

j.b. spins

Jazz, film, and improvised culture.

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thursday, january 29, 2009

Manchevski's Shadows

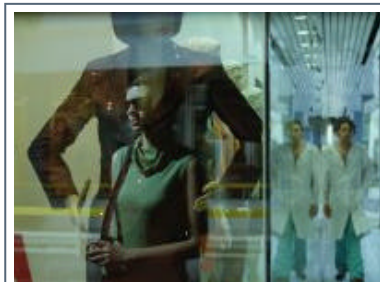
When Milcho Manchevski started filming his breakthrough debut *Before the Rain*, Macedonia was not yet a fully recognized country. While the modern Macedonia is a relatively young country, the region carries the baggage of centuries of dramatic and often bloody history. After all, Alexander the Great began his conquest of the known world as king of ancient Macedon. The past figuratively haunts the work of Milcho Manchevski and literally haunts the protagonist of his latest film, *Shadows* ([trailer here](#)), opening tomorrow in New York.



Dr. Lazar Perkov is a good father, but as a man, he is a bit wishy-washy, avoiding conflict with his over-bearing mother, Dr. Vera Perkova, at all costs. He is so programmed to respond to her, he causes a terrible traffic accident while reaching for his cell-phone to take her call. Nearly embraced by the light, he comes back to Earth—remember the name was Lazar.

Though fully recovered physically, something is still wrong. Returning home, Perkov finds a withered elderly woman in his apartment, speaking in a mysterious tongue. Recording her cryptic speech, Perkov looks for help from the local linguistic professor, but finds Menka, his research assistant wife in his place. According to her, Perkov's uninvited caller has been demanding in an ancient Aegean dialect: "Return what's not yours." Though she is initially contemptuous of Perkov, sparks quickly fly between Perkov and Menka. While at first, he precipitously retreats from her sexual advances, the seeds of obsession are firmly planted. The nature of reality becomes increasingly problematic for Perkov, as visions of the alluring Menka, the old woman, and a hobbled old man with an infant increasingly intrude into his daily life.

Shadows is a ghost story in a very real sense, but not a horror story as such. However, Manchevski maintains an eerily effective mood throughout the film, in contrast to the rather inconsistent tone of *Dust*, Manchevski's sophomore slump following the masterful *Rain*. Ranking solidly between Manchevski's first two films, *Shadows* might in fact be his strongest work



from a purely visual standpoint, thanks in large measure also to Fabio Cianchetti's brooding cinematography.

If not as visceral as *Rain*,

[Global Lens 2009: I am
from Titov Veles](#)



Manchevski's screenplay is compelling and economical. It is also his most sexually explicit work, by far. As in his previous films, events from the past continue to exert a palpable influence on those in the present. In Manchevski's *Skopje*, antiquity is only concealed by a thin veneer of modernity. It can be heady stuff, but Manchevski pulls the audience through at a good clip, aided by a strong cast, particularly Vesna Stanojevska, whose performance brings surprising depth to the enigmatic Menka.

With *Shadows*, Manchevski seems to be back on track. Dark and moody, but oddly satisfying, *Shadows* is a film for adults—meaning those with adult sensibilities. It opens tomorrow in New York at the Cinema Village.

Labels: [Ghost movies](#), [Macedonian Film Festival](#), [Milcho Manchevski](#)

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