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Reading Moscow's Architectual Text

By Gregory Feifer

February 2000
MOSCOW

I crept home one snow-bound mid-January Moscow evening, cursing the city and the fact that I'd broken one of my own cardinal rules: never attempt more than one daily errand in this chaotic Byzantine metropolis. That I had attempted more than three was something I tried to put behind me while preparing dinner.

However, the doorbell's jarring ring interrupted the beginning of the eagerly-awaited meal. I'd barely opened the front door of my apartment when a corpulent woman in what seemed to be her early 60s muscled inside and straightaway made a bee-line for the bathroom. I quickly followed. (One has to pass through the kitchen to get to the bathroom, and I wanted to make sure the intruder wasn't after my fast-cooling repast, whoever she may be.)

"You'll have to cut these pipes," came her voice from the bathroom. It was my downstairs neighbor.

"Why?" I ventured to ask, too surprised even to beg 20 minutes to eat first and discuss my plumbing later.

"I'll call the plumber and tell him to come at eight tomorrow morning," said Nadezhda Ivanovna.

I'd scheduled an interview the next morning and didn't have time to deal with Soviet-trained municipal plumbers wreaking havoc on the pipes. But feeling anger, and registering it with Nadezhda Ivanovna, were clearly two different things.

"You don't live in a dictatorship," she informed me. "You can take a morning off to fix the pipes."

The trouble, it turned out, was that the water pipes heating her towel rack weren't working, and the "plumbers" suspected a blockage in my pipes. I cursed the ancient building's plumbing, resigned myself to the inevitable, and decided I'd cancel the interview in the morning in the interest of bundling Nadezhda Ivanovna out and sitting down to sup at last.

But she paused in the doorway. "You know this building didn't always have hot water," she said by way of letting me know I had no right to protest her unalienable right to warm towels. "There weren't even radiators. People used stoves."

What could I do to get her out instead of having to listen to yet more evidence of the Soviet Union's stunning record on social services?

"There weren't even bathrooms."

Here I stopped short of giving her a good hard shove onto the landing

Moscow pastiche on Gagarinsky Lane: a 19th-century wooden building next to a 1970s monstrosity in front of one of the city's seven "Stalin skyscrapers," this one housing the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

outside. "Really?" I asked.

"Oh yes," she replied. Her scowl seemed to vanish. "Your bathroom is where the back stairs used to be."

Even though my only thought a few minutes before was how to assuage the pangs in my stomach, I wanted to know more.

Nadezhda Ivanovna told me the small three-story building had been erected in 1863. She described how many rooms my apartment originally had, the dates of each refurbishment, each installation of new technology (heat, water, telephones) and parted with a warning finger that I should be ready for the plumber early next morning. I didn't care. I returned to my stone-cold meal resolved to find out more about the history of my building and its neighborhood.

Moscow had always seemed a very impersonal place to me, one in which human life meant very little in the face of the city's giant bureaucratic machine, where in the struggle to survive, niceties to strangers produced nothing in return, and suspicion was a means of self-preservation.

The cityscape seemed on the whole to reflect that unconcern for the public good. I saw it as a growing collection of architectural kitsch and literal trash. But the more I investigated, the more I found that even the trash has a vital part in the city's debate over its identity. As the maddening mess of Moscow became more complicated in my own conception of it, the city began to take on a new sheen.

The more I learned, the less Moscow seemed to consist simply of the utter chaos that had always confronted me. That's not to say that chaos doesn't rule in Moscow. But it is a chaos of juxtaposed fragments whose place in history and in the city itself point to an intense debate between the official and the private, western and Slavophile, classical and anti-classical. Those discourses make the city's very buildings quintessentially "Russian" (that is, unique to this country).

* * *

My first task before going to City Hall to find out more about the building was to buy a Moscow guidebook. I knew which one I wanted — a deluxe edition I'd been given as a present at a dinner party two years earlier, but had forgotten at the house of my hosts. Early one morning a week after my meeting with Nadezhda Ivanovna, I set out to walk to Moscow's main bookstore, The House of Books.

I hadn't decided to live in my neighborhood randomly. It is in an old part of the city-center, with many pre-Revolutionary buildings (many now being rebuilt) that were a welcome change from the usual Soviet eyesores.

Indeed, the first suburban sights greeting a visitor driving into Moscow from the airport could be enough to make him want to turn around and get back on the plane. Concrete-slab Soviet high-rises placed seemingly randomly dominate the cityscape. I was horrified when, on my first visit in 1991, my host actually drove up to one of these, a decrepit-looking, rain-stained monstrosity, saying, "Here we are."

Moscow had looked surprisingly similar then to how I'd imagined it — grey and forbidding — with one excep-

tion: the city was sprawling. Wide spaces stretched between streets and buildings that seemed to have been put in their locations for no apparent reason. Vacant lots peppered even the heart of downtown.

Another visitor, the French Marquis de Custine, surely one of the most perceptive travelers to have written about Russia, described the city upon his first visit in 1839 as a "chaos of plaster, bricks, and planks called Moscow."[1]

Buildings are still coated in grime, and the city is now choked with a drastically increasing number of cars that has transformed what was once some of Europe's cleanest city air (because so few residents had cars) into a foul concoction of diesel and low-grade octane fumes.

For the past decade, however, new office and commercial buildings have begun to transform the skyline. Under the guidance of Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, who runs the city with a granite fist, Moscow has been engaged in the process of inventing itself anew after its 70 years of life as the supposed model Soviet metropolis.

As increasing numbers of crumbling buildings are rebuilt, making their façades much easier to see and take in than under the usual coat of soot, Moscow's old architectural tapestry is beginning to emerge.

* * *

The French philosopher Michel de Certeau compares walking in an urban landscape to reading words on a page. It is the act that brings the "text" of the city's architecture to life.

Another metaphor is that the act of walking is to the urban system what speech is to language. But even the streets' *real* text — the street names — serves us well, too, I ruminated on my way to the bookstore. Prechistenka Street — meaning in essence "Very Clean Street," off which I live, was so named in 1685 because it lay on the main route to a convent housing the much revered "Our Lady of Smolensk" icon. The street had previously been called Bolshaya Chertolskaya (roughly: "Big Devil's Street"), since a stream running down the middle caused a nuisance during spring floods. The street was renamed Kropotkinskaya (after the anarchist Prince Peter Kropotkin) in 1922, and Prechistenka again after 1991.

Before the Revolution and communalization, the street's mansions housed a number of Moscow's nobility. The area is now seeing a renaissance as buildings are renovated and apartments consolidated.

Practically the first building I saw on my walk, on my own street of Malyi Levshinsky Lane, fits Custine's description almost exactly. It was the facade of a neoclassical building, mostly demolished. Looking through the façade's windows, I saw two versions of the new: a pre-Revolutionary building, red, simple, functional — and renovated. Foreign cars were parked nearby, a sign of the benefits brought by industrious (if perhaps corrupt) work inside. Some of

An increasing number of Moscow's grand old buildings are being rebuilt, such as this typically "Russian" mansion now housing Red Cross offices.

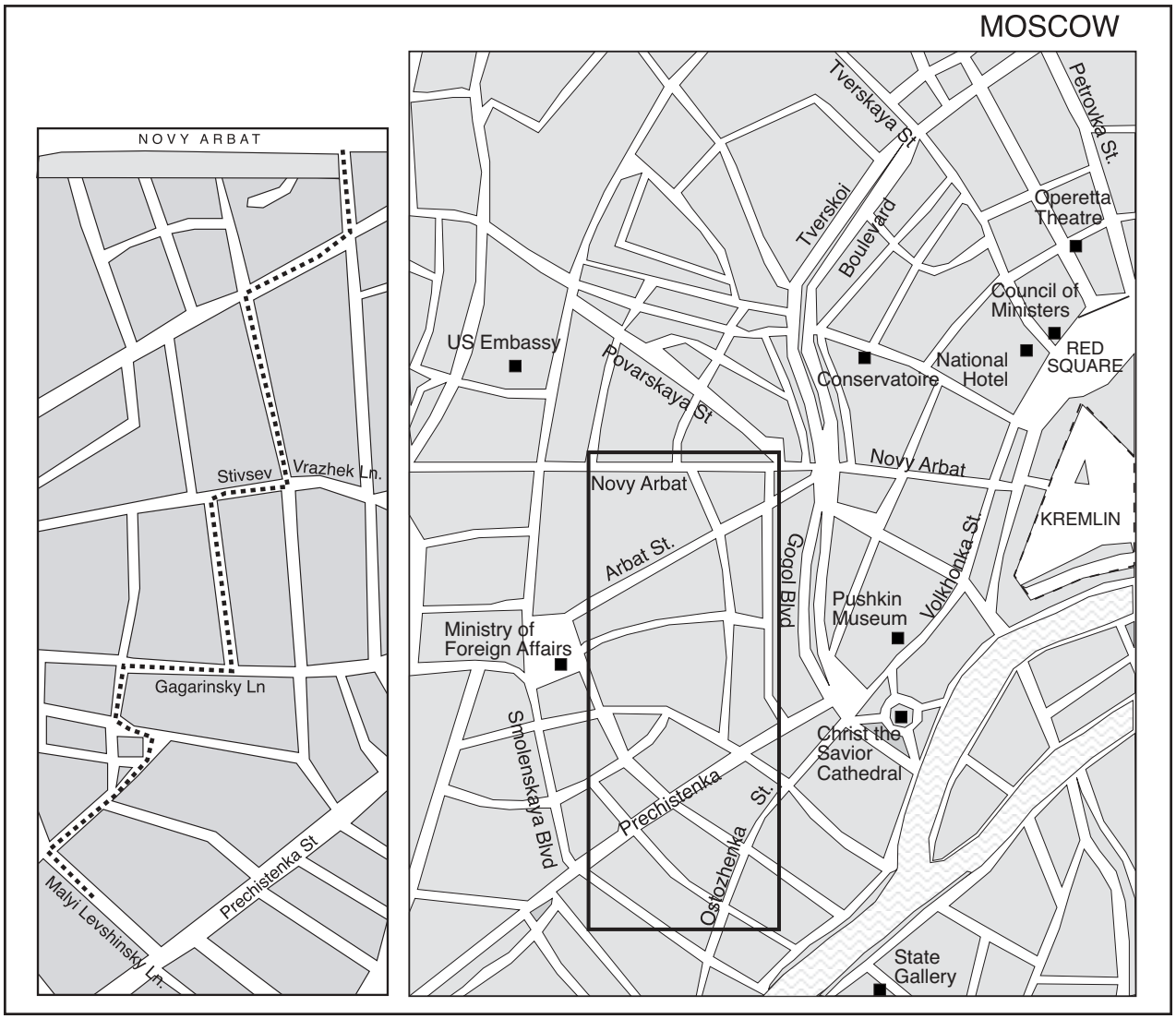
[1] Marquis de Custine, La Russie en 1839. (translation: Journey for Our Time, Phyllis Penn Kohler, ed., trans., 1987, Washington, D.C.: Gateway Editions, p.265.)

Reading the old city's text: here, quite literally on the surface of a photograph, are the layers of Moscow's architecture.

the city's luckier inhabitants had reclaimed the old building, making a stark contrast to the view through another of the façade's windows: a 1970s concrete-slab high-rise, decrepit-looking and forlorn, one of tens of thousands gracing every Soviet city.

As I turned corners to emerge on Gagarinsky Lane, I passed examples of the architectural avant-garde of the 1920s, which included buildings sporting the austere modernism of formalist and constructivist schools which supplemented the elaborate neoclassicism that characterizes 19th-century Russian architecture.

On parallel Stivsev Vrazhek Lane loomed a version of Soviet utopia: dark, forbidding Stalinism. Here I passed an office building used by the Russian Army, built in the 1940s. Whitewashed classical columns have been replaced by



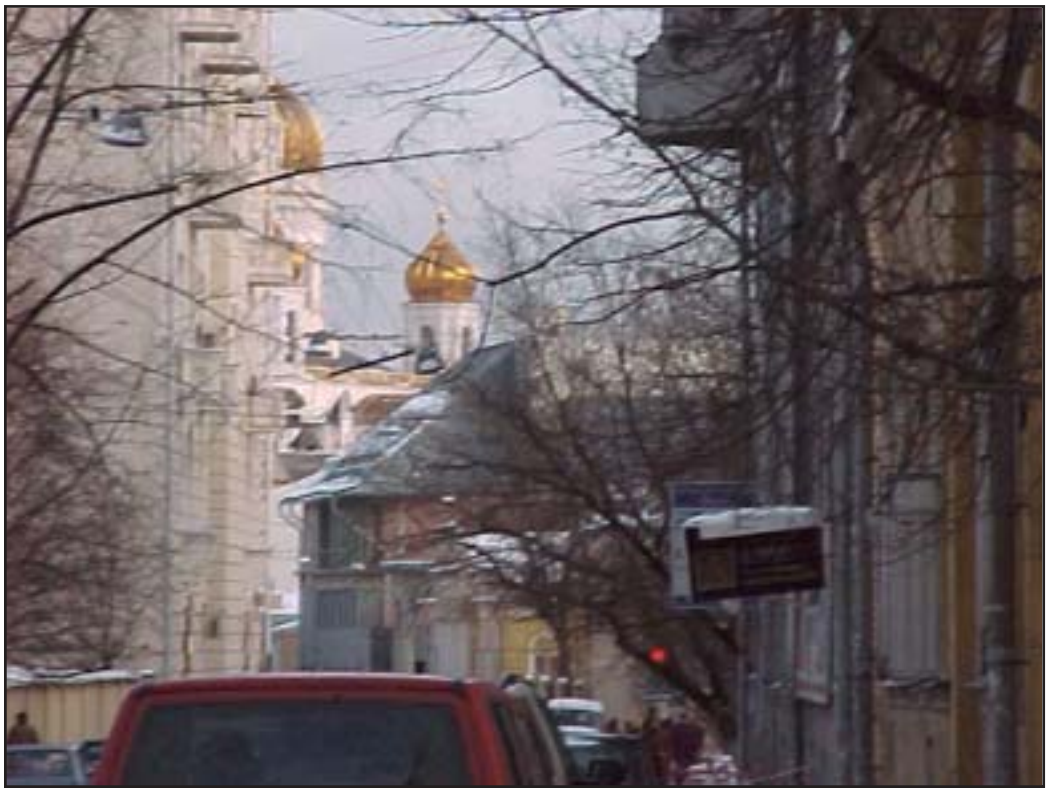
grim black marble. The typical Russian neo-classicism is no longer lyrical, but monumental. Officers busy fighting their war in Chechnya briskly and purposefully walk in and out the main entrance, many to waiting chauffeured sedans.

A typically dark, imposing Stalinist military building next to that of another columned vision: light, airy pre-Revolutionary neo-classicism on Stivsev Vrazhek Lane.

By 1930, the incredible dynamism of Russian artistic creation had been almost wholly suppressed. Instead of Moscow's early 20th-century architectural polyphony came Stalinist Hausmannization. Neighborhoods were bulldozed to create broad avenues with massive, totalitarian, neo-classical grandiosity, more cheaply constructed with each passing year. The most visible of these are the so-called Stalin skyscrapers, massive Gothic sand castles rising into a single spire to dominate the neighborhoods around them. The closest one to my route was the skyscraper housing the Foreign Affairs Ministry, so tall and imposing that the entire neighborhood seems to cower in its shadow.

In 1953, upon Stalin's death, yet another new type of architecture sprang up: the very, very cheap, meant to house as quickly as possible families previously living in communal apartments. The first of these shabby, concrete, five-story buildings were called Khrushebys, after the new general secretary.

Residents of these ugly edifices, standing next to the neo-classical and other bygone styles, now live here because they cannot move elsewhere. They own their apartments after privatization, each family staked to the Soviet past.



The brand-new Christ the Savior cathedral rising over Gagarinsky Lane, a sight paradoxically familiar to the 19th-century pedestrian.

With time, the concrete became a little better and the buildings taller and more expansive. By the 1980s, Brezhnev was constructing vast suburbs of Soviet high-rises, many of which we call "Russian Tudor" because of the patterns of mortar slapped between the unpainted, different-colored slabs of concrete.

* * *

One of the newest symbolic projects to renovate the city, however, only adds to the confusion of styles. Just over the tops of Gagarinsky's buildings, one can see the towers of the Christ the Savior Cathedral, first built in the late 19th century, dynamited in the 1930s by Stalin, and recently rebuilt by Mayor Luzhkov. It was com-

A new interpretation of neo-classical by Mayor Yuri Luzhkov's administration.

pleted late last year, and one can be forgiven for being muddled by its sight, and by the path of the new Russia it supposedly represents.

The church is a symbol of Russia's ostensible spiritual rebirth after 70 years of communism. The structure is a replica of the building that stood exactly in the same place 60 years ago. But the Byzantine and repressive nature of Russia's Imperial past, supposedly replaced by communism, is still reflected in the new cathedral. Millions of dollars went into the construction, which sports gold-gilded domes. Millions more were spent on icons collected around the world at inflated prices. While City Hall maintains the money came from private donations, news reports have claimed federal funds were used. The real controversy is over how, and how much.

If the exterior echoes the Tsarist past, the interior, lined with towering slabs of marble and brass lamps, smacks of Soviet-era grandiosity. The monstrosity is a confused homage to a confused past.

The church, however, represents a drastic change from 1990, when the city's economy had ground to a halt and even cheap concrete buildings were no longer constructed. That changed with the rise of Mayor Luzhkov in 1992, who, channeling some of the vast amounts of cash then beginning to flow through the capital (as the rest of the country was being ripped off), began to create a triptych style: a continuation of concrete slabs for people moving out of crumbling Khrushchev-era housing; renovated pre-Revolutionary buildings; and new, geometric-shaped office buildings that neither Moscow nor any other of the world's cities had ever seen before.

"Luzhkov is a great man," said Artyom Ivanovich, a pensioner living in outer Moscow's concrete high-rises. "Every politician rips us off, but at least Luzhkov builds things. Look at the ring road," he said, referring to the outer highway circling Moscow, once dark, decrepit and dangerous, and now the pride of Muscovites after a Luzhkovian western-style renovation. "Look at the cathedral and the other buildings that have gone up."

One of these is on Ostozhenka Street, parallel to Prechistenka, where I live. It is a sprawling, yellow, neoclassical building with simple white columns. The scale makes the style absurd, for it is the size of a modern block of apartments. And the roof, in a tin mansard-type style, clashes enough to make the building laughable. "No expense or detail was spared on me!" it cries, and the result is architectural cacophony.

Almost every Luzhkov-era building has a spire and tends toward neo-classicism. Like Stalinist pomp, the structures are a mish-mash of different elements. The mix is almost incoherent, although one thing is clear: the appropriation of styles serves to glorify the mayor's political power.

The ransacking of different elements is nothing new. Even the *old* neoclassical buildings in the heart of today's Moscow — those that seem most quintessentially Russian — are themselves a foreign transplantation, an appropria-

Vycheslav Glazychev, who heads Moscow's Architecture Institute among many other activities (including helping edit an online literary magazine) is one of the city's most astute critics.

tion of classicism taken hundreds of years ago to create a European history the country never had.

Similar, attempts in the opposite direction, to Russify the cityscape, particularly at the end of the 19th century when a "Slavic" school of architecture sprang up eschewing Ionic and Doric for folk-tale pointed arches and embellishments, were as artificial as what came before it because they were architects' inventions more than a reflection of any "traditional" style.

Yuri Vashchenko, a prominent Moscow painter whose studio is located in a vast attic under the eaves of a 19th-century apartment, waves the comparisons aside. "Luzhkov is ruining the city," he says. "Moscow may have always been a paradox in its influences, but it was a place its residents loved. You could walk the streets looking for the hidden treasures and they were yours, everyone's. It's something we all shared despite the repressed lives we led. But Luzhkov's buildings have no style. They're not Russian, they're not ours. He's turning the city into a tourist attraction."

* * *

Vycheslav Glazychev, who heads Moscow's Architecture Institute and is one of the city's leading members of the intelligentsia, more into Luzhkov's buildings. "At least in the first three to four years [after 1991], one could talk about a complication of Moscow's 'text,' about the appearance of the signs of visual modernization and westernization on the pages of the city book."

I had sought out Glazychev because of his reputation as a humanist and westernizer, thinking he would heap criticism on modern Moscow for its worthless new architecture. But the city guru (he's a sociologist as well, and a leading interdisciplinary cultural figure) finds life in the very existence of the city's chaos.

Glazychev says Moscow's traditional mode of development is "like a woman not loved enough" (*ne dolyublinnaya*). "Approximately the same thing has happened in architecture," Glazychev says. "When a serious discourse with western architecture began — and that was only at the end of the 1970s — our architects didn't know the language of architecture. They could appreciate western buildings visually, but couldn't 'read' them."

Twenty years later, a fair number of the Soviet Union's "architectural dissidents" of which Glazychev speaks — many of whom are in their seventies — occupy top positions in official Moscow architecturedom. Their chief fault, according to Glazychev, is that they were "terribly squeezed by the Soviet Union in every sense. They thirsted to tear away. And when they were given the opportunity, the greed of the unrealized made everything come all at once."

That gave rise to what looks to the western eye like a great amount of kitsch. Glazychev diplomatically calls

What is it? A cylinder? A Sultan's palace? At least one thing is clear: Moscow's new Riverside Towers office complex has the requisite Luzhkovian tower and flag.

Moscow's new buildings "very funny mistakes and inaccuracies, in the professional sense." The architect describes one brand new office building, opposite which I worked for one year, as "a story of a sultan prince on the body of a somewhat aged formal London commercial postmodernism of the beginning of the '80s."

What may have been the result of commercialization in the West comes out as something different here. The bizarre creations I cringed in front of for so long actually represented an intellectual emancipation, one that even Glazychev admits to having been caught up in. "Moscow used to be grey, repetitive and exhausting," he says.

Luzhkovian Moscow, however, is probably a geological layer that will inevitably end. The current wave is already changing. New generations are studying under tutors like Glazychev and for the first time companies commissioning their own buildings are beginning to realize that they want to manifest their images in architecture. "That hasn't seriously begun," Glazychev says. "Corporate self-consciousness and PR doesn't yet include the professional commissioning of architecture as it exists in the developed western market." But the signs are there.

Until a new generation begins to produce new work, a standardization of architectural "signs" has most recently led to a decrease in variation in the city's main streets as the Luzhkovian style becomes codified and façades grow increasingly similar.

That poses a threat to traditional Moscow's pre-Revolutionary individualistic architecture, in which the style of many buildings on the same streets varied so widely as to make it seem that each structure had only contempt for its neighbor. To look for individuality in new construction, it is now often necessary to wander into side streets and find second-tier buildings ranked by both size and location.

Even those buildings are in danger of becoming standardized. Increasingly, only the interiors of buildings have something new to offer, but because of the tight security surrounding the city's elite living in new houses, entrance is usually barred.

* * *

Moscow as a whole is perhaps most remarkable for what it isn't. The imperial Tsarist mission to display political power through architecture and planned development was largely undertaken in another metropolis, St. Petersburg, one of the world's most planned — and therefore artificial — cities. Moscow, on the other hand, was allowed to continue to develop as it had since its days as the seat of a small medieval principality.

"In Petersburg, these feeble-minded tyrants of modern cities found a bare table," Custine writes, "but here they had to fight against the old national monuments. Thanks to these invincible obstacles of history and of nature, the aspect of Moscow has remained that of an ancient city."[2]

As a result, the city represented for many the opposite of St. Petersburg, not only physically, but psychologically. If St. Petersburg was created to be a transplantation of the West onto Russian soil, Moscow in the common conception had to be quintessentially Russian despite the fact that many of its most prominent structures, including the Kremlin, were built by Italian architects.

Moscow's symbolism was seen as the opposite of artificial. In an essay called "Petersburg Notes 1836," Nikolai Gogol characterizes St. Petersburg as a foreigner, a German — and Moscow as an old Russian mother, a housewife, cooking *bliny* (pancakes), listening to stories and looking from afar, but never caring enough to get out of her chair to investigate.

Gogol called St. Petersburg the wave of the future, whereas Moscow was the country's heart, and as such, of vital importance.

Despite its 13 million inhabitants, Moscow to this day has the feel of a provincial village, as more than one Muscovite will point out. While main thoroughfares such as Tverskaya Street, the main shopping drag, may be choked with traffic, Prechistenka's side streets and alleys are almost completely quiet most times. At the same time, many Muscovites behave not as one would expect of residents of one of the world's largest cities, but as provincials, spitting and pushing on the streets, cursing and shoving in the metros.

* * *

Narrowing my view of the city from a general picture to a growing awareness of its composite elements, it becomes increasingly clear that Moscow's disorder can generally be seen as a collection of plans drawn up at different times to reflect different ideologies. Even in the totalitarian Stalinist era the plans could not dominate the organic structure, and many grandiose projects remained simply projects and not schemes enveloping the entire city.

Planners for pre- and post-war Tverskaya Street, for example, attempted to carry out an austere Stalinist classicism of cold, tall stone and marble edifices. But as if in keeping with tradition, the project remained unfinished. First, the war interrupted construction. Then came Stalin's death in 1953. As a result, a number of pre-Revolutionary Art-Nouveau and Baroque buildings remain on the street to provide contrast.

The Khrushchev era that followed began with a wave of de-Stalinization, and city planning accordingly attempted to create yet another image of Moscow: that of glass and concrete. Perhaps the most prominent example

[2] Ibid., p, 268.

is the Novy Arbat, roughly parallel to Tverskaya. Its limitations are easy to spot: in the post-Soviet era, its decaying, cumbersome buildings now serve as a reminder of one of the many of the failed Soviet attempts to build a bright new future (after razing a beautiful pre-Revolutionary neighborhood). Rather than reinventing the city, the cheaply-built structures came to serve as a monument to the corruption of Soviet bureaucrats who lived off the fat of the land at home while blindly cutting to the bone everywhere else.

Tverskaya Street at night. Moscow's main drag, once a grim, dark Stalinist alley, is now a showcase loaded with hotels, shops, and restaurants.

Tverskaya is the city's main artery, leading straight to the Kremlin. The Novy Arbat is also an important thoroughfare, and both streets turn into major highways leading out of the city. Now, even the original conceptions of these contrasting and roughly parallel orders are complicated by a capitalist layer of shops and restaurants. Tverskaya, once dark at night, is now lit majestically and has become a showcase of Luzhkovian transformation. That both streets are close and fragmentary illustrates Moscow's particular type of chaos.

Before the Communist Party cut Russia off from the West and attempted to do the same to the country's past, Moscow's architectural discourse had often been dominated by a traditional Russian debate: between Westernizers, who argued that Russia was a European state, and Slavophiles, who stressed Russia's uniqueness. Indeed, this debate stands at the heart of Russian philosophy and broader collective consciousness.

Glazychev now says this and other traditional debates will return to Moscow, leading to a more "natural" culture. He looks to the inevitable strengthening of the Russian state under President Vladimir Putin as the force behind Moscow's architectural future. "The trend of strengthening the federal, imperialistic, call-it-how-you-will state will undoubtedly demand certain visualizations," he says.

In this case, the Moscow of today, the Luzhkovian city, has no real future as a code of symbols because City Hall simply doesn't have the resources to create the imperial capital that the post-Soviet era demands. The task will have to be carried out by the federal government.

That's a natural psychological task as well: Russia's new generation of rulers will try to legitimize their own power by building visual signs of their ascendance. The first task will most likely be the construction of a new parliament building as well as Supreme and Constitutional court buildings.

These state bodies are now housed in Soviet-era buildings built for other purposes. At the first financial opportunity — and perhaps even earlier — the mixed signals of intransigence delivered by the adapted structures will most likely be replaced by buildings constructed to proclaim the legitimacy and permanence of Russia's new state organs.

The new insignia will most likely take the form of classicism. "We can talk about the epoch of the Internet, but that's all rubbish because people still live according to models of the classical all over the world," Glazychev says. "In that regard, the 'imperial' Mall in Washington — amid all Washington's disorder — creates enough of a distinct text. Moscow as a capital doesn't yet have such a text."

The new federal project will constitute one aspect of Moscow's emerging dichotomy. The other will most likely be the city's private architecture, which will project new cultural and professional visual signs, caulking the cracks of the official project.

It is precisely this dichotomy that Glazychev thinks will bring Moscow back to its natural cultural discourse.

As far as practical matters, are concerned, such as housing for the neglected plebs who toiled to build communism under the Soviet Union, those will probably remain on the back burner. The construction of enough decent housing requires such resources and time that the task extends beyond the borders of the imaginable. Everything has to be rebuilt. When and how and with what resources and by whom is unknown. Just fixing the city's rusting and collapsing water pipes — something of which I'm now quite aware — is an immense burden.

The cheap and shoddy have always mingled with the lavish and lush in this land of paradox. "It's unwise to un-

derestimate Moscow's irrationality," Glazychev says, and he's right. Luxurious imperial palaces often stood near squalid housing for illiterate peasants who made up over 80 percent of the population in Tsarist days. And the glorious Stalinist metro, which boasts among its many stunning stations a monument to Art Deco no less impressive than the Chrysler building, ran underneath a city in which most residents lived in miserable communal apartments. "On a subconscious level, a large number of people are still drawn to the contradiction," Glazychev says.

Another of Russia's chief cultural contradictions, the tension between the St. Petersburg and Moscow ethos, may also help kick-start Russia's hibernating cultural life. In two years, St. Petersburg will celebrate its 300th anniversary, possibly directing the Russian intelligentsia's attention toward the significance of the "northern capital's" path of Europeanism. That is, of course, a strong antithesis to Moscow's numerous neo-Slavophile traditions, and the collision might become a push toward a renaissance of cultural life.

* * *

As I neared the bookstore to which I'd come to buy a Moscow guidebook, I'd become exhausted from negotiating the narrow streets coated in ice and slush, often walking in the middle of the asphalt because cars were parked willy-nilly all over the sidewalks. My trousers were splattered with mud.

I stumbled out of the network of my neighborhood's small streets and alleys and emerged onto the broad, impersonal, Khrushchev-era Novy Arbat Street, with its decaying high-rise office buildings to which Glazychev points as a symbol of the era. Here a sense of the Soviet still reigns mightily despite the large numbers of western-style shops that have opened on the street. Inside the House of Books, I asked about the guidebook for which I'd come.

"We don't have it!" barked a young counter-girl on the first floor behind the "city guides" section, one of many randomly placed booths and stalls in the two-story store. At the information desk, I was told I could find it upstairs. After a couple more attempts to ask, I finally found it behind a counter. "We don't have it!" barked a middle-aged woman standing directly in front of the book.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing.

"It's our last copy. I'm not selling it!" After a pause during which it became clear to her I wasn't going away, she looked behind the counter and produced another copy after much feigned searching and even more real sighing.

As I walked outside, however, I realized I no longer wanted the book. A planned route, programmed beforehand by someone else, deprives the walker, it seems, of so much of his "text." Far better to blunder along by oneself and read the layers firsthand, exploring the cracks and alleys, than to accept the official line.

Several weeks later, I bumped into Nadezhda Ivanovna on the stairs as she was leaving her apartment. She barely grunted a reply to my beaming "Hello! How are you?" (I'd assumed her towels were warm, and she bore me no grudge. No such luck.)

Novy Arbat Street. Another discarded vision of Moscow modern now taken over by shops and nightclubs.

Her manner, indeed the unfriendliness of the old, dirty, unrenovated public spaces that still exist in almost every Moscow apartment building, hasn't changed during the course of reforms and westernization this decade. That, despite the fact that many of the apartments inside the buildings have been refurbished and made comfortable.

Luzhkov might try as he could to change the public face of the city into something else, something fancier, more western. But as far as I can tell, Custine was right. The "invincible obstacles of history and of nature" will probably preserve Moscow's eternal aspect. That is true in architecture at least since, as Glazychev says, the central debates will remain the same even if the styles change.

Nowhere is Russia's self-

defining discourse more physically evident than in this city, with its giant, organic, incoherent mass of fragments amid which the individual on the street, the city dweller himself, scampering to avoid being crushed by the city's menacing cars in the attempt to accomplish at least one errand, means very little. But then Russia was always a place of grand ideas on a grand scale, of imperialism, communism, and capitalism paid for by the suffering of the masses. What helps make the ideas quintessentially Russian is that none was fully realized. Moscow still stands as evidence of that ongoing process. ❑

The State Duma (lower house of parliament) is currently housed in a building erected by Stalin for the "Soviet [Council] for Labor and Defense."

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