fantasi som positionerade väst som det absolut ”andra”. I det ena fallet tar sig denna formen av en plats där glamorösa människor talar franska och har tillgång till vissa typer av konsumtionsvaror, i de andra är det i form av spår av allmäneuropeisk högre kultur i en i övrigt närmast postapokalyptisk värld. I båda filmer spelar också korsandet av gränser en betydande roll.

**Slutsats – Vidare till nya marker**

Sammantaget ger de tre romanerna och de två filmerna en uppfattning om hur det kulturella paradigmskifte som inleddes i skarven mellan 1960 och 1970-talen uttrycktes och hur det kom att utvecklas under tidens gång, från den osäkerhet som mer än något präglar den första romanen till den religiöst influerade världsbild som kommer till uttryck i Tarkovskij:s film. De tre romanerna kan läsas som en skildring av en process att hantera förändring –

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4 Svensk översättning Sam J. Lundwall (Bromma, Lundwall Fakta & Fantasi, 1991).
från motstånd och förnekande till ett motvilligt accepterande av vad som vid det laget redan är ett etablerat faktum: att framtiden kommer att bli en annan än vad man dittills föreställt sig. Filmerna kan också tolkas som visioner av framtiden: Kromanovs slutar i katastrof medan Tarkovskijs ger en mer hoppfull bild av en värld präglad av religiösa och kulturella värden. På detta sätt kan romaner och filmer läsas tillsammans som en sammanhängande karta över en tidsperiod.
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