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Not Yet Europe, Part One

By Jill Winder

DECEMBER, 2004

BERLIN—Defining both the meaning of "Europe" and its borders is an old problem, but one that has gained renewed urgency this year with the expansion of the European Union and the decision to allow Turkey to officially begin full-membership talks that was announced in Brussels just before Christmas. In late November I traveled from Vilnius, Lithuania to Moscow by train with a few colleagues. The aim of the trip was to speak with Russians about what they thought of the USSR's former satellite states joining the EU, their feelings about the new borders created and if they identified at all with the label "European." What we found was that, in general, the new borders were of little interest and that many Russians were proud to distinguish themselves from Europe, or were at least resigned that the political separation of Russia was something that would not be overcome in their lifetimes. "Europe," as it turned out, held little practical or philosophical meaning for most of the Russians we spoke to.

After this failed attempt at understanding the boundaries of Europe, I returned to my Berlin apartment located in Kreuzberg, a predominantly Turkish district, and there I found a different kind of debate about defining Europe and its borders on my doorstep. At the same time that Turkey was lobbying to be given permission to start full EU membership talks, Germans were analyzing the failures of integrating immigrants in the country, with a particular emphasis on the Muslim population (3.2 million, of which 2.5 million are Muslim Turks). This discussion was catalyzed by the politically motivated murder on November 2 in Amsterdam of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist. In my next newsletter, *Not Yet Europe, Part Two*, I consider the status of the Turkish population in Berlin and some of the implications of Turkish EU membership for Germany.

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Part One: Vilnius to Moscow

On the evening of November 19 I was at the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) in Vilnius, attending the opening of the exhibition *Olandu biuras—Vilnius* (Dutch Bureau—Vilnius), part of the visual-arts program, *Who if not we…?* I worked on earlier this year in Amsterdam. The program was organized to mark the Dutch Presidency of the EU and focused on cultural exchange between the Netherlands and the ten new EU-member states. The head curator of *Who if not we…?*, Maria Hlavajova, had invited a number of other curators from outstanding art institutions in the Netherlands and Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia to develop seven exhibitions that showed the work of young Dutch artists in the new member states — and vice versa. My main task within the program was to serve as co-editor and managing editor of a book that functioned as a "catalog" previewing the seven exhibitions, and a "reader" that included new and anthologized texts by some of the most significant European philosophers, thinkers and artists including Etienne Balibar, Boris Groys, artist group IRWIN and Slavoj Žižek. One of the intellectual goals of both the exhibitions and the book was to create a platform

for artists, intellectuals, writers and the public to discuss topics such as the meaning of "Europe," the potential impacts of EU expansion, migration and borders, etc., and to consider what role art and culture does/can play in the current political context.

The CAC in Vilnius is a good example of the types of institutions we worked with during *Who if not we…?* and is emblematic of the remarkable development of contemporary art scenes in the former Eastern bloc over the last 15 years. It is housed in a sprawling, classic Soviet-style modernist building that was an official Soviet Art Exhibition Palace from 1968 to 1990. In 1992, an ambitious director in his early twenties, Kestutis Kuizinas, took over the enormous structure. By the late-nineties the CAC, with its diverse program of exhibitions and events taking place within an unheard-of 2,000 square meters of exhibition space had become the most popular contemporary art center in the Baltic States. The CAC has a legendary reputation for drawing an unusually large crowd to its events, and this evening was no exception. I stood in awe of the throng—seeing 1,000 people attending the opening of a small exhibition was an entirely new experience for me. Sandwiched between the other guests, I was warm for the first time since I arrived in the city that afternoon. It was minus 7 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit) outside, but inside the CAC only our collective body heat was keeping us from the cold. Kestutis is famous for saving precious money from the operating budget by refusing to heat the building much above the freezing point, and all of us were still wearing our coats.

However impressed I was that 1,000 people would come to a contemporary-art opening, I was preoccupied because the four people I was looking for were nowhere to be found. I was waiting for a group from *Archis*, a magazine on architecture, urbanism and culture published in Amsterdam. My distraction was really more like excitement: we were due to leave for Moscow the following day. When I finally spotted Lilet Breddels, *Archis* Events Manager and organizer of our trip in the crowd, I ran up to her. After politely inquiring about how the flight from Amsterdam had been, I impatiently asked: "So, how many people are coming?" Lilet looked at me with a serious and stoic expression and calmly replied, "No one confirmed." I was devastated.

Initially, Maria Hlavajova and I had met with *Archis* editor Ole Bouman in early 2004 simply to invite him to contribute a new text for the *Who if not we…?* book. But over the course of a few early-morning meetings at Café Katoen in Amsterdam, fueled by coffee and Ole's insane enthusiasm and energy, we came up with a unique and rather elaborate collaboration: three events that we collectively called "Going East." "Going East" was to be part of a larger *Archis* project, called RSVP events, which have taken place in such diverse locations as Shanghai, New York, Ramallah, Istanbul and Brussels. *Archis*'s idea was to reverse the way a conference is traditionally organized, by providing only the general topic (such as "European Identities," "Paranoia," "Heritage" or "Time"), the date and the location of an event. The content of the event is then developed by *Archis* based on the interests of the participants. What actually would happen during the event is deliberately kept secret until the event takes place.

Our idea for "Going East" was to physically traverse the new borders in Europe created by the enlargement of the European Union and to discuss EU expansion, border control, the meaning of "Europe" and the contents of the book *Who if not we…?*, with people from both within and outside the official borders of the Union *in transit*. In theory, we hoped to bring together artists, philosophers, writers, architects and students from all over Europe. We planned three trips, all of which would begin with a bus or train journey that crossed a border and would continue at the designated destination.

By the time I was in Vilnius, the *Archis* team had already facilitated the first two "Going East" events. A short bus trip from Vienna to Bratislava had been attended by about a dozen architecture students and artists from Austria and Slovakia, and had continued with a lively series of lectures and discussions in Petrazalka, a Socialist-era housing development located only a few miles from the borders of both Hungary and Austria. The second event took place during the two-hour train journey from Ljubjlana and Zagreb, perhaps a more remarkable border than most because a mere 15 years ago Slovenians and Croats shared Yugoslav citizenship. Although there were only six architecture students on the train, the *Archis* team had intensive conversation with them about their hopes for the future, the division of Yugoslavia and the Balkan War and had continued the dialogue with a larger group through a lecture at the architectural faculty of the University of Zagreb the following day. But our planned trip from Vilnius to Moscow by train was the event I had the highest hopes for, and the only "Going East" event that I would attend.

When Lilet told me that no one had confirmed for our Vilnius-Moscow "Going East" trip, in an instant my elaborate fantasy of a lively, 14-hour train conference, with famous philosophers and artists from Europe and Russia discussing significant questions while dining on caviar and throwing back shots of vodka, evaporated into thin air. In the end, we had asked too much. Even the most basic prerequisites for the trip—obtaining a visa for Russia and a transit visa for Belarus— were expensive and time-consuming, not to mention the cost of travel, accommodation, etc.. To invest so much time and money in an event one did not know the exact content of was surely a leap of faith, and by the time we were in Vilnius none of the dozen or so people who had initially registered had shown up.

The spectacular failure of having no outside participants lead to the question of whether we should go on the trip as planned. If we went ahead, our "conference"

would include only those of us who had organized the event, and in that case it looked suspiciously like a nice paid holiday. In the end, with all our plane tickets, hotel rooms and visas arranged and paid for, we agreed to press on and attempt to turn our fellow unsuspecting passengers on the train into de facto conference participants. Ole, the *Archis* editor, was sure we could make the best of it.

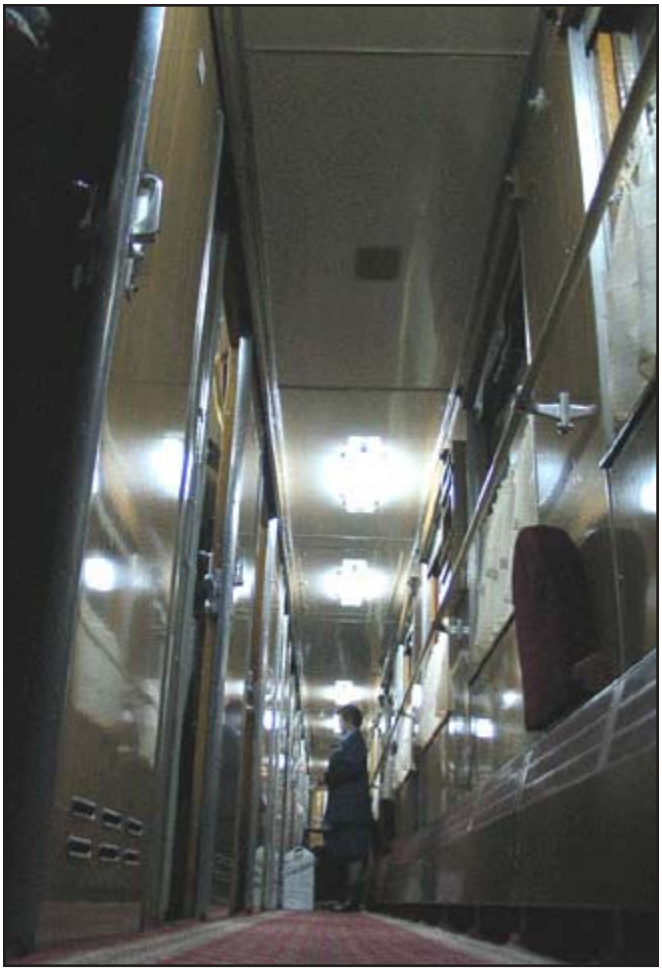
Because our train did not leave until late afternoon on November 20th, we had most of the next day to spend in Vilnius. We first met Deimantas Narkevicius, an artist who has been involved with the CAC from its inception, and who recently made a film about the building and its history. After a tour and discussion at the CAC, we talked a cab driver into taking us to the Lithuanian—Belarussian border, about a 40-minute drive outside the city. We wanted to see the border from a different perspective than we would have on the train, and to observe what kind of security measures were in place because the crossing now represented not only a national border, but also the far-eastern border of the expanded EU. The driver thought we were crazy, but was amicable enough to take us and probably happy to have come across such a lucrative fare. We drove through the frozen landscape, which after passing the outskirts of the capital was vast and empty with an occasional small village here and there. Near the border, the farming land was partially overtaken by dense forest and on more than one occasion we were forced to share the highway with an old farmer riding in a horse-drawn wagon piled with firewood.

As we approached the border, a long line of lorries and trucks became visible. The cab driver told us that this checkpoint is most often used by commercial vehicles transporting goods from Lithuania to Belarus and Russia. There were no passenger cars in sight. Security around the checkpoint was minimal, with only one guard present to check the documentation of the vehicles. Our cab driver became very nervous when we asked to get out of the car, and even more nervous when he saw one of us take out a video camera. We instantly attracted the attention of the border guard, who stepped out of his tiny office to see what we were doing. In less than three minutes, he yelled at us in Russian to stop filming and leave the premises.

In a sense, this was the first of a number of failed attempts at experiencing a border crossing: simply being there and documenting the site told us little to nothing about the real consequences of the political, cultural and economic impacts of EU expansion or the relation be-

tween states and their populations. In what would become a theme of the trip, we learned much more about these issues by chatting with the cab driver (in a mix of German and English), so what happened en route was much more significant than what we found at our destination. For example, our driver told us that his parents were ethnic Russians who had been forced to relocate to Lithuania after the Second World War as part of Stalin's plan to "Russify" the Baltics. The driver held both Russian and Lithuanian passports, but was unable to visit members of his extended family who were now living in Belarus because of visa requirements newly imposed on Lithuanian citizens. The dissolution of the USSR had presented him with a higher standard of living, but had also drawn borders where none existed before, presenting practical problems for travel and opening up an impossible gulf for families who lived only an hour away from each other. In framing the "Going East" events, I came to feel we had made a fetish of the borders we wanted to cross, projecting significance onto them that the people who were actually impacted experienced in a completely different way. For those of us from the "West," these borders presented no real constraints, and yet we wanted to cross them anyway. I struggled with this problem as our departure drew nearer, wanting to believe what we were engaged in was intellectual analysis and not simply voyeuristic tourism.

Our train left Vilnius at 5:43 p.m. We arrived late and ran with our bags through the station trying to find the correct departure platform. Rather unhelpfully, none of us had bothered to take the couple of hours needed to review the Cyrillic alphabet, which struck me then as another damning deficiency in our preparation for the trip. There were five of us: myself, Ole (*Archis* Editor), Lilet (*Archis* Events Manager), Bert and Elaine (responsible for documenting the trip with digital camera and video camera, respectively). We were armed with 20 Euros' worth



View from the inside of our train with the attendant in the rear. Photo: Bert de Muynck

of Russian rubles and food for the trip, including vodka, cookies and snacks that we hoped to offer to other passengers in order to strike up conversations. We held between us two Dutch, two American and one Belgian passport and we could collectively speak (with varying degrees of proficiency) Dutch, English, French, German and Spanish.

Sign on the platform at the Vilnius train station announcing our departure to Moscow (via Minsk and Smolensk) Photo: Bert de Muynck.

As we boarded, a stern woman carefully checked our tickets just outside the entrance to our car. We had eight tickets in a first-class car that had four beds per compartment — not the most luxurious accommodation available (there are compartments with only two beds—the so-called "official's class") but a huge step up from the second-class car that held 20 beds without the privacy of compartments. We later realized that the woman taking tickets would be our attendant for the duration of the journey, bringing blankets and sheets to the passengers, heating the interior of the car with coal and offering hot tea or coffee at various intervals. As I stepped into the comfortable and spotlessly clean car, I had another moment of doubt. Had we really been serious about wanting to meet many

people, we could have forgone the comforts of first-class accommodation and placed ourselves in second-class where at least polite conversation and interaction would have felt more natural.

As soon as our train departed, we took stock of the passengers in other compartments by "unobtrusively" pacing the corridor. It became clear almost immediately that if we wanted to talk to anyone we would have to make our move soon, because people seemed already to be settling in for the night, leaving little or no chance for socializing. This was especially true since the train did not have a separate dining car or anywhere else where people could comfortably mingle. Our first conversation was with a young Russian woman in a compartment adjacent to ours who was traveling from Vilnius with her husband and small son. Because three-year-old Nikolai wandered down the hallway and into the open door of our compartment, it was natural to exchange a few words with his mother as she retrieved him and hope for a conversation to develop. So our first contact, facilitated by a child, was easy enough.

Ole first asked Olga why she was making the trip. Speaking in understandable but tentative English, she explained that her husband was Lithuanian and that though they lived in Moscow, they often visited her husband's parents in Vilnius. We asked what she thought about Lithuania being part of the EU and if that had changed her family's life at all. In response to the question of whether or not she felt "European," Olga gave an answer that we talked about often during the rest of the trip. She said, "Russia will never be part of Europe, nor will I. Not just because of history or Putin, but because we are Russian and have always been different. If I hoped to be part of Europe or for a better life, I would just be unhappy. It is something we will never have." When Ole asked Olga if she was happy with that condition she said, "We're not happy or sad. It's just reality. In Russia you can never hope to have more than you do. It just makes you crazy."

A raging snowstorm invades the unheated space between train cars. Photo: Bert de Muynck

With the clock ticking and the Lithuanian/Belarussian border approaching, Elaine, Lilet and Ole decided to walk through the train with the video camera and microphone to see if they could stir up some more informal interviews. Most people did not want to be disturbed, were understandably wary of the video camera, or spoke only Russian and Lithuanian, which made communication virtually impossible. The most success the trio had was talking with a group of Tajik businessmen who were selling machine parts in Vilnius. Although the men were drunkenly friendly and hospitable, offering to share vodka and smoked fish, Elaine, Lilet and Ole did not get far in the way of a discussion about their opinions of Europe.

Bert and I stayed in our car with everyone's belongings and tried to meet the people in close proximity. We had to act fast, and desperate times called for desperate measures. I watched out for people going into the freezing space between train cars to have a cigarette, and followed them under pretense of asking for a light or heading for the toilets. In this way, I managed to start a conversation with a Russian man called Mikhail who ended up spending a few hours with us. Speaking in a muddled mixture of English and German, I learned that Mikhail was an aeronautical engineer who specialized in servicing and flying Soviet-made helicopters. He was born and raised in Moscow, but had married a Lithuanian nurse he met while she was studying in Moscow in 1988. Although Misha (as he insisted I call him) lived in Kaunas, Lithuania, most of his jobs were abroad and he had spent time in Japan, Hong Kong and two years in Mexico. He was on his way to Moscow to take a flight to Singapore, where he would spend three months teaching mechanics how to repair ancient Soviet helicopters in the government's fleet. We were struggling to discuss what Misha thought of Belarus's dictatorial president Alexander Lukashenko when Elaine found us. Thankfully, Elaine speaks passable Spanish, in which Misha was fluent because of his years in Mexico.

We invited Misha back to one of our compartments to share vodka, cheese and bread. As our train approached the Lithuanian/Belarussian border, Misha shared his opinions about Lukashenko. He said that although Lukashenko was a Soviet-style leader, he thought that most Belarussians preferred a centralized government closely aligned with Russia and that the opposition in the country was made up mostly of the intellectual elite. When we asked what he thought of the constitutional amendment Belarussians approved in October allowing Lukashenko to run for a third term as president, he said that as long as Russia wanted Lukashenko in power, there would be no other viable candidate that voters could elect. He was troubled by the near-absolute power of Lukashenko (and the increasingly absolute power of Putin in Russia), but reiterated, over and over, that because of the Soviet past, the majority of the population felt much more comfortable with state control even if it meant that certain freedoms were restricted: The unknown was much more frightening than the known.

Around 7p.m. we reached the border. Under Lukashenko, Belarus is almost completely isolated, with

Russia as its only major ally. Lukashenko does not allow NGOs to operate in the country, and virtually no foreigners are given residency permits. He has banned the advertisement (and in many cases, the sale) of western-produced goods and even recently outlawed the use of foreign-born models in ad campaigns. If one manages to travel to Belarus, the costs of a visa and mandatory Belarussian health insurance for all travelers are exceptionally high. Belarussian visas are even more difficult to acquire than Russian ones, and we had all been required to get a "transit visa" for Belarus even though we were simply passing through the country and would never even leave the train. Applying was a complex, bureaucratic process and at 60 Euros (US$80) each, the transit visas were more expensive than our train tickets. As Americans, Elaine and I could have also been slapped with a "supplementary" fee of US$50, but the consulate in The Hague mysteriously did not charge us. Because of the Lukashenko regime, we all expected the border to be stringently controlled, and were surprised at how quickly and easily the process concluded. What was more, we learned that this would be the only passport check of the journey because of an agreement between the respective governments (indicative of the extremely close ties between the Lukashenko and Putin regimes), and that our Belarussian entry stamp was valid for Russia as well. As far as our exploration of borders was concerned, first, we had no participants for the event and, now, it seemed our significant crossing experiences were over as well.

After a few more attempts at conversation with other passengers, the five of us retired to one of the compartments to discuss what we had seen. Around 1 a.m. we crossed into Russia with no fanfare. The only excitement we had for the rest of the night came at 3 a.m., as we stopped in Smolensk and Ole read a passage from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* recounting Napoleon's entry into Smolensk in the winter of 1812 and describing how Napoleon's soldiers had raided the city library and wrapped their wounds with documents from Smolensk's archive. The storm that had been raging since we entered

Ole Bouman reads from War and Peace *while the train stops in Smolensk, Russia. Photo: Bert de Muynck*

(Above) Arriving in Moscow November 21. (Right) Karl Marx guards the entrance to the first station we encountered in the Moscow metro.

Minsk showed no signs of letting up, and I stayed awake until 4 a.m. staring out of the window onto the dark Russian landscape through a whirl of white snow, wondering what Moscow would be like. Ever since reading Robert Massie's *Nicholas and Alexandra* at age 13, I had been fascinated by Russia, but in all my travels in Central and Eastern Europe I had never managed to make the trip.

We rose tired but excited around eight a.m. and rolled into Moscow at nine. After managing politely to decline the aggressive offers of cab drivers who descended like vultures on passengers exiting the train, we made our way toward the entrance to the metro, which was bustling, ornate and beautiful.

Much to my dismay, I found myself already falling into the trap of seeing Moscow through a misguided veil of clichés: I did not manage to stop myself from eagerly taking a photo of the marble bust of Karl Marx that adorned the metro entrance. After a 15-minute ride, we

A partial view of Hotel Rossija, a vast Stalin-era hotel we stayed at in Moscow. Photo: Bert de Muynck

exited onto the street in the midst of thick-falling snow and temperatures around minus 10 Celsius (14 Fahrenheit). According to the map we were at the stop nearest our hotel, but in the end we trudged through the snow for nearly 30 minutes before reaching our destination. Streets were covered with several feet of snow, and it seemed like thousands of people were employed to remove the stuff from roads and sidewalks, a winter army using everything from rudimentary tools like small shovels to massive bulldozers.

When we approached the entrance to Hotel Rossija, I was overwhelmed by the building. It is the last of three enormous showcase hotels built to Stalin's requirements in Moscow during the early 1950s, just before his death (the other two were torn down in the 1990s). The Hotel Rossija has 2,900 rooms, over 15 bars and restaurants, two beauty salons, many shops, a dry cleaner, bank, grocery store, travel agency and even a strip club—truly a city within a city. Although the hotel is rather run-down, it is popular with travelers because of its reasonable prices (70 Euro per night, or US$90) and central location across the street from Red Square. We quickly got a sense of just how large our hotel was when we realized that getting to our rooms from the nearest elevator required a brisk ten-minute walk through seemingly endless corridors.

By the time we settled into our rooms and ate lunch at a hotel café overlooking the Kremlin wall, it was already beginning to get dark outside. We resolved to head to Red Square first and then use the evening hours to explore the famous Moscow metro, with its unique and flamboyant interiors. Red Square was busy with visitors, tourists and beautiful Russian women in long fur coats who somehow managed to walk elegantly through ice and snow in high, stiletto-heeled boots. On the square, we tried to speak to a group of young conscripts who had just graduated from a military-training academy assembled for a class picture, but none of them spoke English.

We ran into the same problem during our journey through the Moscow metro system that evening. With

(Right) Young conscripts graduating from a Moscow military academy pose for a class picture on Red Square. Photos: Bert de Muynck, (Above) Bert, Lilet and myself on Red Square beside Lenin's Tomb.

no knowledge of Russian and no translator, we could communicate with people on only the most simplistic level, and they tended to react to us with suspicion or friendly incomprehension. Security was high and pervasive in the stations. Every passenger was required to pass through a metal detector while armed guards stood by. More than once we were approached by policeman and guards in military uniform who demanded that we stop filming and taking pictures in the metro.

The ornate, "trademarked" interior of Café Pushkin where photography is only allowed if a person is in the picture. Here I stand almost entirely outside the frame, posing so that Bert can take a few photos. Photo: Bert de Muynck

Moscow is a huge, sprawling, crowded city and during rush hour you can barely walk in the metro stations, let alone squeeze into one of the cars. We were amazed at the self-organization of the crowd, with people patiently lining up like sardines and waiting up to 20 minutes to board. We became completely lost at one point because our handy metro map from the hotel did not have the station names written in Cyrillic. We asked a teenaged girl in the crowd for guidance. She spoke very little English, but was eager to help us find our way and tried to speak to us, however haltingly. Once again, the barriers of language prevented us from being able to learn what her views of "Europe" and EU expansion really were and we could manage only the most basic of interactions.

A helpful Moscow resident in the metro, wearing a hat with the Euro logo. Photo: Bert de Muynck

November 22 was our only full day in Moscow and it included a meeting with Viktor Misiano, a well-known Russian curator and art historian. We met in the Café Pushkin, located right across Pushkin Square from Viktor's office. The café had a beautiful 19th-century interior and as we waited for Viktor we wondered how such a decadent place had managed to stay open during Soviet times. It seemed to embody the cliché of a luxurious Russian-bourgeois eatery, and we were shamelessly charmed by its ambience. When we were seated for lunch and began to ask Viktor questions about the café's history, he laughed at us in a generous way. As it turns out, there is a famous French ballad that tells the story of a singer falling in love with a Russian woman at "Café Pushkin" and dreaming about taking her back to France. "Café Pushkin" was a fictional location made famous by this song, and in the early 1990s a rich Russian investor built up the interior of an old café

The metro system in Moscow is one of the most beautiful in the world, and one of the deepest underground. A nearly five-minute-long ride on fast-moving escalators is required to reach street level.

Travelers packed into the metro wait to board during rush hour. Photo: Bert de Muynck

on Pushkin Square to recreate the fantasy setting. In Viktor's opinion, such a story sums up the city of Moscow: What is old is new, what was forbidden is ubiquitous and contradictions are de rigueur.

To explain how such clichés can be productive in understanding the current state of Russia, Viktor told us about a major contemporary art exhibition he was organizing in collaboration with the Moderna Galerija (Museum of Modern Art) in Ljubljana. He and the director of the museum, Zdenka Badovinac and curator Igor Zabel, had come up with an idea for exhibiting art from Russia and Slovenia entitled *The Seven Sins*. Instead of using the biblical seven sins, they identified seven "sins" that are supposedly typical of artists and cultural production in Eastern Europe: Collectivism, Utopianism, Masochism, Cynicism, Laziness, Non-Professionalism and Love of the West. One of the claims of the exhibition was that these clichéd characteristics are usually understood from a Western perspective as weaknesses, but they can also be viewed as "virtues" that contribute to the diversity and richness of European culture. For example, Viktor explained that utopianism could be seen as an antidote to pragmatism or neo-liberal politics, stressing the dimension of hope and prospects for the future.

Discussion of the exhibition finally provided us an opportunity to delve a bit more deeply into notions of European identity and how far such an identity is embraced in Russia. Of course, there was a strong dose of irony in the way that Viktor and his colleagues described the exhibition, but the underlying point was clear: that differences in the understanding of culture, production, identity and lifestyle were things that should be critically analyzed, not swept under the rug of rhetoric about a unifying European culture, or relegated into a banal dichotomy of "East" *vs.* "West." According to Viktor, most of the Russian intelligentsia identify themselves strongly with Russian traditions, to some degree with the former satellite states of Central and Eastern Europe and to an even lesser degree with Western Europe. The question of "Europe" as a political, economic or cultural construct was not a major matter in these circles, although the impact of Russia isolating itself from Europe was a concern. Very pressing, for example, was the Ukrainian election that had taken place November 21st and would gain worldwide attention in the weeks that followed. The election of Viktor Yuschenko, the pro-Europe opposition candidate would ally Ukraine much more closely with the EU, and Yuschenko clearly wanted to distance the country from Russia, potentially creating the most significant shift of power in the region since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991.

With our time in Moscow nearly finished, we took a long walk through the city and back to the hotel. On the way, we encountered numerous relics of the Soviet past

The interior of the GUM shopping arcade. Once a state-owned department store, it is now home to expensive boutiques such as Chanel, Missoni, Rolex and Cartier.

(Left) One of many residential buildings built during the early 1950s in downtown Moscow reflecting Stalin's taste for monumental architecture. (Right) A Socialist-Realist frieze depicting two heroic workers now stands next to newly-built gambling complex in downtown Moscow.

that clashed strikingly with post-1991 novelties, all symbols of the contradictions of contemporary Russia that we had discussed with Viktor. In the end, it was clear that moving beyond clichés and superficial observations would demand much more time and preparation than our 72-hour journey had allowed. And though the lack of "Going East" participants was part of the problem, we were very much to blame for the failures of the trip. We had experienced an interesting but flawed attempt at "Going East," and although we were full of good intentions, probably did no justice to Moscow or the questions themselves. ❑

Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.

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