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**“Brother,” Enjoy your Hypermodernity!  
Connections between Gilles Lipovetsky’s Hypermodern Times and Post-Soviet  
Russian Cinema**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In prominent French social philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky’s Hypermodern Times (2005), the author asserts that the world has entered the period of hypermodernity, a time where the primary concepts of modernity are taken to their extreme conclusions. The conditions Lipovetsky described were already manifesting in a number of post-Soviet Russian films. In the tradition of Slavoj Zizek’s Enjoy Your Symptom (1992), this essay utilizes a number of post-Soviet Russian films to explicate Lipovetsky’s philosophy, while also using Lipovetsky’s ideas to explicate the films. Alexei Balabanov’s 1997 film *Brat* (“Brother”) is examined in the context of Lipovetsky’s work, along with other films from the era. This essay introduces Lipovetsky’s new intellectual worldview, and demonstrates how it might be applicable to the study of film and theatre.*

**Introduction and Sources**

The social thought of French critic Gilles Lipovetsky, as presented in his 2005 book Hypermodern Times, is reflected in major works of the post-Soviet Russian film establishment. Through an examination of both Hypermodern Times and Alexei Balabanov’s 1997 film *Brat* (hereafter referred to by its English name: *Brother*), this article examines connections between the ideas of Lipovetsky and the art of Balabanov, demonstrating how they can explicate one another. Lipovetsky’s ideas on hypermodernity can also be seen in many of Balabanov’s other films, including *Brat 2* (*Brother 2*, 2000). Hypermodern themes are not limited to Balabanov, and are apparent in a host of other post-Soviet films by a variety of directors, particularly in the works of Pavel Lungin.

Films are a great place to experience philosophical ideas in action; allowing the educated viewer to make intellectual connections as abstract ideas are interpreted through a film’s action, precisely because both philosophers and filmmakers are working from the same palette. Contemporary philosophers, like film-makers, are reacting to the world around them. Art often seeks to hold up the “mirror to nature,” and the afore-mentioned films are reflecting the reality of

post-Soviet Russia, where many of the ideas that Lipovetsky articulates in Hypermodern Times have been a clear and vital part of a society wrapped up in a time of nearly constant change, transition and uncertainty.

This kind of work has been done before, most notably in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Slavoj Zizek in his 1992 book Enjoy Your Symptom! Zizek makes connections between the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and popular Hollywood films. He writes, in part, that: “. . . Hollywood is conceived as a ‘phenomenology’ of the Lacanian Spirit, its appearing for the common consciousness” (Zizek xi). Here post-Soviet Russian film is explicated with a similar kind of phenomenology, substituting the spirit of Lipovetsky for that of Lacan. Just as Lacan’s works are illuminated by Zizek’s approach, so too might Lipovetsky’s works become clearer through an understanding of Balabanov’s *Brother*.

Richard Gilmore attempts a similar project in his recent book, Doing Philosophy at the Movies (2005). Indeed, Gilmore’s is a project done with a full knowledge of Zizek’s prior work, and differs only in that he uses a variety of films to examine the works of a range of philosophers, including Aristotle, Plato, Nietzsche, Kant, Wittgenstein and Zizek. Gilmore provides a good model for this current study in his introduction, where he writes:

Thinking is about trying to understand things. It is the attempt to move from a place of confusion and doubt to a place of understanding and of knowing what to do. This is the narrative of virtually every film that has ever been made. . . . The action of the movie is, one might say, externalized thought. To see the action of a movie as an externalized performance of an inner drama, of an interior exploration of ideas and possibilities, brings out not just the philosophical aspects of movies, but their aesthetic aspects as well. (10-11)

Like Gilmore’s study, this work details the interplay between the films and Lipovetsky’s work as much as it does the films themselves. Perhaps readers will find the following observations of this study useful not only for their own intellectual sake, but also because they enhance the aesthetic enjoyment of some great Russian films from the last fifteen years, some of which are probably unfamiliar to American scholars.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the work of Russian film scholar Anna Lawton. Her book Imaging Russia 2000: Film and Facts (2004) is by far the best, and indeed one of the only English-language book-length studies of Russian film during the 1990s. In the course of her examination of nearly ninety Russian films made between 1991 and 2002, Lawton intersperses bits of Russian social and cultural history, along with her own experiences living in Russia during this tumultuous period. Her project is ambitious, definitive, and a must-read for anyone who is interested in contemporary Russian cinema. Imaging Russia 2000 is the follow-up to her equally impressive work Before the Fall: Soviet Cinema in the Gorbachev Years, which was re-released in 2004.

### **A Brief Introduction to Lipovetsky's Hypermodern Times**

Hypermodern Times is a relatively short tract, at just over forty pages, which seeks to do nothing less than change the way scholars think about contemporary culture and civil society. It is divided into four main sections, but the important one for the purposes of this study is Lipovetsky's long essay "Time Against Time: Or The Hypermodern Society." It is this portion of the book that is referred to throughout the whole of this essay as Hypermodern Times. Like Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, which essentially created the ground rules for the intellectual discourse of postmodernism, so too is Hypermodern Times the starting point for a new discourse on knowledge. Whereas Lyotard posited "computerized societies'" cultural transition into the postmodern age, Lipovetsky's basic contention is that the postmodern era, as we know it, has officially passed on (Lyotard 3). What happened is that those same computerized societies, after a brief flirtation with the ideas of postmodernity, entered into the hypermodern era. Lipovetsky writes: "the label 'postmodern' is starting to look old; it has exhausted its capacities to express the world now coming into being" (Lipovetsky 30). Here is where the discourse of hypermodernity takes over. Hypermodernity is essentially a reaffirmation of the essential tenets of modernism; except that now, there is no viable alternative to modernity. This leads to excess in all areas, hence the hypermodern times that the book describes. In Lipovetsky's thesis, the entire postmodern apparatus is relegated to a sort of intellectual speed-bump on the road from modernity to hypermodernity. As he describes the current age, Lipovetsky poses the pertinent question: "Is there anything now that does not reveal a modernity raised to the *n*th power?" Lipovetsky's analysis answers his own question with a resounding "No!", and as we shall see, so too do a number of post-Soviet Russian films (30).

Lipovetsky notes that what we are seeing today is a sort of "consummation" of modernity, emerging even as the ideas of the postmodern world were taking shape, eventually completely eclipsing them and moving on into a world where there are no challengers to the "absolutely modern" (31-32). What are the basic tenets of this modernism? According to Lipovetsky, the three "axiomatic elements" are the market (hypercapitalism), technocratic efficiency (the machinery of excess) and the individual (hyperindividualism) (32-33).

We can see everywhere the results of this shift towards the hypermodern, and here is a key passage from Lipovetsky:

A new society of modernity is coming into being. It is no longer a matter of emerging from the world of tradition to reach the stage of modern rationality, but of modernizing modernity itself and rationalizing rationalization: in other words, destroying 'archaic survivals' and bureaucratic routines, putting an end to institutional rigidities and protectionist shackles, privatizing everything and freeing it from dependency on local conditions, while sharpening competition. The heroic will to create a 'radiant future' has been replaced by managerial activism: a vast enthusiasm for change, reform and adaptation that is deprived of any confident horizon or grand historical vision. (34)

This passage is significant not only because of its descriptive qualities in defining what hypermodernism is, but also in its eerie similarities to precisely describing the conditions in Russia following the fall of the Soviet Union, many of which persist into the present day. Indeed, to cite one example, the 2006 natural gas controversy between Russia and the Ukraine, which has more recently moved into Belarus, was justified, in part, by Russia's desire to move to "market prices" (Belton 1).

Hypermodern Times has received little significant commentary in the English-language scholarly press, which is particularly surprising, since Lipovetsky's previous book, The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy (1994) was widely reviewed and is still cited frequently by a variety of academics. Sara Mills reviewed Lipovetsky's book for The Sociological Review in 2005, and she notes that the book is one that "could aid further understanding of a range of social and cultural processes" (Mills 779). She posits that the "most innovative" part of Lipovetsky's analysis lies in "consideration of the paradoxes of hypermodernity and hyperindividualism" (778). Mills further writes that "the hyperindividualism of the hypermodern as characterized by fashion is double edged, 'we' are both disciplined and free, and we constrain ourselves but assert our individualism" (778). Her observations certainly illustrate the main thrust of Lipovetsky's book, and demonstrate how this work might be applied to cultural artifacts such as *Brother*.

Lipovetsky uses the majority of Hypermodern Times to describe how we have arrived at the hypermodern era, and speculates as to where it may be taking us. Lipovetsky's description of what may be called the hypermodern condition is of great importance, for the purposes of this essay, since it posits that this condition was previously and independently articulated in the post-Soviet Russian cinema, namely in Balabanov's *Brother*. After a detailed introduction to *Brother*, this study contains further explication of Lipovetsky's thesis concerning the hypermodern condition in light of these examples. Additional commentary on other hypermodern post-Soviet films is included, demonstrating that Lipovetsky's hypermodernity is reflected in a numerous works.

### ***Alexei Balabanov's "Brother"***

In her book, Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005, Denise Youngblood notes that *Brother* is "entertainment, not art, but the kind of mass-market filmmaking that deserves serious attention from social historians" (213). Theatre theorist Bertolt Brecht convincingly wrote in his essay "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" that art and entertainment are not mutually exclusive (Brecht 69). This can also apply to cinema, and so it is possible to disagree with the first part of Youngblood's assertion, while agreeing that this is a film worthy of study. Whatever the film's supposed artistic shortcomings, academics primarily concerned with post-Soviet Russian cinema have explored the film in great detail, and images from the two *Brother* films grace the covers of both major English-language examinations of post-Soviet cinema.<sup>1</sup> The plot of the film is relatively simple. Danila (Sergei Bodrov Jr.) has

been released from his service in the Russian army, and is on his way home. He stumbles onto the set of what appears to be a music video for the song *Kryl'ya (Wings)* by the Russian pop group *Nautilus Pompilius*. Attracted by the song, Danila ends up being attacked by the men hired to provide security for the set. After a bloody altercation, which first establishes Danila as a sort of "tough guy," he continues his journey to the home of his provincial mother. Worried about his future prospects at home, she tells him to look up his brother, Viktor (Viktor Suhorukov), in St. Petersburg. Viktor became the chief male figure in the family after his father was imprisoned for burglary and died, and he is clearly mama's favorite son.

Viktor is now an assassin for the Russian mafia, and soon has Danila doing his most difficult work for him. Along the way, Danila meets and forms relationships with two women: Kat (Mariya Zhukova), a drugged-out raver with a love for all things Western; and Sveta (Svetlana Pismichenko), a sometime-prostitute and tram-driver who meets Danila during a time when her abusive husband is in prison. Danila is also befriended by Hoffman (Yuri Kuznetsov), known as "the German," who is a small time criminal. The German connects Danila with his own criminal network, and also serves as a kind of advisor and father-figure to the young visitor, which stands in stark contrast to Viktor's actions.

Danila completes a number of jobs for the mafia, but is deceived by his older brother, who keeps most of the money for himself. He is also targeted by Roundhead (Sergei Murzin), the head of the mob, who would much rather kill his hit-men than pay them. Eventually, Danila is fully betrayed by his brother, who leads him into a trap set by Roundhead. Danila is one step ahead of the game, anticipating the trap, killing Roundhead and his minions, and forgiving his brother, who he sends home to mama with some of Roundhead's money. On his way out of town, he meets up with both Sveta and Kat, neither of whom are willing to leave (Sveta chooses to stay with her abusive husband, and Kat chooses to keep partying), and after some parting advice from Hoffman, Danila is off to Moscow.

### ***Production History and Critical Analysis of "Brat"***

*Brother*, as well as its sequel, was produced by Sergei Selyanov's STV, based in St. Petersburg (Lawton 24). Selyanov emerged as an important independent producer in the 1990s, and he was recently highlighted in *Variety* as an important "czar of Russian cinema" ("Czars" A4). His films have been tremendously successful in an industry that has suffered greatly through the economic changes of the past decade. Indeed, *Brother* was the most popular Russian film in 1997, and was also extremely popular with Russians when it came out on video, moving 300,000 units by September of 1998, at a time where legal sales of Hollywood blockbusters typically numbered around 70,000 (Hoberman 141, Birchenough 2000: 20, Birchenough 1998: 25). This was a major event for the post-Soviet Russian film industry. As late as 2000, George Faraday noted in his book *Revolt of the Filmmakers: The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry* that there were very few Russian movies being released in Russia for Russians. His comments echo those made by Daniil Dondurei, editor of *Iskusstvo kino*

(Film Art), in his remarks to the III Congress of The Russian Filmmaker's Union in 1997 (Beumers 46-50). Of Dondurei's comments, Anthony Anemone writes that he was advocating "for a genuinely popular mass cinema to create new heroes, myths, and cultural values appropriate for a new society" (143-145). Although *Brother* was not really the type of movie that Dondurei had in mind, it seemed to address these needs for the mass audience. In addition to being a homegrown box office success, the film was also critically praised by both fans and members of the industry, being voted by the readers of *Sovetskii Ekran* (Soviet Screen) as the best film of the year, and the movie was also nominated for a Nika Award—essentially, the Russian version of the Academy Award (Lawton 308, Sokol 198-199). Birchenough writes that the *Brother* movies "caught the popular mood" in Russia (2006: B1), but clearly the appeal of the movie was also international, as the film was nominated for awards at a total of eight film festivals, and racked up wins for lead actor Bodrov Jr. as Best Actor in Chicago, and a special prize for director Balabanov in Torino.<sup>2</sup>

*Brother* was directed by Alexei Balabanov, who has been hailed as "one of the world's great contemporary film-makers" and "the Russian David Lynch" by Roger Clark of the Independent (16). Michael Brooke of DVD Times lists Balabanov as "the first internationally-acclaimed post-Soviet Russian director" (Brooke). He was recognized early on in this country by Lawrence Van Gelder of The New York Times, who wrote in a review of Balabanov's short film *Trofim* (actually an excerpt from *Pribytiye poyezda*, "Arrival of a Train," 1995) which premiered at the New York Film Festival, that it was an "exhilarating display of the talent" of Balabanov (C14).

There are numerous critics who disagree with these assertions concerning Balabanov's skills as a director. To cite one example, Central Europe Review's Andrew James Horton dubs Balabanov "An interesting film-maker, but ultimately a disappointing one" (1-7). Horton and others have also frequently derided Balabanov for the casual racism and xenophobia which is often prevalent in his film characters (1-3). Yet no one can deny that Balabanov has been one of the most successful Russian directors of the past decade. He is most noted for his two *Brother* films, as well as *Pro urodov i lyudey* (*Of Freaks and Men*, 1999), which explores an early 20<sup>th</sup> century St. Petersburg where a number of "men" make a financial killing by pornographically exploiting a number of young women and a variety of "freaks" in their films (Lawton 205).

Sergei Bodrov Jr.'s Danila seems to fit into a long line of disaffected film characters. Horton unfavorably refers to him as a juvenile Travis Bickle from Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), and comparisons could also be made to the protagonists of Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down* (1993) and Pavel Lungin's *Taksi-Blyuz* (*Taxi Blues* 1990). Slant Magazine critic Nick Schager even compares Danila to Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov from Crime and Punishment, claiming that he is "bereft of social-consciousness" with an "amorphous moral code" that "reflects the precarious condition of his late-'90s homeland" (Schager). This analogy is true to an extent, if we only consider the character of Raskolnikov at the beginning of Dostoevsky's story, and not the murderer who is wracked with feverish dreams and unresolved guilt throughout the bulk of the novel. Unlike most of these protagonists, Danila is not so much rebelling against the

social order as he is learning to survive in it on his own terms. He is also given to bouts of soul-searching and self-contemplation, and this seems to stand in contrast to what many critics referred to as Danila's lack of morality. His stint as an assassin in St. Petersburg is not an easy project for him, and for this reason critic Nick Sturdee also compares Danila to Raskolnikov, and here the analogy is correct because he *does* suffer in his mind and soul because of some of his actions (22). As shall be seen, it is only in certain aspects of his profession that Danila has difficulty, and this is exactly in keeping with Lipovetsky's ideas.

St. Petersburg is as much a part of the movie as any of the characters, and perhaps this is fitting. Peter the Great's "window on the West" has often been a place of great tension and unrest in Russian history, and it seems fitting that an understanding of hypermodernity should begin here. Many critics commented on the attributes of Balabanov's city. Stephen Holden of The New York Times writes that the film: "suggests that St. Petersburg is a Darwinian battleground where everything is up for grabs" (E5). David Stratton of Variety notes that *Brother*: "depicts the beautiful Russian city as an Americanized place: People rendezvous at McDonald's, carry guns, listen to Westernized music and do drugs" (69). Jay Carr of The Boston Globe writes that the film "takes us inside St. Petersburg's back alleys and rock clubs, giving us a local's-eye view of it, while at the same time reminding us how Americanized it's getting" (D5). Bob Graham of The San Francisco Chronicle also writes of a St. Petersburg "which is starting to look a lot like America" (C6). Graham goes even further in connecting the new St. Petersburg to America. He writes: "when gangsters propose that they go into "business" together, they say the word in English. When serious money is involved, it is paid in dollars" (C6). He also notes that Balabanov's film "will be of interest to anyone who wonders what certain aspects of life must be like in Russia now" (C6).

The end of *Brother* echoes the end of Lipovetsky's work. He concludes that: "Democratic and market-led hypermodernity has not uttered its final word, it is merely at the start of its heroic adventure" (69). As Danila hitches a ride to Moscow to continue his own journey, the viewer gets the sense that his adventures are only beginning. Of course, we now know from the sequel that the viewers were right, but Balabanov's first *Brother* movie ends with the same sense of Lipovetsky's work: we have only explored the first phases of the hypermodern condition, and we have a long ways to go.

### ***"Brother," Enjoy Your Hypermodernity!***

In summarizing the upheavals of the move into hypermodern times, Lipovetsky might as well be describing post-Soviet Russia, particularly the one seen in Balabanov's *Brother*. Lipovetsky writes: "The past is resurfacing. Anxieties about the future are replacing the mystique of progress. The present is assuming an increasing importance as an effect of the development of financial markets, the electronic techniques of information, individualistic lifestyles, and free time" (35). Danila's journey through St. Petersburg can be marked off against this hypermodern checklist: the presence of Hoffman and Danila's innate xenophobia hearkens to a resurfacing



past; Danila's (and his mother's) anxieties about his life after being demobilized; the fact that much of the action takes place, literally, in a marketplace; the fact that Viktor uses caller-ID and cell phone technology to betray his brother; and the ways that Danila now spends his moneyed free time are all directly within the hypermodern path that Lipovetsky has charted.

While he is perhaps not the first hypermodern archetype, the fact is that Danila's actions proceed as though the character has read Lipovetsky's work. Many critics have commented upon Danila's sense of morality, or lack thereof, and this is exactly as Lipovetsky has described the emergence of the hyperindividual. Russian film scholar David Gillespie writes: "Danila kills without mercy or remorse . . . There is no condemnation of Danila's chosen profession . . . the job of hitman . . . is as valid as any other means of earning money in the new Russia" (152). Compare this to Lipovetsky, who writes of: "a detached hyperindividualism, legislating for itself, but sometimes prudent and calculating, sometimes unrestrained, unbalanced and chaotic" (33). Watching Danila travel through St. Petersburg is to watch him act as judge, jury and sometimes executioner for nearly everyone he meets. He sometimes calculates his actions, as in the assassinations of the Chechen and Roundhead; while at other times; he just jumps in as the mood strikes him: saving Hoffman, threatening the freeloaders on the bus, and saving an innocent radio director from his new comrades. As Russian film scholar Birgit Beumers notes, "the new hero makes no choices, but lives on the spur of the moment" (83).

*Brother* is also a film that is conscious of its commercialism. As J. Hoberman of Village Voice writes: "In its knowing deployment of genre conventions, *Brother* manages to be both a commercial movie and a comment on commercialism" (141). Nowhere is this more apparent than in Danila's near obsession with the band *Nautilus*, who he first hears as he waltzes onto the video set at the beginning of the movie. Even while still at the police station, when he encounters and apologizes to one of the security guards that he has pummeled, he is most concerned with identifying the artist who crafted *Wings*. He spends much of his subsequent time "plugged into his Discman," and is constantly spending his free time looking for *Nautilus* CDs (41). Brooke notes Danila's "obsession with improving his knowledge of contemporary Russian pop music, which occasionally overrides somewhat more pressing matters" (Brooke).

While this obsession is, in and of itself, a sort of commentary about commercialism; the film is even more sophisticated. After all, it is the real-life lead singer of the band, Vyacheslav Butusov, who composes the soundtrack for Balabanov's movie. In addition to the various *Nautilus* posters that are evident on Danila's walls, as well as in the music shop, the band also appears, as themselves, three times in the movie. The first time is when Danila takes Sveta to see them in concert, landing front-row seats and running into Kat in the bargain. They again appear when Danila purchases a video of one of their concerts, which he is disappointed to find out is a pirated copy. Finally, and most humorously, when Danila is waiting for a potential victim to come home while also dealing with a hangover, Butusov appears at the door. He was actually trying to get to a party one floor up, and Danila follows upstairs to see if he can get some aspirin, but also to be in the presence of musical greatness. He is rewarded by getting to see all the members of *Nautilus* "chilling out" and singing with the locals.

*Nautilus'* participation in the film is even deeper than these surface appearances, particularly to the audience member who is already familiar with the band. Birgit Beumers notes that Danila is constantly seeking certain *Nautilus* CDs, but so far as the movie is concerned, he is unable to find them. Still, the soundtrack of the movie is often posited for the viewer as being that which Danila is hearing in his headphones. Beumers writes:

The songs . . . are all from the albums *Atlantida* and *Yablokitai*, which, in fact, Danila fails to acquire at the music shop. In other words, the audience hears the music Danila wishes to hear on his CD player, but has actually not yet managed to acquire—the latest albums of *Nautilus*. The spectator is entangled in the illusory quality of the sound as much as Danila is entangled in the illusionary quality of his perception of reality. The hero lives under the sound-system of another world, in which he is immortal; the CD player saves his life when it deflects a bullet. (85)

All of Lipovetsky's axiomatic elements of hypermodernity are contained in Danila's relationship with *Nautilus*: the first axiom is demonstrated by the hypercapitalistic support for the band contained in the movie, as well as the constant market references in his pursuit of the elusive CDs. The technocratic efficiency of hypermodernity is expressed through Danila's all-powerful Discman, which serves as a means to listen to music, attract women and survive gunshots. Danila's hyperindividualism is reinforced by his devotion to the band, even when they are derided as old-fashioned by Kat. This devotion even stretches into *Brat 2*, when Danila tells his pop-star girlfriend (real-life Russian pop star Irina Saltykova) that he doesn't enjoy her music, preferring his beloved *Nautilus* and some other similar bands. *Nautilus* is, in fact, a very popular Russian band with a devoted following, but one senses that Danila would love them even if this was not the case. Danila clings to *Nautilus* as a vital component of his identity, regardless of what anyone thinks, because he *wants* to, and that is enough.

*Brother* is also replete with issues from Russian history, and the question as to whether Russia is primarily a "new" European or a "traditional" Asian country is always apparent in the life choices that Balabanov's characters make. Beumers notes that Danila "combines within himself the contradictions at the heart of the 'Russian Idea': self-assertion and self-effacement, the right to judge and the compassion to redeem, West and East (83). It is as if the character himself is emerging into hypermodernity as a way of dealing with the array of modern and postmodern problems afflicting Russia. This approach towards the 'Russian Idea' is also apparent in how different Russians react to their new conditions. This dichotomy seems to be best expressed by the three primary female characters in the movie: Mama, Kat and Sveta; with their varying relationships to the present. Mama is clearly representative of the provincial Russian, tied down to the past and not wanting to deal with change. In her one scene, we can see her uncomfortable with change (still referring to "Leningrad"), with technology (Danila's Discman) and with Danila's prospects, seeing his only hope as going to Viktor, his family. In contrast, Kat lives in a world that changes from day to day, is much hipper than Danila (listening

to new foreign music), and immediately sees “potential” in Danila (for good times). Trapped between the traditional Russia and the “New” Russia is Sveta.

On the one hand, Sveta seems to be the ideal New Russian. She adapts quickly to changing situations, maintains a regular job, is willing to prostitute herself for extra money and easily forms and breaks relationships as they fit her needs. On the other hand, Sveta is incapable of truly breaking free from “traditional” ways, represented mainly in her relationship with a criminal and abusive husband. She stays with him, even after Danila acquires enough money to give them a new life together. Sveta is the one character in the film for which Danila consistently shows his emotions. He is genuinely concerned about her past, outwardly angry about the abuse she receives from Roundhead’s mobsters, and clearly emotionally distressed by her rejection of him near the end of the film. This is a decision based on marital tradition that she clearly regrets in Balabanov’s final look at her situation. Like the tram-tracks upon which she drives on a daily basis, Sveta is unable to leave her primary path. Sveta occupies a kind of in-between place in Russian society, with an ability to react to changes, but only from within certain rigidly defined parameters. Sveta is our stand-in for “Mother Russia,” trapped between the Russia that was and the Russia that is coming into being. Danila, as well as Balabanov’s entire film, are caught up in the same trap. As Beumers notes in The BFI Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema: “The film is both within the mainstream of Russian cinema, in its concern with the cruelty of everyday life, and outside it, in the absence of an authorial moral stance” (Taylor, Wood, Grafty, Iordanova 24). The conflict within Beumer’s description exists because the movie marks the emergence of the Russian hero, and the Russian film, into Lipovetsky’s hypermodernity, and it therefore does not “fit” into the old expectations of contemporary Russian cinema.

### **Balabanov’s, Lungin’s and Other Hypermodern Post-Soviet Films**

*Brat* serves as an excellent film through which to explore the nuances of Lipovetsky’s theory, but it is only one example from the post-Soviet film era that matches up well with the concept of hypermodernity. While it is beyond the scope of this project to deal with any of these other films in-depth, it is important to briefly note them here, so that future scholars can explore the connections between post-Soviet Russian films and Lipovetsky’s theories as explicated in this study. Although many films in the post-Soviet era complement hypermodernity, those of two directors stand out: Balabanov and Pavel Lungin.<sup>3</sup>

The most obvious film of Balabanov’s to compliment *Brother* is its sequel, *Brother 2*. Here the director raises the stakes of hypermodernity, as the hero travels from the Westernized St. Petersburg of *Brother* to first Moscow and then the actual West, with extended sequences taking place in both Chicago and New York City. All of the hypermodern themes explicated in the first movie are magnified here. For example, the violence in *Brother*, which was somewhat muted, is ratcheted up, especially in a scene where “Bodrov blows away 10 people within the space of a minute” (Birchenough 2000: 20). Not only is this scene more violent than any in

*Brother*, but Balabanov films it so that the audience views it as though through Danila's eyes, and is highly reminiscent of many "first-person shooter" computer games. *Brother 2* does not just show a hypermodern character, but at times allows the viewer to vicariously become one. Many of Balabanov's other films highlight hypermodern themes, and what is interesting about these films is that they consist of a wide range of genres and situations, yet all evince at least some reflection of Lipovetsky's hypermodernism. Among the films are the aforementioned *Of Freaks and Men*. Stephen Holden regards this film as a "striking change of direction" from Balabanov's earlier work (Holden 1999: B14). Even so, this film about the past abounds in examples of Lipovetsky's hypermodernity.

Another Balabanov film with hypermodern themes is *The War*, which examines both a cynical and ultra-nationalist view of the conflict in Chechnya. In this film a British actor named John is released by a Chechen warlord to go home and raise a huge ransom to free his girlfriend from imprisonment. Unable to raise the full amount, John instead uses what he has raised to enlist the help of a former Russian soldier named Ivan, who was also imprisoned, to mount a rescue operation. In one scene, Balabanov has Ivan tell John: "If you play Dostoevsky, I go," in response to John's moral qualms about killing people to accomplish the mission (Warren 17). John is learning lessons on how to survive in the hypermodern world from his Russian comrade, and in the end, he surpasses his teacher by making a great deal of money on the video he has made of his adventure, leaving Ivan to take criminal responsibility for the rescue in Russia.

Finally, *Zhmurki (Blind Man's Bluff, 2005; also translated as Dead Man's Bluff)*, provides a sort of comically graphic economic history lesson on illegal activity in Russia during the early 1990s, and it abounds in the themes of hypermodernity. Furthermore, *Blind Man's Bluff* was released in the same year as Lipovetsky's text, and they share some historical perspectives. Of the four movies mentioned above, *Blind Man's Bluff* is the film most like *Brother* in its depictions of hypermodern times, taking their portrayal even further than *Brother 2*. The "history" film is framed by two scenes: one of present-day students trying to understand how the current situation in Russia came to be, and another of Russia's present-day moneyed class, former criminals, pondering their next moves. All are struggling to master the new rules of the hypermodern era. An interesting real-world side note to *Blind Man's Bluff* is that it featured Nikita Mikhalkov, president of the Moscow Film Festival and the preeminent filmmaker of post-Soviet Russia, as a gangland boss (Holdsworth). This is of particular note because the relatively conservative Mikhalkov was once engaged in "a world class feud" with Balabanov because he thought his films were immoral (Carr D5). In the hypermodern era, the old guard joins with the new, even though *Blind Man's Bluff* is Balabanov's bloodiest movie to date, and "Mikhalkov hams it up juicily, his [character] a giddy mixture of bonhomie and bloodthirstiness" (Felperin 29).

Another one of Russia's most successful post-Soviet directors is Pavel Lungin, and like Balabanov, his films demonstrate hypermodern trends emerging in Russia beginning in the 1990s. Of his late- and post-Soviet films, four most clearly echo Lipovetsky's work: the aforementioned *Taxi Blues*, *Luna Park* (1992), *Svadba (The Wedding 2000)*, and *Oligarkh*

(*Tycoon: A New Russian* 2002). *Taxi Blues* explores the confrontation between a Russian musician who had fully embraced the hypermodern era, and a taxi driver who yearns for the “good old days.” *Luna Park* chronicles the chaos of Russia’s vast economic and cultural changes in the early 90s through both skinhead and bohemian subcultures. *The Wedding* is interesting in that it seems to suggest a rejection of hypermodernity through a return to village life and traditional values. *Tycoon* is probably the most relevant of the films to Lipovetsky’s theory, particularly as it deals with a broad swath of time, from the first rumblings of change in the old USSR, to the various ups and downs of the 1990s and new millennium. Loosely based on the story of real-life oligarch Boris Berezovsky, Lungin’s film charts the creation of a “New Russian” in the form of Platon Makovski (Vladimir Mashkov) through his business acumen, opportunism, and criminal contacts. Like Balabanov’s *Blind Man’s Bluff*, *Tycoon* is a film that explores the process of change in Russia, and is even more far-reaching in its analysis, stretching back to pre-*perestroika* times.

The emergence of the “New Russians” coincides with hypermodernity. There are also a number of interesting parallels between the literature surrounding the concept of the New Russians and hypermodernity. Mark Lipovetsky comprehensively defines New Russians in his article “New Russians as Cultural Myth.” He writes:

From their very first appearances, the New Russians were seen as mythological figures closely associated with the vital, constructive, and destructive energies hidden within the chaos of the post-Soviet era. This mythological perception was motivated by the inapplicability to the New Russians behavioral patterns . . . of social or moral norms. They were viewed as standing financially above—yet in other aspects dramatically below—the norms of mundane reality, as beings possessing a sui generis code of behavior incompatible with that of mortals. (54)

M. Lipovetsky’s article about New Russians begins with an analysis of Lungin’s movie, and curiously enough, describes how Lungin posits his creation of the New Russian *against* the idea of the “social avenger” who is featured in the *Brother* movies (54). For Lungin, the New Russian is a positive, rather than a negative force. Tellingly, his version of the story does not end with the tycoon fleeing to London, as Berezovsky did in real life, but with Platon returning to continue his works in Moscow. For the purposes of this study, both his and Balabanov’s New Russians are those people who were able to successfully navigate through the chaos as Russia quickly moved into hypermodern times during the 1990s (White and Cullison A1, A6).

Some characters navigate through the chaos by latching on to figures of power, and quickly dropping them when their time has passed. Lungin’s *Tycoon* provides an interesting example of this, as the female protagonist, Masha (Mariya Mironova) is clearly meant to be a sort of historical stand-in for “Mother Russia,” and she moves over time from her relationship with old power (represented by her husband, a communist party boss) to the New Russian (Platon). Balabanov uses a similar strategy with his female characters in *Brat*, which is discussed above.

## Conclusions

Gilles Lipovetsky's Hypermodern Times begins to articulate the world that is emerging in the new millennium. His description of the hypermodern condition is either the beginning of a new discourse on knowledge, like Lyotard's Postmodern Condition, or will be viewed as a reaction to and addendum for postmodern discourse. In either case, Lipovetsky has crafted an engaging and pedagogically useful way of encountering the world, and his critical approach should be welcomed by academics in a variety of fields. In the tradition of Zizek and Gilmore, Lipovetsky's hypermodern condition might be a useful tool for scholars and teachers of film, theatre, performance studies and literature. Lipovetsky's work provides a great theoretical lens through which to encounter stories from the hypermodern age. These stories also have the potential to shed light upon the details of Lipovetsky's intellectual endeavor, which is particularly useful for pedagogy.

The themes described in Lipovetsky's hypermodern condition are extremely similar to those found in a number of post-Soviet Russian films, and this relationship merits further study. No Russian film better complements Lipovetsky's ideas than Balabanov's *Brother*, and the theory and performance text link up in a similar manner to Aristotle's theory on theatre and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The primary difference in this analogy is that Aristotle wrote his theory around the play, whereas Balabanov and Lipovetsky link up because both are describing the same historical phenomenon, that of Russia's transition from the center of the Soviet state to the current Federation; as well as the Western intellectual world's transition from modernity to hypermodernity. In the analysis of these times, it becomes clear that Russians are dealing with hypermodern themes in their creation of and mythologizing of the "New Russian" in society.

If Lipovetsky's idea of the hypermodern society becomes widely accepted by academics, and if it is truly reflective of contemporary society, then those ideas will emerge in other philosophical, literary, performance and sociological studies over the next decade. If the same is true specifically for Russian culture, then scholars of post-Soviet cinema, literature, and theatre should be able to identify similar themes in these areas to those found in this analysis of Balabanov's *Brother*. Mark Lipovetsky's article about the New Russians, cited above, provides an excellent place to begin in Russian literature, as many works that are ostensibly about New Russians are also about hypermodernity. This article contains a short list of post-Soviet Russian films which scholars may choose to consider in the future, it is by no means exhaustive. Finally, some post-Soviet Russian plays (including Danila Privalov's Five Twenty-Five, Natalia Pelevine's In Your Hands, and Oleg and Vladimir Presnyakov's Playing the Victim) could be examined in light of their hypermodern content. Playing the Victim was recently released as a film in Russia (*Izobrazhaya zhertvu*, 2006), and it is the probably the best recent example of Lipovetsky's ideas.

Alexei Balabanov's *Brother* is an important film, both for scholars of post-Soviet Russian cinema and lovers of thought-provoking movies in general. Although much criticism has focused on the popular appeal of *Brother*, as though this was a major obstacle in seriously considering it

as a work of art, it is an important movie precisely *because* of its popularity in post-Soviet Russia, demonstrating that the director struck a nerve with his primary audience, those that were most familiar with the hypermodern themes exploding all around them in the New Russia. That *Brother* also contains sophisticated elements of a wildly morphing, sometimes disturbing and thoroughly hypermodern worldview is indicative that Brecht's call for theatre that is both instructive *and* entertaining applies to film as well, and that this is a movie that clearly merits further study by scholars.

Professors who teach contemporary literature and performance, particularly with a bent towards cultural criticism, should find in Lipovetsky's work a new way of talking about these works. Whether seen as an addendum to postmodern theory or as a radical break from it, the concept of hypermodernity is one that can be easily explained and applied to a variety of performance texts and cultural situations. Lipovetsky's keen observations about the world that is coming into being reflect observations of trends that began as early as the 1980s, if not sooner, and therefore may also be useful as a way of looking back and reconsidering important texts from the past three decades. Finally, an understanding of hypermodern terms and concepts is useful in understanding the modern and postmodern projects, and this understanding can be best furthered through a familiarity with both Lipovetsky's and Balabanov's texts.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Beumers, Birgit. Ed. Russia on Reels: The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999. See also Lawton, Anna. Imaging Russia 2000: Film and Facts. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2004. An image from *Brother* is also



featured on the cover of Insiders and outsiders in Russian cinema, edited by Stephen M. Norris and Zara M. Torlone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See “Awards for *Brat* (1997).” Internet Movie Database (IMDb). [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) Last accessed 29 May, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Other late- and post-Soviet films that might be examined for their affinities to Lipovetsky’s theory of hypermodernity include Vyacheslav Krishtofovich’s *Rebro Adama* (*Adam’s Rib*, 1990), Yuri Mamin’s *Okno v Parizh* (*Window on Paris*, 1994), Vladimir Shchegolkov’s *S Dnyom Rozhdeniya, Lola!* (*Happy Birthday, Lola!*, 2001), Sergei Bodrov Jr.’s *Syostry* (*Sisters*, 2001), Yevgeni Lavrentyev’s *Afyora* (*The Scam*, 2001), Andrei Konchalovskii’s *Dom Durokov* (*House of Fools*, 2003), and Timur Bekmambetov’s extremely popular film adaptations of Sergei Lukyanenko’s novels: *Nochnoy Dozor* (*Night Watch*, 2004) and *Dnevnoy Dozor* (*Day Watch*, 2006).