

Whose City is Moscow Today?

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In many respects, Moscow is becoming a normal city. It is being filled with different forms of life and social activity that were previously invisible or forbidden. The market economy has brought the city new types of buildings, such as commercial banks and offices, luxury hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, vending stalls, boutiques, casinos, private clubs, etc. Street artists, just like those in Paris and London, have appeared throughout the city, each one eager to paint the portraits of all those who wish. Thanks to the importation of consumer goods, durables, and foodstuffs, Muscovites have gained access to commodities which over the years have been in short supply. Vendors in private shops and stores are urgently trying to learn proper retail etiquette, and sometimes even crack a smile when helping customers. Hotel personnel are gradually getting used to the idea that their business is to cater to their patrons, rather than keeping vigil over their guests' Moral behavior or political sympathies.

Eating at cafes and restaurants is no longer a problem. While in the 1980's there were only 300 restaurants in the city, by 1997 their number had increased to 1200 (Itogi, November 4, 1997: 36), and by the beginning of 1998 to more than 1500 (*Den'gi*, N 2, January 28, 1998-.38). Although the mayor of Moscow has complained that this was still ten times less than in major European megalopolises, a remarkable progress is quite evident. Moreover, waiters have begun to rejoice each time that customers sit at their table.

Not so long ago it was practically impossible to find a place where one could quickly get an inexpensive snack. To satisfy this demand, the idea of fast food was imported from the West. McDonald's came first, and created quite a stir as a symbol of the Western standards of service and of the Western way of life. Pizza Hut, Steak House, Baskin Robbins, and others followed suit. In addition, vendors selling hot food and beverages also appeared on Moscow's streets. Signboards advertising hot dogs - often accompanied by the Russian *goriachie sosiski* (hot sausages) for explanation - became quite common.

This rapid Western expansion into services that had previously not existed in Moscow provoked a desire to promote against it something decidedly Russian. Thus, another fast food chain appeared called *Ruvskoe Bistro* (Russian Bistro), aimed at competing with McDonald's and

similar cheap restaurants by offering fast food Russian cuisine. This was considered so important that the first outlet of the new chain was solemnly opened by Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, and President Yeltsin was one of the first patrons. Ironically, the word bistro is of French origin, but this was disputed on curious legendary grounds. Allegedly, the Russian Cossacks who came to Paris after their victorious campaign against Napoleon were always in a hurry when they demanded food service, often saying *hyviro, hyviro* (quickly, quickly)- thus giving a name to the idea of the small snack bar, or bistro.

Most potholes on Moscow's streets have disappeared, while traffic jams have become as commonplace as in New York or Paris. Every year the number of cars in Moscow is increasing by about 300 thousand (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, October 31, 1997). The total has already reached 2 million; in addition about 200 thousand more belonging to visitors are pre in the city every day (*Simptom*, N 8 (44), 1996: 15).¹ However, pedestrians and drivers have yet to learn to respect one another, and pedestrians do not have the right of way.

Moscow after dark has become a city full of bright streetlights, marquees, and a bustling nightlife; especially in comparison with the Soviet era. Russian language editions of *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Vogue* fill newspaper kiosks. Even more serious publications, such as the *New York Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, and *Le Monde* have become readily accessible in Moscow.

In the last few years the level of inflation in Russia has considerably lowered. Nevertheless, Muscovites still trust the dollar considerably more than the ruble. Among the most frequent of signs seen on the streets of Moscow today is *Obmen valiuty*, often accompanied by the English equivalent, "Currency exchange." Advertisements for consumer goods have partly taken the place of advertisements for ideas and, as in the West, present the world as one large shop window packed with consumer items. Moreover, ads for cigarettes, hard liquor, and Coca Cola are encountered on Moscow's streets more often than on the streets of any Western city. A neon billboard, measuring about 200 square meters, advertises Coca-Cola on Novyi Arbat Avenue. It is even larger than similar billboards in New York's Times Square and London's Piccadilly Circus (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, November 21, 1997). These achievements of modern Western civilization have preceded other Western traditions, such as respect for the law and the timely payment of wages, in coming to the Russian capital.

The craving of Muscovites for Western styles of life is reflected in the writing of advertisements. Strictly speaking, advertisements - as Westerners understand them - have been found in Moscow for only about the past ten years. Only after the August 1991 putsch did the ever-present masterpieces of Soviet agit-prop (agitation and propaganda), such as "The Party is our Helmsman The People and the Party are One," or the especially absurd "Lenin is More Alive Than Any Living Person," began to disappear from the streets and buildings of Moscow. But Soviet advertisements were pure agitation and propaganda, even when they advertised goods and services. These types of Soviet advertisements, such as "Fly Aeroflot," in essence substantiated the lack of choice, because in the USSR Aeroflot was a monopoly, and it was impossible for ordinary Soviet citizens to fly on Western airlines.

Western advertisements, apart from their direct goals, acquired some other functions in Moscow. They demonstrate the possibility of choice in goods and services, and at the same time tempt Muscovites to embrace the consumer society. It has become fashionable for advertisements to use English words. The writing varies: sometimes in Latin characters, others in Cyrillic (often accompanied by an incorrect transliteration)- sometimes with two variations at once. This occasionally has a humorous result. A few years ago, along the respectable Kutuzovsky Prospect (Avenue), where I had once lived, I noticed a new, modest cafe under a strange name: *Drim* - a word written Cyrillic, but which does not exist in the Russian language. No one in the cafe, even among the wait staff, knew what this word meant; and it took some time for me to realize that *Drim* was in fact a Russian transliteration of the English word, "Dream." Purists and many in the power elite of Moscow have long been protesting the preponderance of foreign words in advertising, but still without real success, because the appearance of these words was far from accidental. On the one hand, this is connected with the necessity to define new Western realities; on the other, to the desire to display in advertisements an aura of the Western way of life. Thus, on the streets of Moscow appeared English words such as "SHOP" often written in Cyrillic, as an analog for the Russian *magazin*. In the naming of stores, which in the eyes of their owners (though often not in practice) correspond to Western standards, the English words "supermarket" and "minimarket" are seen more and more often- as well as new, compound hybrid words; in which one part is Russian and the other the English "super" or "market." The French *boutique* has also come into fashion and represents a salon, in which expensive clothes, shoes, et cetera are sold. The reaction to "Western dominance" in advertising

is noticeable in the attempted return to pre-Revolutionary names, almost forgotten during Soviet times: *lavka* (a small shop), *traktir* (in the past, a cheap restaurant, a snack bar where hard liquor was sold, but today often a respectable restaurant serving Russian cuisine), *trapeznaia* (cafe), and others.

Russia is still in transition, and nowhere is this more evident than in its capital, despite the fact that in a way Moscow is even less Russia than New York is the United States, or Paris is France. Even the Moscow authorities admit that "Russia is not Moscow yet."

The job market situation in Moscow is much better than in the rest of Russia and in many of the countries of the CIS. By April, 1997, only 48,387 city-dwellers were registered as unemployed. One should take into account, however, that official Russian statistics tend to significantly understate these figures. According to some estimates, the true number of the unemployed in Moscow is close to seven percent of all able-bodied people (*Simptom*, N 11 (59), 1997: 8-9). Also, every fifth employee in Moscow lives in the suburbs or in towns of the Moscow *oblast'* (administrative region) (*Pul's*, N 36 (120), 1996: 12). Every day about 500 thousand of these people commute to the capital (*Simptom*, N 1(49), 1997: 67). But, if and when they lose their jobs, they are registered as unemployed not in Moscow, but in their place of residency (L'vov, 1997: 144). Still, Moscow has avoided the perils of high permanent unemployment; and many workers from Ukraine, Moldova, and even from some regions of Russia come to Moscow eager to take, sometimes illegally, the available jobs - especially in construction - that are not appealing to Muscovites.

Moscow is much wealthier than the rest of Russia. Contrary to what occurs in many other regions of the country, pensions and wages to budget-dependent groups are usually paid without delay in Moscow. The provision of budgetary resources per Muscovite is three times higher than for any Russian citizen living outside the capital (Bernstein, 1997:2).

Large state investments in Moscow's financial and credit institutions contributed to the rapid formation of this new sector in the city's economy- In the early period of market reforms, the State Central Bank provided low interest loans to Moscow banks, giving them access to cheap credit. High inflation rates in the initial years of reform were propitious to their activities. Capital was accumulated easily and quickly.

It is no wonder that Moscow's tax base constitutes about 20-25 percent of the states' total revenue, even though the capital accounts for only 6 percent of the country's population.²

Although Moscow's GNP represents 13.1 percent of the country's total (*Nezavisimaia gazeta-Regiony*, No. 1, October 1997:2), about 80 percent of Russia's financial capital and the lion's share of foreign investments are concentrated in Moscow (*Moskovskie novosti*, December 14-21, 1997: 18). Thus, of the 6.7 billion dollars in foreign investments in Russia during the first half of 1997, 5.5 billion dollars (83 percent) was invested in Moscow. In addition, most of the Russian monopolies and corporations have their headquarters in the capital, and are paying municipal and other taxes there.

However, while Moscow is the most affluent city in Russia, it is also the most expensive. It has actually become one of the most expensive cities in the world. While in New York City the price of office space is about 60 dollars per square meter, in Moscow the cost is around 100 dollars or more. In this respect, Moscow is second in all the world only to London. A modest dinner for two at an inexpensive restaurant costs at least 60 to 70 dollars, or even more. No wonder that less than one percent of Muscovites eat at restaurants more or less regularly (*Itogi*, November 4, 1997: 8). A taxi ride from Sheremet'ev airport to downtown, a distance of about 17 miles, costs 70 dollars. Although the official average monthly income per person in Moscow (250 dollars)³ is more than twice the average of the rest of the country, the subsistence minimum in the capital is also more than twice as high (*Simptom*, N 5 (41) 1996: 48; *Pul's*, N 36 (120) 1996:25; *Trud*, September 5-11, 1997- *Moskovskii komsomolets*, September 18, 1997; *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, October 22 1997).

Income differentiation in contemporary Moscow, just as social variety, is much greater than in the Soviet period and continues to grow. In 1992, the incomes of people in the top ten percent of earnings were 7.3 times higher than those in the lowest ten percent, in 1993 the difference was 13.3 times; in 1994 it was 28.3 times; in 1995, 31.6 times, and in 1996, 45 times. In the rest of Russia, the average difference was 10.5 times in 1995, and 13 times in 1996 (*Pul's*, N 36 (120), 1996: 5-1 *Simptom*, N 5 (41), 1996:49; L'vov, 1997: 111). Official publications of the Moscow authorities estimate that 2 to 3 percent of Muscovites are characterized as very wealthy, while an additional 10 to 12 percent are considered highly paid. Fifteen to eighteen percent of Muscovites are considered middle class in terms of income; while 55 to 60 percent are poor, with the remaining population (18 to 20 percent) living below the poverty line (*Pul's*, N 36 (120), 1996: 6-7 *Simptom*, N II (59), 1997: 42).

The so-called New Russians consist of the emerging class of businessmen, bankers, and executives, the corrupt officials whose lifestyles do not correspond to their reported incomes, and the Mafiosi. They keep their money in Swiss and British bank accounts, and are acquiring villas on the Cote d'Azur and in Switzerland, or in London's Belgravia district. In addition, scores, perhaps even hundreds of thousands of people who found employment in banking, financial institutions and other private companies, or who managed to open small businesses, have begun to enjoy high living standards, although only in comparison with the average Muscovite.⁴ Nevertheless, they open bank accounts, buy cars, and spend their vacations in Turkey and Cyprus.

Still, all of these people constitute but a minority of Moscow's nine million plus inhabitants. They live side-by-side with about 2,200,000 elderly pensioners (*Simptom*, N 9 (57), 1997:18), who spend their declining years in financially trying circumstances. In 1995, the average pension of a retired person amounted to a mere 45 percent of the subsistence minimum (L'vov, 1997: 102). In addition, there are many hundreds of thousands of disabled persons in Moscow; about 200 thousand of whom are still able to work, but only 40 thousand of whom managed to find jobs (*Moskovskie novosti*, February 1-8, 1998: 21). The lifestyle of well-to-do Muscovites contrasts with that of the millions of employees in those sectors of the economy which were adversely affected by reforms-, namely, in the military-industrial complex (about 25 percent of Moscow's industries consist of plants that produce military equipment - L'vov, 1997-.118), in machine building, metal working, and the automotive industry- as well as in public health, education, and the sciences. Industrial enterprises in the city are now producing less than half the production of their heydays. Still, in 1997, the recession continued (*Trud*, September 51 1, 1997). Moscow is over-saturated with colleges, universities, and research institutions. Eighty-four universities and other institutions of higher education (15 percent of Russia's total), with about 477 thousand students and about 80 thousand faculty are located in the capital. In addition, by 1996, about 240 thousand people were employed in various research institutions. Although in the period from 1991 to 1995, the number of scholars, scientists, researchers, and their staffs decreased by 53 percent, they still constitute more than 13 percent of Moscow's labor force; while in Russia this sector makes up, on the whole, three percent (L'vov, 1997-. 118-119). Almost all of Moscow's universities and research institutions are now facing formidable financial difficulties, and many of them are barely getting by. Their personnel were accustomed to what

in Soviet times amounted to middle and upper class incomes, while in 1996, their average wages amounted to only 63 percent of the city's average (L'vov, 1997: 119). Nowadays they constitute a part of the millions of people who live slightly above or near the poverty line and are characterized as the "new poor" (*Simptom*, N 5 (41), 1996: 52; Varoli, 1996: 8).⁵

Moscow's *nouveaux riches* have to share the city with the new and numerous underclass- the beggars, the homeless, tramps, and more than 20 thousand prostitutes (several thousand of whom are aged 11 to 14 years, or even younger), who charge anything between 100 dollars to several thousand dollars for their services - rates higher than anywhere else in post-communist Europe (*Komsomol'skaia pravda*, March 26, 1997). They also have to share it with refugees and involuntary migrants, mainly from Azerbaidjan, Georgia, Tadjikistan, Moldova, and Chechnia. According to official statistics, these people number only 15 thousand, but more reliable sources place their number at more than 100 thousand (*Pul's*, N 36 (120), 1996: 9; *Simptom*, N 1 (49), 1997: 67). These people are persecuted by the Moscow authorities, who want them to leave the city, and are harassed by the Moscow police as easy prey for extortion. Ordinary Muscovites also do not harbor kind feelings for the refugees, migrants, and visitors from the southern republics. More than 57 percent of Muscovites are of the opinion that the migrants are negatively affecting the labor market, and more than 70 percent claim that the migrants are to a large extent responsible for the shortage of affordable apartments. More than 77 percent are sure that most of the migrants are involved in criminal activities (L'vov, 1997: 155). None of these groups - new rich, new poor, the underclass, and the migrants - associate or intermingle with each other- each lives their own lives and spatially become more segregated than in The Soviet period.

Moscow also boasts the highest degree of political activity in Russia. Democrats, liberals and Westernizers, populists, Slavophiles and monarchists, communists, and neo-fascists - all of them have their own vision of Russia's past, present, and future; and each is trying to implant their vision on Moscow's landscape.

National iconography and symbolism (flags, emblems, anthems), ceremonies and festivals, public squares and representative buildings, shrines, monuments, sculptures (along with their design and location), state patronized and supported arts as an aesthetic force for binding the nation together, even postage stamps represent a political lexicon that may reflect a continuity with the past and serve as a bridge between a past and a future. They may also

accentuate a break with a past. However, there is not one past, but many, and the same symbols may have quite a different meaning to different social and ethnic groupings. There are no "natural" symbols at all. The symbols of state and nation are just as arbitrary and arguable as any other symbols. Which past and whose symbols are selected, and how they are selected and interpreted, may be a matter of consent or contestation. At present, Russia's self-identification is ambiguous and uncertain. It is still a matter of the ongoing political and ideological debate that involves cultural presentation as well.

In Russia, the future always begins with rewriting and restructuring the past. Thus, Moscow has become the battlefield on which the different political forces and social groups are producing, modifying, and appropriating competing national representations. In this contest, historical facts, myths, and symbols are invented or reinterpreted, and monuments and public spaces are destroyed, erected, and reconstructed in an attempt to shape the country's collective memory and to demarcate new sites of power. So far, post communist Moscow has failed to come to any symbolic, cultural, or stylistic unity, and, to a large extent, has ignored the social aspects of urban development.

Nowadays, Moscow is a city of imitation, fakes, and bad-taste eclecticism which often borders on sheer kitsch. At the street level, this is apparent in the numerous two-sided posters which show a picture of an Orthodox church accompanied by the words "the heart of Russia" on one side, and an advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes or imported hard liquor on the other. At a higher level, this is evident in the old-new state symbol, the double-headed imperial eagle, which, after more than sixty years, is once again brazenly displayed on the roof of the State Historical Museum - located at the entrance to Red Square - while Lenin's mummy still rests in his mausoleum and the red stars still crown the steeples of the Kremlin towers. The double-headed eagle was borrowed from Byzantium in the 15th century and symbolically implied the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome.⁶ Nevertheless, it is actively exploited today by Yeltsin's leadership and, ironically, is bitterly opposed by the same communists who are longing for the restoration of the Russian Empire. The imitative character of post-communist Moscow is also evident the fervor to rebuild churches destroyed in the Soviet period, which is sometimes accompanied by the destroying of existing historical and cultural monuments. However, the hastily rebuilt churches are inserted into the semiotic context of the urban landscape that had been developed during the Soviet era. Thus, their semantics are quite different from the original.

The political opposition is fairing no better. The ideological collapse of communism in Russia simultaneously resulted in the end of totalitarian symbolism. In fact, the latter did not disappear completely, but became discrete. The secret places and memorials of the Bolshevik Revolution and the monuments to the communist rulers and heroes have lost a significant part of their charisma. In the Soviet period, they served as shrines of compulsory national adulation; nowadays they retain a positive symbolic meaning only to the communists and their supporters. To satisfy the need for additional symbols, the opposition, instead of attempting to create new ones, is trying to appropriate the symbols that it totally negated in the recent past. This is most apparent in their meetings and demonstrations, during which portraits of Stalin, who almost destroyed the Orthodox Church, peacefully coexist with icons. Likewise, protesters carry red banners of the Soviet Union alongside the yellow-black-white tricolors of the Romanov dynasty, without showing any hint of the paradox that surrounds this contradictory and oxymoronic display.

No wonder contemporary Moscow has several different faces. One of them is best expressed in the slogan: *enrichesiez-vous*. This is the motley Moscow of conspicuous consumption and fancy shops. The number of such shops far exceeds the real demand, because they often duplicate each other, and no more than 5 or 6 percent of Muscovites can afford purchases there in any case (Lokotova, 1998: 58). This is the Moscow of prestigious foreign cars, with chauffeurs and bodyguards. The number of such expensive automobiles in Moscow exceeds the total in many Western capitals. This is the Moscow of renovated and newly constructed office buildings and expensive condos. Numerous new magazines (*Profil'*, *Den'gi*, *Domovoi*, *Mir i Dom*, and others) are filled with advertisements for apartments in the so-called "elite houses" where one square meter of dwelling space costs more than two thousand dollars. They also advertise the services of designing and remodeling firms that promise to remodel and furnish apartments in any style: from German to Japanese. Since anti-Americanism has again become fashionable in Russia, these firms are especially recommending the "evroremont" (remodeling in the European style), which together with furnishings may cost up to 120 thousand dollars for even a one room apartment (70 square meters) in an elite house (Roshek, 1998-.55). This is also the Moscow of nascent suburbanization, a completely new phenomenon for the city. In the Soviet period, mainly the working class and the underprivileged lived permanently in the suburbs. Those who could do so preferred to settle in the city. Middle and upper class

Muscovites, especially those with young children, liked to move to the suburbs, where they owned or rented *dachi* (wooden summer houses), only for the summer months. Now, one is witnessing the birth of another suburban Moscow, where single family brick and stone houses and mansions cost from several hundred thousand to several million dollars. Twenty to thirty thousand such houses have already been built in the most scenic locations (*Moskovskie novosti*, December 14-21, 1997 - 8). Not infrequently, their construction is in blatant violation of Russian legislation which forbids construction of villas in the vicinity of reservoirs that supply the capital with drinking water (*Moskovskie novosti*, October 26-November 2, 1997- 12).

Another face of Moscow is shaded in gray hues. It represents the grim communist past and the hardships of the transition period. This is the Moscow of wholesale markets where the numerous poor, who cannot afford to shop at retail stores, find the majority of their foodstuffs and consumer goods. This is the Moscow of elderly women trying desperately to supplement their meager income by petty trade on the streets, all the while intimidated by police who extort bribes from them, at the same time closing their eyes to the activities of real criminals. This is the Moscow of crowded communal flats occupied by several individual families; the Moscow of four- to ten- or more story apartment buildings built from prefabricated cement slabs, depressing in their monotony. One fifth of Moscow's apartment houses still consist of *khrushcheby*, five story houses of very low quality construction, whose building was initiated under Khrushchev (they are ironically called *khrushcheby* by Muscovites because this word sounds similar to the Russian word *truvhcheby*, or slums).

In principle, families with modest means are entitled to rent-free dwellings provided either by the state or the city-, "modest" meaning those who currently occupy tiny flats or rooms with no more than 5 square meters of floor space per family member. Still, by 1996, 346.6 thousand families in Moscow were waiting for rent-free apartments; 14 percent of them had been waiting for ten years or more (L'vov, 1997-.96- *Nezavisimaia gazeta - Politekonomiia*, N 2, January 1998 -2). However, the construction of living quarters for the poor strata of the population has all but come to a stop. In the past, up to 67 percent of the city's budget was allocated for this purpose, while today this is only 3 percent (L'vov, 1997:99-100). Only state and city officials and bureaucrats are provided with rent-free apartments - and those are of the highest quality. For the rest of the population, the municipal government has built too many apartment buildings in the outlying districts of the capital, where Muscovites were supposed to

be able to purchase apartments at favorable rates. Upon closer investigation, however, the advantages of these apartment buildings are revealed to be fictitious. The supposedly low cost of municipal lodgings was fixed at 630 dollars per square meter, but similar apartments on the open market were fetching 500 to 550 dollars for the same space. As a consequence of this situation, there are now 40 thousand unsold and empty apartments; only one tenth of those built have been purchased (Kamensky, 1997: 48-49). To solve the problem, the Moscow government now wants to provide subsidies and develop a system of mortgages, ideas which in their Western understandings are virtually nonexistent in Russia (banks are providing only short term mortgages, at very high interest). However, some experts doubt that many Muscovites would be capable of purchasing apartments with even these favorable conditions (L'vov, 1997: 1 00). One more face of contemporary Moscow is determined by the interests and the tastes of the political class, which, in its attempt to create and promote a new national identity, tends to propagate a mighty statehood and Russian nationalism with Orthodox accretion. Remarkably, the boundaries between the public and private realms have not yet changed significantly in post-communist Moscow.

Having embraced a market economy, Moscow has collided with the problems that follow the absence of commercial and office space. Construction and real estate have appeared to be an extremely lucrative business. However, if the construction boom had been precipitated by market demands, it is the municipal authorities that are profiting more from it than anyone else. The Moscow municipal government remains the principal owner of city land, as well as the main customer and primary builder in the city. Likewise, every step in construction, beginning with architectural projects, is under its tight control. In fact, monopolism, clannishness, and dependence on bureaucracy are very strong in Moscow's architectural establishment. In order to receive a project from the city, one should be sufficiently servile, obedient, and on good terms with its authorities. In these respects, capitalism in Moscow, at least in most cases, has turned out to be bureaucratic capitalism.

This state of affairs, together with an enormous concentration of capital in the city, has allowed Yuri Luzhkov, the authoritarian mayor of Moscow and one of the most influential politicians in Russia, to play the populist-nationalist card and use the construction boom to carry out, in short order, the large-scale reconstruction of the city, especially its historical center. A priority has been given to highly publicized grand projects, each costing hundreds of millions of

dollars, which have irreversibly changed the face of downtown Moscow. The political aspects of this Luzhkov-style reconstruction, which is being carried out with the full consent of Yeltsin's leadership, is entirely obvious.

On the one hand, every Muscovite must know and feel that construction is being carried out by those in political power, and that only those in power can make the city comfortable for each person. This is why the reconstruction of the city and the erection of new buildings is so provocatively noticeable and, in its very essence, antidemocratic. It seems that the municipal and state authorities are simply screaming for everyone to hear: "we are the power." The Moscow mayor and his cronies peremptorily decide which architectural style befits the capital and which does not. It is well known that Luzhkov dislikes architecture of glass, concrete, and metal. Thus, to please him the architectural establishment have already come out against the "mechanistic implementation of Western architectural style (*Segodnia*, March 2, 1996: 8)," and now demands an adherence to the so-called "traditional Moscow style," even though no one has ever defined this style in any convincing or professional way. Moscow is not a very layered city. Its characteristic feature is not the perpetuation of tradition, but rather its frequent interruptions. Nevertheless, it is the adherence to Moscow traditions that above all other characteristics is taken into account by the city bureaucrats when they decide, often arbitrarily, whether to approve or reject architectural projects (Rezin, 1997- 52).

In practice, the contemporary "Moscow style" is an eclectic mix of post-modernist vernacular with elements of the neo-Russian architecture of the second half of the 19th century, which aspires to the alleged Russian symbolism (gables decorated with arches, tent-like and helmet-like exterior ornamental features set over roofs, merlons and pointed towers on roofs, *kokoshniki*: a series of corbelled-out, round, or pointed arches arranged in receding tiers as a purely decorative feature, et cetera). This is hardly accidental. The neo-Russian style (incidentally, in the past it was usually called the pseudo-Russian style), which found its inspiration in the Russian architecture of the 17th century (Barton, 1990: 175 ff), was not noted for its artistic merits. No wonder that contemporaries ironically labeled as "chests with *kokoshniki*" such specimens of this style as the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the Imperial Historical Museum. However, in the neo-Russian style the ideological side always prevailed over the artistic one, and this is just what makes it so attractive to the Moscow authorities preaching the ideas of traditionalism and *derzhavnost'* (mighty statehood).

Any traditionalism, even the most imitative and tasteless, works much better for an assertion of the ideology of *derzhavnost'* than *avant-garde*. Members of the Russian avant-garde in the early post-revolutionary period, even those who had been devoted to the communist cause, earned the hard way that it was impossible in the Soviet Union to be *avant-garde* while simultaneously reflecting in their art the official ideology. I am afraid that this is also impossible in post-totalitarian Russia. In fact, the official concern with forms of local cultural identity is not new in Moscow. It was quite conspicuous during the reign of Czar Alexander I¹¹, and even more so in the Stalin era (Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze, 1992; Papernyl, 1996: 51 ff.). Still, contemporary Moscow architecture contains some new and almost beguiling characteristics, which prove that Russia is still in transition, and that nothing there is certain as of yet. In addition to the "local tradition," contemporary Moscow architecture attempts to adopt post-modernism to support traditionalist, nationalist, and statist ideologies. Post-modernism is, however, ill suited for any official rhetoric. The two different aesthetic principles are combined without comprehension of the fact that they are opposites. Thus, a contradiction has emerged—the image of the mighty state is asserted by means of its deconstruction.

In the early years of perestroika, exhibitions were mounted at the Moscow Manezh Gallery of major city projects. Muscovites used to record their opinions in ledgers placed at the gallery. The authorities would peruse these ledgers, but then go ahead with their own projects, studiously ignoring everything they had read. But at least a modicum of democratic decorum was maintained, and the projects were open to public scrutiny. Nowadays, the city government is not permitting even that. Authoritarian decisions have replaced independent experts, public opinion, and open bidding competition.

Russia is a more verbal country than a visual one. From the 19th century Russian culture has acquired a clearly literature-centered character. Now they are trying to change this in Moscow. All principles of the current Moscow style are mendacious. Instead of history, one gets its negation. Incorrect replicas of destroyed monuments are rebuilt from the bottom up, such as the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and a growing number of other buildings, next to which even original monuments lose their authenticity. A replica may appropriate the style of a lost original, but its message is different. In a way, the replica becomes more real than the original, because it is contemporary. Instead of declared respect for the city's architectural banality and landscape, one witnesses their disruption (e.g., the Trade Center at Manezh Square).

The disfigurement of Moscow's historical face, which began under Lenin, reached its climax under Stalin, and continued under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, has been resumed in the post-communist period-, this time by the authorities who claim to be democratic. Instead of contemporary architecture, Moscow gets its imitation.

It is well known that monuments say more about the agenda and artistic preferences of those who ordered their construction than about the persons or events they are intended to commemorate (Wohl, 1996- 1). While the characteristic feature of the contemporary Western cultural tradition connected with society's democratic and egalitarian principles is the decline of public monuments and statues, they are mushrooming in Moscow and have become a vehicle for statist and nationalist visual propaganda. Another contemporary tendency, that of miniaturization of sculptural monuments to make their scale more humane, is also alien to post-communist Moscow. Its iconography is certainly acquiring illiberal and authoritarian traits, and tends to celebrate things that are removed from the everyday concerns of ordinary people- imperial rule, military victories, the pomp and circumstance of the Church, the omnipotence of the state, et cetera. Perhaps nothing symbolizes this better than the Victory in World War II Monument on Poklonnaia Hill, a pompous and ugly reserve of the Soviet spirit, or the nearly 90 meter high monster monument to Peter the Great on Krymskaia Embankment, which Muscovites have nicknamed "the Terminator." The latter was built despite vehement public protests, and is widely perceived not only as characteristic of dubious, but officially cherished artistic values, but also as a symbol of Russia's new statehood.

Thus, culture again becomes ideology, and ideology becomes politics. The old imperial double-headed eagle and Saint George defeating the dragon (the pre-Revolutionary emblem of Moscow) have functionally replaced the hammer and sickle and red stars of the Soviet era; but in some places they even share the same reverence and respect.

Statism was always an important ideological factor in Russia. Its current merger with nationalism seems almost natural. While a declared goal of the Russian leadership is to build a multiethnic civic nation in the country, its actual policy suggests something quite different (Khazanov, 1997- 138-139). The triumph of the new power and its search for self-expression through the control of public space, monumental propaganda, and pageants reached its apogee in September 1997 during the festivities for the artificial 850-year Jubilee of Moscow. This event, with its pompousness, ostentation, and inevitable haste, was a repetition of the Soviet-era

syndrome for mass celebrations (Grueva, 1997: 56-59). In the best tradition of Potemkin villages, building facades were quickly repaired and beautified anew, but only in downtown and only of the edifices that faced the street. In addition, this repair and beautification was done in such a way that the paint will certainly chip and peel by the end of the first winter.

In aesthetic terms, the jubilee, with its large pageants, mass processions with thousand of participants, choreographed rites, military symbols, and abundant fireworks, was an attempt to resurrect the Soviet-era "Grand Style." However, only the political and financial elite and their families were invited to and attended the most prestigious events. The ordinary taxpayers were entertained with cheap performances. All of this also recalls the Soviet era. The tribute to capitalism consisted of a new style in advertising. Slogans like "Moscow is Russia's true value" -were placed on advertisements for Italian plumbing equipment and Belgian toilets. Likewise, at the close of the festivities, church bells began ringing all over the city at the same time that billboards for Menatep Bank and Sainsung Electronics lit up the night sky.

More interesting were the ideological aspects of the festival. I very much doubt that its organizers knew Ernest Renan's celebrated saying that to be a nation its members have to forget many things, but they followed his dictum in practice. In the performances organized on the occasion of Moscow's pseudo-jubilee, Russian history unexpectedly appeared as an endless, unbroken sequence of golden centuries. It turned out that all was well and good during the reign of the grand princes, the czars, the emperors, the communists, and the post-communist leadership. The message was clear- the murky waters of the past should be apotheosized, not enlightened and debated anymore, in order to assert historical continuity and to fabricate a new political reality. It was as if the long-buried concept of the Third Rome had never been forgotten. In a song specifically commissioned for the 850-year jubilee, Moscow was called the "prophet" and "messiah." The official narrative was a clear *démarche* against national retrospection and the still numerous liberal-minded people in Moscow who adhere to Western values. In an interview given in regards to the jubilee, Luzhkov exalted Moscow as having preserved the "spiritual conservatism," In Luzhkov's view, Moscow in this sense was advantageously distinct from Russia's seaside cities (obviously, St. Petersburg is the first that springs to mind), in which a constant foreign influence has resulted in an intensive erosion of the national mentality and common statist values. (*Trud*, September 5-11, 1997).

But that is not all. Once again, we are witnessing the widespread use of Russian mythopoeia: pre-Revolutionary Russian symbols and reinvented episodes from Russian history are used and manipulated to provide the authorities with an aura of legitimacy. The festivities and television, which broadcast the Jubilee ceremonies to all of Russia, must have shown to all who watched that a consumer society has already arrived in Russia, and will soon make its appearance throughout the rest of the country, if only other regions follow Moscow's example. But this "new" society should be a specifically Russian, great power, nationalist and Orthodox consumer society.

Construction of the memorial at Poklonnaia Hill came to no less than 200 million dollars. The cost of the monument to Peter the Great is, at minimum, 15 to 20 million dollars. The reconstruction costs for Manezh Square and its commercial center are kept from public scrutiny, as if they were a state secret, but are estimated by experts to be 350 million dollars minimum. The renovation of the capital, in anticipation of the jubilee, cost about 60 million dollars, with a further 50 million dollars spent on organization (*Izvestiia*, September 9, 1997). In market economies, expenditures usually correspond to income. In post-communist Moscow, however, things are done a bit differently. The construction of churches and monuments, reconstruction of downtown, and the celebration of the artificial jubilee were carried out with a sweep that goes beyond all reasonable limits. In Moscow today political populism is accompanied by aesthetic populism. Moscow's mayor, with a clear conscience, ravages the municipal coffers for the glorification of his own political ambitions, and for the satisfaction of his own extremely low cultural standards.

Only one face is conspicuously absent in present day Moscow -- that of the middle class liberals. These people played an active role in the defeat of communism in Russia and the downfall of the August 1991 putsch, a role which at that time led a well-known publicist to name Moscow "the city of decent people." Today, their impact on Moscow's landscape is minimal. Under these circumstances, city authorities, without hindrance, accomplished the reconstruction of the Manezh Square, the very square which in the era of perestroika became the gathering place for democratic rallies attended by hundreds of thousands of people who had just awakened to political activism. This "closing down" of the public space for democratically minded Russian citizens is taking on an almost symbolic meaning. Marked by impeccably bad taste, the new

constructions are becoming a memorial to their time.

Notes

1. Russian statistics are still not very reliable, and those on Moscow are no exception. Whenever possible I prefer to use data published by the Department of Press and Information of the Moscow Municipal Government in such editions as *Pul's and Simptom*. These publications, although not classified, are published only in 680 copies each to provide information for the deputies of the City and State Dumas, as well as for the Russian government, for Moscow's high officials, and for the editors of some newspapers. I am most grateful to the people in Moscow who assisted me in obtaining these editions.
2. Moscow mayor Luzbkov boasts that Moscow contributes an even 43 percent to the state budget (*Obshchaia gazeta*, October 16-22, 1997), but this is apparently an exaggeration.
3. Actually this figure should be somewhat higher because of the widespread practice of tax evasion and employment in the "shadow economy."
4. The number of those employed in small businesses (no more than 7 or 8 employees) in Moscow has reached 1.3 million people. In addition, a significant number of people are employed in these businesses without registration, in order to avoid paying taxes (*Pul's*, N 36 (120), 1996:24-1 *Simptom*, N 11 (59), 1997- 12).
5. In 1996, Professor Alexel Komech, Director of the Institute of Arts Studies and one of the most respected art historians and critics, told me that his salary was 1200 rubles (\$200) a month; while his daughter, a minor clerk in one of Moscow's hotels, earned 1300 rubles a month.
6. Actually, this may be another myth. Some scholars are of the opinion that this emblem was borrowed by the Moscow Great Prince Ivan III from the Habsburgs.

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